

The Prophet of Germany's New Right

Götz Kubitschek, a self-proclaimed “rightist intellectual,” lives in a medieval manor house in Schnellroda, a rural village in eastern Germany. From this isolated, antique outpost, Kubitschek, who is 47, wields considerable influence over far-right thinkers, activists and politicians across Germany, who make regular pilgrimages to Schnellroda for an audience with him. The manor serves as the headquarters for the magazine and publishing house that Kubitschek runs with his wife, the writer Ellen Kositzka, and also for a rightist think tank, the plainly named Institute for State Policy, and a small organic farm where he raises rabbits and goats. Kubitschek calls himself a conservative, battling to preserve Germany’s “ethno-cultural identity,” which he says is threatened by immigration and the alienating effects of modernity. He identifies as part of the German “New Right,” which seeks to dissociate itself from the “old right,” which in Germany means Nazis. German political scientists, by contrast, classify the brand of thinking Kubitschek ascribes to as either an ideological “hinge” between conservatism and right-wing extremism or as simply extremist — not vastly different, in other words, from the old right. Kubitschek, however, presents his views with a disarming, Teutonic idealism that recalls a Germany that long preceded the rise of Hitler. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* once referred to him as a “dark knight.”

It was in April that I first made the journey to Kubitschek’s stronghold. Schnellroda is in a rural part of what was once East Germany, and getting there involved taking a train through a murky river valley past villages dotted with medieval castles, Gothic churches and drab apartment complexes built during the Communist era. As the train chugged farther into the valley, the towns looked increasingly forlorn.

Schnellroda itself is a neat village of about 200 people, and I quickly found Kubitschek’s home on the main street, not far from the Lutheran Church. It was relatively modest for a medieval manor, a yellow-painted three-story house that was built around the year 1000 and, according to local folklore, served as a lodge for traveling knights and dignitaries of the monarchy. In the front yard, an unusual flag — red and black stripes with a gold oak-leaf pattern in the center —

fluttered on a lumber pole. This was the banner of the *Urburschenschaft*, a patriotic fraternity founded in the early 19th century with the goal of uniting German-speaking kingdoms and territories into a single state. The flag seemed to mark a rebel outpost, and as I walked onto the property, I had the sense that I was entering occupied terrain. The flag, I would come to understand, exemplified Kubitschek's worldview: His national pride was rooted in German identity, but not in the modern German republic.

Kubitschek was hosting an event called Café Schnellroda, an open house for people interested in learning about his ideas and publications. I walked through an open door and up a set of wood-plank steps into a timber-beamed loft. A few dozen guests sat at tables, sipping coffee and eating homemade cake. The attendees looked mostly bookish; a few of the younger ones wore the beards and browline glasses favored by the transnational intelligentsia. Kubitschek was immediately recognizable, a towering black-clad figure with a well-trimmed goatee and the upright posture of a military officer. (He once served in an Army reconnaissance unit.) Greeting me with a formal handshake and nod, he invited me to join him at a table in the corner, where he poured himself a small glass of beer and began to describe for me the philosophical underpinnings of his ideology.

The human being, he told me as he took a restrained sip, is a "very difficult type." It is not in our nature to adhere to some strict political ideology like communism or Nazism, he said; rather, human beings ought to be raised according to their inclinations. "There's something the human being can achieve, something he can be. It's in this direction that he ought to be raised. And we ought never to pull him away from that." Is this a dark knight or a Montessori schoolteacher, I asked myself, but Kubitschek had already moved on to the topic of Germanness. "The idea that there is such a thing as a pure German is wholly absurd," he said — populations migrate and absorb other influences. Naturally, he said, an immigrant could also become a German, just as long as that person "is willing to give everything for this country and is ready to identify with it."

I asked Kubitschek to define "Germanness" for me. He seemed eager to discuss the subject. Few other people, he said, are so thoroughly preoccupied with the question of who they are: Germany is both Catholic and Lutheran, he said, both Prussian and Bavarian; Germany is the sensitive, cultured nation that produced poets like Goethe and Schiller and the historically militaristic one that produced

the Waffen-SS. "Germanness is a fissure," he said. "Germanness is a question without an answer."

