

The Divided Nation
A History of Germany 1918-1990

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Fourteen Tension and Transformation in Twentieth-Century Germany

Germany in the first half of the twentieth century was a country riven with crises: to avert civil war, it entered into world war; defeated in 1918, it was plunged into revolution and counter-revolution. The Weimar Republic was a period of barricades, street-fighting, and political violence, of instability and unresolved tensions. The crises of the late Weimar Republic were 'resolved' in the facade of the 'national community' of the Third Reich only insofar as the state, by appropriating to itself such a high degree of violence, could suppress its enemies at home and pursue foreign policies which were to culminate in a second World War and genocide. The period from the Second World War to 1990 was also not without its violence and its crises: pictures of the East German Uprising of June 1953, or the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, are remarkably reminiscent of pictures from earlier decades of Berlin streets filled with demonstrators, police and military vehicles, or of the throwing up of concrete walls and tangles of barbed wire, as in the sudden creation of the ghettos of Łódź and Warsaw in 1940. The techniques and aims of violence of course changed: the sophisticated apparatus of minefields and an electronically policed no man's land which formed the boundary of the German Democratic Republic, and the riot gear and battle-shields deployed by West German police wading into demonstrators at nuclear power plants in the 1970s and 1980s, bore little resemblance to earlier shows of force.

Yet whatever points may be made about continuity and change in manifestations of force, violence and coercion in twentieth-

century Germany, something fundamental appeared to have changed. In the physical division of Germany into two states, the domestic tensions and political instability which had beset Germany since the early twentieth century appeared to have been resolved. The two Germanies founded in 1949 survived longer than the preceding political forms, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, put together; and they achieved a remarkable stability, considering the arguably more difficult circumstances of their birth. Created as they were as impermanent entities, carved out of a defeated, occupied, and dismembered nation, it was truly extraordinary that the two Germanies should have become such apparently permanent elements of the later twentieth-century world. Moreover, despite the lack of widespread popular support for a relatively drab and repressed existence under the East German regime, the German Democratic Republic had a political system which was capable of reproducing itself: unlike the Third Reich, it was not inherently chaotic, dependent on the non-routinized charisma of one man, or expansionist and ultimately self-destructive. The concept of 'totalitarian', when intended to cover both the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic, is intrinsically misleading and obscures a multitude of important differences. Yet in 1990, the apparently stable post-war settlement of the German question, and the European and world balance of power, was once again shaken open. With a new reshaping of the boundaries of Germany and its place in Europe, another major historical watershed was being passed. It is time, in this concluding chapter, to bring together some elements of the preceding analysis and propose a broader interpretation of the course of twentieth-century German history.

The Role of the Third Reich

The Third Reich obviously played a pivotal role in the course of

twentieth-century history. Its implications for the reshaping of European and world politics scarcely need elaborating: without Hitler's war, the nature of later twentieth-century Europe, and the involvement and roles of the superpowers, would have been

very different if there had been any such alignment at all. More difficult to determine are the implications of the Third Reich for domestic developments in German politics, economy and society. Did the Nazis' rise to power inaugurate, as many have claimed, a 'national revolution', a 'national awakening', a 'social revolution' producing a *Volksgemeinschaft* in which all was made anew? Did it play a key role, as commentators such as Ralf Dahrendorf would have us believe, in removing 'obstacles to modernization' in German society? Or was it rather as Nazi ideology also gave grounds for believing a 'conservative' revolution, against a variety of aspects of 'modernity'? The curious mixture of the use of modern means, modern technology, modern mass mobilization, in pursuit of avowedly anti-modern ends the unattainable idyll mythicized and idealized in the romantic, agrarian, blood-and-soil ideology has puzzled many analysts. A still more contentious issue has been the attempt to 'normalize' the history of the Third Reich, and to place the Holocaust in a wider historical context. Let us consider first the question of the degree to which the Nazi era represents a period of social revolution.

