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Security versus Unity:
Germany's Dilemma II

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

A few months before the March Bundestag debate on atomic weapons I visited a local civil defense meeting. The group leader enthusiastically painted a hideous picture of atomic devastation; the audience remained dumb and expressionless. Film and magazine reports on hydrogen bombs, fall-out, radiation effects - they all seemed to fall on plugged ears in Germany.

"What can one do?" asked Kurt Odrig, who sells me vegetables. "When it comes, we're all goners anyway." The Germans were not unique in that attitude.

Along with this nuclear numbness there was the dazed resignation towards the question of reunification. Everybody was for it - like the five cent cigar. Any West German politician who wanted to make the grade had to master the sacred reunification phase: "Let us not forget our seventeen-million German brothers over there..." Uttered with solemn reverence, it had an effect the same as "poor starving Armenians" once had - paralysis. The West Germans felt, rightly so, that there wasn't much they could do about unifying their country.

But since the March debate their reaction to atoms and reunification has changed from palsy to St. Vitus Dance. Germany's basic dilemma has not changed since 1949 - security could not be had without sending reunification a begging; reunification could not be had without sacrificing security.

What then is the difference?

The fresh factors in the German predicament include nuclear armaments, awakened public opinion, and a new concept of security.

Security for the Federal Republic was a relatively simple matter until atomic arms became an acute question last winter. Until then the great majority of Germans concurred with the Government's Western defense policy. But Rapacki, Kennan, and the Bundestag Opposition planted the nuclear seed of doubt: Germany would be drawn into the atomic circle with all its perils and anxieties; security would be threatened by atomic arms, not increased; even the hope for reunification would be darkened by the new weapons. Public opinion aroused from its coma; manifestos were signed, declarations issued.

The Adenauer Government, which hitherto had a monopoly on security and reunification policies, now had a monopoly on neither. Now there were two concepts of security instead of one, two approaches to reunification instead of one.

Moreover, the awakened public was forced to face anew the jolting question: "Which comes first; security for West Germans or unity for all Germans:" This is why the March debate was a turning point.

T h e D e b a t e

The Bundestag's chamber of deputies looks something like a field headquarters - stripped for action. The rakish golden German eagle glowers above the president's rostrum on the battleship - gray wall. In front of the high black rostrum is the speaker's lectern with a quartet of microphones. To the right is a black bank of plush green chairs for the Bundeskanzler and his cabinet. Beyond the lectern is the wide semi-circle of deputies' seats and desks - also green and black. Above are three long galleries for the press, public, and Government guests. All this somber scene is lit by fluorescent ceiling lamps, which bring out warts and dirty fingernails.

But then Bonn is only a provisional capital, and the Bundestag is only bivouacking here.

The debate began on a brisk Thursday morning. At 9 a.m. nearly all of the chairs in the chamber were filled. After an hour of preliminary sparring, Chancellor Adenauer left his bank and mounted the speaker's platform. Never known for wasting words, Adenauer came quickly to the point:

"All questions on the agenda of this debate turn on the key question: 'Should we stay in NATO or not.' ...NATO is in a phase of weapons - and military-strategic reorganization...The potential opponent of NATO is the Soviet Union and the East Block. The Soviet Union has atomic weapons and rockets. If an important part of NATO (Germany) doesn't possess equally strong weapons, then NATO is meaningless and pointless.

"If the NATO's strategic planning demands - and we will verify this - that the Bundesrepublik participate in this further development of weapons technique, and the Bundesrepublik objects, then the Bundesrepublik practically secedes from NATO..."

The Chancellor repeated his opening question, then added that if Germany wished to contribute to a general relaxation of tensions it must "carry the load too." Hammering the lectern, he said Germany's present goal should be controlled disarmament. These hard words plainly chilled the Opposition.

Foreign Minister von Brentano followed Adenauer at the lectern. German reunification, he cried, must stand on the summit conference agenda. That reunification must begin with free elections. Press-row was almost empty during Brentano's speech, an indication of his popularity rating.

