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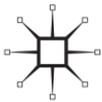
Right-Wing Extremism in Contemporary Germany

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Foreword

This book presents a well-balanced analysis of the past, present, and future of the German radical right by one of the foremost scholars on the history of contemporary Germany. Gerard Braunthal's reputation rests particularly on his investigations of post-World War Two German Social Democracy (SPD) and civil rights in the Bonn and Berlin republics. His present work focuses directly and implicitly on the contrast between the contemporary German radical right and its predecessor under the ill-fated Weimar Republic (1918–1933), which gave birth to the Third Reich and the atrocities and power politics associated with it. The comparison takes into account the international environment and the domestic shape of the German extreme right.

The rise of German National Socialism and of kindred movements after the Great War took place under the shadow of the catastrophic German defeat by the Western Allies, of the painful losses of German territory and colonies, and of the traumatic collapse of two mighty empires and imperial dynasties, Hohenzollern and Hapsburg. Many German patriots felt humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles, which required the admission of German responsibility for the war and the surrender of the German emperor for trial (this was never carried out), of the imperial navy and air force, and the imposition of size limits on the armed forces. Many were haunted by paranoid fantasies of having been “stabbed in the back” by their own successor government – especially the centrist and left-wing politicians in it – who signed the Versailles Treaty of Peace. They thought of revenge, against both the Western victors and their alleged domestic collaborators some of whom were assassinated by military conspirators. There were unsuccessful right-wing coup attempts against the national government and against at least one state government – Bavaria – where a Workers and Soldiers Council had seized power in imitation of Bolshevik takeovers in St. Petersburg, Budapest, and Vienna. There was also an underground border war along some of the new frontiers, for example with Poland and, after the Franco-Belgian invasion of 1923, with the occupation of the Ruhr area. We must acknowledge all these factors in the minds of the rising Nazis in the midst of many extreme right-wing organizations at that time; however, nothing similar was in the minds of the defeated Germans after World War Two. The defeat of 1945 was actually far more devastating and, this time, the Germans really admitted total defeat. The Allies had insisted on “unconditional surrender” and imposed years of military occupation, denazification, and democratic reeducation on the Germans, which also involved the suppression of any Nazi revivals.

Another important aspect of the Weimar situation that enabled Adolf Hitler and his movement to rise to power in 1933 was that Germany in many ways had not matured enough to support a thriving democracy. Two telling images come to my mind, which show the particular weaknesses of Germany's first attempt at democracy: one is of a session of the Reichstag (Parliament) in 1932, which features a large section of its membership in Nazi storm-trooper uniforms. It was a sign of the Nazis' contempt for parliamentary democracy and heralded the coming of dictatorship with the help of a combined popular majority of Nazis and communists in imminent elections as well as the battles of the militant armies of both in the streets. The second image emerges from an interview with Fritz Schäffer, the conservative (CSU) finance minister who had been in the thick of Weimar politicking with the equally conservative Bavarian People's Party (BVP). Mr. Schäffer described to me the incredibly hectic and violent election campaigns at all levels, as he raced from one rally to the next, constantly threatened by extremist street violence from the right and the left. There was simply no room for a moderate politics of democratic discussion. At the same time, so many basic structures of German society were coming undone, as the German historian Karl D. Bracher and others have explained: relations between capital and labor, farming, capitalism, civil-military relations, the civil service, the greatly reduced army amidst militant veterans' organizations, the federal system; everything was in tenuous transition or outright crisis. Even the prewar political parties were splitting up, particularly on the moderate right and left where new radical mass movements such as the communists and Nazis experienced explosive growth and threatened to take over the unloved republic.

The democratic post-World War Two fathers (and mothers) of the West German Federal Republic were determined to base their democratic politics on strong, resilient institutions and a constitution, the Basic Law, that the major parties vowed to defend "militantly" against all extremists of the right and left (*streitbare Demokratie*), unlike their Weimar predecessors who had never defended Weimar's constitutional democracy. Never again, they resolved, should German democracy be left to the tender mercies of the sworn enemies of democracy. Among other steps, such as the electoral barriers to splinter parties described in this book and the special anti-extremist powers of the Federal Constitutional Court, the Bonn government created a *Verfassungsschutzdienst* (constitutional protection service) which played an important role investigating subversion and, in the 1970s, the terrorist conspiracies of the Red Army Faction (RAF). It publishes annual surveys of political extremism, including the radical right. The surveillance and intrusion of this secret service into German civil liberties, for example by tapping telephones, has also attracted much criticism from German civil libertarians and representatives of the political left, as Braunthal has described in his book on the subject.

A major challenge to West German stability before 1990 was posed by the East German Stasi, the communist secret service of the self-styled German Democratic Republic (GDR) which, among other things, sent out and embedded spies in the highest West German offices, such as in the Foreign Office and in Chancellor Willy Brandt's staff. The Stasi also compiled voluminous secret files on many prominent West Germans for potential blackmail purposes, and to embarrass them before the Western public and abroad. German unification in 1990 posed new major challenges including that of integrating the public services of the communist east into the democratic state and society, especially the schools and universities. This process of systematic cleansing was not always fair and even-handed, and was often accompanied by dire warnings that the elimination of communist rule would inevitably lead to a revival of Nazism. The old state Communist Party, the SED, transformed itself into a strong extreme left successor, the PDS (now part of the Left Party), even as its remnants in the public services of the east were spotted and removed. The Stasi archives were now firmly in Western hands.

