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 The Neutral Devil:
 Germany's Dilemma I

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 Giessen, Germany
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Two weeks have passed since the last windy orator gasped his last hot breath in the great foreign policy debate of the German Bundestag. Yet it may be more felicitous to discuss that cyclonic event today rather than immediately afterwards.

Because the Bonn debate of March 20 to 25 was something extraordinary. It lasted a roaring 37 hours. Its principal issue - whether or not to arm the Bundeswehr with atomic weapons - stirred up the West German public as no other issue has since World War II. It gouged a cleft between Administration and Opposition that seems now to be almost unbridgeable. It has spurred calls for a general strike and for a popular referendum - both unconstitutional. Finally, it has spread confusion and anxiety among all sections of the population, including the politicians.

The atom has entered the German soul, apparently to split it, as a verse of Goethe suggests.

Bundestag deputies and German editorialists alike have called the March Debate a "turning point", a "crossroads". As Hans Zehrer wrote in "Die Welt", "This is a milestone...From now on, we'll never be able to return to the world before March 20, 1958."

For the observer who attended all four days of the debate and its aftermath, this analysis does not seem amiss. Even if the Government's post-debate majority vote to accept atomic weapons from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization brings no practical consequences, most Germans think they have passed a crossroads. They feel they have taken a path from which there is no turning back. And whether this is true or not, it is enough.

Just why the debate on atomic weapons became so crucial is difficult to assess.

On the political level it is a fairly simple matter. Both Chancellor Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union and the Opposition Socialists and Free Democrats saw the issue as ideal for defining the line between them. The Adenauer party declared that acceptance of the nuclear arms means continued security and partnership in NATO; rejection means insecurity and isolation from the Western Alliance. The Opposition asserted that acceptance of the weapons means that Germany will be a nuclear target in the next conflict. Rejection of nuclear weapons, said the Opposition, means a lessening of tensions in Central Europe and a better chance for reunification of Germany.

There was no thread of compromise between these two implacable positions.

Yet that goes only part of the way in explaining the significance and temper of the great debate.

In order to slice closer to the core of this indehiscent matter, one is obliged to probe that imponderable of the ages - the German mind. Nothing, of course, could be more offensive to Germans. They tend to deplore "politics". Analyses based on examination of their political bunion seems to them repellent and unfair.

Nevertheless, the attitude of the Germans towards the political issues of the debate is important to its understanding.

One attitude might be summed up in the words of Clemens von Brentano, a great lyric poet and an ancestor of the present foreign minister, who is not a great lyric poet. Just 145 years ago, Brentano wrote:

"To hate or love,
The world is driven.
No choice remains,
The Devil is neutral."

Applying this to the impassioned debate in the Bundestag, one sees the Adenauer party deliver its doctrine: Hate the Communists; love the Western Allies. One sees the Opposition expound a similar formula: Hate the Administration's Western vassalage; love a "disengaged" Central Europe. The middle ground had fallen away, not only for the deputies in Parliament, but also for the citizens outside.

In college we were taught that "symbolism is a very profound function of the mind, allegory is a superficial one." The Bonn debate recalls a medieval allegory:

"Then arose the goddess of Discord, who lived in the tower of Evil Counsel, and awoke Wrath, the madwoman ... and Rage and Vengeance, and they took up arms of all sorts and cast out Reason, Justice, ... and Moderation most shamefully."*

Whether or not this is a "superficial" analogy remains to be seen. Certain it is, however, that the allegorical characters mentioned above were all struggling during the Bundestag debate. They were joined by still other allegorical figures, somewhat in the following manner:

"Hate battled his enemy Fear, while Guilt wrestled with Blame; and only Confusion reigned in the arena after they had slain each other."

It is my contention that many Germans within and without the Bundestag have come to regard the conflict over atomic arms in these allegorical terms. To see how this works out, you will have to take a closer look at the debate itself, its background, and its aftermath.