This, I thought, was hardly the kind of positivist vision of German greatness upon which you might build a right-wing nationalist movement. I was, for the moment, having a bit of difficulty conjuring the version of Kubitschek who had, with an almost apocalyptic fervor, warned of the looming demise of the German *Volk* (literally the "folk," but often used to indicate a national identity in ethnic terms), the man who had argued at an anti-immigration rally that Germans are being "replaced and exchanged" by migration, the man who had suggested that the "pathological" manner with which Germany processes the crimes of the Nazi past leads to a corrupting strain of national self-hatred. Kubitschek promulgates these ideas not only through books and in seminars but also through his connections to some of the most radical politicians in Alternative for Germany, or the AfD, a far-right party that won nearly 13 percent of the national vote in September, making it the most successful nationalist party to sit in the German Parliament since the Second World War. Alternative for Germany has become ever more radical since it was founded in 2013 — increasingly portraying itself as the defender of the *Volk* and of German identity — a transformation that Kubitschek, behind the scenes, has been instrumental in bringing about.

As Kubitschek nursed his beer at the table, however, he was sounding pretty measured. Before I got around to asking him about his connection to Alternative for Germany, a young girl in a white dress, the daughter of a visitor, approached our table. She had been outside playing with some of Kubitschek's younger children (he has seven). "Mr. Kubitschek!" she said. "One of the rabbits got out and is running around the garden."

"What?" replied Kubitschek with feigned, playful drama. "Then catch it and put it back in the cage!"

"O.K.!" the girl said, hurrying back out.

A few minutes later, a young woman quietly informed Kubitschek of another problem. A newborn baby goat was "very agitated." Kubitschek, who decries modern man's disconnectedness from the sources of his food, promptly excused himself and rushed out, returning a few minutes later to explain that his newborn goats sometimes have trouble digesting their mother's milk. He rubbed the

distressed newborn's belly, he said, and it passed a stool. All was well at the manor again.

Kubitschek does not officially belong to the AfD — he and his wife applied and were rejected as too radical in 2015, when the party's leadership was more moderate — and he doesn't see party politics as his domain. (His wife has since joined the party.) He prefers to promote his ideas in what he calls the meta-political realm, where he can sway a culture that, in his view, is dominated by leftist thinking. Kubitschek does not hesitate to provoke in the service of his New Right cause, but he also has a talent for couching his illiberal ideology in innocuous-seeming, even liberal-sounding precepts that keep him within the bounds of acceptable discourse even as he expands them. The idea, for instance, that no one should be forced to abide by a strict ideology sounds wholly unobjectionable. But for Kubitschek and his fellow New Right thinkers, the roster of strict ideologies includes liberalism, multiculturalism, egalitarianism and feminism, all of which are “social experiments” (as Kubitschek puts it) imposed by the political elite on the unwilling *Volk*.

Kubitschek's views are reaching a growing audience. Despite the unique cultural taboos arising from the historical memory of Nazism, Germany has joined a long list of European countries — Austria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia among them — where far-right, sometimes explicitly racist political parties command significant minorities in national elections. This ethno-nationalist renaissance presents an odd paradox. European nationalists who at one time might have gone to war with one another now promote a kind of New Right rainbow coalition, in which sovereign states steadfastly maintain their ethnic and cultural identities in service of some larger “Western” ideal. This “ethno-pluralism,” as New Right activists call it, is not based on Western liberal notions of equality or the primacy of individual rights but in opposition to other cultures, usually nonwhite, that they say are threatening to overtake Europe and, indeed, the entire Western world by means of immigration. The threat to the West is also often cast in vague cultural terms as a kind of internal decay. When President Trump visited Poland, he argued in a speech that the United States and Europe were engaged in a common cultural battle. “The fundamental question of our time,” he said, “is whether the West has the will to survive.”

