Germany: Extremism without Successful Parties

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The so-called 'third wave' of right-wing extremism,[1] which has washed the shores of Western Europe since the mid-1980s, has largely passed by both West and later unified Germany. With the notable exception of the 1989 European elections and some regional elections, extreme right parties in Germany have never been able to make substantial inroads into the party system. In fact, they belong to the least successful extreme right parties in Western Europe. This notwithstanding, Germany remains linked to the phenomenon of the extreme right, not just because of its tainted history but also because of contemporary events. In sharp contrast to the weak parties, the extreme right subculture is well developed, particularly in the former East Germany.

In this article we provide a short historical survey since the war, focusing on the relevant political parties and their environment. We describe the two parties that have come to dominate extreme right politics since the 1980s, the Republicans (REP) and the German People's Union (DVU). We assess whether 1998 has brought a 'Second Coming' of the extreme right parties. We look at the broader extreme right subculture, ranging from rigidly ideological and highly organised neo-nazi groups to the rather disparate skinheads. In conclusion, we consider why the extreme right in Germany is successful only outside of the party-political realm and whether this is likely to remain the picture in the near future.

The postwar extreme right 1945–80

After the second world war, Germany was briefly divided into four sectors of Allied occupation. Most right-wing extremists were interned or in hiding. Mobilisation was further obstructed by the denazification policy, which included a provision requiring the approval of all parties by the Allied forces. Moreover, as the over three million surviving internees were reintegrated into German society, most chose to stay out of politics or to join a democratic party. The same held for the over ten million expellees, who had come to the Federal Republic from the former 'eastern territories' (most notably in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia). In the 1950s they had their own party political basis in the form of the Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (Block of Expellees and Dispossessed, BHE), which entered into electoral lists with extreme right organisations at the regional and local levels. The successful social integration of the expellees and refugees led to the

gradual disappearance of its electoral basis in the late-1950s. Its political potential was mainly absorbed by the liberal Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party, FDP) and, more importantly, by the large Christian-conservative 'catch-all party' CDU/CSU.

With the end of Allied party licensing and the increasing polarisation of the East-West relations, some space was created for the extreme right. However, overall, the environment remained largely hostile during the whole postwar period. The few parties that did organise and contested elections hardly grew beyond regional significance. Moreover, when the reasonably successful Sozialistische Reichspartei (Socialist Reich Party, SRP) was banned by the Constitutional Court on the grounds of its neo-nazi character in 1952, the extreme right was reminded of the narrow margins of its toleration.

The first successful extreme right mobilisation came with the foundation of the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD) in 1964. In the late-1960s it was represented in seven of the ten state parliaments and was widely expected to make it into the Bundestag. At its highpoint, the party counted some 28,000 members, which added up to almost three-quarters of the 'organised' German right-wing extremists. The only remaining competitor was the wealthy publisher Gerhard Frey, owner and editor of various nationalist weeklies with a combined readership of over 200,000. Despite similarities in goals, he did not support the NPD but called upon his readership to vote for the CDU/CSU.

The NPD's failure to overcome the 5% hurdle in the 1969 national elections, gaining 'only' 4.3% of the vote, was the beginning of the end. As a consequence of infighting and scandals, as well as links between the party's youth movement and violent groups, the NPD lost all its seats in the state parliaments by 1971. By the end of that decade, it had become a 'less-than-one-percent-party' with huge financial debts and a marginal membership of some 6,000. Though in the 1980s it tried to revitalise itself by adopting the immigration issue, its days were numbered: the future belonged to other extreme right parties.

The 'third wave' 1980–

Rather than from the ruins of the NPD, the most successful postwar extreme right party to date originated outside the extreme right subculture.[2] Die Republikaner (The Republicans, REP) were founded in November 1983 by two MPs of the Bavarian CSU, Franz Handlos and Ekkehard Voigt, and a popular Bavarian television presenter, Franz Schönhuber. The immediate cause was the support by CSU-leader Franz-Josef Strauß for a large credit to the German Democratic Republic, though this was in fact the last drop in mounting dissatisfaction within CSU-circles. The original goal of the new party was to become a sort of national CSU, a right-wing conservative party contesting elections throughout the Federal Republic and not just in Bavaria. Its first

electoral programme was a replica of its mother party's, moderate in tone and policies and with a particular stress on Bavarian issues such as agriculture. The only point in which the two programmes differed was the importance of Christian values, stressed by the CSU and largely ignored by the Republikaner. Most media, most notably in the south, treated it accordingly, referring to it as a 'right-wing breakaway'.

