

National Socialism negative. The restorers of the past are wary of attempts to demythologize the past. Such attempts, they suggest, would lead nowhere. But then these people want to construct a countermyth, a "positive myth" about an honorable national history that can be balanced with the dishonorable history of the Third Reich. Who is holding the scale—down here on earth?

Or one can take refuge in countermyths of the negative kind and thus come close to a leveling strategy, just as announcements of horrors from the distant past are not suited to proving that back then, too, murderous deeds were committed. And what about the recent past: "Didn't Stalin . . ."; "in Cambodia, didn't they . . ." These are sad calculations—which in a strange way have propagated themselves into the political view of the present. For if all things are equal, what does this all mean for differences between the great powers? Peter Graf Kielmansegg and Ralf Dahrendorf discussed this in *Die Zeit*. The former emphasized the difference that it makes when a government is freely elected, when the forum of public discussion is free, and when the courts are independent. The other sounded a different note, which in essence suggests that these differences are losing meaning, that a convergence between East and West will come about and that for this reason the necessity of a political decision in favor of the one side or the other might be sidestepped altogether.

Is there an agreement, or an affinity, between this convergence theory and the continuity thesis discussed above? Both cases amount to leveling. One has taught that the path to Hitler's Reich was the German path into totalitarianism, parallel to Italy's road into fascism, Spain's road to the Falange, and Russia's so thoroughly trodden road to Bolshevism. In other words, unavoidable and inevitable—if we could overlook the fact that other European nations maintained their freedom or lost it only through external intervention. But what is freedom, say the convergence theoreticians? How free are we really, and how unfree are the others? What is of duration are the continuities in the oppositions of power and individual self-assertion. Thus nationalism and neutralism appear to be the desired outcome.

Do a majority of readers in Germany expect history books to be nationalistic? Certainly not. But books that treat the greater German past are not unpopular with readers. Do they also expect the naturally negative view of the Third Reich to recede? Not necessarily. But a certain degree of saturation is quickly reached. Is, however, a positive revision expected? No. But the mass media are making sure that something can be gained from the theme of National Socialism and the debate with the revisionists. Are more books about the resistance to Hitler expected? Without doubt. Is there today a predominance of "apologetic tendencies in German historiography," as Jürgen Habermas has warned? Who knows?

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HANS MOMMSEN

Search for the "Lost History"? Observations on the Historical Self-Evidence of the Federal Republic

Recently, in the weekly *Das Parlament* (No. 20/21, May 17, 24, 1986) Michael Stürmer gave eloquent expression to the trauma of the conservative Right, which is now consolidating. This is a trauma that derives from the insight that the Right can no longer shore itself up on an adequately consensual national image of history. Stürmer fears that this "lost memory" will lead to a lack of continuity and reliability in the Federal Republic's foreign policy. We can set aside for the present whether a closed image of history is really desirable in a world subject to rapid changes. Likewise, we can set aside for the moment the hypothesis that a stronger connection to historical tradition makes foreign policy more reliable. Is the complaint about the loss of historical identity, which has almost become a stereotype in this country, justified? And is this complaint a reflection of the fact, argued on the conservative side, that in the Federal Republic a new political self-understanding has developed, accompanied by a fundamental change of the historical paradigm?

In comparison to the fields of economics and politics, the regrouping of historical-political thought comes about in a slower rhythm. This can explain how the debate about the historical self-understanding of the Federal Republic is beginning in a period characterized more by political stagnation than by rapid change. The debate is, in the meantime, the expression of a creeping crisis of legitimation of the Federal Republic's political system. This country has just emerged from a phase of uninterrupted and unquestioned economic growth and can derive no further bonus of trust from the undeniable accomplishments of reconstruction of the early postwar period. The political polarization, which is becoming more and more acute, touches not insignificantly on central sociopolitical questions. It touches in increasing measure our understanding of politics itself. It is no wonder that therefore the transmission of history also is becoming the object of fundamental controversies.

