

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DB - 18
Hegel in the Last Chance Bar:
Election, Part II

Plockstrasse 8
Giessen, Germany
December 12, 1957

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The man on the platform is making a campaign speech. Across his hopeful visage, the familiar political emotions play: pride (in accomplishment), scorn (for the opposition), and faith (in the future). Yet he is not indulging in the time-honored campaign clichés - election promises, stories of his wise Uncle Herkimer, or tales of oppressed income groups which his party will raise to wealth and dignity.

Instead, he is delivering a philosophy lecture.

Down in the pit, some 200 sullen natives are guzzling beer and liquor. They grumble approval and disapproval - depending on their allegiances. Half a dozen armed constables guard the doorway, their peacemakers at the ready. A nimbus of tobacco-smoke hangs low over the hall. The atmosphere seems tense.

You might imagine yourself to be in a wild west saloon.

In fact, this scene was repeated countless times in election District 133. Regardless of party, regardless of candidate, the pattern was the same throughout the 1957 campaign. Almost invariably, the campaign speech was a two-hour travelogue of stratospheric abstractions. Listen:

"Nationalism is no longer possible in the Atomic Era."

"Malicious enemies always imply that we have doctrinaire tendencies. But our policies are clear. I can't go into detail on this."

"Our German mothers have too much to do. We must think about their future."

"I have faith in justice. I'd need hours to talk about justice."

No hell-fire oratory, no direct attacks on the opponent, no quotation of chapter and verse - just these philosophical platitudes. And the crowds seemed to be uniformly angry, righteous, and hungry for trouble. Asked why he employed such high-falutin rhetoric, one candidate explained: "If I came down to earth, this crowd would start a riot." By implication, the Germans are still political frontiersmen; and the politician is a kind of town marshal who keeps law and order by talking philosophy.

Judging from reports on campaign speeches in other parts of Germany, those candidates who failed to observe this formula reaped a whirlwind. There were fist-fights in Lower Saxony, rumpuses in Bavaria, and calls for the riot squad in the Rhineland.

There were no campaign donnybrooks here in Upper Hesse, but the atmosphere seemed to be charged most of the time. The following is an exposure to some of the district's pre-election highlights - as manifested by the major parties.

Campaign

Freiherr von Kühlmann started off his F.D.P. campaign early last August with a speech to the district's party hierarchy. The evening meeting was held in the conference room of Giessen's most expensive café, and none of the guests wore ready-made suits. There was wine and cognac for the thirsty, and coffee for the slumberous. The youthful baron appeared in his squire's get-up, bronzed by the sun, and full of fiery talk for the faithful. He made a good impression.

His speech stressed independent action by the Free Democrats as "guarantors" of parliamentary democracy, the party's Adam Smith style economic policies, and the necessity for new and vigorous foreign policies. Notable in the crowd were City Councillor Kötter; the diminutive lawyer and ex-student dueller, Herr Zimmer; and the principal of the Girls Trade School, Therese Kalbfleisch (see DB - 4).

A month and 40 speeches later, Knut von Kühlmann made his major Giessen address in the Saalbau auditorium. He had a large audience - maybe 500 persons. The candidate made his pitch on the following themes:

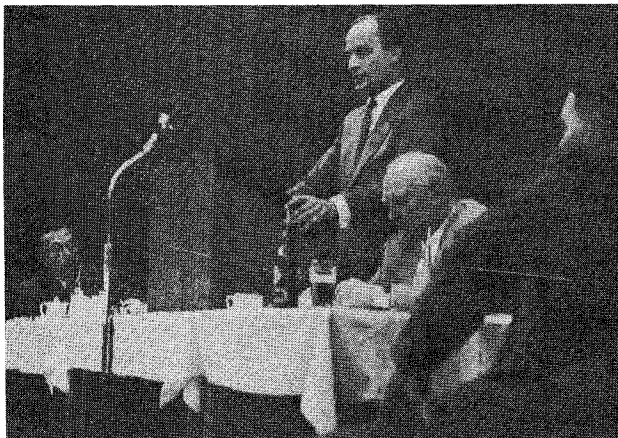
Coalition--"The F.D.P. has kept itself free from all ties or promises to other parties. We will enter a coalition with the C.D.U. only when we are treated as full partners. We will never ally ourselves with the Social Democrats." (Two months later, the F.D.P. gratefully joined the Hamburg city election winner - the S.P.D. - in a coalition.)

