

INTERVIEW I

DATE: Undated, but before December 1979, according to Chancellor Brandt's widow, Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt

INTERVIEWEE: WILLY BRANDT

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Willy Brandt's office, at the Social Democratic Party offices

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

F: This is an interview with former chancellor Willy Brandt in his office at the Social Democrat [sic].

Were you in Berlin when Mr. Johnson came there as vice president?

B: Yes, of course. He came the weekend after the Wall was erected. I had sent a letter to President Kennedy Tuesday or Wednesday after that Sunday when the Wall was built, [which] was the thirteenth of August 1961. I had an answer from President Kennedy that he would send Vice President Johnson. He came on a Saturday together with a group of people. I remember General Clay was one of them; Ambassador Bohlen was a member of the group.

And he had, I think, a wonderful reception. The Berliners came in great numbers. They felt him coming as a sign of encouragement. He spoke to people outside of the city hall and addressed the city council. We had a number of good discussions. He stayed there that Saturday and Sunday; [he] left, as far as I can remember, very early Monday morning.

We had met--by the way, if I may add that we had met years before that, during my first visit to the States, which was early in 1954, February 1954. I was there for--not for a few days, but for a couple of weeks. I was together with three of my party

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colleagues. One of them is still alive; it's Professor Carlo Schmid, who was the vice president of the Bundestag for many years.

We met Lyndon Johnson, who was Democratic floor leader at the Senate. I had a good discussion with him there and then he asked about our travel--our plans for looking at [inaudible] United States. When he learned that we would go to Texas he said he would arrange some kind of meeting for us in Fredericksburg. As a matter of fact we stayed in--the original end of going to Texas had to do with the armed forces; we stayed at Randolph Air [Force Base] for three or four days--perhaps five--to collect some information about military structure. Because we were facing the problem of building up our new forces.

Then one of these days a wonderful thing was arranged at Fredericksburg. As I said, it was Lyndon Johnson who had arranged it at, I think, the Hotel Nimitz?

F: Right.

B: In Fredericksburg?

F: Right.

B: Yes. So that was the first time we met. We must have met, also, during some of my visits, because I came to the Senate when I was Mayor of Berlin. That was from 1957. But I couldn't give any details now without looking at the papers. But that was the first visit, in 1954.

And then we had this quite impressive and very important visit with the Vice President in Berlin. We met again then after the death of--

F: Yes.

B: --President John F. Kennedy.

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F: You came over there fairly soon after Kennedy died and you were, I know, a guest at both the Oval Office and at a luncheon in Washington in May of 1964.

B: Yes. I saw the President both in 1964 and in 1965.

F: Right.

B: I think there must be one little misunderstanding because in your letter you also spoke about the Ranch.

F: Right.

B: I did not visit the Ranch. That didn't work out. I was invited once or twice, but it didn't work out.

F: Right.

B: But I remember the--

F: By your being in Fredericksburg, I had taken something for granted that wasn't quite right.

B: No, we didn't go then because Senator Johnson, as he was then, wasn't there himself. He couldn't leave Washington. So he arranged things by asking his friends in Fredericksburg to give us a big reception.

F: Did you get the feeling that he had a certain empathy toward Germany and toward the German people, from his own background?

B: Yes, I think he had. Because this was the reason why he asked us to go to Fredericksburg. There may have been an additional reason, which was that Fredericksburg was rather Republican, I think, and it could perhaps add something to his popularity there. But, no, he would not only point back to part of his background, he even remembered some words and some smaller pieces of children's songs, which he

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would quote. He spoke about the contribution immigrants from Germany had made to the development of Texas and the United States. And I think he also--and this is on record--that at various connections he expressed his appreciation of German reconstruction, and Germany's cooperation with the United States--new Germany's cooperation, I mean--and our role within the alliance.

Going back to these two visits in 1964 and 1965, I still was Mayor of Berlin but I already was chairman of my party for the Federal Republic. To that position I was elected very early in 1964.

I remember the discussion in the Oval Room in 1964. There he was speaking a good deal about his domestic problems. That, of course, was before the convention in 1964. He was discussing some problems: who might become his candidate for the vice presidency, I remember; the problem of what Bobby Kennedy would do for the years to come played a role in his thinking; his further plans for social legislation and so on.

While, in 1965, when I was together with a good friend of mine, Fritz Erler, who also was in that group of four which went the first in 1954--he died in 1967; he was then parliamentary leader for my party in the Bundestag. There we were upstairs in the White House in his rooms, and there he was concentrating almost completely on Vietnam. He did get reports while we were discussing with him. He was very much upset.

Also, I don't know when this would have been. I also was present--I think this must have been very early in 1965, apart from the visit in the spring of that year. I was invited to participate at a meeting in New York. The--oh, I don't get the name of the organization for which--

F: Freedom House.

