

BERLIN AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

What is the Basis of the Malaise Among West Germans Today?

Thomas Molnar

Even at such a relative side-show as the Communist-sponsored youth festival in Helsinki last July, the American delegation was able to note that two countries were the chosen targets of all propaganda: the United States and West Germany. The very consistency and crudity of the Soviet design is impressive: the old adage of *divide et impera* is practised with every available means, at times through brutal attack, at other times through the basest flattery. The goal at all times is to isolate the United States from Europe and isolate Germany within Europe. It will be remembered that about a year ago the Kremlin demanded no less than the extradition of General A. Heusinger (high officer in NATO) as a war-criminal, but a few months later it addressed a note to Bonn suggesting economic and political cooperation since "only two great powers remain on the European continent, the Soviet Union and West Germany." *Le Monde* remarked at the time that the Kremlin aims its propaganda not so much at the present government in Bonn as at its successor, which will consist of men much younger than Adenauer and thus less tied to the Atlantic alliance.

Outside of the United States, West Germany is then the real object of Soviet policy in the western world. The reason is obvious: a mutilated Europe would have to go the way the Germans go; any loosening of western ties with Germany would lead to the quick neutralization of the European heartland and of the exposed wings: Italy and Scandinavia. Of Western Europe only fringes would remain. The effects would be equally disastrous on the morale of the East-European satellites: the latter may have no particular sympathy for Germany after the Nazi occupation, but their civilization and world outlook is indelibly impregnated by more than one thousand years' German cultural supremacy and German protection against the Slavic ocean; Germany, more even than France or England, has been their window toward the West. And just as importantly today, it is the testing ground of Soviet versus American strength.

The exposed position of Germany makes a visit to that country and conversations with its leaders very

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instructive. This is still the generation which knew the Hitler era, fought the wars in Africa and Russia, lived through the total collapse and became, for some years, an outcast of international life. These vicissitudes would shake the consciousness of the steeliest character, but, as intelligent Germans perceive it so well, the German temperament is basically moody and sentimental; it knows exaltation or is abjectly downcast, it jubilates in victory and is struck down by defeat. The result, in today's context, is confusion, cautious contentment that things are working out, that the economy is prosperous, that Germany has become once more a "western" country. Will I be believed if I say that the German officer is proud to serve under the common command of NATO, a situation so new for him that he looks upon it like a parvenu on a status symbol? And the same thing is true of the politicians, from Adenauer down. After all, the heart of the regime is the Rhineland with the gently winding river from Mainz to Cologne, one of the highways of European civilization.

Life in Germany today is comfortable and bourgeois. This is far from the epicureanism of the French and even, in spite of some similarities, from the suburban existence in America. In spite of the abundance, salaries are not high, and the average housewife in a butchershop or at the grocer's still buys only a few decagrams of this, a few pieces of that, although the spreading supermarkets make inroads into this habit. Leisure seems to exist only for the young; people with a settled life think mostly of further educating themselves in view of job promotion. Hard work and thoroughness are still the dominant characteristics. Therefore even big cities like Frankfurt, Cologne, Dusseldorf (not mentioning Munich), while pretending to metropolitan status, in reality are swollen towns.

Behind bourgeois comfort there is, however, a malaise difficult to define. Germans are reticent and do not express themselves with the friendliness of Americans or the volubility of the French. But the West-German intelligentsia is vivacious and often steel-sharp, cosmopolitan in outlook and realistic in political matter. The present cautious mood of their compatriots has become, in their case, a sense of

diplomacy and a sense of measure: those involved in political life are today the best "Europeans," less limited in outlook by national realities and chauvinism than the French or the Italians.

Although Germany is still a big country and one of the most powerful on the continent, it has no great-power consciousness. Its present political mentality is closer to that of the Benelux countries, for example, than to that of France, as if the Germans knew deep down that their emergence from the Nazi hecatomb is a miracle and their political survival a fragile thing. Consequently their leaders have developed a sixth sense for watching the mood and the reactions of the world outside.

