The New, Old Danger: Young Neo-Nazis in the GDR

By Konrad Weiß

While working on his various documentary projects for cinema and television, East German filmmaker Konrad Weiß did research on rightwing radicalism in the GDR,[1] starting in the 1960s. In the 1980s, he focused even more closely on the topic and collected related articles published in East German newspapers and, in November 1988, he drafted a survey of growing rightwing radicalism in the country based on his research.

In his text, Weiß not only describes the existence of neo-Nazism, he also looks into political and social explanations for how it was possible for neo-Nazis to find a base and grow in the GDR. This first East German analysis of rightwing radicalism broached a topic that was officially taboo, as the existence of neo-Nazi groups was considered a disgrace in a country that promulgated an antifascist ideology.[2] Its wide publication, including in West Germany, was therefore not welcomed by GDR authorities, and Konrad Weiß faced the consequences in his professional and personal life.

Weiß' text was originally brought out in *Kontext: Beiträge aus Kirche, Gesellschaft, Kultur* (Issue 5), an underground samizdat magazine produced by the Evangelische Bekenntnisgemeinde in Berlin-Treptow, on March 8, 1989. Edited versions of the article were published in the weekly papers *Die Zeit* (West Germany) and *Polityka* (Poland). The text also circulated in many international daily papers, sometimes appearing in a shortened or unauthorized version.

In 1991, Luise von Flotow (then at the University of Michigan) translated a portion of the text that had appeared in *Kontext* and published it—with an introduction and under the title "Skinheads and Faschos in East Germany: The New-Old Danger of Fascism"—in *Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Number 10, pp. 148-157). The following approved version includes von Flotow's 1991 introduction (below) and blends the sections she translated into the remaining parts of Konrad Weiß' newly authorized text, translated by the DEFA Film Library.

The DEFA Film Library thanks Konrad Weiß for permission to publish the first complete English translation of his 1989 text for our release of Roland Steiner's contemporaneous documentary *Unsere Kinder* (*Our Children*). We also thank Luise von Flotow for allowing us to use her 1991 introduction and translation.

Introduction

By Luise von Flotow (1991)

Independent samizdat periodicals, sponsored by the Lutheran church, have been appearing in East Germany for years. They differ from the official publications of the church in several ways. Most important, they are able—at least to some extent—to avoid state censorship. Although the samizdat papers are published by the Lutheran church, their tendency is pluralistic and usually characterized by liberal humanism. Produced privately in church halls or the homes of those who dare, these magazines are issued in tiny editions, passed from hand to hand, and read carefully. Church groups, peace seminars, human rights activists, and ecologists meet regularly to discuss such publications and then devise responses and commentaries.

One of the samizdat magazines, Kontext: Beiträge aus Kirche & Gesellschaft, Kultur*, was published by the Evangelische Bekenntnisgemeinde in Berlin-Treptow. The issue from which the following essay is taken contains texts on the greenhouse effect, pollution, and ecological disasters. The entire issue is characterized by a pastoral*

[1] GDR stands for the German Democratic Republic, commonly known as East Germany. It was established on October 7, 1949 after West Germany, or the Federal Republic of Germany, was founded on May 23, 1949, and was assimilated by the latter with German unification on October 3, 1990, less than a year after the opening of the Berlin Wall.

[2] In East Germany, the Nazis were referred to as fascists. Accordingly, those called "Faschos" in (East) Germany were neo-Nazis, and "antifascism" (and, hence, Antifa) can be understood to mean anti-Nazism.

and moralistic tone, although the authors are not necessarily churchmen. This essay, "Die neue alte Gefahr: Junge Faschisten in der DDR," addresses the moral bankruptcy of a society trying to solve its problems through violence. Since the first-person narrative and the emotional rhetoric are evidently intended to provoke the reader, I have tried to preserve in the translation these characteristics of the text with only minor abridgments.

