

Forum

RIGHT-EXTREMISM IN GERMANY

Recruitment of New Members

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Gerard Braunthal

Political Science, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Abstract

Much has been written about German right-extremist groups, regardless of whether they are neo-Nazi political parties or skinheads, but little has been published about their recruitment of new members and sympathizers. As is true of any group, the rightist movement needs constantly TO replenish its ranks in order not to shrink. Thus, they seek recruits in the high school and university student populations. In the latter, they have wooed members of conservative fraternities especially. Moreover, they have sought to win over recruits and officer trainees in the German armed forces. This article assesses their degree of success and raises the questions whether the recruitment by rightist groups differs from democratic groups and whether the rightist groups pose a threat to the existing democratic system.

Keywords

Bundeswehr; fraternities; universities; high schools; membership recruitment; right-wing extremism; youth culture

Introduction

*R*ecently, there has been a worrying rise in xenophobic attitudes and right-wing extremism in the Federal Republic of Germany. To understand the influence that the right-wing has in the twenty-first century German



polity, one must dissect its efforts to win over high school and university students, especially males, to the rightist cause. Equally important is the attempt to win over youth that are serving in the armed forces. Several questions must orient an analysis of such recruitment efforts. What methods do rightists use to inculcate their views on the sizable group of young people who are still malleable to antidemocratic propaganda? How effective have the use of new technologies, such as electronic media and CDs, been as tools of recruitment? Conversely, how successful are the forces in democratic civil society, such as youth and party groups, the police, and judges that attempt to limit such rightist propaganda? Are there significant differences between Eastern and Western Germany in terms of rightist successes at the polls and violence on the streets? Do such successes and acts of violence mean that the existence of the democratic system is endangered?

In seeking answers to these questions, one must recall that on a number of economic and social issues, the rightists feed on much of the population's dissatisfaction with the status quo. Numerous scholars point out that there is a frustration among low-income individuals with economic modernization processes that have left them behind. Such "losers" are ready to support rightist groups. For instance, Wilhelm Heitmeyer of the Bielefeld Institute for the Interdisciplinary Study of Conflict and Force contends that right extremism has emerged from the fulcrum of a society that produces an increasing number of broken homes, single mothers, and divorces. As a consequence of these and other factors, individuals with a bent for authoritarianism and xenophobia join rightist groups or internalize their prejudices. Some social scientists even echo Theodor W. Adorno's warning from the 1950s about the persistent residues of National Socialism still posing a threat to the democratic system. Nevertheless, many other scholars are more optimistic and view the German democratic system as stable, but subject to challenges, especially from the right.¹ This article looks at these rightist challenges to the German political system by groups of high school and university students as well as soldiers and officers in the armed forces.

High Schools

Rightist youths in Germany have seen their fellow high school students as one of the primary targets for indoctrination and membership recruitment, especially since German unification in 1990. Rightist youths have sought to win over to their cause especially the students who already had latent xenophobic and antisemitic *Weltanschauungen* or those who could

find little support in the schools and at home. How successful were the rightist students, backed by the three major rightist parties—the Republikaner, the German People’s Union (Deutsche Volksunion), and the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationale Demokratische Partei Deutschland, NPD)—in this recruitment effort? What peaceful and what violent actions were taken to win the support of students? Could the rightist youth expect to gain new recruits if they used violence against foreigners and leftist students? Was the use of violence counter-productive because it alienated some potential recruits to the rightist cause? These questions frame the discussion as to how the democratic establishment can effectively minimize the threat from the right.

Since the mid 1980s, but especially since the 1990s, a rightist youth culture developed in the Federal Republic with its own music, symbols, myths, fashion, and lifestyle. Such a culture was a major attraction for young people who were still seeking a political home. It was visible in the schools when rightist students appeared wearing message tee-shirts, some with the inscription “Odin [the chief God in Nordic mythology] instead of Jesus.” They greeted one another with the number “88,” standing for Heil Hitler, “H” being the eighth letter of the alphabet. During class breaks they might play “Oi” music on tape. According to Sylke Kirschnick, a case could even be made that in recent years numerous elements of right extremist youth culture have become the trend setters within the “normal” youth culture. Even though most students distance themselves formally from the rightists, many have nevertheless supported the rightists’ political agenda in which migrants, refugees, Jews, homosexuals, and other minorities in the German multicultural fabric are viewed as the enemies.²

Remarkably and regrettably, there are instances from the 1980s and early 1990s where a few conservative school authorities asked tough rightist students to maintain order within the schools, in the courtyards, and in the neighboring streets. In exchange for these tasks, teachers would neither object to the rightists appearing in class in their martial uniforms nor would the teachers in their classes deal with the Nazi past, the plight of foreigners, or the democratic ethos. Such teachers’ caving in to rightist youth was not replicated in many schools, however, in some instances teachers were forced to change classrooms or schools because their names had appeared on rightist internet blacklists.³

In August 1997, sixty-five rightist professionals signed a brochure, with a claimed printing of 110,000 copies. The brochure was apparently printed in another country and distributed free in German schools. The brochure’s title, “An Appeal to all Germans in Self-Defense against the

Flood of Immigrants—the People’s Death of the German People” was indicative of its contents. It called for the immediate end of Germany’s political asylum policy and for foreigners to be repatriated to their home countries. The brochure also had antisemitic references.⁴ Although it is impossible to know how much of an impact such a brochure had on its readers, it must have reinforced the widespread antifoigner sentiments among a segment of the youth population.

In January and February 2001, student newspapers in all of Germany received an announcement from rightist “independent friendship circles” that the newspapers could reprint free of charge for one year essays on such revisionist topics as the Treaty of Versailles “sellout” and Germany’s renunciation in 1945 of its Eastern territories. The essays also belittled German war crimes, critiqued the Allied powers’ efforts at the democratic reeducation of Germans, and assailed the country’s multicultural society. City and Länder authorities began investigations of whether these rightist essays constituted a violation of the Basic Law.⁵

Then in 2004, fifty-six rightist groups and organizations, under the slogans “Action Schoolyard,” “Project Schoolyard,” and “Schoolyard CD,” distributed a free brochure devoted to the popular rightist rock music scene to 150,000 students outside of school grounds. Up to 50,000 of these students also received a CD containing songs of rightist bands. A few of the songs were on the government’s blacklist, which made them even more attractive for receptive students. The CDs also contained tips on how to contact right extremist groups. According to North Rhine Westphalia Minister of the Interior Fritz Behrens (Social Democratic Party, SPD), right-wing groups never before had been so aggressive in schools. As a result, numerous Länder ministers of the interior urged school administrators to stop the rightist actions. In August 2004, two courts ruled that the government, which had tried to stop the pressing of the CDs, had the right to confiscate the ones not yet distributed.⁶

In 2001 the NPD and the East German based *Kameradschaften* helped to organize boys and girls, receptive to their ideology, in numerous East German school districts. For instance, in the town of Greifswald the NPD youth formed a “School Initiative for the Free Formation of Opinion and Expression.” They accused the teachers who had confiscated their CDs filled with Nazi music of discrimination against them. In addition, the youth set up information booths in the town, where they handed out flyers, leaflets, and brochures. They also organized demonstrations advocating more freedom of expression. These activities indicated that the rightists were skilful in spreading their propaganda, especially in small

towns in East Germany in which they gained significant support from the local population.

