

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Who really was Herbert Wehner?

Studying just-published dossiers and private notes may shed a light on many a dark affair.

This author joined the LaRouche movement in May 1974, when Chancellor Willy Brandt, then the chairman of the German Social Democrats (SPD), resigned over a spy affair involving his closest aide, Günther Guillaume. His resignation came just as Germany was struggling with the economic, strategic, and political repercussions of the 1973 “Yom Kippur” Arab-Israeli War and the ensuing Arab oil boycott.

When Brandt was replaced by Helmut Schmidt at the chancellory, and massive austerity was imposed under the pretext of fighting the effects of the oil shock, this seemed to serve the Trilateral Commission of David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger in its plans for a reorganization of the western world around the design for “fascism with a democratic face.”

It was known in early 1974 that Kissinger and Brandt had clashed when Brandt balked at allowing U.S. airlifts to Israel from bases in Germany, during the Yom Kippur War. The German government gave in to heavy pressure, but Kissinger swore revenge against Brandt. After all, Kissinger had played a key role in early 1969, in sabotaging a continuation of the Grand Coalition (Christian and Social Democrats) then in power, and preparing the socialist-liberal coalition that made Brandt chancellor. Kissinger believed that Brandt owed him a favor—a debt that was to be paid in 1973.

Brandt’s reluctance to sail along with at least some of the Trilateral Commission’s plans also had to do with his resentment against Kissinger for the “arrogance of power” Brandt felt in him. Brandt’s widow revealed

that interesting story on Dec. 18, 1993, in a *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* essay. Her remarks, based on previously unpublished private notes of Brandt, aired aspects of transatlantic tensions that hadn’t been known to a broader audience in Germany.

This detail may put a missing stone in the mosaic of the period of German postwar history more broadly known as *Ostpolitik*, the diplomatic opening to the East. It had always been a puzzle why Wehner, the parliamentary whip of the Social Democrats in Bonn, changed views about the liberal Free Democrats. In 1968 he had wanted to kick them out of the parliament by a change in the election laws; yet in secret talks in late 1969, Wehner wooed the same Free Democrats as a coalition partner for a socialist-liberal government, after that year’s September elections.

This about-face was widely ascribed to Wehner’s reputation as a “power tactician,” as a move in the project of making a Social Democrat—Willy Brandt—chancellor in Bonn for the first time since the West German republic was founded in 1949. Wehner had already played a key role in the overthrow of the late 1950s’ SPD party chairman Erich Ollenhauer, and after a short interlude with chairman Fritz Erler, also helped steer Brandt’s election as new SPD party leader in 1964.

The fact that Wehner also helped engineer Brandt’s downfall in May 1974, posed questions as to his loyalties. If not for himself, for whom else did he stage Brandt’s exit and his replacement by Helmut Schmidt? Or, from the standpoint of *Ostpolitik*—why would the “grand tactician” Wehner, an ex-Communist and postwar left-leaning Social

Democrat, stage a crisis in Bonn that brought to power a committed atlanticist and great admirer of Kissinger like Schmidt?

Documents from former East German intelligence archives have just been made public, indicating that Wehner kept secret contact, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with senior East German leaders. Some, like Erich Honecker, he knew from their days together in the pre-war German Communist Party. He kept contact even when he was Bonn minister of all-German affairs in the Grand Coalition of 1966-69—in 16 cases, without telling Brandt.

These dossiers suggest that Wehner never stopped being an agent of the Comintern and the postwar KGB, even after becoming a member of the West German Social Democrats in 1946. The dossiers don’t tell, however, what Brandt’s private notes made available by his widow point to: Wehner met Honecker in 1946, in the British zone of occupation, under the eyes of the British authorities. It was, after all, British intelligence officers who debriefed Wehner during his 1942 arrest in Sweden—the arrest that made him a “convert from communism to social democracy” and paved his way into the SPD in 1946. Was Wehner, who died in January 1990, an Anglo-Soviet agent?

This may explain why he helped oust Kissinger’s adversary Brandt in 1974; it may also explain why Wehner made the SPD party executive pass that late 1974 “incompatibility” decree outlawing any contact between SPD party members and the LaRouche movement, which Kissinger also saw as an adversary. In order to combat LaRouche’s programmatic influence in the party, in late 1974, slanders of LaRouche as an alleged right-wing “CIA” creation began to penetrate the leftist SPD.