Although the piece was published in the spring of 1989, it has not lost its relevance. Its author, Konrad Weiß, is a filmmaker who worked in the section for documentary film at the East German film studios. In 1964, at the age of twenty-three, Weiß joined a group of young Germans whose purpose was to find ways to understand and take personal responsibility for German history. He became one of its first members to visit Auschwitz after World War II. This experience had an important influence on his moral and professional development, and its effect is evident in the work he subsequently produced. Flammen *(*Flames*), a film made in 1967, deals with the Herbert-Baum-Gruppe, a Jewish resistance movement of the 1930s.* Dawids Tagebuch *(*David's Diary, *1980) is based on a young Jewish boy's diary of events in Poland after 1939. His 1988 documentary* Ich bin klein, aber wichtig *(*I Am Small but Important*) traces the thought and work of Janosz Korczak, a Polish doctor, educator, and writer, whose commitment to the Jewish children in the orphanage of the Warsaw ghetto led him to accompany them to Treblinka. But Weiß' career has not been smooth. Films were made but never shown. The emphasis on Jewish questions challenged the censors and government administrators in East Germany. It took Weiß half a year of struggle to get* David's Diary *released. The publication of this essay in the Lutheran samizdat cost him his job at the state film studios, and as further punishment, his youngest daughter was not accepted to the university.*[3] *After the political upheaval at the end of 1989, Konrad Weiß ran for a seat in the Volkskammer on the ticket of the small liberal party called Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now).*

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By Konrad Weiß (written in November 1988)

- *November 1987, Oranienburg near Berlin:* On the site of the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp, a group of young fascists is arrested. For months they have been terrorizing and assaulting people in trains, restaurants and on the streets, making no secret of their intentions. In their possession, the police find fascist badges and the swastika flag.
- *December 1987, Berlin-Mitte:* Four men are tried in the borough court; the youngest is seventeen, the oldest twenty-three years old. Together with other rightwing radicals, they had broken into the Zionskirche in order to "beat up, smack up, smoke out the red punks." Roaring "Sieg Heil" and "Jews out of German churches," they beat up young men and women in a cowardly and brutal fashion.
- *January 1988, Berlin:* Again, eight violent, fascist criminals are on trial. They were involved in the riots in the Zionskirche. It becomes clear that this was a "pan-German action": skinheads from West-Berlin also joined the hunt for dissidents, punks and "weird people."
- *February 1988, Halle district:* Four juvenile criminals are sentenced for badly vandalizing a municipal cemetery in

[3] DEFA Film Library: Konrad Weiß shared the following information in an email dated February 11, 2021: "It is not exactly correct that officials put pressure on me because of the publication of my essay. However, it is true that I was not allowed to make another film after the production of my film *Weltbühne* was halted; although they tried to push me out of the studio, they never terminated my contract. I was allowed to take six-months of unpaid leave and got a visa to visit West Berlin and West Germany. I used these months for research for a planned book project on Lothar Kreyssig. I must also mention that my youngest daughter had been under Stasi surveillance since she was 12 years old. We only found out about it after the Wall came down and we received access to her Stasi file. They were interested in her because she exchanged letters with kids in Western countries. We assume that this might have been why she was not allowed to go to university."

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Weißenfels. One of them also has to answer for having brutally maltreated a man during a fight.

- *March 1988, Berlin:* Six young people are arrested for anti-Semitic rioting. They knocked over, smeared, desecrated and destroyed more than 200 gravestones in the historic Jewish cemetery on Schönhauser Allee. For several nights they were up to no good, shouting fascist and anti-Semitic slogans, despite the fact that the police station is next to the cemetery and staffed day and night. Shouldn't the police have been more alert and vigilant after the destruction of the first night?
- *April 1988, Halle:* Five young men—students, apprentices, young workers—are on trial for a racist crime. Together they beat up a young Mozambican. "Beating up a N-----," is what they called it.
- *May 1988, on the train from Riesa to Elsterwerda:* For no reason young workers insult two Africans, showering them with evil racist slogans. They grab one of the two foreigners, beat him, kick him and finally push him out of the moving train. The man is seriously injured. The other passengers remained silent, no one intervened.

This oppressive list of violence, anti-Semitism and racism could go on. You would think it was news from the pogrom year of 1938 or a distant part of the world. The fact that all this has happened here and now, in our country, is distressing and hard to bear. Even knowing the punishments that have been meted out does not change the facts. And it pains me deeply that I must call young people, my fellow citizens and younger contemporaries, fascists.