That question has deep roots in Germany. In 1918, the German philosopher Oswald Spengler published the first volume of “The Decline of the West,” arguing

that cultures decline as regularly and predictably as any other organic entity — and that Western civilization was near the end of its cycle. Germany had just lost a war, and Spengler's book struck a chord with disillusioned Germans looking to explain their sense of downfall. Spengler belonged to a loosely defined group of German thinkers called the Conservative Revolutionaries, who argued that Western decline was the inevitable result of materialism and soulless democracy. They opposed the fractious parliamentary democracy of the time, the liberal values of the French Revolution and ultimately modernity itself. They called for national revival by way of an authoritarian leader who could bring about an almost-mystical regeneration of the *Volk* — in part by pitting them against the *Volk* of other nations. "A people is only really such in relation to other peoples," Spengler wrote, "and the substance of this actuality comes out in natural and ineradicable oppositions, in attack and defense, hostility and war."

The German New Right portrays itself as the contemporary reincarnation of the Conservative Revolution. Kubitschek regularly echoed Spengler in our conversations and on more than one occasion told me that Germany was a "tired" nation in its twilight years. The New Right's efforts to reclaim this dated political and intellectual movement serve a purpose. Despite their unmistakable ideological overlap with the National Socialists, many Conservative Revolutionaries were ambivalent toward them and rejected Hitler as a proletarian brute. That apparent distance provides New Right thinkers not just with a nationalist, antiparliamentary tradition rooted in German history but also with a useful argument: National Socialism is a deviation from their chosen ideology, not its inevitable conclusion.

The ideas of the Conservative Revolutionaries, however, cannot be separated from the rise of Hitler. In 1923, one of the movement's most prominent thinkers, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, published "The Third Reich" — another critique of Western liberalism. As the title suggests, Moeller van den Bruck had some influence on the Nazis (Goebbels said his book was "very important for the history of National Socialist political ideas"), though they later repudiated the author himself. The Conservative Revolutionaries' more consequential influence, however, was on the wider population. Their despair over modernity contributed to the "debility of democracy" and fueled a "politically exploitable discontent," the historian Fritz Stern wrote in "The Politics of Cultural Despair." In other words, their ideas helped pave the way for the arrival of a *Führer*, even though the one

who arrived was not necessarily to their liking.

After World War II, Armin Mohler, a Swiss-born writer who had tried unsuccessfully to join the Waffen-SS, took on the project of disentangling the Conservative Revolutionary ideology from Nazism. Mohler, a self-described fascist who had an early and profound influence on Kubitschek, sought to create a more palatable tradition for the postwar era, and he is considered the father of the German New Right. Until recently, though, New Right thinking mostly remained on the fringes of German society, lacking grass-roots expression or a viable manifestation in party politics. But the German political climate changed in 2015, when Angela Merkel allowed nearly a million refugees and migrants to enter the country over the Bavarian border. While many Germans celebrated their arrival, others were angered, feeling that their worries about “Islamization,” criminality and the erosion of German identity were being ignored by the political establishment. For New Right activists, that anger is good. It is the ineradicable opposition that will bring about the political transformation they seek.

But the German New Right has other influences as well. Nils Wegner, a young writer who translates English-language books into German for Kubitschek’s publishing house, follows the American alt-right scene with great interest — listening, for example, to podcasts by Richard Spencer, the white-supremacist leader who once declared before a crowd of acolytes: “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” Wegner told me that the American idea of a “racially defined ethno-state” would “come across as pretty weird over here,” because Europeans are not comfortable putting identity matters in racial terms. I asked him if this discomfort was substantive or merely semantic, and his answer was surprisingly forthright. “I would say that the main difference is the semantic difference,” he said. “Also, the *modus operandi* is not really the same.” Unlike alt-right activists in the United States, he went on to explain, activists on the European New Right tend to avoid appearing alongside “orthodox” right groups — neo-Nazis — because “the look” would impede their effort to appear as a “new kind of postmodern” patriotic movement.

Wegner said another difference was a matter of intensity. The Americans, he said, see their country as collapsing, and therefore they advocate revolutionary action — the creation of a white ethno-state in the Pacific Northwest, for example. European New Right activists don’t see their circumstances as that dire, he continued. They would be content with a “roll back” on immigration.

"It's not yet a revolutionary situation," he said. "The old structures are to be kept intact."

Kubitschek was born in Ravensburg, a wealthy southern town in what was then West Germany. It was a traditional society, he recalls, one where women stayed home and raised children and people voted for the center-right Christian Democratic Union, currently the party of Angela Merkel. He and his friends learned Latin and Greek in high school, and they preferred fencing or horseback riding to soccer, which was considered a "prole" activity. This halcyon way of life was gone, he told me — a victim of society's leftward progression.