In different ways, scholars such as Ralf Dahrendorf and David Schoenbaum argued that, far from being a reactionary, anti-modern movement, Nazism actually played a key role in 'modernization' processes in twentieth-century Germany. Dahrendorf suggested that the Nazi development of the role of 'national comrade' (*Volksgenosse*) helped to break down the earlier 'pillarization' of society: the division into rigid status hierarchies and separate social milieux so characteristic of Imperial and Weimar Germany. This breaking down of old rigidities, according to Dahrendorf, subsequently made possible a more individualistic, mobile society in which the role of 'citizen' was rendered possible (although Dahrendorf, writing in the 1960s, was less than sanguine about the then degree of democratization of West

Germans). Schoenbaum's less wide-ranging study, focusing on the years from 1933 to 1939, suggested that while the Nazis failed to effect a social revolution in reality previous tendencies towards urbanization, concentration of capital and industrialization continuing unabated

there was nevertheless an important revolution in the field of 'interpreted social reality'. As we have seen in more detail above, these views must be subjected to a range of qualifications. Research sparked off by the debates of the 1960s revealed a far more complex situation, leading to the conclusion, as summarized by Ian Kershaw, that while the Nazis failed to effect a revolution in social reality, their penetration of popular political consciousness was not as deep or as consistent as previously supposed either. Recent research has begun to reveal the variegation of popular opinion among different groups, at different times, under the influence of different factors. Yet it is still not clear where this leaves the role of the Third Reich in long-term processes of change in twentieth-century Germany.

Part of the problem lies in the essentially dated notion of 'modernization', which had considerable appeal in the 1960s, but which has subsequently been the focus of well-founded criticism. It clearly wraps together a number of separate processes – urbanization, industrialization, technological advance, 'secularization' and the like – adding a few dashes of evolutionary optimism, teleology and ethnocentricity to the cocktail, to produce a standard against which very different histories can be measured. Much the simplest way of cutting through the debates is to reject the general intellectual framework of 'modernization', and rather to try to ascertain as accurately as possible what changed, why it changed, how far Nazi policies were preconditions for subsequent developments and how far they were irrelevant to subsequent processes of change in a variety of spheres. Further, to attempt any sort of adequate answer to such questions, the focus must clearly straddle the supposed historical divide of 1945. Hence, a discussion of such issues – however brief and preliminary – can only come at the end of a broad historical survey such as has been undertaken here.

If one pauses to reflect on the processes described in preceding chapters, it becomes apparent that, while Nazi policies (particularly in relation to foreign policy aims and the associated rearmament) had an important immediate impact on the nature of economic recovery and socioeconomic development in the 1930s,

more fundamental were the consequences of war and defeat. In the period after 1945, far-reaching changes were effected in the Soviet and western zones of occupation which had a profound impact on the development of the two Germanies over the next four decades. The Marshall Plan and the reorientation of West German industry from the late 1940s to the 1960s effected greater changes in economic structure and the political orientations of business elites than had any measures taken by the Nazis. Similarly, East Germany experienced what amounted to a *real* social revolution, under Soviet auspices, on a scale incomparable to any immediate effects of Nazi rule, and as a direct result of the military defeat of the Nazi regime. What the Nazis 'achieved' was less any sort of revolution than self-destruction and, along with the destruction of an inherently unstable regime, the destruction of the credibility (and even the very existence) of certain old elites. The two German armies of the period after 1955 were very different animals from the army of Weimar and Nazi Germany; the Prussian Junkers found the material basis of their very existence swept away from under them with East German land reform; there was something of a sea-change, with shifting and variegated currents, in the fields of educational, cultural and moral elites in different ways in the two Germanies. But the construction of the new systems in the post-war period was contingent, not only on the effects of military defeat, but also on wider international developments, and in particular the Cold War, which had consequences only tangentially related to processes set in motion by the Nazis. To make great claims for the role of the Third Reich in 'modernization' processes in twentieth-century Germany seems, from this wider perspective, to be somewhat out of focus.