All the same, what has been quoted here is only the conspicuous tip of the iceberg. By far not all rightwing extremist activities and acts of violence have been made public. The cases I have mentioned were reported in the daily press and local newspapers. Occasionally, background information and assessments have also been made available, for example in *Sport und Technik* (6/1988, p. 20) and in *Magazin* (8/1988, p. 32). The tendency of these publications has been to portray and trivialize the fascist outbreak as an individual phenomenon, as a sort of perversion and as imported, in form and content, from the West. There has been no inquiry into the social environment in which new fascist groups could emerge and flourish, and none is planned. A comment on the topic in the Protestant weekly newspaper *Die Kirche*, dated June 26, 1988, led to the entire issue being banned. Only in the *Weltbühne* (No. 35, August 30, 1988, p. 1115) does a reader's letter warn us against overly simplistic answers and downplaying the question.

Meanwhile, two teams of sociologists—one at the Akademie der Pädagogischen Wissenschaften (Pedagogical Sciences Academy), the other at the Ministerium des Innern (Ministry for Domestic Affairs)—are researching skinheads and other fascist groups. The sociological analysis, like journalistic representations of the new fascism in the GDR, however, is made more difficult by almost perfectly functioning self-protective mechanisms. The knowledge that the mere expression of fascist ideas and ideals is punishable and the strictest control exercised by the group and its leader also make it almost impossible to obtain authentic, let alone programmatic statements: "We're not self-incriminators." The concealment of fascist convictions before interrogators and investigating judges is clearly trained; revealingly, they themselves characteristically call pre-trial custody their "academy."

In the early 1980s there were only a few skinheads in East Germany indicating a certain rightwing potential that was still unorganized. At that time an ideology was not visible and acts of violence appeared to be spontaneous. The assumption was that the skinheads were just one among many other youth groups and that they would disappear of their own accord. It was unthinkable that young people raised in East Germany could become the carriers of a new fascist thinking. I myself expressed this view only two years ago.

Around 1983 the new fascists began to organize. At first rightwing groups made appearances at the soccer stadiums, a development similar to that in other countries, and instigated nonpolitical fights and rampages, usually under the influence of alcohol. Acts of violence together with racist and anti-Semitic insults became the norm at soccer games in East Germany. The irrational hatred between Saxons and Berliners, formerly taken lightly, has become part of fascist

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ideology. The game between Lok Leipzig and Union Berlin on April 23, 1988, was a sad climax, as police had to use rubber bullets against the warring "fans."

Besides the skinheads, who are identifiable by their martial appearance, there is a second, in my opinion more dangerous, group—the Faschos, who clearly adhere to a fascist ideology. At first glance they are unobtrusive conformists and good workers. Yet in their own closed circles they are engaged in the secret elaboration of their new-old *Weltanschauung*.

These developments have probably overwhelmed those who are responsible in the state and the party. Perhaps they were too occupied in the early 1980s with struggles against the advocates of environmental reforms and peace and human rights activists. Was the socialist German state blind in the right eye, or at least myopic? The official response to fascist incidents was simply to blame them on influences from the capitalist West. On May 29, 1985, when GDR television broadcast the massacre at Heysel Stadium in Brussels live, I called to urge first the TV station manager in Adlershof, then the duty officer at the SED's Central Committee[4] to interrupt the broadcast. The answer was: We will keep broadcasting; our people should see what takes place under capitalism.

In his book *Die Rebellion der Betrogenen* [trans. *The Rebellion of the Betrayed*],[5] Thomas Heubner takes the same position. Even in the most recent, 1988 edition of the book, he lays the blame exclusively on the West: "In their thinking and their actions, the skinheads are a mirror image of capitalist society." But I do not think things can be that simple.