Third Party--"There is danger that a single party will obtain sole power in the Bundesrepublik. Germany isn't mature enough for single-party rule." (One asks what country is ready.)

Economics--"Germany's free market economy has shown itself as the best policy...all socialization schemes have been filed away. The middle class must be the focal point of all economic policies.

A couple of weeks earlier, the baron was one of five candidates taking part in an open forum sponsored by the local "Jaycees". Then, von Kühlmann came out even more strongly for the F.D.P.'s conservative economic policies. He said: taxes must be lowered, cartels given free rein, and federal reserves reduced. This Free Democrat made his economics arguments sound plausible and desirable if you happened to be a wealthy middle class listener.

The placards and ads put out by the district F.D.P. played the baron as a smiling aristocrat.



Baron von Kuhlmann

As one Free Democrat ad put it; "A man who has seen the world, who has a tradition as son of the last Imperial secretary of state. He is independent, and therefore not obliged to become a deputy in order to earn money." F.D.P. advertising expended most of its gall on the maverick Schneider and his "D.P. - F.V.P"). "The only thing obtained by running Herr Schneider," says one ad, "is the weakening of the non-socialist front."

The F.D.P. also hauled in a couple of party notables from

outside the district in order to pep up the local campaign. Among these was Max Becker, a short bald man with black eyebrows and an expression of Fred Allen dourness. Becker is from Hersfeld, a conservative spa-town some 50 miles north of here. He is an old style German liberal and a former Bundestag vice-president.

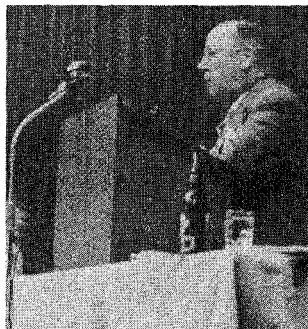
Dr. Becker's night-time election rally was held in the Giessen University student home, which has a large hall. The audience numbered about 200, including a lot of youngsters. Again, alcoholic spirits were served. Becker, who is chairman of the state F.D.P. committee, started off his 2-hour lecture by reminding the listeners that his ancestors were noted Giessen liberals.

Then he eased into his long, monotonic address: "Don't give one or another party a majority. We don't want a majority dictatorship by the S.P.D. or the C.D.U. We don't have a democratic tradition like other countries. A majority will ram through a phoney election law...the two party system is completely false. We need a good healthy third party...Look what happens when the socialists take power; look at England, where everything was nationalized. They went bankrupt."

Becker rambled on - Germany shouldn't throw its money on France and England in pan-European schemes; the reunification problem could be settled with a neutral middleman like Nehru; Germany shouldn't get atomic weapons; inflation can be stopped by lowering taxes. The good burghers of Giessen remained dead silent throughout the speech. Afterwards, as is custom here, there was a question and discussion period. A young university instructor got up and challenged Becker's two-party thesis. A student said: "What Germany needs is less politicians and more parties." Then we all stuffed our pockets with F.D.P. campaign literature and went home.

Ludwig Schneider and his D.P. - F.V.P. started the campaign off with a band, a loud brass band with blue and red uniforms which played Prussian marches at every election rally. As local campaigns went, it was obvious that Dr. Schneider's bunch had the most money.

Their leaflets were fancier. There were free matchboxes with Schneider's mug printed on the cover. The speaker's platform was always loaded with flowers. And black-red-gold German flags abounded.



A Renegade

A crowd of over 200 gathered in the Saalbau auditorium for Schneider's major Giessen address, several days before the election. Waiters dashed about with trays full of drinks. The renegade politico mounted the podium in a sincere suit. He started off in an earnest tone - his deep melodious voice caressing the consonants: "This is Germany's hour of destiny. We of the coalition are standing on our record. The opposition says everything we have done is bad.

