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An Analysis of Political Intolerance, Racism and Scapegoatism in Twentieth Century Germany

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Ideology is the source of all organized activity—there is no possibility of organized social activity without an internalized morality or ideology to legitimate it. Indeed, ideology is the transcendent phenomenon of everyday life, not as the causal or motivating factor in social activity, but as the link between organized mental activity and the organized social world. Ideology serves to legitimate realistic social activity, focus heterogeneous cognitive, moral, and wishful ambitions on the completion of social tasks, and define the range of appropriate behaviors in terms of those tasks. Ideology is the most important variable in the explanation of social stability and social change. Why does mankind have a much greater tendency change its ideology and produce feelings of fear and hatred in times of economic distress, hardship, or social upheaval? This paper attempts to answer this question and to provide socio-economic, psychological, and political theory rationalizations for Germany's consistent history of racial and ethnic intolerance in the twentieth century.

First, intolerance during pre- and post-World War II Germany are briefly discussed to provide a background and a greater understanding for what has occurred in more recent years. Since right extremist parties have once again entered parliamentary politics in the 1980s, it is necessary to examine the political focus and the socio-economic environment which helped mobilize voters and contributed to the success of the extreme right. Finally, the dramatic wave of intolerance and violence after the reunification of Germany is looked at and analyzed.

A History of Intolerance—Before W.W.II

The Great Depression shattered the economic basis of the welfare state in Germany. The financial foundations of social security and sickness insurance were swept away; local authority initiatives in housing and welfare were especially vulnerable as some had been supported by municipal savings banks
and American loans. State welfare authorities were subjected to a ruthless axing of funds by retrenchment-minded ministers. The edifice of the Wiemar welfare state—a well-thought out but unfinished modernist construction by planners and social hygienists—came crashing down. By 1931 Germans were in a state of panic at the economic calamity. There was a massive over-reaction in the sphere of welfare with savage cuts to all services. Municipal welfare experts pointing out that needs were greater than ever clashed with economists who stressed the need for severe cuts and selectivity in health and welfare administration. The state faced a dilemma: as needs grew resources diminished. Between 1929 and 1932 unemployment rocketed from 1.8 to 5.6 million (Weindling, p. 442). It has been estimated that in 1932 one in every three of the working population had no job, a situation that also threatened those that did have jobs. The society was in a state of chaotic decline. The upshot was that clinics closed and social security benefits were cut. In this atmosphere there was a renewed campaign against lay practitioners, the rising number of women doctors, and the high percentage of Jewish doctors in cities. Anti-feminism, anti-semitism, and anti-socialism were welded together by economic pressures, resulting in sympathy for authoritarian politics.

Biologically conceived remedies replaced political solutions to social problems. Popularizations of eugenics pleaded for a return to ‘natural’ solutions to social problems. One geneticist considered that the scientist was in a position to draw conclusions for humanity as would a breeder for the improvement of his stock. The ‘feeble minded’ and the deaf and dumb would not survive in nature, so why should society allow the procreation of this poor hereditary stock? He recommended measures to protect the nation’s genetics by sterilizing all those with bad hereditary traits.

The defeat of Germany did not mean the defeat of eugenics, population policy, or other racist feelings. Although there was horror at Nazi atrocities, most academic and professional institutions survived untouched, or were reconstituted in such a way that social interests were left intact. Generally, only party political activists lost their posts in public health and welfare administrations. There were remarkable continuities in the personnel and administrative structures of public services, and most geneticists and teachers and researchers were back in office within a few years. While the Nazi political elite was removed, professional and administrative structures persisted after the war. For purposes of de-Nazification—itself only partially implemented—a narrow political definition of Nazism was employed, leaving many key areas relatively unaffected.

The character of unemployment contributed to distinctive political action. It was not just that unemployment levels rose, but that significant numbers of skilled workers and white-collar staff were affected who were not prepared to regard this as part of their fate. This was particularly so from 1929 onward as an upsurge in long-term employment undermined Weimar’s social insurance system and threw many of the jobless back onto meager local
authority relief payments. In these circumstances millions of Germans suffered the dissipation of vocational skills, a loss of sense of position in society and a loss of self esteem.

