

## Hamburg Dispatch: Cell Block.

The New Republic, Pg. 12 ; ISSN: 0028-6583

December 13, 2001

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Hamburg is the Rhode Island of Germany: a small, prosperous state renowned as a bastion of multicultural tolerance and a stronghold of the left. The center-left Social Democrats comfortably dominated its politics for close to 50 years. You are more likely to find a gay-pride march here than a skinhead rally.

But less than two weeks after September 11, this liberal haven elected a man to the state parliament--which then awarded him the state's highest law enforcement post--who is known to his friends and enemies as "Judge Merciless." His real name is Ronald Schill, a municipal judge who earned his moniker by handing down the harshest possible sentences for minor crimes: One graffiti sprayer, for instance, received a long term in a high-security prison. But Schill is not just your typical law-and-order conservative. He's an extremist who pledges to send "back to Africa" any Africans who cannot produce identity cards. He says that "foreigners" are clogging local jails and that the "same ethnic groups" always commit crimes. He has promised to deport foreigners who commit crimes. He has even floated a plan to chemically castrate sex offenders.

For decades German politics have been driven by guilt, which precluded anything resembling war-era rhetoric. So how did a man of the radical right rise to power in the country's most liberal state? By taking advantage of the war on terrorism--and its attendant fear and xenophobia--which may be triggering a long-feared, and long-repressed, realignment of German politics.

"Judge Merciless" and his Party of the Law and Order Offensive's get-tough-on-crime message is perfectly tailored to the politics of post-September 11 Germany. Before the attacks, pollsters predicted that Schill and his new party would claim 14 percent of the vote, enough to give them a few seats but only a minor role in the parliament. After the attacks, Schill's support climbed to nearly 20 percent. The additional support was "in view of what happened in the U.S.," Melanie Schneider of Emnid, a polling firm, told reporters. A German parliamentary coalition of three parties propelled Schill into power.

It helped that in the follow-up to 9/11, investigators traced Mohammed Atta, two other suicide pilots, and three Al Qaeda accomplices to Hamburg. In his campaign, Schill reminded voters that the city is a "nest of terrorists." He prodded: "Why did terrorists choose to live in our city, why did they think it was the ideal place to plan their terrorist attacks?" He blamed lax law enforcement and the "generation of 1968," which lacked the will to fight political extremists.

Schill had a point. Hamburg is home not only to terrorist cells, but to a strong anti-capitalist, anti-American anarchist movement, which periodically attacks the Hamburg police in bloody street battles. The anarchists claim several neighborhoods as "law-free zones," which police generally

avoid to prevent riots. What better base for terrorists, Schill pointed out, than a state filled with anarchists and nonconfrontational, indulgent police?

Schill's message, however, wasn't just anti-criminal and anti-terrorist. It was anti-foreigner, too. Critics call Schill the "Jorg Haider of Hamburg," and there are similarities. Like Haider, Schill is telegenic, enjoys something of a personality cult (his party was listed on the ballot as simply "Schill"), and gleefully steps on politically correct sensibilities. But he's savvier than his Austrian counterpart. He doesn't visit Nazi veterans or praise Hitler's economic policies, as Haider did. He turns up in a suit, not an ersatz uniform like some neo-Nazis. He reminds his listeners that he's a judge--a sober professional. "One shouldn't confuse being righteous with being on the right," he tells reporters robotically. Instead, he says he wants to make Hamburg "as safe as Stuttgart or Munich." But then he trots out bogus statistics: 70 percent of drug dealers are "foreigners." "Everyone knows Hamburg is easy on crime," he said at an election night event. "The word has spread all the way to Africa." And while Schill is not openly anti-Semitic, he doesn't display the usual German sensitivity to Jewish issues either. Earlier this year Holocaust survivors and Jewish leaders had cut a deal with the Hamburg government to shut down a prison and open a memorial museum on the site of a former concentration camp. When Schill was elected, he overturned it.

But the usual political niceties don't win elections in Hamburg anymore. Before September 11 Schill's campaign stops were packed with middle-aged, lower-middle-class people frightened and angry that Hamburg's murder rate is ten times that of Stuttgart or Munich. They knew that the city's main train station is a mall for dope peddlers. Then they woke up one September morning to find that they were sharing their city with terrorists. Before the attacks they wanted Rudy Giuliani; now they want Pat Buchanan. Schill's party captured nearly one out of five votes--far more than any other far-right party in any German election in the postwar era.

And the momentum hasn't let up. Schill plans to expand his party into the states of eastern Germany, where crime and unemployment is high, and the strict law enforcement of the Soviet era is remembered fondly by some. And the post-September 11 discovery of terrorist cells scattered throughout Germany will only help his cause. "Our success is causing a dynamic we can barely resist," he told London's Daily Telegraph. "That makes a national engagement likely" in next year's national elections. Across Germany, one in four people now say they would vote for Schill's policies, according to a late October poll. Before the attacks his party was barely on the national radar screen.

And don't bet that as the shock of the attacks wears off, support for Schill and other far-right politicians will wane. September 11 energized an anti-foreigner electoral strategy that has been emerging for several years. Last year the Christian Democrats (CDU)--a long-established center-right party, which joined Schill's coalition in Hamburg--began testing a campaign theme of German "national identity." The party fought Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's immigration reforms, which would have increased immigration levels and overturned the long-standing requirement that German citizens have "German blood." While CDU lost on immigration reform, its popularity rose. The party scored a surprising electoral win in the relatively prosperous, centrist-conservative state of Hesse. Roland Koch, prime minister of Hesse and a rising star in the CDU, predicted that the issue of "national identity"--i.e., opposition to foreigners--would be

second only to the economy in national elections next year. And in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine Westphalia, Juergen Ruetters, deputy chairman of the CDU, campaigned on the slogan "Kinder statt Inder" (Children instead of Indians).

September 11 has moved the fulcrum of German politics from guilt to fear. For decades the politics of guilt had been manifest in the strength of the German pacifist movement. It showed in the massive financial contributions to the EU--a form of self-imposed war reparations. And it played into the German government's unwillingness to take a tough stand against terrorism within its own borders. After a bomb in a Berlin disco killed two American soldiers and wounded some 200 Germans in 1986, Chancellor Helmut Kohl vowed tough action. But a conviction took 15 years, and it later came out that the Kohl government had stalled so as not to anger the Libyans. In another case, in 1998, Italian police detained Kurdish terrorist Abdullah Ocalan by executing a German arrest warrant. But Schroeder's government refused to request his extradition to Germany.

The attacks on the United States ended this leftist timidity overnight. German newspapers reported that much of the terrorist plot was hatched on German soil, and police arrested Al Qaeda operatives throughout the Federal Republic. Chancellor Schroeder announced his "unlimited solidarity" with the United States. He even pledged to send German soldiers to Afghanistan. This provoked a fierce battle within his coalition. His partners, the Greens, opposed sending any element of the German army. Schroeder upped the stakes, combining a vote to send troops with a vote of confidence. If the Greens voted as a bloc against troops, they would be dissolving the German government--and kicking themselves out of power. The government survived by two votes. How could Schroeder make such a daring move? Because he was confident that the mood of his country had changed. It wasn't simply that polls favored military action against terrorists; he sensed that Germans were undergoing a lasting change of heart.

Some of that change of heart is reasonable, even laudatory. But it is also what makes "Judge Merciless" possible. Schill, in fact, embodies exactly the qualities that postwar German politics tried so hard to get away from. He is authoritarian, draconian, and militaristic. He champions the death penalty. Most of all, he targets foreigners. Before September 11, his rise to power would have been unthinkable. Now, dealing with him is unavoidable.

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