Let us turn then to the question of 'interpreted social reality' and the impact of Nazi ideology. The propaganda campaigns waged by

Goebbels have frequently been termed the 'war that Hitler won'. The co-ordinated press, radio, newsreels, the staged mass rallies and parades, the rewritten school textbooks and revised curricula, battered home a consistent message to the German people, whose access to different views was severely restricted. Undoubtedly some of the propaganda particularly

in the peacetime years must have hit home, or at least struck a chord with pre-existing prejudices. But there is also considerable evidence to suggest a widespread cynicism and scepticism about much Nazi propaganda, particularly in the war-weary years after the invasion of Russia. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that certain elements which are taken to be aspects of 'Nazi ideology' were in fact common, widespread views shared by people other than committed Nazis. (This is true not only of such obvious attitudes as dislike, and desire for revision, of the Versailles Treaty, but also of, for example, eugenic theories, which had a respectable scientific standing.) To disentangle the specifically Nazi from more broadly held presuppositions is a complex task; part of Nazi success in gaining support on certain issues lay in picking up on pre-existing attitudes and placing them in a wider framework of interpretation. But whatever the complexities which would bear much closer analysis than can be attempted here it is clear that the Nazis did not succeed in simply 'brainwashing' an entire generation.

More important, arguably, were the ways in which Nazi policies changed the structures of social experience, with important implications for people's perceptions and attitudes. Experiences in everyday life might be more formative of patterns of political orientation than obviously propagandistic messages. (The same can be said in principle with different substantive contents of East German attempts at cultivating a 'socialist personality'.) In these areas, the range of effects was wide, and not always in directions intended by the Nazis. What is clear is that the main impact of Nazi reorganization of social life and community structures was negative: while helping to break down previous modes of organization and associated attitudes, the Nazis failed in the more positive (from their point of view) task of attempting to construct a genuine new 'folk community'. Thus, for

example, the co-ordination of the range of pre-Nazi youth groups into the Nazi youth organizations did contribute to some partial (though ultimately incomplete) destruction of the 'pillarization' of pre-Nazi society. But the continuity and development of alternative, potentially subversive youth subcultures indicated the failure to achieve a uniform impact

on youth in all social positions in Nazi Germany. Similarly, the destruction of trade unions and the co-ordination of workers under the DAF did prevent a whole generation of young workers from gaining experience of trade unionism. The loss of collective bargaining and the introduction of individual pay negotiations and rewards for merit and achievement also induced a greater degree of individualism among some German workers, whittling away at previous notions of collectivism and sentiments of solidarity. But, as in the area of youth organizations, these effects were not universal: many workers quite cynically took advantage of essentially paternalistic schemes, such as the holidays and outings offered by the KDF, without swallowing much of the ideological baggage that went along with such policies.

What the Nazis in the end 'achieved' was essentially negative: a destruction of previous forms of communal organization; a withdrawal of certain forms of experience from a new generation; but an associated failure to put viable new forms in the place of the old. The pressures to conform, to become 'folk comrades' in the new national community, instead led to a very widespread phenomenon: that of leading a dual life, separating public conformity from private authenticity. This duality is encapsulated in numerous jokes of the period, illustrating the ways in which people attempted to retain shreds of honesty and self-respect while simultaneously appearing to conform. One example of such behaviour is the resort to muttering the phrase 'The snow lay this high' ('So hoch lag der Schnee') rather than 'Heil Hitler', when raising the arm in the Hitler-salute. Symbolic forms of 'inner emigration' were not restricted to a minority intellectual elite in Nazi Germany.

What changed in these respects after 1945? Obviously the official ideologies of the two post-war Germanies—liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism—were very different from the peculiar amalgam of

beliefs, prejudices and aims which together made up Nazi ideology. Whatever the failures of Nazis to put across their ideas as a totality, explicit attempts by the occupying powers in the immediate post-war period were also less than entirely successful. Certain pre-existing views such as a widely prevalent anti-communism proved useful as

transitional ideologies in the West in the 1950s, helping to anchor the new democracy, while other continuing prejudices (such as racialism) were less acceptable. A residual authoritarianism and belief in the virtues of political obedience may have helped in the early years of East Germany's existence, as well as a sense or hope that the division was impermanent and would not last long. More important than explicit instruction in the new political ideologies may have been the changing structures of social and political experience in the two Germanies. A 'pillarization' of German society could not return, in part due to the actions of the occupation powers, and this not only in the East. In the West, too, new patterns of organization were fostered and crystallized, and the resurrection of certain old patterns (such as the SPD's penumbra of social activities and groups) were discouraged. Some orientations which appear to represent continuities may in fact simply be similar forms of behaviour appearing and reappearing under new circumstances. The widespread political apathy of the later 1940s and 1950s, evident in both East and West, and frequently held to be a residual legacy of the Nazi period (or even an eternal, enduring characteristic of the 'apolitical German' since Luther or Kant), might in fact have represented a rational means of responding to new political regimes in which there was a justifiable fear of the possible consequences of 'sticking one's neck out', 'getting one's fingers burnt', by a too hasty political commitment in circumstances which might again prove to be temporary. Similarly, the later retreatism evident in East German society might largely have been an adaptation to the pressures of an authoritarian political regime. Such questions obviously require further, more detailed exploration.