Unemployed youth in particular became outcasts as their life prospects faded, apprenticeship training became useless or, if they were school dropouts, they confronted a world into which they had never been socialized through holding a job. Then, as now, it has been argued, the seeds of radicalization rather than apathy lay in this degrading process. As poverty at home drove unemployed youth onto the streets, devoid of either money or self respect, they became ready recruits for street gangs which, in turn, were manipulated by extremist political parties—or they were recruited directly by the radical paramilitary formations:

"There the unemployed found what they needed. Uniforms gave them the feeling of superiority which compensated for their feeling of inferiority. They could march in file with the companions of their fate. They could fight against an enemy, they learned how to shoot and kill and they found an outlet for the painful tension of hate and resentment" (Fischer, pg. 140). Hitler and the Nazi movement became crucial for large numbers of people because they addressed themselves to an immediately disrupting, potentially chaotic situation that threatened the practical exercise of skill and the realization of ideals on an unprecedented and unanticipated scale. People lived with a sense of failure, of weakness; they were afraid that they would not be able to achieve goals, aims, and ideals, that present difficulties could not be surmounted. There was a feeling that Germans were doomed to be victims unless something was done about it.

After the War

Until 1945, nationalist and anti-democratic parties were the dominant political forces in Germany. After the German defeat in World War II, however, the dominant political forces of pre-war times were banned in the East and relegated to the extreme right in the West; the Catholic and the social democratic opposition to the former 'national camp' shaped post-war politics and relocated its political center. Although right extremist parties have been represented in West German parliaments only intermittently, they have retained enough electoral potential to be relevant, at least as channels for social and political discontent.

Right wing extremism in the Federal Republic developed in three separate phases and around three different parties: the German Reichs Party (DRP) and the Socialist Reichs Party (SRP) in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the National Democratic Party (NPD) in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Republicans in the 1980s. At the core of the success of the second phase of West German right extremism, which stretched from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, was the transition from a replica ideology of National Socialism
or similar vintage to a selective focus on contemporary issues. When the NPD entered seven parliaments and won sixty-one seats between 1966 and 1968, the party had dual appeal. On the one hand, it was perceived as the party political mouthpiece of the extreme right, the successor organization of the right extremist parties which had declined during the 1950s. On the other hand, the NPD had only been founded at the end of 1964 by merging right extremist and conservative groupings. To the electorate, therefore, it could appear as a new political force. Studies of the electoral support for the NPD in the 1960s have revealed two distinct sources: about half of the voters were ideological voters, adherents of right extremist views and former voters of similar parties; the other half were voters who feared unemployment or economic uncertainties during the first economic recession since post-war reconstruction. Most of these voters perceived the NPD as a protest force, a party against the system—they had neither read its program nor defined their own political position as right extremist. Once the economy stabilized, the NPD vote regressed to its extremist core.

Throughout the 1970s neo-Nazi groups attracted young people, predominantly from the working class. At the end of the decade, although right extremism lost its parliamentary representation, it developed a two-pronged organizational structure which bridged the generations and combined conventional right extremism with a radicalized protest culture of the extreme right. Although these groups aimed at rehabilitating National Socialism, the neo-Nazi groups of the period adopted a more radical approach and frequently used political violence. Criminal offenses with right extremist motives soared and changed in nature: in the 1950s and early 1960s, anti-Semitic violence was the most common kind of offense; now it was more generally directed against foreigners, and physical attacks, arson and murder increased sharply. Between 1969 and 1989, criminal offenses with right extremist motives rose by 150 percent (Hainsworth, pg. 65).

The third phase of West German right extremism began in the mid 1980s. At the extra-parliamentary level the associations, action groups, book clubs and publishing ventures of the extreme right enjoyed rising memberships or circulation figures, a trend which has been exacerbated since unification. By 1989, memberships and circulation figures had increased by almost 50% times since the early 1980s.

The 1980s

More significantly, the extreme right made some headway in the 1980s at electoral level. In January 1989 the Republicans won 6 percent of the vote and eleven seats in the parliament in West Berlin and in June 1989 entered the European Parliament with 7.1 percent of the vote. Local elections in March and June 1989 resulted in similar gains for the extreme right.

In the 1980s, the Republicans recruited two sets of members. They
attracted the consolidated right as well as new members who had no right extremist history, joining the Republicans simply to change the style or direction of contemporary politics. A pattern similar to the NPD became apparent—the duality of traditional right extremists and the new members with new motivations to effect changes led to a detachment of the leadership from the rank and file, and a radicalization towards neo-Nazism, especially among younger members.