In 1988, the number of young people belonging to fascist groups in East Germany was estimated at about one thousand. But by 1986 skinheads had already begun terrorizing punks, who were considered left-wing and proletarian. Today the punk scene has been more or less wiped out; a few went over to the rightwingers and attack other marginal youth groups, members of visible minorities, and members of grass-roots alternative groups. Acts of violence increased fivefold between 1983 and 1987, and most of the perpetrators were not identified or brought to justice. Now the "potential for politically motivated criminality" has increased enormously. Fascists are on the move. Vocational schools count on two or three rightwing extremists per class, and there is no great territorial differentiation. At least three quarters of the young fascists were born between 1962 and 1970 and are no older than twenty-six. Furthermore, fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds are strongly attracted to the rightwing scene.

Among the new fascists we find children of working-class as well as intellectual and middle-class families. Skinheads often have proletarian backgrounds or are young workers. The fascist groups are heavily dominated by men; in contrast to other independent groups, in which females participate, fewer than one-fifth of the members of the rightwing groups are women. Most of the members are single, and as far as I have been able to ascertain they marry relatively late. But it is not clear whether these socio-typical indications are a significant or a chance development.

The Program of the New Right

If we consider skinheads and Faschos as a fighting, rampaging mob, as a horde of uncontrolled criminals misled by Western idols, then we can avoid the issue of their political program. But that is exactly the attitude that caused the most far-reaching error ever made by the left and the middle class in German history. It seems to me that today, many first- and second-generation antifascists have literally taken as their credo the assumption that the new social order and forty years of antifascist education cannot have been in vain. For them it is unthinkable that young Germans who know about the horrifying National Socialist terror and fascist mass murders could again succumb to the madness of rightwing ideology.

And what exactly do we know about the way the new fascists—the skinheads and Faschos—think? Both groups

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[4] The SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or Socialist Unity Party) was the name of East Germany's ruling communist party.

[5] Heubner, Thomas. 1985. *Die Rebellion der Betrogenen. nl konkret* 67. Berlin: Neues Leben. 167.

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embrace the principle of violence. Their social values are not those of democracy, the French Revolution, socialism, or Christianity. Instead, they are founded on strength and violence—on the *Herrenmensch*. In political terms this attitude is not limited to a group or small clique whose members think along similar lines. The Faschos, more clearly than the skinheads, draw inspiration from national socialism. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* circulates readily among the new right in East Germany. But antifascist writings also serve as material for an education in ideology!

Both skinheads and Faschos have reservations with regard to the socialist German state. The Faschos also have reservations about West German democracy: "We stand for a unified Germany. The whole left makes you sick in this shitty state." "To be a rightwing radical means to consistently stand up against these total phrase-screamers, against all the yes men. But we aren't yes men, and we stand up for what we think." The Faschos want a return to the German Reich and the boundaries of 1938. They consistently refuse to leave the GDR; they see their mission—the elimination of socialist society and the struggle for a united Greater Germany—as being here. Such a political motivation is less pronounced among skinheads. Attitudes on this issue will probably be decisive in the new right's upcoming process of differentiation.

Occasionally, the new fascists also engage in activities related to external affairs. Their hatred is directed, logically, against the allied countries, victors of the Second World War, who destroyed the fascist Nazi state. Apparently, the new fascists have contacts in the neighboring socialist states, and especially with the rightwing groups in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. There is some indication, too, that common ideological and logistical bases and processes make it easier for them to acquire propaganda material, martial-arts equipment, and weapons.

That there are also contacts among skinheads in West Germany and other western countries is known; connections to political neo-fascism in West Germany are suspected. In my opinion, however, relations with the new political fascists in West Germany have probably been exaggerated due to the official party line. I am convinced that the thinkers and leaders of the new fascism in East Germany are not to be found in the west but rather that they "hibernated" or grew up in East Germany.

Most recently a real anti-Americanism has developed among the Faschos; the right needs a new enemy. Anti-Semitism and racism already exist in latent form, and we can expect a series of anti-Semitic actions and graffiti in the near future. Anti-Semitic jokes and comments are already a commonplace on the soccer fields and in the bars frequented by the new right. In fact, any belief that the roots of anti-Semitism have been totally eradicated in East Germany is nothing but wishful thinking. When anti-Semitic statements in collectives at work and school are dismissed as harmless aberrations, when Article 220 (2) of the *Staatsgesetzbuch* (*National Code of Law*)—the prosecution of public expressions of militaristic and fascist content—is applied only hesitantly, it only encourages and strengthens the New Right.