If one wishes to draw conclusions about the legacies of the Third Reich for the course of twentieth-century German history, there seem to be two main points of importance. These relate to the two areas of

very specifically Nazi policy, namely foreign policy and racial policy.

First, the essential legacy of the Third Reich consisted of a negative, indeed suicidal, rather than revolutionary set of processes. It was not so much what the Nazis did to the

German economy and society, as the fact that Hitler unleashed a war which led to total defeat, occupation and division, that had radical consequences for social and economic restructuring in the post-war period. In this sense 1945 did represent a sort of 'zero hour'; obviously not all things could be made anew, but the destructive cycle of the previous seventy-five years of German history had been broken.

Secondly, the racial policies of the Nazis culminated in a genocide which had a profound impact on both the Germanies founded on the ruins of the Third Reich. Both Germanies, in different ways, had to grapple with the problem of 'coming to terms with the past' whether through distortions and oversimplifications of historical reality, or selective amnesia, or repeated attempts to explain (if not explain away) the ultimately inexplicable. This essentially indigestible moment of Germany's past proved, beyond any other, that all causal accounts in history are also moral indictments, apportioning responsibility and blame. Whether the issue of explaining the Holocaust has been, or ever can be, satisfactorily resolved is another matter. Certainly, with the sheer passage of time, the burden of guilt is one which ever fewer Germans feel it is their part to bear.

In view of the essentially negative 'contributions' of the Nazi regime to twentieth-century German history, perhaps it is time, finally, to jettison some of the arguments about its role in putative processes of 'modernization'. The factors which explain the different patterns of development of the two post-war Germanies were dependent, not so much on processes set in train by the Nazis, as on the consequences of their defeat. Let us turn, finally, to the dynamics of development of the two Germanies from 1945 to 1990.

The Double Transformation:
The Two Germanies 1945-89

1945 was not exactly a *Stunde Null*, a zero hour, when Germany became a blank sheet on which to make a completely fresh beginning, as certain post-war apologetics attempted to proclaim.

Yet in many fundamental ways 1945 did constitute a radical break in German history certainly more fundamental than the break between *Kaiserreich* and democracy in 1918. Continuities there certainly were across this break, in structure, personnel, and political culture in different ways in *both* Germanies. Yet there were certain radical changes which arguably constituted the key factors helping to explain the relative stability and longevity of the two post-war Germanies in the period before 1989. Four aspects may be singled out as relevant here: first, the structure and interrelations of elites in each state; secondly, the nature and timing of material success in the two Germanies; thirdly, the character and implications of dissent; and finally and, classically, last but not least! the changed international system.

It was notable that in the Weimar Republic certain elites acted in ways that undermined the viability of Weimar democracy: opinion formers and moral and cultural leaders teachers, university professors, priests and pastors, writers and artists, left-wingers and right-wingers articulated either anti-Republican or anti-capitalist sentiments and denigrated the 'party squabbling' of democratic politics; certain army leaders, notably Schleicher, did their best to undermine democracy and replace it with some form of authoritarian state; certain sectors of industry opposed a system which they perceived as detrimental to their economic interests; debt-ridden landowners of large estates sought desperately for a government which would be particularly friendly to their interests. In the Third Reich, these elites by and large compromised with or condoned even by silence, inner or real emigration a system which should have provoked opposition; such resistance as did emanate from elite quarters uniquely placed to offer effective opposition was partial, isolated, and belated, certainly never sufficient to overthrow Hitler

from within. The track record of German elites before 1945 was at best an ambiguous one. From the foundation of the two Germanies in 1949 to the collapse of the East German regime in 1989, however, the orientations of different elite groups to their respective political systems, and to each other, had rather different implications. This may be illustrated by considering

political, military, economic, cultural, moral and educational elites in turn.