It may be surprising that distinguished historians like Michael Stürmer present the Federal Republic as a land without history, despite the fact that in contrast to the 1950s, the interest in history has gained breadth and intensity. Even the politics of the day makes reference more and more frequently to historical events. For the early postwar years one could speak of an extinguishing of historical memory; the traces of the catastrophe of the Second World War were evident to everyone. Despite the deep wound of a shared sense of the loss of national unity, there was no fundamental break in historical continuity. Hour X, longed for by Helmut James von Moltke and which would have created a tabula rasa for an epochal new beginning, did not happen. The hopes to be able to exploit the downfall of the Third Reich for a fundamental societal upheaval revealed themselves to be misplaced.

The period of reconstruction oriented itself throughout to political norms that went back to the Weimar period. Only in exceptional cases did the Allied policy of reeducation prevail against the habitual structures of public administration in the party system and in economic life. At the outset there was no lack of pronounced conservative-national parties, which increasingly gave up their votes to the CDU/CSU. This larger party proved to be a catch basin for groupings that had belonged to the older conservative Right. This contributed to the fact that if one does not count neo-Fascist splinter parties and parts of the *Vertriebenenverbände* [associations of people resettled from the German East after 1945], the political Right was not able to form a clearly delineated grouping. Within the spectrum of the political parties, the CDU took over this role without being defined as a conservative party.

In contrast to the founding phase of the Weimar Republic, the political Right after the war possessed no reservoir of conservative values to which it could connect without interruption. The weak attempts of the chancellor democracy to revivify the legacy of Bismarck on the one hundredth anniversary of his death came to nothing. Likewise the incantation of the Christian-Western tradition lost credibility to the extent that the various strategies of the cold war were incapable of changing the status quo in Central Europe as had been agreed to in Allied conferences during and after the war. Konrad Adenauer's anti-Bolshevism could be effectively and successfully industrialized for the fancy of right-wing groups of voters. In foreign policy matters this anti-Bolshevism stumbled in 1961 with the erection of the Berlin Wall. Significantly, Washington pressed then for détente. For the long term, a conservative position with reminiscences of the cold war could not be founded.

The expression coined by Rüdiger Altmann in the later years of Ludwig Erhard of the "molded society" represented a first attempt to carry over certain conceptualizations of Weimar neoconservatism to the parliamentary system of the Federal Republic and to lend the conventional liberal

motto, the "social market economy," a sociopolitical support. Important preconditions were lacking for a revivification of neoconservative ideological currents. The obvious success of and expansion of the industrial society refuted the ideas of the neoconservative ideologues of the 1920s, which essentially had arisen from the preindustrial structures. Even if corporatist ideas were taken up one by one under the motto of corporatism, the emphatically antiparliamentarian alignment of the conservatism of the Weimar period precluded direct connection to it.

Furthermore, the political Right, by making itself into the unreserved advocate for the Atlantic Alliance, ended up in a skewed political alignment. Foreign policy considerations ruled out the possibility of the Right's making itself the advocate of national sovereignty and of its encouraging more independence in foreign, economic, and military policy for the Federal Republic within the framework of NATO. The ghost of the neutralization of Central Europe deprived the Right of the possibility of being the advocate for specific national interests against Western European partners; under duress it had to leave this to the SPD and to the neo- and post-Fascist splinter groups. So long as the Federal Republic found itself so completely on the lee side of the Western Allies' foreign policy, the theoretical dilemma of conservatives remained a low priority. In the face of the open appearance of a specific U.S. policy under President Reagan, the German position is transformed into a strange rigidity. Clinging to the Western Alliance, something not earnestly contested by the opposition, is stylized as a domestic political dogma.

The escape route of conservative thought in the Federal Republic was at the same time obstructed by the fact that it had all too incautiously let itself be taken in by the theory of "total dictatorship." The equating of National-Socialist dictatorship and Communist dominion, which was the consummate principle of totalitarianism theory, met the need in the cold war to gain a stalwart ideological platform that could not only decorate itself with the epithet "anti-Fascist" but could also rule out and criminalize leftist efforts. The separation of totalitarian dictatorships has served since then as the basic pattern for the justification of a bellicose democracy and for propping up the idea of democracy, reinterpreted in the constitutional sense as a "liberal-democratic order."

