# THE EXTRAPARLIAMENTARY LEFT IN EUROPE

by George Katsiaficas

The Reagan administration's plan to install medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe has aroused a wide spectrum of international opposition which recently has been given considerable publicity in the United States. A quarter of a million people marched against the missiles in Bonn on October 10. Similar large-scale protest marches with distinctly anti-American overtones were held two weeks later in Paris, London, Brussels, and Rome. On September 13, amid a flurry of guerrilla attacks on U.S. personnel and bases in West Germany, over 7,000 riot police were needed to guard Secretary of State Haig from at least 50,000 demonstrators in West Berlin, and in the ensuing turmoil hundreds were arrested and over 150 police injured.

The anti-American upsurge in Europe seems to have erupted very suddenly and to be gaining momentum at a fast pace. Where did this movement come from? It did not first appear in late 1979 after the NATO decision to position the missiles, nor did it emerge from within the established liberal political parties—as European conservatives would have us believe. While there are some politicians and even more intellectuals who have contributed to the building of the movement in its present phase, today's anti-Americanism in Europe has emerged with the development of a militant extra-

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parliamentary opposition, a cultural/political youth movement based outside the universities. Although visible to many people only in the wave of riots in England, this movement has been building slowly over the past few years and has helped spark new political motion among millions of people.

Through their militant attacks on nuclear power and weapons industries and their defense of "squatted" houses, i.e., empty houses illegally occupied, a new generation of radicals has helped to delegitimize the authority of the state and the Atlantic Alliance at a time when the postwar division of Europe into hostile zones of East and West seems to be losing its rationale in the minds of many Europeans. As a movement, these activists care little about established forms of politics, but their actions have already caused the mayor of Hamburg to resign, precipitated the downfall of the Social Democratic government in West Berlin, and mounted a serious threat to the fragile liberal alliance now governing West Germany.

In this article, I will trace the development of the youth movement in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Zurich, and West Germany; relate it to the current economic crisis; and make some brief observations on its internal characteristics. There have long been more than superficial connections among activists in these four places. They share a cultural and political universe in their felt oppression, immediate activism, and general conception of a better society. They have converged in conferences, friendships, and symbolic gestures of the international solidarity which is rooted deeply in their consciousness.

### Amsterdam

Since the end of the 1960s, more than 10,000 houses and apartments have been squatted in Amsterdam, and an additional 15,000 are now squatted in at least ten other Dutch cities. The huge base of the movement was obvious at the coronation of Queen Beatrice on April 30, 1980. "Geen woning-Geen kronung" (no place to live, no coronation) was the slogan for the demonstrations, but it was more a mobilizing call than a threat to

the royal ceremony. The squatters originally had hoped for a peaceful party day although, like any other day, they had also planned to occupy a few more empty dwellings. They were against a coronation so lavish that it cost 56 million guilder (then about \$25 million), but it was only after mounted police attacked some of the street parties that fighting began. The police were beaten so badly that the next week the police commissioner complained that many of his men could not continue to fulfill their duties for "psychological reasons."

In Amsterdam, a city of fewer than 800,000 inhabitants, more than 50,000 dwelling places are lacking. When polled, a majority of the Dutch people have repeatedly expressed sympathy for the squatters because of the dearth of reasonably priced places to live. Given the widespread sympathy enjoyed by the squatters, local authorities have attempted to divide the huge squatters' movement by naming only a few dangerous radicals who have "led astray" thousands of "honest" squatters. Police attacks on a perceived central movement leadership have been massive, but hastily assembled throngs of squatters have blocked the way to besieged houses in the Wendelstraat on March 3, 1980, and at the Groote Keyser after the coronation events. Squatters in Holland enjoy considerably more legal rights than elsewhere in Europe—once a chair, table, and bed have been moved in, legal residence has been established, and only a court ruling can authorize further action. Although these legal rights are being curtailed, the Dutch government now has its hands full dealing with the question of nuclear missiles, and it appears that it will be many years before there can be any way to outmaneuver the squatters.