There was obviously a radical transfer of power in both Germanies, following the dismantling of the Nazi regime. In the East, the Communists were determined to gain power for themselves, as a new political elite. In the West, it was more a case of the restoration of former politicians who had been excluded or taken an acceptable backstage role in the Third Reich (typified by the re-emergence from semi-retirement of the ex-Mayor of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer, who had spent much of the Nazi period quietly cultivating his roses). However, beyond this rather obvious point, there are some rather more interesting features concerning the development of post-war political elites. After the various purges in the 1950s, Ulbricht effectively led a relatively united party; this was also true of the SED under Honecker until perhaps the mid-1980s, when the challenge of Gorbachev and the succession question fostered greater internal discussion. The relative unity and lack of factionalism in the quarter century or so from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, in marked contrast to the situation in both the Polish and Czech communist parties, was undoubtedly a major factor in the ability of the SED to sustain its hold on the East German state and society during this period. In West Germany there was of course a plurality of political elites; the notable feature was the willingness on the part of most whatever their orientations in the Third Reich to commit themselves to the democratic system. Initially, the constraints imposed by the Allies had much to do with this; so also did Adenauer's policy of incorporating former Nazis into the new Germany.

Military elites played an insidious role in the downfall of the Weimar Republic, and had at best a flawed and ambiguous reputation in the Third Reich. Yet in neither of the post-war Germanies did the

refounded armies play a role tending to undermine or destabilize the political system. The West German army, subjected to a range of parliamentary controls and reconstituted as a rather different entity, was constrained to recognize by the 1970s at the latest that it could no longer aspire to any sort of independent political role. The East German army

showed no evident distance from the East German communist party; nor was there any perceived need for military, rather than civilian rule, as in Poland when faced with the Solidarity crises of 1980-1. Party and army seemed wholly of one purpose and determinedly efficient in pursuit of their goals in the GDR.

Economic elites, both agrarian and industrial, were effectively abolished in East Germany, starting with the land reform and nationalization measures of 1945-6. Yet in a different sense, a potential new economic 'counter-elite', the technical intelligentsia, appeared to be developing as a possible rival for power alongside the SED in the 1960s. Particularly under the New Economic System, it might have proved possible for managers and qualified technical specialists to appropriate more power in important decision-making processes. Yet Ulbricht took care to ensure that decentralization of the economy was not accompanied by political decentralization. Contrary to the claim made by P. C. Ludz, no 'institutionalized counter-elite' developed in the GDR, challenging the party's claim to leadership or seriously influencing important decisions. A high degree of education and specialist qualifications became increasingly important characteristics of the party elite in East Germany under Honecker; but party commitment took precedence over technical expertise, and the latter was definitely placed at the service of the former. In West Germany the situation was different, but the effect a stabilization of the political system was comparable. Economic elites were able to salvage their interests across the historical watershed of 1945; their organizations were rapidly resurrected and adapted to the changed conditions of the occupation period; and in the decades following the foundation of the Federal Republic they were able to promote their interests and influence policy formation through a range of pressure groups and organizations. They found that the particular form of

corporatism that developed in the Federal Republic was one which they could use to their advantage. Undoubtedly also the early economic successes of the Federal Republic, as well as a changing climate of entrepreneurial opinion, helped to ensure that West German economic elites came to accept parliamentary democracy as a viable political

form in which to realize their interests. This stood in marked contrast to the situation in the Weimar Republic.

Turning to the cultural and moral intelligentsias and the leaders of opinion formation in each state, the profiles were again very different but, in different ways, a certain *modus vivendi* appeared to have been achieved by the 1980s. For all the censure made by prominent West German intellectuals of the 'repressive' West German state, or of its failure to confront the past, criticisms were generally directed not *against* democracy but rather against perceived gaps between ideal and reality, and in favour of the extension and fuller realization of democracy. The position of the East German cultural intelligentsia was unique among East European states in that they had another identical language community in which they could publish works censored in their own state and to which they could, if need be, emigrate and yet continue to earn a livelihood by writing in their native tongue. This latter fact had benefits from the point of view of the state, too: disagreeable dissenting voices could be involuntarily exiled, to become thorns in the flesh of West German bourgeois society instead of East German authoritarian bureaucracy. In the event, for the most part of the GDR's history, the cultural intelligentsia insofar as individuals were not entirely regime hacks knocking out required tracts maintained a partially supportive critical stance, and exercised a degree of self-imposed censorship. It did not in any case seek to establish itself as a 'counter-elite'.