The reliance on the theory of "totalitarian dictatorship" served at the same time as the theoretical underpinning for bracketing out the period of the Third Reich from the continuity of German history. Friedrich Meinecke had already postulated this in his *Deutsche Katastrophe* [German Catastrophe] in 1946, and it asserted itself in the chancellor democracy on a broader front. The interpretation of the Third Reich as a capricious regime that subjugated the German people, one that is traced back to the demonic power of Hitler's seduction of and successful manipulation of the "atomized masses," contains an indirect exculpation of the predominantly

conservatively predisposed functionary elite. Their decisive coresponsibility for the origin and stabilization of the National-Socialist dictatorship thus steps into the background. Their coresponsibility corresponds to the psychological repression of the criminal politics of the Third Reich, a repression justified by Hermann Lübke as the means to a psychological self-assurance.¹ This manifested itself in the neglect of the criminal prosecution of the war crimes by the justice system of the Federal Republic. Serious prosecutions only began when the Ulm *Einsatzgruppen* and the Eichmann trial caused a stronger pressure on the Federal Republic from the public abroad.

The interpretation of National Socialism as the result of "ballot democracy" held on until deep into the 1950s. Even today the classical repertoire of conservative thought includes the thesis that the rise of the NSDAP is primarily attributable to the mass unemployment of the early 1930s and that the "power grab" would have been unthinkable without the consequences of the Great Depression. It is significant that the Weimar Republic was viewed in the years immediately following 1945 as an experiment failed from the outset; not until the success of the chancellor democracy did this image brighten. Then the Weimar experience could be trotted out for the additional legitimation of the Federal Republic and the fundamental superiority the Federal Republic asserted. However, cause for doubt is given by the fact that the political Right condescendingly refers to the Federal Republic as the "most democratic" and the "most liberal" constitutional order, against which critique from the Left is inadmissible.

For the profiling of domestic conservative positions, the wholesale rejection of the GDR won a place of central importance. It culminated in the West German claim to be the sole representative of all Germans. The demand for reunification was made serviceable for purposes of domestic politics until it turned out that this was unpopular with the majority of the populace, who saw Brandt's *Ostpolitik* with relief. The lack of recognition of the GDR, and its function as the anticlich  to "liberal-democratic order," resulted in West Germans' national solidarity with the population of the GDR being undermined. To the same extent, the nation-state tradition of the Kaiserreich lost its psychological binding power. For large parts of the West German population, in particular for the younger generation, referring back to the founding of the Reich by Bismarck proved itself to be historically blind. Such references were soon exhausted as a source of legitimation of the pan-German claim.

The dilemma of conservative politics consists not least of all in the fact that the specifically national interests of the Federal Republic are hindered by the fixation on the claim for reunification. Reserving the term "nation" for the people of both German states lends ambivalence to the attempt to appeal to a national sentiment; it throws up the question of the difference between these views and the rightist-nationalist and neo-Fascist tenden-

cies. Neoconservative journalism, which has grown steadily in the past two decades, frequently mixes its claim for the return to the "German nation" with hardly redeemable demands for revision. The line between these views and unambiguously neo-Fascist positions has proved to be fluid. A comparison of the publications of the study center Weikersheim e.V., led by the former minister president Hans Filbinger (and conceived of equally as a retirement residence), with the contributions to the *Deutsche Nationalzeitung* makes this all too clear.

The politics of revision propagated by the new Right was very difficult to bring to terms with subscribing to the status quo in German-German policy, to which the Federal Republic as a satellite in the Atlantic Alliance was bound, in the absence of any alternative. Similarly, the neoconservative authors pushed the criticism of Allied reeducation in the years after 1945 more than seemed supportable for the continuation of good relations with the United States. Except for the incantations of pan-German visions, which occurred with fine regularity and achieved their most painful apogees with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's visit to the Silesia conventions, the refuge in decidedly nationalistic positions was blocked for conservative politics. The debate about the German question, which has largely gone politically sterile, moved itself not coincidentally to the level of conflicting images of history.