He now speaks of the former West Germany in derisive terms. He sees "Wessis" — the people who live there — as having been indoctrinated into a form of hyper-moralistic mass thinking. Its cities, he believes, are "lost" to immigrants. His wife, Ellen Kositzka, who writes polemics against what she calls "hyper-feminism," also hails from the West — from a working-class city near Frankfurt that, she said, has become almost completely "foreignized." The former East Germany, where they've made their new home, has experienced comparatively less immigration; it's the place where, as Kubitschek put it, "Germany is still Germany."

Kubitschek told me his political awakening came in high school, when a group of classmates put together a presentation about the Nazi period in their state. Kubitschek loathed the presentation, he said, because it unjustly placed guilt for the Nazi crimes on his grandparents' entire generation. Kubitschek, who was an editor at the school newspaper, wrote an article criticizing the presentation, and it set off a community debate. The younger teachers, products of 1960s counterculture, took the side of the students who put on the presentation. The older teachers, including the rector, who helped operate an anti-aircraft gun in the war, sided with him. One sympathetic teacher suggested that Kubitschek read the work of the historian Ernst Nolte, known for a controversial essay he wrote around that time titled "The Past That Won't Go Away." Nolte portrayed Nazism as a reaction to the "existential threat" posed by Bolshevism and suggested Bolshevik "class murder" was comparable to the Holocaust, calling it the "logical and factual predecessor to the Nazi 'racial murder.'" Nolte's revisionism sparked a divisive debate in Germany known as the "historians' dispute," and though Nolte was denounced as a Hitler apologist, several conservative German historians and journalists supported him. For Kubitschek, Nolte's work has been a lifelong influence.

After high school, Kubitschek joined the German Army, becoming part of a special reconnaissance unit, and later joined the reserves. His company was “very right,” he said. It drew from an “unbroken historical tradition” that reached back at least as far as the Brandenburgers, a Nazi covert-intelligence unit, and symbols like the “swastika and so on” hung on the company walls. Several of the men I met in Kubitschek’s circle also served in the military; in postwar pacifist Germany, one of them told me, it is attractive to a lot of rightists who saw German demilitarization as an emasculating development. In 2001, Kubitschek himself was discharged from the reserves for “right-wing-extremist endeavors,” but the decision was later revoked after supporters petitioned the Army.

Kubitschek now keeps close contact with a faction of Alternative for Germany politicians who refer to themselves as *der Flügel*, or “the Wing.” It is led by some of the most extreme politicians in the party, including a former history teacher named Björn Höcke, a head of the party in the eastern state of Thuringia. Kubitschek and Höcke have known each other for nearly two decades, and Kubitschek speaks very highly of the party leader, calling him an “idealist” and a “romantic.” But in Germany, few politicians have done more to blur the already-fuzzy line between the New Right and the old right. In March 2015, it was Höcke who initiated an internal party revolt against the party’s founder, an economist named Bernd Lucke, releasing a resolution that accused the party’s leadership of unduly embracing the “establishment” and failing to resist “the further erosion of Germany’s sovereignty and identity.”

The resolution, which set into motion Lucke’s downfall as party leader, read like something Kubitschek could have written. In fact, Kubitschek told me, he drafted it in his library in Schnellroda. What Lucke had failed to grasp, Kubitschek said, was the degree to which Alternative for Germany represented an emotional “outbreak” that went way beyond the economist Lucke’s “technocratic dissatisfaction” with the euro.

Flügel politicians are now ascendant within the party — and they are increasingly mixing their nationalism with the antiliberalism agenda of the New Right. Before the election, I attended an Alternative for Germany rally in Artern, a depressed-looking town not very far from Schnellroda. There, I was struck by how *Flügel* politicians devoted much of their speeches to a number of economic issues traditionally thought of as leftist — low wages, poverty in old age, insufficient social benefits, rhetoric designed to shift the party away from its roots

in economic liberalism. One of the politicians, a man named Jürgen Pohl, who was subsequently elected into Parliament, denounced the claim that Germany is doing “better than ever” economically. Should Angela Merkel and “our new African citizens” come to the former East Germany, he said, they’d see the “poor house of Germany.” Another speaker, André Poggenburg, the head of the party in Saxony-Anhalt, declared Alternative for Germany to be “the new party of social justice.” The message was simple enough: more benefits for the *Volk*, and fewer foreigners to take those benefits away. In the former East, where unemployment remains higher and salaries remain lower than in the former West, that message seems to resonate, helping the party peel away hundreds of thousands of voters from *die Linke*, the descendant of the East German Communist Party.