The Republicans made their political gains at a time when party systems in many Western European democracies became more diversified with small parties challenging established electoral hegemonies. Two special developments in the German party system of the 1980s suggest that a parliamentary party on the extreme right could play a more visible role than in the 1950s or 1960s. First, both main parties, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), have lost electoral support and increasingly depend on coalition governments at national and regional level to command parliamentary majorities. Translated to the national level, the outcome of the 1989 European elections suggested that neither of the two main parties would have been able to secure a parliamentary majority in a coalition with just one small party. The second development can be summed up as a trend towards issue politics. Since the early 1970s the broad church-approach to policy articulation, which has been the hallmark of the West German catch-all parties (Volksparteien) no longer satisfied the expectation of specific policy changes. With parties no longer able to ignore public sentiments at the risk of losing voters, the articulation of issues inside and outside parliaments has been an effective lever of policy change. Provided that a party of the extreme right can establish itself as a political force which might win enough votes to matter, they can expect to influence the political agenda even if they do not achieve parliamentary representation.

The Social Basis of Right Extremism

The main areas of Republican support seem to be the established, modest, residential districts or suburbs. These are the people with no more than the basic education, the blue-collar workers or low-status employees. Members of the police force—allegedly disappointed with the government’s leniency towards former terrorists and their perceived indecision in matters of law and order—figure strongly among Republican voters and members.

Only in West Germany did political detachment and containment of post-war right extremism occur. In the 1940s and 50s, one survey of public opinion suggested that one in three adults at the time held anti-democratic attitudes and showed little interest in the political changes that took place (Osmond, p. 155). Ten years later, Almond and Verba’s study of the civic culture revealed that West Germans had come to accept democracy in a
pragmatic fashion as a set of rules to be followed. When the German civic culture was looked at again in the 1980s, it was found that pragmatic conformity had given way to endorsement of democratic values and a preference for democratic practices. Generally speaking, Germans today declare themselves satisfied with their political system and the number of people who still look towards a one-party state has declined sharply.

Generally, Germans believe widely that other countries committed equally horrendous war crimes. In 1989 a majority from all political persuasions declared themselves in favor of ‘closing the books on [their] past since equally bad things happened elsewhere’ (Hainsworth, pg. 73). This kind of rehabilitation of the past is one of the set pieces of public opinion and of contemporary right extremism. Given that more than 10 million people fell victim to national Socialist persecutions and mass murder, the number of sentences given is astonishingly low—Of the total prosecution files opened against individuals, only 7.1% of those had sentences passed, most of those sentences being minimal prison sentences (Hainsworth, pg. 73).

In public education, the task of critically examining National Socialism has also been largely ignored. It has been found that students have persistent beliefs that the war interrupted what had essentially been positive government under Hitler. In 1988, on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1938 November pogroms, the then Speaker of the House, Philip Jenninger, drew a vivid picture of improved living conditions, reduced unemployment and the ‘amazing successes of Hitler’: “Of course, some cantankerous characters kept on nagging and were prosecuted by the Security Police and the Gestapo but most Germans—from all social classes, the bourgeoisie as much as the working class—would have believed in 1938 that Hitler could be regarded as the greatest statesman of our history.” (Hainsworth, p.74).

In German political culture, a positive evaluation of certain aspects of National Socialism has existed side by side with democratic operations. This duality is an important precondition for right extremism. For example, popular beliefs that Hitler could be ranked among the greatest statesmen weakened in the 1950s though they have hardly changed since the 1960s.

In 1989, 38 percent of West Germans thought Hitler might be counted among the top statesmen. Polls have shown that those with lower levels of education and with party preferences right of center tend to hold more favorable views about Hitler than the better educated; answers to the question of whether National Socialism should be regarded as mostly good or mostly bad match party divides.

The influx of highly educated people into the labor market has raised employers’ expectations about qualifications and made it more difficult for the less well-educated to secure training or employment. Moreover, many young people with only basic education have been unable to obtain vocational training. In 1987, a survey of 16–17 year olds concluded that 16 percent held right extremist views. At the very least, right extremism has survived among postwar generations and in contemporary political culture as an
acceptable way of articulating protest. In an economic culture which requires vocational requirements for any type of skilled work, young people at the bottom of the educational ladder have been confined to unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. In this sector of the labor market, unemployment has always been a threat. New technologies and the shift towards managerial tasks and advanced technical skills have threatened whole occupational sectors. Moreover, unification has rendered most of the East Germans, for whom the collapse of political institutions entailed an unexpected collapse of economic and social prospects, into this position. This is the milieu for contemporary right extremism. Surveys in the wake of the Republican gains in 1989 have also shown that right extremism draws on a groups whose views of politics are more negative than those of other groups.