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* Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris. 1405-1449. ed. A. Tuetey. 1881

T h e B a c k g r o u n d

Always at the heart of any discussion of foreign policy since the formation of the Bundesrepublik in 1949 is the subject of reunification. It lies there uncomfortably, gnawing away at the German vitals. Every decision affecting the Federal Republic's external relations is measured by its relationship to reunification. Of course there has always been more than one way of interpreting this relationship. But the essential process remains the same.

Since 1949 it has been the constant policy of Konrad Adenauer's and his Bundestag coalition that the only way towards unifying East and West Germany lay in holding free all-German elections. Moreover, say Adenauer and the C.D.U., the new national government must be free to ally itself with other powers as it sees fit - NATO for instance.

Until recently, the Opposition Social Democrats and Free Democrats (who broke away from the coalition two years ago) went along with the broad lines of this policy. That is, they did until the atom entered the scene.

The breach began to widen last spring. It started April 5, 1957 when Chancellor Adenauer announced that atomic armament was in "flood tide" everywhere. Germans, he said, could not halt this development. Therefore the only alternative was to adapt to the new circumstances.

Seven days later, 18 German nuclear physicists issued a manifesto declaring that a small country like Germany could best defend itself and peace in general if it renounced possession of any kind of atomic weapons. This statement came as a shock to the German public, as it did also to Konrad Adenauer. The Chancellor reprimanded the scientists publicly. The physicists retorted that Adenauer was "deceiving the public" when he called tactical atomic weapons "a modern development of artillery." Although the Chancellor later placated the scientists, the damage had been done. It was to be the first of a series of nuclear "explosions."

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union had already begun its campaign against the stationing of nuclear weapons in West Germany. On April 27 the Kremlin demanded that Germany forswear atomic arms. It was the eve of the Bonn NATO conference, and the Government postponed a reply.

Then on May 10, the Bundestag met to debate the question of atomic weapons for the first time. The venomous controversy which followed was a portent of future clashes on this subject. Speakers from the Free Democratic Party joined the Socialists for the first time in the call for a nuclear arms ban in Germany. But the Government majority held firm. The only motion on which the Parliament could agree was a resolution that Britain, Russia, and America should halt atomic weapons tests.

Having held off the Opposition in the May 10 debate, and feeling strengthened by the show of unity at the April NATO meeting, the Bonn Government was ready to answer the Soviet demand for a nuclear ban. On May 24, the Foreign Ministry issued a note refusing to comply with the Soviet order. The Bundesrepublik reserved the "legitimate right" to maintain national security with nuclear weapons if the Soviets continued to block a controlled international disarmament agreement.

The next stage was reached on July 2 when a bill for amendment of the Constitution on atomic energy development was put before the Bundestag. The bill was worded in such a way that the Adenauer Coalition feared it would endanger the Bundesrepublik's chances for military uses of the atom. The C.D.U. fraction had promised to support the bill, along with the S.P.D. But in a surprising last minute maneuver, the C.D.U. members walked out of the house and left the bill to founder, five votes short of the necessary two-thirds majority. The Social Democrats cried "Sabotage!"

By this time, Coalition and Opposition were engaged in the election campaign that was to culminate in the Adenauer victory of September 15. During the weeks following the defeat of the atomic energy bill, the Social Democrats developed their current policy on nuclear arms, (see D.B. - 15). They began calling Adenauer the "Atomic Death Chancellor", and warned that nuclear weapons here would make Germany an atomic target. The Coalition soft-pedalled the issue.

However, it was not until after the election that the Opposition began to stress the relationship between nuclear arms and reunification.

Two events were instrumental in the shaping of this new argument. The first was on October 2, when Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki unveiled his modest scheme for an "atom-free zone" in Central Europe, which Czechoslovakia and East Germany quickly supported. It was not the first such neutralization plan, nor was it the last - (at latest reckoning there were seven "plans".)

