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## Berlin Journal

# The War Memorial: To Embrace the Guilty, Too?

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BERLIN, Nov. 14 — German officials dedicated a national monument today that is intended to honor victims of past conflicts, but the angry protests and boycotts that marred the ceremony suggested that Germans have not yet reached a consensus about how to confront their recent history.

The monument stands in a Neoclassical 175-year-old former Prussian guardhouse on Unter den Linden, Berlin's most elegant boulevard. It contains a single large room centered on a statue of a grieving mother holding the body of her son. On the floor is the inscription, "To the Victims of War and Tyranny."

Chancellor Helmut Kohl chose the site, the inscription and the statue, which is an enlargement of a small original modeled by the German graphic artist and sculptor Käthe Kollwitz. Mr. Kohl laid a wreath at the ceremony today.

"This monument is an important symbol of reunited Germany and the free democratic system of our constitution, which affirms the dignity, value and rights of each citizen," Mr. Kohl said.

### Inscription Is Deplored

As the Chancellor and dignitaries sat through the brief ceremony, protesters could be heard chanting.

The protesters disapprove of the site, which has been a prison and was a monument during the Nazi era, and the statue, which they say fails to portray the horror Germans inflicted on their own citizens and on citizens of foreign lands. But they are most strongly opposed to the inscription, which they say fails to differentiate between victims and perpetrators.

Last week, several dozen demonstrators chained themselves to the monument in protest. "German murderers are not victims!" they shouted as police arrested them.

Hundreds of protesters turned out in the rain today to chant similar slogans. Several prominent figures showed disapproval by staying away.

"This inscription places victims and perpetrators on the same level," said Jerzy Kanal, chairman of Berlin's principal Jewish organization, who refused to attend the ceremony. "Naturally there were also German war victims, but they were perpetrators at the same time, and they should not be mixed with the innocent Jews who suffered."

### Swastikas and Yellow Stars

The police also detained about 200 rightists in several German states on this, the National Day of Mourning. One group tried to hold a rally at a World War II cemetery in Halbe, a small town southeast of Berlin.

The Culture Minister of Berlin, Ulrich Roloff-Momin, also stayed away



Attending a dedication yesterday of a national monument in Berlin intended to honor victims of past German conflicts were Chancellor Helmut Kohl, left, and President Richard von Weizsäcker, second from right. Reuters



The New York Times

The memorial to victims of past conflicts is in the Neue Wache, a guard house built to celebrate Prussia's victory over Napoleon.

and joined more than 50 writers and public figures in signing a statement asserting that the monument "can never be a place for remembering the victims of German fascism."

"Should it now be considered in Germany that those who voluntarily wore swastikas were the same as those who were forced to wear yellow stars with the word 'Jew'?" the statement asked.

The essayist Reinhart Koselleck suggested that the inscription be changed to read, "To the Dead: Fall-

en, Murdered, Gassed, Died, Missing." "The inscription disguises what happened and ignores the brutal and absurd truth of our history," Mr. Koselleck wrote.

Despite such protests, Chancellor Kohl refused to alter his plans for the memorial but agreed to allow a brass tablet to be affixed outside the main entrance. It carries a quotation from a 1985 speech by President Richard von Weizsäcker naming some groups that fell victim to Nazi terror.

Officials said that Mr. Kohl made the concession to assure the presence today of Ignatz Bubis, Germany's principal Jewish spokesman. The Chancellor also agreed to support Mr. Bubis's proposal for a separate Jewish memorial.

Mr. Bubis said the Chancellor's decisions did not leave him "jumping for joy," but he called them "a compromise we can live with."

### Is Pietà the Right Image?

The striking building in which the memorial stands, known as the Neue Wache (New Guard House), was designed by the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel to celebrate Prussia's victory over Napoleon. It was used as a garrison and a holding cell for prisoners. For most of its history, it was used for military ceremonies. During the Nazi era it served as a memorial to victims of World War I.

Allied bombing seriously damaged the building, and it remained shut until 1960, when the East German Government opened it as a monument "to the victims of fascism and militarism." The remains of an unknown soldier and an unknown concentration camp victim are still buried under the stone floor.

Although the building's history and the inscription aroused most of the protests, some also complained about the statue, which is a modern version of the classic Pietà design, showing the dead Jesus in Mary's lap. Mr. Kohl said he favored it because Kollwitz was one of Germany's greatest artists, and because her personal history reflected the country's: Kollwitz's son died in World War I and a grandson was killed in World War II.

"The pain and doubt of countless women who, over the centuries, have sought and perhaps found solace in the image of the mother of God is here misused to suggest the inescapable necessity of suffering and sacrifice," said the art historian Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, who urged that a different statue be used. "The purpose of choosing this statue is to use the image of a suffering mother to promote national unity. Perpetrators and victims are gathered into her lap."