When the liberalization of the Bundespost's
Kommunikations Industries
sourcing regulations forced West German
By Ralph Kohlrausch
Philips Kommunikations Industrie AG (PKI)
to get serious about exports, the company
couldn't make the deadline." So the PKI team
started to look into the possibilities. When they
checked the available computer systems, they
found Siemens' Metal the best of the bunch.

"Logos, for example, will only let you lease their
system for three years. You can't really invest in
Logos and further develop the glossaries and source
code yourself, since the whole thing never becomes
your own property. And Systran is purely online
— which gives you no control whatsoever. As for Phil-
ips' Rosetta, being developed in Eindhoven, it won't
be on the market till 1991. And Little and his team
needed machine translation now.

THE METAL PEOPLE

What Metal offers is an integrated documenting
and machine translation system—which you can
buy for US$140,000, plus an extra US$55,000 for
the software. So in September 1988, PKI decided to
try it out for a year. They bought the hardware, an MX-
2 minicomputer with four terminals and a Symbolics
LISP machine, while the software (German-to-
English) was provided free of charge for the period of
testing. User training was taken care of by
Siemens.

PKI's newly formed translation department,
with a current fulltime staff of eight, received an
initial one-week crash course in Metal, then worked
with the system for six weeks. This was followed by
another week of training. And when problems do
arise, there is a constant hotline to Metal's developers
in Munich. Tips and improvements are passed
along this line in both directions.

"We've made several suggestions for improve-
ments to Siemens," says Little, "which we are
assured will be incorporated into Metal's next ver-
sion—which is supposed to be available in June this
year. When a new PKI product is to be exported, the
total technical documentation, contracts, etc., are
handed to the people whom the office wags like to
call the "Metal people" — most of them being
women—who then take page after page and feed
them into a scanner. Metal then splits each docu-
ment into a text file (ASCII) and a layout file. And
while the latter is stored separately, the ASCII text
is transferred to the Symbolics, where Metal checks

"There's some people in Nürnberg
being buried by a translation load,
Man of Metal!!"