Church leaders and opinion formers such as the vast majority of school and university teachers in the Federal Republic tended to act positively to sustain democracy. Although widening gulfs developed between church leadership and laity on certain issues (particularly, among Catholics, on matters such as abortion and birth control, also family morality more widely), disputes did not have to do with the

political system as such, in contrast to the Weimar situation. In East Germany, the situation with respect particularly to the Protestant churches was more complex and difficult to evaluate. From being, in the 1950s, a persecuted group, East German Christians adapted to changed circumstances and by the 1970s had won from the regime a

limited willingness to accept their existence and respect their contribution to GDR society in certain supportive activities. It can be suggested that in the period from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s the asymmetrical partnership between church and state actually helped in curious ways to stabilize the regime by simultaneously providing an outlet for dissent while containing it within certain limits. However, this process itself led to the proliferation of dissenting voices, and ultimately set in motion forces providing a less easily containable challenge to the party's authority. Once changed external circumstances provoked a regime crisis, internal voices for reform were able to inaugurate the popular revolution which ultimately heralded the collapse of the GDR. If one turns from the 'moral' elite to the educational elite in the GDR, the situation appears much simpler: by and large the education system was one serving the interests of the party, and, despite certain recognized difficulties, fulfilling the functions required of it. The main problem from the point of view of goals such as the development of socialist personalities, was that the East German education system tended to breed a certain authoritarian outward conformity rather than an inner commitment to party ideology.

In very different ways, the configurations and orientations of elite groups in the two Germanies up to 1989 tended either to sustain the respective political systems or at the least not to pose serious threats to their stability. What of the masses, the vast majority of the people, in the two Germanies? Much is frequently made of the material privations suffered by people in eastern European countries, with their inefficient, centrally planned economies. Together with restrictions on personal liberties, inability to travel freely, to emigrate, to express their true opinions, to read, discuss, and form autonomous organizations, people in eastern Europe were frequently considered by

westerners to be in such a position of subjugation that they could be held back from revolution only by the threat or reality of naked force. How relevant is such a picture in interpreting pre-1989 East Germany, whatever its validity or otherwise in respect of other communist countries? Similarly, much is often made of the commitment of westerners to democratic values,

and participation in their political systems. How important were such factors in post-war West German history? However different these questions appear to be, ironically part of the answer in relation to both Germanies seems to be the same: relative material success played a major role in the political trajectories of the two Germanies from the late 1940s to the 1980s. This occurred in different ways, and at different levels in each state; but it provided a crucial margin – however small at times, particularly in East Germany – allowing the new states the space for consolidation and stabilization without the real commitment of a majority of citizens.

Undoubtedly a large number of East Germans did complain about material shortages and personal restrictions. We shall consider the implications of the latter in a moment, in connection with the question of dissent. But in relation to the material shortcomings of life in the GDR, two points must be made. First, whatever their criticisms and grumblings, East Germans did take a certain pride in the performance of their economy, particularly as contrasted with what they considered to be the incompetence of the neighbouring Poles. Secondly, whatever the invidious nature of comparisons with West Germany, for considerable periods one could say that 'es liess sich leben' in East Germany: it was possible to live a relatively comfortable life. The importance of consumer satisfaction was not lost on the regime's leaders: starting with Ulbricht's measures in the wake of the 1953 June Uprising, concessions to consumers periodically and repeatedly were used as a tool of regime stabilization. Certainly under Honecker the material satisfaction of the population was a constant concern; and the rapid expansion of car ownership in the 1980s, as well as the increased availability of formerly scarce luxuries such as real coffee, testified to an improved standard of living for many East Germans. Despite Western criticism of material failings in East Germany, and

despite East German discontent about lack of choice or quality, there were not the kinds of economic dislocation and acute shortages or phenomenal price rises which prompted food riots in Poland at various times. In essence, there was not cause enough for mass discontent on a scale which would have persuaded East Germans that it was

worth jeopardizing the entire functioning of the economy. This fact tended to isolate and minimize the impact of intellectual dissent for a long period of East Germany's history.

