

Nazism's new global threat

The Internet helps build a sophisticated web of violent, well-funded racists

BY DAVID E. KAPLAN
AND LUCIAN KIM

When Hendrik Möbus stepped off a British jet and onto American soil last December, the German neo-Nazi was looking for more than kindred spirits. A convicted murderer, Möbus needed refuge. After serving five years in a German jail for helping strangle a fellow teenager, he had allegedly violated parole by disparaging his victim, raising his arm in a Nazi salute, and organizing gatherings of the far right.

Möbus trekked across the United States for seven months, staying with suspected white supremacists in Washington State, Ohio, and Virginia. He finally landed on a remote mountaintop in rural West Virginia, at the 300-acre compound of the National Alliance, a white supremacist group that the Anti-Defamation League calls the largest and most dangerous in the nation. There Möbus stayed for 10 more weeks, until U.S. marshals caught up with him last month. He now faces deportation to Germany.

That the 24-year-old Möbus had contacts across America is a troubling sign of closer ties between U.S. neo-Nazis and their counterparts abroad. Until the 1980s, America's postwar white supremacists were a ragtag collection of local Ku Klux Klansmen and neo-Nazis—with little exposure to people or events overseas. But in this age of globalization, white supremacists have gone international, too. Fueled by the Internet and cheap jet travel, neo-Nazi leaders are exchanging speakers and literature and forming chapters of their groups abroad. Some analysts see the outlines of a sophisticated, worldwide neo-Nazi movement, in which violent, racist groups share tactics and resources

as never before. Says Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups: "We're seeing better funding, more hiding places, and, ultimately, greater violence."

There is no shortage of people on the political fringe. German officials say some 54,000 individuals are tied to the extreme right in that country; tens of thousands more are active elsewhere in Europe. Between 100,000 and 200,000 Americans are thought to have similar ties.

Ironically, after winning the war against Nazism, it is the Americans who are helping revitalize it. For years, U.S. groups have been the major source of Nazi-inspired books, memorabilia, and propaganda; such materials are illegal in Germany but protected by the First Amendment here. Nebraska-based Gary Lauck, dubbed the "Farm Belt Führer," spent two decades shipping racist literature to Germany. His luck ran out when he visited Europe, and German officials slapped him with a four-year jail term. Lauck now stays closer to home—running a Web site with a catalog, in 14 languages, of Nazi books, newspapers, and CDs.

A haven for extremists. German neo-Nazi groups are also flocking to U.S.-based Internet providers. The German government's crackdown on the far right, following a spate of violent attacks on foreigners, has prompted extremist groups there to transfer scores of Web sites to the United States. German intelligence officials say 70 percent of the nearly 400 German neo-Nazi sites are now on American servers, and nearly a third of those would be illegal under German law. Last year, one U.S.-based Web page posted a \$7,500 reward (in German) for the murder of a young left-wing activist, giving his home address, job, and phone number.

Web sites and E-mail are the electronic glue that pastes together the once dis-



parate edges of a worldwide movement. Among the most active neo-Nazi groups is Hammerskin Nation, a federation of so-called skinheads whose members sport swastikas along with their shaved heads and steel-toed boots. Known for their violence, followers of Hammerskin Nation run chapters in Australia, New Zealand, and across Europe and North America. U.S. Hammerskin bands regularly perform in Germany, while British and German Hammerskins often visit America, officials



HATE UNITED. Clockwise from left: German riot police arrest skin-heads in Bavaria last month; Möbus waits in a German courthouse, accused of murder; neo-Nazi William Pierce in front of his West Virginia compound

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say. The Ku Klux Klan has also ventured abroad, setting up chapters in Britain and Australia and giving talks in Germany. And the Illinois-based World Church of the Creator, whose follower Benjamin Smith went on a two-state shooting spree last year, claims chapters in Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, and Sweden.

If the American radical right has an unofficial ambassador, though, it is William Pierce, 67, leader of the National Alliance. It was at Pierce's rustic compound that

Möbus was hiding. A former physics professor, Pierce wrote the notorious *Turner Diaries*, a crude novel depicting an American race war in which the U.S. government is overthrown and Jews and minorities are systematically slain. Among the novel's fans was Timothy McVeigh; his bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building closely resembles a scene from the book.

Under Pierce's leadership, the National Alliance has established chapters in 11 countries. Pierce's travels have brought

him to the United Kingdom, and since 1996 he has made four visits to Germany, where officials say he now has a representative. His main contacts are with the 6,000-member National Democratic Party (known by its German initials, NPD), a group so dominated by neo-Nazis that government officials have proposed banning it. In a speech before the party's congress last year, Pierce spoke of a new era of collaboration among "nationalist" groups, echoing the NPD's own calls for expansion abroad. NPD officials, in turn, have attended meetings of Pierce's National Alliance in the United States. "Our destinies are linked," Pierce later proclaimed, sounding like Adolf Hitler in 1933. "If the Jews succeed in destroying the German nation, they will have an easier time destroying us."

Angry Aryans. Like others on the far right, the National Alliance has wholeheartedly embraced the Web, offering online materials in five European languages. *The Turner Diaries*, which once had to be smuggled into Germany, can now be read on its Web site in German as well as French. Last year, Pierce also moved into the music business with the purchase of Resistance Records, reputed to be the world's largest purveyor of neo-Nazi CDs, with titles like "Too White for You" by the Angry Aryans. Pierce's warehouses reportedly carry 250 titles and stockpile some 80,000 CDs. A major market is the European skin-head scene.

Despite its growing reach, however, the neo-Nazi movement remains widely fractured, both at home and abroad: Groups often hate each other nearly as much as they do non-Aryans. The danger, of course, is that even individuals, like McVeigh, can cause enormous damage. Moreover, the Internet is hastening the spread of a more consistent ideology. American white supremacists have been "Nazified" in recent years,

analysts say. A generation ago, Ku Klux Klan members with memories of World War II would never have associated with Nazis; today, they attend rallies, sport swastikas, and offer *sieg heils*.

Such a common culture does not bode well. "All the ingredients are there," warns German political scientist Thomas Grumke, who studies the far right. "Somebody just has to mix them together." ●

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