The diverse nature of incidents involving right-wing youth indicated their ability to move into an activist mode. Some rightist youth transgressed constitutional boundaries. In 1994, unknown persons smeared swastikas and antisemitic slogans on the entrance doors of the Anne Frank Gymnasium in Altglienicke, a Berlin district. On another occasion, Molotov cocktails were thrown at the building as a result of verbal clashes between leftist and rightist students. A number of incidents were not even made public because the school principal and the teachers feared for the Gymnasium's reputation. Stephan Voss, head of the Berlin-based Land Commission against Violence, counseled school authorities to go public and encourage intensive discussions within that Gymnasium and other schools. Such counsel, however, did not prevent disputes between skinheads and immigrant youth at several high schools.

This was true, for example, in a rural Saxon school where a sixteen-year-old student held up a swastika in his classroom and reviled his teacher as a Jew. In the same school, six students, wearing skinhead clothing, defiantly smoked cigarettes in the play yard. Administrators and teachers initiated a reeducation program with mixed results. In another school, some rightist students, aware of students' interest in the youth popular culture, told nonpolitical fellow students that they could buy illegal skinhead music CDs in a downtown record store or online from a United States or Scandinavian distributor.⁷ In 2002, the NPD sent out flyers to high school student-body presidents in Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. The flyers said: "Stop the filling of our schools with foreigners. Stop foreigner violence in our schools. The boat is full." It called on the students to help halt immigration and to support "the freedom of opinion for all political groups and standpoints," a reference to futile government attempts to ban the NPD. The liberal student presidents forwarded the flyers to the authorities.⁸

In a propaganda escalation the neo-Nazis painted slogans, such as "SS/SA," "Long Live Germany," and "Out with the Turks" on school walls. In other areas, however, the Young National Democrats changed their strategy to appear more mainstream. In turn, the school administrators, teachers, and democratic-inclined students took numerous countermeasures, such as giving Länder Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz) and police specialists an opportunity to give informational lectures. These measures were only partially effective in defusing the neo-Nazi offensive.

Eastern German students have been more apt than their Western German counterparts to resent foreigners and to stereotype them. According to a 1998 study by specialists Bernd Wagner and Anetta Kahane, 30 percent of school-age youth in Eastern Germany had a rightist orientation. This was expressed in hatred of blacks and Turks, confrontations with leftists, and a disdain for democracy. It also was expressed in antisemitism among segments of the Muslim communities. In addition, Jews were blamed for supporting globalization, which had negative consequences upon the average German citizen.⁹

As already noted, right-wing youth have not shied away from violence. This was especially true when foreign pupils and others came on school trips from Berlin and nearby cities to Eastern Germany's camping areas. One Berlin class, which had 50 percent Turks among its students, arrived in a vacation area dominated by rightist youth. The organizers' reaction to these incidents, as many as fifteen in a six-month period in 1998, varied sharply. Some teachers counseled against canceling such trips because these played into the hands of rightists, whereas others said that a confrontation would lead to a mini civil war and was not worth it. The Berlin school administrators and Brandenburg Ministry of Education officials opposed any trip cancellations. They said that violence arose because the rightists saw the pupils as outsiders invading their turf. Thus the officials proposed establishing a partnership between Berlin and Brandenburg classes.¹⁰

On occasion, rightist students, influenced by older compatriots, beat up leftist students in schools rather than on the streets, especially if they had long hair and black clothing. In the 1990s and 2000s, such violence was more apt to take place in Eastern Germany's general and vocational high schools, the Realschulen and Hauptschulen, in which the students voiced their frustration at the bleak outlook for decent jobs. Some of the frustration was directed at students attending the university-track Gymnasien who were more likely to find a decent job after their graduation. To illustrate, the Jewish High School in Berlin Mitte was opened to provide a religious education for the city's Jews. Fearing antisemitic acts against the building, a fence several meters high was built, the police patrolled the area constantly, and video cameras were installed in strategic places. One Jewish student walking to the school suffered repeated antisemitic insults and beatings from adolescents, in this instance with an Arab background. Finally the student had to be given police protection on her way to school. The Jewish High School director noted in 2006 that the number of antisemitic incidents had increased considerably in the previous two years.¹¹

At times, such incidents in German high schools have been reported in the world's newspapers, partly because they recall similar ones in Nazi Germany. In 2006, in one dramatic episode, three rightist schoolmates forced a sixteen-year-old high school student to parade around a schoolyard in the small town of Parey in Saxony-Anhalt. He had to hold up a sign with the words "I am the biggest pig in town for having befriended only Jews." The government and school authorities were outraged that such an affair could have taken place. Saxony-Anhalt Minister of the Interior Holger Hövelmann (SPD) denounced the repulsive incident. He said that the Nazis and the SA, after gaining government control in 1933, had publicly humiliated their opponents in the same manner. The affair also triggered anger and fear among governing elites and segments of the population about growing far-right extremism in the country. The prosecuting attorneys said that they were investigating charges of xenophobia, duress, and defamation. The German and foreign media publicized the incident with banner headlines.¹²

According to Berlin's Parliament, there were sixty-two right-wing incidents in Berlin's schools in the 2004-2005 academic year, which represented a steep increase from the previous year when thirty-nine cases were registered. The incidents were not restricted to physical violence, but included antisemitic, racist, xenophobic, and right-wing extremist remarks, as well as those expressing fundamentalist Islamist views.¹³ As an illustration, to provoke the teacher and other students, one rightist high school student in Berlin, said in class that "all Jews must be gassed." In another Berlin district, rightist students locked a student inside the chemistry laboratory and said "Now we will turn on the gas." In still another one, a teacher's aide attempted to settle a dispute between students and was told "piss off, Jew." According to Peter Wagenknecht, who heads the Kreuzberg-based project "Educational Building Blocks against Antisemitism," not all students who use the word "Jew" are automatically antisemites, but rather use the word thoughtlessly, not realizing how charged it is when it becomes an insult. Moreover, students from Arab or Turkish families have made anti-Israel remarks that border on antisemitism. As a consequence, some Jewish students have been afraid to rebut such remarks, often on the advice of their parents who did not want their children to be exposed to conflicts and aggressive behavior. Wagenknecht notes that such students "do not want to present themselves as Jewish. In such cases, the class often doesn't know about their background, and the teachers keep mum."¹⁴

Antisemitic incidents can be understood in the light of polls taken of students' political views. In a 2001 official Berlin opinion survey, 23 per-

cent of students said that they had an understanding for right radicalism. Tellingly, in Berlin's poorer eastern, formerly communist districts the percentage stood higher at 32 percent, while in the wealthier western districts it stood at less than 18 percent.¹⁵ The higher percentage of neofascist youth in Eastern Germany than in Western Germany can be explained by a continuing high number of unemployed and underemployed in the postcommunist area.

