The point of departure for right-wing agitation is the naturalization of politics and society. The belief in systems of leaders and vassals, in struggling as an existential form of life, the belief that peoples should be sharply separated and the identification with one's own are the basic patterns of a political ideology which is legitimated by the unquestionable axiomatic faith that these principles are a natural given (Jaschke 1987). From this point of view, which does not require any further rational foundation because of the eternal validity of its principles, present circumstances such as the quarrelling between political parties or the increasing rate of foreigners seem to be unnatural or decadent. It is the mythical belief in Germany and in the German people and its fate that determines the spirit of the right wingers and not any rational discourse, argument, compromise or the conflict of legitimate pluralist interests. Thus the right wingers are opposed to a democratic culture of political discussions, which is based on willingness to compromise, a basic consensus and respect for the legitimate interests of others (Sarcinelli 1990).

Xenophobia and racism are everyday phenomena in practically all Western European countries at the end of the twentieth century. With societies becoming more and more multi-cultural, they appear on the level of attitudes and behaviour towards foreigners but also in politically organized form (The Runnymede Trust 1986; Backes 1990a; Bauer and Niedermayer 1990; Schubarth, Pschierer and Schmidt 1991; Gress, Jaschke and Schönekäs 1990). Extreme right-wing parties, such as the British and French National Front, the Republikaner in Germany and the Italian Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI: Caciagli 1988; Gress, Jaschke and Schönekäs 1990, p.122), are still more or less marginal parts of the spectrum of political parties but they constitute important points of crystallization for a more general pre-democratic collective readiness for protest which is also a part of political culture in Europe. There are indications that racist, xenophobic potentials – most of all among the youth – are also emerging in Eastern
Europe after the breakdown of the socialist systems (Ködderitzsch and Müller 1990; Schumann 1990; Brück 1991).

According to Konrad Schacht, an election analyst,

the number of voters who decide in favour of the extreme right-wing parties represents only a relatively small part of the general readiness for adopting a right-wing point of view and the protest potential which exists in our society and which could be mobilized in favour of a right-wing party, e.g. in case of an economic crisis or under the strong pressure of immigration. (Schacht 1991a, 1991b)

Similarly, Eike Hennig states: ‘illiberality, intolerance, crude simplification, unquestioned acceptance of fixed rules and regulations, steadfastness and the rejection of strangers (“people of a different nature”) – these important hallmarks of a right-wing attitude and character – remain within the spectrum of established and accepted behaviour. The majority of persons with right-wing attitudes have so far been submerged among the voters for the Christian Democratic and Christian Socialist Union (CDU/CSU) parties’ (Hennig 1991, p.219). Even before the unification of both German states in October 1990 it had become obvious that latent views and manifest forms of protest from the right wing are not at all confined to the Western capitalist societies, but are also spreading in the former so-called socialist countries. But whereas in the latter cases the political abuse of power by the former corrupt ruling cliques can be held responsible for this phenomenon, this motive is not the reason for the development in the old FRG and the other nations of Western Europe.

Right-wing extremism can be examined from a political point of view such as its relationships to the political system and the competing parties (Stöss 1988; Backes 1990b). It can be studied under social psychological aspects and one can consider the question of to what extent Adorno’s thesis of the ‘authoritarian personality’ still may be valid (Claussen 1989). Other sociological points of view analyse the decline of traditional social structures and moral concepts and emphasize the orientation problems of young persons, which open up the trails to the right wing today (Heitmeyer 1987, 1991).

Right-wing extremism thus is a political and social phenomenon, which has many causes and must be analysed in different ways. In the following section – using the example of the German case – the question of to what extent this form of protest shows distinct sub-cultural features will be examined. Is there a right-wing milieu? Is there an organizational network by which it is held together? What are the