



Hard times for heroes

Willy Brandt of Germany

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Written prior to Mr. Brandt's resignation, May 6, the following article traces developments leading to the Chancellor's departure from office.—Eds.

Chancellor in Crisis." "Federal Chancellor Despairs." Such is the tenor of articles discussing the political situation in the Federal Republic. What has become of Willy Brandt? There have always been anecdotes about the chancellors. Adenauer in particular received his share. But the humor of bitterness and gloating has not been witnessed in these parts since the days of Adolf Hitler. Obviously, the two men are not to be compared. What is comparable is the need for psychic relief in political humor.

In fact, the image of Willy Brandt as the nation's model, as a man larger than life, simply could not be sustained forever. People should become saints after they die. Right now Germans are finding a host of weaknesses in Willy Brandt. A desertion of sentiment, a not-so-subtle disenchantment, is evident even among authors such as Guenter Grass and journals such as *Der Spiegel*, which until recently competed in their admiration for the Chancellor. Now he is criticized for his irresoluteness, for his "weak leadership," for his "withdrawal from the everyday tasks of government." A popular cartoon has a man on the street ringing a fire alarm (in German, *Feuermelder*, a pun on Willy Brandt's name). Instead of fire engines there comes a tape-recorded voice from the alarm box. It is that of the telephone operator when the information line is busy: "Please

wait . . . Please wait . . . Please wait." Meanwhile the fire rages.

The fire rages everywhere. Inflation, street battles between police and Left-radical "demonstrators" in Frankfurt, Marxists further undermining desolate universities, bitter disputes with the radicals in Brandt's own party, trade unions fueling inflation with exorbitant wage demands, and serious mistakes in Brandt's *Ostpolitik* efforts to come to terms with Eastern Europe. In addition, European unity has been severely shaken, and myriad questions are raised about Germany's relations with the United States. Polls show that support for Brandt's party has dropped in a little more than five years from the almost 46 per cent registered in the Bundestag elections of 1972 to 35 per cent now. That is perilously close to the 33 per cent that has for decades been considered the last reserve of the SPD.

The laurels Brandt won at home and abroad, laurels beautifully plaited by the Nobel Committee, have been plucked away. Willy Brandt has again become a mortal, and the worshippers are getting nasty with him because he did not live up to their illusions. Only a year ago the London *Times* proclaimed Brandt "A Man for All Europe." He was a man of moderate, rational socialism, a moral paragon, combining idealism with common sense. Indeed, they noted, a man quite different from the cynics otherwise populating European politics, people such as Heath, Wilson and Pompidou.

If there were illusions, and there were, they came about not entirely without Brandt's cooperation. He cannot be blamed for speaking English and knowing how to run an international press conference. The journalists liked that very much, and could not help

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pointing out the contrast with Adenauer or Barzel. But the creation of Brandt's image took more than that. The "more" was that Brandt believes in his mission, the humanization of politics. This was the mission behind the slogan of his *Ostpolitik*: "To make peace more secure." It persuaded many. Less persuasive, perhaps somewhat colorless, were the slogans of domestic policy: "To improve the constitutional state," and "To dare more democracy." In every case, Brandt cast politics into the language of virtue. Its appeal is almost irresistible, at least at the start, at least until fantasy is overtaken by the consequences of policy. As politics became moral, it became moral to be for Willy Brandt.

Of course the youth revolts of the late sixties are an important part of any explanation of Willy Brandt. He seemed to be one of them. Had he not once been a Left radical? Instead of fearful criticism he offered understanding for "our critical young generation," as he so often put it. But such an emotional movement could not be easily controlled or patronized. The youth were oppositional, rebellious, restless and emphatically leftist. The one thing they were not was critical. Nevertheless, many thought Brandt's attitude of indulgent understanding revealed something attractive and humane in the man.

Such was the popular attitude when, in May, 1972, Rainer Barzel brought his parliamentary motion of no-confidence against Brandt and his *Ostpolitik*. In the Bundestag, as in the country, the motion was viewed as exceeding the limits of permissible disputation. This was no mere testing of parliamentary legitimacy. No, it was thought that Barzel was unfairly exploiting a situation created by the "corruption" of the Opposition. It was aimed at embarrassing the "Peace Chancellor." The defeat of the motion seemed almost like a judgment of God, a victory of Good over Evil.

Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was more than a policy of relaxing tensions, or rapprochement. Those steps had already been taken by the previous two regimes, by Erhard and Kiesinger. Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was rather conducted as a massive offensive of good will, almost as though the regimes of Eastern Europe could be overcome by the Federal Republic's complaisance and yearning for peace. Bonn had to make sacrifices to demonstrate its good will, and sacrifices Bonn made. These had to do both with borders with Poland and borders within Germany. Brandt went as far as he could, resulting in a de facto recognition of the GDR as a second German state. True, trifling juridical provisos were maintained, but these were promptly ignored by the partners in the *Ostpolitik*, Moscow, Warsaw and East Berlin. The provisos were also largely overlooked in the West, except for a few experts knowledgeable in the intricacies of German policy.

The Eastern treaties were widely interpreted in

terms of Germany's "finally accepting the results of World War II." Within Germany, Brandt had great difficulty in answering the criticisms from the Opposition, with which he was not prepared to conduct a bipartisan foreign policy. He had to demonstrate that the Eastern treaties were not in fact new obstacles to a real peace treaty. The Opposition contended that the treaties in fact validated nothing. And how could Brandt deny that the treaties violated the explicit mandate of the Constitution to unite a divided Germany? Gradually but surely the moralistic core of Brandt's rule was coming under attack.

Peace as the fruit of complaisance, rather than of mere military security, seemed to become the highest value in Bonn's foreign policy. The Chancellor bathed with Brezhnev in the Black Sea. He explained to his countrymen that the German people were burdened with guilt as a result of Hitler's war in Eastern Europe. Such guilt had to be "paid for" by catharsis. Thus Willy Brandt, himself totally innocent of any Nazi atrocities, fell upon his knees, as the envoy of his people, before the monument in the Warsaw ghetto. The gesture made an enormous impact, in Germany and elsewhere. The Chancellor's halo glistened yet more brightly.

Why the present disillusionment? The reason is not, as the *Times* would have it, that his foreign policy was too idealistic. The reason may have something to do with common sense, however. Egon Bahr, the principal architect and negotiator of *Ostpolitik*, insisted from the outset that Moscow could not be bound to make counterconcessions to the concessions offered by Bonn. Bonn in effect renounced any control over the results of *Ostpolitik* by inserting a "step-by-step" procedural clause. Brandt wanted a policy "on a grand scale." It was to be the Eastern version of what Adenauer did in the 1940's and 1950's when he forged Germany's relations with the West. Brandt envisioned German concessions being made in order to gain trust, to achieve reconciliation, to establish real friendship. Unfortunately, Brandt did not have Adenauer's good fortune in drawing his partners. *Ostpolitik* was staked on persons, notably Brezhnev, and Brandt did not inquire too closely into the politics or morals of those whom he would woo into friendship. The risk was that *Ostpolitik* would result simply in giving the appearance of legitimacy to the dictatorships controlling Eastern Europe.

Brandt was no doubt correct in trying to achieve an agreement, some kind of rapprochement. The emphasis, vocabulary and controlling concepts of that policy, however, were overdrawn. "Reconciliation," "friendship," "brotherly kiss"—all were excessively and misleadingly emotional. Misunderstandings were inevitable. One misunderstanding was the illusion that now peace had become "more secure." The other: The Chancellor no longer understood, or,

if he did understand, no longer cared about the profound differences dividing Europe.

Bahr's outline called for a movement from mutually hostile alliances to "peaceful coexistence of the two social systems." But that was to compare the incomparable. The West has a "social system." The Soviet Union is a political system holding the subject peoples of Eastern Europe under its sway. Brandt did not, at least not in public, endorse Bahr's vision of a future without alliances. On the other hand, he did not dispute the vision. Bahr remained his most important advisor, sketching the world of the day after tomorrow, pronouncing on general European security, advocating some vague middle position for the two parts of Germany. All this disconcerted a portion of the German public, as well as Germany's allies. Is Brandt facilitating the Soviet goal of driving the Americans out of Europe and thus bringing all Europe under Moscow's influence? Was he not, at least unintentionally, upsetting the balance of power? Has the necessity of a European balance of power been sacrificed to a naive "morality"?

Now things are beginning to appear in a different light. The Four Power agreement on Berlin, celebrated as securing West Berlin's viability, turns out to be a vehicle for continuing the old quarrel. Moscow and East Berlin still do their best to separate West Berlin from the Federal Republic. Indeed, the conflicts over Berlin go on just as though there were no explicit formulas, nor any Four Power agreement, for that matter. At the Geneva Conference for Security and Cooperation, Moscow tries to sweep under the carpet Bonn's legal provisos that were part of the border recognitions in the Eastern treaties. Hopes for some kind of "opening up" of the institutions of East Europe now seem vain. East Berlin has, with Soviet support, actually intensified its policy of delimiting and dividing the country. The recognition of the other German state and its admission to the United Nations were supposed to signal a new era of relaxation and cooperation. So Bahr and Brandt thought. Some even pictured a "convulsion" in East Berlin that would be more favorable to freedom. In fact they have dug in more deeply, strengthening the control of the Communist minority over East Germany. As for the Soviet Union, the Solzhenitsyn affair speaks for itself.