According to Uwe-Karsten Heye, the chairman of an antifascist group, the three-tiered high school system is partly responsible for the rise of right extremism. He accused the non-academic schools of constantly producing losers. 10 to 15 percent of students leave school yearly without a graduation certificate. As a result, these youth are alienated increasingly from democratic society and many drift toward the radical right.¹⁶ School authorities, teachers, and students have introduced a palette of countermeasures, such as opening youth centers, to reduce the percentage of students who have been inclined to support right radicalism. The countermeasures, however, had only mixed results. Thus, it was no wonder that in a 2006 study, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, based in Vienna, criticized the numerous cases of antisemitism, racism, and right-wing extremism in German schools.¹⁷

Universities

Right-wing organizations also have sought to win over university students, especially fraternity (*Burschenschaften*) members, to their cause as part of a drive to strengthen their weak intellectual base. From their perspective it made sense to reach out to university students who are seen as the future elites, be they in the judiciary, administration, the economy, science, or the cultural field. Konstanz University opinion surveys, taken sequentially over a number of years, show that these rightist students achieved some success at various universities. The polls indicate that the sample student group of engaged democrats who were ready to support actions against rightists has gone down consistently over the decades, reaching a low 9 percent in the early 2000s. In the meantime, a politically indifferent middle group and a rightist "national conservative" group of students have been growing. The rightists have gained the active support from 5 percent of students at Western German universities and 8 percent at Eastern German universities. The rightist Eastern German fraternity members can count on the passive support of sympathizers, making up between 17 and

25 percent of Eastern German students.¹⁸ Most of the students on the right-extremist spectrum are males who opt for an authoritarian approach to social conflicts. They are interested in discussing such topics as resistance against foreign cultural infiltration in Germany and the setting of limits to immigration. Right-wing associations have supported the current 120 fraternities with their preponderance of national conservative male members. The students' vocabulary has been filled with such concepts as honor, devoutness, power, camaraderie, manliness, courage, glory, loyalty, and patriotism. It does not support women's emancipated role in society and implies that women have been inferior to men.¹⁹

Fraternities have played a not inconsequential role in German history—not always supporting conservatism. Dueling fraternities emerged as early as 1815 to work for an end to the feuding German principalities, for national unity, and for a strengthening of moral virtues. The fraternities attracted the sons of the Protestant upper middle class in old universities, such as Jena and Göttingen. At the time, some patriotically minded fraternity students were prosecuted for advocating democracy in Germany. Yet, as early as 1882, one fraternity in Marburg barred Jews as members, and by 1921, most fraternities, in a national conservative mood, stipulated that new members had to prove their Aryan ancestry. The Nazis did not have to worry about resistance from fraternity members. The entrance requirements for fraternities, then and now, included the reciting of patriotic verse and songs, the swearing of several oaths, and at least one year of menial work. Any deviation was and is punished.²⁰

In the post World War II Federal Republic, some 30 percent of all German male students belonged to fraternities, but, by 2006, the percentage of students in fraternities had plunged to between 2 and 3 per cent. This sharp decline was due partly to the reluctance of students to join those fraternities that continued the traditional practice of dueling. The decline was also the result of liberal and leftist students shying away from joining any organization, especially one that had an “old school” reputation.²¹ The peak nonpartisan German Fraternity Association (*Deutsche Burschenschaft*, DB) has about 15,000 members enrolled in 120 chapters at more than fifty universities. From the early 1990s onwards, a right-extremist fraternity society (*Burschenschaftliche Gemeinschaft*, BG) formed. The BG has forty-two fraternities as members and another ten to twenty fraternities sympathizing with its right-extremist aims, but not formally joining. Soon after its founding, the BG gained a majority within the DB. One leading member of the NPD student organization “National Democratic University League” was elected to the DB board. Tellingly, the DB's motto became “Honor, Freedom, and Fatherland.”

For the right-wing fraternity members, the concept of fatherland has been closely identified with the racial and populist nationalism that they espouse. For instance they have hung on to the illusionary concept of Germany some day annexing Austria and the lost Eastern territories as part of recreating an all-German nation. Jürgen Schwab, a radical right fraternity leader at Bayreuth University, sought to expand the DB's national membership. He acknowledged that even though many fraternities were apolitical, they had the potential to move to the political right. In the fraternity initiation rites, such as those in which heavy drinking is the norm, he noticed that there was growing opposition among old and new members to a modern secular culture. This shift could presage a right radicalization. Schwab, who had studied journalism, eventually became editor of the NPD organ, *Deutsche Stimme*. In the journal he wrote about the necessity to further push the DB into the rightist camp. Fraternity members at numerous universities, especially those located in Bavaria, worked for the same goal.²²

More generally, these individuals were actively looking for an appropriate field for political activity and found it in fraternities that cultivated Prussian virtues, such as "faithfulness and honesty," discipline, order, and diligence. If an individual's grandfather and father belonged to the same fraternity as the son, then the son inherited a long-lasting "abeyance structure" that upheld a national-conservative ideology. Bert Klander-mans notes that a number of rightists had become politically active because they felt betrayed by the liberal ideological stance of the establishment political parties.²³

As a result of the new activism, numerous controversies centering on fraternities erupted. At a January 1998 closed Kiel University meeting of the rightist University Guild Theodor Storm, young skinheads acted as a security force. Clad in black clothing, boots, and bomber jackets, they made sure that only invited guests attended the meeting. The nationalist ecology specialist Baldur Springmann spoke to sixty elderly Nazis, fraternity members, and members of the Circle of Christian Democratic Students (a CDU organization). Flyers were distributed denouncing the Allied air bombardment on Dresden in 1945 as "systematic mass murder." In the meeting's aftermath, some Guild members said that it was stupid for the Guild to have asked skinheads to act as a security force because they alienated potential recruits to the conservative cause. At future meetings, the students would provide protection themselves. University administrators and student council members also met to discuss whether the police, who were present, should have dissolved the meeting. They agreed that they could not have blocked it because the sponsoring Guild was a recognized

student organization.²⁴ While the 1998 meeting produced sparks of controversy, several rightist Guild members, who had quietly infiltrated the CDU organization, ran successfully for student council on the CDU youth ticket.