The importance of material success in post-war West German political life can hardly be overstated. Less than five years after its foundation, the Weimar Republic was in serious economic difficulties, with the great inflation of 1923 adding to the more general difficulties and dislocations of the years after the end of the First World War. In contrast, West Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s, saw the beginnings of a remarkable economic recovery; so rapid and remarkable, indeed, that it soon became widely known as the 'economic miracle'. Sheer pragmatism and concern for personal survival and material well-being brought many West Germans to support the political system which appeared to have initiated, facilitated and sustained this recovery. It was not a principled commitment to democracy as such; but the economic take-off of the 1950s bought valuable time in which the political system could be stabilized, and in which Adenauer could successfully pursue his strategy of western integration. Willingness to jettison East Germany to the Soviets might have been far less, and commitment to an impermanent, severed limb, a partial entity rather than a united nation state, might have been far more difficult, had it not been for this phenomenal economic success. With the passage of time, shifts in factors influencing opinion as well as the passage of generations could effect more fundamental changes in political attitudes. Thus early economic success was crucial in a 'fair weather democracy'; later, economic storms could more easily be weathered and bracketed off from critiques of the political system as a whole. The question became one of which party was held to be the best manager of the economy, rather than one of which political system as a whole would be

preferable to the present one, as in the Weimar Republic.

What of the implications of principled dissent and opposition in the two Germanies? In both Germanies, former Nazis were by and large absorbed, in different ways, into the new societies and polities of the 1950S, insofar as they had not been major war criminals (and unfortunately sometimes even when they had

been). In both Germanies, new forms of dissent proved more problematic than any serious revisionism. In West Germany, the anti-system opposition of a few extremists, of both left and right, failed to gain any widespread support and generally provoked public hostility and opprobrium. This was in marked contrast to the public reception of anti-system opposition in the Weimar Republic. Articulate intellectual dissent in West Germany tended, while being critical of the regime, to sustain its fundamental values and principles. In East Germany, early purges of dissenting factions in the SED helped Ulbricht consolidate his power. Subsequent dissenting Marxist intellectuals such as Havemann and Bahro remained relatively isolated, without mass followings. The proliferation of wider grassroots dissent in the 1980s, focusing on issues such as peace, human rights, and the environment, proved ultimately to have more impact on the regime. But for the past, one can say that in the forty years of their divided existence, prior to the international changes providing the revolutionary preconditions in 1989, both Germanies were able to contain dissent in ways not possible in the Weimar Republic.

Finally, there is the question of a changed international situation and its implications for German politics. The war that Germany unleashed in 1939 ultimately radically transformed the nature of the world system. No longer was there a Europe of strong states, jostling for power, influence, and colonies; instead, there was a larger world, divided into spheres of influence between the new superpowers, the USA and USSR, and in its midst a much weakened, dependent, war-ravaged and divided Europe. What developed in the period after the Second World War was a world system very different from that of the first half of the twentieth century. And this changed international system had considerable impact on subsequent German history.

There was of course the obvious set of implications: the division of

Germany, the reshaping of the political, economic and social systems of the two new states, the less visible but no less important reshaping of attitudes, values, modes of orientation and expression. There were also the quite obvious constraints imposed by the Allies setting limits on what it was

possible for the Germanies to become. In these ways, Allied conquest and occupation of Germany broke the previous spiral of crisis. 1945 did in this sense mark a fundamental break in German history, whatever continuities might be discerned across that divide. In wider ways, changes in the world as a whole meant changes for Germany. In an age of potential nuclear catastrophe, issues of peace and security within a changed framework of international military alliances rendered the 'German question' a very different one from its nineteenth and early twentieth-century predecessors. As Edwina Moreton put it, the 'German question' of the late twentieth century was no longer one of how Germany affected European security, but rather of how European security affected Germany.¹ This is in itself a measure of the gulf separating Germany in the 1980s from Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.