In recent years, the extreme right has shifted its stance to be more concentrated on hostility towards foreigners. Germans appear to be shedding former inhibitions to expressing xenophobia openly. In 1978, 39 percent favored the return of foreigners to their country of origin; in 1989, 60 percent felt this way. In 1986, a report by the Ministry of the Interior stated that extreme rightist groups had a total of 23,000 members, an increase of one-third within two years. In 1988, the report listed over seventy such extra-parliamentary groups and parties with collective membership of 30,000. Neo-nazism gained ground even before unification. Another indicator that the extreme right has grown since it concentrated on hostility towards foreigners is the election record of recent years: in the early 1980s a group calling itself Liste Auslanderstopp won 3 percent of the vote; the National Democratic Party, which was winning about 0.2 percent of the vote throughout the 1970s now wins more than 0.5 percent. The Republicans grew from about 3 percent in the early 1980s to over 7 percent in recent years (Hainsworth, pg. 83)

There are basically two kinds of foreigners that receive most of the anger from the Germans. The first were recruited from Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia in the 1950s at a time of economic boom and acute labor shortage. These “guest workers” took jobs no Germans wanted. Today they are an integral part of the German economy, and make up about one-quarter of the population in Frankfurt, nearly 20 percent in Stuttgart and Numich, and about 15 percent in Dusseldorf, Mannheim, Cologne, Berlin, and Hamburg. By now, their population is growing quickly, and this demographic change scared the Germans, worried that the country could face a shortage of Germans to run the country’s economy and institutions in the next century. The other groups is the asylum seekers. In 1989, 57 percent of West Germans and 90 percent of Republican followers believed that asylum seekers were treated too generously. Just one in five Germans was prepared to accept asylum seekers (Hainsworth, pg. 86). And, immigration of German resettlers and East Germans into the Federal Republic more than doubled between 1981 and 1989 while the housing shortage became a larger and larger problem as the decade progressed.
Economic Effects of Reunification

It has been four years since the Berlin wall collapsed, and three since German reunification. The world cheered as Germany entered a new and exciting era, seeming ready for a position of world leadership. However, the Germans did not live happily ever after. Their joy of November 9, 1989, faded. The west Germans begrudged transferring $100 billion a year to the east Germans. The east Germans resented their 40 percent real unemployment, the meagerness of productive investment in eastern Germany, and the second hand cars they often got stuck with.

Administratively, unification went smoothly enough. Previously non-existent state and local governments were set up in the east and neophyte officials elected to run them. West German politicians filled in the many gaps. Western federal and state ministries and courts loaned thousands of bureaucrats and judges to the east for two years. Training programs for practically every aspect of life began to show up everywhere.

The political crisis of the German Democratic Republic derived in large measure from its economic crisis, and the problems did not depart with unification. In many respects they grew worse as they old system was exposed to market forces. The economy of the GDR before the revolution of 1989 was primarily industrial—manufacturing, mining, and electricity generating 72.3 percent of Net Material Product in 1988, the construction industry 7.4 percent—but with a surprisingly large agricultural sector (9.8 percent of NMP). The economy was almost entirely state owned, with only about 3 percent of the NMP coming from private enterprises, and those operating under strict limitations (Osmond, pg. 153).

The first half of 1990 saw the downhill slide begin. In all sectors of the East German economy concerns faced shortages of supplies, critical gaps in the workforce, and competition from western producers. This was either because the latter's goods were being sold in the GDR or because East Germans in Berlin and near the border were doing their shopping in the Federal Republic. In the early summer western consumer goods, foodstuffs, alcohol, and tobacco were being sold on the streets of the GDR, often from mobile stalls. Second-hand cars were being driven to the GDR for sale. All these problems were exacerbated by the monetary union of July 1, 1990, when the Deutschemark was introduced into the GDR. While the exchange rate of 1:1 was attractive to the East German consumer in that it boosted purchasing power, it almost immediately rendered a large proportion of the East German economy uncompetitive and led to a collapse in both its internal retail market and its export markets in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The food and consumer goods industries almost overnight found their produce was replaced by western alternatives more attractive to the population. West German suppliers saw the GDR as a huge untapped market and tired to relieve the East Germans of their now converted savings.