Among other disciplinary actions, Regensburg University administrators forbade the fraternity “Teutonia” from further distributing rightist flyers. According to the administrators, the students also broke the campus peace by inviting provocative neo-Nazi speakers to address the students. In 2001, the Munich University fraternity Danubia invited a NPD activist to talk about the martyr Albert Leo Schlageter, the Nazi member whom a French military court had ordered executed in 1923 for having committed sabotage against French and Belgian occupation troops after World War I. The lecture was entitled provocatively “Life and Death of a German Hero.” The fraternity also sponsored talks by other top NPD and neo-Nazi leaders. To make matters worse, a Munich University fraternity member allegedly hid the suspected rightist assailant of a Greek citizen who had died from his injuries for one night in his Danubia fraternity building. The assailant fled to the Netherlands the next day.

As a result of such incidents, the Munich University ordered the Danubia fraternity to stop distributing notices and flyers on university premises. The non-rightist student government association went a step further and demanded that the fraternity remove all its showcases from the campus. In the meantime, the student government had plastered the showcases with the slogan: “Old Men–New Right: The Shadow Side of the University.” A Bavarian Ministry of the Interior spokesman and a SPD Bundestag deputy called for an inquiry as to whether the fraternity should be shut down because it had violated the democratic constitutional order. Catholic and other fraternities, aware of the poor image of the right-dominated fraternities, warned that further incidents would damage the reputation of all fraternities.

In light of the numerous incidents, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior Günther Beckstein (Christian Social Union, CSU) issued a warning in June 2001 that right extremists sought to gain more influence in fraternities and thereby in universities. Nevertheless, the political establishment did not support a unified front. In 2005, the Brandenburg Minister of the Interior, Jörg Schönbohm (CDU), addressed members of dueling fraternities in Hamburg, which counted numerous rightists in their midst. Earlier in the 1990s some of these members took part in army sports exercises and marched in rightist demonstrations.

Rightist students also have been active in Hesse’s four university fraternities, especially Marburg and Giessen, with the aim of building an intel-

lectual elite within the NPD's youth branch. According to Lutz Irrgang, head of Hesse's Verfassungsschutz, "there are attempts to make this dueling club [at Giessen University] into something akin to a brain trust for the extreme right."²⁵ In 2005, Giessen University's Dresdensia-Rugia fraternity, which has close links to the NPD, participated in a public "funeral march" on the sixtieth anniversary of the British "terror" bombing of Dresden in 1945. During the NPD-sponsored march, the fraternity members stood out in their sashes and round brimless hats from the skinheads who were also marching.

How successful the fraternities, especially the dueling ones, have been in developing a brain trust within the rightist scene is hard to discern. A number of university graduates, who had been fraternity members, have gone into politics, diplomacy, and business. But few in these "old boys clubs" have assumed leading posts in the rightist political parties. Nevertheless, there has been an exchange of ideas and programs between the fraternities and right-wing journals. In the fraternity journal, the *Burschenschaftliche Blätter*, there are numerous favorable reviews of rightist books. There are also close contacts between numerous fraternities and the conservative weekly *Junge Freiheit*, facilitated by journal authors who then or in earlier years had been fraternity members. The fraternities help in the distribution of the journal on university campuses and place advertisements in the journal for their organizations, and in turn, *Junge Freiheit* advertises in fraternity journals.

In sum, although most university students are still politically on the left or center—or are apolitical and indifferent—the right-extremists are gaining more backing as they espouse a national conservative position. According to one 2001 survey, the number of students who support right-extremists has risen at Western German universities from 8 to 11 percent and at Eastern German universities from 13 to 17 percent. At eastern technical universities, the percentage is even higher, at close to 25 percent.²⁶ The greater support at many Eastern German universities for rightist causes can be traced to a host of factors, including the delayed recovery in that region that had produced chronic unemployment.

The Bundeswehr

The right-wing parties and groups also have targeted the Bundeswehr in their recruitment efforts to gain new members. Germany's crushing military defeat in 1945 led to the dissolution of its army, the Wehrmacht. A majority

of the population resolutely opposed the formation of a new army, fearing the re-emergence of militarism and a military elite. But, the Cold War and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's insistence that a democratic army be established to support western Allied forces led to the formation of the Bundeswehr in 1955. To ensure that it would be democratic, Parliament insisted on civilian control, which meant that the defense minister would be the supreme commander during peacetime and the chancellor during wartime. It also meant that Parliament would control the military budget and appoint a commissioner for the armed forces (Wehrbeauftragter). The commissioner, serving as an ombudsperson, would hear grievances from soldiers and be empowered to protect their constitutional rights.

These objectives have largely been fulfilled, even though the army has been the source of numerous controversies concerning its role in international affairs. Democratic control is maintained because the officer corps, which is not a powerful political elite, has been subordinated to the elected political leadership. The corps, whose ranks come from cadets trained at military universities in Hamburg and Munich, has developed the concept of an "Inner Leadership" (*Innere Führung*).²⁷ This is based on the principle that soldiers are "citizens in uniform" who have certain rights and who must not necessarily obey the orders of their superiors if these orders run counter to their conscience and legal norms. Democratic control had also been maintained (until the government effectively announced the end of the practice in late 2010) because of universal male conscription, ensuring that the army was made up primarily of draftees who served nine months in uniform. Their political views will not be substantially different than those of the general population, unlike professional soldiers, who (as in most countries) tend to cluster on the right of the political spectrum. This said, it is important to note that Left-leaning youth prefer the alternative conscientious or civilian service track—which had become increasingly popular since it was established in 1973

Political and partisan developments on the national scene had an effect on policies within the Bundeswehr. In 1982, Defense Minister Hans Apel (SPD) issued a "tradition" decree, which reinforced the separation of all legal, institutional, and ideological links between the Wehrmacht and the Bundeswehr. But his successor, Manfred Wörner (CDU), announced that he would not enforce it. After vehement protests, Wörner changed his mind, yet, his initial intent encouraged the right-wing extremists to portray the Wehrmacht as an organization that had fought valiantly against enemy forces and that had not been involved in annihilation actions against Jews, eastern Europeans, and Russians during the war years.

