

By Paul Hockenos

EAST BERLIN

**A** WAVE OF NEO-NAZI GANG ACTIVITY HAS accompanied the tumultuous changes in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Reports of attacks against gays, foreigners and punks, as well as acts of vandalism against socialist and Jewish monuments, appear daily in the press. But the country's leftist squatter communities have been singled out for special persecution.

Thursday evenings at 8:00, delegates from the city's 30 or so squats meet in one of the occupied houses. This week, at the Schönhauseralle commune, the tension is palpable. Deep in the run-down Prenzlauer Berg district, black and red flags dangle from the five-story building's crumbling balconies. Inside, the representatives shift about uneasily on the floor and against the window sills. At the crowded table, the order of the evening, again, is the squats' defense against neo-Nazi and skinhead attacks. The issue of police protection on the houses' behalf is a painful one for the assembly of anarchists, punks and militant left *autonome*.

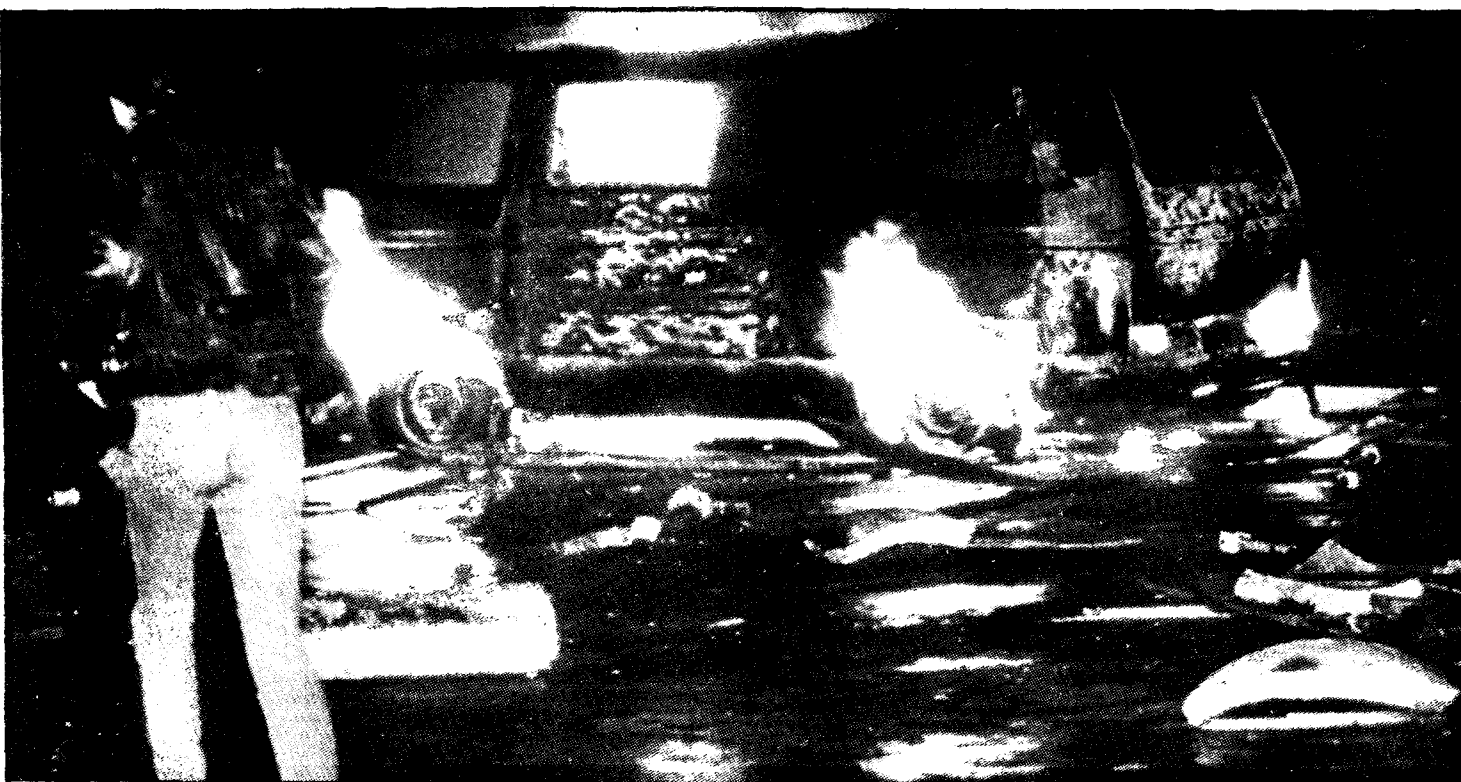
But after hours of debate, the squatters' council reverses its earlier decision to work independently of the police. Cooperation with the authorities, a majority acknowledges, is necessary given the alarming escalation of violence.