#### Copenhagen

In 1972 a former army base on Christiania Island in Copenhagen was occupied by 50 people and, over the years, a diverse group of nearly 1,000 inhabitants has turned the more than 160 abandoned buildings into homes. Over the years Christiania has become a focal point for a cultural-political opposition in Denmark and the squatters there have repelled attacks both from police and from an invasion of bikers in 1976. More than 200 jobs in self-managed institutions have been

created in Christiania, providing foreigners and Danes alike with a countercultural haven from the society at large.<sup>2</sup> Today, however, there are severe internal problems in Christiania best symptomized by profit-hungry heroin and hashish dealers who have free run of this "liberated" zone. Unless the movement is able to stop the internal decline in their community, a fate similar to that of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury in the 1960s may befall Christiania.

#### Zurich

Over the last two years, a radical youth movement in Zurich has been in imaginative opposition to the complacency bred by Swiss prosperity. A combination of tactics including nude marches and roller-skate demonstrations have been used in an intense and successful struggle for an autonomous youth center. In the words of the activists themselves this center is a place "where new forms of living together can be found and our own culture developed [as a step toward a] society in which humanity, freedom of opinion, and the unfolding of the human personality can be made real." At the end of 1980 (after the center had been cleared by police), there were more than 1,100 youths facing criminal charges in Zurich, and general assemblies at least twice that size were debating the next steps the movement should take. 4

All this has been happening in a country where there are more jobs available than willing workers. There is, however, a housing crisis which, together with inflation, has resulted in a wave of house occupations and the creation of a shantytown named "Chaotikon" in one of Zurich's fashionable lakeside parks to dramatize (and partially solve) the problems young people have in finding a place to live. Chaotikon was cleared out and destroyed by riot police only a week after it was built, but an autonomous youth center has since been won, and the movement has spread to Basel, Bern, and Lausanne. In recent housing riots, two people were killed, and today the polarization of Swiss life has reached unexpected extremes.

#### West Germany

Beginning in December 1980, police attacks on squatted

December 1980, the paper's editors celebrated the barricades in the spirit of 1848, 1919, 1929, and 1967. But on Black Friday, their office in Berlin was raided by police, and its new issue was confiscated from kiosks in that city and throughout the country. To top it off, more than 25 criminal charges similar to "inciting to riot" were brought against the editors.

The violence of the street fighting quickly polarized the city; and two months later, in the elections of May 10, the radical alternative list won enough votes to enter the city government. In the process, however, the left helped to shatter the decades-old Social Democratic coalition government, thereby allowing the Christian Democrats to form a new majority coalition with a clear mandate to carry out a hard line against the mushrooming squatters' movement. (Between Black Friday and the city elections, the number of occupied houses had jumped from 35 to 160 in West Berlin and from 86 to 370 in all of West Germany.)

The first step taken by the new conservative government was to break off the negotiations with the squatters and call in the police against them. Twice after the elections—on May 26 and June 25-26—police attacks were met by street fighting of the intensity of Black Friday. Even after the media called it a "civil war," the Christian Democrats continued to believe that they could accomplish through force what the Social Democrats had sought at the bargaining table, and they vowed to clear out ten of the key squatter strongholds during the last week in August. In response, the squatters put out an international call to come to Berlin and defend the movement. In the inevitable confrontation (which was delayed until Haig had come and gone), an 18-yearold demonstrator was killed after 2,000 police charged eight occupied houses in Winterfeldplatz. The next night heavy rioting broke out in ten West German cities (as well as in Amsterdam), and only then did the Christian Democrats give in. On September 26, the stalemate was formally announced: no more attacks on squatters, and the Bundestag (the German equivalent of the U.S. House of Representatives) would debate the housing question.

The squatters' movement has been a key driving force of the new Europe-wide youth movement, but there are other movements of resistance—particularly against nuclear power and atomic weapons—which have been the focus of action in recent houses have touched off an escalating spiral of mass arrests, street fighting, and further occupations of vacant houses, particularly in West Berlin. Over 100 persons were arrested and more than twice that number injured there when barricade building and heavy street fighting lasted through the cold night of December 12. The squatters' movement quickly spread throughout West Germany and collided head-on with Bavarian order.

The conservative Christian Democratic government in southern Germany had long been critical of the attempts to "compromise" with the squatters by their scandal-ridden Social Democratic colleagues in Berlin, and they showed their own method of governing by clearing out all squatted houses in the south. Even so, the number of house occupations continued to climb, and police in southern Germany responded with mass arrests and more brutality.

