[Editors’ Note: This article first appeared in *Autonomie*, No. 10, Winter 1978, pp. 116-120. Because this article was written for a German audience familiar with the history discussed, many references are abbreviated. In as much as we suspect many of those references will be obscure for non-Germans, we have provided several “editor’s footnotes” to more clearly identify various people and events mentioned in the text.]

**The German Model: Against Mass Autonomy**

**By**

**Karl Heinz Roth**

The “German Model” has become a reality. Since Stammheim[[1]](#footnote-1), we are witnessing to our horror the full growth of a new fortress of state power which we, in the German movement, have not wanted to recognize. After ten years of historical rupture, we must now face the facts. Helmut Schmidt[[2]](#footnote-2) has given the signal for a planned attack to annihilate us. We must take advantage of this moment of fear to come to terms with this turning-point in the form of state power in West Germany. We should not hide or despair. But we must analyze this state-conducted terror on the one hand, and the experience of mass political refusal on the other in order to define the basis for new forms of resistance.

**1.**

Firstly, some remarks about the events since July-August 1977. The past few months have been marked by a coup d’état from within. This began in the late summer with a series of provocations against imprisoned members of armed groups in Stuttgart-Stammheim and Berlin. The abuses, harassments and the intensification of solitary confinement were highly coordinated. The prisoners responded with hunger strikes which were brutally suppressed by the Federal Chancellery and the judicial system. None of the demands for the restoration of prison conditions as they had been prior to July-August were met. More and more prisoners risked their lives. The reports of their gradual extinction were shocking. The rapacious ruling powers knew that this would provoke the mass movement as a whole. The autonomous mass movement, which represents an “anti-party” of political refusal, was incapable of responding. Pressed for time, the movement could not manage to develop levels of political power adequate to confront this situation without abandoning their most recent objectives. Therefore the armed groups decided once again to respond on their own initiative. They carried out a number of actions, including the kidnapping of Schleyer[[3]](#footnote-3) and the confrontation at Mogadishu[[4]](#footnote-4). Their defeat was predictable from the outset given the "terrorism from above" which was coordinated by the *Kleiner Krisenstab*[[5]](#footnote-5). For the first time "armed existentialism" was driven to the point where it turned its own violence against the masses. The desperate tactic of simply taking hostages [the Lufthansa passengers] was translated by the *Krisenstab* into a means of propagating a climate of mass fear. This laid the basis for a new, broad, consensus to support the German Model in its latest phase. The bestiality of the Social Democratic State was able to impose a new morality: the German butchers have always been filled with the deepest morality.

During October, the internal coup d’état consolidated itself in the emergency general staff. They started with the provocation of a new wave of despair in the movement. They accelerated the killing of the hostages already imprisoned for years.. This was to guarantee a reaction in the form of "existentialist autonomization of revolutionary counter-violence”. The aim of all parties in the coalition was to keep this process alive and harness it as a vehicle for their own supper terrorism. The immediate objectives which were agreed upon by the all-party coalition was the annihilation of the RAF prisoners. We have since discovered more about this. We know that the speedy enactment of the solitary confinement law [passed on February 30,1978] meant more drastic isolation after years of solitary confinement: in effect a death sentence. It meant the transformation of the prisoners into shadows of themselves and their psychological destruction. The sequence of events is terrifying: two days before Mogadishu the historian Golo Mann[[6]](#footnote-6) became the self-proclaimed announcer of a campaign which climaxed in the demand to kill the RAF prisoners, one after another, as hostages of the state. One day later, the emergency general staff discussed this proposal. It was apparently rejected on tactical grounds. What we have since learned about Mogadishu has led us to the conclusion that a special commando unit of the State Protection Agency entered Stammheim prison on their own initiative and did its work immediately after the liberation of the plane hostages. They apparently used a special entrance. The prison officer on duty that night on the seventh floors has since disappeared. The discovery of arms, the suicide stories etc. were an operation of pure concealment by the security police. The emergency general staff was probably informed of the action during the same night. It decided to cover it up because, on the previous day, it had judged this public liquidation to be a tactual mistake. Involvement and complicity in this cynical crime has welded together more strongly the various agencies of state power. The range of these agencies is extensive. It is no accident that the renegades of the Social Democratic Party, ex-Jusos[[7]](#footnote-7) from Ruhr to Wischenwski[[8]](#footnote-8) have themselves acted as agents of this policy of terror from above. They assumed that they, and not the hijackers, were the better terrorists.