Pitched street battles here among hundreds of police, anti-fascists and skinheads have left dozens injured since the new year. So acute is the aggression that the city has put anti-riot squads on constant alert. After matches at the nearby soccer stadium—the favorite meeting place of right extremists and like-minded hooligans—200 armed police now must surround the Schönhauseralle house with wagons and water cannons.

**Stalin's children:** While the "skins and the punks" closely resemble their Western counterparts, the level of violence in recent months is a GDR phenomenon. Stalinism's children have filled the social vacuum here with protest movements and value systems as different from one another as they are from the old regime. Alternative youth culture—right and left—emerged here in the early '80s. The neglected Prenzlauer Berg quarter, where buildings still lie in ruin from World War II, became an enclave for artists and political activists. A small punk scene evolved, loosely aligning itself with the opposition work of evangelical churches. In church cellars and a handful of clubs, the system's malcontents formed bands, study groups and illegal political organizations to challenge the dictatorship's hegemony.

When the Communist regime collapsed, an alternative, creative scene flowered almost overnight. Groups that had worked together for years occupied dilapidated buildings—thousands of which have stood empty for years, scheduled either for demolition or modernization. Gay and lesbian cooperatives, radical printing presses, Third World solidarity cafes and hard-core clubs now give expression to one voice of East Germany's younger generation.

Nineteen people inhabit the spacious rooms of Schönhauseralle 20. The wall art and graffiti that decorate its soot-stained facade are to the point: "This is Our House!", "Break All Chains!", "Nazis Fuck Off!" *Hinterhof*, the musty back courtyard of Berlin



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## Violence begets violence in East Berlin youth culture

renown, is an obstacle course of projects underway. Bicycle frames and incomplete new-wave sculptures lie between mounds of rubble discarded from the windows above.

In contrast to the corrupt "socialist" values of the Communist era, the occupants hope to realize their own form of communal living, cooperative work and self-government. Hoffi, a 25-year-old anarchist and Schönhauseralle resident, explains that occupying an empty room during the dictatorship was perfectly legal. "The problem was that any more than two people in a flat was considered a 'political front' and therefore illegal," he says. "The cops used to toss us out right away."

But since January, the police and the state Communal Housing Administration have taken kindly to the squatters. For the time being, in light of the housing crunch, funding and labor are being provided to assist with the enormous renovation project. The buildings, however, belong either to the state, as part of the so-called "peoples' property," or to private owners. "We're in a state of limbo until the specifics of the unification process become clear," says Micha, 20, a Schreinerstrasse resident.

Until then, the most pressing threat is neo-Nazi aggression. Gangs numbering between 15 and 200 regularly storm the squats. Windows are smashed, doors broken down and fascist graffiti sprayed on the walls. In an attack last week, skins tear-gassed the Köpenickerstrasse house, sending two women to the hospital. On the streets, punks and foreigners are regularly assaulted by the right-wing thugs. "It's come to the point that we can't let anybody stay in the house alone anymore," says Micha. A telephone chain between squats and groups in the East and West coordinates a civil defense network, and gas masks, rocks and pipes stand at the ready in the Schreinerstrasse kitchen.

**Birthday greetings:** The tension between neo-fascists and the new left came to a head April 20, the 101st birthday of Adolf Hitler.

The alarm had already been sounded in the leftist community as about 500 skins and drunken hooligans gathered at the soccer stadium. The pack, some with arms outstretched in the Nazi salute, marched toward Schönhauseralle shouting, "Turks and Reds out!" and "Sieg Heil!"