A national call from the southern squatters for a day of solidarity demonstrations on Friday, March 13, 1981, sparked rallies and demonstrations in every major city in West Germany as well as in many other towns which had not seen a political action for over a decade. In Hamburg a peaceful demonstration of 5,000 people was viciously attacked by police with dogs, in a display of terror reminding many older witnesses of the Nazi brutality of 1933. The biggest demonstration in the history of Freiburg—21,000 people—was a festive affair; thousands marched in Bremen, Stuttgart, and Tübingen; and street fighting broke out in nearly all the big cities.

On "Black Friday"—as that day came to be called in Berlin—the downtown Kurfürstendamm (which caters to the shopping whims of chic, mainly upper-class customers) was heavily trashed, as it had been many times before; but unlike previous confrontations, the number of people in the streets reached at least 15,000, rather than the usual 2,000 to 3,000 militants, and the protesters spread out. There was a nude march at the same time as organized small groups of marauders attacked at least 39 buildings and even set the Reichstag on fire. The independent radical daily, *Die Tageszeitung*, estimated that the massive participation in the movement of Friday the 13th greatly exceeded any high points of the late 1960s when the New Left in Germany reached its highest level. After the street fighting in

years. Only recently has the issue of nuclear weapons become the primary target of international opposition.

### The Anti-Nuclear Movement in West Germany

From May 3 to June 6, 1980, at Gorleben (in the eastern part of West Germany), 5,000 activists staged a four-week livein on the ground where construction had begun on a huge underground waste disposal site for radioactive by-products from reactors in Germany and other countries served by the multinational German nuclear industry. A city was built from the already felled trees—a wonderfully diverse collection of houses-and dubbed the "Free Republic of Wendland" (a name taken from the region's traditional title). Local farmers, the majority of whom were against the nuclear dump yard, provided the thousands of resident-activists with food and enough materials to build their "republic." During the four weeks of occupation, passports were issued bearing the name of the new republic, imaginative illegal underground radio shows were broadcast, and newspapers were printed and distributed throughout the country. During what seemed to be endless discussions, the Wendlanders agreed on a tactic of passive, nonviolent resistance to the coming police invasion, a tactic which served its short-term purpose remarkably well.

On June 3, 1980, the largest deployment of police in Germany since Hitler—some 8,000 strong—violently attacked the sitting Wendlanders, as well as numerous reporters and photographers, and outraged thousands of people around the country. Once the site was cleared of people, the buildings were razed and barbed-wire fences erected around the construction zone. That same day, well-organized, peaceful protest marches occurred in over 25 cities. The police brutality against nonviolent demonstrators had the effect not of slowing the movement down or otherwise intimidating people, but of radicalizing the thousands who had lived at the Free Republic of Wendland and their growing ranks of supporters.\*

<sup>\*</sup> During late October and early November 1981, a similar scenario (resistance village and police invasion) was enacted in Frankfurt in an attempt to stop a new runway at the airport. This time, however, there was a majority fighting back.

The changed character of the anti-nuclear movement became obvious by February 28, 1981, when over 100,000 protesters converged on police barricades around the construction site of a nuclear power station at Brokdorf (near Hamburg). At the end of 1976 the building of the plant at Brokdorf had ended because of the decisive resistance mounted by the anti-nuclear movement, and when construction began again at the beginning of February, it took less than a month for the movement to respond. About 20,000 police and soldiers were mobilized to protect the construction site; the demonstration was declared illegal even before it began; and it was rumored that U.S. troops at nearby bases were given "shoot to kill" orders in case any demonstrators decided to attack U.S. nuclear weapons. At and around Brokdorf, however, thousands of people dared to converge on the last circle of fences at the construction site and attacked it with sticks, rocks, and Molotov cocktails. The police responded with massive blasts of tear gas fired from within the construction compound, and groups of 20 to 30 police were sporadically dropped from 35 helicopters; they beat back demonstrators for as long as possible (until a counter-attack could be organized) and then relifted to safety. By the end of the day, the construction site itself was still intact, but a new level of resistance had been reached by the movement against nuclear power. The passive nonviolence of Gorleben had given way to massive, active confrontation, and the stage was then set for Black Friday.