After a fierce power struggle, Schönhuber got the upper hand in the Republikaner Party. Elected chairman in 1985, Handlos and Voigt decided to leave. The conflict had been both personal and political. Inspired by the electoral successes of the Front National in France, Schönhuber wanted to make it a modern right-wing populist party. In this, he was supported by his vice-chairman, Harald Neubauer, a former NPD-member and Frey journalist. However, the new strategy, as well as the past of the two leaders (Schönhuber had served in the Waffen-SS), strengthened media accusations that the party had drifted into extreme right waters. In fact, under Schönhuber the party did change its original national-conservative party ideology into a modern extreme right one.[3] Building upon a core ideology of nationalism, xenophobia, welfare chauvinism and law and order, it targeted particular issues like German unification, 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' (the way in which the German state deals with the nazi past), immigration and crime. Though always cautious in its use of language, it increasingly wrapped its propaganda in populist anti-party sentiments, accusing the established parties of betraying the German people and perverting the democratic system.

The Republikaner's first electoral test was the Bavarian state elections of 1986. Though its 3.1% kept it well under the 5% hurdle, it did bring generous state funding and national media coverage. This led to a doubling of its membership within two years, bringing the number to 8,000 at the end of 1988, despite a string of less successful state elections. In 1989, it had its best result to date, with 7.1% in the European elections. As a consequence, it entered the European Parliament with six members, led by Schönhuber, who together with the French National Front and the Belgian Flemish Block, formed the Technical Group of the European Right.

The party also had an increase in membership, from 8,500 in January to 25,000 in December 1989. Moreover, its unexpected breakthrough led to a REP-mania in German public opinion, with hundreds of editorials, articles and books being written about the party. Some commentators even predicted that it would become the fifth party in the German political system, while within CDU/CSU circles voices emerged favouring a coalition with it. At the same time, the ongoing debate about the extremist character of the party was fuelled even further, and the comparison between the Bonn Republic of the 1990s and the Weimar Republic of the 1930s became a serious topic of discussion.

As quickly as its successes had come, its defeats followed. In the 14 elections the Republikaner contested in the following two years, it never passed the 5% hurdle. Partly as a consequence of German unification, which robbed it of a popular topic, partly because of increased infighting, the REP fell back into a marginal position, gaining in between 1% and 2% of the vote in the various elections. Schönhuber was ousted as party chairman, after a challenge by a group around Neubauer, only to return with a vengeance, expelling the Neubauer group and declaring the party cleansed from all 'extremists'. Party membership fell back to under 17,000 at the end of 1991.

Since then, the party has never been able to make a real comeback. Though it had some regional successes, notably in the southern state of Baden-Württemberg (10.9% in 1992 and 9.1% in 1996), it has become more or less a marginal phenomenon within German politics. This was demonstrated in the 1994 'super election year', when it contested the parliamentary, European and eight state elections without once overcoming the 5% hurdle. Moreover, in December 1992 the Minister of the Interior placed the party under surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, a decision confirming its extremist character in law.

Electoral fiascos and state monitoring have led to mounting internal disputes, which were one of the reasons for Schönhuber's rapprochement with his old enemy Frey. When the two issued a joint communiqué in 1994, the party leadership reacted swiftly and decisively. Distancing itself from any cooperation with 'right-wing extremists' (meaning Frey and his party, see below), they dismissed Schönhuber as leader. This time he was unable to make a comeback and, after a short period of internal opposition, left the party. The new leader of the party was former vice-chairman, Rolf Schlierer, the uncharismatic but well-educated Stuttgart lawyer, who had been so successful in the Baden-Württemberg state elections. Under him, the party has tried to steer away from open extremism, both in ideology and in alliances, but has been unable to make an electoral impact. Consequently, it has been riddled with internal dispute and a continuing decrease of its membership, which numbered some 15,000 at the end of 1999.

Under Schlierer, it has also lost its position as the strongest electoral formation to the right of the CDU. This position has been taken over by the Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union, DVU) of Gerhard Frey. After a short flirtation with the NPD in the mid-1970s, he had stayed away from party politics for almost ten years, devoting himself to the expansion of his publishing business. At the end of 1986, however, he decided to found his own political party which, after a few different names, became DVU-List D (the D standing for Deutschland) in April 1987. In his own publications, Frey explained his entrance into party politics as a reaction to the failure to deliver the promised 'Wende' (change of direction) by the Christian Democrat-Liberal government

and its weaknesses in such matters as 'Deutschlandpolitik' (the politics of the Federal Republic towards the German Democratic Republic), internal security and immigration.