Intended to counter this interpretation, more than a decade later in March 1995, Hamburg University history professors mounted a traveling exhibition of photographs and documents entitled “War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944,” which portrayed the extent of the army’s involvement in the Holocaust. The exhibit opened in Hamburg and then toured in thirty-four German and Austrian cities where nearly 1 million people saw it. It produced a furor among conservatives, neo-Nazi, and other right-wing circles that felt the Wehrmacht’s honor had been besmirched. They mounted massive demonstrations in Munich and other cities against the exhibit. Moreover, top armed forces leaders have been reluctant to discuss charges made by some historians that the Wehrmacht had been involved in massive wartime crimes.

Thus, the past cannot be divorced from the present. In Mittenwald, Bavaria, for example, there is a yearly memorial service at a monument for the Wehrmacht mountain rangers who had died in World War II. In 2004, 2,000 Wehrmacht veterans, Bundeswehr mountain rangers, and their families attended the service organized by their association. Those attending were incensed after a leftist protester defiled the giant monument with the word “murderer.” The protester, supported by 600 leftists, was referring to the mountain rangers’ involvement in World War II of dozens of massacres of Jews, civilians, and prisoners of war in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Until 2004, no speaker ever referred to such massacres, but that year the retired Brigadier General Ernst Coqui criticized their crimes against war and humanity. In a press interview, he defused his critique by asserting that citizens need to remember the dead but not their deeds. The leftist message that guilty rangers need to be punished and need to compensate the victims made no impression on those attending the memorial service or on the local population residing in a city in which the military, with its many barracks, is sacrosanct and adds to the city’s coffers.²⁸

The democratic founders’ hope that the Bundeswehr will not be tainted by incidents that right-wing supporters had committed was shattered on numerous occasions. In the early 1970s, Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt (SPD) fired General Heinz Karst, a leading right-wing spokesperson, and other generals for their political appearances and remarks. The generals had said that freedom and democracy were not “the last words” and that the “inner leadership” concept was only a mask that one had to put up in front of one’s face for tactical reasons.²⁹ During his tenure from 1972-1978, Defense Minister Georg Leber (SPD), Schmidt’s successor, had to deal with the case of an air force inspector who accepted an invitation to visit South

Africa when it was still an apartheid state and the case of two air force generals who had invited the right-extremist Hans Ulrich Rudel to a traditional celebration of the army.³⁰ Years later in 1990, a few soldiers produced a video showing three drunken non-commissioned officers giving the forbidden “Heil Hitler” salute. In March 1993, Defense Minister Volker Rühle (CDU) admitted to the Bundestag Defense Committee that members of an SS veterans association and soldiers, at a private meeting in the Bundeswehr Leadership Academy, discussed the joint maintenance of war graves.³¹

In 1994, eight soldiers, including a first lieutenant from the crack 571st Alpine Battalion, which was preparing for deployment to the Balkans, made an amateur video featuring themselves shouting rightist songs and anti-gay and anti-foreigner slogans, giving the Hitler salute, and denouncing Jewish “imperialism.” The video would not have come to public notice if it had not been for Private First Class Mike Rueggeberg, who had been involved in producing the video, but turned against his friends in order to make money off of it by publicizing it on a private cable television channel (SAT-1). In 1997, that station aired a documentary based on Rueggeberg’s information claiming that neo-Nazism was rampant in army barracks. Soldiers could easily obtain swastika paraphernalia, copies of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and other illegal materials. Minister of Defense Volker Rühle denied the sweeping allegations, rather viewing the incident as an aberration of the army’s democratic spirit. He put an end to Rueggeberg’s anonymous whistle-blowing by identifying him publicly and calling him a “right-wing extremist dirty rat” who had been discharged from the army in March 1997 for “lack of aptitude.” Police searched Rueggeberg’s home and those of his fellow video-makers to provide evidence to state and military prosecutors, who, in turn, pressed criminal charges against seven soldiers and one junior officer. During the course of the legal proceedings, the soldiers and the officer were suspended from duty or left the army when found guilty of inciting racial hatred, using symbols of outlawed organizations, and glorifying violence. Rühle also pressed for a legal change that would allow the Bundeswehr to review the criminal records of new recruits in order to screen out “active neo-Nazis or potentially violent thugs.” But this suggestion ran counter to the principle that there should be no major government intrusion into the citizens’ private lives, as had been the case under Nazi Germany. Attempting to share blame for the incidents, Rühle said that the failures of eighteen years of lack of parental control, education, and work cannot be ironed out in nine months of training.³²

In another 1994 videotape uncovered in July 1997, troops training in southern Germany for duty in the Balkans filmed themselves carrying out imitations of rapes and executions associated with the wave of “ethnic cleansing” marking the Bosnian war. As a result of this videotape becoming public, one soldier was dismissed from the army. Chancellor Kohl said that these two videos reflected “isolated incidents” that should not be the basis for a “wholesale defamation of the armed forces.” Insisting that the vast majority of soldiers were dedicated democrats and beyond reproach, he nevertheless did not comment on the 126 reported pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic, and anti-foreigner hate incidents committed from January until November 1997 involving 161 soldiers. . This was a steep rise from 1996 when there were forty-four incidents involving fifty-six soldiers. A Ministry of Defense spokesperson explained the rise by pointing to a stronger right-extremist movement in Germany.³³ The Bundeswehr’s top command, however, was concerned enough to put the incidents on the agenda at one of its regular meetings. Inspector General Hartmut Bagger asserted that these crimes were a disgrace to the army, that the soldiers involved would be called to full account, and that the crimes were not a particular Bundeswehr problem but a social one affecting the entire nation. The commanders established a working group of military and civilian specialists who would study ways to intensify officer supervision of enlisted personnel and ways to prevent a wall of silence at the mid-level command structure.

