

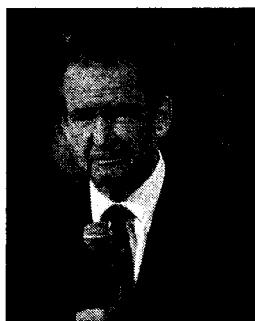
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## Germany's War Wounds

By Paul Gottfried

THE EXPRESSIONS OF OPPOSITION to the war with Iraq from German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and from his foreign minister Joschka Fischer have evoked on the American side outraged responses, from complaints that Germans do not appreciate all we did for them to neoconservative attributions of Nazi motives to the current German pacifism. Against this background it might be useful to note the appearance of three books in the last four years, by novelists W.G. Sebald, Günter Grass, and by military historian Jörg Friedrich.

Grass devotes part of his newest book, *Crab Walk*, to the Soviet torpedoing of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a ship full of German refugees in the Baltic that went down with 8,000 passengers on Jan. 31, 1945; in a less novelistic fashion, both Sebald and Friedrich take on the bombing of German cities from 1941 until the end of the war. Of the two books that treat the bombing, Friedrich's *Der Brand (The Fire)* is the more densely documented, and though written like spasmodic news dispatches, the more factually relevant study of something that should not have happened. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* combines a moral indictment of German novelists and historians for sidestepping the mass murder of their people with reminiscences about growing up in the postwar German rubble.

All three books, which are being sold together on the German Amazon.com, have received favorable treatment in the German national press and, remarkably enough, in the leftist *Der Spiegel*. The association of Grass, a Noble Prize recipient, with the pro-Communist Left for forty years probably has not hurt and may have neutralized objections from German intellectuals that he is making the Germans appear to be "victims." Some of the same built-up grace may be working for the other two authors, who

have published on the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. Although Friedrich's book, unlike the others, has not been translated, conservative German papers have given it loads of attention. And so did his most acrimonious foreign critics in the British *Daily Telegraph* who laced into Friedrich for suggesting that Churchill, the most admired of all English statesmen, was a war criminal.

What Friedrich demonstrates, from the recorded statements of Sir Winston Churchill and the air commanders Sir Charles Portal and Sir Arthur Harris, is that British leaders from 1940 on intended to bring Germany to its knees by wiping out civilian populations. Whereas 567 Englishmen died in the much-publicized bombing of Coventry (and about 21,000 in all of the German bombing of England), the Anglo-American side, and particularly the British, destroyed in the range of 650,000 German civilians. Most of this went on in the final year of the war, when German cities were relatively defenseless and the British side had abandoned the argument that it was destroying weapons and war materiel in favor of the idea that it was waging a "moral struggle." In the final section of his book, Friedrich details the destruction in wartime Germany of artwork, collections of priceless books, monuments, and churches. Among the most spiteful of such destructive acts was the firebombing, on April 17, 1945, of the complex of buildings that had until 1918 formed the Prussian royal residence and the surrounding town of Potsdam. In all, 1,700 tons of bombs were dropped over a few square miles, until they had obliterated 47 percent of the historical buildings and killed 5,000 residents. Although this malicious act had no conceivable effect on the already decided outcome of the war, it allowed the British command to express disdain for "Prussian militarism."

The massive use of phosphorous bombs, when they became available as a weapon of choice, was turned with deadly effect against the historic sections of German cities and villages. Although these *Altstädte* had little if any military

value, their stones and wood did explode quickly, thereby causing the indiscriminate devastation that the firebombing was supposed to create. Churchill and Harris hoped to develop this aerial warfare effectively enough to bring death to at least 100,000 residents of a German city. Despite repeated efforts, particularly in the Northwest corner of the country, between the Maas and the Ruhr, the British bombers failed to get their kill. But among the totals they did achieve were 45,450 killed in Hamburg in July 1943, about 25,000 in Berlin, after several years of intermittent bombing, and 35,000 fully identified dead and about the same number of *Teilidentifizierte* (partially identified corpses) killed in Dresden on Feb. 13, 1945. What kept these figures from getting even larger, according to Friedrich, were the high degree of German civilian morale and the continued operation of *Flak*, the German Aerial Defense Unit. British attempts to win the struggle by smashing German morale did not work; although by 1943 most civilians had grown contemptuous of the German Ministry of Propaganda, they also believed they were fighting an implacable enemy. Thus Berliners did what they could to stave off aerial attacks, and when there was little they could do to keep the bombers away, hid in well-insulated bunkers.