After the noon pause, the S.P.D. sent its top jurist, skinny Adolf Arndt into the discussion. He turned to Government benches: "How can the Chancellor grasp atomic weapons with one hand and gesture toward the giants with the other (telling them) to disarm?" A decision to arm the Bundeswehr with atomic weapons, said Arndt, "can with great probability be the decision against reunification!" He concluded: "Hands off mass destruction means!"

The next speaker, Defense Minister Strauss, quickened the atmosphere with a trenchant and articulate address. The chunky Bavarian drew a grim portrait of Russian aggression, then launched on a vindication of Administration arms policy: "It would be criminal and foolish to try to drive out Communism with an atomic crusade..." But the nuclear deterrent will "keep it from spreading." Strauss also asked the S.P.D. whether it would be willing to "defend freedom with every means - including atomic weapons?" One of his finishing statements got a ruddy cheer from the Coalition. It was: "I think the bomb is safer with us than with the Soviets."

High-domed Fritz Erler of the S.P.D. drew first blood. He said Franz Josef Strauss's speech reminded him of "the despoiler of the German people (Goebbels) who cried out in the Berlin Sport Palace: 'Do you want total war?'" The hall filled with angry shouts. Nearly all of the Coalition deputies stamped noisily out of the chamber. Erler's speech - to the half-empty room - was calm and pertinent. "Again," he said, "we've reached the point where strategy dictates politics." The fall of NATO isn't the question, Erler said, but rather the question whether the Bundesrepublik shall be drawn into the atomic arms race.

Von Brentano burst like a red rocket on Erler: "You can't compare those who wanted a war with those who don't! Goebbels prepared a total war, while the Bundesrepublik wants to prevent a total war." Returned to the chamber, the Coalition applauded loudly.

Then the chairman of the F.D.P., Reinhold Maier, took the stand; a white-haired Swabian with a soft accent and a graceful wit. Were it not for these South German qualities, his speech might have driven the Coalition out of their chairs once more. Turning to Strauss, he said: "That was not the speech of a statesman, but rather a war speech...we heard the Reichskriegsminister, the talk of a fully armed war ministry...I would entrust no field cannon to the Defense Minister, for a man who talks like that shoots too." Maier finished with a smile: "The F.D.P. isn't going to put out fires in this Bundestag. We're going to start fires!"

Kurt Kiesinger rounded out the first day of debating by rapping some knuckles for the C.D.U.: "Rapacki's plan is patchwork"; "To accuse our fraction of wanting to arm for war is a monstrous slander"; "The intellectuals (against atomic weapons) are not idiots we can overlook."

At 9 p.m. when the president closed the session it was plain that the Coalition intended to arm the Bundeswehr with atomic weapons.

On Friday morning, the Bundestag chamber had the air of a maternity ward in a dragon hospital - everyone was waiting for the birth of some new verbal ugliness. We didn't have to wait long.

The first speaker, 43-year-old Herbert Schneider of the Deutsche Partei cried out: "May God keep us from a new conflict." Then turning to the S.P.D. ranks he added, "Let's hope you are able to believe in this God." The Social Democrats rose as one, shouting: "Shameless wretch!" In the press box M.S. Handler of the New York Times observed, "God is a controversial figure in Germany."

More interruptions came during the rebuttal of Herbert Wehner, one of the best minds in the S.P.D. and a Communist before the war. Wehner needled Adenauer for making contradictory statements. He also warned against the Chancellor's "delusion" that the Russians might someday weaken or collapse. In conclusion, Wehner called on the Government to contribute to a relaxation of tensions: "Say yes to negotiations on the Polish suggestion for an atom-free zone. A yes to negotiation doesn't mean a yes to the present plan, but for heaven's sake say yes to negotiation."

Again, Foreign Minister von Brentano entered the dispute. Spectators and correspondents vacated the chamber, leaving the tiresome Hessian to blunder into several slips of the tongue.