They find themselves in a many-cornered situation. The ties with France, more than anything else, guarantee their membership in Europe. It is generally forgotten that Germany's weight in Europe is polarized in the Eastern parts, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, a culturally and politically German-influenced territory which includes even White Russia, and of course Poland, Hungary and the Balkans. This influence stops in the West at the Rhine and the Alps. Consequently, in Sovietized Europe Germany is somewhat isolated and its own mutilation hurts it even more. As long as the present situation lasts, Germany will remain a raw flesh which may start bleeding at any time.

Cooperation with France is then a way for Germany to "belong." Yet the French are not easy to live with, and under de Gaulle things are even more difficult. The best French moralists have always known that their nation's dominant trait is *vanity*, and one wonders if the Germans will prove sufficiently patient and subtle to play on this. To be sure, the street crowds hailed de Gaulle at his recent visit, and were grateful that he called them "a great nation"; but the leaders in Bonn are more prudent: they do not want to jeopardize their present good relationship with the Anglo-Americans.

These leaders know well that the American alliance is the best thing that could happen to Germany since 1945. They also know, as someone put it to me, that if they step on Britain's toes the United States will yell; besides, Anglo-American business interests are too thoroughly engaged in German economic life to permit a policy hostile to them.

All this would enable Germany to play the arbiter's role between the French and the Anglo-Saxons if the French were not so vain and independent (particularly with de Gaulle) and if the Americans and the British were not so incalculable and basically aloof from the continent. Adenauer, it is true, has great prestige and a relatively easy job: his past and present are known, and he does not hide his convictions. In the early 1920's he was among the advocates of an autonomous Rhineland

with pro-French orientation; after 1945 he wanted more than anything else a rapprochement with France and strong political and military ties with the United States; and he is uncompromisingly anti-Communist, not because of a general and vague posture but from deep religious conviction.

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But the question is: who will succeed him? Will it be someone of the Erhardt line, reinforced by the Liberals of Erich Mende? This would mean the businessmen, a kind of Eisenhower republicanism, with strong British preferences, and, like the British, intent on developing economic ties with the Communist world, not over-enthusiastic about the Common Market. Or will it be the Strauss-line (Strauss himself is too "controversial"), anti-Communist, pro-European, willing to compromise on concrete issues but not on principles, not on a strong European defense.

The most likely solution is a coalition of these two lines with Strauss in a decision-making position. Last summer's small crisis is indicative of the defense minister's strength. The question was: would he remain in his present post or would he take over the premiership of Bavaria? It should be understood that the Bavarian premier is next in line after the chancellor himself; Bavaria is the strongest *Land* in the Federal Republic; Strauss' party (the Bavarian wing of the CDU) controls Bavaria. Thus whether in Bonn or in Munich, Strauss is in a good position to bid for power and his backing comes from the best elements Germany has. (A few months ago he impressed a rather hostile audience of students who were booing him while one of them launched a Greek quotation intended as a caricature. Unperturbed, Strauss continued the quotation in fluent Greek. The students cheered.)

The choice among various candidates to Adenauer's mantle is not merely an issue of domestic policy. Foreign political considerations are obviously in the forefront, in the cold-war sense of the term since the cold war is a daily reality on German soil. This is obvious in Bonn and Cologne, the political centers of the country (Bonn is so small that most embassies are installed in Cologne, a half hour's distance), as well as in conversations with most Germans. To say that East Germany is the Bonn regime's "Algeria" is not even an adequate expression of reality. It is easy to suggest in Western European and American newspaper editorials that for all intents and purposes Bonn has given up the idea of reunification but that it is embarrassed to say so—but it is also inaccurate.