The collapse of the east German economy had a devastating effect on
the labor market. A rapid increase in unemployment shocked the East Germans who were unaccustomed to unemployment, having experienced "employment as a right" for the preceding 40 years under the communist leadership. The shock was intensified by the magnitude of the upheaval, which is without parallel in post-war European history. There was full employment in the Honecker era, but unemployment rose from 142,096 (1.6 percent) in June 1990 to a short term peak of 1,068,600 (12.1 percent) in July 1991 (Osmond, pg. 162). January 1992 saw a big increase in unemployment due to the end of short-time working for many and a reduction in the figure for those considered capable of gaining employment.

German unification has resulted in immense social disparity between the eastern and western regions of Germany. The emergence of the mutually derogatory terms "Ossis" (east Germans) and "Wessis" (west Germans) in the popular vocabulary represent the social tensions that have grown out of the process of economic and political unification. The majority of east Germans are unconvinced that they will attain comparable living standards to those in western Germany in the near future, and this opinion has strengthened since unification.

The popular optimism that accompanied the political events in the GDR in 1989 quickly became a feeling of desperation for many during 1990 as they were confronted with the sobering impact of marketization. Disaffected by the consumer rush that accompanied the opening of the Berlin Wall and the introduction of the Deutschemark into the GDR economy, a large number of east Germans have begun to question the advantages that unification is assumed to have brought them. The blind rejection of everything that is east German has led many to conclude that rather that October 3, 1993 symbolizing unification, the GDR was subject to "annexation", and that the socialist hegemony to which they had been exposed since 1949 had been replaced by a capitalist variant. In addressing this accusation, it is often argued that the current rise in neo-fascism in eastern Germany and the lack of understanding of democratic practices can be put down to political socialization under the old communist leadership. This argument, although true in part, reduces the significance of socio-economic disparity between the eastern and western German states and distorts attempts to assess accurately the social problems to which unification has given rise.

Emigration has taken many out of the east German labor market. Estimates suggest that approximately one million people emigrated to west Germany between may 1989 and January 1992, though this figure doesn't take into account the number moving back to the east. Another way in which the unemployment statistics have been kept down is the widespread practice of short-time working. The west German state has provided a wage subsidy for firms encountering a fall in business, in order to allow them to reduce production whilst preventing redundancies. By early 1991 perhaps half of the east German workers on short-time were actually unemployed. This situation had arisen out of the special conditions for short-time payments in the
east German states, whereby the state in extreme situations would be allowed to pay the wages of an entire company in order to avoid bankruptcy and an escalation in unemployment.

Social Effects of Reunification

German unification has meant many changes for the people in the GDR, ranging from the freedom to travel to the freedom to be cast into unemployment. In general it has produced a mobility, especially amongst the young, unknown in that region, and something of the "wild east" phenomenon to be experienced elsewhere in the former communist states. There is money to be made, but there are also dangers of falling into poverty. For everyone, some of the immediate problems have been employment and housing. Rents on apartments have risen drastically, putting pressure on those whose incomes have suffered. Many blamed their failure to attain Western living standards fast on the new heartlessness of capitalism rather than on forty years of communist heartlessness. German voters in both the east and the west became disillusioned with the centrist political parties. Their flirtation with the far right threatened to top the crucial 5 percent of votes at the federal level for the first time since 1945. Kohl's accentuation of the positive—a style that had worked well to inspire eastern confidence during the transition—seemed less suited to rallying citizens to sacrifice for rebuilding. The combination of untamed violence and economic stagnation created a discontent that went well beyond the usual German propensity to use pessimism as a tool to identify and solve social problems. Teenagers at the low end of the social scale, especially in the east, assaulted third world nationals seeking asylum, and while other Germans rallied to protect their foreign guests, many others cheered on the skinheads.

The nastier aspect of life in the new Germany has been given prominence in the international press. The incidence of racist attacks and the growth of new-Nazism causes concern about the future of Germany. Because violence against foreigners and minorities has reached an all time high since the Nazi era, some are led to wonder whether Germany has truly overcome its 20th century curse. 1991 saw the largest spree of racial violence in Germany since the early Nazi era, mostly in the former communist half. Federal police say that right-wing extremists now commit more crimes each month in eastern Germany than they once did in a whole year.

