

# Who's afraid of a united Germany?

German reunification was a jolly idea to which just about everyone in the West paid lip service — until it became a real possibility.

Now that the Wall is coming down and East Germany's Marxist regime has collapsed like a wet paper tiger, the spectre of 70 million reunited Teutons smack in the heart of turbulent Europe is giving a lot of people a bad case of the willies.

Over the past few weeks, mounting pressure has been put on West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl by his western allies and the Soviets to back off on any immediate plans for union or even loose federation between the two Germans. In a grim and very pointed reminder from the 1940s, Kohl was told that the Four Power alliance of Britain, France, the U.S. and USSR, which ruled postwar Germany, would have the final say over reunification. Last week U.S. Secretary of State Jim Baker urgently restated this view.

The politically powerful American Jewish community has also warned against unification and is making its voice heard in Washington. Even President Francois Mitterrand of France, until recently a supporter of unification, has changed his tune. West Germany, in spite of its industrial might, is still, it seems, a semi-captive of the wartime Allies.

Chancellor Kohl, a sensible and cautious politician, quickly backtracked from his recent unification proposals. Senior West German officials promised that there would be no surprises or shocks for Germany's worried neighbors. Go slow was the order of the day in Bonn.

But events in East Germany are now running so fast that a policy of delicate, gradual integration may no longer be possible. Germans on both sides of the breached Wall are gripped by a long-suppressed passion

Eric

## IV ARGOLIS



for unification and national self-assertion. The Germans of 1989 may no longer accept the Allied diktat of 1945.

The big question now is who will prevent German unification? Suppose a new, non-communist government in East Germany insists on union. More important, imagine millions of East Germans simply raising the West German flag and saying they are part of a united Fatherland. People power in the two Germans may prove stronger than cautious government policy.

Chancellor Kohl could quickly find himself forced to either howl to popular emotions or face a disastrous defeat at the polls.

As the process of reunification accelerates, what will the wartime Allies do? Reoccupy West Germany? Impose economic sanctions? Or will the Soviets order their 400,000 troops in East Germany into action? Even the Poles might jump into the act. This would mean an ironical replay of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia — call it the crushing of the Berlin Spring.

What's more likely is that the Germans will terrorize and promise not to reunify while quietly merging everything but name: A covert Anschluss. One thing is certain: The negative reaction of Germany's allies and neighbors to the idea of unification will inevitably rekindle one of the deepest traumas of the German soul

— the conviction that the world is out to get Germany.

For centuries, the European powers kept the lands of Germany divided and weak. One of the reasons Germany was drawn into World War I was the fear that Britain, France and Russia were plotting to crush German power — which they very much were. Hitler, we should recall, rose to power because of the widely held view that Germany was the victim of its jealous neighbors who were bent on denying the German people their rightful place in the sun.

For almost 50 years this notion has been suppressed. But now there is a very real possibility a new generation of Germans who were born after the war will find themselves gripped with the same old fear that seized their fathers and grandfathers. That Europe is still conspiring to thwart German greatness and to deny the German people genuine independence. That Germany is to be forever kept a prisoner in golden chains.

Heading off this national angst is an urgent task for both East and West. Clearly, some method must be found that will permit the gradual reunification of the two Germans without spreading alarm among its neighbors. Sadly, 200 years of European history have so far shown there is no easy solution to this dilemma. Churchill's nasty old quip that Germans are either at your feet or at your throat still holds true. Germany almost seems doomed to a recurring cycle of growth to greatness and power, followed by a crushing defeat by its frightened or envious neighbors. A new cycle is now beginning.

Perhaps in this era of political miracles a way will be found for Germany to finally find its rightful place in the sun without casting a dark shadow on the rest of Europe.