The youth movement was the first to raise the issues of nuclear weapons and resurgent militarism in Germany. Almost a year before the recent fighting at Brokdorf, the annual induction ceremonies for the *Bundeswehr* (the West German army) was beseiged by angry demonstrators at the soccer stadium in Bremen. Part of the stadium and many empty buses which had been used to transport the new recruits to the induction center were set in flames by Molotov cocktails, and hundreds of helmeted demonstrators bitterly fought with the surprised police. Similar ceremonies were attacked later in Bonn and Hanover.

The massive mobilizations in October 1981 against the NATO plan to bring new nuclear weapons to Europe had their

roots in these militant actions. The hundreds of thousands marching in the streets today have surprised many people, as has the emergence of the extraparliamentary youth movement. Five years ago in the London-based magazine New Left Review, at a time when West Germany was suffering a rightwing "anti-terrorist" mobilization, an article was published in which it was said that Germany appeared to be the "last stable fortress of reaction in Europe." The mass movement there today is one of the most volatile in the industrialized core of the world system. In the next section, the movement's roots are located both in the world economic crisis and in cultural dislocation of a highly industrialized society.

#### Causes of the Unrest

In recent years, the "economic miracle" of postwar Europe has turned into economic crisis. This turnabout worried the guardians of Pax Americana long before their attention was called to the possibility of a breakdown in Western Europe's military and political alliance with the United States. The word recession has become widely used only recently in the United States, but in Western Europe, depression has long been used. In the last year alone unemployment in Common Market countries rose 30 percent. Since Margaret Thatcher came to power in May 1979, Great Britain's unemployment rate has more than doubled to over 12 percent (about 3 million people), the highest rate in over 50 years. Butch unemployment has risen to a postwar record of over 350,000. As early as the middle of 1980, unemployment in West Germany exceeded one million for the first time since 1954, and is now more than one and a quarter million.

Since the postwar baby boom in Germany was delayed until after reconstruction, the jobless rate among youth today is much higher than it was for their parents, and the number of young people aged 15 to 29 entering the workforce will not reach its peak until 1987. Not only are many young people increasingly denied a job by the social order, but many are unable to find a place to live as well. In West Berlin, over

17,000 people, the vast majority of them under the age of 35, are registered with the local housing authority as without a residence. Unofficial estimates in the establishment media place the number of people without housing as high as 50,000 at the same time as it is publicly admitted that there are between 7,000 and 17,000 empty houses and apartments. <sup>10</sup> The situation in other major German cities is not much better. In Munich, more than 10,000 homeless people have registered with the housing office, and even by conservative estimates an additional 12,000 are searching for housing on the city's "free market." In all of West Germany, it has been estimated that as many as a million dwelling units are lacking. <sup>11</sup>

The shortages of housing and jobs are serious, but there is another aspect of the crisis now faced by Western Europe: a cultural-motivational one, obvious in the unwillingness of young people to integrate themselves into what they consider to be the "middle class." The legitimacy of the family, the hegemony of the state, and the complacency of an everyday existence predicated on material comforts in exchange for hard work have become questioned in theory and practice by many young people. Traditional issues of the workers' movement-unions, wages, and working conditions-have become negotiable within the welfare state's institutional apparatus, and the union bureaucracy does not substantially differ from established political parties. The national executive committee of the German Federation of Unions forbade its members to officially participate in the recent peace march in Bonn, but over 300 locals endorsed the march, and large contingents of predominantly young unionists were present.

The new radicals seem less concerned with material comforts for themselves than with creating a new relationship between human beings and nature and finding a way of life freed from both capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic domination. Their aspirations for a nuclear-free, fully housed society seem to be unattainable within the present system; their aesthetic fight to save the old cities from becoming concrete jungles defies the logic of large-scale capitalist efficiency; and their notion of freedom as more than freedom from material want seems incomprehensible in a world where starvation and

war are still remembered by many Europeans. This culturalpolitical movement calls for long-term fundamental changes, but the immediate prospects outside small activist enclaves are none too bright, particularly in West Germany, since the Christian Democrats are in a position to take over if and when the Social Democrats fall.

World conditions and the state's repression so far have served to broaden the movement and heighten the resistance, but internal conditions and co-optive political forces now seem to threaten the vitality of the extraparliamentary left. The rootless nature of a movement comprised mainly of young people without steady jobs, teenagers whose occupied houses are under attack, is all too apparent and gives the movement an unsteady character. If there are older activists involved in the present movement, they are from the New Left of the 1960s, a movement whose *internal* collapse may prefigure the fate of the new youth movement.

