

100th anniversary of Brandt's birth

Willy Brandt, first Social Democratic chancellor of Germany and opponent of Trotskyism

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The hundredth anniversary of the birth of Willy Brandt on December 18 has triggered a flood of TV specials, events, exhibitions, documentaries and media commentaries.

The headline, "100 Years Birthday of Willy Brandt—The patriot who was loved, fought, betrayed" appeared in *Der Spiegel* magazine a full month ago. The weekly *Die Zeit* newspaper followed a few days later with a full-page cover picture of the first Social Democratic chancellor (Brandt melancholic, as mandolin player) with the headline, "What is the source of his fascination?" This was followed by a 50-page glossy magazine, titled, "Willy Brandt—visionary, world citizen, chancellor of (German) unity".

During his lifetime, Brandt received the Nobel Peace Prize. Today one gets the impression there is a powerful lobby seeking his sainthood.

There is something bizarre about this Brandt euphoria. The ruling elite in the business world, politics and media is trying to personify him as some sort of wonderful father figure. They are determined to grandiloquently elevate his role as a politician who "reconciled (the workers) with capitalism" during the great strikes of the sixties and seventies, cleared protesting students from the streets with his education system reform, and prepared for the reunification of Germany with his "new *Ostpolitik*" (policy of opening up to the Stalinist East). His genuflection at the Warsaw ghetto memorial in December 1970 is portrayed as an act of a genius.

A psychologist would probably describe this glorification of Willy Brandt as an archetypal expression of fear. An attempt is being made to find something in the past that is patently missing in the present: a charismatic leader.

The ruling class knows that the historical crisis of capitalism, which is deeper and more comprehensive today than in the thirties, is leading to monumental class struggles and social upheavals. It is impossible for the policy of social demolition to continue without provoking mass opposition.

Willy Brandt was certainly useful to the ruling class in the post war decades. He was an anti-fascist, unlike the many old Nazis orbiting the Adenauer government, and could make left-wing speeches while promoting right-wing policies.

The ruling class would dearly like to have someone like him around today. But it has only an East German pastor's daughter as chancellor, who is unable to foresee the consequences of her radical austerity policies, and an East German pastor as federal president, whose main political talent is giving anti-communist sermons. In addition, it has, as chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), a man who regards Agenda 2010 (the programme for creating a vast low-wage sector) and law-and-order polices as the most important social democratic achievements necessary to

maintain the German state.

The vast majority of the working population will find the euphoria over Brandt remote from their interests. The name Willy Brandt evokes for many only bitter memories of promises not kept. Some older people still remember the huge demonstrations and strikes of the sixties and seventies, which vainly sought to force the Brandt government to implement social reforms. At the time, the saying "We'll keep Willy in range of our lash" was often voiced by workers, but soon proved to be an illusion.

No one today expects social improvements or progressive initiatives from the Social Democrats. The SPD is known for what it is: a right-wing party of the political establishment.

Brandt, the SAP and the Fourth International

The many publications on the political life of Willy Brandt have deliberately omitted certain key periods in his career. Hardly anyone talks about Brandt's exile in Norway and the fierce campaign he waged against Trotsky and the Left Opposition. His subsequent promotion to leading positions in the post-war West German SPD was closely associated with these attacks on Trotskyists. We intend here to illuminate this important period in more detail.

At the age of only 16, Brandt—then known as Herbert Frahm—joined the SPD in his home town of Lübeck. But his initial membership of the SPD did not last long. He left the SPD to become a member of the Socialist Workers Party of Germany (SAP), formed in the autumn of 1931. After the Nazis took power, he emigrated to Norway and took over the leadership of the SAP youth organisation in Oslo.

The SAP was the classic case of a centrist party. It criticised the right-wing policies of the SPD, but refused to draw revolutionary conclusions from its own critique, fluctuating back and forth between the reformist and revolutionary camps of the labour movement.

The SAP had emerged as a left split from the SPD and became a melting pot for various political currents estranged from the SPD and the German Communist Party (KPD). These included left-wing Social Democrats, former leaders of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USDG), remnants of the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD), defectors from the Leninbund (Lenin Left Communists) and the KPD Opposition, and various groups who described themselves as "radical pacifists".

Trotsky characterised the SAP as a "group of desperate social democratic public servants, lawyers and journalists", adding that a desperate social democrat is still not a revolutionary.

Confronted by the thuggery of the Nazis, the SAP moved temporarily to the left. Max Seydewitz and Kurt Rosenfeld, two left-wing Social Democrats, were replaced as party leaders by Jacob Walcher and Paul

Frölich—two founding members of the KPD, who came from the KPD Opposition led by Heinrich Brandler.

