

Extreme right 'makes part of Germany no-go area'

23 January 1998

By REGINE WOSNITZA

A top German criminologist has warned that at least one-third of young people in the former East Germany identify with the far right.

Berndt Wagner — who has monitored the far right for 10 years — described extreme right-wing views among Germans aged under 30 living in that part of the country as “the norm.”

Interviewed in the Guardian, Mr Wagner said: “To say that one-third of East German youth is now prone to the extreme right is an understatement. The point of no return has already been reached... It’s very depressing. It’s growing. It’s getting worse.”

Xenophobic crimes take place in eastern Germany almost every day. In Brandenburg state, which surrounds Berlin, 514 far-right crimes were recorded last year — of which 93 involved violence.

Annette Kahane, of East Berlin’s Centre for Democratic Culture, who surveyed 800 13-to-16-year-olds at a high school, found that 90 per cent were xenophobic and had far-right sympathies.

A spokesperson for Brandenburg’s Interior Ministry believed that many of these teenagers were influenced by parents and peers.

Figures issued by the German police show the country has 37,000 members of far-right parties, 6,400 skinheads prepared to use violence and 2,600 skinheads who are not necessarily violent.

This cumulative figure of 47,000 far-right sympathisers shows a rise of 4.5 per cent on last year’s figures. Parts of eastern Germany have become no-go zones for foreigners, gays or anyone considered “un-German.”

The spokesperson told the JC: “You can no longer guarantee that nothing will happen to a foreigner travelling by public transport. Anti-foreign sentiments have become an eastern German trademark.”

Irina Knochenhauser, who manages the Jewish community in Brandenburg’s capital, Potsdam, told the JC: “Subconsciously, everyone is prepared for an attack all the time.”

She said the Jewish community was involved in efforts to educate others about the religion and to campaign against racism.

“Neo-Nazis are weak and they only pick on those who are even weaker,” said Ms Knochenhauser, who herself has received hate-mail.