# Spontaneity and Consciousness

The new movement in Germany has begun where the old one ended-from the fusion of a cultural politics-and this time it is punk rock which has become the music of the movement. The putschism and commando tactics which contributed to the New Left's demise, however, have been supplanted by anarchy and disorder as the specters raised by the movement's radicals. "No power to anyone" is a popular slogan. The black leather jackets worn by many neatly match the black flag carried by others. It is not really an ideological anarchism as much as a style of behavior within the movement which makes contempt for the established institutions and their U.S. "protectors" into a virtue on an equal footing with disdain for the "socialist" governments in Eastern Europe. Nude marches and an unwillingness to communicate with politicians are facets of the movement which have caused order-addicted German authorities a great deal of consternation. When former Hamburg Mayor Ulrich Klose invited the staff members of the city's high school newspaper down to City Hall, five of the students came and stayed only long enough to reveal stylish circled "A's" painted on their bare behinds.

The movement today is more diverse and unpredictable and less theoretical and organized than the New Left was. The universities and the middle class spawned the New Left, but today it is not primarily students who are involved; and although it is predominantly youth, it is not exclusively so, as was nearly the case ten years ago. From working-class rockers to feminists, recent immigrants from Turkey to the elderly, students to single mothers, and born-again Christians to ideological anarchists, the new radicals are more a motley collection than a self-defined collectivity. The practical consciousness of the squatters' and anti-nuclear movements has not grown much beyond an understanding of single-issue struggles and reaction to the state. Disputes within the movement and the rapid pace of events have not allowed an appreciation of the importance of the mass base of the movement. All the different movements of resistance stop short of together comprising a unified whole. Instead, today there is a fragmented leadership at a time when the left is growing rapidly.

Liberal opposition political leaders hope to step into this vacuum of leadership and channel the growing anti-U.S. feelings into the established German political system. Some politicans have begun to take up the left's call for a nuclearfree zone, and others have raised the issue of reuniting Germany. At the October 10th rally in Bonn, for example, a former Social Democratic mayor of West Berlin was heard describing himself as a German patriot, and representatives from the Free Democrats also spoke out for a "German nationalism of the left." Such a new parliamentary maneuver "from the left" could help to defuse the radical potential of the situation. In the short run, such co-optation is difficult to fault, since NATO's re-escalation of the arms race would be supported by the Christian Democrats if they were able to form a new government in Bonn. The long-run consequences of such co-optation, however, would be to strengthen the state and the two-party system (modeled on the United States). The extraparliamentary left would be weakened and so would the small but growing new left political forces—the Alternative List in Berlin and the Green Party. These groups owe a good deal of their support to the energy being generated in the streets, as the parties themselves admit. The Social Democrats may yet stage a public transformation and regain some or all of the support they now seem to be rapidly losing.

## Spontaneity and Leadership

Because it contains political divisions and diverse memberships, the squatters' movement has generated a loose form of tactical organization within which many people participate in democratically formulating programs, making decisions, and debating differences. Open general assemblies have been the final decision-making bodies of the Zurich radicals, the Christiania communards, and the squatters in Amsterdam and Berlin. Within these general assemblies, decisions are reached as often as possible through the consensus of hundreds of people, a process which seeks to maximize democracy and participation and to nurture the expansion of activists' political consciousness. Smaller groups sometimes are chosen out of the general assembly, but only to carry out the decisions of the larger group.

The anti-nuclear movement is structured similarly along decentralized, bottom-up lines. Locally organized, short-term action committees have put out the major calls for demonstrations. Although actions have been nationally coordinated, there still is no central anti-nuclear coalition of forces capable of mapping out a coherent strategy or evening out the movement's ups and downs. Apparently such a centralized leadership is considered superfluous, given the fact that the anti-nuclear movement continues to build its mobilization capacities and popular support.

The pragmatic activism and decentralization of the left are healthy qualities testifying to its grass roots strength. At the same time, however, the fragmentation of the youthful left's theory and practice and its social isolation are serious obstacles made worse by internal dynamics, which are scarcely discussed within decentralized activist circles.

