



1990

Toward Germany

A 'Fourth Reich'? Historical Analogies Wrong, This Time

By Josef Joffe

MUNICH — The first German unification, when Bismarck founded the modern Reich with "blood and iron" in 1871, spelled trouble for Europe and the world. With a new heavyweight at the center, the European balance was unhinged, and 40 years later Germany made a grab for European hegemony in World War I. The ill-fated Weimar Republic followed, and in 1939, there was a second try, vastly more brutal and bloody than the Wilhelminian version.

Today, the two Germanys, children of the Cold War, are re-emerging from defeat and partition, and formal fusion may well be completed by 1991, exactly 120 years after Bismarck unwittingly set in train a process that culminated in catastrophe for Germany and Europe. Will the second unification turn into a remake of the first?

Commentators and cartoonists round the world, even in Germany, have been inordinately fond of the image of the "Fourth Reich," thus dragging the past 120 years forward into the future. They have drawn the picture of a mighty new colossus in the heart of Europe, which, unshackled from the restraints of the vanishing postwar order, will pay little heed to sensitivities abroad and democracy at home.

As tempting as the historical analogies may be, they are wrong. Germans fondly confess these days: "We have learned our historical lesson; we were bad then, but we are good now and you should trust us." Such incantations are beside the point.

The point about present-day Germany is twofold: It is a different society than either Wilhelminian or Weimar Germany, and it lives in a different world than its two forebears.

In the Wilhelminian version, the

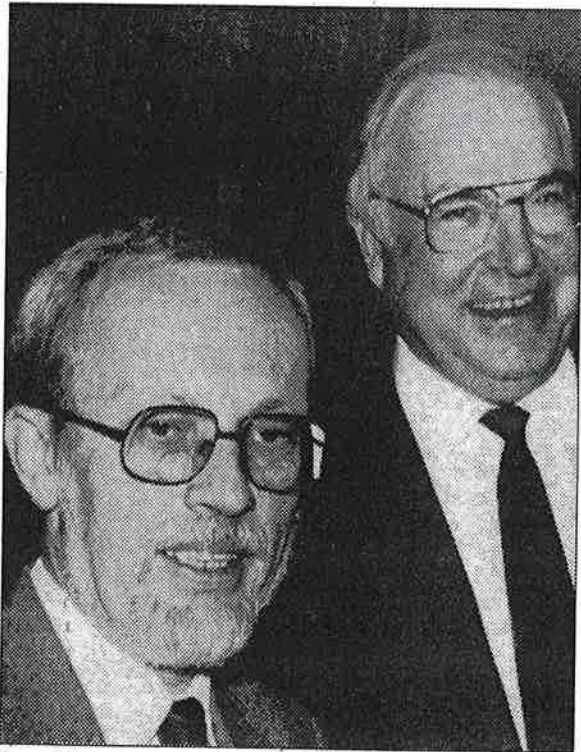
economic revolution triggered by a unified market never spawned a political one; the rising bourgeoisie was happy to enrich itself while leaving the driving to the old aristocracy. In the Weimar Republic, democracy never had a chance. From the beginning, democracy was associated with defeat and the humiliation imposed by a punitive peace. Even so, the democratic experiment might yet have worked. But then, the Depression hit. It sharpened ancient class conflicts, while disaster after disaster, denying any respite, left only room for delusion and paranoia.

Into that void of rationality and faith stepped the pseudo-messianic figure of Adolf Hitler, promising deliverance and salvation. Democracy? That was the alien faith of the victors. Freedom? That was but the privilege of those "parasites" and "plutocrats," Jews all of them, who had conspired to enslave the German people. Instead, the Führer offered submission to *Volk and Vaterland*, and the exhilarating membership in the "master race" that was destined to conquer the world.

To recall this sorry past is to make an almost self-evident point about the present and the future. It is not that the old Germans were "bad" whereas today's Germans are "good." Hitler's children and grandchildren have done so well in the game of democracy because, for once, the conditions were right.

DEMOCRACY in the Federal Republic is not associated with national humiliation and economic misery. Instead of punitive reparations, as after 1919, there was Marshall Plan aid. Instead of competitive devaluation and beggar-thy-neighbor tariffs, there was free trade, managed and enforced by the United States. Instead of depression, there was export-led growth. And instead of isolation and discrimination, there

Continued on page 20



The Associated Press

A People o To a New N

East Germans rally country's first free forced to "vote with their support to Lot left, allied to West Helmut Kohl's Chri



Argentina

Australia

INSURING YOUR RISK

This Time, No 'Fourth Reich'

Continued from page 19

was membership in a Western community.

In this setting, democracy, civility and, yes, "Westernization" could at last take root. And little in the past 40 years suggests that the new liberal (and somewhat dull) Germany is a fly-by-night operation that would vanish at the next economic downturn.

In the mid-1960s, West Germany experienced its first postwar recession, which coincided with a sudden rise of the Neo-Nazi National Democrats (NPD). Yet, for much of the past decade, unemployment has hovered around the 2 million mark, and the NPD is virtually extinct.

The New Right, the cynically mislabeled Republicans, a bunch of nationalists, started making headlines last year when they pulled 7 percent in the European elections by appealing to the resentment of the poorer sectors of the population. Now, hardly a year later, they are back to 3 percent in the opinion polls.