Bonn, no matter what regime will be in power, can no more abandon East Germany than Lincoln was willing to accept Southern secession. East Germany is not on another continent as Algeria is, and

the Germans are not a divided nation as are the French for whom every issue is a pretext to re-enact the Revolution of 1789. Christian Socialists, Social Democrats and Liberals agree that Germany is indivisible (the institute of *Unteilbares Deutschland* is an active center of information and propaganda); the politician who would say otherwise might as well retire from public life.

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But the hard core of the entire situation is West Berlin which, even with the Wall, remains the symbol of liberation and well-being for the East German population. I spent some time in Berlin last summer and came away with this conviction: if the Western allies give up that city, even with a face-saving device to sweeten the pill, they may not make a stand again before the Atlantic ocean. It is hard to convey the impressions which made me reach this conclusion; hard because no newspaper or magazine article (our usual sources of information) has the existential quality of a city, of a people's mood and way of life, and, in the specific case of Berlin, nobody can imagine from a distance the real impact of the Wall.

Yet, let us make an effort and visualize a Broadway on one side of which all life has stopped, with windows, shops and entrances walled up, with graves, crosses and shrines on the sidewalk in memory of those who had leapt to their death. Let us now also imagine the effect this has on the free side of the street, on the shops which have lost their clientele, on the children who play in the shadow of machine guns, on the tourists who stare gasping at this new version of the concentration camp.

And this is only one sector of the huge town; one may follow the Wall in its contortions and cover miles upon miles of it as it cuts into the flesh of the city, catching occasional glimpses of life beyond, or rather of the dead, grey immobility of a ghost town patrolled like a devastated battlefield.

Behind the visitor, West Berlin lives the existence of a western big city, prosperous, active, noisy, or suburban and quiet. One look at the contrast and the visitor realizes that Ulbricht had to build the Wall or else give up his satrapy. Even in the face of the present mortal danger, about fifteen people escape daily under or above the Wall, draining an already disastrously run economy of its most active elements. Nor is the Wall a solution for the Pankow regime: the accumulated despair of the population has created a revolutionary situation in which people no longer care what they say or do. The repression is, of course, the more brutal for it. Only our leftists and appeasers can preach accommodation under these circumstances: the East Germans, whether the worker Peter Fechter, the lieutenant-

colonel Martin Löffler, or the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch prefer freedom.

What do the West Berliners think of their present and future and of their place in Germany? I had a long conversation with Dr. Eckart, West German high commissioner in Berlin, who says in essence that the status quo is guaranteed since the United States cannot afford to withdraw from the city, and the Soviet Union will not risk a war over it. On the other hand, the average Berliner, like most people in border areas, prefers not to think of what *might* happen, and tries to enjoy life as long as he can. Also, the impression created in 1948 by the airlift still lasts and nobody can visualize an American retreat.

Or, rather, nobody could until August 13, 1961. At that time the population expected, if not U.S. military action, at least serious diplomatic efforts to strengthen the city's position. Today they know that there is little hope, since the West yields everywhere from New Guinea and Laos to Algeria and Cuba. People who have seen in their lifetime wars, revolutions, occupations, retreats and collapses, cannot be fooled: if Washington allows Communism to establish a stronghold in the Caribbean, it cannot be expected to protect a far more exposed Berlin. I repeat: nobody imagines how the retreat will take place, but almost everybody agrees that it is a matter of time only. They have not forgotten Prague and particularly Budapest.

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Berlin can be written off only by abstract theorists and ideologues who consider our differences with the Soviet Union negligible, and a so-called neutralization under United Nations auspices a step towards the brave new world. The various recommendations by Senator Mike Mansfield or Professor Fred Neal that Berlin could become a Bonn-Pankow condominium or some such, are only ways of camouflaging the murder of the city. The same can be said of Dean Rusk's suggestion that the Autobahn be neutralized with, at each end, a neutral beachhead carved out for control of traffic. Last spring by an adroitly timed leak, Bonn managed to thwart these subtle projects elaborated during endless meetings between Rusk and Gromyko; at the time of this writing, Adenauer still resists a new effort to neutralize the Autobahn under a commission which would include representatives from Pankow.

