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Aggravated by Politicians

Division of Germany—An Unhealed Wound

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(Third of a Series)

Speaking in Dusseldorf last summer to a group of industrialists, Germany's Foreign Minister Dr. Gerhard Schröder said: "I now come to the actual German question . . ."

He really didn't have to continue. Everyone in West Germany knows the question just as certainly as no one knows the answer.

It is, in Dr. Schröder's words, "the division of our nation and the wish of all Germans to live in a single, free German State."

The severance of East from West is an amputation felt by every citizen of the Federal Republic. The wound has never healed. It is aggravated continually by West German politicians who include unification as a liturgical necessity in every speech.

Every map in West Germany, whether it is in a text book or railway coach, shows the Reich as it was in 1937, including the "eastern territories" now claimed and settled by Poland. Sometimes the East, West and Polish areas are differentiated slightly by color but the outer border is always defined heavily. What we call East Germany is referred to officially as "Mitteldeutschland" or Central Germany.

The political campaign is reinforced by family ties which almost 20 years of separation have done little to weaken. Personal links with the East are even stronger for many of the 13,000,000 Germans who moved from East to West before the border of the Soviet zone was sealed in 1961.

Some of the younger people I met were skeptical about the recovery of the Polish territories. Even in the capital of Bonn, government officials hinted quietly that the eastern territories might be sacrificed for the sake of unification with "Central Germany." One official used the phrase — "the price we might have to pay for reunification."

This of course is not official policy. The unification policy of the Erhard government still includes the territories which have been absorbed by Poland following the postwar defection or expulsion of their German-speaking inhabitants.

If some Germans view the recovery of the Polish territories as remote, even the most apolitical citizen of the Federal Republic believes in the inevitable disappearance of the brick walls and barbed wire that slice his country in half from north to south. He doesn't know how this will be achieved. No one does, from Chancellor Erhard down to the poorest Bavarian peasant. But they are convinced that it will happen.

When it comes to methods of achieving unification, West Germans produce only one definite answer. It is not worth war.

When they say this, they

mean global nuclear war. They are not talking about the Cold War. As far as the Federal Republic is concerned, the Cold War is not at all a bad thing. In fact it is essential. Any "thaw" in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States tends to stabilize the status quo which West Germany regards as intolerable.

In West Germany's view, there can be no accommodation between East and West, between Russia and the United States, until the question of German unification is settled.

"This determines the rela-

tions between us and Moscow," Dr. Schröder said, "and a decisive turn for the better can only take place if progress is achieved in this question."

"As long as that is not the case, we have very little free play. For no doubt must be permitted to arise on this point: The right of self-determination of the Germans in the Soviet zone, the freedom and viability of West Berlin, are not for us an object of bargaining!"

One can sympathize with German emotion. For a proud people, the Wall is a continual outrage as well as a

constant reminder that Germany itself paved the way for Stalin's drive into the heart of Europe. But sympathy doesn't remove concern about the eventual result of this determination to achieve something that seems, at the moment, to be impossible.

Polish 'Models'

Talking to a government official in Bonn, I was startled to hear him evoke the Polish people as models of determined "unifiers."

Poland was divided for centuries among its neighbors, including Prussia, and achieved sovereignty over a

considerable block of territory only after World War I. After a few years of so-called independence, it became a parade ground first for German soldiers, then for Russian divisions. The years of national unity did nothing to change problems created by the existence of a small Polish-speaking national group sandwiched between other larger and far more powerful national groups.

One couldn't help wondering, even if it sounded heretical to West German ears, whether unification would reduce the problem faced by the Germans for the past

75 years — the problem of making the most powerful nation in western Europe work in harness constructively with its neighbors.

"The Common Market and a united Europe," said the Bonn official, "will be adequate against any imbalance which might be caused by the unification of Germany."

"If neighboring countries are apprehensive, unification can be accompanied by arrangements for reduction of troops, mutual inspection, territorial guarantees and so forth."

How clearly many of these countries, including Russia, remember other treaties and guarantees!

A German salesman told me proudly: "Certainly Russia is afraid. They haven't forgotten that they were almost beaten by only half the German war machine."

Afraid or not, Russia may hold some interesting cards in the future. The United States is officially in favor of German unification but actually powerless to do anything about it. Premier Khrushchev has indicated that the Soviet Union might feel free to manoeuvre at some future date.

He was quoted last July as saying: "The Germans will want another Rapallo (the German-Soviet treaty of friendship signed in 1922). It won't happen under Adenauer's successor, nor probably under his successor's successor. Later perhaps. But the day will come, and we can wait."

This sort of talk is useful to Khrushchev. It creates apprehension and sabotages attempts to bring western European nations into economic and perhaps political harmony. But the Russian leader isn't just talking through his fur hat, as the West Germans appreciate.

In his speech last summer, Dr. Schröder said that "the key to this problem lies in the hands of the Soviet Union . . . which continues to refuse to the Germans in its sphere of influence the right to decide freely on their political fate."

"I am, however, of the opinion that the present state of affairs must also be unsatisfactory for the Soviet Union," he continued, "for it has neither succeeded in converting the Germans to Communism, nor has it been able to abolish the permanent economic crisis in the Soviet-occupied zone."

Dr. Schröder went on to say that the Soviet government "has shown that it has, at times, a sharp eye for facts, for real political advantages." Because it is blinded by ideology, it does understand that a removal "bondage" in the zone and an easing of conditions in satellite states "would result in far greater advantages to the communist states than they now gain from their trade with the Soviet-occupied zone in its condition of permanent crisis."



Staff Photos by Peter Desbarats

This was once the main street of a Berlin suburb. Now the abandoned post office stands behind the East-West

barricade, in Communist territory, while a Western border guard patrols the deserted avenue.