

THE HOPES AND FEARS OF WEST GERMANY

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If one mentions to German friends that we in America have taken the successfully running film, *Rosemary*, as a true—and disturbing—picture of their “fabulous fifties,” they only smile and answer that the film tells about Frankfurt and that Frankfurt is not Germany. In fact, they point to this old city, Goethe’s birthplace, as a “little America,” not only because of the obvious presence of G.I.’s, but primarily because its population has adopted something similar to the American way of life amidst a new architectural setting they describe as “American style.”

But outside Frankfurt, Germany does not appear to be the natural habitat of high-class call girls like Rosemary Nitribitt. The impression one receives, whether in Bavaria or in the Rhineland, is one of serious people going about their work, although many claim that the West Germans have become less obsessed with *tüchtigkeit* and more interested in leisure and a good time. But when I remark upon the seriousness and the somehow closed features of the people one sees in trains, tramways, streets and restaurants, I mean a kind of indifference to any but personal problems, a life in a vacuum.

A historical and political vacuum in the first place. Whether we like it or not, those who belong to our generation will continue asking the Germans—even if tacitly—what they remember of the Nazi era, how it affected them. The Western press, English, French, American, keeps voicing its disapproval that the German government and schools (decentralized and under the authority of the Lander) do not tell more about the recent past, and do not invite the population to a permanent manifestation of collective repentance. But it is quite evident here on the spot that the Germans actually forgot *that* past and have become a nation without memory. There are books, the latest is Paul Schalluck’s pocketbook best-seller, *Engelbert Reinecke*, which delve deeply into the

dilemma whether to avenge the victims or to try to forgive the guilty and rebuild life with them, but these deal with the human conscience and thus with the anguished problems of individuals.

On the collective level the Germans have preferred not to speak of the Nazis, and by dint of a long silence the memories have truly faded. This was particularly striking at the presentation of the Swedish-made film (by a German emigrant), *Mein Kampf*, that I saw in Munich. The house was fully packed with people of all ages and social classes. There was a hushed silence throughout the projection, interrupted only by brief laughter at some particularly studied—and in the close-ups ridiculous—gestures of the orating Hitler and Goebbels. Even in the dark I could observe on my neighbors’ faces the horror which shut tight their lips but was eloquent in their eyes. More than this embarrassed *mea culpa* (the film runs in all big cities, and teachers have been instructed to take their pupils—up from twelve years of age—to see it) one cannot expect of a nation which intends to live for the future.

The future and the present appear to be quite translatable into American terms. Today West Germany is a large middle class, politically rather indifferent, leaving its spiritual problems to a class of active and professional-looking intellectuals; it lavishes much public money on the construction of large cultural centers where the public can enjoy operas and concerts, plays and exhibits. Architecturally this yields intriguing constructions and surprisingly clever mixtures of styles when, as in the Gunsenich of Cologne, for example, the bombed-out ruins of an old church are masterfully integrated with a super-modern concert hall (and a restaurant in the cellar).

The shops and department stores are abundantly stuffed and the prices are as stiff as in corresponding stores in the States. The only reminders of more difficult times are the still numerous low buildings erected hastily in the place of bomb-erased buildings, which look like barracks. Their primitive and lamentable exterior contrasts strangely with the brightly lit stores and shop windows they harbor.

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This not-showy and somewhat tepid prosperity exists in the framework of an uneasy political situation. The West may feel resigned, even relieved, at the thought that Germany will remain indefinitely divided; but here this does not appear to be a settled problem at all. Many political decisions are made or debated in view of how the East Germans will react, whether they will be demoralized or given

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hope. Thus one reason why Konrad Adenauer insists on a second, state-controlled television channel is that it could better concentrate on propaganda and on keeping the population of the "Zone" (as East Germany is called here) attached to a concept of free, democratic Germany. This is especially important since now East German television and radio stations are so strong that in Hamburg or Schleswig-Holstein they are tuned in more easily than are, for example, the broadcasts from Munich.

Ties of family and friendship are also channels which proclaim the inseparability of the two Germans. People always have a few stories ready to illustrate the discontent in the Zone, the beastliness of the Communists, and the anxious calls from the "other side" not to be forgotten. With all this, however, my friends admit that much of their compatriots' suffering is imposed by Ulbricht's creatures rather than by the Russians themselves. "You know," one of them said to me, "we Germans do things thoroughly on whatever side we are: here we imitate conscientiously the Americans, in the East they are more Communist than the Russians."