The second event was George F. Kennan's third Reith Lecture for the B.B.C. on November 25, which dealt primarily with the problems of Germany in the context of Central Europe. The former ambassador to Moscow suggested that the best way towards calming this area would be to withdraw the military forces stationed in it. Kennan followed in his fourth lecture with an eloquent warning against the arming of Western European nations (including Germany) with atomic weapons. In his sixth and final broadcast, he condemned NATO for engaging in "sterile competition" to outmatch the Russians in destructive power.

Neither Rapacki nor Kennan had brought forth any startlingly new concepts. Yet their recommendations had an astounding echo in Germany. There were several reasons. One was timing. Both men had spoken during the lag between the September election and the December NATO meeting in Paris. Thus their music fell on the hyper-sensitive ears of the defeated Opposition parties.

Another reason was the character of the two men. In the eyes of many Germans, Rapacki represented a potential ally beyond the Iron Curtain. The possibility of negotiations seemed highly attractive to them. For it appeared to be the first chance in years to treat over the heads of the East German authorities and "under the nose" of the Soviet Union. It also seemed to be a way out of the nuclear ordeal, into which NATO was forcing the Bundesrepublik.

Kennan, on the other hand, found a friendly reception in German Opposition circles not only because he was an eloquent American, but also because of his pristine approach to the German problem.

Kennan's original contribution was in treating military disengagement on the Continent and the proposed denuclearized zone as intimately bound together with the eventual reunification of Germany. At first hesitating, then with more and more enthusiasm, the Opposition parties pressed this new idea to their bosoms.

It was a natural, and actually the only legitimate argument against Chancellor Adenauer's arms policy. From now on, the political and non-political groups hostile to Bonn's loyal NATO course would claim that the Government was hindering reunification; that atomic weapons in the hands of the Bundeswehr, would be the death of all hopes for unity.

But this was only the beginning of the struggle. Meanwhile, the NATO conference took place in Paris. Dulles requested the member states to accept American middle-range rockets. Speaking for West Germany, Adenauer said Bundesrepublik's decision would depend on "military aspects", not political exigencies. Practically speaking, the Chancellor was buying time, postponing the crucial decision on nuclear weapons.

Christmas came, and the long Government vacation afterwards. Towards the middle of January, the Chancellor took the offensive. He addressed himself to the German public in a sort of "fireside chat" on January 15. Adenauer's comment on the Rapacki scheme for an atom-free zone: "It would mean the end of NATO and thereby the freedom of West Europe, and also the end of our freedom." Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano fired off some even more direct salvos. He accused George Kennan of spreading a "fairy tale". Here in Hesse, he also warned an audience at Friedberg that disengagement would only invite a Soviet attack, and, "When the Ivans come..."

However, the Opposition had been doing plenty of roadwork too. When the January 23 debate on foreign policy came along they showed themselves to be in good condition.

The debate started with deceptive calm. Von Brentano read out a long statement for the Administration. It reviewed the NATO Council meeting and the exchange of notes between Bonn and Moscow. Finally, the Foreign Minister edged into the atomic armaments problem. He rejected the Rapacki proposal out of hand, and added that the Bundesrepublik was prepared to accept nuclear weapons, according to NATO stipulations.

The first Opposition speaker was Erich Mende, the young Bundestag whip of the Free Democrat Party. He criticized Adenauer for speaking on the radio and thus showing "disrespect for Parliament." He compared the speech to the Third Reich's political use of radio. Then Mende hammered on the reunification theme: "Germany is not only politically divided, but also the military forefront of the two (power) Blocks." He also accused the Administration of "capitulating before the military" in its nuclear arms policy.

Von Brentano hurried back to the speaker's platform to denounce Mende's criticism of the Adenauer radio speech. The F.D.P., he said, had less right than any other party to draw analogies with the Hitler regime - (The F.D.P. like the C.D.U. has a sprinkling of ex-Nazi little shots in its ranks).