If there are elements in the movement which contain the seeds of liberation, there are others—ones of aggression and destruction—which tend in the other direction. "Punk rules"

runs a popular slogan. "Germany—all downhill now—fire and flames" goes another. This kind of pure nihilism is expressed in a variety of ways. Indications like the combat boots and black leather jackets worn by many militants can be disregarded as superficial, but there are equally obvious characteristics of the left which merit serious attention: a scathing anti-intellectualism, an overt and often unchallenged male view of events, and random violent clashes among the members themselves. To put it mildly, there is often a failure to establish a peaceful and supportive community, and there is more than just a dose of German national pride. On these levels, the left has not broken with some of the worst elements of their cultural tradition. There has been a conscious theoretical break with established politics, and an alternative mode has been developed. There has been a conscious rebellion against middle-class values, and the aesthetic rejection of concrete condominiums has led to an ecological vision of "green" cities. Neither of these oppositional moments of the left, however, necessarily means that the movement has internally solidified enough to provide a socially legitimate leadership for the millions of anti-nuclear Germans.

The problem is further complicated by many activists' vows never to become integrated into the "middle class," a fate suffered for better or worse by all but a few of the previous generation(s) of activists. The most prominent example of those who have not been absorbed into the system are imprisoned members of guerrilla groups, some of whom have sacrificed their lives in hunger strikes protesting against their sunless, constantly videotaped isolation cells. Despite severe legal sanctions against publicly supporting the "terrorists," solidarity with these prisoners has become an important rallying point. But it is more the plight of the prisoners and their non-compromise with the system than an espousal of their tactic which motivates this support. As the severity of police attacks on the squatters increased, so did the affinity of many activists for armed responses.

For its part, the state will continue to alternate its use of both the carrot and the stick, hoping not only to split off the movement's "hard core" from "marginal supporters" but also to drive the more militant activists into underground actions not tied concretely to a mass base. As long as the struggle is between the forces of law and order on one side and militant street-fighters and "terrorists" on the other, the vast majority will have little choice but to sit on the sidelines and take in the spectacle.

Whether or not the struggle of young people spreads, it is a fact already that a massive peace movement has emerged which will continue to confront the nuclear insanity of generals and politicians. Even though there are severe problems within the youth movement, nowhere else in the political universe of Western Europe do the desire for a different kind of world and the necessity of building a new way of life coincide. More than a decade after the collapse of the New Left, newly developed youth movements continue to question many of the fundamental premises of industrial civilization. In this questioning, there is hope that the revolutionary movements of tomorrow may help to create a new kind of society, based not on the accumulation of wealth and power, but on the improvement of the quality of life for all.

#### NOTES

- 1. I will consistently use conservative estimates in this article, since I have no intention to inflate the scope of the events in question. At the anti-Haig demonstration, for example, it was estimated by some that at least 80,000 demonstrators were involved, probably a more accurate number than the police guess of 50,000. German sources include the Frankfurter Allgemeine and Die Tageszeitung. All translations from the German are the author's.
- 2. More analysis of Christiania can be found in Christiania: Selbts-organization von Nichtangepassten by Heiner Luft Kastell (Copenhagen, 1977) and Christiania: Argumente zur Erhaltung eines befreiten Stadtwertels, Doris Teller, Heiner Gringmuth and Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert, eds. (Werdorf: Gisela Lotz Verlag, 1978). 3. "Offener Brief an den Stadtrat Von Zurich," Zurich Tages-Anzeiger (December
- 13, 1980), p. 34.
- 5. Die Tageszeitung (May 4, 1981), p. 12.
- Los Angeles Times (August 26, 1981), p. 12.
- 7. Die Tageszeitung, March 26, 1981, p. 11. 8. Los Angeles Times, August 26, 1981, p. 120.
- 9. One of the best sources of information about the increasingly serious problems of the West German economy is Von Wirtschaftswunder zur Wirtschaftskrise by Elmar Altvater, Jürgen Hoffman, and Willi Semmler (Berlin: Verlag Olle und Wolter, 1979). The data referred to are on pp. 100, 258-259, and 263.
- 10. Die Tagespiegel (Berlin) (June 8, 1980).
- 11. Die Tageszeitung (May 5, 1981), p. 8.