Until the end of the 1960s the self-understanding of the Federal Republic had been predominantly directed to economic growth. During this time the question of historical legitimacy characteristically was assigned a subordinate weight. The debate with the critical Left changed this and led to the call for an intensification of historical education. The CDU/CSU hoped to prop up its endangered domestic consensus. The legitimacy debate took on greater importance after the proclamation of the politics of the *Wende* [the change in 1982 to a conservative coalition government in Bonn]. It proved quickly to be the case that there was not sufficient resonance in public opinion for recycling the formulas of the 1950s. After the honeymoon had passed that had allowed the Kohl-Genscher government to profile itself in comparison to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's divided social-liberal cabinet in his last years in office, the lack of an integrative political concept became evident. In the politics of the *Wende* this lack took on the blemish of unadorned restoration. As opposed to the social-liberal politics of reform and the program "dare to have more democracy," the new government was only able to refer to its higher level of economic reliability. There was no real shortage of efforts of rightists, nor of intellectuals who had gone over to the Right to fill this vacuum. And they did not shy away from borrowing from U.S. neoconservatives. But in the last analysis these efforts, accompanied by distinctly conservative cultural politics, could come up with no long-term perspective that was suitable to providing an ideological cloak for advancing the politics of naked self-interest.

Precisely in this constellation the long-smoldering debate about the contours of the West German image of history grew much sharper. Whereas previously the debate had always developed in the context of a supposedly widespread antipathy toward history, now it could take shape with regard to the actual content of history. In the central position stood the evaluation of the history of the Third Reich. The commemorative ceremonies, forced on the Federal Republic from the outside and only accepted against its will, in honor of the fortieth anniversary of the German capitulation gave the external impetus for this evaluation. The ineptness of the government of the Federal Republic on the occasion of President Reagan's visit to Bitburg made surprisingly clear that the burdens of the Second World War now as before possess traumatic meaning. These burdens disturbed the dramaturgy of the Bitburg spectacle, which, under the fiction of final reconciliation among friends, was supposed to replace the idea of a crusade by the Allies against a Hitler dictatorship with the idea of a crusade against Communist world dictatorship. Consequently, in the official speeches, the Second World War was pushed back into the sequence of normal wars and the Third Reich appeared as a tragic but, in the face of the threat of Bolshevik aggression, understandable entanglement.

The domestic policy arguments that followed immediately on the Bitburg episode likewise made plain that the view of the National-Socialist period, which had set the tone in political education and in the history books, no longer had any adequate binding force. This view was stamped with the problematic acceptance of the internal programmatic consequence of Hitler's ideology of domination. This acceptance had been combined with the totalitarianism theorem, which had originally purposefully not been framed in terms of personalities. On the one hand, the emphasis on Hitler as the decisive initiator of the criminal policies of the Nazi regime grew out of the reaction to the assumption that Hitler's good intentions had been turned into the opposite by his subordinates. This assumption was already predominant in the ruling elites before the defeat and was bitterly disappointed in 1945. This point of view became a necessary lie to precisely the extent to which the dictator usurped the monopoly of national identity. As a matter of policy, every attempt to turn away from the "Hitler cult" had been stigmatized as antinational. On the other hand, Hitlerism in historical interpretation had the aim of unburdening the conservative leadership groups by presenting the complexity of the domestic and foreign policy decision-making apparatus as the simple derivative of the omnipotent will of the *führer*. This made possible the wholesale rejection of the Third Reich in the first years after the war; it was seen as a kind of historical foreign body. The analysis of causes was therefore preoccupied by the topic of the erroneous estimations of the National Socialists by the other parties and interest groups before 1933. However, these historians avoided detailing the various and frequently nonhomogeneous motivations that induced in particular the representatives of the upper middle class to