The next speaker was Erich Ollenhauer of the S.P.D. The stocky, slope-browed party chairman called on the Administration to give a clear picture of its arms policy. He asserted that an arms race would only lead to a "hardening of the status quo and the division of the world, Europe, and Germany." The Bundesrepublik could serve the cause of disarmament by refusing to arm the Bundeswehr with atomic weapons. The Rapacki plan could be a first step on the way towards lessening tensions.

Ollenhauer was answered by Kurt George Kiesinger, foreign policy specialist of the C.D.U. This elegant, high-cheeked deputy rejected Rapacki and Kennan too. It would be false, he said to take a "mortally dangerous middle path" between decisive defense readiness and effective disarmament.

The debate droned on through the afternoon. Towards evening, ruffled Carlo Schmid, a superior orator and a keen mind, mounted the podium. It was not politics, he said, to range "one and a half bombs against every one the enemy has." Countering the C.D.U. claim that Rapacki's plan would only cement the status quo he said it will be, "cemented hardest when things remain the way they are." Schmid also urged the Government to try by means of classical diplomacy to negotiate, rather than rely only on public declamations.

Bundeskanzler Adenauer took the stand to defend his policies. He said his main goal was controlled general disarmament. Until the Russians give up their aim of world domination, he said, it is impossible to discuss an atom-free zone. Germany must wait until the Russians make a "pause" before thinking about negotiating with them. Adenauer was seconded by Defense Minister Franz Josef Strauss: "The Soviets will leave only when they see and are convinced that they won't get any farther in Europe, that they can't spread their domination here!"

Then the dam broke.

At 10 p.m. a flood bitter and vengeful accusations burst upon the Bundestag. They came from the F.D.P.'s Thomas Dehler, minister of Justice in Adenauer's first cabinet and a man often torn by love and hate for the Chancellor. This time he hated.

With the glare of a Gorgon, Dehler fell upon the Coalition. He accused Adenauer of cold-blooded refusal to work for reunification. He cited a proposal by Stalin in March 1952 which named fairly liberal conditions for a unified Germany, including free elections. That was the "pause", said Dehler, which Adenauer now seeks. But the Chancellor rejected Stalin's bid. From the wide ranks of Coalition seats came shouts of "Pfui!" His voice trembling with anger, Dehler renewed his attack: Adenauer sabotaged reunification in the preparations for the European Defense Community, and again at the Geneva Conference. More cries from the Coalition: "Unheard of!" "Shameless!"

Heinrich von Brentano leaped out of his chair and grabbed the microphone. Red-faced, he hurled a question at Dehler: "Do you want to capitulate before the Bolsheviks?" He said Dehler was suffering from a "persecution complex". Another C.D.U. speaker called Dehler's attack "infamous", "odious", and "an insult to the whole German people."

But the Opposition wasn't through yet.

The next man to enter the lists was Gustav Heinemann, a pop-eyed 57-year-old industrialist and Lutheran churchman. Heinemann was Adenauer's Minister of Interior until he broke with the Chancellor in August, 1950. A year ago, this political maverick joined the S.P.D.

In contrast to Dehler's pale heat, Heinemann delivered his assault with ice cold mien. He too dredged up the Soviet note of March, 1952, pointing out that the Russians made a similar bid in October, 1954. "The answer of the West," said Heinemann, "First the Paris (E.D.C.) treaties. The Soviet Union will still negotiate afterwards. Let's not be intimidated! Get stronger first! That was the answer. I regard this as the historic fault of the C.D.U. ...How long do you want to continue this game?"

Heinemann also stung the Christian Democratic Union by needling them on their religious flank: "It's not a matter of Christianity against Marxism." (cries from the Coalition, "But?") "Rather it concerns the recognition that Christ didn't die against Karl Marx, but for us all."

However, it was the loaded references to the Soviet reunification bids of 1952 and 1954 that did the most damage. The debate sputtered on until 1:30 a.m., but the Coalition could not bring forth one speaker to reply to the Dehler-Heinemann accusations. So the suspicion that Adenauer had "stabbed reunification in the back", still hung over the Bundestag.