Columns of riot police met the gangs with clubs and shields, driving them toward the central Alexander Platz. An hour later, according to witnesses and press reports, the skinhead/Nazi contingent had grown to 900 in number, assaulting guestworkers and bicyclists on the way. The Espresso Bar, a reputed gay meeting place, was once again ransacked. The law eventually moved in, dispersing the mob and arresting 30, including several West Berliners. Smaller skirmishes continued into the night as leftist troops set themselves against the fascists.

The number of organized neo-Nazis in East Berlin has tripled to about 3,500 since November. Skinheads, unmistakable with their uniformly shaven heads, green bomber jackets and combat boots, represent the crudest expression of reactionary hate. Usually between 15 and 22 years old, the youth roam the streets in closely knit, aggressive gangs.

**A legacy of rage:** Their extremism, fueled more by blind rage than an understanding of the Nazi era, is no less a reaction to the system than the punk culture. But while the skins vehemently reject leftism of any sort, they subscribe to the same traditionally German values of authoritarianism, obedience and elitism inherent in the ethics of the Communist state. The restricted cultural and travel policies of the old regime, combined with a narrowminded provincialism resulting in a fertile breeding ground for racism and intolerance.

While the neo-Nazi groups often overlap with the less militant skins, they are somewhat older—between 20 and 28—more educated and formally organized. Meeting in small groups since the mid-'80s, some of the

leaders have a solid grasp of fascist ideology. Their stated goal is a fully militarized, "racially pure" Germany and a reinstallation of the country's 1937 borders. Violence as a political weapon is integral in their strategy.

In the tradition of the anti-fascist state, the new GDR election regulations prohibit neo-fascist parties from running for office. Nevertheless, the East Republican Party (REP), the sister organization of the ultra-right West party, has organized extensively, and with marked success, across the GDR.

The REP's effort to enter the May 6 municipal elections under the guise of the National Alternative (NA) was foiled just before the vote. The election commission banned the group after a police raid on three skinhead squats and the unofficial NA headquarters uncovered weapons, fascist and REP propaganda and Third Reich flags. A computer found there contained a list of "left enemies," including the names and addresses of prominent left leaders and journalists.

The political ban, however, lasts only as long as the GDR operates under its own election laws. Once the GDR is incorporated under the Federal Republic's constitution, the fascists will have free rein in the East. Not without justification, the REP claim their support in "Middle Germany" exceeds the 10 percent to 15 percent of the urban vote they have captured in regional West German elections.