loyalty to Hitler. These were people who were inwardly opposed to and rejected the NSDAP and the SS, and especially, as they were characteristically called, the "methods" of Himmler, Heydrich, and Goebbels. Describing the Third Reich as a monolith caused the fact that it was also characterized by an open political process to recede from public understanding. Still, one sought the "guilt" for the catastrophe of the Weimar democracy in the extreme opposition of Left and Right that supposedly strangled the political center of Weimar. The foreign-policy complement to the comfortable and altogether too easily grasped model explanation consisted in the grotesque conclusion that the British policy of appeasement, especially the British pacifists of the 1930s, had to bear the burden of responsibility for the ominous escalation of the National-Socialist politics of violence.

The evaluation of the Third Reich as an event, complete in itself, and only conditionally connected with the Weimar Republic, was also reflected in the complete equation by conservative historians of the Russian October Revolution and the Nazi power grab of 1933, as it was called. This terminology itself is an incorporation of National-Socialist vocabulary and in this way describes the Nazi rise to power as a "revolutionary" upheaval. Thus the history of the Third Reich was stylized as a fated doom from which there was no escape and from which no concrete political impulses could reach the present. Similarly the conservative historians reacted to the persecution of the Jews and to the Holocaust primarily with moral shock, leaving the events, only inadequately reconstructed by the West-German research community, on the level of a purely traumatic experience. Chancellor Kohl captured this political consequencelessness, which becomes visible here, of the National-Socialist experience with the phrase "Gnade der späten Geburt" [blessing of a late birth].

Precisely against this ubiquitous tendency to "shake off the mortgages of a past now happily made morally neutral" (Jürgen Habermas), Martin Broszat directs his plea for "historicizing" National Socialism.² In the international as well as in the West German writing of history, a far more open view of the Third Reich has predominated for some time, a view that has freed itself from the originally predominant dualistic interpretation, which compared the traditions of the "other Germany" to the center of terror of the SS state and prescribed an ideological-historical determinism. Significantly, it was the foreign-policy research, in particular the ground-laying works of Andreas Hillgruber, that suggested the view for continuities of German policy from the late Wilhelminian period up to the capitulation. At the same time it became ever more plain that the availability of extensive segments of the predominantly conservative leadership elites for the Nazi regime rested less on ideological indoctrination than on this regime's promises, only inadequately fulfilled, to reverse the loss of status brought about by progressive social leveling.

It is significant that this line, which had long been under way in concrete

research in the Federal Republic, was fought less by means of scholarly than legalistic arguments. The highly emotionalized debate about the question of whether a formal order by Hitler for the policy of genocide was necessary illuminates this tendency, reaching up to the threshold of agnosticism to reject unpleasant facts that cannot be ideologically compensated for. This can be demonstrated analogously to the research on the resistance to Hitler, which, due to the slackening of interest, is accused of demythologizing, an accusation for which there is no justification. Similarly, an increased softening of the fossilized image of the Nazis makes itself evident not least of all in the light of the attitude of the younger generation, which has difficulty coming to terms with the interpretation of the National-Socialist period that attributes this period primarily to a fateful entanglement.

Where conservative scholars once bracketed the Third Reich out of the historical continuity, they now want to relativize it. With the demand that National Socialism be placed in larger historical contexts, Ernst Nolte agrees with more pronouncedly progressive historians, as he does with the warning against taboos motivated by "folk pedagogy." When, however, he understands the genocide as a naked psychological reaction to Lenin's White Terror, characterized as an "Asiatic" deed, and describes the genocide in the tradition of "the tyranny of collectivist thinking," then he is moving in an arena in which all actions directed against Bolshevism appear justified as such and every political responsibility disappears behind dispositions determined by the specific epoch. In his view, the tyranny of collectivist thinking has been answered by the "decisive turn to *all* the rules of a free society."³

