

Germany Must Learn the Lessons of 1923-33 To Overcome Neo-Nazi Threat

by Rainer Apel

Listening to the radio or television news, or reading the newspapers in Germany these days, tells one little about the state of the world or the global economy. News items about monetary and economic turbulence have disappeared from the media, while 90% of coverage is occupied with updates on the “new threat from the right-wing extremists” and related incidents in numerous German cities. And indeed, one should not minimize the fact that there are 25 to 30 such incidents throughout Germany every single day. These range from racially motivated insults or displays of racist or neo-Nazi emblems (which are illegal in Germany, and which comprised 70% of all incidents), to dissemination of racist and neo-Nazi propaganda, to fistfights with leftists, arson attacks (35 last year), and bomb attacks (two last year). All in all, there were 10,400 such incidents in Germany in 1999, and there is no reason to feel complacent about that. There is no place in Germany for racism and related ideologies, and effective action must be taken to change the social and economic conditions that encourage their spread.

But, hysteria of the kind that has been building in the public debate in Germany over the last few weeks, is not a good basis for making decisions on how to deal with the problem. The exclusive focus of the news on the issue creates the false impression that Germany is on the brink of takeover by neo-Nazis. This is utter nonsense.

(In fact, the situation in Britain is far worse. There, racist and neo-Nazi incidents have more than doubled during the three years that Prime Minister Tony Blair and his “New Labour” have been in power and have repeatedly stated their commitment to fight racism. London alone reported some 23,000 such incidents between April 1999 and April 2000—more than twice the figure reported for all of Germany. Britain as a whole reports 46,000 incidents—four times the figure for Germany.)

The hysteria in Germany has developed in the wake of a shrapnel bomb explosion in Düsseldorf on July 27, which wounded ten immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Six of these are Jews. But, now, four weeks later, none of the known neo-Nazi or racist groups, nor any new group, had claimed responsibility. The terrorists may have been from

the right-wing extremist camp, but police have yet to find any evidence of that. The incident, in which a hand grenade was used as the basic device for the bomb, is a most unusual one, and some experts would link it to the Russian or other eastern European and Balkan mafias, who use hand grenades as part of their *modus operandi*. Approximately 100 incidents of this type have occurred in Germany during the last ten years.

Anglo-American Sabotage

Most of the racist and neo-Nazi incidents have been occurring in eastern Germany, and, although there is never a simplistic connection between the social and economic environment and the eruption of violence, youth unemployment is highest in Germany’s eastern states, and general unemployment is two or three times as high as in the western states. And, there is broad disgust at, and even hatred toward western Germany, among many eastern Germans, because of the humiliating treatment most of them have suffered over the ten years since the reunification of the two German states.

People in eastern Germany are not just “losers” in the process of globalization, as many experts say, using a euphemism to describe something very nasty. Rather, they are the victims of an economic warfare that has been only slightly less brutal than what the Russians have gone through during ten years of shock therapy. In eastern Germany, 90% of the industry that had existed before 1990 was willfully destroyed, and with it, more than 4 million industrial jobs and many important trade links to Russia. Only a few industrial jobs have been restored; most of those who found jobs after 1990, did so in the unproductive service sector. If a big crisis hits in the so-called “new economy,” most of those new jobs will be gone in an instant.

All kinds of phony excuses have been made by politicians to justify that economic destruction, but the scenarios of Anglo-American geopoliticians for the economic destruction of Russia were behind it. The policy was forced upon the Germans as a precondition for unification, by the governments of Britain, France, and the United States, in 1990. Before that,

East Germany was one of the prime suppliers of industrial goods to the Soviet Union (Russia being its dominant part), and therefore, all the firms in East Germany that had commercial links to Russia, were made to disappear.

The last real attempt to keep those industrial links to Russia intact, was made by Detlev Rohwedder, the chairman of the Berlin-based Treuhand agency, the institution in charge of the former East German state-sector industry. Rohwedder was assassinated in April 1991, and his post at the Treuhand was taken over by Birgit Breuel, a radical neo-liberal—essentially a German version of Britain’s former Prime Minister, Baroness Margaret Thatcher—who pursued a strategy of brutal privatization and liberalization from May 1991 on. If the economic conditions of eastern Germany this Summer are to blame, at least in large part, for the overproportionate rise of xenophobia, racism, and neo-Nazism among eastern youth, it is Breuel’s policy that created those conditions.