The Values of the New Right

Rightwing radicalism is already finding increasing support among collectives of apprentices and workers. According to one insider, antifascist resistance in the population is wearing thin. This is most certainly a result of the values systematically propagated and systematically lived by the Faschos. The apolitical observer, the everyday person or *Kleinbürger*, perceives them as industrious, orderly, and disciplined young citizens who are active and seem to know their purpose in life.

In fact, however, he new right is vehemently opposed to the otherwise quite widespread anti-ideology, to dropouts and people who want to leave for the West, to a certain tearfulness and resignation among some alternative groups. "The majority of young people here have no role models, they live for the day and they are filled with mischief. They have no idea of how they want to shape their lives," according to a skinhead from Prenzlauer Berg. The new right is different: They are proud to want something, to have a goal in life, ideals. The new right rejects any type of anarchy and exercises

self-discipline. Physical training and healthy lifestyles are part of their political program; generally, they are extremely fit. "We are the elite of German youth." The current rejection of alcohol by one part of the new right supports this view. Other important values are a personality cult and a pronounced sense of comradeship—and here again the historic role models are undeniable. Weekly meetings serve as forums where members educate one another in absolute adherence to the idea and the idols. The new right deliberately promotes elitism and confidence in rightwing beliefs. Each member has to submit to certain test rituals, in which he proves his willingness to use force; inhibitions to do so are gradually dismantled. Cowardly ambushes on passersby are usual as a test of courage. Some groups spend weekends in camps where battle strategies or paramilitary exercises are practiced.

It is no accident that military values are cultivated—discipline, obedience, perseverance, trustworthiness, and especially the sense of fascist *Wehrmacht* comradeship. They try to communicate rightwing ideology to soldiers in the GDR's National People's Army and seek allies among their ranks. Whether the fascist, undercover propagandists are well-received among those fulfilling their military service is hard to tell; but it certainly cannot be ruled out. In any case, former skinheads are particularly common in certain units—parachute units, for example.

An integral aspect of the personality cult of the right is the view that those convicted of violent crimes are heroes. "Comrade" Ronny Busse, for example, one of the thugs in the raid on the Zionskirche, is virtually worshipped in the scene. There is a definite danger that without some kind of socio-therapeutic program, prison will truly turn into an "academy" for many of these young men, a place where their opinions will harden, and their self-confidence develop. For the Faschos and the skinheads on the outside, those who have been convicted are [welcome] martyrs of the movement. Only if the wholesale cowardice and pitifulness of these new "comrades"—who have beaten up women and girls and peaceful fellow citizens—were really made public, without sparing the painful details, could this development be curtailed.

The Logistics of the New Right

It is relatively simple to identify determining characteristics and common values for various independent groups, but it is almost impossible to verify the existence of organizational structures and mechanisms. Since all the new fascist groups operate under strictly conspiratorial rules, there are no clear indicators of a central organization. Yet the logistics of the Faschos and the skinheads do point toward a central, ideologically based leadership.

The rightwing groups are generally small, with no more than ten to fourteen members—according to sociologists an ideal size, enabling such groups to insulate themselves against the outside and thus control any leaks of information. The leaders' hold on power is based not on democratic principles but on strong personalities. Once their authority has been accepted, unquestioning allegiance is required. Group leaders are typically of above-average intelligence. They have access to *Elitewissen* (privileged knowledge), suggesting the participation of higher authorities. In certain cases, fifteen-year-old children were the leaders of groups of older youths.

Instances of well-timed and simultaneous actions and activities of the new right also indicate ideological structure and a central authority. These include the massive attempt in the mid-1980s of young fascists to infiltrate GST military sports groups and the security branch of the official FDJ youth organization. This means that they proceeded according to a pre-meditated plan, and they were often successful. In the meantime, this tactic has been identified and is no longer effective.