One day we may arrive at the truth. Perhaps there will be a German Watergate. More likely, however, there will be some additional state funerals of the less ceremonial kind: more "suicides" in the prisons, more traffic accidents, and more free trips to the bottom of the Rhine and Elbe.

Since Mogadishu we have witnessed the further development of the coup d'état from within. The "Final Solution" for the RAF prisoners corresponds to the planned ghettoization of the whole autonomous mass movement in West Germany. The ruling powers have their directed all of their institutions and media to coordinate a campaign of fear arising from "armed existentialism". For the first time, the Lufthansa hijacking made possible the collectivization of fear. The state was able to channel it and mobilize it against the broader network of the autonomous movement. It is, in effect, a centrally directed operation as described by Peter Bruckner[[9]](#footnote-9)

In the West Germany of 1976-77 there was a broad connection between the desires of the class for self-determined activity beyond the discipline of work, and the practice of alternative movements. It is not only the autonomous left which has refused the rules of established politics which attempt to subjugate the class into abstract labor-power. The dissolution of the nuclear family, the self-emancipation of women, and the many other partial movements for the reappropriation of social existence against capital, all express a social revolution which has taken root way beyond the autonomous initiatives.

Until Mogadishu/Stannheim, the capitalist state could not successfully intervene against these movements which oppose the German Model. The state could not grasp the nature of the autonomous movement. Since Mogadishu it confronts it for the first time on the basis of a new conceptualization. It has declared the movement to be the front line, the wider strategic terrain in which the guerilla activists operate. It has seen it as a swamp that must be dried out. The main object of attack is dissent in general, refusal to adjust, and refusal of productivity. The state sees the permanent damage which has been caused by the massive withdrawal from murderous rhythms of work by replacing the nuclear family with communes, and by refusing all kinds of discipline from examinations to general social regulation. Because the autonomous network is impenetrable and can no longer be split from within, it must be encircled from outside. The media as a whole has been mobilized to attack the subversive terrain of the autonomous movement by the working class to create imaginary fears in the face of the deepening disintegration of the state. Parallel to this runs a tendency to criminalize at all costs the process of isolation. Policing functions can be divided into many different functions and levels. They have two main objectives. The first is to make visible the social linkages of the regrouped movement and to intimidate whole neighborhoods through regular police raids. The objects of attack are youth centers, communes, local community newspapers. Secondly the subjects themselves are put onto computers. They become targets of all kinds of attack, from the individual manhunts to purification campaigns in football stadiums, and special new concentration camps.

We can see just how far the ruling powers will go in their attempt to use the subversive needs of the class against those whom it has begun to put into practice; the extent to which the German Model can be seen in the sub-human terrorists. We can now begin to see that the Nazi concept of the Jew Marxist-Slave was only a prior projection. The latter has not only managed politically to realize its profound need for a life without the rhythm of work or the terror of the nuclear family, but has put these needs into practice in daily life.

**2.**

I propose the following general thesis: since 1974-75 the autonomous movement has been able to maintain a network of organization within the crisis-State and its plan of enforcing the Philips curve.[[10]](#footnote-10) This network is self-managed and it attacks the German Model at its roots. This development has not been seen by the European left, but it has been noticed by American comrades. The changing connection between refusal and the creation of positive alternatives characterizes a period of flux and retreat in the face of potential violence. It signifies an escape from a system of violence in which the tactics and traditional strategies of the Left have proven fruitless. It is important to understand the reasons for the forced retreat of the extra-parliamentary mass movement and of worker militancy which was born in the early seventies. All of the reports of socialist‑revolutionary groups agree of one point as regards the events of 1973-74: they all point to the complete criminalization of direct conflict.