Next morning German newspaper headlines howled: "Rapacki-Plan Splits Bundestag". But it was more than Rapacki, more the Kennan, and more than the nuclear weapons problem. The reactions of the Adenauer Government and the West German public to the 14-hour debate of January 23 demonstrated this painfully.

To the public, the debate reeked of party politics, malfeasance, and useless claptrap. I remember the unanimous contempt with which friends and acquaintances spoke of this Bundestag controversy. Regardless of party, they condemned the whole Parliament for "dirty politics," "wretched behavior", and the like.

To the Adenauer Government, the debate represented a stunning sock in the belly. They were left nearly speechless by the sound and fury of the Dehler-Heinemann attacks. Five days later, Konrad Adenauer took to the radio waves again. He was out to quell the "stab-in-the-back" legend built up by his two former ministers.

Adenauer began his January 29 broadcast thus: "Ladies and gentlemen. I have been asked from many sides why I didn't answer the accusations of Dr. Dehler immediately...I didn't do so because the level of the debate before and after midnight had sunk so low, due to the fault of both former ministers Dehler and Heinemann, that a serious debate no longer seemed possible."

This charge was hardly justified, but it cleverly reflected the mood of German public. Moreover, Adenauer got away with this highly unorthodox approach to parliamentary government. He countered the Dehler-Heinemann claims with his own assertion that the Russians never offered to reunify Germany through free elections.

Nevertheless, the debate was continued in all its acrimony on the radio. Erich Ollenhauer demanded and received time to retort to Adenauer two days later: "There's no parliamentary democracy in the world where such a disregard of the parliament by the head of government could happen without the immediate fall of the administration." Ollenhauer also repeated the accusation that Adenauer had "wasted" a chance for reunification in 1952.

Government by radio continued on February 2 when Erich Mende broadcast a reiteration of his F.D.P. colleague Dehler's accusations. Twenty-four hours later, the whip of the Coalition Deutsche Partei, Schneider spoke up for the Government on a network hookup. On February 6, Minister of Interior Gerhard Schröder concluded the soap-box opera with another talk for the Adenauer team. Said a newspaper editorialist: "The public is tired of this performance."

The next six weeks were busy and confusing for the West Germans. On February 14, Poland let the air out of Rapacki's trial balloon and made a direct approach about an atom-free zone to Bonn. With Chancellor Adenauer sunning on the Riviera, the Government contented itself with an unofficial rejection of the plan on February 21. That same day, Defense Minister Strauss offered his scheme for a thinned-out zone, which was to spread out to Albania, Hungary, and Bulgaria. A little later he flew to Washington for a look at new weapons.

On March 5, Strauss announced the Bundesrepublik would accept American "Matador" rockets from the United States. Whether with or without atomic warheads he did not say. The German public was uneasy. Meanwhile, the "Council of Elders" of the Bundestag was discussing when the next foreign policy debate should take place.

On March 10, a few days after his return from a five-week holiday, Chancellor Adenauer set the date of the debate for March 20. He did this against the advice and warnings of his C.D.U. party aides, Kiesinger and Eugen Gerstenmaier, (Kiesinger marched out of the sitting with Adenauer). The Chancellor also had his way, after some arguments, about Germany's policy towards a summit conference.

During the following week, Opposition and Coalition sharpened their nails and teeth for the next big scramble.

Already the contrasts between their two positions were blacker than Ruhr coal and whiter than alpine snow. The Germans I talked to here and in the Rhineland spoke only in terms of love for the Administration and hate for the Opposition - or vice versa. Those who hadn't made up their minds felt plagued by the "neutral Devil." A few days before the debate, public opinion polls were announced which showed more than 80 per cent of the German people to be against stationing of atomic weapons here. Yet these were the same Germans who had voted 51 per cent to elect the Adenauer Government - including its arms policy. The situation was ripe for allegory.

This was the setting for the gigantic Bundestag controversy of March 20-25 - where Rage, Hate, Fear, and Blame upstaged Reason and Moderation much of the time.

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