

For Esche, nationalism is original sin. "We always understood that the division of Germany resulted from Nazism, from the war that Germany inflicted on all of Europe, from German crimes. We had to live with that. It was a form of penance." That is why, he says, left-wing intellectuals abandoned the national question – the question of German unification – to the right, rather than seizing it and lending it a more democratic hue. It is not clear whether it would have made any difference. In any case, the triumph of Kohl's approach only adds to their feelings of guilt and responsibility.

IF YOU CROSS THE BRANDENBURG GATE INTO the East, past the long scar the Wall has left across Berlin, you hear similar sentiments in certain quarters, but expressed without the guilt. Here too they worry about a right-wing, nationalist revival. According to Tatiana Galla – a rock star and idol who personified for some young people the defiance and anger that preceded the dismantling of the Wall – the shadow of Hitler is already visible.

East Berlin's 10,000 mostly local squatters – with a few West Germans, Dutch and others – have to defend the abandoned buildings in which they live against attacks from "skin-heads" in paramilitary gear. This very unusual group of extremists, also called "Fachos" (from Fascists), not only take on the "punks" and other squatters, but also homosexuals, foreign workers and students mostly from Vietnam and Mozambique.

What is behind these youth gangs? One hears of an extreme right-wing group that has established itself on the street, the Movement for Social Alternatives. In the upper storey of a little apartment building the skin-heads are renovating, two kids sit behind a table. Only the leader talks; he is about twenty years old and has the sober appearance of an office clerk. "We favour a sovereign Germany, free from all foreign influence. We also believe that Germany should withdraw from all political blocks, whether the East block – the Warsaw Pact – or NATO or even the European Community." This is Claude Cheysson's nightmare.

BUT HOW SERIOUSLY SHOULD we take these people? They are a few friends many of whom were imprisoned as juvenile delinquents under the old regime. They have modest jobs and share a taste for German military history. They have no visible means of support, and apart from the skin-heads, have no following in the general population. And yet when the media speaks of dangerous right-wing move-

ments, it is this group which turns up over and over again.

There is a legitimate political party of the extreme right to be sure: the Republican Party. However, the fact of its existence cannot be laid at the feet of the East, it was born in the Federal Republic. Moreover, its information booths were not exactly overrun by interested voters during the run-up to the October elections in the former GDR, and Republicans drew few votes in the East's five new *Länder* or states. Voters placed their fate in the hands of Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democrats, except in the state of Brandenburg around "red" Berlin, which elected the Social Democrats.

Of course, it's not all over yet. Galloping unemployment in the five Eastern states and the widespread popular sense of being second-class citizens could well have a pernicious influence on the newly-annexed Germans. It should not be forgotten that poverty and humiliation have a history of raising demons in Germany. But much time has passed and societies change, even inside totalitarian rule.

Winston Churchill said of the Germans, they are always either "at your throat or at your feet." But in which Germans is this notorious submission to authority supposed to be most ingrained these days? Nothing says that it must be the East, where the people have developed a healthy blend of cynicism and humour through the years, closer, in fact, to the Polish tradition than the German. Before rising up last year, East Germans long feigned submission, an attribute which often required enormous inge-

nuity, especially in the simple chores of day-to-day living and which helped to develop in them a flare for improvisation. All this was hidden, of course, but private life, as such, was enriched. Mutual aid and solidarity, and for those who had no chance for foreign travel, art and literature – nourished and sustained a kind of internal exile.

