

# Nazi ghosts linger on

**F**RANKFURT — Travelling through Germany from south to north, one gets the impression the entire country is a giant factory with trees. It's difficult to go for more than a few kilometres without seeing neat industrial buildings where finely crafted products are being readied for export to the four corners of the Earth.

Hard work, attention to detail and pride of craftsmanship has made Germany rich. Equally important, the nation's riches have not been squandered by immoral politicians, as in once-wealthy Canada. In the Federal Republic inflation, deficits and debt are very bad words.

Now, after decades of toiling, West Germans are enjoying the fruits of their labor. Germans, by and large, are stunningly well dressed in very expensive clothing. The French have some serious fashion competitors in Germany. Gone are the days of beefy, lederhosen-clad Teutons making oom-pah-pah music. Today's West Germans are sleek, slim and very chic.

Well, most of them. Here in Frankfurt, one also sees tribes of punker mutants who look like they crawled out of the radioactive aftermath of World War III. Berlin used to be the crazy capital of Germany but this unenviable title seems to be shifting to once-staid Frankfurt. In fact, Frankfurt by now has the reputation of being Europe's "anything goes" capital. That former Mecca of drugs, hookers, sleaze and slime, Amsterdam, has been downgraded to second place.

Having to put up with downtown road warriors and urban cannibals is, I suppose, one of the prices Germany must pay for its admirable tolerance in things political and cultural. Still, it's disquieting watching blue-painted mutants and skinheads prancing about. When the Germans go weird, we are talking extra serious no-joke weird. Maybe the heavy, belly-busting food here and battery acid wines have something to do with it.

In North America, there's plenty of room to separate sanitized yuppies from rancid punkers. Not so in Germany, where the atmosphere is downright claustrophobic. Germany, like Switzerland, Belgium and other European nations, has

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simply run out of room. There's no place to park, picnic or get away from the world. People, cars, trucks and factories are everywhere.

And to think that pre-war Germans used to pine for Lebensraum (living space) when Germany was almost 50% larger than it is today.

In addition to lack of space, there is another irritant that is becoming a major issue in West Germany. Many Germans are convinced they are to be eternally damned for their Nazi past. Hardly a week passes without a new TV movie from Hollywood about the Nazis and their crimes. Forty-four years after Hitler killed himself, the Nazis, thanks to TV, keep goose-stepping into our living rooms.

Non-Germans will, of course, observe that the monstrous crimes committed by Nazi Germany ought never be forgotten or forgiven. Germany must suffer the consequences of its sins.

Yes, say young Germans, but why us? Most of the old Nazi generation is dead. The majority of today's West Germans were either not yet born or children when the Nazis were in power. How long, they ask, must we be punished or reviled for the crimes of our fathers or grandfathers? Can collective guilt really be inherited?

These are vitally important questions. Deep anger is simmering in Germany against those who keep alive the ghost of Nazi evil in books, TV and films. Much of this anger is turning to overt anti-Americanism.

As one young German told me, "The Americans are going to keep us slaves forever. Every time we try to get off our knees they hit us over the head with the Nazi business."

This growing anti-U.S. feeling runs across Germany's political spectrum, from reds, pinks and greens to the small hard right. Even more disturbingly, Hollywood's 100-year war against the Germans is beginning to produce dark stains of anti-Semitism in West Germany among young Germans who never before had such feelings.

Interestingly, this anti-Semitism is in no way directed against Israel, which remains highly popular in Germany. In fact, West Germany is one of Israel's closest and most reliable allies, providing all sorts of covert help to the Jewish state. Instead, the new anti-Semitism is directed exclusively against the U.S. and some American who are seen as unrelenting enemies of Germany.

Hollywood's endless outpouring of anti-Nazi material, supposedly designed to prevent this scourge from ever reoccurring, seems to be backfiring. Today's Germans want to be freed from the dark past — and see no reason why they should not. History teaches that when the Germans feel deeply wronged, their anger can be truly terrible.

**Punch**

