

Shadow of Nazi Era Falls over Divided Germany

(By Religious News Service)

An unexploded bomb burst into the news recently from East Berlin. It could well symbolize the current situation in Germany.

Nearly a quarter-century after Adolf Hitler's crushing defeat, the shadow of Der Fuehrer still stretches long across the land. It is reflected in the nation's postwar division into two zones, in the lost territories now a part of Poland; it is invoked by analysts of political trends and conjured up by Germany's latest educational crisis.

The shadow fell dramatically into a recent conversation between a cardinal and a rabbi, temporarily disturbing Christian-Jewish harmony. It lurks behind the scenes at Oberammergau and in a rusted but still lethal bomb that lay, buried for more than two decades, near St. Mary's Lutheran church in East Berlin.

The bomb popped up, dramatically, just before a memorial service for Dr. Otto Dibelius, one of Hitler's arch-opponents and an index, in life and in death, of the troubles that have plagued Germany. Dr.

Dibelius died in Berlin on Jan. 31, praised by the free world as a staunch opponent of tyranny in all its forms but dismissed in a few negative words by the East German press.

East German churchmen, unable to obtain travel permits for his funeral at St. Matthew's church in West Berlin, scheduled a memorial service at St. Mary's in East Berlin. At the last minute, it was transferred to St. Sophy's because of the discovery of the bomb.

Funeral attendance was only one of the normal activities

regularly disrupted by the barbed-wire and sentry posts that lie across Germany. West Berliners, finding it difficult to visit graves of relatives in East Berlin, sometimes hang wreaths and memorial notices on the infamous wall. The choir of St. Hedwig's (Roman Catholic) Cathedral, formerly one of the world's finest, lost half of its members when the wall went up. It is only slowly moving back to its former status.

On a larger scale, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID) suffers constant difficulties because of the division and Berlin's Roman Catholic Archbishop, Alfred Bengsch, residing in the eastern sector, needs constantly renewed permits to visit half of his diocese.

Dr. Kurt Scharf, Evangelical Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, has been denied entry to the eastern sector ever since his election last year. His diocese, like the national EKID, has to hold separate synods in the two zones and the day-by-day business of the eastern sector is under the care of an administrator, Dr. Albrecht Schoenherr.

So far, EKID has resisted continuing pressure, from the East German government and some East German churchmen, to formalize an administrative division which would mirror Germany's political division. Talk of unity is still heard in EKID circles on both sides of the dividing line, but the immediate prospects are against it as Gerald Goetting, chairman of East Germany's Communist-dominated Christian Democratic Union, underlined in a recent speech.

Advocates of EKID unity are "henchmen of Bonn" supporting a "weapon of the cold war against the German Democratic Republic," he said. "It is an insult for progressive Protestant citizens of our sovereign socialist state if, in East German church circles, there is still talk of unifying EKID."

Further to the East, at the Oder-Neisse line which was set up as the new German-Polish border after World War II, another kind of political problem plagues Roman Catholic churches. Since World War II, the Vatican has refused to appoint permanent bishops in the former German territories now administered by Poland. A footnote in the Annuario Pontificio, the Vatican's directory of its ecclesiastical, administrative and diplomatic personnel, explains that "the Holy See does not usually proceed to definitive changes of diocesan boundaries until the final questions of international law concerning these territories are regulated by fully recognized treaties."

Until the long-pending question of Germany's borders (and perhaps its unification) is settled, the former German Catholic dioceses are in the care of apostolic administrators, bishops in rank and function but technically not the ordinaries of the sees they administer.

One of these administrators, Archbishop Boleslaw Kominek, visited the Vatican recently and had a long, private conversation with Pope Paul VI. It is believed that possible diplomatic relations between Poland and the Vatican were among the topics

of discussion and, with the Oder-Neisse border still disputed by West Germany, this also involved Vatican-Church relations.

One condition Poland would certainly try to impose as a price of such relations is Vatican recognition of the Oder-Neisse line. Prospects of such recognition, in the present situation, are virtually non-existent, but hopeful rumors have begun to circulate in Poland—rumors which the government certainly does not oppose and may even have started.

Germany has broken the 1933 concordat that Hitler made with Pope Pius XI, according to the Polish sources, and this breach may make the Vatican more sympathetic to Polish claims in the area disputed with Germany.

The concordat was broken, in fact, according to Vatican spokesmen when the West German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg recently passed an education law which will close virtually all of the 660 state-supported Catholic schools and replace them with interdenominational schools.

