

By Diana Johnstone

MAINZ, WEST GERMANY

GERMANS BEGAN WORRYING about chemical weapons after U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-OR) appeared on a TV show called *Monitor* in April 1981 warning that the Pentagon was preparing a new generation of C-weapons to be stored in Germany. Referring to planned binary nerve gas weapons, Hatfield noted that "there is little point in storing these weapons in the U.S. Eventually they belong on the potential battlefield—and that is Europe. Our friends must accept them and that includes West Germany. Therefore, I would like to know more precisely what the Germans think of having such weapons stationed on their soil."

Alarmed Germans responded by trying to make it clear what they thought of such a project. Prominent among them was Julius Lehlbach, the outspoken chairman of the German trade union confederation DGB for Rhineland-Palatinate, a state with more than its share of U.S. military bases. In 1982 SIPRI Yearbook disclosed that the U.S. was storing some 10,000 tons of old munitions containing nerve gas in the Fischbach depot in Rhineland-Palatinate, not far from the French border. A movement against poison gas sprung up in Pirmasens, the main town in the Fischbach area.

Lehlbach kicked off his campaign by writing to top German officials, but they could not tell him much. It was only in 1971 that Chancellor Willy Brandt got President Richard Nixon to promise to keep the Bonn government regularly informed of U.S. weapons on German soil. But state and local authorities are kept in the dark. There are no emergency measures to protect the civilian population in case of leaks like the one that killed thousands of sheep in Utah. Although the identity of storage sites is unclassified in the U.S., in other countries both sites and quantities are secret. A footnote to U.S. Army Regulation 380/86 on "Secret Classification of Chemical Warfare and Biological Research Data" (May 1976) says, "The sole fact that the U.S. maintains stocks of lethal chemicals in Germany is unclassified. Classification attaches to specific location."

At its congress in May 1982 the DGB, representing eight million union members, unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Lehlbach demanding removal or destruction of American poison gas stored in West Germany. Even Bonn government experts expressed doubt as to the "deterrent" value of a weapon that would massacre the civilian population. *Der Spiegel* reported in 1982 that soldiers were equipped to survive a poison gas attack. Up to 98 percent of military personnel might be spared, although 98 percent of civilians in the area would die.

The administration line

While Germans were expressing what they thought of having such weapons on their soil, the Reagan administration was not showing the same concern for their views as Hatfield. The U.S. broke off bilateral talks with the Soviets on chemical weapons in July 1980. The Reagan administration has persistently sought to get congressional appropriations for manufacturing binary nerve gas, gradually wearing down the resistance of original opponents like Rep. Les Aspin (D-WI). In its plans for "Airland Battle 2000," the U.S. Army is preparing to fight "from the outset" on a "conventional-nuclear-chemical-electronic battlefield." New mini-missiles will be able to be equipped with conventional, nuclear or chemical (binary) shells.

It may be that the chemical industry wants its share of Pentagon contracts. At any rate, the U.S. did not ratify the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning use of chemical weapons until 1975, and almost immediately a campaign began casting doubt on international agreements as a means to stop use of chemical weapons. This cam-

A dangerous new chemical dependency

paigned by the eager acceptance of extremely flimsy evidence—some leaves—taken to indicate that the Vietnamese had used chemical weapons in Laos. Overlooking scientific refutations, the Reagan administration and its allies talk about "Soviet use of chemical weapons" in Southeast Asia as if it were an established fact—which it is not.

The eagerness to believe this story is in itself suspect, as it is used as an excuse *not* to make an agreement to end production and storage—as well as forbid use—of chemical weapons. The Reagan administration has taken up the right-wing propaganda line that it is impossible to make *any* agreement with the Soviets because they "cheat." Underlying the "cheating" argument is another assumption—laws and agreements, by restraining the powerful, favor the weak. Since the U.S. is powerful, that means agreements favor its enemies. So the U.S. should count on its superior force, unhampered by international treaties and conventions. Since there is still a little hesitation about saying this openly, stress is placed on the need to "verify" agreements to keep the Soviets from cheating.

The USSR has submitted a draft convention to the 40-nation conference in Geneva on chemical weapons providing for destruction of all chemical weapons over a 10-year period. It is not true that the USSR, as U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Director Kenneth Adelman puts it, has just said "Nyet, nyet, nyet" to verification. The Soviets have proposed a system of supervision combining national and international control committees. International inspectors would permanently supervise destruction of C-weapon stocks and regularly inspect manufacture of authorized quotas of hypertoxic substances. Plants manufacturing C-weapons would be dismantled. Each state could ask another to explain suspected violations and, if not satisfied, request on-site inspection.

