

Hal Dahrendorf looks forward to German unification

# On Your Marks



**O**n one sense, the East Germans are lucky. They have all the problems of their post-communist neighbours - an ailing economy, the collapse of central government, a sense of moral degradation - but they also have a solution. Its name is, if not *Anschluss*, then *Beitritt*, accession to the Federal Republic of Germany. Accession is actually the term used in the much-quoted Article 23 of the West German basic law which lists the *Länder* which constitute the *Federal Republic*, and adds that others may accede if they so wish. The Saarland did in 1955 (with an appropriate, and relevant, transition period). Why should not the five East German states follow once people have discovered on the morning after the elections of March 18 that they may be able to form a new coalition government in East Berlin, but otherwise little has changed?

This is extraordinary language. It is also simpler than the reality of German unification is going to be. Still, the events of the last six months can almost turn the most convinced Kantian into an Hegelian of sorts (a marxian perhaps?) who believes that 'history' is on the move and we cannot deflect it 'whatever this or that individual or even the whole of Europe may visualise as its goal'. German unification is happening under our noses. Nobody will be able to stop it. The question is whether, when the process begins to slow down, we have ideas about turning it to the advantage of those who love liberty and want progress.

Even this is in the first instance a German question. Unfortunately the German Left has joined the remnants of the East German Communist Party (now PDS) and a few politicians in the West trying to defend the two states against unity. It would make more sense to invoke, in Germany, the 'constitutional patriotism' which Jürgen Habermas advocated in the recent 'historians' dispute' about the Nazi past and start building institutions for a larger and, if need be, greater Federal Republic. Extending the rule of law and the constitution of liberty to the whole of the new Germany, and creating a

civil society where it does not yet exist, is much more interesting than moaning about the lost intimacy of East German underdevelopment.

Then there is the European question. Many people in the new democracies say: 'We have not left the East in order to join the West, but in order to join Europe.' Again, East Germans are privileged. The Greater Federal Republic will be a member of the European Community. But what will this community do? German unification will not accelerate the process of European integration. German monetary union, for example, will detract attention, and economic strength, from European monetary co-operation. But there is a case, and a chance, for new horizons of European co-operation which offer a prospect not just to the 12 but to the Efta countries and the new democracies as well.

The third, and for many the biggest, question is that of German power. Is it not true that (as the American historian Fritz Stern put it to the German Bundestag on June 17, 1988) 'a united Germany has brought untold misery over the world'? Gunter Grass has recently opposed German unity in similar terms by linking German unity with Auschwitz. However, yielding to Hegel for a fleeting moment is one thing, yielding to Ben Akiba another. History does not repeat itself. What is more, we, that is all of us in Europe, can do something about supporting a free Germany. It will not be that much bigger than the present Federal Republic, and there is no sign of it wanting to behave differently. Of course, the borders of Germany's neighbours must be guaranteed by international conventions. Beyond that, however, we must get on with the real job of extending civil society to the whole of Europe rather than yield to the old hang-ups until they turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. •

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