From the outset, the Volksunion was an odd party. It never produced its own party paper, relying on Frey's, and even its programme was a selection of points taken from 'action groups' within a wider umbrella organisation. Membership was extremely small, while cadre was non-existent. The first was countered by a trick of counting all members of the umbrella organisation as party members. This turned it from one of the smallest into the biggest extreme right party in Germany, with some 25,000 members in 1989. However, this left the unusual situation of a lot of money but no cadre. The problem was overcome by an alliance with the former archenemy, the NPD, which had the more common problem of enough cadres but no money.

Between 1987 and 1990 both parties profited from their partnership. In the first elections it contested, in the city state of Bremen, in 1987, the Volksunion got 3.4%. However, because of a special provision, the 5.4% in the constituency of Bremerhaven brought the party two seats. Its success had been preceded by a massive electoral campaign, in which Frey was said to have spent two million DM, more than the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats together, while receiving only 65,000 DM back from the state through the party subsidy system. However, it was also a dress rehearsal for the European elections of 1989.

Its election campaign for the 1989 European elections was one of the most expensive in German history. Frey paid no less than 17 million DM, mostly his own money, primarily for three national door-to-door deliveries of pamphlets with a total circulation of 70 million. This notwithstanding, the party was completely overshadowed by the Republikaner and got a mere 1.6%. This fiasco led Frey to end his alliance with the NPD prematurely, thereby reinstating the old enmity. It did not negatively affect Volksunion membership however, which increased by almost 50% that year. In 1991 it returned from the political dead, being elected into the state parliaments of Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein, with over 6% in both and becoming the third largest party in Bremen.

Surprisingly, the party did not contest any elections in the 'super election year' 1994. The main explanation was its poor financial situation, said to involve a debt of 9 million DM, covered by the personal capital of the Frey family. With no money for its expensive campaigns, and no activists for an alternative labour-intensive campaign, it retained a shadow existence. It has never been able, and was probably never really willing, to build a functioning party organisation. As a consequence, it lacked qualified candidates in elections, which again caused a consistent pattern of splits between and defections by its parliamentary representatives.

The Volksunion also has a strange political repertoire.[4] Its programme is probably the shortest of all German parties and has not been seriously changed since its foundation—despite historical events such as German unification, the fall of communism and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. It lacks a statement of principles, thematic brochures and a paper of its own. In so far as the party has an ideology, it can be found in Frey's extreme right weeklies, the *Deutsche Wochen-Zeitung* and the *Deutsche National-Zeitung*, which were merged in 1999. However, they are based upon tabloid journalism, providing short and shallow stories under shouting headlines. Moreover, they hardly address contemporary issues, rather focusing on German's history. Most of the articles deal directly or indirectly with the war and the issue of German responsibility, downplay or reject German atrocities while stressing those of the Allied forces. They are also drenched with more or less openly antisemitic articles, ranging from short stories about corrupt Jewish businessmen to allegations that Jews started the second world war or that Israel uses the Holocaust to extort money from Germany. Finally, they highlight the virtues of German soldiers and the beauty of the 'real' East Germany, i.e. the 'lost territories'. As far as contemporary issues are taken up at all, they mainly concern threats to the German nation (immigration, crime, European integration) and German successes, such as the double victory at Wimbledon in 1992. At the core of these articles lays a mix of nationalism, patriotism, xenophobia, law and order, and antisemitism. Even more than is the case of the Republikaner, the Volksunion literature is dominated by conspiracy theories. Strangely, this was not combined with any strong anti-party rhetoric. For a long time, Frey remained loyal to his CDU/CSU allegiance. While vigorously attacking the left-wing parties SPD and Greens, as well as suspected left-wingers among the Liberals and Christian Democrats, his papers wrote positively about right-wing Christian Democrats.

1998: a second coming?

