

sequence of this appeal to the past is that it brings out continuities between the dictatorial regimes of the present and the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period. Thus it appears that history may provide a new source of legitimacy for illiberal, antidemocratic leaders—and, as Rothschild argues, it is already doing so.

Of course, there is no way of knowing whether this perverse use of the past will finally prevail. And events in Poland provide a hopeful counter-model. There, millions of citizens have repeatedly demonstrated in support not only of national sovereignty but also of freedom from repression, arbitrary one-party rule, and unchecked government power.

Such popular movements lead me to resist Rothschild's gloomiest forecasts. If

politics were restricted to official goings-on, then I would be convinced that current developments in most of Eastern Europe signal a return to the severely limited political life of the 1930s, with ritualistic mass plebiscites and elections ("whose outcomes are known in advance") as window-dressing for autocratic regimes. But the maturity of peaceful mass politics exhibited by millions of Poles is something new under the Eastern European sun. Only if movements like Solidarity fail to survive and spread, will we have cause to fear, along with Rothschild, that a repressive Soviet empire will someday be replaced only by a half-dozen smaller repressive states.

—Mária M. Kovács, '88

NEW TITLES

History

THE UNMASTERABLE PAST: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity by Charles S. Maier. Harvard, 1988. 227 pp. \$22.50

Last autumn, the speaker of the West German parliament, Phillip Jenninger, was forced to resign after failing to condemn the Holocaust in a speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Nazi's "Krystallnacht" attack on German Jews. The incident received worldwide press attention, but it was only the latest in a national controversy over German responsibility for the horrors of Hitler's Third Reich. German scholars, as Harvard historian Maier shows, have long been at the forefront of the debate. Conservative historians, among them Ernst Nolte, argue that, while the Holocaust was terrible, it was no worse than Stalin's mass-murder cam-

paigns in the Soviet Union or Pol Pot's genocide in Cambodia. Others even suggest that it was a precautionary measure: Hitler, alarmed by Stalinist purges and Jewish support for Great Britain, created Auschwitz and Treblinka in self-defense. Among leftist scholars outraged by such assertions is sociologist Jürgen Habermas. He sees in the conservative revision of German history a not-so-veiled effort to revive German nationalism (a perception acknowledged by some conservatives, including Michael Stürmer, who say that West Germany cannot be an effective member of NATO without a guilt-free national identity). The debate is not merely academic, Maier says. Waged on the editorial pages of leading German newspapers, it is bound up with domestic politics, which have grown increasingly unstable during the era of détente and declining prosperity. Maier fears that the issue, if unresolved, could even endanger the Western alliance.