I ask you, what were things like in 1945? And what is it now? We built a state out of nothing, out of war and rubble."

"...The Social Democrats would have introduced a planned economy to bring about this miracle, with their Weltanschauung. (His voice rose an octave and got gravelly.) Russia started that doctrine 40 years ago the same way. The S.P.D. is a milder form of Marxism. But only nuances make it different. They say 'nationalize a few things - public power and such'. But where are the limits? The principle is the same. Their idea is to put power in the hands of the state." (He was bellowing by this time.)

It was another 2-hour speech - the average length in this campaign. One wondered at the patience of the listeners. Still bellowing, Schneider made the following observations on other subjects:

Inflation--"The German worker's demands for higher wages can only lead to a price spiral. The workers are sawing off the limb on which they are sitting."

Future--"The next Bundestag has great tasks - to help the rest of the people enjoy our economic miracle - the farmers, the middle class. These are problems, real problems. I'll just skip over that tonight..."

Coalition--"The F.D.P. and the S.P.D. have signed truces in more than 20 districts and are ready to make coalitions. Our party will never compromise with the Socialists." (This later proved to be untrue. In November, Schneider's party formed a coalition with the S.P.D. in the state of Lower Saxony).

N.A.T.O.--"As long as the Russians want to make foreign policy with weapons, they won't be able to negotiate. I'm deeply convinced our policy of strength is the only one that will make the Russians change."

Law--"We must stop the growing crime wave. I am personally for the reintroduction of the death penalty." (The Giessen audience cheered, but one week later, Schneider's own party came out against the death penalty).

Two-party system--"Germany cannot afford to have a two-party democracy. It won't work where you have ideologies. If the opposition came to power, it would overturn everything that had been done by the previous administration."

Such was the tenor of the 62 campaign speeches by Ludwig Schneider.

A couple of days earlier, the D.P - F.V.P. candidate was able to welcome a party comrade here in Giessen. This was Franz Blücher of the Deutsche Partei, who came here to campaign for Schneider. This silver-haired, blockheaded gent was vice-Chancellor at the time, an office which compares to our vice-presidency in name only. Blücher got the post from Chancellor Adenauer as a sop to the coalition-loyal D.P. after the 1953 election. It's strictly an honorary post.

The party's band was on hand again for the Blücher speech, and voters flocked 1,000 strong to the Saalbau to hear numbers like "Prussia's Glory". Dr. Schneider treated the crowd to a stunt which was the closest thing to baby-kissing I saw in the whole campaign. He called a little girl up on the platform to present a bouquet of flowers to Vice-Chancellor Blücher. Patting the child on the head, Schneider said: "Listen, little Helen, you can tell your grandchildren now that you greeted one of the great Germans of the post-war period." (The "great German" is now an ordinary Bundestag deputy). The audience, which included a number of university faculty members and retired Wehrmacht officers, did not seem to be impressed by this bit of frivolity.

Franz Blücher's speech was a tedious mixture of nationalist slogans and protracted platitudes:



"Our German mothers..."

"Our German mothers have too much to do..."

"The Free Democrats who call us traitors are spiritual descendents of the Nazis."

"We must not permit any more slandering of the S.S. They only followed orders and did their duty."

"Automation is not for us with our specialized industries. Man must run the machines; not machines run the man."

"We must keep yearning for our lost territories, East Prussia, Pommerania, Silesia; teach your children about them."

There was no discussion period following this address. Instead, the rally closed with

the singing of "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles." Herr Blücher and Dr. Schneider stood stiffly in front of their huge blue and yellow party banner and intoned the solemn, misused anthem with the rest.

Spade-faced Hans Merten of the S.P.D. had the roughest campaign of all. First off, he had only 4,000 marks (\$1,000) for the 6-week campaign. Out of this he had to pay all his personal costs - meals, hotel bills, transportation, newspaper ads, phone calls, and so on. The party provided only his campaign posters. The other parties were richer. Pastor Merten (one of four Lutheran ministers who represent the S.P.D. in the Bundestag) gave himself a hard schedule. He made a total of 79 speeches - most of them of the 2-hour variety. And most of them were pretty good.