Because the rehabilitation and development of the formerly communist economy of the GDR by West German leaders fell far short of the "blossoming" promised by the unification chancellor, Helmut Kohl, the unification left behind a legacy of failures and resentments which have been reflected in East German voting: after initially following West German political patterns, East Germans soon began to distinguish themselves not only by voting for a large successor party to the communist SED (now PDS), but in recent elections also in great numbers for the neo-Nazi NPD and DVU; however, in all these elections no extreme right party has been able – except for a few stealth candidates in the 1950s – to elect a neo-Nazi to the Bundestag. East Germany remains a major trouble spot in the control of the extreme right in the Berlin Republic.

In the early decades of the Bonn Republic, perhaps as late as 1970, public opinion polls clearly revealed the spell of Nazi opinions over the public, for example on such nationalistic issues as acceptance of the Oder–Neisse line as the German–Polish border or German responsibility for World War Two, as the work of Anna and Richard Merritt, among others, has shown. After the end of Allied occupation, successive waves of neo-Nazi parties under names like the Socialist Reich Party (SRP) or the National Democrats (NPD) scored minor regional victories in spite of the hostility of democratic governments. Their activists and voters were mostly diminishing numbers of old Nazis and their families and offspring. As long as these parties were small and could be kept under control by local and state-level measures of harassment, the first West German chancellors, and especially Adenauer, avoided direct confrontation – for example by attempts to outlaw or suppress them. The democratic leaders were probably afraid to provoke these elements into forming a *Fronde*, a "national opposition" that would have obstructed democratization as had happened in the Weimar Republic. Or perhaps they too still held some partial

Nazi views that inclined them to tolerate old Nazis and Nazified groups and to spare them rigorous judgement – cases such as Hans Globke and others seem to suggest this. As new generations of democratic young Germans with strong anti-Nazi views grew to voting age and their political activities began to dominate German opinion, the neo-Nazi parties found that they could no longer expect a ready reception for their views. They began to shift towards issues like German unification and opposition to the progressive policies, foreign and domestic, of the Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt administrations.

In the meantime and especially since German unification, youthful new groups have emerged that in their own ways vie for the mantle of Hitler and his movement, often with little or no knowledge of the old ideology. Many of them are extremely violent skinheads operating in small groups and their lethal hostility is directed mostly at foreign migrants and refugee hostels, which they have attacked and set on fire. They are motivated as much by alcohol and the psychological stimuli of youth gang activity as by a general ideology of racism. There is a difference between a personal reaction against people of color and an elaborate ideology. To the extent that they rationalize their anti-foreigner hatred, it translates into a kind of “welfare chauvinism”: a mistaken belief that these migrants and refugees receive public benefits above and beyond what the frequently unemployed and down-and-out right-wing skinheads get. In east German urban ghettos and small towns they also feud with young socialists who like to wear their hair in dreadlocks as a kind of uniform. In some east German locations, extreme right coordination is so dominant it creates a terror regime for leftists and people of color. Even the DVU and NPD are not sure how they can integrate the unruly skinheads into their political activities. But the youth gang-like street violence of today’s Germany – not unlike the vicious urban warfare of the Bloods and Crips, two large African-American gangs in Los Angeles – is different to the political marching, proselytizing and fighting of the storm troopers of another day. By contrast, the young neo-Nazis of today make the old Nazis of the 1920s and 1930s look almost rational.

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List of Acronyms

ANR	Aktion Neue Rechte (Action of the New Right)
ANS/NA	Aktionsfront Nationaler Sozialisten/Nationale Aktivisten (Action Front of National Socialists/National Activists)
BfV	Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution)
BHE	Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (League of Expellees and Dispossessed)
BMI	Bundesministerium des Innern (Federal Ministry of the Interior)
CDU/CSU	Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union)
DA	Deutsche Alternative (German Alternative)
DA/VR	Deutsche Allianz – Vereinigte Rechte (German Alliance – United Right)
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Trade Union Federation)
DKP-DRP	Deutsche Konservative Partei-Deutsche Rechtspartei (German Conservative Party-German Right Party)
DL	Deutsche Liga für Volk und Heimat (League for a German People and Homeland)
DNVP	Deutsche National Volkspartei (German National People's Party)
DRP	Deutsche Reichspartei (German Reich Party)
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union)
EU	European Union
FAP	Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Free German Workers Party)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (The Freedom Party of Austria)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
JN	Junge Nationaldemokraten (Young National Democrats)
MAD	Militärischen Abwehrdienst (Military Counter-Intelligence Corps)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPD	National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany [GDR])

NF	Nationalistische Front (Nationalist Front)
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
NRAO	Nationalrevolutionäre Aufbauorganisation (National Revolutionary Building Organization)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NSDAP/AO	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei/Auslands-Organisation (National Socialist German Workers' Party/ Foreign Organization)
NZ	National-Zeitung/Deutsche-Wochenzeitung
PdA/DS	Partei der Arbeit/Deutsche Sozialisten (Party of Work/ German Socialists)
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm troopers)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SRP	Sozialistische Reichspartei (Socialist Reich Party)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Elite guards)
Stasi	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security)
WAV	Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Vereinigung (Economic Reconstruction Association)