

'I Don't Like The Word Terrorism'

The son of a Krupp Steel director, West German lawyer Otto Schily is a boyishly handsome man of 45 who affects three-piece suits and gold watch chains. He is also an unabashed leftist who maintains that West Germany's "urban guerrillas," as he calls them, are waging a legitimate war against the state and, when captured, should be treated as prisoners of war rather than as common criminals. Not surprisingly, Schily enjoys the trust of the extreme left: he was a key lawyer for the defense in the recently concluded Baader-Meinhof trial and is now appealing the life sentences of the three surviving members of that gang. In an effort to find out what motivates Germany's terrorists, NEWSWEEK'S Timothy Nater talked with Schily last week in West Berlin. Excerpts:

NATER: Do terrorist means really serve a definable end in West Germany?

SCHILY: Let me say right away that in my opinion an armed struggle inside West Germany, for the attainment of whatever end, is politically disastrous. But I don't like the word "terrorism" because it must first involve a definition of who originated the violence. For me, the world's greatest terrorist was Harry S. Truman, who obliterated two Japanese cities full of old men, women and children. The West German urban-guerrilla movement grew out of a reaction to American genocide in Vietnam. The continuing armed struggle stems from the realization of West Germany's complicity in all aspects of capitalist repression around the world. The people engaged in terrorism say that a form of government has been established here that only serves to exploit the working class. The guerrilla movement has clearly defined its political objectives, which are to combat imperialism in the cities. For them, this country has become an ideological, economic and cultural colony of the U.S., and the state apparatus must first be destroyed. What comes after that is admittedly still vague in their minds.

Q. But what rational logic motivates these people? The West German working class is hardly being exploited.



Sven Simon—Katherine Young

Schily: 'There has been no strict renunciation of Fascism in this country'

A. I wouldn't be too sure. You just have to see who suffers the consequences when things go wrong with the economy. Not the capitalists, but the 1 million unemployed.

Q. Killings and bombings are hardly the way to combat unemployment. Are these terrorists deranged?

A. Not in the least. They have formulated a clear analysis of what is happening in West Germany, and this analysis is extraordinarily similar to opinions about this country that are held by socialist circles in both France and Italy.

Q. That's a highly questionable statement. But tell me what compels this country's violent extremists to do what they do?

A. The blame for why these intelligent people have developed in such a fashion lies in the fact that there has been no strict renunciation of Fascism in this country. Many of the old Nazis are back in top positions in government and industry again and we have settled into the worldwide strategy of American imperialism.

Q. How do you explain the large number of women involved in the terrorist scene here in West Germany?

A. That's no new phenomenon. There was [Palestinian terrorist leader] Leila Khaled, and the revolt of the Paris Commune saw many women play an important role. Some of the guerrilla groups here might see it as a part of the revolutionary process, one that shows that the traditional form of military conflict, in which the man ran around with a gun and the woman stayed home making wreaths for him, no longer exists. I don't think it's a

result of female emancipation or female hysteria.

Q. Are the terrorists misunderstood?

A. The state is in a real dilemma now. If it starts discussing the true motives and political goals [of the terrorists], then it must run the risk that these motives and goals will become known to the broad public. And it fears that the public may very well assess these things in a very positive way. So the state is for now far more interested in suppressing the political qualities of the guerrilla struggle and instead claims there are no political motivations at all, but that these people are all the purest criminals.

Q. Why can't radical leftists instead establish a strong leftist movement in Germany that is legal?

A. I believe that the Third Reich left such devastation in the political consciousness of the German people that a sort of vacuum was created. Into this vacuum came the Soviet Union, with its bureaucratic socialism—if you can call it socialism at all—and the United States. Any other form of politics could therefore only develop sporadically inside the student movement. In France, there's a broad socialist-democratic movement, the union between the French Communists and socialists. Given that sort of movement here, the urban guerrilla might not be necessary. Unfortunately, the violence here is also steadily narrowing this country's room for political innovations.

Q. Do you anticipate more terrorist attacks soon?

A. I'm afraid so.