

We asked one of our European correspondents, Wolfgang Bosswick, for a report on the riots over asylum in the former East Germany (GDR). Mr. Bosswick is a candidate for a Ph.D. in sociology, and is working with the European Forum for Migration Studies.

The Riots in Germany

Reportage by Wolfgang Bosswick

Most of the riots occurred while I was on vacation in Poland. I had no news from Germany. We went into only one town to shop, so I didn't hear of the riots before I met my Polish friends in Krakow. They were very afraid of crossing into the former GDR (East German) territories on their trips to Germany because there had been some serious incidents during the last year (scarcely mentioned by the German press). The growing violence is not only directed against immigrants and asylum seekers, but also against tourists from Poland. In the last two years of the Communist regime there was a growing hostility toward Polish people crossing the border to the GDR to shop, and this mood seemed to be at least accepted by the former [East German] government. I had to get the information on the riots from old press releases after I returned, and I missed the live reports on TV from Rostock, Quendlinburg and Wismar.

I should explain some things to an American audience.

The term "right-wing extremist" is a bit misleading in this case. There are clearly racist and even fascist propagandists currently gaining support in growing circles of the mostly unemployed and frustrated east German youth. On several occasions, police raids uncovered weapons and Nazi-like propaganda materials during the last several months. Nevertheless, the majority of the rioting people seem not to be organized, and not even to have an ideological relation to these circles — they seemed to come mostly from the local, suburban neighborhoods. But, doubtless, there had been right-wing activists participating in the riots and their propaganda gave a background for these violent attacks. The rioters legitimate themselves by a postulated necessity for a "wake-up call," and the most frightening aspect of these riots is the broad applause given by the spectators from the neighborhood. As far as I can see, there are several reasons for the outbreak.

There is a deep and widespread frustration in the former East German population about the consequences of the reunification and their feeling of being completely ignored by the West German political elite. There are growing nostalgic sentiments and the feeling of their territory being almost 'occupied' by their counterparts from the wealthy, densely populated western part of Germany. The majority of employable people lost their formerly "safe" jobs, mainly because of the complete collapse of the eastern Europe market for industrial exports (which is related to currency unification), the unclear ownership of real property in the former GDR (which hinders new investments), and the loss of the local consumer product market to goods imported from west German enterprises. Many of the key positions in the political parties are taken by west German "import" politicians and very few are widely accepted. The western legal and administration system was implemented without regard to conflict over the ownership claims of West German citizens against their former properties confiscated by the Communist regime, and over the Abortion law (§218 Criminal Code).

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There is a mood of resistance and provocation against the political system and the administration — these produced violent attacks during the riots, not only against the foreigners, but against the police. The police force is often perceived both as the old "Volkspolizist," to which, of course, a lot of the staff had belonged, and as the representative of the new

state, now dominated by the west Germans. This is certainly a psychological problem, and it should be taken as seriously as the economic turmoil.

Finally, there is an obvious hostility against foreigners nowadays, especially against the asylum seekers who have been a major source of controversy in the election campaigns for years. Compared to the situation in west German communities, the total number of asylum seekers in east Germany is quite low, but the coincidence of violence against asylum seekers in west Germany, the heavily discussed question of the asylum legislation, and the nearly complete absence of foreigners in the daily life of the former GDR, are all opening a valve for these incidents. There were guest-workers from Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam and Cuba during the last decades, but their numbers had been small compared to the labor migration into West Germany, and they had been strictly separated from the German population. The official "Internationale Sozialistische Völkerfreundschaft" (International Socialist Peoples' Friendship) propagated by the regime (although sometimes in sharp contrast to the real treatment of these guest-workers) adds one more facet to this complex situation. Crossing the former wall from Berlin-Mitte to Kreuzberg and Neukölln, with its nearly 40 percent Turkish population, must have been a very strange experience for East Germans at the time when it first became possible.

Many of the rioters are unemployed; most of them are very young (14 to 18 years old). Part of the problem also seems to be that many of them, formerly involved in the GDR youth organizations with their sophisticated programs, now regard themselves as abandoned by the state. There is no immediate competition between the East German natives and the asylum seekers on the job market, but in matters of social services and the housing market, they certainly are perceived as a massive burden. Conflicts similar to those in west Germany between the second generation of labor immigrants, the lower class natives, and the recently arrived ethnic Germans from the East — related to competition in the labor market — are unlikely in East Germany.

The Vietnamese guest workers had been employed in some segments of industry in the former GDR. There was a treaty with the Peoples' Republic of Vietnam defining the terms of this labor

migration. The presence of the workers was limited to five years, women becoming pregnant had to abort or leave the country immediately, and the wages were only partially paid to the workers. Sending goods to Vietnam and the exportation of goods on the way back was very restricted. The guest-workers lived in separate housing areas, worked in separate departments, and contacts with the local population were, although not forbidden, sharply restrained by the authorities and the secret police, STASI.

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The Rumanian Gypsies are asylum seekers and most of them enter via Poland. A Polish friend of mine in Krakow told about her visit to her parents in Przemyśl (located in southeast Poland, just at the Ukrainian border). There, hundreds are living on the streets under very bad conditions, crowding the main station, parks and the downtown section of the city. There are reliable reports of frequent pogroms against the Gypsies in Rumania (often supported by local authorities), but there also seems to be a well-organized smuggling network marketing the migration option to the Rumanian Gypsies. Many of them try to proceed to Germany and to apply for asylum. In late September, the German government signed a treaty with the Rumanian government in which Rumania agrees to receive deported Rumanians from Germany, even if they don't have any identification documents.