The shift is not entirely surprising. New Right thinkers often entertain the idea of establishing a *querfront*, or a “cross front” that would unite opponents of liberalism on both extremes of the political spectrum. During my talks with Kubitschek, I often found myself detecting what at first seemed to me a perplexing leftist bent, an aversion to American-style materialism. You had only to go the shopping center on a Saturday morning, he once told me, and observe people in their “consumption temple” to see how there is “nothing at all there, spiritually.” For Kubitschek and other New Right thinkers, American liberalism — with its emphasis on individual rights and the individual pursuit of happiness — is perhaps the most corrosive force eating away at the identity of the *Volk*, replacing a sense of “we” with individualism and profit-seeking self-interest.

One evening, as we sat in the gloaming dimness of his library, Kubitschek delivered a long lament about what he perceived to be the ills of modernity: banal consumption, the decline of Christian belief (Kubitschek is a Catholic), mechanization that is making workers superfluous. These forces were undermining the *Volk*, he told me, and there was very little that could be done to stop it.

I asked him then what was left for him to do. Despair?

I was half joking, but he nodded in all seriousness.

“You’re desperate?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

What, I asked, does political victory look like for a movement of despair?

The best that could be done, he said, was “to prevent the worst.”

On the Monday after my first visit to Schnellroda, I went to see Kubitschek speak at a demonstration in Dresden. The event had been organized by “Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West” — known by the German acronym Pegida — which had been holding rallies in Dresden on Monday evenings since 2014. By the following year, as the global refugee crisis arrived in Germany with full force, the demonstrations often drew more than 10,000 people, but attendance has since dwindled, and on this night only a few thousand people were expected.

Kubitschek casually mentioned that he would not mind at all if a strongman came to replace Merkel, if that was the only way to correct her decision to allow the migrants to enter Germany.

The rally took place in a central square near an unostentatious memorial marking the spot where thousands of corpses were burned after the 1945 Allied bombing that destroyed the city. Before the event began, I found a group of demonstrators — mostly men and women of retirement age — huddled around an accordion player. They were singing folk songs like “Holy Fatherland,” a tune once favored by the Hitler Youth. “In dangerous times, your sons cluster around you. Surrounded by danger, Fatherland, we all stand hand in hand.” One silver-haired man who placed a bellowing emphasis on the word “Fatherland” every time it came up handed me a lyric sheet so I could follow along. I asked him what kind of songs they were.

“Forbidden songs!” he said, almost hollering.

“Really?” I asked.

“Almost,” he said more gently. “People don’t listen to German folk songs.” Raising his voice again, he added, “Nationalism is out!”

In that moment, I was reminded that before the fall of the Iron Curtain, while West Germans were still struggling to comprehend and expose Nazi crimes, East Germans were taught a different version of World War II history, one that depicted them as heroes in the global fight against fascism. Some scholars suggest that the East German deflection of blame reverberates today in the form of a greater willingness to accept far-right nationalism. It’s perhaps no

coincidence, then, that Pegida demonstrations are more prominent in the former East Germany, and that Alternative for Germany won 22 percent of the Eastern vote in the recent election.

After enough demonstrators gathered, they went on a short march around the town hall, with its soaring clock tower, and back to the square. Anti-fascist counterdemonstrators, most of them young, many of them university students, held a banner that said “Make Borders History” and yelled, “Nazis out!” Pegida demonstrators, many of them old enough to be the counterdemonstrators’ grandparents, retorted: “You’re the Nazis!”

Soon after the Pegida demonstrators returned to the square, Kubitschek hopped onto a makeshift stage and clutched a microphone. The center of his speech was an extended metaphor featuring a cat and its avian prey, a dove that can’t get away because it has a broken wing.