When it was spelled out in February 1984, Bonn welcomed the Soviet proposal for international inspection as encouraging and voiced hope for rapid conclusion of an agreement. The Reagan administration responded on April 18, 1984, by presenting a new concept of "inspection by permanent invitation" to the 40-nation Geneva confer-

ence. International inspectors would be free to investigate at all times and without notice all chemical companies "owned or controlled by the state."

To German observers, this proposal was proof the U.S. was not serious about a chemical weapons ban. Soviet chemical installations are *all* "owned or controlled by the state," whereas American companies are private. The USSR obviously could not accept such a one-sided proposal.

U.S. officials told journalists that the

Critic Julius Lehlbach wants to get chemical weapons cleared out of West Germany—and Europe—as soon as possible.

Soviets rejected verification, and that is what the reporters wrote. In September Bernard Gwertzman wrote in the *New York Times* that "Moscow has rejected the American insistence on verification of Soviet chemical factories to ensure that they are not producing weapons. Talks in Geneva on a global ban on chemical weapons have not gotten anywhere, U.S. officials said."

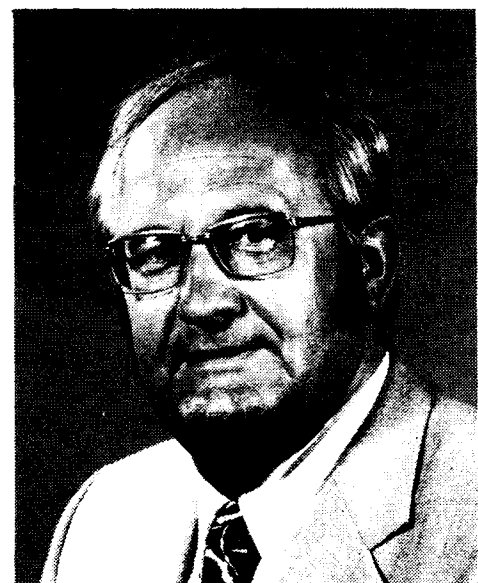
This is one example of the need for "confidence-building measures" to overcome mutual distrust. If Americans think Soviets would use every uninspected installation to manufacture C-weapons on the sly, Soviets suspect Americans would use permanent inspection to "disrupt production and engage in industrial espionage."

Julius Lehlbach explains the American attitude by pointing out that gas is a battlefield weapon. As Hatfield said, the battle will be fought in Europe. Since the U.S. is not threatened by a gas war on its own territory, it has less interest than others

in banning it.

Since Germans are more directly concerned, they should do something themselves, Lehlbach concluded. He wrote to both West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and East German party leader Erich Honecker urging them to get rid of Soviet and American chemical weapons stationed on German soil.

In the summer of 1984 the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) began to consult with the East German Communist Party (SED) on the problem. Last June, the SPD's Karsten Voigt and the SED's Hermann Axen concluded a Draft Treaty for a Chemical Weapons Free Zone (CWFZ) in Europe. The CWFZ would include at least the two German states and Czechoslovakia (whose government has voiced assent) and could be extended to Central Europe as defined by NATO and the Warsaw Pact at the



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Vienna talks—that is, to include Poland and the Benelux countries. A system of national and international controls is envisaged similar to the Soviet proposal for a global ban.

The German parties explained that a CWFZ would be both "a step in arms limitations and disarmament as well as an essential confidence building measure." It would provide useful experience for a global ban. Regional measures, the Germans noted, are easier and quicker to carry out because they concentrate on withdrawal of C-weapons rather than their destruction, a more time-consuming process. The regional ban "would make a war with chemical weapons in Europe as good as impossible."

The Germans left open the question of whether chemicals that primarily destroy the environment—such as the "defoliators" the U.S. used in Vietnam—are to be included among chemical weapons. Their Draft Treaty calls for the International Commission to set up a data bank of scientific and technical information relating to problems of banning C-weapons. An annual colloquium would be held.

SPD leaders have said that if they come to office in 1987 they will seek to make the treaty a reality. It is a model that could be extended geographically, or to other categories of weapons, such as nuclear weapons. At a meeting with SPD leader Johannes Rau in September, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachov said the USSR would agree to withdraw their chemical weapons from Eastern Europe if the U.S. did the same from West Germany.

Historic step

The CWFZ Treaty thus appears a *feasible* step toward stopping the arms race and breaking down the military blocs. It is comparable to New Zealand's ban on nuclear warships, but even more momentous in its implications. Junior members of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would in effect be giving orders to the superpowers to withdraw their weapons.

But one can doubt this will ever happen. Because, for one thing, the historic SPD-SED initiative has aroused surprisingly little support from peace movements or citizens in other NATO countries, while it has been flatly dismissed and rejected by the U.S. The project does not seem to be gather-

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Sign pointing to U.S. chemical weapons depot at Fischbach in West Germany



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