In the *Atlantic Monthly*, Christopher Hitchens, who shares at least two neo-conservative fixations, residual Teutono-

phobia and a passion to bring democracy by force, looks at those German authors who have begun to dwell on German suffering during World War II. A friend of Sebald's, Hitchens is upset that his fellow writer would be so carried away by his subject. Those Germans who told Sebald about their wartime agonies show "a combination of arrogance and self-pity tinged with anti-Semitism."

## THE EAST GERMAN COMMUNIST REGIME HAD A VESTED INTEREST IN PLAYING UP THE WESTERN ALLIES' BOMBING OF GERMAN CIVILIAN POPULATIONS.

Sebald supposedly indulged in similar self-pity when he spoke about the "war of annihilation" against German cities. Hitchens is deeply shocked at the way he mourns the *Luftwaffe's* crew slightly more than he regrets the raid on Norwich. Unfortunately for his outlook on the war, Sebald was living in a North German town that had been targeted for obliteration. And the losses the inhabitants endured in his part of Germany vastly exceeded, on a scale of 10-to-1, those that the British sustained during the Battle of Britain.

The commentators on British firebombing, however, did not contribute much toward the opposition to the Iraq war being expressed by the Red-Green coalition in power. Friedrich and Sebald have produced books that would be more characteristic of the '50s and '60s than of the present age. Hitchens is dead wrong when he remarks, "[T]he peaceful and democratic reunification of Germany has impelled or permitted Sebald and other writers to revisit the half-hidden past." Forty years ago, West German politicians and historians were not shy about uncovering Allied atrocities against Germans. Back then neither the anti-fascist thought-police, now shielding their countrymen against national pride, nor compulsory German self-hate held back historical research.

Most importantly, the German Left and the East German Communist regime had a vested interest in playing up the

Western Allies' bombing of German civilian populations. The Americans and British maintained both armies and weapons systems in West Germany in order to contain the Soviets and their East German allies. The most bloated figures for the number killed by the British in the attack on Dresden—300,000—came from the assistant chairman of the East German Council of Min-

isters in 1955. In 1977, the *Soviet Encyclopedia* cooked up the more modest (but exaggerated) figure of 120,000. By contrast, West German authors wrote tracts without reservations not only on Anglo-American bombing but also on the murder, mayhem, and rape of the Red Army as it moved through Eastern Germany.

Neither Schröder nor Fischer nor the leftist press that endorses them wants any part of the present attempt to bring up atrocities perpetrated on their countrymen by the Allies. They treat these killings as necessary to free Germany from fascism, a process they are continuing by providing tax money to agencies and organizations that expose and harass German nationalists and those who do not accept Germany's place in the new world order. Fischer, who once aided the Bader-Meinhof Gang and then grumbled at German reunification, is the Teutonic Jane Fonda, an ostentatiously self-hating German who has published ten booklets to express his revulsion for his own country and his hope that it will soon disappear. During the Serbian crisis, Fischer, like his mentor, the cultural Marxist Teutonophobe Jürgen Habermas, looked forward to the "replacement of classical international law based on nations by a new cosmic regime built on human rights." To present such a figure as a German chauvinist is an act of lunacy or colossal ignorance.