A similar law is now in the planning stages in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The Apostolic Nuncio to West Germany has threatened court action on this issue and the federal government of Germany is attempting to act as a mediator in the situation. It is not seriously believed anywhere (except, perhaps, in Poland) that this dispute will lead to Vatican recognition of the postwar border-shift.

The German Catholic bishops (minus those of East Germany who were denied travel permits) have held a meeting at Bad Honnef, West Germany, and announced that they will study the school situation throughout the country to work out a basis for joint action.

In German politics and inter-religious relations, too, the bitter memory of Hitler lives on. Observers inside and outside of Germany have expressed growing alarm, lately, at the sudden rise of a party which they describe as neo-Nazi, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands for National Democratic Party. Founded at the end of 1964, the NPD has already captured over 7 per cent of the vote in regional elections in two states, Bavaria and Hesse.

Preaching nationalism and capitalizing on discontent with rising inflation and unemployment—the party accumulated more than 600,000 votes in the two states and hopes to win 2.5 to 3 million in the 1969 national elections. Its two national leaders, Fritz Thielens and Adolf von Thadden, have had no known Nazi affiliations, but the lower echelons are said to be dominated by ex-Nazis.

Charges of former Nazi affiliation have also been levelled at a much more prominent German politician, the newly-elected Chancellor and leader of the Christian Democrats, Kurt George Kiesinger. He admitted joining the Nazis in 1933 but said that he became disillusioned and left the party within a year. Following World War II, he was subjected to denazification proceedings and cleared by both the occupation authorities and the West German government.

Also in the new cabinet is a former Communist, holding the sensitive Ministry for All-German Affairs which deals with the question of German reunification. Herbert Wehner was, in fact, a Communist Party official in Moscow during World War II, but his political views have since shifted to right-wing socialism.

Nazi anti-Semitism came back from the grave, during the past month, to cast a temporary chill over Catholic-Jewish relations in Germany. The incident began in a conversation between Joseph Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, and Rabbi Max Nussbaum, chairman of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress.

When Rabbi Nussbaum expressed apprehension at the rise of the NPD, Cardinal Frings attempted to reassure him by comparing the present situation in Germany with conditions before Hitler took power.

In the 1920s, Cardinal Frings said, ill-feeling toward the Jews was generated in some parts of Germany by their "great economic, political and cultural influence," and this prepared the way, psychologically, for Nazism. The rabbi sensed overtones of anti-Semitism in this observation and in the cardinal's question whether he was sure 8 million Jews had been killed by Hitler.

When it was reported in the press, this incident provoked widespread discussion and threatened a serious breach in Catholic-Jewish friendship. Since then, however, a number

of Jewish organizations have made statements recalling the cardinal's firm stands against anti-Semitism during the Hitler era, leaders of the Cologne Jewish community have had a friendly meeting with Cardinal Frings and all parties have expressed regret at the incident.

For a week, there were fears that Brotherhood Week would have to be cancelled in Cologne, but this prospect was finally averted. The case is apparently closed.

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The crucifixion of Christ is depicted in an ancient Armenian manuscript recently reported sold in Jerusalem and put up for auction in London. Armenian churchmen claimed it was stolen from their cathedral. This week the manuscript was returned to Jerusalem.

French Bishops Reply

Remedy rather than Rap

Paris — (NC) — The Church must remedy evils rather than Ottaviani warning against un-denounce them, the French orthodox theological views bishops said in their reply to The letter of the cardinal.

who is pro-prefect of the Doctrinal Congregation, was sent to the world's bishops in July, 1966.

The French bishops' reply, drafted by the permanent council of the French Episcopal Conference in mid-December, was made public with the permission of Cardinal Ottaviani.

Expressing regret over the condemnatory tone of the cardinal's letter, the French response said that the current tendency of Catholics to question points of doctrine arises from modern conditions and cannot be stopped "by authority alone."

Admitting that the pressures of modern life and the development of non-traditional ways of thinking had led to certain "imprudences" among French priests and laymen that may cause the "warping of doctrine," the bishops emphasized that those occasional errors were not part of a heretical system.

THE BISHOPS emphasized: "Most of the French bishops even fear lest the simple enumeration of the 10 errors or dangerous tendencies wrongly lend credence to the idea of a coordinated system, or harden positions that are still fluid, or even needlessly provoke doubts on matters that pose no difficulty."

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