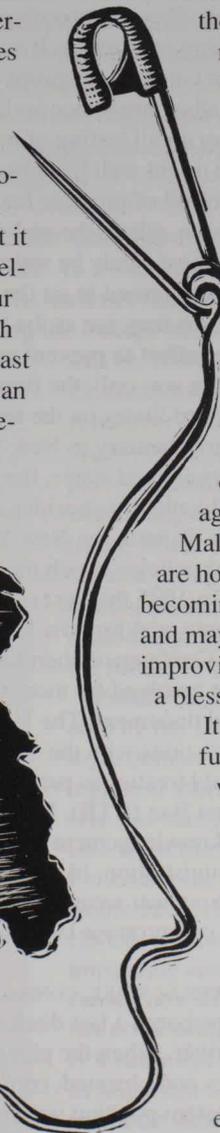
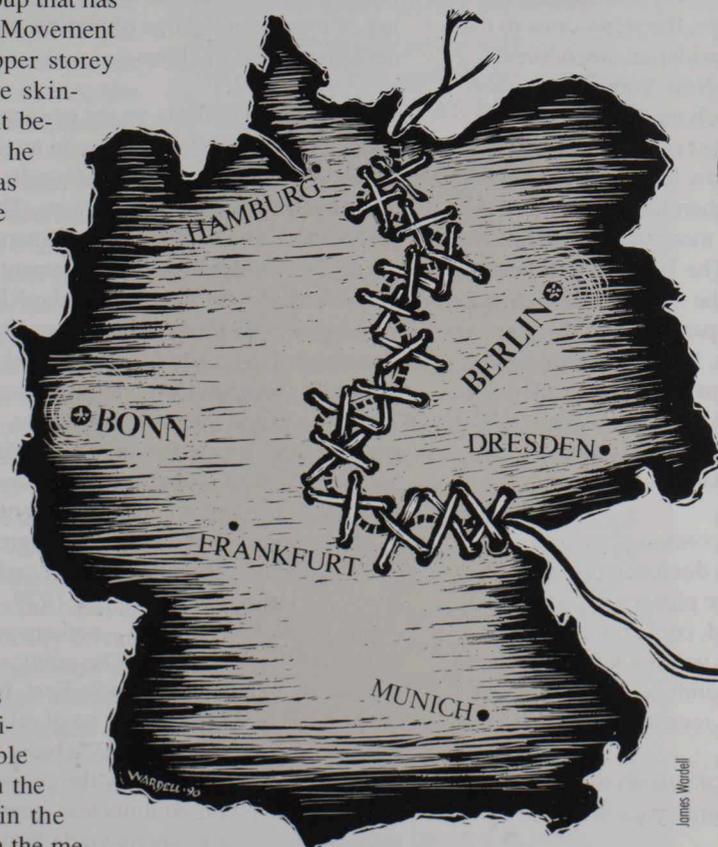
THE WEST BERLIN AUTHOR PETER SCHNEIDER speaks of the East's *Nischenkultur* – society that values friendship over success. In a Leipzig apartment lovingly decorated and lined with books, Karin and Stefan Haidekker recall with a hint of nostalgia that their West German visitors used to envy their calmer, more congenial lives. In the same vein, our interpreter in East Berlin told us with some pride about the results of a recent survey showing that East Germans were superior to their

Western cousins in at least one way: they have sex more often and masturbate less. It is undoubtedly the same survey cited several days later in the *New York Times*, according to which East German women are eleven per cent more likely to achieve orgasm.

A central question, therefore, is: what if East Germans, in exchange for the marvelous Deutschmark, brought to the marriage an even greater gift, that of the art of living, a sort of languid warmth. Some years ago, the late British social critic Malcom Muggeridge said: "There are hopeful signs that the Germans are becoming less industrious and efficient, and may well soon be as indolent and improvident as we English are ... what a blessed relief."

It is a wish that perhaps is to be fulfilled twenty-five years later with the arrival in serious, industrious, and not very happy West Germany of millions of sons and daughters of the *Nischenkultur*. François Mauriac, the noted French novelist and journalist of the early post-war years, said he loved Germany so much that he was happy there were two of them. And there still are; despite monetary and political union, genuine unification is still far off.

Why then not hope that with time the virtues and strengths of each Germany will combine to create a benevolent giant in the heart of Europe. □



James Wardell