"Americanized" or not, there is no doubt that German politics is now very firmly planted in the Western world. Talks one hears in the United States about some future about-face, neutralism and alliance with Russia are pure nonsense, and the plight of East Germany, if nothing else, would be enough to discourage any rapprochement with the huge Red neighbor. The Russian war of nerves in Berlin is intended, precisely, to eliminate this point of constant comparison between well-being and misery; and the tales of the still-pouring refugees from the Zone are a permanent reminder that the Communist "thaw" exists only in the minds of Western intellectuals.

The political and economic situation being what it is—and what it has been now for years—intelligent German observers say that Adenauer will win the elections once more. "Why exclude the possibility of grace?" the Chancellor answered when someone respectfully inquired whether he wanted to live and remain active up to the age of one-hundred. The strength of his personality is still the most important single factor in German political life; to a large extent it is responsible for keeping the divergent interests manifest in the Christian Democratic Union together, and for the centralizing tendency which the self-governing Lander cannot successfully resist. But everybody agrees that even if *der Alte* disappears from the political scene, neither his own party nor the Social Democrats can modify his policies in any significant manner.

Almost single-handed, Adenauer has forged German unity and self-respect, and the Germans themselves admit that they need a strong man to lead them. The philosopher Karl Jaspers has recently argued before television and in a series of articles that Bismarckian Germany is forever gone, and the best one may hope for is a slow process of liberation (*not* just liberalization) granted by the Kremlin to its East German satellite which then would re-enter into some federal relationship with her Western twin. But without paying much attention to the historical predictions of philosophers and intellectuals, Adenauer has made of the Bundesrepublik a strong and respected member of the Western community. In quiet residential Bonn, which the Germans call a "village," this new might and influence are wisely hidden; only the many cars with "CD" on their license plates remind the man in the street that this is a capital city, one of the focal points of Western diplomacy.

The political importance and influence of the Federal Republic are unquestionably growing. This can be ascertained also in the increasing number of students from Arab and Negro countries who come to German universities to learn technique and know-how, economics and engineering. But this is particularly evident from the key position that West Germany occupies again in Europe.

• This is a key position, but also a controversial one. When, a few weeks ago, Adenauer allowed the army to send up the trial balloon of the famous memorandum signed by Admiral Ruge, the chorus of the British, French, Polish and Czech press, not to mention that of the Soviet Union, cried out with one voice against Germany becoming an atomic power. Yet the request, presented in moderate terms, seems quite logical and reasonable. Messrs Adenauer and Strauss, the German generals and the Pentagon, know that the duty of a government is to equip its army with the best and most up-to-date weapons it may possess. Treaties signed against such a step are unrealistic, and in the present situation they may be even dangerous. With the bulk of the French army tied down in Algeria, the German military force represents the defense of a Europe whose armies will perhaps never be integrated. Moreover, Europeans—not only the Germans—cannot escape the impression that once the United States does possess the ultimate deterrent weapon, it will pull out its ground forces from the continent and retire to its peripheral bases in Great Britain and Spain. With all the talk about the "democratization" of their army, the Ger-

man generals insist on a complete military build-up in the face of unceasing Russian threats.

But the problem of supplying the German army with nuclear weapons—and note how fast the British were to respond to the hardly concealed request!—is only part of the larger European problem of integration and unity. At his September 5 press conference, which I attended, de Gaulle made it very clear that France would not be pressured into adopting the “unrealistic scheme” of placing her army under other than French command. Furthermore, as he stated with patience and his usual articulateness, even a new Europe must be founded on existing and traditional bases, that is, the nation-states (*patries*) with which political decisions, he thinks, must ultimately rest.

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Now this statement, while confirming the German leaders in some of the directions they have taken, was quite disturbing to many readers on the other side of the Rhine. Intelligent observers remark that the de Gaulle-Adenauer honeymoon is over, and that Macmillan is quick to reap the benefits for Great Britain. For one thing, it is argued, the Chancellor would never go too far in antagonizing the Anglo-Saxons; for another thing, he is apprehensive of a renascent German militarism (once he is no longer there) not tempered by Europe-wide guarantees of cooperation and integration. There is no doubt either that if not he personally, many in his entourage fear a French hegemony on the continent, and not only military but economic as well. (One must only hear Germans speak of the formidable French economic come-back already before, and now under de Gaulle, to measure the extent of this fear.) Hence the pressure on Adenauer to bring the Six and the Seven together, to walk the tightrope between the French and the British.

Thus a substantial segment of German politicians and intellectuals insist, for one reason or another, on multiplying the ties of integration with France, Great Britain and the rest of Europe. These men consider themselves good “Europeans” precisely because they are good Germans; they express, some with signs of embarrassment, others quite freely, their fear of the never-extinguished German military spirit, kept awake by the new *Drang nach Osten* to liberate the Zone and the other occupied territories. One receives the impression that what they want most is to tie the sleeping giant, Germany, to a renascent and again vigorous Europe, thereby strengthening both.

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