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Unlike the struggle against Serbia, in Iraq the United States declared war against a Third-World government, which means, for the multicultural imagination of the German Left, against an object of veneration. Fischer would think differently if the enemy were Jörg Haider's Austria. It was he who led the way in calling for international sanctions when the anti-immigrationist Haider was entering an Austrian coalition government four years ago. At a time when over 80 percent of the German population opposed American military action against Iraq, and as high a percentage opposed the American use of German bases, it would have been imprudent for any German politician, including Fischer, to be associated with the Bush administration. But that is not the same as suggesting that critics of the American war policy are thinking about what happened in the 1940s. Most of them were not around at that time; in any case contemporary Germans live in a society in which all pre-1945 German states are treated in the same negative way that our media depict the Confederacy. Finally, it has to be mentioned that given the presence of about 7 million Muslims (out of a total population of 82 million) in Germany, over 60 percent of whom vote for the Left, the Red-Green coalition is pursuing its interest by protesting the waging of a war against a predominantly Muslim country.

The themes of Friedrich's and Sebald's books most resonate are among two groups: older Germans who lived through the events they describe and the anti-globalist national Right. Both may have been targeted by what Hitchens styles "the rightwing mass-circulation tabloid *Das Bild*," which "has called Churchill a war criminal and is serializing Friedrich's work." When the German nationalist weekly *Junge Freiheit* asked readers who lived through the fire-bombing to contribute accounts of their experiences, the editors were flooded with narratives. Meanwhile other German newspapers have begun the same practice, with the same results. Living through the *Brand* is a demonstration of the "will to endure [*Durchhaltewille*]" that elderly Germans talk about the way Nazi and Soviet victims discuss their near-death experiences. Curiously these elders welcome comparisons with those who survived the Holocaust and distinguish their wartime trials from the Nazi government that helped to bring about the invasion of Germany.

But there is also the antiwar Right, which extends from the Christian Democratic dissidents Peter Gauweiler and Willy Wimmer and their followers to the anti-immigrationist *Republikaner*. Representatives of this persuasion oppose American imperialism and fall easily into invectives about Tony Blair as an American lapdog. On this embattled Right, resistance to the war goes hand-in-hand with memories about Allied bombing. Nor is there any affection on the nationalist Right for the Red-Green opposition to the Bush policy, which is seen as having nothing to do with specifically German interests. American globalists are right to hate and fear such types. Unlike Fischer, they are not waiting for the German nation to go away and, unlike the Christian Democratic majority, deeply resent any view of their people as moral pariahs. ■

*Paul Gottfried is a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College and the author of Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt.*

[*Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881, Joseph Frank, Princeton University Press, 784 pages*]

## The Novelist as Prophet

By Patrick Henry Reardon

WHEN MAURICE BARING, in his little 1914 book on modern Russian authors, described Dostoevsky as "the antithesis to Tolstoy, and the second great pillar of Russian prose literature," he confessed that such an opinion, had it been expressed ten years earlier, "would have been met with an incredulous smile amongst the majority of English readers of Russian literature, for Dostoevsky was practically unknown save for his *Crime and Punishment*." Indeed, back in 1905 when Baring had contemplated translating Dostoevsky into English, a publisher told him there would be "no market for such books in England." It was during the ensuing decade, Baring wrote, that Dostoevsky came to be better appreciated as "a creator and a force in literature."

Baring seems to have surmised likewise that Dostoevsky might also turn out to be a prophet. He suspected that those twisted, grossly improbable characters haunting the Dostoevskian corpus—Verkhovensky, Stavrogin, Rogozhin, Svidrigailov—though they had seemed exaggerations some decades earlier, were already proving to be the imaginary silhouettes of more substantial lunacies. Baring remarked, "[R]eal life in subsequent years was to produce characters and events of the same kind, which were more startling than Dostoevsky's fiction."

That was in 1914, and Baring himself could hardly have realized, I think, the further terrors soon to fall. At the very moment he reflected on Dostoevsky's premonitions, certain "characters and events" incomparably more startling were at the point of casting their shadows in Europe's doorway. Already the



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