“Now, it is dragged down the stairs,” he said, staring into the crowd. “It does not flutter anymore. It does not defend itself. Its head bangs against every step, and there’s a long way to go until we reach the cellar.”

The dove with the broken wing was, of course, the *Volk*, while the cat was the “political class.”

“Actually, we are way too big for this cat that is dragging us behind it,” Kubitschek continued, “and yet for some reason, we do not get on our feet. But we must get back on our feet ... and climb up again step by step.”

The crowd cheered and chanted: “Resistance! Resistance!”

Kubitschek paused, as if to collect his thoughts. There was a way for the *Volk* to escape the cat’s paws — it must demand the re-institution of “law and order” through the sealing of the German border, and it must demand that the political parties putting their own interests above the country’s be reined in by restricting their public financing. He mocked Angela Merkel. She presides over a party called the Christian Democratic Union, he said, but would have gladly opened Vienna’s city door to Ottoman Muslim invaders in 1683. “Why does our establishment despise its own people?” he asked.

The source of the contempt, according to Kubitschek, was Germany’s “memory politics,” the effort by Germans to confront their Nazi past, which involves

tempering any nationalist urges. New Right thinkers see that restraint not as a virtue but as a symptom of a deeply ingrained self-hate — a hatred that must be overcome for Germany to be great again.

In January, Björn Höcke, the AfD leader, voiced a similar lament in a speech at a beer hall in Dresden, and much more caustically. Germans are “the only people in the world who have planted a monument of disgrace in the heart of their capital,” he said, referring to the Holocaust memorial near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. German history was being made “rotten and ridiculous,” he said. “It cannot and must not go on like this! There is no moral duty to dissolution!” The speech provoked a national uproar, and even some politicians within AfD criticized it.

Kubitschek saw it as a tactical error. Höcke’s comments, he said, were “correct in substance but wrong in tone.”

Kubitschek has had greater success advancing the “self-dissolution” theme in the meta-political realm. Recently, he published a book called “Finis Germania,” written by Rolf Peter Sieferle, an environmental historian. Sieferle warned that shame over Nazi crimes is driving a neurotic German belief that the “Earth will be cleansed from the shameful mark of the eternal Nazis only when the Germans have completely disappeared.”

In June, “Finis Germania” was selected for a prominent book-of-the-month list, an entry into the mainstream of public opinion that itself stoked another major controversy. How could such a book, deemed anti-Semitic and extremist by many within the media and literary establishments, be so readily accepted into the public discourse? Kubitschek called the reaction a “panic.” Expanding the boundaries of discourse was precisely what Germany needed, precisely what the Volk required. This was the way to heal its broken wing.

Photo



A rally in Nuremberg by 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West,' or Pegida. Credit Gene Glover for The New York Times

My last visit to Kubitschek's home was on a Saturday evening, some hours after he had hosted a book reading. We sat in a room next to the offices of his publishing house, joined by several of his friends, all men. Kubitschek lit several candles, and a warm breeze from the open window whipped the flames. The other men popped open bottles of beer; Kubitschek stuck to juice. In the company of his friends, he spoke more openly than he had in our previous talks. The topic of the night was mostly the refugee influx since 2015.

Kubitschek casually mentioned that he would not mind at all if a strongman came to replace Merkel, if that was the only way to correct her decision to allow the migrants to enter Germany. In a time of great peril, he noted soberly, a leader must act beyond the law. He cited Carl Schmitt, the conservative political theorist who criticized parliamentary democracy and aligned with the Nazis after they took power: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception." Merkel herself had acted outside the law by opening the border, Kubitschek said, and that proved she was sovereign. And yet, he continued, "I'd have absolutely nothing against it if someone came along and with the same sovereignty did the opposite. Someone who would say: 'The experiment is over. The Parliament won't be consulted. I will

prop up with my power the administration, the organs of the state, the police' — who would in any case be supportive — 'the border patrol, the military, and we will end this experiment.' That means: borders shut. Test to see who can be assimilated; they can stay. Those who can't be assimilated, they've got to go."