One can perhaps understand this argumentation as an inadmissible construction in the history of ideas without any political intention. But Nolte's justification years ago of the deportation of the Jews and his view of Auschwitz as a mere outgrowth of an anomalous apolitical constellation had led to his being criticized as an "ordinary German nationalist" (Felix Gilbert). The alleged apoliticality is therefore insufficient to account for the defense carried out on his behalf by conservative colleagues. Klaus Hildebrand explicitly took sides with Nolte's view when he gave up his previously stubbornly claimed singularity of National Socialism (failing to appreciate this was, as is well known, the standard criticism of the comparative fascism theory).⁴ Similarly, Michael Stürmer called on Franz Oppenheimer as an unsuspecting witness. Oppenheimer had appealed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to the Germans to free themselves from the traumatic ballast of this part of their past and argued against holding on to the "collective German pre-occupation with guilt."⁵

It is no wonder that this new view of things found well-meaning applause coming out of Washington. In a lecture entitled "Beyond the Zero Hour: The Creation of a Civic Culture in Postwar Germany," given at a Nuremberg symposium, the U.S. ambassador to Bonn fervently entreated the

Germans on May 23, 1986, to develop a greater self-consciousness and a higher sense of national pride in view of the accomplishments since 1945 that had their roots in national history. As far as he was concerned, Burt emphasized, there was no "zero hour." May 1945 meant "the reanimation and consolidation of German democracy," which in Weimar had stumbled above all because of hostile economic conditions and not from any internal necessity. The Germans must free themselves from the "tragedy of 1933-1945" and be mindful of the positive elements of German history, which for a long period had borne democratic features.

The exhortations from Washington to clear up at last the relation of Germans to their history give cause to prick up our ears. These exhortations touch on the concern of Michael Stürmer, expressly brought up by Burt, that without a consolidation of the German image of history the foreign-policy alliance of the Federal Republic with the West would be put into question. The exhortations are at the same time connected to his complaint about the putative "ahistoricity" of the Federal Republic and the challenge to reclaim lost terrain. Only through the collective endowment of higher meaning by means of historiography could the endangered domestic political consensus be secure for the long term. The alternative would be, Stürmer emphasizes, that the conflict between opposing interests and values, "if it found no common ground," would necessarily lead to a civil war.⁶ With this the instrumental character of the restitution claimed by the ruling parties of the "thousand years of healthy history beyond National Socialism," (from a 1978 CDU statement on the reform of instruction in history) is clearly revealed.

One could hardly impute to West German historical scholarship that it is committed to this politically motivated tendency. It is too apolitical in attitude for that, despite its strongly conservative stamp. This tendency does however meet halfway the broad current of the discipline that takes a skeptical stance on the trend toward social and regional history and research about everyday life. This current is directed back toward the classical history of politics and ideas. It is difficult to estimate to what extent the neorevisionist tendency championed above all by Stürmer and Hildebrand will meet with agreement. At any rate, their technocratic instrumentalization might just run into rejection from conservative scholars; even with them, as in the case of Hillgruber, there is a certain affinity for a stronger emphasis on national factors. His historiographic association of resettlement and the Holocaust indirectly supports the plan, so aggressively posited by Stürmer, of relativizing the crimes of the Third Reich. It allows for revisionist misunderstandings by its demand for "a reconstruction of the destroyed European Middle."⁷

By viewing the experiences of the Third Reich exclusively as a national burden and assigning the shock about the crimes of the National-Socialist domination predominantly to the category of "guilt," the representatives

of neorevisionism actually block the way to a measured treatment of this epoch. The phrase "collective obsession with guilt," apart from its apologetic tendency, diverts from the actual consequences, which are not primarily of a moral but of a political nature. A 1986 memorandum of the Federal Republic's minister for construction on the erection of the House of History in Bonn states that the "mortgage of the Third Reich" must be balanced against German history's "capital of venerable parliamentary, democratic, and especially federal traditions." He acts as though the recent past could be neutralized by simple accounting measures. This only proves that the constitutive meaning of the experiences of the National-Socialist epoch for the historical and political self-understanding of the West German society is being denied.

