

The years of exile and the post-war period (1933–1947)

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The years of exile and the post-war period (1933–1947)

In danger of being arrested by the National-Socialists, the 20-year old Willy Brandt fled to Norway in spring 1933. He quickly learnt the language of his country of exile and engaged actively in the labour movement, on the political and media fronts. As representative of the SAP (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei) he also played a substantial militant role in the socialist resistance to the Nazi dictatorship and the other fascist movements in Europe. Responsible for establishing contacts between exiles and party sympathisers who had remained in Germany, Brandt travelled variously, under an assumed name, to Spain during the Civil War, to Paris and to Berlin. His first-hand experience of the Norwegian Workers' Party, which as a governing party had developed a pragmatic version of social democracy, was to have a lasting influence on Brandt's political credo and activities. Of no less importance for his political development were his exposure to international circles and a view of the European situation 'from the outside'. Both these elements heightened the youthful Brandt's understanding of the need for a peaceful order in Europe based on European unification, a concept to which he first gave expression in an article published in 1939 in the Norwegian newspaper *Bergens Arbeiderblad*, entitled 'The dream of a United States of Europe'. The idea developed in the article was that of a 'federation achieved in stages', built on increased trade, economic cooperation and partial integration by region, one aim and not the least being to forestall future German attempts to impose hegemony.

The invasion of Norway by Nazi Germany on 9 April 1940 forced Brandt, like many other émigrés, to flee to Norway's neutral neighbour, Sweden. During his exile in Stockholm, with its markedly international flavour, Brandt was to meet Rut Hansen, a Norwegian who, as Rut Brandt, would later become his second wife; he also came into contact with many figures who, like himself, would go on in the post-war period to shape the political destinies of their countries and international relations. Social Democrats like Bruno Kreisky (who would become Chancellor of Austria), Gunnar Myrdal (who went on to be Sweden's Minister of Commerce, a UN Emissary and winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics) and Halvard Lange (who became the Norwegian Foreign Minister) debated in what came to be called the 'Small International' on such issues as 'the peace aims of European socialists and the outlook for a peaceful and stable post-war order in Europe'. Brandt became honorary secretary of this group and, as Kreisky later recalled, its 'chairman'. As regards Brandt's own ideas concerning European unification, it soon became clear to him that those ideas were hard to reconcile with the realities and challenges of the post-war period and could be implemented only in the long term.

Following the capitulation of the Third Reich, Brandt returned to liberated Norway, where he re-established contact with the Social Democrats who, in the interim, had assumed power under the leadership of Einar Gerhardsen. In November 1945, he was dispatched as a reporter to the ruins of post-war Germany. While he was there, he reported for the Scandinavian workers' press on the Nuremberg war crimes trials and wrote 'Criminals and Other Germans', a book which would later attract much hostile comment. In January 1947, with the backing of Halvard Lange, he was appointed press attaché with the Norwegian Military Mission to the Allied Control Council. Just one year later his political commitment prompted him to reassume German citizenship, of which he had been deprived by the National-Socialists, and to take part, through the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in the political, economic and social reconstruction of Germany.