



Conference Papers on the Web

**The American Impact on Western Europe:
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective**

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In a speech before a gathering of West German journalists, Konrad Adenauer decried the growing use of neologisms in the German press. Citing the dangers inherent in too much linguistic experimentation, Adenauer concluded with the semi-ironic remark: “Ich bitte Sie, meine Herren, wir sind doch keine Amerikaner!”

These comments from the “Chancellor of the Allies” should encourage us to remember an often forgotten truth, that despite Adenauer’s largely successful policy of *Westbindung* and despite very close postwar German-American relations, there nevertheless remained a great deal of ambivalence in German responses to the West. However much Germans such as Adenauer wanted Germany to become part of the West, that did not mean that they accepted uncritically everything that came from that direction. As we examine the reactions of German political parties and interest groups especially to American political models and to the unavoidable pressure to conform to American conceptions, we can see that the result was not simply a uniform acceptance of these models, but rather a constant process of adaptation and negotiation that produced a variety of German “Wests” with varying American accents. Despite the obvious power imbalance between the defeated Germans and victorious Americans, developments after 1945 are marked more by adaptation than imposition, motivated both by American reluctance to be seen as dictating terms and German determination to save what they thought worth saving

from their own traditions. The result is thus a blended reality, the product of the “dialectical process” described by Professor Berghahn in his earlier paper, and by Dr. Spevack here.

This dialectic has been of particular interest to me in my own work, as I look at the ways that German politicians in the CDU/CSU developed their foreign policy conceptions in the postwar years, balancing their desire to support European integration under American leadership to rebuild the “*christliches Abendland*” with their ambivalence about the USA’s suitability as a long-term partner with Europe. The result there is a policy in which the “West” sometimes includes the Americans and sometimes does not, a search for the maximum autonomy and flexibility while at the same time recognizing the significance of maintaining the transatlantic tie.

The three papers offered here today offer different perspectives on this very complex process.

Edmund Spevack’s paper goes to the very origins of the West German state, to see the degree to which Allied and especially American conceptions of a constitutional democratic order found expression in the West German Basic Law. What he has found is an interesting mixture of especially American ideas about federalism and democracy and German willingness to improve upon the mistakes of Weimar. What remained of German anti-western, anti-democratic attitudes, even those expressed by members of the resistance and in early post-war discussions, was effectively excluded by Western planners; and while the Basic Law was clearly German, the allies shaped the context within which it could be developed, the “crib,” according one important quote in the paper. In order to advance the discussion, I would like to offer one observation and some questions. My observation is that, while Dr. Spevack refers to the “allies” I cannot help but

think that he would be more accurate in saying “the Americans.” Ultimately, the British and French political models were not terribly attractive to the Germans, and the state that emerged in 1949 bears more visible traces of American ideas than those of any other European state. Both the federalist ideas that emerged as dominant during the debates on the Basic Law and the fact that, as Spevack writes, most of the impulses for the new constitutional movement came from groups such as the Ellwanger Circle, who represented politicians in the American zone, underscore this fact. Even the conservative anti-Americanism of many members of this circle could not hide their preference of the American model to the British, much as they preferred American economic models to Labour-inspired socialism. In this way we can see that the terms “allied,” and “Western” can in some cases be elided into “American.” I would thus ask the audience to consider the extent to which this concrete case reinforces one or the other side of the “Americanization-Westernization” debate. Is there a practical difference here between Americanization and Westernization, or can the terms be used interchangeably? I would also ask whether the eventual development of “chancellor Democracy” under Adenauer, which was a foreseeable but certainly not inevitable result of the system created by the Basic Law, reflected a specifically “German” political culture, one that sought stability in a strong executive, and thus can be seen as a reflection of real German autonomy in the practical execution of the Basic Law, thereby further highlighting the degree of German autonomy in shaping postwar political practice.

Philipp Gassert’s paper addresses the problem of Americanization from the biographical perspective, by attempting to outline the relationship between Kiesinger and the Americans. On

this personal level, this dialectical process is even more clear. Kiesinger was willing and able to adapt to the new situation created by the Federal Republic's "Turn to the Atlantic," and would become a champion of western values. That did not mean, however, that he somehow became American over night, or that he lost any connection to his German past. As Gassert describes Kiesinger's very gradual reorientation away from National Socialism, we see that this reorientation was due more to practical political considerations than idealism. Furthermore, Kiesinger's espousal of *Westbindung* and democracy aimed at righting the wrongs of 1919, not 1933. Once he became an important member of the CDU/CSU, Kiesinger embodied the decision of many other German conservatives, for whom championing of *Westbindung* and European integration under American leadership was as much a *Realpolitik* decision designed to provide greater political autonomy for Germany and Europe as any embrace of American leadership. One can also see in the tension between political and ideological westernization, exemplified in the struggle between CDU and SPD over the direction of German policy. Neither side was willing to discard all German elements, but rather both hoped to harmonize them with American policy. The CDU/CSU was initially more successful, but subsequent developments after the Bad Godesberg "conversion" of the SPD made their more flexible approach to domestic politics and especially to foreign relations more appealing to the Americans. Kiesinger's ascent to the Chancellorship was after all the product of the divisive battle between "Atlanticists" and "Gaullists" that ended Ludwig Erhard's tenure in office and heralded the CDU/CSU's eventual loss of national political dominance. Kiesinger played a key role in this conflict as a mediator between the factions within the CDU/CSU, and himself embodied the ambivalence within German politics toward the West. His case should encourage us to consider in our discussions

the utility of the biographical approach, and the degree to which this example of an “Americanized” but still very “European” statesman can serve as an illustration of the overall development.

Frieder Günther gives us an even more clear example of how hard it is to speak of a one-way street of Americanization by looking at a group of individuals who proved especially resistant to new ideals. The reactions of German professors of law to American and other western models should remind us all of the dangers of assuming radical breaks in history. Indeed, their initial resistance and eventual grudging accommodation to change can also be seen as representative for the German academy as a whole, where universities maintained older and specifically “German” elements much longer than any postwar planners would have preferred. What change did take place happened only gradually and through adaptation. My questions for Günther and for us are more general. In what way does the assertion that elements of the Basic Law “broke decisively with the German constitutional tradition” (4) fit with Dr. Spevack’s paper? You also mention that the Federal Constitutional Court eventually robbed the *Staatsrechtslehre* of much of its importance, and that in Karlsruhe, where the judges were chosen because of their clean records, in contrast to the Professorate, western ideas were adopted with greater speed and enthusiasm. (6) Does this privileging of more “westernized” academics therefore explain the ultimate Westernization of the *Staatsrechtslehre*? In other words, should we attribute this shift to the changing career pressures on legal scholars? What does this suggest about the impact of material pressures on German Westernization? Finally, there is the question of the significance of the

changes in *Staatsrechtlehre*. Is this group of professors representative of the entire German academy, or is it merely an extreme case?

I do not want to go on too long, but want to give the presenters and then the audience a chance to consider these issues.