The S.P.D. campaign started rolling late in July with a meeting of the district party committee. It was a colorful crowd - old men in shirtsleeves and galluses, wearing faded party buttons; women in peasant dirndls. Pastor Merten began his talk with: "My dear guests - comrades." It was the first and last time the old S.P.D. greeting, Genossen (comrades) was used in this campaign.

Merten outlined the party's campaign program which was announced a few days earlier at Dortmund. Then he fired off a few shots at Dr. Schneider and the right-wingers: "The music parties of Hesse are at it again - the ones who think all they need to do is play a few military marches to make the voters' eyes moist."

Later, in his Giessen campaign rally, Merten came back to this subject: "We have no band on our platform. I'm a musical politician; but I'm not for music in politics."

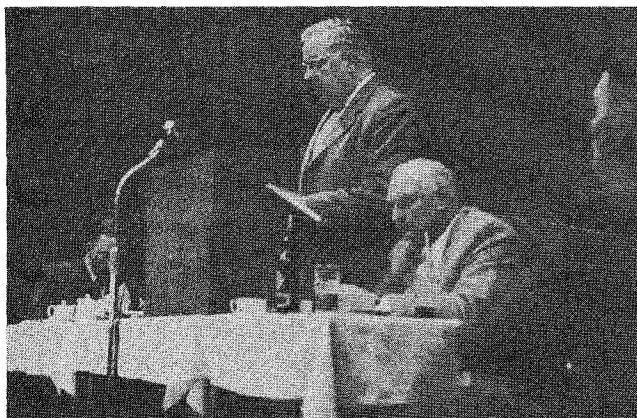
He also replied to right-wing critiques: "They call us hostile to the state, Moscow agents, and if we're lucky, just morons. To me this is a sign of our political immaturity, when politicians must use hate and the denial of all alternatives in an election." And, "The fact is, the coalition loves to look back on the last eight years - but not forward."

Commenting on the Adenauer "policy of strength" in foreign affairs, Merten told the Giessen audience: "They say, get atomic weapons for Germany because America is going isolationist. We say, membership in N.A.T.O. is not an active policy towards German reunification. In the last five years it has brought us neither security nor unity."

Hans Merten's 73d campaign speech was in the conservative stronghold of Alsfeld. The town was an F.D.P. fortress in the 1953 election, and Merten figured it would go to Scheider this time, "by default."

"He's got C.D.U. backing now, and the voters know him from his F.D.P. days," Merten added. "He wouldn't get 10 per cent of the vote if they weren't behind him. Naturally, some will reject him because he changed parties - he who changes his opinion in Germany is a bad man - but it won't be much."

Merten's Alsfeld day began this way: He got home about 1 a.m. from a day full of rallies, and slept until 10. Then he read the papers and telephoned to his Bonn office for a half hour. After



Hans Merten at Open Forum

lunch, he dictated his evening speech to his wife for two hours. Then he conferred with the district campaign chief, and stopped by local S.P.D. headquarters to compose a newspaper ad. It was time to set out over the green hills of Hesse for Alsfeld. I joined Merten and his wife in their Opel "Kapitän" for the ride and the speech. These are some of the things he said about politicking during the trip:

"You know, the S.P.D. is the only German party that has to carry the baggage of history with it. The party is close to a hundred years old. The other parties started in 1946. It's largely an advantage for them.

"Yes, I still use my 'pastor' title. It helps a lot with the peasants."

"You'll notice that the F.D.P. is making a strong play for the rightist votes. Tactically, they're right to do so.

"The German likes 'philosophy' in politics. Our people just cannot see that our political parties no longer have a Weltanschauung or that they are no longer trying to be an Ersatz for religion!"

"Frankly, I don't think I've had any influence on the election result with my 70 odd speeches. And I'd willingly forego this Alsfeld job; I'll get a tough reception here."