A Drastic Change in Policy Is Needed

Politicians and experts who acknowledge that these conditions in eastern Germany bear a major part of the responsibility for the problems with the youth there, have to think about a drastic change of policy, lest all their talk be meaningless. To date, very little has been done in this respect; rather, most of the recommendations are for repressive emergency measures against the neo-Nazi groups: political bans, more police, harsher sentences in trials, and the mobilization of leftist groups and organizations against the “far right.” The last aspect, which comes up prominently in remarks by Social Democrats and Greens, is dangerous, because it implicitly encourages agitated leftists to commit acts of violence against the agitated rightists, who will strike back. This is already happening, according to police reports, as many acts of “politically motivated violence” are related to such clashes between leftists and rightists. It is still far from the situation that prevailed 70 years ago, in the clashes during Weimar Germany, but it resembles that situation, and it can escalate.

The intensity of such clashes will escalate rapidly, once martyrs are created on either side, and the way these clashes are being prepared, with a lot of hype and hysteria on both sides, leads one to the conclusion that it is being done willfully, with the purpose of provoking bloody incidents. The string-pullers behind these scenarios are at work, who want to turn the amorphous groups of the left and the right into mass movements, terrorizing each other and paralyzing the state, as was done during 1923-33 in Germany. Investigations into who those string-pullers are, inevitably leads to the higher-level controllers among the financial oligarchy, who are faced with the imminent collapse of the global financial system, and are desperately seeking to eliminate all opposition to their continued rule. Whether every politician who is fuelling the mass hysteria about the “threat of the extreme

right,” is fully aware of what he or she is actually doing, is doubtful: It is “politically correct” to act that way nowadays, in German politics. But the fact that they are doing a great disservice to the state, is beyond question.

The Growth of the ‘New Violence’

One has to measure this particular hysteria-mongering against the two main errors committed by the politicians:

First, they are not talking about the fact that violence, and not just political violence, has become an accepted practice of everyday life—has become virtually a life-style. For most Germans, particularly the youth, it is a so-called “New Violence,” which proceeds from the Internet and video games, and in which great passion is being invested by millions of Germans. And in most recent killings or serious attacks committed by German youth, the perpetrator frequently is found to have been playing of video games and Internet variants. In stark contrast to France, where the authorities are trying to impose national restrictions on everything that global Internet providers such as Yahoo are doing within French borders, no such thing is being actively considered in Germany. Politicians do not really want to interfere with the free market of the Internet, and therefore, the battle to shut down use of the Internet by neo-Nazi organizations is a relatively futile effort in Germany, because 80-85% of all racist and neo-Nazi Internet websites are registered in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European countries.

A society that tolerates mindless Nintendo and other such video games, with their crude “kill or be killed” matrix, will be unable to contain either the neo-Nazis who are using the same matrix, or the many leftist counter-organizations which are operating in the same manner.

Second, an economic reconstruction program to rebuild eastern Germany’s industry, to create 4 million high-skilled industrial jobs, and to make sure that every youth who finishes school either gets a job or can enroll at a university to learn and become employed in a productive profession, is an urgent need. If the average official jobless rate of eastern Germany remains at 20%, with youth unemployment even higher, and with many cities reporting 30-50% of their population as being without a regular job; if eastern Germany remains a region where many areas lack even a minimal social infrastructure, the emotional mixture of frustration, disgust, and hate among its residents, will not be overcome. There is potential for populist, radical, even extremist movements to emerge. And as long as the problems in eastern Germany remain, Germany as a whole will be unstable.

One has to look into the not-so-distant future, with the much larger economic problems and crises that will hit Germany because of the volatility of the global monetarist system, to get an idea of the instability that is about to emerge. Whether a society and an elite that acts as Germany’s has, that cannot even solve the problems of today, will be able to survive those storms of the future, is doubtful indeed.