After having lost its parliamentary factions in Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein, not the least because of personal infighting and financial scandals, the Volksunion made a comeback in Saxony-Anhalt in 1998. The party, which at the time of the elections had hardly more than 30 members in this eastern state, won 12.9% of the votes and 16 seats in the state parliament. Thereby, it obtained the highest vote percentage in state and national elections of all extreme right parties in postwar Germany. It had obviously succeeded in mobilising parts of the population that hold extreme right values. This has been estimated at an average of 13% of the population within Germany as a whole, ranging from 4% in Saarland to 19% in Brandenburg, the 'new' (i.e. eastern) states scoring high. The electoral result are however only partly explained by the authoritarian and xenophobic potential because ideological considerations played a subordinate role for the majority of its

voters. Economic motives proved decisive. Dissatisfaction with the economic and social results of unification, and the impotence of all other parties to solve them, found an outlet in voting for the DVU, which dismisses the established party system fundamentally. Studies of Saxony-Anhalt show DVU voters over-represented in the younger and older age groups, in majority male, workers or apprentices, and secular without Church affiliation. In their dissatisfaction with the party-political system and their pessimistic evaluation of the economy, they resembled the voters for the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) at the other end of the left-right spectrum.

The electoral victory brought some new members into the party (from 15,000 at the end of 1997 to 18,000 a year later). Moreover, well-known activists within the 'national camp', among them former Republikaner leader, Franz Schönhuber, declared their willingness to support the Volksunion. More surprisingly, the current REP leader, Rolf Schlierer, gave in to mounting internal pressure and met Frey in November 1998, agreeing that 'unnecessary competition' in future elections should be prevented. Though Schlierer played down the importance of the agreement immediately afterwards, the next year the two parties no longer competed in state elections.

The rise in fortune was again short-lived, however. The 1998 parliamentary elections once more showed the extreme right parties' irrelevance nationally, with the Republikaner getting 1.8% and the Volksunion a mere 0.6%. Even without competition, the former could garner only 1.7% of the vote in the 1999 European elections (against 3.9% in 1994). The two parties could not overcome the 5% hurdle except in two of the following state elections. In the western city state of Bremen the Volksunion again profited from the special provision in the electoral law and entered the state parliament on the basis of its 6% in the Bremerhaven constituency (against just 3% state-wide). More important, it got 5.3% and five seats in the eastern state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The profile of its electorate there was very similar to that in Saxony-Anhalt, though this time the number of young voters clearly outnumbered the elderly.

Despite these incidental electoral successes, the party remains a ghost party, which has to compensate for its lack of activists by very expensive electoral campaigns. However, increasing financial problems, an estimated debt of some 15 million DM at the end of 1999, have forced it to choose carefully which elections to contest, with internal frustrations as a result. Moreover, the lack of cadre renders the electoral victories practically meaningless because the parliamentary parties always fall apart within a year, leaving it virtually without representatives, money or political influence. The situation of the REP is even worse: in the last ten years it has been able to overcome the 5% hurdle only in Baden-Württemberg: it has no money and many of its declining number of activists oppose the 'moderate' course of party leader Schlierer.

So, at the beginning of a new millennium no German extreme right party seems even remotely capable of establishing itself at the national political level. The splintering of the party political camp to the right of the CDU and the lack of a charismatic leader make it incapable of profiting from the weakened position of the CDU, as a result of financial scandals, or from the 'Haider-effect'. This situation is in sharp contrast with the vitality of the, often violent, extreme right subculture.

The extreme right subculture

Extreme right activities outside the realm of political parties go back a long way in German history. After the war, extremists were often forced to organise either within non-extremist parties (especially the Liberal Party, FDP) or outside the party system altogether. Not surprisingly, the largest extreme right movement, the Deutsche Volksunion (founded in 1971 by Gerhard Frey), remained for a long time unattached to any political party. In any case, the more extreme groups, such as the neo-nazis, never laid much trust in the mechanics of parliamentary democracy and preferred to mobilise outside of party politics.

In this respect, Die Bewegung (The Movement) was the most notorious. Its charismatic young leader, Michael Kühnen, was able to create a whole network of neo-nazi organisations, overcoming most of the typical infighting. Despite several prison sentences and his open homosexuality, he was the most successful and least divisive neo-nazi leader of the postwar period. His death of AIDS in 1991 dealt a decisive blow to the mobilisation and integration capacities of the neo-nazi subculture. The 1990s saw also an increasing vigilance of the German authorities with regard to extreme right groups and several were banned. The government reacted to the wave of anti–immigrant violence of the first post-unification years, which had put it under considerable domestic and international pressure to act. This was nevertheless largely symbolic politics because the neo-nazi scene, the clearest target of the bans, was certainly not the most important source of the violence.

A result of the bans was simply the restructuring of the scene. Instead of well organised action groups, with formal membership and internal hierarchies, loosely organised 'circles of friends' appeared: in 1998 the various Offices for the Protection of the Constitution reported some 80 of these with between 10 and 15 activists. Some 2,400 people were regarded as part of the 'neo-nazis', in 41 groups with 'some organisational structure'. However, the rivalries of their leaders stand in the way of more unified organisation and mobilisation.