At the current point in time, the effort is to remain inconspicuous and renounce martial appearances. This fall, even sworn skinheads are letting their hair grow and have hung up their uniforms… nationwide—a mere coincidence? Concurrently they are striving for a new citizen-friendly, appropriate image, combined with a declaration of war on alcohol. It has become common practice to send the youngsters out to provoke fights that experienced members briefly show up to carry out, before quickly disappearing again.

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The Nazi Relay

It is evident that there are countless threads that connect the new right to German national socialism. How is it possible that this dreadful seed could fall on such fertile ground in East Germany in the mid-1980s?

Antifascism has been an integral part of the East German constitution and of East German state policies. Nazi criminals and their collaborators were more rigorously punished in East Germany than in West Germany. By the mid-1970s, 12,876 Nazis had been sentenced, and every year since then there have been further trials. The most recent conviction of a Nazi criminal of which I am aware was in Halle in July 1988. Antifascism is a constitutional obligation and state policy in the GDR.

Yet this tells us nothing about the psychological or moral condition of the Germans in East Germany. Many of those who welcomed Hitler in 1933 or were part of the silent majority that [carried out] the fascist crimes and war never really turned over a new leaf. Some—and they were probably the ones who shouted "mea culpa" the loudest—may have changed flags, uniforms, and party cards, but basically they stayed the same. For most of the silent conformists, though, the knowledge that they were criminally misused and led astray for twelve years is so terrible that it has simply been repressed. The immeasurable guilt and shame have rendered a real confrontation with the past exceedingly difficult.

Neither the church nor society in East Germany has ever recognized the problem: none of those involved in the Third Reich were able to confess publicly or discuss their actions or omissions publicly. The criminals were punished. Millions of conformists, however, and all those who were guilty by silent acquiescence, were reduced to silence. The relief of repentance was denied them. The Germans in East Germany moved too quickly into the new order of things.

Shame and sorrow were further hindered by the claims of superhuman purity and humaneness made by many antifascists and especially by the communists. But this noisily proclaimed humanism were soon confronted by the postwar Stalinist terror. The result, especially among those proselytizers who knew themselves to be guilty, was the total discrediting of the antifascist state and the antifascist idea. Every error, every shortcoming that developed in East Germany and in East German society became an argument in support of one's own superior morality and led to a renewed interest in fascism. The latent readiness to turn back (toward Nazism) gave rise to a new, yet deeply held fanaticism.

These reconverted fascists spent forty years in apparent conformity, behaving like politically indifferent citizens or playing the role of socialists. Yet they are the ones who have been patiently awaiting their turn and who have now passed the brown baton on to their grandchildren. They are the ones—unobtrusive, apparently harmless, and hard to pin down—who hold the reins of control in their hands, and not the handful of former SS-men or party bosses who may have been able to hide somewhere under false names and papers.

I am aware, of course, that this is all hypothetical. Maybe it is all much simpler. Maybe there really are families who have lived the fascist idea openly and without interruption and who have bred a fascist elitist consciousness. Maybe the widows of those who were executed passed their husbands' heritage on to sons and grandsons. Or maybe the walls around our country or our prisons are simply more porous than we could ever imagine.

The Burden of the Present

There is no full explanation, however, for the popularity that the right is presently enjoying, a popularity that can only be based in and explained in terms of the present. Even in those cases where an honest reversal of values occurred, traces of the Third Reich remain in the subconscious and the unconscious, as our everyday language reveals. Our everyday culture was never completely de-nazified: the individual, the unique element, is still not placed at the top of our scale of values, but rather the masses, the collective. Similarly, originality and innovation are not highly valued, but submission

and conventionality are.

The East German state has never had the opportunity to take up or carry on the democratic traditions of the 1848 revolution or of the Weimar Republic; instead, a proletarian dictatorship with a Stalinist core was forced upon it. The antifascist-democratic societal structuring has not touched all aspects of life; often it has remained nothing more than a project. The communist *Kaderpartei* (cadre party) has not supported the development of democratic values but has created a system of new privileges designed to reward loud-mouthing, servile behavior, and party discipline. The *Führer* principle, which proved so disastrous for Germans, experienced a renaissance in different constellations: first the Stalin cult, then the unconditional claim of the Communist Party that it functioned as a vanguard. Grassroots control by those in power and their structures has never existed in the East German state.