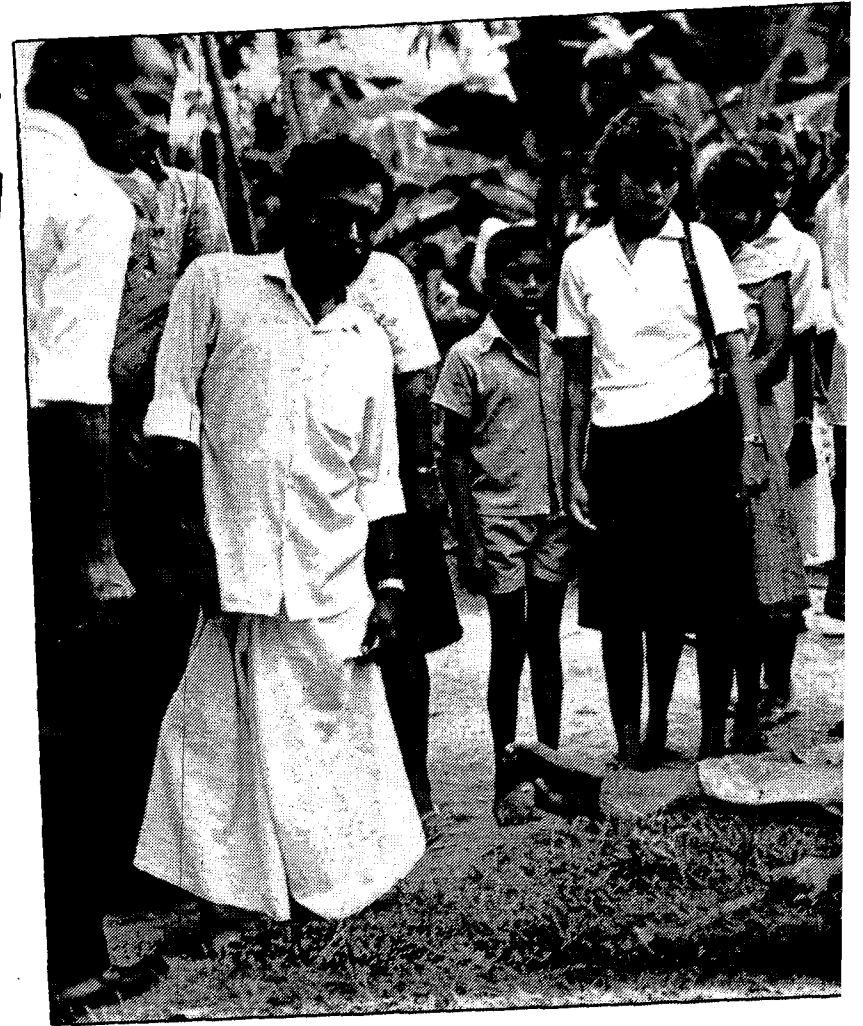
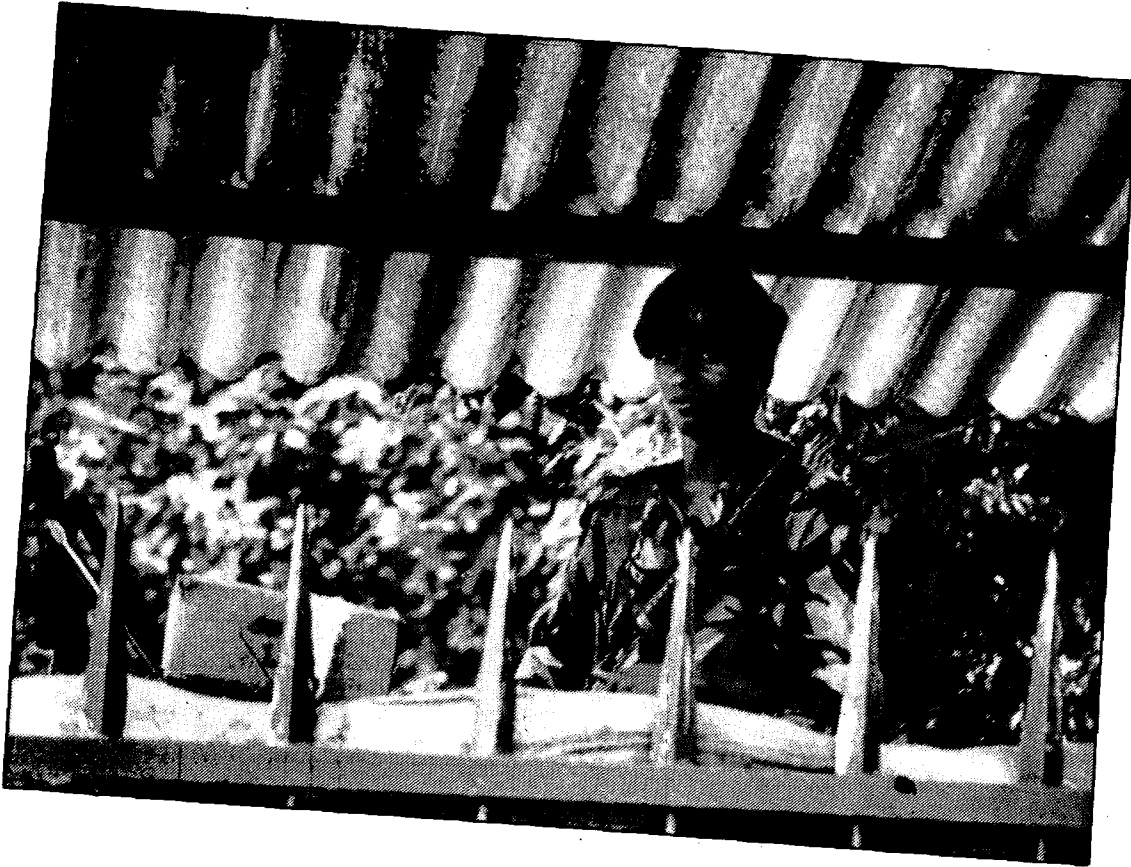
A broad spectrum of forces—from church parishes to militant Kurdish groups—are organizing against the right's ascent. But the scattered groups' divergent tactics and political isolation has left them unable to tap mainstream opinion. The full-scale re-evaluation of Nazism and the fascist structures of German states, East and West, is more removed from the political agenda than ever. The nationalism and bigotry that has erupted here stands in the way of the social consensus necessary to alter those structures at their very roots. Until such a consensus is reached, the victims of fascist extremism are on their own in combatting the right's violence with the only means available—violence of their own. □