These factors – the commitment of elites, the relative material success, the containment of dissent, and the changed international system with Germany's changed and divided place in it – together help to explain the longevity of the two German states which succeeded the ill-fated Weimar Republic and Third Reich. Each of these factors itself requires further exploration and more detailed analysis than has been possible in a brief survey such as this; but it may be suggested that they at least provide fruitful clues to the problems of trying to interpret the relative domestic stability of the two Germanies over four decades. Yet nothing in history is unchanging; history is a perpetual process of dynamic development, in which, at certain times, a combination of elements produces a moment of major transformation. Such a watershed was reached at the end of the 1980s.

The international situation had become a very different one from that of the late 1940s. No longer was Europe weak, war-torn, ravaged; rather, western European states were relatively prosperous entities

moving towards closer economic, and even political, co-operation and integration, in the framework of a supranational European Community. By contrast, one of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union, was by now a weakened empire beset by domestic problems, and relinquishing its former

claims to dominion over Eastern European affairs. Having set in motion processes of increased political openness and economic restructuring at home, with implications for reform movements in its former satellite states, Gorbachev's USSR was content to observe at a distance the playing out of the consequences elsewhere in Eastern Europe. With this *de facto* Soviet withdrawal and condoning, even encouraging, of change, the major precondition for the whole post-war settlement of divided Germany was removed.

The dismantling of the Iron Curtain, predicated on these developments and inaugurated by the reformist Hungarian regime, precipitated in the form of a flood of refugees the regime crisis in the GDR. The domestic situation had altered in important respects too: the SED was more differentiated, with many members more willing to contemplate reforms and dialogue; and dissenting voices had proliferated, and developed new strategies of non-violent protest and assertion in pursuit of the aim of democratization by peaceful means. These factors shaped the unique pattern of the gentle revolution of autumn 1989. With its protective shell cracked from without, the East German communist regime capitulated rapidly to mounting pressures from within. But even as dissenting voices pressurized for the development of a democratic socialist GDR, so at the same time the salient focus for material comparison became the now readily attainable consumer paradise of the Federal Republic. In the months following the opening of the borders, it became increasingly clear that an independent East Germany could not hope to survive as a viable economic entity. At the same time, the strains placed on the West German economy and welfare state by the continuing avalanche of immigrants posed serious problems, attacking the very heart of West German material prosperity which constituted almost the very essence of any real West German identity. It became clear that a resolution of the problems

posed for both Germanies by the coming down of the border could only be through a common economy, and common political organization. The division of Germany had effectively collapsed; the problem became that of managing the transition, of designing institutions and allegiances that would

provide a secure structure for the future of a united Germany in a changing international system.

It was a long road that Germany travelled in the over seventy years from 1918 to 1990. It may have been a 'twisted road to Auschwitz', but it also must not be forgotten that many more twists and turns have taken place since the collapse of the brutal system that spawned Auschwitz. Is it possible, then, as some Germans are demanding, to 'normalize' the place of the Third Reich in Germany's longer-term historical past?

The answer to this question depends, of course, to some extent on what is meant by 'normalization'. Attempts to diminish the sense of guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust by equating it with, or excusing it with reference to, other atrocities elsewhere must be dismissed as misplaced. On the other hand to wrench the Holocaust out of 'history' and place it on an isolated plane of unique reprehensibility is equally misplaced: this too abstracts evil from its everyday context and represents not only an abdication of the historian's task of attempting to explain, but also evades the moral questions of guilt and responsibility. The Holocaust must be firmly located, and examined, like every other historical phenomenon of note, in its time and place, in its ordinariness and human manner of execution. To this extent, it can be maintained that the Holocaust must be 'normalized' and placed in the long-term patterns and paths of German history.

How should a book on Germany in the twentieth century conclude? With an emphasis on success, or failure; stability, or instability; violence and coercion, or new modes of support and hope? Twentieth-century Germany has witnessed a spectrum of experiences provoking all manner of emotions among those involved and those observing; it

is not for the academic analyst to pronounce final judgement. The last words must be ones of caution: it is ultimately impossible either to evoke the totality of the past or to produce a definitive interpretation of its course; all analyses must remain partial and tentative. But an attempt can be made to suggest modes of approach and points for

discussion. It is hoped that the present work has gone some small way to putting the worst aspects of the German past in their wider place, and has shifted the emphasis forwards to new problematics: the transformations of the present, which provide the starting-place for human actions in the future.