Workers in all major sectors today see their activities being constantly monitored. Gigantic surveillance systems and bugging devices have been installed in the plants with personal control systems, so that any attempt to make contact outside of immediate work group leads to immediate confrontation. Meanwhile there are also individualised personal identification systems that register workers' attitudes by machine stoppage time, complaints to the shopsteward, absenteeism, sick leaves and the family situation. The level of surveillance in the factory is increasingly extended outwards in the form of an invisible state of siege in the urban districts. In some urban centers there are television systems that film all major road junctions and squares. Identification techniques now permit searches for individuals without direct intervention via a television control center. Such surveillance systems are currently being installed in all crucial and visible centers of power: commercial centers, suburban transportation systems, and even in universities. The fundamental role of the installations of surveillance is clearly to paralyze any possibility of direct confrontation. We can see how effective this is if we add the invisible kinds of supervision: the introduction of a personal identification system which gathers all information about social behavior in one place including family background, social security, school records. Surveillance is one central answer of the crisis-State to the propensity for ever-increasing groups of the class to struggle in work places without institutional mediation[[11]](#footnote-11) and to appropriate social wealth.

Secondly the surveillance system has been complemented by a systematic institutionalization of the capacity to struggle. Before 1973-74 some sections of the mass movement struggled temporarily within and against this level of institutionalization despite the growing surveillance. Young workers tried to get integrated into the trade union organizations. The multinational company unions tried to take over the lower echelon shop steward movement. Academically qualified groups of the New Left entered the fray as journalists, writers and teachers. The student movement tried to penetrate the university organization with its own self-management committees. All of the rebellious and militant groups of the mass movement wished to take the "long march through the institutions".[[12]](#footnote-12) This march was clear proof of the ability of the ruling power to launch the historical rupture of the 1960's which followed. Now four years later, we can conclude: the long march has failed due to the relentlessness of capitalist state power. All the dreams about using the institutions themselves to open up and democratise the system have been irrevocably exploded. The social revolutionary minorities found themselves thrown in among the marginalized sections of the class: the homeless, unemployed youth, foreign migrant workers, single-parent families, housewives, the handicapped, old ex-cons, and the mentally ill. In this process they discovered themselves and the community with its counter-culture. They rediscovered themselves in the states of the unemployed, of those fired or refused jobs on political grounds, of casual workers, or they began a double existence divided between enforced adaptation to the norms and refusal. This signaled, for the proletariat, a process of self-discovery that was the birth of its autonomy, the moment when it discovered itself. At the same time they abandoned both their role as mass worker and the union structure which was seen as an intrinsic aspect of the German Model.

**3.**

So the era of autonomy began. A comrade recently wrote in the Munich community paper *Blatt*: "Autonomy means to give yourself a name, based on your own desires and needs, to change the totality, and thus also daily life, to put subjectivity first . . . In its positive expression this involves the development of new contents and forms of life, opposed to one another and not reducible to one single formula, but which reflect the plurality of needs. Its negative expression, this shattered the unity of the oppressed groups, signaled the end of conciliation, and the refusal of politics as such". This description of forms-of-behavior seems adequate to an understanding of the nature of the mass movement which has expanded enormously since l974-75. It has established itself on many different terrains, spreading across the entire Federal Republic as a network of loosely connected regional centers in which the former gap between the former strongholds and the provinces is closing. Everywhere we find the same sections of the movement, often only loosely defined, linked through foci like youth centers or local community papers. I can only sketch very roughly the level of development of these partial movements. What is of decisive importance is that, without exception, they all define themselves according to their actual place in the process of social reproduction and in relation to the nodal points of capitalist discipline. A third of the students and assistants in higher education (students and diploma-work force) belong, in their language and mode of living, to the autonomous movement in the broadest sense. They no longer define themselves according to the internal constraints of the knowledge factory, but rather according to the possibilities of surviving as unemployed while studying and developing an alternative social definition.