Such a "solution" would, of course, be *the* decisive step towards helping the Soviet Union sign a peace treaty with the Ulbricht regime. If the West recognizes that regime as legal participant in the problems of Berlin, diplomatic respectability and recognition will logically follow. What will also follow is recognition in some form of joint East-West authority over Berlin, with only token forces gar-

risoned by the Western powers. Once the presence of Ulbricht's Vopos in West Berlin is legalized, the city is as good as given up to the Communists.

In a way, as I have indicated, the Berliners are aware of this probability; one sign is the steadily decreasing value of real estate in a city where, under normal conditions, it ought to go up since land is scarce. The reason why some are still incredulous is that they know that the loss of Berlin would spark the decisive Soviet offensive against Western Europe. Not because of the city's value in itself; the loss of Berlin would mean to Soviet Germany that it cannot count on western solidarity and defense, and any pro-Western government in Bonn would be swept from power.

I was told by responsible people in Germany that at present the pro-Russian elements in political life and among the military are negligible, but that each snub, like President Kennedy's interview with Ad-joubai last November, weakens the supporters of the Atlantic alliance and strengthens those who preach rapprochement with Russia.

We must remember, as I wrote at the beginning of this article, that Eastern Europe has always been a rather chaotic territory of conflicting races, nationalities and religions. The two organizing forces have been the Catholic Church and Germanism: even Russia, since its emergence from Tartar rule and since Peter the Great had opened it to western influence, has been organized and structuralized by the German element among its middle classes, the military, and servants of the State. The merchant in Russia, as well as in Poland, Hungary, the Baltic Lands, was not the Jew but the German; he was also the civil servant.

This tradition gives the Germans a feeling of confidence that in the long run they would again be able to become the dominant element in Eastern Europe, including Russia. Not even Marxism could obstruct this trend: after all, the East German Communists say, Karl Marx was a German, the Russians merely adopted him; at international Communist meetings the East Germans often show more Marxist orthodoxy than the Kremlin's delegates themselves.

It is, therefore, not unimaginable that western

retreat from Berlin would actually bring about a rapprochement between the two Germanies, and eventually between Bonn and Moscow. The latter would give up gladly its friendship with Ulbricht for the much larger prize: West Germany. This is not for tomorrow; the Kremlin's plans are characterized by long range designs and infinite patience. The Laos "solution," for example, had been initiated at the Geneva conference in 1954, and Far Eastern observers are of the opinion that the complete communization of the now "neutral" country will take at least two more years. The same rhythm applies to the German situation where the stakes are infinitely higher. The Kremlin misses no opportunity to suggest to Bonn that the latter's western partners exploit it, while Khrushchev speaks to Paris about the dangers of German militarism. The overall aim is to isolate Germany from the West and persuade it that it will find better terms as a neutral nation with its gravitational center (Berlin) in the East.

After all, the Russians, and the Communists in particular, have learned what the Germans can do both in war and in peace: in 1918 the German armies almost crushed the Bolshevik Revolution, and in 1941 the Bolshevik Empire; they would have succeeded without involvement on two fronts. After 1945, leaning on the strongest industrial system in Europe, they rebuilt a vigorous economy, now among the dominant forces in the world market. The Russians know: possession of Germany, one way or another, means domination over the Eurasian landmass.

Stalin broke down the invisible wall that had contained the Slavic ocean and launched his forces against Western Christendom; there is no doubt that his successors—and Khrushchev's successors too—want to exploit the potentialities of Stalin's conquests. The old dictator remarked to Djilas that it was inevitable for him to create an East Germany and that he was not surprised at the American ambition to set up a West German regime. The question is now, will West Germany remain, will we allow it to remain, in the Western world where combined American-German wisdom between 1945 and 1948 has placed it.

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