In August 1933, the International Left Opposition (ILO) called for the building of the Fourth International. Inaugurating this move, Trotsky was implementing the lessons he had drawn from the German catastrophe. The disastrous policies of the German Communist Party, which adamantly rejected a united front with the SPD against the Nazis, had let Hitler legally—i.e., without firing a shot—take power. When the Third Communist International defended this policy and none of its sections protested, Trotsky drew the conclusion that it was moribund as far as revolution was concerned and could not be reformed.

The SAP, together with the International Left Opposition and two Dutch parties, signed a proclamation, calling for the construction of the Fourth International. In this "Declaration of the Four", it was categorically stated that "the new International cannot tolerate any conciliation with reformism or centrism. The necessary unity of the labour movement cannot be achieved by blurring revolutionary and reformist conceptions, or by assimilating to Stalinist policies, but only by overcoming the policies of the two bankrupt Internationals".

Willy Brandt, who had taken this name during his Norwegian exile, agreed with this statement—in order to then systematically boycott and combat the building of the Fourth International. In doing so, he relied on shabby bureaucratic tricks, as well as fierce political denunciations. He saw to it that the Trotskyists were expelled from the International Youth Office and wrote articles accusing Trotskyism of the "worst form of sectarianism."

In a report to Trotsky and the International Secretariat of the Left Opposition, Walter Held described how Brandt organized his expulsion from a meeting of the International Youth Office on August 18, 1935.

Held, a leading German Trotskyist, had emigrated from Berlin to Norway in 1933 and later worked as Trotsky's secretary. During an attempt to reach the United States by travelling via the USSR in 1941, he was arrested along with his wife and child by the Stalinist GPU secret police, and later murdered.

The meeting of August 18, 1935, had been convened on the initiative of Walter Held. The work of the Youth Office had come to a stop since the June 17. "On that day, Willy Brandt and I addressed a letter to the Socialist Youth League of Sweden (SYL)," writes Held, "in which we called upon it to withdraw its representative from the Mot Dag group and appoint another representative, because collaboration with Mot Dag had become impossible due to this group's opportunistic attitude to Norwegian and international issues."

Mot Dag (English: "Towards the Day") was an association of Norwegian intellectuals who courted social democracy and Stalinism.

During preparation for the meeting, Willy Brandt had supported Walter Held's initiative to exclude the Mot Dag representatives. At the meeting, however, Brandt allied himself with the Mot Dag deputy, angrily attacked the International Left Opposition, and demanded that Held distance himself from Trotsky's criticism of the Youth Office. When Held refused, he was expelled. The International Youth Office was disbanded a few weeks later.

Operating through the *Marxist Tribune*, the theoretical organ of the SAP, Brandt waged an intensive political campaign against Trotsky and the founding of the Fourth International. He published several articles on the topic of "Trotskyism versus revolutionary *Realpolitik*", demanding: "Our relationship with the Trotskyists must be re-examined. The alliance with them in the four-party pact of 1933 has turned out to be wrong and damaging."

In another article, Brandt justified his rejection of the Fourth International as follows: "In our view, there exists an essential contradiction—a fundamental contradiction—between us and the Trotskyists regarding the development of the proletarian party and the relationship

between party and class. The Trotskyists see their task to be the creation of an ideologically exactly aligned vanguard standing above the working class. We regard it our duty to contribute to the creation of truly communist proletarian mass organisations, based on the western European labour movement and emerging from the practical life and tradition of the working class of our own country."

Brandt's position could hardly be revealed more clearly.

The juxtaposition of "an ideologically exactly aligned vanguard standing above the working class" and "truly communist proletarian mass organisations" was a cheap demagogic trick. Historical experience, particularly that of the Russian October Revolution, proved that building an "ideologically exactly aligned vanguard"—that is, a party based on Marxist principles and a clearly thought-out socialist programme—is the prerequisite for constructing "truly communist proletarian mass organisations." Lenin and Trotsky's struggle against the Socialist Revolutionary Party and Menshevism secured the Bolsheviks the support of the vast majority of the working class when it came into conflict with the provisional government.

Brandt counterpoises a party based on the lessons of history, the international development of class struggle and an historical materialist analysis, with a party which adapts itself to the dominant bourgeois ideology and the national milieu.

Brandt's enmity towards Trotskyism prepared him for his later role as a leading representative of German imperialism.

Brandt in the Spanish Civil War

But before Brandt returned to Germany and became mayor of Berlin, the front-line city of the Cold War, he travelled to Spain as a war correspondent in 1937.

