

## INTRODUCTION

Like yesterday's headlines, political orations do not as a rule remain news for any length of time. Yet there are occasions when parliamentary debates illuminate the political complexion of a country and highlight the problems confronting it.

Such an occasion was the Plenary Debate on the Policy Statement of the newly-formed German Federal Government, carried on by the spokesmen for all political parties in the Bundestag at Bonn in September 1949. Both Statement and Debate are still of topical interest since they provide a comprehensive roundup of political programs, temperaments and methods of approach on the right, in the center and on the left. They show us how the issues that agitate Germans today are reflected in the views of their political leaders. True enough, such keynote speeches are made with one eye on the gallery and the folks back home, in Germany as elsewhere. Yet even promises and demands impossible of fulfillment at this time help the observer to evaluate the personalities and parties that were the choice of the people of Western Germany in the elections of 14 August 1949.

Those were the first free elections for a national parliament in seventeen years. Just over a century before, the middle-class revolution of 1848 had culminated in the election of a National Assembly. Germany's first democratic parliament assembled in Frankfurt, but its high-minded liberalism soon proved ineffectual in coping with the entrenched forces running the country. By 1849, these forces were again in the saddle. After a united Germany had been formed in 1871, a new national parliament, the Reichstag, was elected in direct and secret suffrage by men over twenty-five. The electoral system was based on single-district majority vote. Dealing with such strong-willed rulers as the "Iron Chancellor" Bismarck and later Emperor Wilhelm II, it was a restraining and democratizing influence even when it came off second best.

In November 1918 the Emperor was deposed and a democratic republic proclaimed. In its Article 22 the new Weimar Constitution provided for a Reichstag elected on the basis of proportional representation by direct, universal and secret ballot of both sexes over twenty. In the first ardor of the Republic's prime, the Reichstag was its democratic powerhouse. But when the Nazi vote soared from 1,075,000 in 1928 to 6,400,000 in 1930, while the Communists boosted their total from 3,250,000 to 4,600,000 in the same period, the two groups, united in their common hatred of parliamentary

democracy, made a mockery of the parliamentary process. As the economic depression deepened, radicalism swept the country. By 1932, the National Socialists had again more than doubled their vote, to 13,750,000, while the Communists reached 5,300,000; together these two held half the seats in the Reichstag. They abused its privileges and prerogatives and frustrated all constructive work. Nazi and Communist tactics so undermined the structure of democratic government that it collapsed before the goose-step of Hitler's cohorts.

Four weeks after Hitler's accession to power the Reichstag building in Berlin went up in flames. The conflagration and the propaganda campaign unleashed by it were part of the Nazi campaign of terror and intimidation. A week later, on 5 March 1933, the last Reichstag worthy of the name was elected. When it approved the "Enabling Act" on 24 March 1933, it signed its own death warrant and wrote finis to German democracy. One by one, all parties were eliminated; by July 1933 only the Nazi Party remained. The Reichstag lingered on, leading a sort of phantom existence. When it met at long intervals, the deputies listened to a Hitler speech, then ratified government measures unanimously. But the outer trappings of a functioning parliament remained and the Reichstag "deputies", mostly local Nazi bosses and hangers-on, drew full deputy's pay.

With the German collapse in 1945, this sham "parliament" vanished. Under military occupation, representative councils to give the German people a voice in the determination of their own affairs began to be elected at local level in early 1946. Gradually, elections were held at county level, then, for the most part in 1946 and again in 1948, at state (Land) level.

The failures of both the Moscow and the London Conferences of the Council of Foreign Ministers in 1947 demonstrated the impossibility of reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union on the political and economic unification of Germany, which had been called for by the Potsdam Agreement. In view of the deterioration of the general political situation and of the Western German economy, which had been financed since the beginning of the Occupation at great cost to the U.S. and U.K. taxpayers, the U.S., U.K. and French Governments were thus forced to revise their position. In the "London Agreements" of 1 June 1948, the three Occupation powers and the Benelux countries resolved to establish a Federal Government in

Western Germany on the basis of a democratic provisional constitution.

In August 1948, the legislatures of the eleven states of the Western Zones chose 65 delegates to a Parliamentary Council, a constituent assembly that met in Bonn to draft such a provisional constitution. After this charter had been adopted in May 1949, a national parliament, the Bundestag, was elected on 14 August 1949 by free, direct, secret and universal ballot of all Germans over 21 years of age. In the Soviet Zone, no election above Land level has been permitted. This state of affairs is one of the major obstacles that have hitherto precluded the unification of Germany.

The Bundestag elections of 14 August 1949 were conducted under an electoral system in which about 60 percent of the candidates in each Land were elected by single-district majority vote. Approximately 40 percent were chosen by proportional representation, on the basis of Land reserve lists compiled by each Land party headquarters. Votes were computed separately for each Land.

The Bundestag assembled for its inaugural meeting at Bonn on 7 September 1949. Two weeks later, a Cabinet had been formed and on 20 September 1949 Federal Chancellor Dr. Konrad Adenauer delivered the Government's Policy Statement, fol-

lowed on succeeding days by eleven keynote addresses from spokesmen for each party. All these speeches have been reproduced in this volume. Other representatives took part in the latter part of the Debate. Their addresses have been omitted here because they were, for the most part, in the nature of repartee, rebuttals of the points made by preceding speakers. Interruptions by hecklers have been reproduced wherever they appeared to facilitate an understanding of the Debate.

The Coalition Government of CDU, FDP and DP (see p. 13), sworn in just before Dr. Adenauer delivered the Policy Statement, is made up of center and right-of-center elements whose views differ widely on controversial topics such as centralism *versus* states' rights, planned economy *versus* laissez-faire, parochial *versus* non-denominational schools, etc.. Therefore, the Policy Statement of the Government was eagerly awaited as an indication of the policies it intended to pursue. By the same token, the Plenary Debate following it gave spokesmen for the Opposition parties their first opportunity to define their attitude towards the Government and the problems it must grapple with.

Resolved to do its best and to resist temptation, German parliamentary democracy for the fourth time marches towards the future.

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