Ostpolitik had been praised for its realism, for its "recognition of existing facts." But it was precisely realism it lacked. The result is that West Germany must now make up for lost time in maintaining its part in the Western alliance. To the extent that *Ostpolitik* endowed the obviously necessary with a breath of historical greatness, it was a courageous achievement. But the old conflict between East and West, a conflict of which Germany is inescapably part, has not been lessened. To be sure, it continues



in different forms, but even the forms are not all that different. *Ostpolitik* ran into its limits, which were the limits of Soviet policy, sooner than expected. Moscow will not, it probably cannot, renounce political expansionism and ideological conflict.

Some think *Ostpolitik* can be put back on the track with large, cheap, German financial credits to the Soviet Union. The Brandt government may still grant such credits, if only because "Otherwise nothing at all is possible." Even so, *Ostpolitik* will not be put back into motion. The attempt to save *Ostpolitik* as an independent German activity is finished, most decisively finished. Credits will change nothing. The effort to break out of the patterns of power politics has failed.

As tragic as this truth must be for Willy Brandt, there is reason for the Federal Republic and the Western alliance to take heart. The failure of *Ostpolitik* has removed the danger that a German government—under pacifist pressure or the pressure to assert independence, or both—will again slide into the ambitious and illusory role of being a neutral mediator between East and West. That danger has been opportunely warded off—by the Russians! The sacrifices of *Ostpolitik* remain purely German sacrifices. No substantial piece of common Western security has been surrendered.

All this does not mean that the danger of a redirection of German foreign policy has been dispelled forever. If such a danger arises again, however, it will not be from what we have known as *Ostpolitik*. It will come rather from revolutionary internal change, when the "moderate" rational socialism of the SPD gives way to the radicalism within the party. The danger has been growing from year to year since the late sixties. At the last Party congress, the radical wing made up 40 per cent of the delegates. They are transforming a party of moderate and parliamentary socialism into a radical, plebiscitary power machine. In the universities this means something not unlike a Chinese cultural revolution. In the other schools it is the Marxist indoctrination of children. In defense policy it calls for constant confrontation with industry, with the Federal Army, and with the Americans. In the big cities, the goal is communalizing the land. Street

disorders and lawbreaking are justified as necessary to the struggle against "the ruling class."

The SPD is one box trying to contain the murderous struggle of two Socialist parties. The one a reform party committed to the constitutional state and parliamentary democracy; the other a revolutionary party of authoritarian Marxist "system changing." The two are irreconcilable, but Willy Brandt has always rejected the obvious idea of expelling the other party from the Party. At least so long as the other party was small. Outside the SPD, the revolutionaries would soon wither into a sect and become politically irrelevant. It is their inclusion in the Party that gives them their chance to gain control of city administrations and to wield power in the provincial and federal governments. Brandt hesitated for years, during which the radical wing grew to such a degree that it is now no longer possible to draw a line on the Left. Because he was horrified by the prospect of another Socialist party to the left of the SPD, he made compromise after compromise, thus moving the whole Party in an increasingly leftist direction. The center of gravity has shifted—in the Party, but not necessarily in the country.

When the SPD became a party of "reasonable reform," it was able to appeal to the non-Socialists, to

the liberals, to the floating vote of the center that had until then supported the Christian Democrats. Without that non-Socialist support, Willy Brandt would not be Chancellor. If Brandt does not separate himself from the radical wing, that floating vote will most certainly separate itself from him. Such a separation is now clearly under way, as demonstrated by the Hamburg elections, the first of several provincial elections scheduled for this year.

First, it was the radical Left that endangered the Social Democratic regime. Then it was the weakness of the regime's leader in responding to the danger. The regime's announced great age of reform has come to a close before it got under way. The reasons for this are many, some of which I have mentioned. In addition, there is the destructive power of inflation. Out of Socialist embarrassment, Brandt underestimated the inflation and failed to take prompt and decisive action. It is gnawing at the financial resources of the reformers, endangering economic growth, and undermining the security of workers' jobs and the prosperity of the little and middle people.

"To make peace more secure." "To dare more democracy." Now Willy Brandt must work hard just to hold on.