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B: Freedom House. Leo [Inaudible] was the man who arranged it. A number--I had been invited there once to make a speech; [I] also was given an award. This gathering in the great ballroom of the Waldorf--a great number of prominent people were present. And President Johnson developed his policy as he saw it. I think it must have been early in 1965.

F: No, according to my date it's February of 1966.

B: Is it 1966? Well, then that was the next visit.

F: Yes.

B: There were large crowds, outside of the Waldorf, of people who did not agree with the official policy. I myself from then on, I must confess now, became doubtful.

F: Yes.

B: I was convinced at that time that President Johnson had no alternative. This was one of the reasons why I went there. But I had, from that time on, sometimes--also with Dean Rusk, who didn't agree with me--without making public statements--had my doubts, if the policy could lead to a reasonable end. Yes, in 1966.

F: Without getting into any sort of an argument, one of Johnson's rationalizations for Vietnam's continuation was that he had made a commitment and that other people in the world would feel that the United States did not live up to their commitments if they pulled out of Vietnam. Now then, taking that as his thesis, did Germany get any comfort from the fact that we were living up to a commitment even though it was a bad one?

B: Well, I'm not sure I'm the best one to answer that question because, as I already indicated, to begin with--

(Interruption)

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F: We were talking about Vietnam.

B: Yes. To begin with I agreed completely with this argument which had to do with credibility. And this perhaps more because I was Mayor of Berlin than for other reasons. I thought the argument was right, that the credibility of the American guarantees might be hurt if the U.S. would go from those obligations which had been entered into in Southeast Asia. I didn't discuss this, I think, at any time in any detail with President Johnson, but I did so with Dean Rusk.

Even when I was--no; it was when I had become foreign minister, which I became in late 1966. I think the first time I sent a letter about these things to Rusk was early 1968. So at least at that time, I felt that the U.S. should feel free, and that the U.S. could rely upon that there would--that had become my conviction then--that there would be no negative consequences by a change in policy on Vietnam. As experience I think has shown; whatever may be the judgement upon Vietnam policy but in Europe; they had no--

F: It was a mistake and they finally admitted it and just quit.

B: Yeah.

F: But Johnson felt, I think, that he had to stay in. Did you feel any tenseness in 1965 when you visited him? Because that was an election year for you, and he had good friends on both sides.

B: Yes.

F: More careful than usual?

B: No, no. No, there wasn't really the. . . . The feelings he expressed [were] intense, he always was very intense in his contact with people. That was not reduced by protocol

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considerations or how they would effect us. No, we were very close to each other. But as I said, all his thinking at that time was concentrated on Vietnam.

F: Did you find it difficult to get him to talk about the European problem, and Germany's integration within Europe?

B: I think that this was not difficult, but my feeling is that he did not occupy himself too much with the details of what was really [inaudible]. I think he was in a general concert with this idea of bringing Europe closer together. But all these burdens which result from European history--Germany, France and Great Britain and what-not--I think he did not go too much into these.

F: Was he fairly forthright in explaining or in expressing his feelings toward people like Harold Wilson and Charles de Gaulle or was he correct in that?

B: He didn't use bad words about anyone I can remember--of people outside of the United States.

(Laughter)

F: Well, you know, he could de-hide people at times--quite considerably. When you went over there in later times, as foreign minister, did that make any difference in your--or as vice chancellor?

B: I don't know how often I did see him during those three years, but in any case, we had a visit of several days in 1967.

F: Yes.

B: I think it was 1967.

F: It was 1967, you were there at least--

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B: In 1967 I was there alone. Then I went with Chancellor [Kurt] Kiesinger. Was that in 1967?

F: That was 1967; that's August 1967.

B: August 1967. That's right. And then, of course, I did not see him as much because they had a good deal of talks, just the two of them. So my partner during that second visit in 1967 was Dean Rusk more than it would be Lyndon Johnson. The visit of 1967 had very much to do with the NPT.

F: Yes.

B: With non-proliferation, a thing which had raised certain problems for us--doubts--more on the side of our partner, the CDU, which was represented by the Chancellor. But all of us, of course, had an interest in getting this work out in a way which would not mean discrimination in the field of peaceful use of nuclear energy, and which would do no harm, if possible, to the process of European integration. But this, of course, was discussed more with the experts, but Johnson himself also was engaged.

F: Well, Johnson never felt any interest in a kind of a second-class status for Germany, did he? He always intended for it to come forward as--

B: Yes, yes.

F: Did you have any opportunity--I know you rode from the Waldorf Astoria, at that Freedom House dinner, with him to Kennedy Airport, and Robert Kennedy was along.

B: Yes, how did you know?

(Laughter)

F: Well, I've been looking into it. I wondered if you felt any tension between the two men.

B: No. Bobby Kennedy was in the car; Warren was in the car.