He was right. Merten did get an unfriendly reception in Alsfeld. Aside from a hundred Social Democrat old-timers, there was a large knot of youthful C.D.U. hecklers at the rear of the dingy hall. Merten spotted them right away and acted accordingly. The first hour and a half of his address was delivered in a flat, unemotional tone. It was about foreign affairs, and there wasn't a single phrase which hecklers could seize on. Merten kept a tight rein on them the whole evening. During the discussion period, he parried their rude statements expertly.

Merten fared better in the factory town of Lollar a few nights later. This time the audience was pure Social Democrat - workers from the huge Buderus iron company. Hans Merten cut loose: "I'm convinced this administration is preparing an offensive war, not a defensive one. That's why the C.D.U. defeated our proposal for peaceful use of atomic power last summer..." "...The C.D.U. is trying to swallow up all opposition. They are trying to form a national front, like the Communists."

The hard-bitten worker audience sat silent during this blast; silent, but not displeased. At the end, they gave Merten a throaty growl of approval.

The S.P.D. candidate made an especially good showing at the aforementioned "Jaycee" open forum. He delivered a factual, straightforward account of the Social Democratic economic policies. Merten maintained that government controls are essential, lest "big business" and the industrial cartels gain too much power.

The open forum drew 600 people. One of the most heartening aspects was the large number of youngsters in the audience. They also had their share in the lively discussion afterwards. This forum and the general custom of discussion periods following the regular speeches are precious elements in German post-war politics. They permit voters to acquire a degree of political tolerance and respect for one another.

One other S.P.D. speaker is worthy of comment. This was potbellied Heinrich Ritzel, who came up here from South Hesse to make a courtesy speech. In the space of one hour, Ritzel unloosed an incredible number of bold claims and insinuations:



"No one would listen to me..."

"The world needs an international police force. I thought of that in 1939, but no one would listen to me." (cheers). (whispering) - "I know for a fact that the C.D.U. is ultramontane. And their big industrialists order a church pew for an hour on Sundays just so they can sit there and count their dividends."

"America promotes the 'sword and shield' theory in N.A.T.O. That means they provide the sword - jet bombers and rockets - while we provide the shield, the infantry."

The high point of the Ritzel speech was his half hour elegy on what Hesse would look like after an atomic bomb dropped here - the idea being that this would result from a C.D.U. victory.

The Christian Democratic Union did a lot of campaigning in District 133. Despite the fact that he was running in another district, Pastor Gontrum turned up for a half a dozen rallies here. His every speech was like the 1812 Overture - it had at least 15 climaxes.

Another C.D.U. man, Erich Grosskoph of the Hessian Legislature, gave this definition of his party's goal: "We mean it in bitter earnest when we say our aim is to bring faith (religious) and politics to a fruitful synthesis." The burden of his speech was devoted to a recital of C.D.U. accomplishments during the past two terms. He did take time out for a backhanded cut at the Socialists-- "This election is a part of the worldwide struggle between occidental Christianity and the materialist-economics of the East."

The final C.D.U. campaigner in the district was Kai Uwe von Hassel, minister president of Schleswig-Holstein and a relative of Ulrich von Hassel, who was liquidated after the plot on Hitler's life. He made a slick speech, full of artful smears against the S.P.D. and predictions of victory for his party. Like his predecessors, von Hassel made a strong plea for Dr. Schneider at the end of his speech: "Vote for Schneider on the first list and the C.D.U. on the second."

Up on the platform, Pastor Gontrum nodded half-heartedly.

It was a busy campaign. Here in the city, there was a rally every night for over a month - sometimes two. Out in the villages, the candidates stormed the voters at least three times a week.

Posters and banners fluttered from every available lamp post. Cars armed with loudspeakers cruised over the cobblestone streets and country roads. Yet in the cafes and taverns it was difficult to find a conversation dwelling on politics. And if you asked somebody how he was going to vote, he would jerk away from you, frightened. One man said: "You don't ask that question in Germany." Occasionally, someone would confess their party preference, but then only in an anxious whisper.

David Binder
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