This socialist society accepts the principle of violence, recognizes it, and practices it. Time and again conflicts have been resolved through violence: Critics have been expatriated, dissidents imprisoned, books and newspapers banned. Violence, used in the class struggle, is considered of high moral value. Violence against unborn life is sanctioned by the state. Finally, the Wall is the consummate materialization of the principle of violence. Non-violence and pacifism, on the other hand, are at best tolerated, not valued by socialist society.

All of this does not constitute fascism. But the basic approval of violence and the lack of a democratic culture have provided propagandists for the fascist movement with a ready public. People growing up in East Germany and educated in East German schools have not been sufficiently immunized against the bacteria of radical thought.

An additional factor is that the national pride of Germans has been severely disturbed for more than half a century. After the pathological nationalism of the first decades of this century, all nationalist thoughts and sentiments were artificially suppressed by the division of Germany. For many years it was a disgrace to be German. To this day, the word "Germany" is tensely avoided, and the beautiful lyrics of our antifascist national anthem are not sung. Patriotism was supposed to be replaced with internationalism—but how can you be an internationalist, if you have no national identity? The synthetic construct of a "socialist nation," created in light of political considerations, has never really been accepted by the Germans of East Germany. Is it this suppressed and repressed nationalist feeling that is now turning into extreme nationalism? History offers more than one analogy.

Moreover, the return of much, if not most of the East German population to petty bourgeois values and lifestyles, its evident retreat into private niches, its flight from the public into the private sphere—all these phenomena have also increased susceptibility to fascist thought. In the long run, nobody can cope with such duplicity, such a double existence as has spread throughout this country. The mass emigration via television in the evenings is, even more clearly than the wave of emigrés, an indication of a divided social consciousness. A community whose citizens constantly say something different from what they think, who constantly do something different from what they want, who seem to be something different than what they are, is sick and weakened and susceptible to radicalism of any kind.

Young people who grow up in our country are exposed to these social defects from childhood on. Our educational system supports the unthinking adoption of offensive behavior patterns in families and small groups. Almost regularly, parroting and conformity are encouraged and rewarded, instead of critical thinking and one's own thoughts. Young people who want to think through and try out alternative modes of living and society unfortunately learn that they are regarded and treated like a threat to the state. Education is intellectualized, the soul and feelings are not sufficiently developed. In school, the confrontation with history is often so sensually and dogmatically inhibited, social science is taught so coldly and dispassionately, and repetition, as with a prayer wheel, is expected to replace critical appropriation.

"The impoverishment and aberration of emotional life, cold-heartedness and brutalization, the reduction of sensitivity to beauty prepare the ground for fascism. Fascism destroys the whole human being, their whole humanity. We must therefore make the whole human being resistant to this poison. Naked information and mere knowledge are not

enough." This warning, expressed by director Konrad Wolf in 1979, seems, like many things, to have gone unheard by those responsible for youth and education policies. Most schools in this country are clearly not an "emotional breeding ground for active antifascism," as Wolf put it. Antifascist campaigns and demonstrations cannot replace the constant hard work of a humanistic education of the heart and brain.

Violence and Reaction

Painful as it may be to recognize, the young fascists in East Germany are a product of East German society. They are our children. We must not give up a single one of them. And we must avoid prejudices, for how often have prejudgments become judgments? Of course, after all the damage done to Germany and the world by the National Socialists there can be no tolerance for fascist opinions and deeds. But we owe even the worst culprits compassion, warmth, and discussion.

The efforts of the state to contain the new fascism seem helpless and rather ineffective; counter-violence is apparently seen as a panacea. Many measures are exaggerated and often directed at the wrong people. Sometimes the exaggerated and violent reaction of state power may be what drove young people into the arms of the right in the first place. Young people with shorn heads, let alone in skinhead garb, even pure *Mode-Skins* (fashion skins) are given a hard time, patronized and bullied. They are hardly allowed access to discos and youth clubs. The police stop even completely peaceful young people on the street, just because they dress a bit unusually or perhaps express themselves with a bit more passion. In larger cities, when a club or restaurant has become a hangout for such cliques, they are often closed down on some pretext like technical problems or a sudden, urgent need for renovation. The groups look for a new hangout somewhere else; the problem is shifted from one district to another.