Pied pipers are not likely to become Führers in a Federal Republic that is Westernized, permissive and engaged in the individual pursuit of happiness — much like the

United States, Britain and France.

The problem lies elsewhere. The happy career of the Federal Republic cannot be divorced from the ultra-stable European order installed after 1945, and which is moving fast now that the Russians are withdrawing and turning inward. Explicitly, that order was designed to contain the Soviet Union; implicitly, it was to constrain a resurgent Germany. With Russia retracting, and the United States possibly following suit, a united Germany undoubtedly will become No. 1 on the Continent — willy-nilly, and by dint of its sheer economic clout and geographic position.

Liberated from the constraints of a crumbling European order, Germany, muscular to begin with, might become less modest, no longer deferring so routinely to the wishes and sensibilities of its neighbors and allies. Yet, a "Fourth Reich"? Unlikely.

Again, the reason is more solid than those incantations of moral improvement some Germans like to invoke. The point is not whether the Germans have changed; the point is that the game of nations, at least in the Western world, has changed. It has become much more civilized and civilianized. Power today is not measured by

possession of this or that province, but by such questions as: "Who determines parities in the European currency grid?"

The battle lines are drawn in the balance-of-payments ledgers, and the accounts are settled in ECUs and not with "blood and iron." The new game has devalued the military chips, delivering power and prestige to those who can back up their bets with investments and loans. Why, then, should countries like Germany and Japan forgo their advantage and change the rules? In the attempt, they would certainly revive the hostile coalitions that proved their undoing in 1945.

Soon, Germany will be reunited. But the remake will not be shot with a cast of latter-day Erich von Stroheims. The soundtrack will not be the Horst-Wessel-Lied, the fighting song of the Nazis, but a reggae or rhythm-and-blues tune. Cologne and Kansas City, Munich and Marseille have been listening to the same beat for a long time; adding Dresden and Leipzig should not ruin that score. At least, we are entitled to hope so.

JOSEF JOFFE is foreign editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Munich.

Sense of Reality After Elation

Continued from page 19

to an inhuman regime that turns out to have been no stronger than a house of cards.

East German fears are about essentials: jobs, pensions, wages, housing, the loss of social security, the brutality of capitalism and, frequently, the question, "Will I be able to compete?"

The dissidents who led the mass protest that brought down the regime for the most part dreamed of a different kind of socialism in a separate state that would be democratic, with such social protection as the right to work. Others say scornfully that nothing at all that existed before November is worth saving.

And a majority, probably, for whom Lothar de Maizière, the new prime minister, is trying to speak in his negotiations with Bonn, simply wants to be protected from unacceptable hardship during the transition.

In the West, the fear is about inflation, higher taxes and rising unemployment. There have been open revolts in some cities over East German refugees taking scarce jobs, getting subsidies, and being quartered in schools and other facilities that the local population claimed for its own use.

But the number of refugees has diminished dramatically, to a few thousand a week.

Yet, there are political fears.

among Communist splinter groups in West Germany. Others fear that the East Germans will vote for the ultraconservative, Nazi-tinged West German Right.

"We may get the first real polarization since the war," an editor in Bonn said.

In a word, will West Germany remain the reasonable, moderate model state that its citizens are so proud of?

"The End of the Federal Republic," proclaimed the cover of *Der Spiegel*, the influential weekly, a few weeks ago.

No wonder, then, that the tone has changed.

Where a few months ago the pace could not be fast enough, editorials and politicians now call for a slower, "more normal" pace.

The language now is more reminiscent of a corporate merger than a family reunion, with hard-nosed delegations on both sides refusing to be "drawn across the conference table," as the conservative West German mass circulation daily *Die Welt* put it.

During the currency talks, Mr. de Maizière, the mild-mannered former musician who had been thought to be in Mr. Kohl's pocket, declared bluntly in public that he "insisted" on certain things and that other points were simply "not negotiable."

But the business of unity is taking its course, and more swiftly so in the country than at the conference tables.

a financial aid to East Germany in Frankfurt had received nearly 3,000 requests for a total of more than 500 million Deutsche marks from East German would-be entrepreneurs eager to modernize their equipment and take the plunge into the market economy.

A dramatic growth of small businesses is the best if not the only hope to mitigate the forbidding rate of unemployment that is expected, economists say.

In Berlin, where at last count there were 43 crossing points in the Wall, people have started turning unification into daily routine.

Fur coats and other signs of capitalist wealth aside, a visitor is finding it increasingly hard to tell East Berlin visitors from their West Berlin hosts and vice versa, as the once telltale synthetic windbreakers and cheap shoes are being exchanged for better wear.

Demeanor also has changed. Berliners from either side are no longer gawking at each other and at the sights, but they still find it "easy to spot those stodgy West Germans," as one of them said with a grin.

At the Wall near Checkpoint Charlie, a tousled young man in uniform who could warm the heart of any mother-in-law, had put his border guard's cap on the head of a young girl for a snapshot. In the working class district of Kreuzberg, the approaches to the Wall were empty except for an old Turk on a ladder chipping pieces from the Wall for the tourists.



essence

ernational net-computer links.

single financial and resources

s.

