

promises to be different. Was it not his conservatives, in power from 1982 to 1998, who bloated Germany's bureaucracy, expanded welfare programs and ran up the national deficit faster than you can say "socialism"? "Stoiber's reflexes are for more government," says Wilhelm Hennis, politics professor at the University of Freiburg.

If there's a realm of genuine difference between the two, it concerns foreign policy. Schröder's populist stand on Iraq has isolated Germany even from its barely less Bush-phobic allies. With antiwar sentiment running high, the normally pro-American Stoiber has kept his distance from the administration as well. But unlike the Social Democrats, his party hasn't bolted entirely. While Stoiber tells the voters there will be "no military adventures," his shadow foreign minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, sends a friendlier signal. "Saddam is a problem we have to deal with, and the threat of military action needs to be kept up," he recently told *NEWSWEEK*.

The differences are equally clear on less high-profile but just as pressing issues. German-French relations, once a motor for European integration, are virtually frozen—mainly because Schröder and President Jacques Chirac just don't click. Without Europe's two largest states at least in rough agreement on a course for the EU, watershed decisions on institutional reform, agricultural subsidies and regional funds aren't being taken. The French are so tickled by the thought of getting rid of Schröder, in fact, that last July Chirac named him a commander of the Legion of Honor—an unprecedented interference in a neighbor's election campaign.

German-British relations are almost as cool. What looked like an emerging entente on pro-market reforms died a quick death after the left wing of Schröder's party told him to back off. Though no economic liberal, Stoiber's politics should at least be closer to Tony Blair's. "Stoiber understands better than Schröder that a strong Europe is good for Germany," says Daniel Gros, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels.

Of course, it's the economy that will make or break any government. And with no direct election of the chancellor, Germany's future depends not only on the two main parties but also the three smaller ones, the Free Democrats, Greens and Communists. Once the vote is in, coalition politics will require compromises. That might morph either candidate into yet another confusing image. Germany's mounting problems are laid out in brutal clarity. One would wish their choice in the election were as clear. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS—MAGNUM FOR NEWSWEEK

TARGETS: Some worry about creating an Orthodox ghetto

Birds & Trees, Poles & String

London's plan to create an *eruv* stirs up a flurry of controversy

BY CARLA POWER

FORGET AL QAEDA OR IRAQ. IN the leafy and luxurious suburbs of North London, the big controversy involves a loop of nylon and some poles. Since 1992, residents of the borough of Barnet have debated whether to build an *eruv*, some 200 of which exist worldwide from Venice to St. Louis. Within the boundaries of these *eruvim*, Orthodox Jews are freed from adhering to the more extreme restrictions of their traditional Sabbath—such as a ban on carrying medications or keys outside the home, or using a baby stroller or wheelchair.

If that sounds innocuous enough, think again. London's *eruv* will amount to no more than 84 boundary poles ranged around an 11-mile perimeter. But it's been debated with all the passion and precision of Talmudic scholarship. Secular and Orthodox Jews have faced off in fury. Nonreligious Jews argue that the nylon-string-and-pole boundary symbolically separates Jews from other Britons. Environmentalists and homeown-

ers have battled against multiculturalists and synagogue committees. There have been community meetings, newspaper editorials, muttered threats of vandalism. Anti-*eruv*ists object that the poles block house façades or might disrupt traffic, or possibly bird-migration patterns. Those in favor argue it would make life easier for some of the 10,000 Orthodox who live in Barnet.

Late last month the Barnet Council approved the plan (after agreeing to change the color of the poles from sage green to goose-wing gray) and workmen busied themselves putting up the *eruv*. End of story? Not quite. Members of the Forum Against Intrusive *Eruvs* claim the installations are illegal. There's speculation that some in the anti-*eruv* camp may appeal—or take more radical action. One 80-year-old woman has said if she were spry enough, she'd cut down the markers herself.

Why all the fuss? Perhaps because the proposed *eruv* seems to challenge a hallowed English tradition of religious quietude. Anglicanism, the official state religion, is an unostentatious faith, eschewing the drama of, say, Roman Catholic liturgy or the five

daily prayers of Islam. And Britain's nearly 300,000 Jews have traditionally tended toward assimilation rather than toward overt displays of Jewishness, says Todd Endelman, author of "The Jews of Britain." Secular Jews also worry that, by marking their neighborhood as Jewish, the *eruv* could create what some describe as an Orthodox "ghetto." Worse, some fear it could attract terrorists.

The anti-*eruv* crowd is also concerned about less spiritual issues, like wildlife and (dare we say it) property values. North Londoners whose homes are included within the boundary claim that the *eruv* could infringe their innate human right to an elegant suburb. Others fret that the *eruv* would somehow damage trees on Hampstead Heath, a large local park, or that birds will entangle themselves in the *eruv*. Indeed, the Brits' fondness for animals may yet trump their open-mindedness. "If you demonstrated that the mating habits of the yellow-bellied sapsucker would be harmed, the *eruv*'s opponents could win any appeal," says Ned Temko, editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*. He's only half joking. ■