

Allan Massie reflects on German unity

## The New Reich

'Events,' Bismarck used to say, 'are stronger than the plans of men.' They also move faster than publishers. Consequently, the arguments which Gunter Grass advances in **Two States - One Nation? The Case Against German Reunification** (Seeker & Warburg, pbk £5.99) already belong to a lost cause. By the time his book appears in our bookshops, the thing will have happened. The East German state which he would have preserved will have been swallowed up. Germany will again be *Ein Volk, Ein Reich*, a prospect that fills him, as a German patriot, with dismayed foreboding.



Grass: Dismayed

He knew of course, at the time of writing the most recent essay in this book (which essay is actually placed first), that this would happen. 'Eventually we will once more - following the German fairy-tale tradition - come to be feared and isolated.' Let us hope, if this is true, that this time, at least, history does actually repeat itself as farce, rather than tragedy.

Grass's opposition to unity is based not only on his fear of the German fairy-tale, but, even more strongly perhaps, in his dislike and disapproval of the Federal Republic as it actually is. He sees it as a state built on a lie - Adenauer's promise to the displaced German of the lost eastern provinces (of whom

Grass himself, as a native of Danzig-Gdansk is actually one) that, some day, they would return to their homes - and maintained by a delusion: that the capitalist economy which functions so fluidly and successfully there can actually satisfy all the aspirations of its citizens, offering them the plenitude of experience. But to maintain such a delusion requires more lies and a degree of smooth, and as far as possible invisible, repression.

Now his idea that a purified east Germany, linked to the West in a confederation, could have supplied a counterweight, may itself be a delusion; but it was not an ignoble hope. The weakness of his argument is rather his failure to define what he means by the culture which he advances as a satisfactory substitute for political unification. Culture is a term freely employed by many who, with reason, distrust the modern bureaucratic state and loathe its manifestations, but it is unfortunately a word which is as vague, unsatisfactory and therefore generally useless as 'freedom'. Grass's opponents are entitled to ask him just what he understands by culture, but though the word is employed several score of times in these essays, he never commits himself to a definition.

And yet this collection of essays, dialogues, speeches, stretching back more than 20 years, does something more than testify to his decency and consistency. Taken in conjunction with Hans Magnus Enzensberger's **Political Crumbs** (Verso, hbk £32.95, pbk £10.95), another compilation of the same sort, it may direct the argument towards the next necessary stage. This must logically be the nature of European unity. We, the other nations of Europe, have been sold this principally as the means of corraling the Germans. Grass makes it clear that he thinks such restraint necessary; consequently, his attitude to European unification seems as naive and uncritical as his attitude to German unification is intelligent and dis-

turbing.

This is very strange. Enzensberger's analysis of the nature of the Federal Republic, from which Grass would not dissent, makes it still more disturbing.

Enzensberger identifies two systems of repression in the Federal Republic. Its first has been inherited: 'Its political basis was the authoritarian state; its equivalent in terms of foreign policy imperialist expansion by military means'. He says, probably rightly, that 'this is a legacy that no one is likely to envy us', though I suggest that 'few' would be more accurate than 'no one'.

'The second system of surveillance and repression is a genuine product of the second world war... Its domestic political basis is the integration of the working class by means of mass consumption and the welfare state; its foreign political equivalent is the offensive of the German export economy in the world market ... The more progressive experts in control and repression... are by type technocrats... (Their) power does not come from the barrel of a gun but from the software of the computer...'

Now much of what Enzensberger has to say of the Federal Republic could be applied with equal justice to Britain, France, Italy, probably also the smaller states of Europe. In all the states of western Europe, the last decades have seen a weakening of the parliamentary process and a strengthening of the administrative organs of government. The complexities of the modern state seems to justify it; the technocrat gets things done. He possesses the information and the capability. And of course he is benevolent; he has the best interests of everyone at heart, hasn't he? And how else could it be done?

Both Right and Left have gone along with this, even though one strand of the Right has its roots in distrust of the state, and one strand of the Left in distrust of authority. But the logic of the modern international economy seems inexorable; con-

sequently we see everywhere power transferred from parliaments to ministries.

The Delors Europe will carry the process further. To bridle the nation-states, it will transfer still more power from elected representatives to permanent officials. To 'maintain level playing-fields' - a grotesque phrase - it will fortify the technocrats. It will promote the culture so admired by Gunter Grass in order to control it, to make it socially useful.

The Delors Europe will become federal Republic writ larger. There will be a new Reich; it will not even necessarily be run by Germans,



Enzensberger: Disturbing

because it will have incorporated everything that is strongest and worst in the German tradition. Moreover it will be the neutral corollary of the whole tendency of the modern state.

It is rather a nightmare. Can it be prevented? Gunter Grass saw the only hope for Germany in confederation, not unity. Isn't that even more true of Europe? Isn't the best hope for Europe one in which power is retained, or rather held, at the level of provinces and small nation-states, and in which only conditional powers are delegated to any central authority? But isn't such a confederation as sadly unlikely as that Germany would have resisted the temptation of unification?