The next Coalition speaker was 45-year-old Richard Jaeger. Pointing to Germany's position in NATO, he said: "When the 18 Allied divisions are armed with atomic weapons and the 12 (planned) German divisions are not, then a potential opponent will know where to make his breakthrough." Tumult raged again when Jaeger said the S.P.D. policy would lead Germany to "capitulate before the Bolsheviks." Herbert Wehner leaped up and bellowed: "Filthy baiter!" Others yelled: "Slanderer", "Provocateur", and "Headhunter".

An F.D.P. deputy asked Jaeger whether he was prepared to bombard Leipzig (in East Germany) with atomic weapons. Jaeger retorted: "Don't you think German officers know better than Allied officers that Leipzig is a German city?" More turmoil in the Opposition, cheers from the Coalition. Bundestag President Gerstenmaier had to call several deputies to order.

Nobody ate a quiet lunch.

The afternoon session started smoothly enough with a dull speech from another C.D.U. deputy. But pandemonium broke out once more soon after Helene Wessels mounted the podium for the Social Democrats. This bulky creature, dressed in black, who makes much of her Catholic faith, raised a menacing fist at the Christian Democrats and cried: "I have the impression from the Coalition speakers that their belief in the power of atom bombs is stronger than their belief in God as the ruler of world history."

"Shame on your shamelessness!" yelled a C.D.U. man. "Poisoner!" yelled another, and several dozen Coalition deputies marched out of the chamber.

They returned later to hear Ernst Lemmer, the rotund Refugee Minister from Berlin, who succeeded in pacifying the parliament somewhat. He wound up with this remark: "If we put our nation of 53,000,000 up for grabs, that will kill the last hopes of the Germans beyond the Werra (in the East)." The rest of the afternoon speakers aroused no special attention.

Still, the deputies nerves had been rubbed raw. When bumptious young Wolfgang Döring got up to speak for the F.D.P. at 6:40 p.m. you could hear the growls from the Coalition benches. They growled again when the 38-year-old Döring said: "Nuclear weapons put us in the position of being able to start a third world war." And they interrupted with shouts of "Pfui!" as Döring lashed out at Strauss, Kiesinger, and other Coalition members.

There was still more agitation when Defense Minister Strauss re-entered the arena. Hunching his bulging shoulders over the lectern, he snapped back at Döring and Reinhold Maier: "A defense minister today is a peace minister. He has to see to it that it doesn't come to shooting...I ought to be able to speak an opinion without being terrorized." At this the Opposition started shouting protests. Some walked out. Hurling his words out like missiles, Strauss exclaimed: "We'll shoot first when we are attacked; second, only on military targets!"

It was close to 10 p.m. when Strauss finished his bull-voiced counterattack. One might have thought the Bundestag had played itself out. But that was far from the case.

At 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Carlo Schmid reopened the dispute for the S.P.D. A few minutes later, trouble broke out again. Schmid criticized the D.P.'s Herbert Schneider, who retorted that Schmid had been a "civil administrator under Hitler." The Social Democrat coldly replied: "Only Communists reproached me with that before." The Allies, he said had given him a clean bill of health. "If you want, Herr Schneider, I'll fight a duel with you on this matter."

Returning to his notes, Schmid declared that the real issues to deal with were: 1--Whether a reunified Germany should enter NATO or not; and 2--Should Germany join in an atom-free zone arrangement. As for East Germany, Dr. Schmid said that no matter how repulsive the Bundesrepublik found the Pankow regime, it must still be recognized as a de facto government.

Von Brentano was steamed up again. He rushed to rebut Schmid: "We're not ready to begin a game of poker with the German people's future. We don't have the courage to play in politics...Certainly we must make concessions, but the Rapacki plan is no good beginning." Brentano, like Schmid, was often interrupted by protests. The deputies were tense.

During the speech of F.D.P. deputy Kreitmeyer, the Bundestag president, Eugen Gerstenmaier announced that the debate would be cut short at 1 p.m. for the day. The next and final session, said the president, would be Tuesday. The reason: "I have received hundreds of telegrams from radio-listeners saying we should "end this horrible game." Kreitmeyer, a former Wehrmacht colonel, finished his assault on tactical atomic weapons by calling them "military nonsense."