At the time, the Bundeswehr ombudsperson, Claire Marienfeld, said that the army was free of organized right-wing elements. But soon after her statement, nine uniformed soldiers, some wearing masks and all armed with baseball bats and knives, went on a rampage in the West German town of Detmold, beating up an Italian and two Turkish citizens in a xenophobic attack. The soldiers, ranging in age between twenty and twenty-three, were arrested and R uhe ordered a special inquiry. In another incident, in May 1997, four soldiers were under investigation for giving Nazi salutes and shouting “Heil Hitler” and other slogans in their barracks in Erfurt.³⁴

These widely reported incidents represented only the tip of the iceberg. Ignatz Bubis, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said that because German society still had right-wing extremists and anti-semites, “it would be a miracle if there were none in the armed forces.”³⁵ Annette Streeck-Fischer, a psychologist in G ttingen, believed that because educators and politicians emphasized the message that Germany’s Nazi past must never be repeated, the taboo makes it attractive to teenagers as an emblem of revolt. She said that “right-wing extremism belongs

to this area of taboo and the forbidden.”³⁶ The military historian Wolfram Wette noted that the Bundeswehr with its new global peacekeeping and military responsibilities has produced many aggressive soldiers who have no reservations about serving in such an army. It was not surprising that some of them carried out right-wing activities.³⁷ The Bundeswehr Institute of Social Science in Strausberg (Brandenburg) commissioned two scholars to conduct a study of violence, society, and the Bundeswehr. In a 1997 national survey, they found that civilian respondents were evenly split on the question of whether the Bundeswehr disproportionately attracts youth prone to violence. The respondents who were positively inclined to the Bundeswehr believed that such youth were not going to stream in great numbers into the armed forces.³⁸

In 1997, the NPD denied charges that it encouraged its members to join the Bundeswehr as a means of getting training in arms. It also said that if the Bundeswehr sought through the courts to discharge NPD members then it would appeal such cases. In response, Rühle, politically on the defensive, suggested that as the number of soldiers involved in violent or nonviolent incidents increased, all new recruits should be investigated for right-wing sympathies. But Minister of Justice Edzard Schmidt-Jortzig (Free Democratic Party, FDP) rejected the proposal as a violation of data protection provisions. Eventually the two ministers agreed to submit a bill to the Bundestag that would amend the compulsory military service law. The bill would facilitate the provision of information about criminal offenses committed by draftees. Although Rühle favored screening recruits, he opposed a bill that Green Party deputies in the Bundestag had introduced to let a public opinion research institute survey soldiers’ political views, fearing the results. Two years earlier, in 1995, two Hamburg Bundeswehr University academics had surveyed officer candidates at their university and at the Munich Bundeswehr University. Not surprisingly, they found that 55 percent of the respondents considered themselves “right of center.” Of this group, 15 to 16 percent viewed themselves as national conservative, a ratio five times as high as civilian students at universities. Only 2 percent of Western German officer candidates and 7 percent of Eastern German candidates viewed themselves as leftist compared to 33 percent of Western German and 37 percent of Eastern German university students.³⁹

In 1997, no sooner had the discussion started on the video episodes and the increasing incidence of right-wing activities among military personnel, than *Der Spiegel* revealed that in 1994 some officers at the elite Bundeswehr University in Hamburg had invited the right-wing extremist

leader Manfred Roeder to give a lecture in January 1995. The commanding officers later claimed that they had not known an invitation had been extended to him. What were the causes for the uproar? The sixty-eight-year-old Roeder was a former lawyer who in the 1970s and early 1980s had been chairman of the rightist German Citizens Initiative and a leading member of the organization German Action Groups. He was a prominent Holocaust denier and antisemite who had libeled Michel Friedman, presidium member of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. In 1982, Roeder was convicted for serving as an accomplice in a bomb attack on a foreign workers' hostel that killed two Vietnamese refugees. He received a thirteen-year prison sentence, but was released in 1990. Shortly after his release, he founded the "German-Russian Joint Organization" that encouraged Russians of German origin to resettle in Kaliningrad, formerly Königsberg, East Prussia, which had become a Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania after the dissolution of the Eastern bloc and Soviet Union. The rightist's aim was to "Germanize" the region in order to eventually make it a "Free State of Prussia." In summer 1994, as part of this unrealistic and provocative effort, Roeder, having close contacts with some Bundeswehr officers, was able to obtain second-hand military vehicles and tools from the army. The officers, in justification, claimed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had certified Roeder's resettlement organization as legitimate.

As noted above, in 1995, Roeder spoke at the Hamburg Bundeswehr University to about thirty officer candidates as part of a monthly seminar series in continuing education for those studying or working there. He called on the support of people of German ancestry living in East Prussia, but did not deal with more inflammatory issues. Two years later in December 1997, Rühle found out that Roeder had made this speech. Belatedly, he suspended its commander and began disciplinary proceedings against the colonel who had issued the invitation.⁴⁰ Opposition political parties felt that the blame for the Roeder incident lay with Rühle and put pressure on him to resign his ministerial post. But, backed by Kohl, Rühle refused, indicating once again that this and other incidents were isolated and not symptomatic of a widespread Bundeswehr problem. He claimed that it was unjust to characterize the Bundeswehr as a "brown swamp."⁴¹

Roeder's speech at the military academy was not his sole attempt to infuse right-wing ideology into the armed forces. In 1995, he asked rightist soldiers gathered under a military tent in a small Thuringian village whether they knew that Professor Michael Wolffsohn, who was training their officers at the Munich Bundeswehr University, was Jewish. These

soldiers apparently were appalled at this revelation. In 1997, rightist academies had invited the Munich Bundeswehr history professor Franz Seidler to give a talk to neo-Nazis and rightist university fraternities on the Wehrmacht's role in the East European partisan war during World War II.⁴² The SPD and the Greens demanded that a legislative commission of inquiry be set up to deal with these controversial cases, but the governing parties CDU/CSU and the FDP rejected their proposal. Thereupon, the Bundestag Defense Committee took over the task.

In the Committee's deliberations, the opposition SPD and Greens deputies characterized the Bundeswehr as a center for right-wing activities and as a recruiting agent for tough Rambo-image men who sympathized with the armed forces' new mission to be ready for peace-keeping activities anywhere on the globe. The deputies noted that in 1997 numerous rightist incidents involving armed forces members took place, although in most cases the incidents occurred in the soldiers' first weeks of training. To defuse the political criticism, the Bundeswehr Inspector General Bagger recommended that the army embark on an educational venture in which officers would be sensitized to recognize new rightist recruits. He announced that as a result of intensive deliberations among a group of high-ranking officers and intelligence officials, curricular improvements were scheduled in political education, the syllabi, and seminars at Bundeswehr training schools and universities. Moreover, advisory teams for officers were to be formed, and in the barracks, exhibits about right-wing extremist organizations would be mounted. Non-commissioned officers, using computerized programs, were to be trained in ways to combat extremist activities. In addition, the media would be encouraged to publicize the message that right extremism had no place in the Bundeswehr.⁴³

The task was not going to be easy given the links of some officers to right-wing parties. For instance, Franz Schönhuber, the former Republikaner chairman, revealed in late 1997 that he had maintained intensive contacts with high-ranking officers, either directly or through his two chief military advisors who were retired army and navy officers. One of them, Major General Gerd Schultze-Rhonhorf published a book upon his retirement in 1997 entitled *Wozu noch tapfer sein?* (*Why Still be Courageous?*), in which he contended that Hitler had eliminated unemployment, that the Poles were as guilty as Germans in starting World War II, and that the German people presently had lost their values.⁴⁴ Such links and pro-Nazi views did not surprise the Freiburg military historian, Wolfram Wette. He contended that revisionist historians' arguments minimizing the Nazi regime's horrors had an effect on German society and more specifically

on the army draftees who were prone to look at videos glorifying violence or to be biased against foreigners. Such views, in turn, led some of the draftees to participate in violent acts against foreigners.⁴⁵