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F: Yes, right.

B: I don't know how this worked out. Some of his people, I think, told me to get through the door and get down to the car, with all kind of security arrangements because of the demonstrations which I mentioned before. No, but. . . .

No. No. As I remember at an earlier occasion--that must have been already in 1964, before the convention, that Bobby Kennedy was one of the possible names for the vice presidency. There, I think, he expressed doubts. Not that he didn't regard him [as] being an able man, but doubts about the wiseness of bringing him as close [inaudible]. But then later on at this car ride from the Waldorf to the airfield, I had no feeling of difficult relations between them.

F: Very friendly.

B: Yes.

F: When he came to former Chancellor Adenauer's funeral, did you have much opportunity to see him, or were there too many people coming in and too much protocol?

B: I did see him. I do not remember how much discussion there was. We had--that was such a big event. He, of course, partly was occupied by his official host, which was President Luebke, who was a very nice man but a bit naive also in his way of handling things. There is this famous picture where he puts the hands of Lyndon Johnson and--who else?--de Gaulle?

F: De Gaulle.

B: Yes, de Gaulle together because he thought they should behave well and be good friends.

(Laughter)

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Then that evening we had a--at one of the places that, I don't know where--we had invited all of the prominent foreign guests and were discussing at small tables, and we had our drinks. But it was not a discussion, I mean, of sitting together for an hour or two.

F: Do you recall that in May of 1964, when he had not been president very long, he gave an interview to a German correspondent, the *Quik* [?] magazine, in which he said that the Germans in Berlin particularly ought to look at their problem through Russian eyes. I know it may have caused some consternation in this country. I wondered if it were overplayed in the American press, or if it was a problem here. The feeling being that, you know, he was backing out on his support, and he very quickly countered that. That made no great impression?

B: No, no. I mean, I would have to look into the files. But it cannot have been a very serious thing, because otherwise I would remember.

F: Did he always regard you as the expert on Berlin? Did he show continuing interest in Berlin, when he'd see you?

B: Yes, yes. He did. I would not say that it played a central role in his thinking--why should it? He wasn't [inaudible], especially since he had been there. He recalled the reception he had been given there.

F: At the [inaudible]?

B: Yes.

F: Did he talk to you about the Kennedy Round, and the necessity of breaking tariff walls?

B: Yes, but I do not think in another way than just underlining what was official American policy, and with which we were in contact along the normal channels of both the State Department and the Treasury.

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F: And I suppose this would be true for arms limitation also.

B: Yes.

F: Did he show any interest in Germany's supplying arms to Israel?

B: I could not remember. I could not remember. That would--no. Let me see.

F: Did he talk with you--I'm sure a lot of this went through State Department channels, but did he talk with you about the potential explosiveness of the Middle East situation?

B: Yes, yes.

F: America's--

B: Yes.

F: --commitment there?

B: Yes. No, I do not think--by the way, I mean, our problem of some support and military equipment to Israel was solved some time before this. This came to an end in 1965.

F: Yes.

B: That was then followed up by more normal relations, by establishing diplomatic relations, et cetera. So, if there had been some contact on this it would have been with other people than me.

F: Did he ever express himself on the fact that Germany had out-competed the United States for a lot of markets?

B: No, I do not think so. No.

F: It would have been in character with him. He loved to sort of tease people. "I helped you, now what are you doing--you're taking all my business!" That sort of thing.

Do you have any evaluation of him as a president that you'd care to make?

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B: I think it was a pity that conditions did not make it possible for him to become as much of a domestic president [as] he would have liked to become. Foreign policy, and especially Vietnam, in a way, spoiled a good deal of--

F: --an otherwise remarkable record, I think.

B: Yes.

F: Did you find that same obsession with Vietnam when you talked with Dean Rusk?

B: What? I didn't get the--

F: Did Dean Rusk seem to have that same obsession with Vietnam that President Johnson did?

B: Yes, yes. And he--I think he belongs to those who *still* believe that they were right. I'm looking forward to seeing Dean Rusk. I have not seen him for seven years. But I understand that he [inaudible]--I remember the one occasion where we even corresponded on it, which must have been early 1968. He described the disastrous consequences he thought a new policy would not only have on the position of the United States in Asia, but also a deteriorating process in Europe. He was convinced that this would happen.

F: What's your opinion of George McGhee as a U.S. representative in Germany?

B: I think he was a good ambassador. I think he was.

F: Well, Mr. Chancellor, I think that's about it. Unless you think of something we ought to add. I certainly appreciate this. It's been just wonderful.

[End Tape 1 Side 1]

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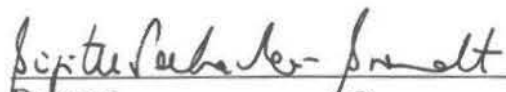

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