The Spanish Revolution was the European proletariat's last major militant struggle against fascism before the outbreak of World War II. While Stalin's theory of social fascism split the working class and paved the way to power for Hitler in Germany, it was his policy of the Popular Front which led the working class to defeat in Spain. In the name of unity against fascism, the Stalinist Communist Party joined the republic's bourgeois government, which feared the working class far more than Franco's fascist forces.

Operating behind the front lines of the civil war, the Stalinist secret police led a bloody campaign against revolutionary workers, anarchists, followers of the POUM, Trotskyists and all who opposed this policy. They thus secured victory for Franco.

The Spanish Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) had links with Trotsky, but was unwilling to lead a systematic struggle against the Popular Front policy. At the height of the revolutionary upsurge in September 1936, it joined the Popular Front government in Barcelona and supported the reactionary alliance of Stalinists and bourgeois parties. This betrayal had catastrophic consequences. Just nine months later, the leaders of the POUM were arrested and murdered by the Stalinist secret police, the GPU.

Willy Brandt was a vehement supporter of the Popular Front. In early February 1937, six weeks after the expulsion of the POUM from the Popular Front government, he came to Barcelona and collaborated closely with the POUM leadership. He left Spain half a year later, just before many of the POUM leaders were arrested.

Having returned to Oslo, he gave a report to the extended national leadership of the SAP, in which he described the Communist Party of Spain as an "extremely progressive" force and accused the POUM of left-wing radical sectarianism. He claimed their socialist demands had weakened the alliance with bourgeois forces and led to an "intensification of the class struggle." Brandt's attacks on the POUM leaders at the time read like a justification of the Stalinist terror.

In the late 1980s, Austrian historian Hans Schafranek reported on repeated allegations against Willy Brandt, which claimed he had been in

contact with the GPU during his visit to Spain in 1937. Brandt rejected such accusations. But the fact is that he never had trouble with the authorities in Barcelona—who were controlled by the GPU—during his stay in Spain, and he defended the Stalin-Hitler pact two years later.

Brandt in Berlin

When the war ended, the SAP disbanded. Some of its officials went into the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED) of East Germany via the Communist Party, while Willy Brandt and Otto Brenner—who later became chairman of the IG Metall trade union—joined the SPD. Brandt rose rapidly in the Berlin SPD, became a member of parliament in 1949 and city mayor in 1957.

During the uprising of the East German workers on June 17, 1953, he moved to block the revolt from spreading to West Germany. When a delegation of striking construction workers from the Berlin Stalinallee and steel workers from Hennigsdorf marched towards West Berlin and took over the RIAS radio station in an attempt to spread the call for a joint general strike in East and West Germany, Brandt helped prevent it.

Such a call from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) workers to the workers in the Federal Republic was highly explosive. At the time, there was also a powerful strike movement in West Germany. The IG Printing and Paper union had organised a nationwide strike against the planned Works Constitution Act in May 1953. On June 6, the IG Metall union leadership aborted a 6-week strike by 14,000 shipyard workers in Bremen. Previously, some 21,000 textile workers had been on strike for weeks for higher wages.

The East German workers were pinning their hopes on support from the West. Striking chemical workers at the Halle railway station turned to inter-zone travellers with a banner that read: "Clean out your crap in Bonn now—We're cleaning house in Pankow!"—referring to the suburb of Berlin housing the SED leadership.

Brandt decisively rejected any common struggle on the part of the workers in the East and West and used his connections with the trade unions to keep worker opposition under control. Brandt reacted similarly in 1956, when Soviet tanks crushed the revolutionary uprising in Hungary. Again GDR workers appealed for a joint struggle, and again Brandt rushed—this time in a police loudspeaker van—to keep the situation at the zonal border under control and stabilise bourgeois rule.

When the Berlin Wall was erected in August 1961, Brandt was firmly established in the front-line city of the Cold War. Although he always denied his involvement in preliminary agreements with the GDR regime, he was nevertheless swiftly on hand to calm the angry crowd in front of the Russian embassy and ensure peace and order.

Brandt was also on the right wing of the SPD with respect to federal policy. He advocated rearmament and supported the Godesberg Programme, in which the SPD severed its last ties with the working class. The Godesberg party congress in the autumn of 1959 was preceded by a party purge, which expelled everyone who was even vaguely associated with socialist ideas.

Victor Agartz, the former head of the economics institute of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), who lectured on "democratic socialism" at the founding congress of the SPD in 1946, was also expelled, as was the editor of *Vorwärts* (*Forwards*), which supported a number of elementary demands from workers.