In 1997, Rudolf von Hoegen, chief of the military's counter-intelligence corps (*Militärischen Abwehrdienst*, MAD), testifying at the Bundestag Defense Committee hearing, said that during the 1970s, his corps had more difficulty identifying rightists than leftists. The rightists were politically less conspicuous than the leftists had been. Of the estimated 270 rightists in the armed services in the late 1990s, 85 percent had been drafted and 13 percent were professional soldiers. MAD had warned the top military command about the rightists, but the warnings were not heeded for a long time. However, in 1998, in a five-month period, 212 out of more than 170,000 draftees were initially not inducted because they had engaged in right-wing activities.⁴⁶

In the early 1990s, rightist organizations were not interested in seeing their members become soldiers because the young recruits might let their membership lapse once their military service had ended. But that attitude changed over the course of that decade. By the late 1990s, the organizations urged their younger members to join the armed services often via the Internet. MAD calculated that such men were involved in two-thirds of the incidents in which soldiers committed a violent act. According to von Hoegen, MAD had no right to bar draftees from serving in the armed services based on their political views. Once they joined, many of them opted for service in elite fighting units, such as parachutists or Special Forces, but they did not form political cells within these units. Nevertheless, as a precautionary move MAD sent politically reliable soldiers as secret informants into the NPD and other rightist organizations to find out what activities they were planning in the military. One parachutist discovered that the rightist Nationalist Front, founded in 1985, was planning to set up a national action commando—a mobile terror unit modeled on SS and SA units. MAD had distributed flyers to military officials calling attention to ways in which ultra-rightist music, abbreviations, symbols, and items of clothing could be recognized as part of the subversive “submerge” scene. As a consequence of higher awareness of the potential rightist threat in the military, its top officers banned *Junge Freiheit* from being sent via mail to soldiers. Ironically, most of the soldiers had not even requested the weekly.⁴⁷

Once the Bundestag Defense committee finished its deliberations in June 1998, Angelika Beer, a Green defense specialist, then in parliamentary opposition, criticized Rühle and other CDU/CSU politicians for belit-

ting the influence of rightists in the military service. She accused the minister of attempting to influence witnesses prior to their appearance before the committee. He denied all charges.⁴⁸ When the SPD and the Greens formed a new national government in October 1998, the political climate in the armed forces hardly changed, even though new Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping (SPD) sought to make the Bundeswehr a more democratic symbol. For example, in 1999, he forbade the Bundeswehr to maintain contact with the Order Community of the Iron Cross Knights. The minister took this action against the organization, created in 1955, because some of its officials were members or sympathizers of the radical right and because thousands of its members had received Iron Cross medals, adorned with the swastika, during World War II.⁴⁹ This was a step forward in creating a more democratic spirit, even though already in 1996, two years before the SPD-Green government was formed, the Defense Ministry had forbidden one army post barrack to invite Order members to an official reception.

Scharping renamed a military base in Rendsburg for Anton Schmid, a Wehrmacht sergeant who disobeyed military orders during World War II. Schmid had saved hundreds of Jews in the Vilnius ghetto from execution, an action for which the Nazis executed Schmid. Until Scharping took this action, the Rendsburg military base had been named for General Günther Rüdell who had fought in both world wars and supported the Nazi regime.⁵⁰ In the Bundestag, however, PDS deputies criticized Scharping in vain for not renaming two other barracks that honored two generals (Hans Hüttner in the Bavarian town Hof and Hans Röttiger in Hamburg), who had commanded military units in World War II that committed crimes in Ukraine.⁵¹

Rightist incidents did not stop because a new, leftist minister of defense had assumed office. In September 2000, a German soldier of Turkish descent accused a noncommissioned officer of making racist and antiforeigner remarks. The officer was promptly discharged from the army, but he appealed the decision. The soldier also said that he encountered many other recruits in the service who were racists, statements confirmed by the Armed Forces commissioner who reported that soldiers had been involved in 300 rightist incidents in 1998. In 1999 there was a drop to 135 incidents and in 2000 a rise to 196, including eleven cases in which drafted soldiers, often drunk, beat up foreigners. In other cases, soldiers were accused of painting graffiti on Bundeswehr buildings, making racist and antiforeigner remarks, singing rightist songs or playing rightist music, tattooing swastikas on their bodies, and raising their arm in a Nazi salute.

Many of these soldiers were disciplined, still others were tried in court, and a few were discharged prematurely from the service. In most of the other cases the military presumably did not have enough evidence to take any personnel action.⁵²

Scharping was concerned enough to increase political education and further inculcate democratic values in the young soldiers. For example, he ordered 10,000 copies of the 1933-1945 diaries of Victor Klemperer, which were distributed to the military services' recreation halls. Soldiers were expected to read the best-selling diaries that dealt with the consequences on one Jewish scholar and his family from escalating measures against Jews in Hitler's Germany.⁵³ The soldiers were then to discuss the implications of the book in the context of current antisemitism and were also encouraged to participate in a nation-wide civilian and military youth competition on the subjects of democracy and tolerance. They were asked to submit essays and videos on the themes of contemporary right-wing extremism and antifoigner sentiments. The effectiveness of such political education efforts was difficult to measure, but they were necessary given the increasing number of right-wingers who joined the Bundeswehr. According to a public opinion study from late 2000 commissioned by the Defense Ministry, 16 percent of soldiers supported one of the right-extremist parties, an increase of 4 percent over 1999. In comparison, 5 percent of all German youth were rightist sympathizers.⁵⁴ Some of these soldiers claimed to be rightists in order to be discharged prematurely from the service—a few had gone to their commanding officer and asked what they still had to do to be discharged.⁵⁵

As a way of keeping rightists out of the Bundeswehr, especially its officer corps, specialists in the military academies administered examinations and interviewed candidates. No similar efforts were made among new recruits, so that the number of incidents in which drafted soldiers were involved did not decline. The Defense Ministry insisted that rightist incidents in the Bundeswehr reflected society's problems—among 340,000 soldiers, of whom 135,000 are draftees, such incidents are bound to occur. But, according to the ministry, the leadership cadre through political indoctrination ought to be able to keep such incidents to a minimum. In response to the ministry's views, one newspaper commented that even though the Bundeswehr was a mirror of society, the argument was inadequate. After all, the Bundeswehr was supposed to protect the democratic society from external threats, so right-wing views cannot be allowed to take hold within the armed forces. In short, the Bundeswehr should strive not to be a mirror, but rather a model for German society.⁵⁶