It was clear the Kubitschek considers "refugee" a misnomer. These were not, for the most part, refugees fleeing persecution or war, but opportunists — mostly "hungry young men," as he put it — acting "very rationally" to improve their lot. These migrants arrived in an "insecure" country, he said, where the people "don't know who they are or what belongs to them." The migrants, he said, therefore begin to think, Doesn't everything here belong to everyone? "And then the waves are set into motion, and they say: 'All right, here we have a country, a fallow country, and it's a country that must be conquered, and it can be conquered. And it won't be conquered with ladders for storming fortresses or with machetes, but with sheer presence.' " Everyone at the table seemed to agree that the consequences of this conquering were dire. Crime, they argued, was on the rise; women could no longer feel safe walking alone outside at night. "We all know the dystopian stories," Kubitschek said. Matters might get "supercharged in a hyper-identitarian way," he added. "If it once again becomes really brutal or cruel, we don't know. It can also transition over into a country that is no longer Germany."

Kubitschek put a few new candles in the candelabrum, pressing them into the molten red wax of the old ones. This seemed like the right moment to ask him about a concept often discussed in New Right circles: *thymos* — an ancient Greek word used to signify a sense of prideful, righteous indignation. Marc Jongen, a philosopher and Alternative for Germany functionary who was once an assistant to one of Germany's best-known contemporary philosophers, Peter Sloterdijk, argues that Germany lacks the *thymos* necessary to defend itself from cultural erosion. Kubitschek addresses Jongen's idea in his own writing, referring to lacking German *thymos* — which Kubitschek has defined more simply as "rage" — as tantamount to the "emasculat[i]on of our *Volk*." Kubitschek writes that it is valid to question whether a revolt, an eruption of mass rage, can be controlled. Yet, he writes, the consequences of a revolt are less troubling than the threat of what would happen if the *Volk*'s thymotic energy became insufficient to fuel the "successful defense of what belongs to it."

I asked Kubitschek about the sharp rise of right-wing violence in Germany since the refugee influx. "It's a reaction that someone can have who really has the

feeling that his country is being taken," Kubitschek said, "that everything he knows and what he grew up in is changing, and who sees that something totally alien is spreading and he doesn't want it."

"Is violence justified?" I asked.

"I don't see it as justified," he said. The migrant is "ultimately only the figure that we can see, so to speak, but behind him is much bigger development." He said that the young male migrants who come to Germany as asylum-seekers must be frustrated — they are being treated like kindergarten kids, given enough to eat and a place to sleep, but they have no real chance to become part of the society. "They want to work," he said. "They want to meet a few women. They simply want to take their lives into their own hands. And it's not at all possible here," he said. "This country doesn't need these people."

Kubitschek mentioned an article he read about a small village in Saxony-Anhalt where a large number of asylum seekers had been settled. "That is also a form of violence," he said.

"Clearly!" said one of the men at the table.

"The village is being changed in its substance," said Kubitschek. "Or perhaps even being destroyed." The question, he added, is: "Why must we be O.K. with that?"

"Why then isn't violence justified?" I asked. If these refugees were conquerors, and their presence was destroying a way of life, couldn't a person justifiably claim self-defense?

"The refugee is the false opponent," Kubitschek said.

After a pause, he added an amendment. "Actually, if it's going to come to violence, we ought to storm the Parliament. We have no replacement to offer, but this woman can't govern any longer. We must go on from here in a different way."

Then Kubitschek announced that there had been too much talking. "Everything is clear, isn't it?" he said, inspiring a round of laughs from the table.

He and a friend picked up guitars, and they began to sing old German folk songs, some of them with beautiful, baroque melodies. The first was a martial homage to

Georg von Frundsberg, a German mercenary who fought for the Holy Roman Empire and was famed for his brilliant infantry maneuvers. Von Frundsberg hailed from a town not far from where Kubitschek grew up, and in 1525 he helped Emperor Charles V secure the imperial throne with a decisive victory at Pavia, in what is today Italy. Everyone at the table sang along

“Georg von Frundsberg, lead us, *tra la la la la la*,” the men sang, their voices deep. I sank back into my chair and listened.

“The one who won the battle,” they sang. “The one who won the battle.”

James Angelos is a writer based in Berlin. He last wrote for the magazine about right-wing populism in France.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/magazine/the-prophet-of-germanys-new-right.html>

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