Women produce and reproduce the crisis of the nuclear family. Through their own autonomous network, they withdraw more and more from the strategy of the crisis which aims at a new subjugation within the class under patriarchal control with continuously more unpaid housework. Working-class youth has been temporarily disintegrated though drugs, alcoholism and aimless violence and surrendered to the stark alternative of adaptation within a reinforced factory disciplineor unemployment. In the meantime the youth centers succeeded in organizing collectively against the "right to work" and in connecting young unemployed with the trade union movement. Finally there is the broad prisoners’ movement which is increasingly integrated with smaller regional movements. Their struggle is especially important because nowhere else isthe social content of the German Model developed so early or as methodically as in the prisons: by reorganizing the majority of prisoners into homogenous groups as labor power and by isolating and psychoanalyzing the maladjusted. This grass roots movement shows that the social revolt against the strongholds of punishment can be led by all prisoners and that it is incorrect to assign it only to the so-called political prisoners.

This brief outline of the various sections of the movement will have to suffice. It must be stressed that this is a movement which encompasses many thousands, and in which the New Left plays a principal role. The network began in 1975 and has been concerned with developing positive alternatives to work and to the structures of discipline within the system. This network pierces the structures of capitalist control over labor power, simultaneously leaving the old struggles which had been largely centered on the factory. The new initiatives have stimulated and reactivated these old struggles in the factory. The comrade cited above argues that they are "networks to build, ditches to dig, a context of struggled to develop, niches and cracks within the system

to occupy, a state to nibble away at” – that is to aim at“the decomposition and isolation of the state rather than its destruction" as part of the goal of the movement. The movement also seeks to make connections. Even if the struggles against nuclear power remained temporary, its mass action was significant – as most recently the [September 24,1977] demonstration of 60,000 against the Kalkar reactor station – and equal in importance to the demonstrations which took place in 1967-68.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**4.**

Returning to the initial hypotheses that the German Model is a force directed against mass autonomy. On the other side mass autonomy is itself no less of a force than the German Model. This is significant because the partial autonomous movements are once again on the offensive against the overall system of discipline from which they were excluded in 1974-75. They are beginning to cover more and more of the central terrains of power. The autonomous movement is faced with new problems. (1) Its immediate task is to define more precisely the subversive content of the masses, who have been atomized by the gigantic work-machine of the society. Until now they have, to a surprising extent, succeeded in translating their right to live into action. But they were often forced to do this from a position of indescribable want and hardship. (2) The right to live should be expanded by all partial movements into a right to an income independent of capitalist work. (3) New forms of appropriation of the enormous social wealth must be developed. It appears that the autonomous mass movement in Germany is developing on lines similar to that of Italy where the issue has been that of guaranteeism [the movement to establish a guaranteed social wage for those normally dubbed "unproductive" workers: the unemployed, housewives, students. (4) Without surrendering the social aggregation points which we have already defined, the autonomous movement must intensify its struggle against the German exploitation Model in all of its aspects, attacking it at its source: surplus labor as its essential precondition for the controlled reproduction of the social life of the class. This step is essential to avoid the threat of ghettoization of the class. This step would also expand the political level of mass struggles, without being forced to accept the old and false rules of the game of the "autonomy of the political".[[14]](#footnote-14) A gradual combination of all partial movements within the process of social reproduction would follow from this. One thing will and must continue to exist: a mass movement that is without hierarchy, that is fully egalitarian and which increasingly abolishes the old class divisions. The movement must abolish all privileges of the centers over the provinces, of men over women, of the young over the old, of Germans against immigrants, of technicians against mass workers, of the waged against the unwaged. The perspective of revolutionary class unity grows from below but must absorb within itself more privileged sectors of the class.

We cannot ignore the threat of terrorism against the autonomous mass movement. Even if we hope for an authentic counter-initiative enabling us to escape from the planned ghettoization, the surviving prisoners remain hostages of the state. We know that as long as they are condemned to solitary confinement, cynics like Helmut Schmidt can always strike at the heart of our movement. They will try again ata more advanced level of decomposition of the power structure to drive sections of our movement into forms of violent confrontation, the outcome of which is pre-determined by the emergency general staff, and used against our social revolutionary perspective as a whole. They will continue to try to separate the question of revolutionary counter-violence from its social base to paralyze us by substituting their own alienated forms of appearance.