Somewhat surprisingly, it is the oldest of the extreme right parties, the NPD that has started to profit from this niche. The new chairman, Udo Voigt, has decided to rejuvenate the party by opening it up to the neo-nazi scene. He accentuated the anti-capitalist elements in the programme, oriented himself on the model of the cadre party and chose an activist course. Consequently, the party, and notably its youth wing

(Young National Democrats), have become a pulling point for young neo-nazis who have been looking for a new organisation after the 1990s party bans. That the link between street politics and electoral politics did not bring the NPD any electoral success was made clear in the 1999 European elections. Although it increased its vote from 0.2% to 0.4%, it did not reach the 0.5% qualifying for electoral campaign subsidies. That said, Voigt was able to consolidate and even elaborate his organisation, increasing its membership to 6,000. The NPD has been able to at times organise various protest marches; with up to 5,000 participants from the extreme right and skinhead scenes, most notably in the eastern states.

The mobilisation of groups has triggered a public discussion about the development of a 'social movement of the right'. There are definitely indications of this, including informal networks, diffuse collective identities (transferred through communications outlets), and links to broadly held stereotypes. At the same time, given the comparatively low level of mobilisation potential, an extreme right social movement is at best in an embryonic phase.

Recent bomb attacks, such as those in 1998 at the grave of Heinz Galinski, the late leader of the Jewish community in Germany, and in 1999 at the Wehrmacht exhibition organised by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, have given rise to speculation on the formation of an extreme right terrorist underground, which could start a systematic campaign of violence after the example of the extreme left Red Army Faction, but the state security forces have so far dismissed the 'Brown Army Faction' as a brainchild of journalists.

The Federal Office for Crime put the number of violent attacks motivated by right-wing extremism, antisemitism or xenophobia at 708 in 1998 (16 attempted murders, 595 bodily harm, 39 arson, three bombs, and 55 trespassing). Some research provides a picture of the social background of the extreme right violent scene of the 1990s. More than half the offenders were 20 years or younger, they were largely male, generally with low education, but unemployment not particularly prevalent. More important, most did not belong to a structured group: most acts of violence seem to have been spontaneous, often under the influence of alcohol. Motives mentioned include: prejudices against foreigners, own experiences of humiliation, search for recognition among peers, and latent or manifest personal tendencies to violence.

Among those who could be linked to groups, the large majority came from the skinhead scene which often has no real organisational structures: common styles of behaviour, music and alcohol consumption are connecting elements. Music, which often glorifies violence, is more central to its magazines than are political positions. 'Extreme right' fanzines were estimated at around 50 in 1998, an increase over the years before. Extreme right skinhead bands were also on the rise, numbering some 100 at the end of 1998. Skinheads tend to be predom-

inantly male, young and low educated, with a high turnover, most youths staying for only one or two years. There seems to be a slight increase in the number of 'older' skinheads though, perhaps because those convicted for violence or racist actions find (re)integration into mainstream society more difficult as they are stigmatised as 'neo-nazis'.

Extremism without successful parties

Unlike some European democracies such as France or Austria, extreme right parties have not been able to make substantial and continuing inroads into the party system of federal Germany. The reasons are several. First of all, the horrors of the Nazi era work as a powerful antidote against right-wing extremism within postwar German society. As a consequence of the continuing and extensive dealing with the Nazi past, political mobilisation at the extreme right meets public scrutiny and generally leads to strong counter-reactions within society. Even stronger than in the population as a whole has been the reaction of the political and cultural elites. At times bordering at the neurotic, they have ostracised everything and everyone who had just the appearance of possibly being part of or linked to the extreme right. Consequently, representatives of far-right parties have found only very little media response, even in periods of electoral success. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Republikaner Party have even been the subject of an outright boycott by the federal press and public radio and television channels.

Second, mainstream parties have so far consistently rejected any coalition politics with the extreme right and have played a key role in the ostracism of such parties as well as of more moderate nationalist parties. That also applies to the conservatives of the CDU/CSU, which on purely strategic grounds followed the recommendation of former CSU-leader Franz-Josef Strauß not to accept a democratically legitimised force to the right of the Union. The conservative CSU, which has for decades formed the government in the state of Bavaria, did not let itself be outdone by the left-wing opposition in its propagandistic rejection of the REP. At the same time, it took up the themes of the extreme right (immigration, asylum, crime) — according to the party itself in a democratically acceptable manner. Most notably in the late-1990s its electoral campaigns became spitting images of those of the REP. In addition, the German electoral system, proportional with a 5% hurdle, made it easier not to enter electoral coalition, particularly compared to the French two-ballot majoritarian system. That said, even at the communal level there have been rarely electoral deals with far-right parties.