In March 1959, the expulsion took place of all SPD members attending a "pan-German workers' conference", which convened in the GDR and drew up plans for a common struggle against the re-emergence of German militarism. In the summer of the same year, disputes began with the Socialist German Student League (SGS), which led to the expulsion of the SPD student organisation. Based on this "purging" of the party, Willy Brandt took over the chairmanship of the SPD in 1964.

Foreign minister in the grand and chancellor in the small coalition

In the previous year, a metal workers' strike in Baden-Württemberg had

manifestly intensified the class struggle in Germany. The striking workers not only demanded higher wages; they also passed resolutions against the planned emergency laws. Companies responded by locking out hundreds of thousands of workers for the first time since 1928. At the same time, miners mobilised against the closure of collieries in the Ruhr region.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) coalition government under Ludwig Erhard (CDU) proved to be incapable of imposing an austerity programme onto the working class. It was replaced by a grand coalition in 1966. For the first time since the late 1920s, the bourgeoisie was compelled to draw the Social Democrats into government to maintain control over the working class.

During the chancellorship of Kurt Georg Kiesinger (CDU and former Nazi party member), Willy Brandt took over the posts of foreign minister and vice chancellor. The primary task of the grand coalition was the passing of the so-called Emergency Laws. This provoked the development of a broad extra-parliamentary opposition, which culminated in the student revolts of 1967-68. In 1969, there then followed the September strikes, a wave of spontaneous strikes in the steel and metal industry, which temporarily slipped out of the control of the trade union bureaucracy.

The political elite responded by replacing the grand with a "small" coalition and installing Brandt as head of government. The FDP, previously positioned on the right of the political spectrum, switched sides and gave him the necessary majority. Brandt brought the situation under control by permitting extensive social concessions. Both the private sector and the public service experienced high wage settlements. Rebellious youth were "drawn off the streets" by a reform programme that included increased expenditure in education.

The proportion of high school graduates increased from 5 percent of all adolescents in the 1960s to 30 percent in the 1970s. The number of jobs for secondary school and college graduates at universities, research institutes, hospitals, schools, social service institutions and in management was greatly increased. The influence of the SPD reached its zenith during these years: it received 46 percent of votes cast in the 1972 federal election and its membership exceeded the million mark.

At the same time, Brandt excluded all those who opposed bourgeois society. The "Radikalenerlass" (Radicalism Decree) of 1972 meant that thousands of people were banned from taking up certain professions, if doubt existed about their commitment to the "free democratic constitutional order". The decree exerted tremendous pressure on everyone to toe the line and renounce any anti-capitalist ambitions.

Brandt also performed an important service for the ruling class in foreign policy. He improved political and economic relations with Eastern Europe and ended West Germany's intransigence towards the GDR. His *Ostpolitik*, which initially met with fierce opposition from conservative circles, procured access to new markets in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for West German companies desperately seeking to overcome the effects of the recession. In the long term, *Ostpolitik* undermined the stability of the eastern European regimes.

When the class struggle intensified throughout Europe in the winter of 1973-74, and 11 million workers were involved in a struggle for wages in Germany, the ruling class demanded a sharper crackdown and pressed for a change of chancellor. The unmasking of East German spy Günter Guillaume, who had worked as Willy Brandt's personal assistant for years, provided the necessary pretext. Brandt resigned from the chancellorship, but remained chairman of the SPD.

The business of government was taken up by another leading figure in the SPD, Helmut Schmidt, who enlisted the support of the unions to repress the workers' offensive. Brandt directed the party apparatus, securing the government policies first of Helmut Schmidt and then of Helmut Kohl (CDU).

Brandt ended his political career in 1989, when he joined Chancellor

Kohl to welcome the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and later the Soviet Union, and sing the national anthem at the Brandenburg Gate to greet German reunification.

The former SAP member, who accused the Trotskyists of sectarianism and called for the building of “truly communist mass parties”, had become a staunch and trusted representative of Germany's national and imperialist interests.

Willy Brandt's personal life also took a sharp turn to the right in his last years. In 1983, he married journalist Brigitte Seebacher, who holds extreme reactionary views as a member of the Veldenstein Association for Research into Extremism and Democracy. She is now married to former Deutsche Bank CEO Hilmar Kopper.

Representing the Trotskyists in the International Youth Office in 1935, Walter Held described Willy Brandt's position with the words: “Loyalty to the right, hostility to the left”, and declared: “It is clear that such views can earn nothing but sharp criticism from our side.”

The life of Willy Brandt shows how right he was.



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