

Kurt Schumacher, Our Place in Europe

Caption: In February 1949, the monthly newsletter News from Germany, published by the Executive Committee of the German Social-Democratic Party, publishes an article on Germany's place in Europe written by Kurt Schumacher, Party Chairman.

Source: News from Germany. February 1949, No 2; Vol.3. [s.l.]: Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

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Our Place in Europe

by Dr. Kurt Schumacher

The consolidation of Western Europe is a decisive part of world politics. The question at stake is whether it will be possible to erect a political edifice upon sound economic foundations which will be proof against economic crises and political storms. It is utterly absurd to think that Germany has a special political mission to act as go-between and bridge between the East and the West. It will be a very difficult and painstaking task to transform the present geographical and historical entity of Germany into an actual political reality. The illusion of Germany's missionary role which has replaced the mad German craving for world domination only serves to frustrate any attempts at solving this great problem.

It is the most fatal of political illusions to believe that Germans have a choice between East and West. Not only pro-Communist agitators — who have long ago made up their minds in favour of the East — propagate this phantasy, but also right-wing sections talk about the “elastic German foreign policy” which should not allow relations with the Soviet Union to be broken off. This demonstrates a pitiful lack of intelligence, realism and political imagination. One can just imagine these beaten, wretched Germans holding the trump cards and playing off the enormous world empires against one another! These ideas represent the historical relics of the last hundred and fifty years, nourished by the traditions of a nationalist “Reichswehr” and of the Eastern-orientated professional right-wing politicians.

The Communists pretend that the German workers and intellectuals have a choice between Eastern socialism, which alone represents true democracy, and capitalist pseudo-democracy. It is not much of a choice! What the Communists please to call Eastern socialism is non-existent. According to European concepts this so-called Eastern socialism is an extreme authoritarian state-capitalism which deprives the workers of all their rights, terrorises the people and maintains its production with the aid of armies of slave labour. What the supporters of Moscow call capitalist democracy need not remain capitalist if the peoples do not wait for a solution from outside but take their destinies in their own hands. ... A decision in favour of the East would constitute the last independent decision the Germans could make. From then onward they would be spared the trouble of thinking for themselves and of taking new decisions.

Democracy inside Germany is the only firm foundation for a policy which can free the nation and open up the way for her becoming an equal partner in the framework of international co-operation. European poverty, the history and political and psychological development of our continent make us realize that the social and moral force of German democracy represents the only effective resistance to the threat of enslavement from the East. The Germans can only attain independence on the basis of democracy. Only socialism can preserve and consolidate this independence.

They must keep their independence vis-à-vis all the occupying powers. If they fail on this issue they will pave the way for the destruction of democracy and of the appreciation of freedom, i.e. they are on the road to Communism. The free play of brutal instincts of the property-owners with their insane craving for profits, which we witness in present-day Western Germany, will in the long run make it impossible to stem the tide of Nationalism and Communism. Socialism and Democracy embody the idea of national freedom and of international peace in Western Europe, and above all in Germany which stands in the forefront of the great political and ideological struggles of our time.

The Social Democrats have welcomed the Marshall Plan. The bourgeoisie however, want to employ it for their shameful exploitation of the working class. Although this may not be the intention of the mass of bourgeois supporters, their representatives act as the puppets of a completely destructive class-egotism. Whether it is their intention or not, they are the Fifth Column of World Communism on German soil. The German Special Democratic party is of the opinion that the unity of Germany can only be realized if the West of Germany can serve as an economic magnet. But economic reconstruction cannot exercise any attraction for the people of Eastern Germany if it bears the mark of a brutal and short-sighted capitalism. We Social Democrats do not think that ruthless profit-making and the exploitation of the weak can form part of

the great idea of freedom. There is only one freedom — the freedom that grants human beings their rights. This is the formula which goes beyond the rather uninspiring defensive attitude and makes an irresistible impression on the people of Eastern Germany.

In the struggle for Eastern Germany the Social Democratic party has taken the greatest risks and made the heaviest sacrifices. For the Social Democratic party there is no such thing as a policy of “writing off” the East of Germany, to use the odious Communist term which has been adopted by ignoramuses of all parties. For the Social Democratic party there is only a policy of solidarity. Democratic Socialism will develop the force to create national unity and to make international co-operation a reality.