Ultimately they will try to rob us of our own legitimate violence. We stand at the threshold of a new period. At present we are not willing to continue the debate with the comrades of the armed groups who are responsible for the killing of bank director Ponto.[[15]](#footnote-15) Such a debate would be a welcome spectacle for the eyes of those in the one-party coalition of capital and state. We will force them into a dialogue by fighting for the liberation of the imprisoned comrades and by achieving success. This will be only the first step to including all prisoners and all those in custody. Only when the condemned, shadows from the jails of Stammheim and Berlin and elsewhere are again among us will we be prepared to make ourselves visible in the discussions of our own and their mistakes.

1. [Editor’s Footnote: i.e., since the death of prisoners of the Red Army Faction in Stammheim maximum security prison on October 18, 1977.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Editor’s Footnote: Helmut Heinrich Waldemar Schmidt was a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Germany and served as Chancellor of West Germany from 1974 to 1982. He sanctioned the October 18, 1977 attack of the GSG9, the elite anti-terrorist group of the German Federal Police, on the Lufthansa flight that had been hijacked by four Palestinians – reportedly members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – who demanded the release of Red Army Faction members then held in German prisons.] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Editor’s Footnote: In 1977, ex-Nazi and former SS officer, Hanns-Martin Schleyer was President of the Confederation of German Employers’ Association and of the Federation of German Industries. He was captured by the Red Army Faction on September 5,1977 and executed in response to the murder of RAF prisoners.] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Editor’s Footnote: Mogadishu, Somalia where the hijacked Lufthansa airplane was attacked by the GSG9.] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Editor’s Footnote: the inner emergency staff of the Chancelor’s Cabinet.] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Editor’s Note: Angelus Gottfried Thomas Mann was the son of Thomas Mann and a popular, liberal German historian and writer who was already known for opposing the student movement in Germany.] [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Editor’s Note: ex-Jusos refers to former members of the youth organization of the SPD (*Jungsozialistinnen und Jungsozialisten in der SPD*)] [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Editor’s Note: Hans-Jurgen Wischnewski was an ex-Minister of State and Deputy of the Social Democratic Party. It was he who negotiated with the Somali government to permit the GSG9 to assault the hijacked Lufthansa jet.] [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Peter Bruckner professor of psychology at Hanover Technical University was smeared in the press and suspended from his job after having been accused of sheltering Ulrike Meinhof. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [Editor’s footnote: The Phillips curve was originally a representation of the statistically observable relationship between wages and unemployment, i.e., as unemployment declined, wages rose. The name “Phillips curve”, however, became associated , by most economists, with a similar trade-off between *inflation* and unemployment wherein rising unemployment was associated with lower levels of inflation. Because in the 1970s a great many economists viewed inflation as driven by rising wages, increased unemployment was used as a weapon against wage increases (and hence against inflation).] [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [Editor’s footnote: “without institutional mediation” refers to the bypassing of institution such as unions or official student groups.] [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [Editor’s footnote: German student leader Rudi Dutschke’s reformulation of Gramsci’s notion of building working class hegemony from the inside: “*Der lange Marsch durch die Institutionen”.*] [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. [Editor’s footnote: This is a reference to the German student movement protests, the *68er-Bewegung* – an important part of the world-wide wave of struggles at that time.] [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. [Editor’s footnote: This is a reference to the position of the Italian Communist Party line of the mid-seventies – a strategy of long-run institutional change that was opposed to the proposals of the Italian New Left and eventually led to the CPI joining with the Christian Democrats in a “Historic Compromise”, i.e., a coalition that launched the April 7, 1979 wave of repression in that paralleled the earlier one in Germany being critiqued here.] [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. [Editor’s footnote: Jürgen Ponto was chairman of the Dresdner Bank board of directors. On July 30, 1977, he was shot in his 30-room mansion in the course of an apparent kidnapping attempt by members of the Red Army Faction. He later died of his wounds.] [↑](#footnote-ref-15)