In fact, from this experience we should derive the commitment to hold firm to the parliamentary-democratic principle and defend liberal principles even at the cost of reduced state efficiency. For only before the backdrop of the dissolution of the state systems of norms and institutions was the collapse into Nazism conceivable. It was a political structure characterized by cynical contempt for human beings and by the application of violent force without bounds. It was a structure that furthermore was promoted by the German elite's practice, reaching back into the late imperialistic phase, of an increasing moral indifference. What made the way clear for Hitler was the turn against Western constitutional traditions. The turning away was in fact not completed in National Socialism and succeeded under the affirmation of the idea of the state based on power and anticommunist resentment. Thus, it was not the continuation of democratic traditions that founded the democratic consensus of the Federal Republic.

The prevailing mistrust in the Federal Republic, independent of every party affiliation, of any cult of community organized by the state, of appeals for national willingness to make sacrifices, and of sentiment against national pathos and national emblems has its roots in the political sobering up that arose from the experiences in the Third Reich. Whoever wants to see in this a lack of patriotic sentiment should be clear once and for all that there is no lack of willingness for democratic participation, although this frequently takes place outside of the corrupt apparatus of the large parties. If Theodor Mommsen bitterly accused the Germans in his political testament of not getting beyond the "*Dienst im Gliede*" [feudal service to the bond of vassalage], this has changed decisively in recent decades despite a growing tendency for external accommodation. This is reflected in the mistrust of the broadening of apparatuses of state control, of data exchange, and of police surveillance, even if signs of political resignation are impossible to overlook.

It is therefore absurd to want to rehabilitate older authoritarian attitudes through historical relativizing. It is a mistake to characterize as a wrong path the consequences of action inferred from the flawed developments of

the period between the wars. These developments by no means touched only the German nation. The pacifist current recently making itself felt in the general critique of the U.S. commando attack against Libya may be somewhat uncomfortable to the government, but is the necessary consequence arising from the experiences of two wars that from today's perspective lack justification. The arms race of the world powers meets in both parts of Germany with undisguised mistrust. This does not have to do in the least with the assumption that because of their "memory of past wrongs" Germans are hindered from advocating their true interests. On the contrary, they have been put in a position to recognize these interests. They now counter doctrinaire claims with skepticism, from whichever side the claims may come. The extensive repression of nationalistic resentment, which has led to a normalization of the relationship with the neighboring peoples and even has reduced xenophobia, is being described from the conservative side as a potential danger to political stability and as a putative "loss of identity." However, it is not primarily national feelings, but rather examples of a politics of self-interest, that give neoconservatives like Michael Stürmer reason to ponder that with the loss of religious bonds, only "nation and patriotism" ("*Kein Eigentum der Deutschen: Die deutsche Frage*" [No Property of the Germans: The German Question]) are able to provide a consensus that transcends social classes. The helplessness of neorevisionism becomes clear at this juncture. For both of these dimensions can be manipulated only at the cost, as the history of the Weimar Republic impressively shows, of losing control over them. Furthermore, the fulfillment of the nationalist claim raised from the neoconservative side is necessarily diffuse and politically fanciful.

It is significant for this dilemma that the sought-after consolidation of nationalist feeling is supposed to be undertaken via a detour: strengthening national consciousness. This is the deeper meaning of the plans of the federal government to erect historical museums in Bonn and Berlin. If it were a matter of strengthening the democratic consensus through a critical treatment of national history, the government would hardly have hesitated to accept the offer of cooperation from the opposition.⁸ Just how authoritarian a path the chancellor is following in this area is demonstrated by the founding of a German Historical Museum⁹ without regard for plans, already completed in Berlin, for the establishment in the Gropius Building of a Forum for History and the Present. The German Historical Museum was supposed to be established and built for Berlin as a "birthday present" on its 750th anniversary. The new museum building planned for the vicinity of the Reichstag has the task, in keeping with the suggestions made by experts who consulted for the Federal Republic's minister for construction, to present the whole of German history, from the ninth century to the present. How strongly desire for external representation is commingled with neoconservative interest in revitalizing German national history is

revealed from the models for this project. They range from the National Museum in Mexico City, the Diaspora Museum in Tel-Aviv, and the Air Space Museum in Washington to the Pompidou Center in Paris.