Whether the chanted slogans of the rioters can be defined as "Neo-Nazi" is as problematic as the term itself. Many of them are coming from the right-wing background mentioned above; some of them clearly do have a racist attitude. Obviously these riots are not mild civil protests against the dispersal of asylum seekers to the local neighborhoods, but violent attacks — verbal and physical. Some incidents, such as the riots in Rostock and in Quendlinburg, gave the impression that the intervention of the police had been at least half-hearted. Several attacks with fatal results during the

last two years have been clearly racially motivated, and directed against people with African or Asian ancestry.

In the case of the riots in former East Germany, I think that the government, but also the other parties, have failed to address the problem in an appropriate way. They should have refrained from deploying contingents of asylum seekers in east German communities in the same concentration as in the west German communities, without an appropriate political and organizational preparation. The focus on asylum seekers in public debate during several election campaigns promoted by the CDU and CSU political parties, while ignoring the large scale migration from east to west Germany and the

immigration from eastern Europe with all its social consequences, has resulted in a paralysis of reasonable measures and the lack of an immigration policy. This is contributing to that situation.

My main concern is — as John Tanton points out in his *Social Contract* editorial — that more and more people will draw the conclusion from these incidents that violence works. Nevertheless, I think that it is problematic to compare the Los Angeles riots with the German ones; in the unique background of German reunification, there are probably more differences than similarities.

I am seriously concerned about these events, although I think there is a real chance to overcome them and to find reasonable solutions. ■

For Example: Healthcare and Immigration

Healthcare is expected to be the largest single sector of most OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) economies by 2000. Nurses will constitute perhaps 5 percent of industrial country workforces. They are already in short supply, and industrial countries are attempting to fill the gap by bringing in immigrant trained nurses. In the United States, shortages are most severe in the inner-city neighborhoods that have high levels of unemployment. If industrial countries continue to try to solve the nursing shortage with immigrants, rather than by training local workers and keeping current nurses in the profession, they will be planting the seeds of another wave of migrant workers.

— Philip L. Martin in "International Migration: A New Challenge"
in *International Economic Insights*, March/April 1992.

The concept of 'carrying capacity' resurfaces periodically as a tool for conceptualizing mankind's situation, and helping to plan a course of action. Washington editor Roy Beck reports on the National Carrying Capacity Issues Conference.

Issues of Carrying Capacity

Reportage by Roy Beck

What might it take finally to *reconnect* the environmental movement to the campaign for U.S. population stabilization, formerly one of the movement's most important goals?

A conference at Georgetown University last summer provided a fascinating model for what could happen. It engendered tensions, but also hope. By focusing environmentalists on the concepts of "carrying capacity" and "sustainable economy" for the United States, frank talk about U.S. population growth *and* immigration policy emerged. And a remarkable result it was to have environmentalists talking about either issue! Since the late '70s, American environmental groups have neglected and sometimes totally ignored the multiplying effect of population growth on domestic environmental problems. The nadir came in 1990, when all but one environmental group ignored legislation that spurred major additional population growth.

"Carrying capacity is the most important issue of our time," Brock Evans, Washington lobbyist for the Audubon Society, told some 200 environmental professionals, activists, academics and interested citizens at the National Carrying Capacity Issues Conference. Because of the United States' size (50 million more people than in 1970) and per capita consumption, "we are destroying forests faster than Brazil," he said. "I hope the future will be a little more benign. My job is to hold the door open and preserve every little bit I can." Evans told how when he ran for Congress from Seattle in 1984 he had to defend his stands on immigration and family planning because critics didn't understand carrying capacity principles.

Former U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson, now of the Wilderness Society, said in his keynote address that the *disconnection* between environmentalists and population stabilization has occurred primarily "due to lack of attention to the concept of carrying capacity."

The definition of "carrying capacity" —

according to the conference sponsor, Carrying Capacity Network — is "the number of individuals who can be supported without degrading the natural, cultural and social environment, i.e., without reducing the ability of the environment to sustain the desired quality of life over the long term."

Nelson criticized Congress and President Bush for failing even to mention population questions when they approved 1990 immigration legislation that will increase U.S. population by millions over the next decade. "From July of 1989 to October of 1990, there were thousands of words of debate in the Congressional Record. Yet, in scanning, I found only one brief reference to carrying capacity."

But then why would Congress talk about an issue the environmental community scarcely raised? Only one conservation group in the entire nation spoke up for the environment and tried to get Congress to consider the carrying capacity implications of the immigration bill. And that group — Population-Environment Balance — also was the only one to oppose the population-growth legislation. (The Federation for American Immigration Reform, with a number of environmentalists in its leadership, also was a vocal opponent.)

Former U.S. Rep. Claudine Schneider, now of the environmentally oriented Artemis Project, told the conference that despite her strong conservation credentials during 10 years in the House, it was only in 1990 that she began really to grasp the connection between immigration and environment.

"Immigration clearly is an area that needs to be looked at," Schneider said, noting that changing the 1990 immigration law would enable the country to move toward quality rather than quantity. "It shocked me (during debate of the 1990 bill) that nobody in a decision-making capacity was willing to talk about population issues."

Rose Hanes, executive director of Population-Environment Balance, said, "We believe population growth is the ultimate environmental threat. I'm