

# Anti-Semitism Re-Enters Public Language in W. Germany

By JOSEF JOFFE

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MUNICH—The other day an obscure town near the Dutch border suddenly lost its mayor. Count Spee, 59, the Christian Democratic burgomaster of Korschenbroich, resigned his exalted position under great pressure because of a slip of the tongue. During a budget debate he had told the city council that there was only one way to close the town's gaping budget deficit: by "killing a few rich Jews."

A few days later another small-town politico—the local leader of the Junge Union, the Christian Democrats' youth wing—proffered some advice. Bemoaning the "arrogance of Israel, which keeps sticking our democratic constitutional state with the responsibility for the slaughter of the Jews in the Third Reich," he appealed to his fellow nationals to "ditch the guilt feelings. Let's be ourselves again."

Another brave new German, Bundestag deputy Herrmann Fellner, 35, resorted to the oldest of anti-Semitic clichés: the Jew as money-grubbing Shylock. Dismissing compensation claims by Jews who had done forced labor in Adolf Hitler's factories, he noted: "Whenever there is money to be had from German coffers, the Jews are there to grab it."

Asked to elaborate, Herrmann had this to say: "I wish the Jews would show more sensitivity . . . I mean, by putting this constant pressure on us, they'll get a counter-reaction . . . The Jews have to understand that there are many in the young generation who would dearly like to see the last of these unceasing (financial) demands . . . The young generation is sick and tired of having to remember what Germany did to Israel (sic) . . . This has to stop."

Fellner belongs to the Christian Social Union, the Bavarian wing of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's party. Yet Kohl remained strangely unruffled. Asked to comment, the chancellor merely replied: "Next time I see the Honorable

Mr. Fellner, I shall tell him: Please don't use these terms."

Does this mean that Fellner should merely have chosen more circumspect language in expressing a widely shared sentiment? As reported by *Der Spiegel*, Kohl said that the overwhelming majority of Germans think like Fellner. Still, Count Spee did resign after proposing his Teutonic version of Gramm-Rudman; Fellner apologized before the Bundestag, and the chancellor denied the statement attributed to him by *Der Spiegel*.

All's well that ends well? Not quite, for the real problem is the breaking of the most powerful political taboo in postwar Germany. For 40 years, anti-Semitic language was absolutely *verboten* in polite German society. Yes, there have always been anti-Semitic incidents. Most of the time, though, this was literally kid stuff—perpetrated by young punks who were more attracted to the black-leather gear than to "Mein Kampf."

What was never excised from the collective unconscious has re-entered public language because the sluice gates have been partly opened. If political pros, who are after all trained to gauge the effect of their words, resort to anti-Semitic clichés, then they must be convinced that this is now acceptable, and even may be profitable in terms of ballots and votes.

That this could happen in post-Holocaust Germany dramatizes another old point: You don't need Jews to hate them. Compared to the 1930s, there are hardly any Jews today in West Germany—around 30,000. Yet a 1982 survey by the polling outfit EMNID found distinctly anti-Semitic attitudes among 30% of the population.

Anti-Semitism, then, seems to be an anthropological given—an indispensable projection mechanism that can only be suppressed but never exorcised. It is impervious to historical experience like Auschwitz; indeed, anti-Semitism thrives in total isolation from experience. It is

doubtful whether Fellner, who hails from rural Bavaria, has ever met a Jew. Yet he "knows" exactly what Jews are like, and he resents them for what they "are."

Why is the taboo beginning to crack now? Fellner provides us with one answer when he reports that his generation is "sick and tired of having to remember," and wants more "sensitivity" from the survivors. Kohl put it more elegantly in Israel a year ago, when he talked about the "grace of God" in connection with the year of his birth (1930), by which he meant a kind of moral no-fault insurance—the exclusion of trans-generational liability via personal biology.

If Kohl wants to draw the line after 40 years—which is why he dragged President Reagan to Bitburg, Waffen-SS and all—young Germans like Fellner want to go one worse. There is a truly new anti-Semitism: It thrives not in spite of but because of Auschwitz. It is based on a total role reversal between culprits and victims. According to this not-so-original defense mechanism, the survivors are the aggressors, since they won't let the Germans forget. Their very presence makes for a permanent provocation, and one that the new generation, saddled with inherited guilt, is no longer willing to suffer. Hence the Jews must show more "sensitivity"—otherwise they will bring down on themselves just retribution in the form of a "counterreaction."

For the time being, the political classes in West Germany have repudiated Messrs. Fellner *et al.*, as did the West German Parliament last week where all the major parties expressed their revulsion in a special debate. But the inconceivable has happened, and the taboo has begun to crumble 40 years after the Holocaust machinery ground to a halt.

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