The plan for a mammoth historical museum in West Berlin, which in contrast to the East Berlin Museum for German History will have no authentic items to exhibit, presents, despite all the expertise of the historians willingly working on the project, an artificial fossil of the nation-state mentality of the nineteenth century. It is supposed to realize what the German unity movements since the wars of liberation have not achieved: a representative national image of history. The special expert committee did agree in the publication of their first concept that they did not want to create a "national shrine" and that they wanted to make allowances for pluralistic views of history. They also said that they wanted to illuminate not the history of the German national state but the history of the Germans in a Europe of changing borders. Whatever one may think in the face of the objective constraints of the chosen medium about assurances of that sort, the intent at any rate will be pursued by those responsible in the government. As in the Bonn House of History, they intend to deliver belatedly to the Germans, as it were, their "national identity." While the idea of the Forum in Berlin was open to various views and interpretations, the German Historical Museum will without hesitation become an event aimed at the middle class. At the same time it will be a self-presentation of the discipline of history.

The recourse to a museum, to a rounded presentation of the national tradition, is significant in double measure for the intentions of the government and its close academic advisers. What is being asked for is not a critical view of history founded on research but balancing accounts. At the same time, the history of the period between the wars is to be thinned out. In Bonn this period functions as a brief introduction; in Berlin it takes up less than a tenth of the exhibition's area. Both plans have the goal of refuge in past normality. In both cases a historically grounded awareness of values is supposed to be transmitted, one that puts the Federal Republic in a position to accommodate the ways of national power politics, not, as in Bismarck's days, as the strongest power in Europe but as a "centerpiece in the European arc of defense of the Atlantic system" (Michael Stürmer). Such a project would indeed require a new image of history, one that takes lightly the warning sign of the National-Socialist epoch and that wants to make us forget the Holocaust and Project Barbarossa under the slogan of "normalizing." This intention has nothing to do with the understanding of history that has grown stepwise in postwar Germany, an understanding that has come about apart from the classical monumental history and frequently independently of the scholarly discipline.

Source: *Merkur*, September/October 1986, pp. 864-874

NOTES

1. Compare with Hermann Lübke, "Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewußtsein" [National Socialism in the German Postwar Consciousness], *Historische Zeitschrift* No. 236, 1983.
2. Martin Broszat, "Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des National-sozialismus," *Merkur* No. 435, May 1985.
3. Ernst Nolte, "Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 6, 1986; also "Between Myth and Revisionism: The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s," in Hans W. Koch, ed., *Aspects of the Third Reich*. London, Macmillan 1985.
4. See the discussion of Nolte's contribution in the *Historische Zeitschrift* No. 242, 1986.
5. See Stürmer's letter to the editor in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of June 25, 1986.
6. Michael Stürmer, "Kein Eigentum der Deutschen: Die deutsche Frage" [No Property of the Germans: The German Question], in Werner Weidenfeld, ed., *Die Identität der Deutschen*, Munich, Hanser 1983.
7. See Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* [Twofold Fall: The Destruction of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry], Berlin: Siedler 1986. It is today an open question "whether more than regional initiatives in Western Europe will be possible for a reconstruction of the destroyed European Middle—as a prerequisite for a reconstruction of the whole of Europe or as a consequence of the reconstruction of all of Europe getting under way." Habermas's critique "Eine Art Schadensabwicklung" [A Kind of Settlement of Damages] in *Die Zeit*, July 11, 1986, goes too far with regard to Hillgruber.
8. Compare Hans Mommsen, "Verordnete Geschichtsbilder? Historische Museumspläne der Bundesregierung" [Ordained Images of History? Museum Plans of the Federal Government], *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* No. 1, January 1986.
9. Compare Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, "Geschichte ohne Ort und Schatten: Deutsches historisches Museum in Berlin" [History without Place and Shadow: The German Historical Museum in Berlin], *Die neue Gesellschaft* No. 7, July 1986.