At noon, the S.P.D. sent one of its youngest cannoneers into the speaker's tribune. Helmut Schmidt, 35, opened up immediately with a charge of grapeshot.

"Again, and again," said Schmidt, "you try to make the Bundeswehr an instrument of the Government party!" (Shouts and growls from the Coalition) At this point, Schmidt refused to allow a question, saying that up until then 18 persons had spoken for the Government against eight for the Opposition.

Schmidt fired again: "You want to keep freedom by preparing a nuclear war!" (angry cries from the Coalition) "I'm convinced you don't want war."

Kaiser Wilhelm didn't want it either...There's much talk here in Wilhelmine phrases. It was the Yellow Peril then, the Russian Peril now."

Then Schmidt took aim at some of the Government's speakers: "When you and the ministers speak of Abendland (the West), Herr Jaeger, then you mean NATO. When you talk of NATO, then you mean atomic rockets. When you talk of atomic rockets, then you mean power for it's own sake. Minister Strauss has betrayed you." His next words went under in a torrent of shouting from the crimson-faced Coalition. The president shook his bell with no effect.

Schmidt set forth his barrage on Strauss: "His feeling for power allowed him to strive toward atomic weapons when he wasn't even defense minister...Strauss is a dangerous man for our people, exactly because of his abilities." The Coalition kept on bellowing. Gerstenmaier rang his bell again. Schmidt reminded the Bundestag that Hitler's Enabling Act was passed exactly 25 years ago and that some of the C.D.U. deputies present had voted for it.* More shouting. Schmidt said: "Atom bombs in your hands are no less dangerous than they are in the hands of any other power!" The Coalition was frothing. Gerstenmaier threatened to close the session unless there was quiet. Schmidt concluded by calling the Christian Democrats to "give up your German nationalist megalomania!"

Countering for the Government, Kurt Kiesinger said: "I am ashamed for this whole parliament." Schmidt's speech was a "bucket of filth", "lies", "slander", and "venomous machinations". Nearly everyone left this mercurial Saturday session in a saturnine mood.

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Early Sunday morning I drove down to Frankfurt to attend the first public protest meeting of the "Fight Atomic Death" committee. This group had been organized several months before under the aegis of the Social Democratic Party. Its manifesto had been signed by well-known authors like Heinrich Böll and Erich Kästner; the Nobel Prize winner, Professor Max Born; theologians Martin Niemöller and Helmut Gollwitzer, and politicians Erich Ollenhauer, Thomas Dehler, and Carlo Schmid.

Some 3,000 people packed Frankfurt's Congress Hall at 11 a.m. There was standing room only by the time a teen-ager ochestra struck up Schubert's Seventh Symphony.

Most of the speakers played on chords that were even more emotional than Schubert's:

Walter Weizel, theoretical physicist--"We culture-humans won't have a chance to survive an atomic war,,, the statesmen and generals won't survive either. (Applause) We must either reject atomic war or accept the downfall of our civilization."

Stefan Andres, writer.."They vote for rockets and say: 'Rather atomic death than slavery!' And they regard this as heroic. Actually this either-or thinking comes from stupidity, inertia, or despair..."

Robert Jungk, journalist--"I saw a Japanese girl in Hiroshima whose eyes were burned open by the atom bomb. She couldn't close them. Do we have to wait until our eyes are opened this way?"

* (On March 23, 1933, Hitler said this law would permit him to work for world peace, disarmament, and armament when disarmament failed.)

During Jungk's speech there were cries for a "General Strike" against atomic weapons. Jungk said: "Yes, strike if your union leaders have the courage to call one." (Robert Jungk, an emigre in 1933, has been an American citizen since 1950.) The cries for a general strike rose again during the speech of Erich Ollenhauer. At a press conference afterwards, the speakers put a lot of distance between themselves and such a strike, and sweated a towelful in the process.

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On Tuesday, the Bundestag assembled for the fourth and last day of debating. The passions of Saturday were still flickering. For a moment it seemed they would flare up again when the Coalition majority rammed through a time-limit motion. But Vice-President Carlo Schmid called his excited fraction to order. Actually, many of the deputies had gotten word from their constituents that they had better quit the rough stuff and behave themselves.