Third, and obviously related, German governments has in the federal and state Offices for the Protection of the Constitution security organisations empowered to watch, even spy, upon potentially violent and anti-democratic organisations. The machinery of Germany's 'vigilant democracy' allows state intervention in the political freedoms of individ-

uals and groups that act aggressively against the 'free democratic order'. Membership of organisations that are officially declared 'extremist' is forbidden to civil servants, which hampers such parties in attracting well-educated cadres and isolates them from the large, state sector.

Fourth, despite the problems that have accompanied the unification process, still ongoing in terms of society and economy, the German state has been able to provide a high level of welfare for its citizens, in both the west and east. Consequently, no deep redistribution conflict or economic crisis is available for exploitation by the extreme right. Further, since a battle about immigration policy divided Germany in the early-1990s,[5] a reticence about immigration in major party politics has prevented a new electoral use by the extreme right of this still sensitive topic. A similar argument can be made with regard to the German unification of 1990 which, by and large, removed the national issue from the political agenda. It left the extreme right with the far less popular call for a 'full reunification', i.e. the inclusion of the alleged 'German lands' in Poland and Russia.

The relative lack of electoral success of the extreme right parties weakens their integrative power at its militant fringes and thereby strengthens the extreme right potential for violence. This relationship was already evident at the end of the 1960s and in the early-1970s, when the NPD, which had been a successful reservoir of the extreme right before, slowly but steadily disappeared into political oblivion. Militant, action-oriented groups, integrated into the party before, now began to found their own political organisations. This was the start of the formation of the neo-nazi action groups, which mushroomed in the 1970s. The fact that Germany is today home to one of the most elaborate extreme right violent subcultures in Europe can also to a large extent be traced back to the weakness of the nationalist electoral organisations. According to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, no less than 15% of the 'organised right-wing extremists', i.e. those belonging to an extreme right organisation of some sort, are considered to be 'potentially violent'. Overall, the group of active militant right-wing extremists is estimated at some 8,200 people, notably belonging to the 'neo-nazi' or 'skinhead' scenes (which obviously overlap).

On the other hand, the large influence of the skinhead subculture in the extreme right violence somewhat weakens the relationship between successes in elections and successes in the streets. The skinheads are a youth subculture that to a large extent organise outside of the political arena. Though the subculture has from the outset attracted extreme right attention and members, skinheads have also often resorted to extreme right symbols or slogans simply to provoke. They mean to shock the public. In a society that has only very few taboos left, SS signs and swastikas have become the last means with which one can upset the world of the adults. Well-organised neo-nazi groups and

extreme right parties have long tried to mobilise the skinhead potential, but until now to little avail.

In the eastern states of the unified Germany the extreme right subculture profits from a fertile social, economic and cultural breeding ground. The abrupt transformations of the political and economic systems left large parts of the population in a deep identity crises. Overwhelmed by the required personal adjustments, and left with very weak social or religious ties as a consequence of fifty years of Communist rule, a minority of the youth have sought refuge in radical, identity-presenting groups to cope with the feelings of insecurity. The skinhead and neo-nazi subcultures are such escape possibilities. However, extreme right skinheads can also feel in touch with the xenophobic sentiments among substantial parts of the population. These resentments transcend the borders of the party political camps and are certainly not limited to the organised extreme right. Xenophobic violence is therefore a broader societal phenomenon, with a considerable degree of independence from the extreme right parties and their chances of mobilisation.

1 K. von Beyme, 'Right-Wing Extremism in Postwar Europe', *West European Politics*, April 1988.
2 On the 'third wave' of German right-wing extremism, see U. Backes and E. Jesse (eds), *Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie*, Nomos, 1989ff; R. Stöss, *Politics Against Democracy. Right-Wing Extremism in West Germany*, Berg, 1991; U. Backes and E. Jesse, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Propyläen, 4e, 1996.
3 See C. Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Manchester University Press, 2000, ch. 2.
4 Ibid., ch. 3.
5 See D. Tränhardt, 'The Political Use of Xenophobia in England, France and Germany', *Party Politics*, July 1995.