

H of C (for circulation as necessary)

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cc: HMCG Munich
WED, FCO

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Mr Powell, No 10 Downing St

BREAKFAST WITH STRAUSS

1. I had breakfast with Franz Josef Strauss this morning. He had promised me 50 minutes and gave me 55. Nobody else was present.

2. I said I should be seeing the Prime Minister on 1 November and would like to be able to tell her Strauss's views on two things: the internal political situation in the FRG, and relations with the East, especially the GDR. (I had selected these two things from the range of subjects suggested here and by HMCG Munich, and also after taking advice from the US Ambassador who warned me on no account to allow Strauss to get started on his travel tales from Albania).

The political scene in the FRG

3. Strauss described this as turbulent, but not so turbulent as the press made out. The results of the local elections in Baden-Württemberg showed what was going on. The CDU had lost a bit, because its voters had stayed at home out of disillusionment. The SPD, which ought to be making hay of the Government's failures, had somehow contrived to lose also. The Greens had made a big advance. The Greens were exploiting 2 issues for all they were worth, and more. The first was the environment: this was a real problem, but it had been

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exaggerated to the point where any twig that looked a bit off-colour was thought to be the victim of chemical pollution. The second was the Flick affair: this too had been inflated, but some people had behaved with a stupidity for which they should be stood up against a wall and shot (standrechtlich erschossen). Strauss then launched into a ferocious denunciation of Green-ism and everything it represented: oppositionism, anti-intellectualism, ignorance, enmity to facts and either neutralist-nationalism or nationalist-neutralism, according to choice. On top of this came an unmistakable tendency towards violence.

4. I made the tactical error of saying that I had met a Green named Kuhn in Stuttgart and thought him relatively harmless. Strauss thereupon sent for some press cuttings and read me a sentence from a speech made by Kuhn in the Land Parliament in Stuttgart, in which he had said that he was in favour of the deliberate breaking of laws. I asked which laws, but this only roused Strauss to further indignation: it did not matter whether it was divorce laws or laws on public order - the principle was the same.

5. Strauss's great fear was that in 1987 the SPD would get say 38% of the votes and the Greens say 12%, ie enough to form a Red-Green coalition. He was not sure that the FDP would go under, but he thought it quite possible that they would. The only alternative was for the moderate centre and right-wing of the SPD to realise which way their present course was leading, break with the left and with the Greens, and

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form a Grand Coalition with the CDU/CSU. He was not prepared to say which way things would turn out. But what he was sure of was that the Greens were a most unhealthy phenomenon. The same sort of people who voted Brown in the 1930s were voting Green now. Strauss only hoped that the outside world would not be so blind to the dangers now as they had been then. (Excursus on Lloyd George, the Clivedon set, the editor of The Times etc).

6. I incited Strauss to tell me what he thought was wrong with the governing coalition. He made the customary point about the policies being not bad but the presentation of them hopeless. He criticised the press for quoting the second part of this judgement and concealing the first. I read him a sentence out of the editorial in today's FAZ which said that "what could have been presented as a success is made to appear a partial failure". Strauss said this was exactly the point. I said that the same leader contained another sentence "The damaging rivalry between Strauss and Kohl will probably be resumed from Munich". He said that if this was the work of Reissmüller (which it was) the man was intelligent but politically untalented. It was a question of style, not rivalry.

7. Hoping to hear some comment on personalities, I said I had met some of the Ministers in Bonn and been quite impressed with them. Wörner was my example - another unhappy one, as it turned out. Strauss launched into a bitter and for the most part unprintable account of the Kiessling affair

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Wörner's mishandling of this, which had led Strauss to say at the time that Wörner must leave the Ministry of Defence. But Wörner was arrogant, and Kohl's policy was one of "Pardon und Prämie" towards his Ministers.

Inner-German Relations

8. I described my impressions of the GDR and related one or two things from the telegram describing Herr Nier's visit to London. Strauss had evidently not heard of Nier but he was very ready to tell me the background to the two credits granted to the GDR, his experience having been that far too many famous people (he listed the names of Mr Arthur Burns, Henry Kissinger, Vice President Bush, Mr Clark, Mr Burt etc) did not know even the elementary facts of the matter. The most important of these was that the loan had been guaranteed not by the Government in Bonn, but by the Government in East Berlin, through the pledge given that if it failed to make the due payments, the FRG could recoup itself out of the annual lump sum payments for transit dues etc to Berlin.

9. Strauss recalled the background to Honecker's visit. He was sure that it would have taken place if it had not been for stupid remarks from Bonn - not made by Kohl, but by certain other politicians. What had been needed was that those concerned should keep their mouths shut for weeks on end, and apparently they were incapable of this. Here followed another excursus back into the credit affair, with a list of the points which Strauss had been able to get Honecker to agree to,

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plus Honecker's own spontaneous offer in May 1983 to begin (in the autumn of that year) dismantling the self-firing devices along the FRG-GDR border. This brought Strauss back to his earlier point about the inability of Bonn to get due credit for successes when there were some. He asked what Boelling (whom he described as Schmidt's Dr Goebbels) would have been able to make out of a bargain of this kind. The whole thing reminded him of the story in Grimm's fairy tales about the boy who was given a lump of gold by his master, but on his way home exchanged it for one thing after another until he arrived home with only a stone in his hand.

Other Subjects

10. Strauss asked for his greetings to be conveyed to the Prime Minister, to whom he had sent a letter after the Brighton bomb. He wished there was time for him to tell me his views on Southern Africa: at the time of the Lusaka Commonwealth Conference he had written an 8-page letter to Mrs Thatcher from a yacht in the Mediterranean begging her not to weaken. Unfortunately she had ignored his advice, and the catastrophe with Rhodesia had followed. I said I could not share his judgement on that.

11. I took my leave, saying that I should like to meet Strauss again sometime, either in Munich or in Bonn. He gave a sort of grunt of assent which I propose to take as a commitment.

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12. Comment: I had seen Strauss often from a distance, but never at close quarters before. He looked much younger than his 69 years and showed the vigour and rich vocabulary which one associates with him. But he spoke more as a commentator on events (and a pretty wintry one at that) than as someone who felt he was playing or expected to play a major part in them. With his mixture of peasant and intellectual quality he has always been a figure rather apart from Federal politics. One or two conversations in Munich during my first visit a fortnight ago gave me the impression that even members of the Bavarian Government and senior officials do not feel all that close to Strauss either. I was interested in the recent reporting from HMCG Munich suggesting that there was some disaffection within the ranks of the CSU about Strauss's style.

JL

J L Bullard

30 October 1984