Some observers said this was the first time public opinion had exercised influence on the Bonn parliament.

The morning session was dominated by two superior orators - velvet-voiced Gustav Heinemann of the S.P.D. and the sagacious Swabian, Eugen Gerstenmaier of the C.D.U.

Heinemann attempted to show that atomic armaments were illegal according to international law (the Hague Convention) and unethical according to Christian teaching. As for the S.P.D. position, he said: "We don't want less security; we want another and a better security." To the C.D.U., Heinemann said: "A blind anti-Communism is coming over us - it led us to tragedy once."

Gerstenmaier complimented Heinemann for his "noble tone". Then he said: "Our power is not such that we can carry through alone what we think is right. The basic concept of our policy has shown itself to be correct - that without a strong and reliable status in the protective system of the free world, the Bundesrepublik has no possibility for influencing political events and no sufficient security for us." The S.P.D. policy depends on Soviet benevolence, said Gerstenmaier. Thus unless Moscow is willing to act on general disarmament, Western nuclear armament must continue.

In the afternoon, Ollenhauer accused the Administration of calling this debate in order to get "revenge for January 23." "If it has gotten out of hand," he added, "it's your fault." In a threatening voice, the S.P.D. chairman concluded: "Don't imagine that this question will vanish from the Bundestag agenda when you make your majority vote." We will hold a popular referendum!"

Ollenhauer was followed by Chancellor Adenauer, Brentano, and Strauss, who repeated essentially what they had said earlier. Adenauer also predicted he would win the 1961 election. Strauss denied he wanted power. And Brentano called Herbert Wehner a liar twice. There were a dozen more short speeches by freshman deputies and big guns. The debate sputtered to an end at 9:30 p.m. With a total length of 37 hours it could compete nicely against Wagner's Nibelung cycle.

An hour later the Bundestag assembled once more to vote on the various bills concerning atom weapons. With an almost sickening show of unanimity the Coalition majority shoved through its motion to accept atomic weapons for the Bundeswehr. Only two Deutsche Partei deputies had the nerve to vote against the obedient tide. For that matter, the Opposition parties showed an equally servile unanimity in opposing the Government bills. Independent thinking and voting still goes down hard in the German Bundestag.

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Earlier I spoke of allegory. It is with allegory in mind that I have cited the wrathful insults and outbursts of the March debate at length. They had little bearing on the course of Germany's foreign policy, but they do indicate the degree of passion Germans feel on this issue.

The March debate put West Germany on the rack. It forced the politicians to wrestle with this nation's painful past as well as its tormenting present. One American correspondent said he thought this was a good psychological purge for the Germans. "They'll get it out of their systems this way," he said. Perhaps he is right, but it seems like a toxic cure to me.

Meanwhile, the Germans have been made excruciatingly aware that security comes before reunification. As if that were not enough, they were obliged to watch their own parliament excuse itself from all responsibility for the Bundesrepublik's future in international affairs. Again and again the Government emphasized that the decisive factors were in Moscow and Washington.

We Americans are left holding the West German bag. And if something goes wrong, you can bet they won't waste time blaming us for it.

T h e A f t e r m a t h

The day the debate ended, 700 workers left their jobs in a Kassel factory in protest against atomic weapons. The German Trade Union Federation refused to approve this action. Later, the Federation representing 6,000,000 workers - declined to organize a general strike against atomic weapons.

Meanwhile, the S.P.D. has been pushing its campaign against the Coalition on two fronts: 1--the "Fight Atomic Death" program; and 2--the call for a popular referendum. On the first front, scores of local protest meetings have been held; mass protest marches have taken place in Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen. On the second front; next week the S.P.D. will try to force the Bundestag to hold a referendum. Half a dozen S.P.D. cities and two S.P.D. states (Hesse and Hamburg) intend to run referendums on a local basis. The Coalition parties, of course, are fighting all these attempts as "anti-democratic."

In the German world, as Clemens Brentano observed, you're driven to the extremes of hate or love. Nobody can embrace the neutral Devil, much as they might like to.

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