Brigadier General Reinhard Günzel, head of the Bundeswehr's elite Commando Special Forces unit, was not such a model. In a letter, written in October 2003, the fifty-nine-year-old general, whom Scharping had appointed to his post in 2000, thanked the Hesse CDU Bundestag deputy Martin Hohmann for his inflammatory revisionist remarks concerning Soviet and German foreign policies. In that speech, delivered on 3 October 2003, Hohmann had also made antisemitic remarks—asserting that Jews bore responsibility for Bolshevism—at a public meeting commemorating German unification. Furthermore, Günzel criticized people who tag those making negative remarks of Jews as rightists, concluding that Hohmann courageously should maintain his critical stance.⁵⁷

Minister of Defense Peter Struck (SPD) immediately dismissed Günzel, who was a “lone confused general.” Thereupon, CSU defense specialist Hans Raidel defended Günzel who “with the best of wills was not a right radical, but a man with principles.” Some SPD and Greens deputies criticized Struck's remark that the general was confused; rather, the general was a committed rightist. Demanding a Bundeswehr investigation, the critics wondered how a general with such reactionary views was able to rise to a top army command post. Bundestag Defense Committee chairman Reinhold Robbe (SPD) claimed that “if we have more such people in the Bundeswehr leadership, then we have a problem.” Paul Spiegel, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, praised Struck for his swift action and viewed it as a model for any similar future incidents.⁵⁸

In February 2004, the Ministry of Defense issued an order that the Bundeswehr must cease any contacts with the League of German Soldiers (Verband Deutscher Soldaten). The League, founded in 1951 as the coordinating body for World War II veterans' leagues, has about 6,000 members, many of them no longer active. In 1970, the League had published in its journal *Soldat im Volk* the founding text of the National Socialist Party of America, one of whose propagandists was the neo-Nazi leader Gary Rex Lauck. The ministry's ban meant that the Bundeswehr could no longer provide support on its bases for the League's meetings and could no longer allow troop visits to the League. Moreover, the League's representatives were forbidden to attend Bundeswehr functions.⁵⁹

To sum up, the many incidents of Bundeswehr soldiers involved in misconduct or violence, and the fewer cases of officers who espoused antidemocratic values, indicate that the top Bundeswehr command must continue to pursue its political indoctrination to instill democratic values at all levels. Until the present, the Bundeswehr has the unenviable record of having been the German governmental institution that has harbored more rightists

than any other. Whether there will be a turnaround toward fewer rightist incidents remains to be seen. Within the Bundeswehr it is hoped that upon the retirement of the older traditionalists, who have venerated the Wehrmacht spirit, the younger, democratic reformers will carry more weight. Then the number of rightist incidents may decrease in an institution that in comparison to many other national armed forces remains democratic.

Conclusion

The array of German media and the Internet have given right-wing parties, neo-Nazi groups, and skinheads opportunities to spread their propaganda among three target groups—high school students, university students, including the national conservative fraternities, and Bundeswehr officers and soldiers. How effective their efforts have been is hard to measure exactly, except for national and Länder election results where, with few exceptions, the right has failed miserably (in contrast to most other European countries).

It is well-known that among the students and the soldiers there is a small constituency that has been easy to recruit because its members already are imbued with a right-wing ideology. The more difficult task for neo-Nazi recruitment has been to win over to the rightist cause those students, soldiers, and officers who have remained apolitical. If the rightists used violence to beat up their opponents, as has happened on numerous occasions over the last decades, then most students would not support the rightists. But if the rightists used the latest propaganda and electronic media techniques (such as Facebook and Twitter), then they have a chance to make inroads among this segment of uncommitted and apolitical youth. Nevertheless, when such efforts are compared with German left-wing organizations that wooed the same uncommitted groups in the late 1960s and 1970s, then the leftist intellectual efforts surely reaped a greater harvest, especially in universities, than was true of the right-wing parties. Yet, presently, rightists have had an effect, albeit limited, on the democratic groups, whose tactics of recruitment do not differ appreciably from the rightist groups. These rightist groups, small in numbers, will recruit new members from the pool of the dissatisfied, who are clustered especially in Eastern Germany, where after 1990 persistent government promises of a better future have not materialized.

If one compares on a transnational basis the United States, European countries, and Germany, all are facing a major economic recession that has

produced great hardships for masses of people in recent years.⁶⁰ Whether in the coming years the neofascist or ultraconservative groups and parties in these countries will become a significant political force that challenges the status quo remains to be seen. American conservative groups have made headway among many disgruntled voters, as seen in the rapid rise of the ultra-right Tea Party over 2009 and 2010. In several European countries, including the Netherlands, Switzerland, and even Sweden, rightist political parties have made electoral gains in recent years among disadvantaged citizens who feel threatened by an influx of migrant foreigners. In Germany, most rightist groups have not openly espoused fascist ideologies that would alienate potential supporters among students and armed force members. But, collective memory of the Holocaust and the country's responsibility for starting World War II continue to have an impact on the elderly people's guilty conscience, although much of the younger generation feels that it is not guilty for the actions committed by their elders. Even though the chance of a neofascist revival remains minimal, continuing acts of violence and xenophobic attitudes mar Germany's democratic image and must be addressed vigorously by the democratic elite.

Born in 1923 in Gera, Germany, **GERARD BRAUNTHAL** grew up there and in Berlin. Forced to flee Hitler's Germany in March 1933, the family moved to Belgium that year and to the United States in 1936. After earning a Ph.D. degree from Columbia University in 1953 in political science, Braunthal taught comparative politics and international relations at the University of Massachusetts from 1954 to 1987. His teaching career included Fulbright grants at Frankfurt University and at Visva-Bharati University (India), as well as a teaching grant at Freiburg University. He was a member and chairman of the Social Science Research Council selection committee on West Europe, member of the Selection Committee for Fulbright applications to Germany and member of the area advisory committee for Western Europe of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars. He has written extensively on politics in Germany, specializing in the study of its parties, interest groups, and domestic policies. His books include *The Federation of German Industry in Politics* (Ithaca, 1965); *The West German Legislative Process: A Case Study of Two Transportation Bills* (Ithaca, 1972); *The German Social Democrats since 1969: A Party in Power and Opposition* (Boulder, 1994). For his service to further German-United States links, the German Federal Government awarded Braunthal the Federal Cross of Merit.

Notes

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