Eastern Germany's neo-Nazi embrace is seen to greatly cling to many of Hitler's ideas for the country—a greater fatherland, racial purity, anti-Semitism—but they have also found a new scapegoat to add to the list: foreigners, who are accused of stealing jobs that would otherwise go to Germans. West Germany has witnessed many similar events, which suggests that there are more influences at play than simply the working out of the residual problems of the GDR. Unemployment, housing shortage and the
An Analysis of Political Intolerance

visible presence of large numbers of Turks, Yugoslavs, gypsies and settlers from eastern Europe have encouraged gang violence and political mobilization of the right in the west too. This political aspect is something which west Germany can offer the east Germans ready-made. Small far-right groups have long been established in the west and they experience occasional waves of electoral popularity. As discussed previously, in west Germany elections, right wing groups have shown successes.

More recently, large numbers of refugees from every part of the world are streaming into Germany. Drawn by relatively liberal German policies toward foreigners, these people hope to build better lives; they are arriving at a rate of about 1000 a day. As they have been arriving, however, social pressures have been building in Germany. As seen before, many Germans have had trouble finding jobs and affordable housing. When they see government benefits going to foreigners they become frustrated and angry, sometimes to the point of violence. This frustration blends well with the emergence of a political far right that has become part of Germany’s social landscape. The police estimate that there are about 40,000 radical rightists in Germany, many of them influenced by Nazi ideology.

One of the problems is that new-Nazism as a political standpoint or simply as a matter of style was a means within the old GDR of registering hostility to the system. Secondly, the constant official rhetoric of “anti-fascism” and “anti-racism” never really explored these phenomena in the way in which many West Germans did, and it also equated them with the Federal Republic. This robbed the anti-fascist stance of much of its credibility. Thirdly, the GDR was by its very nature a society isolated from cosmopolitan influence, not just since 1949, but since 1933, when racism became an official philosophy. Now that the society is more open, but beset by social and economic problems, the appeal to unemployed young men of aggressive group behavior against identifiable scapegoats is unfortunately great. The temporary accommodation given to these immigrant scapegoats while their pleas for asylum are investigated has been subject to some horrific gang attacks.

Two decades after the East German state officially declared Nazism extinguished from its territory, the voice of right-wing extremists is clearly audible within the strong nationalist, anti-communist sentiment that has surfaced. The scene in Berlin only reinforced the impression that disorder is taking over the streets of Germany and the country is unable to stop it. Although racism is not just a German problem and comparisons with Hitler’s state-sponsored pogroms of the 1930s are greatly exaggerated, the world cannot help asking why such behavior is happening again. The Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig estimates that six percent of East Berlin youths and between one and two percent of young people nationwide identify with extreme right-wing policies. A recent institute study asserts that one activist is now in the position to convert between and 10 and 20 co-workers, depending on the area (New Statesman and Society, Jan. 12, 1990).
The Republican Party (RP) also recognizes the reactionary potential in the GDR. They see equal, if not greater, support here as central to their overall strategy. Although fascist parties are prohibited from organizing, the RP has already established a foothold in East Berlin and the south. Propaganda has been confiscated at the border, but the relaxed controls have enabled the party, as well as a handful of other neo-Nazi organizations, to circulate literature at will.

It is fairly easy to rationalize the violence and upheaval going on in Germany right now. Unemployment has reached 50 percent in some eastern cities and that a society held in check by 12 years of Nazism and 40 years of communism is naturally intolerant and vulnerable to extremism. Although Bonn is pumping huge amounts of money into the East, economic output has shrunk to a third of its pre-unification level, and the long-predicted rebound is not in sight. It is thought that a lot of the anger is really at western Germans for shutting down factories and farms, but easterners are reluctant to say so. Instead, the foreigners became surrogate targets. Among the east’s youth, things seem even worse. The institutions for transmitting values have been upended. The relationship between adults and adolescents has been shaken by the rapid shift from communism to capitalism. Schools have been reconfigured to match an unfamiliar western system; communist youth organizations have been disbanded; many of the clubs that there a standard feature of people’s lives have been closed. Conversations with rightist youths suggest that while most of them are frustrated, angry, and prepared for violence, they are largely without political ideology. Many are unemployed and come from families whose lives have been thrown into disarray. The collapse of the old authority structures means that there probably is a need for new authority. In the past years, they have seen their parents lose their jobs, their teachers being replaced, their political leaders being put on trial. “You have to understand the background of this problem,” said Tobias Kogge, youth services director in a city called Chemnitz, near the German border of Czechoslovakia. “In old East Germany, kids had a path clearly laid out for them. They went to school, they were given a career, they were trained and then they went to work. Living conditions weren’t great, but everyone had what amounted to full social protection.”