Paul Hockenos is *In These Times'* correspondent in Eastern Europe.

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# Sri Lanka: The eye of the



Photographs by John Colmey

## Government attributes reign of terror to 'overenthusiastic,' 'perverted' soldiers

As deputy defense minister and chief executive of the ruling United National Party, Ranjan Wijeratne is the second most powerful man in Sri Lanka after President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who doubles as defense minister. It was Wijeratne who masterminded the government's crack-down against the People's Liberation Front (JVP). He believes the last two years represented a personal battle between himself and Rohana Wijeweera, leader of the JVP insurgency, who died while in police custody last November.

Our correspondent spoke with Wijeratne in early May.

**Peace in southern Sri Lanka has come at a high cost in terms of lives lost and property damaged. Was there any option other than the military solution?** No. After President Premadasa took office [December 1988], he lifted the emergency, which had been in place for five years. We let loose 1,800 criminals involved in subversive activities, hoping they would come to the conference table. What did they do? The opposite of what we anticipated. They doubled their atrocities, created fear psychosis throughout the country, brought the government to a virtual standstill for a take-over. We had to promulgate emergency rule, enforce curfew, close down universities—they were hotbeds of subversion—close down the schools and said, "Right, now it's going to be a free-for-all. Enough

is enough." And we went for them.

My intelligence arm was organized by the first week in August and coordinated a plan for all the forces. I went to the field myself, to the front line. And within three months, we smashed up the hierarchy.... It was my life against Wijeweera's life. They put my neck on the block by challenging me. They put me against the wall virtually. I was not going to sit on that. I said, "Right, you're prepared to take my life; I'm going to take yours." That's the motivation—they motivated me.

**But many Sri Lankans believe that in the process the government released forces it cannot control. There have been widespread reports of extralegal killings by hit squads and vigilante groups.**

I don't deny that. There have been extralegal killings, mainly by people who have been hurt. In the village people know who killed whom, and they take revenge. A lot of revenge killings took place. The military also had been infiltrated by subversives—they also killed, they deserted and they killed. Some politicians may have used this opportunity to get rid of their adversaries—on all sides. It would be foolish on my part to say nothing happened. But as far as the forces are concerned and the police are concerned, they are a disciplined lot. I have not told any of my men to do any unnecessary killing. My instructions were, "You go

for the terrorists and capture them. If you come into combat, you shoot." ...[But] just because they put on uniforms, they're not saints. You get the pathological cases.

**But did you let them go at that time, or did you try to rein them in when you spotted those men who got out of line?**

At the height of this anarchy, I had to use the bravest of men to face up to it. I had to get people who were prepared to do the job. They may have been overenthusiastic; they have been a little more perverted than they should be, and excesses may have taken place. We have now eased them out from their charges, because they're no more required for that type of activity.

**Have you remanded people into custody for abuses?**

Of course. I have a little over 100 men in the armed forces and police who will be court martialed.

**Do you have any personal feelings about what happened over the last year? A lot of innocent people died.**

I have a feeling for our people. I am a practicing Buddhist. I look at it from a philosophical angle. If a bunch of criminals are killing innocent people and I fold my arms and look the other way, I feel I am conniving. I did not want this society decimated by a bunch of criminals. In Buddhism we are told, "Don't kill." But that doesn't mean we should allow criminals to kill. —J.C.