The security units of the official FDJ youth organization also cause problems. Among the security people there are apparently some who use the power they have been given against their peers and let their fists speak instead of holding discussions. Careful and responsible selection and psychological training should be the norm. Constant oversight is necessary, even the slightest infringements must be punished. But excessive reactions on the part of security unit people and police officers may provoke aggression and resistance on the other side; at least some convictions for resisting state authority indicate this.

Public, democratic control of institutions and authorities that support state power—the police, judiciary, penal system and state security service—would give young citizens, in particular, more secure civil rights and confidence and thus reduce aggression. The current practice of filing petitions, which is not transparent and requires no justification, is entirely unsatisfactory and encourages the abuse of power. Finally, even the layman can see that the penal code and enforcement of sentences are in urgent need of revision. If anything can help, only a humanistic social and psychotherapy program could be able to make young rightwing extremist lawbreakers rethink things and perhaps change their minds—not the unworthy, meaningless day-to-day of a long prison sentence.

Many of the skinheads who have been sentenced grew up in "good families:" they were good students and workers. Sometimes they came from families with antifascist traditions or parents who were functionaries. Even people from the Stasi (the state security service) have lost their children to the new fascism. It's easy to wonder whether there wasn't a lack of warmth and understanding in the homes of these children who got involved in rightwing activities; whether they were raised according to authoritarian principles or in homes where parents did not practice what they preached, but simply forced their values and philosophies on the children. The legitimate, inevitable, and healthy opposition against authority that young people need to experience for balanced development may often have been broken through antiquated methods using psychological and physical violence. This would become fertile ground for the hatred of all authority. And the children would know only too well that their embrace of fascism would cause their parents, as well

as social and state authorities the greatest pain. How much mourning must they and we all now experience, in order to integrate this flood of hatred and pain!

Alternatives

The danger of a new fascist movement, carried forward by young people in East Germany, has become a reality. It constitutes a challenge for the whole population. People must first ask themselves a number of bitter questions and then consider their personal failings and mistakes. When twenty-year-olds in our country shout "Sieg Heil!" and "Jews out!," the state and church, schools and youth organizations must all ask themselves what they neglected to do and where they failed.

I am afraid that for some time a certain rightwing "potential for politically motivated violence" will continue to exist. Violent countermeasures by the state are not an effective therapy. Rather, the enigmatic powers of seduction of rightwing extremism must be removed and replaced by humanist alternatives. I am of the firm opinion that this is only possible through the systematic and democratic reform of our society and the recanting of violence as a socially constructive option. Substituting nonviolent community service for military service should finally be allowed. We must also learn to not do violence toward unborn life and the environment.

A new culture of public dialogue must be initiated and nurtured. Our country needs freedom of thought and press as well as a range of uncensored media. Young people must be guaranteed legal and social protection so they can experiment with alternative and democratic lifestyles, based, for instance, on the model of the Israeli kibbutz. In the long run, only true democracy can permanently immunize our youth against fascist thought.

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Konrad Weiß is an (East) German documentary filmmaker, publicist and politician, who began researching East Germany's neo-Nazi subculture in the 1960s. As an East German civil rights activist, in 1989-90 Weiß was the co-founder of the civil rights movement *Demokratie Jetzt* and its representative to the Central Round Table and then the East German Volkskammer. From 1990 to 1994, he was a member of the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen parliamentary group in the German Bundestag. Since 1995, Weiß has worked as freelance publicist. (See also: bln.de/k.weiss)

Luise von Flotow is a translator and researcher. She has been a professor of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Ottawa since 1995. She is best known for her impactful research and writing on feminism, gender issues and cultural diplomacy in translation. Her groundbreaking publications on these topics include *Translation and Gender: Translation in the 'Era of Feminism'* (1997). She has published many literary translations from French and German; among others, she re-translated Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (*They Divided the Sky*, University of Ottawa Press, 2013).