“The unification process has been compressed into too short a time, and these kids suddenly see themselves without anything. Kids feel disoriented and overwhelmed. They develop feelings of hatred. In moments of social crisis, people look for someone to blame. Foreigners are the most convenient target.” (New York Times, Sep. 28, 1992)

No one expects the small neo-Nazi movement to become a major electoral force in the near future of Germany. But small extreme-right parties have won as much as seven percent of the vote in local elections, and observers of the neo-Nazi scene say that extremists’ message—a dramatic, often violent rejection of democracy and a rebellion against Germany’s strict taboo on Nazism—could turn into a significant destabilizing force. Opinion
An Analysis of Political Intolerance

polls repeatedly have shown that most Germans reject and fear right-wing extremist, but recent polls indicate a growing radical-right influence: 82 percent of western Germans (up from 49 percent in 1990) and 90 percent of eastern Germans said in a poll commissioned by Bonn’s Interior Ministry that right-wing extremism now endangers German democracy (Washington Post, Mar. 2, 1992).

Small neo-Nazi groups have existed since the end of the war. What is new here is that these groups have a new generation of leaders and followers that did not live through the Third Reich. Opinion surveys show a quite high level of acceptance of racism and violence among German youth right now, and these neo-Nazi groups are creating a climate that justifies violence. If a Hitler type were to come along in Germany, the result could be scary.

Balance Theory and Political Intolerance

Much of the racism and scapegoatism that made Germany infamous over the years can be explained using balance theory.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{YOU} & \\
- & \\
\text{THREAT} & + \text{CULTURE} \\
\text{HANS GERMAN} & \\
- & \\
\text{UNEMPLOYMENT} & + \text{IMMIGRANTS} \\
\text{HOME LOSS} & \text{JEWS} \\
\text{LOWER CLASS LIVES} & \text{BLACKS}
\end{align*}
\]

In this case, Hans German feels negatively towards both threats and towards a certain culture (presumably one different from his own). If he feels negatively about both of these things, then the link between the threat and the culture is a positive one—he feels threatened by this culture. It can also be seen in this way: Hans feels threatened by said culture and he feels negatively about threat, which leads him to have a negative opinion of the culture. There is probably a little bit of both going on in the present xenophobic situation in Germany. Not only are Germans feeling socially and economically threatened by current social situations and are looking for someone to blame, but they are also projecting their frustrations onto groups (immigrants) that they dislike already. And they dislike these groups because they feel threatened by them. It is difficult to tell which came first—the threat or the negative feelings toward the cultures, and balance theory does not try to solve this problem. It
is hard to predict which link will change in such an imbalanced relationship, but there is a great chance that many of the people are predisposed to disliking certain groups, no matter what kind of real threat they post. It has been found that when people dislike a group, there is an extremely high probability that they also feel threatened by that group.

**Conclusion**

For a transition period at least, West Germans and especially East Germans are experiencing a reduction in their standards of living, increased inflation, and social instability. In the former GDR, unemployment and a blend of massive economic restructuring and total collapse confront a population used to state-allocated work, planning, and an institutionalized grid of opportunities and social roles. The people who see themselves bypassed by the affluence and the opportunities they expect in contemporary society are gaining ground in a society which had underestimated the personal dislocations in the wake of unification, and only discovered its cost after the event. In the political culture of the GDR, confidence in democracy has yet to emerge as citizens look towards the state to conjure up improvements; in West German political culture the answers of the extreme right have been uncomfortably close to public sentiment on some issues and in both parts of German socio-economic anxieties still translate into anti-democratic attitudes, and into a future for right extremism.

In the past, Germany's sturdy and resilient democracy has proved itself capable of creating consensus. At this stage, after the cataclysm of three post-wall year, its talent for consensus building has not yet functioned to restore equilibrium and the predictability that Germans seem to crave. The gravest sign of failure is habituation to violence against foreigners, the disabled, and other weak members of society.

Shock at this failure is now palpable. Already it has summoned spontaneous candlelight demonstrations of solidarity with foreigners by hundreds of thousands of Germans in Berlin, Munich, and elsewhere. Is the shock sufficient to rally a sober new consensus between east and west, right and left, parties and public, and Germans and the others who put their hope in Germans? We can only hope the answer will be yes.

**Bibliography**

An Analysis of Political Intolerance


