

# What's Wrong With Germany's Politicians?

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Looked at from a clinical psychoanalytic standpoint, a majority of the political class and Establishment in Germany is behaving irresponsibly, in a frankly disconcerting way, whether, or even because, they are doing “their duty.” That may sound like a paradox, but it isn’t. Because it is this falsely understood feeling of obligation to do that which is expected of one, and to fit in as “normally” as possible, in the sense of being “politically correct,” which leads to politically irresponsible decisions, or also to the failure to take any decision at all.

Therefore, these days we find in our capital city, among persons who are concerned in the broadest sense with the financial system, a really astounding agreement that this system is hopelessly bankrupt. They agree that the collapse of some hedge funds, as the result of the breakdown of the U.S. real estate market, would kindle a crash that would overwhelm the market. Perhaps there is also a weak counterargument that the hedge funds also have a positive function, because they spread the risk more widely through derivatives speculation. But, since the big investment banks, which in large part have financed the hostile takeovers in the recent period, are sitting on a huge pile of bad debt due to the collapse of the hedge funds, any objection vanishes, and gives way to a groaning acknowledgement—yes, exactly that is also the biggest worry here in Berlin. And what then is being done about it? Exactly nothing!

It is certainly astounding that in 1997, the former government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, on the occasion of the publication of documents on the events around reunification, had to admit that it had no plan for the fall of the Wall and the dissolution of the G.D.R. (Communist East Germany), although reunification was the declared goal of the German Federal Republic, which had its own ministry to deal with the issue, namely the Ministry for Internal German Affairs. Apparently we have learned nothing from this experience: Now we stand anew before a systemic crash, and again, no one is working on a concept of how the enormous damage which would ensue, especially for the poorer portion of the population, could be prevented. Whence comes this apparent blindness, this ir-

responsibility which would have such monstrous consequences?

The argument that Germany tried at the G-8 summit (June 6-8) to propose at least transparency for the hedge funds—it would never do to think about regulation—but the resistance of Great Britain and the United States was simply too strong, and therefore no one supported Germany, doesn't get Germany off the hook. Because it doesn't do anything to solve the problem of the threatened crash of the system.

## A Caste System

This behavior, on the one side, has its source in an unbelievably widespread kind of caste-thinking in Berlin and Germany, which is in no way inferior to that in India in its brutality and crippling effects. According to this thinking, there is a caste of politicians, divided into sub-castes of political parties and their branches; then there is the caste of bankers, members of the media, academics, scientists, entrepreneurs, trend-setters, the permanent bureaucracy, the managers, etc. Within these castes, there is currently politically correct behavior, which demands obedience, so to speak, and means that one supports, in an essentially pathological accommodation to the ideology that is dominant in this caste, the mythologies that belong to the belief structure of this caste. Moreover there are certain system-wide taboos and sacred cows, which represent an unspoken consensus among the different castes.

The social rituals connected with the habits of each caste represent a kind of cotton padding, which enables its members to largely suppress reality, and to install themselves comfortably in their niches. Because one subjects oneself, knowingly or unknowingly, to the power structure of each grouping, one can lull oneself into a phony reality, of doing one's duty, thereby being "successful," and being accepted. But, looked at objectively, such people are totally other-directed. In an ironical way, the idea of so-called "self-realization" is also the hallmark of such a caste, to speak of the ideology of a certain phase of development of the '68ers, under which, in spite of the claim to self-realization, lies external determination.

It has come to the point that the different, partly successive ideological influences of the development of the post-war period in Germany have brought the heads and feelings of whole generations into disorder. Such different forms as the so-called critical method of the Frankfurt School, or the Brechtian alienation effect, or post-modern deconstructionism—to name only a few—have all contributed to separate thinking from feelings, among those affected by these ideologies.

## The Loss of 'Capacity for Emotion'

Many of these contemporaries have lost the capacity for empathy to an absolutely astonishing degree; whole

continents can almost disappear before their eyes, and it wouldn't occur to them that it could concern them. The practical consequence is that they have not only gotten rid of empathy, but also the idea of personal responsibility for mankind, or the way out of the historical period in which we now live—a feeling of personal responsibility which could grow out of what Friedrich Schiller called the capacity for emotion.

Without this empathic capacity (as we would express it in modern times), it becomes possible to imagine that performing one's duty according to the conceptions of each caste to which one belongs, also fulfills the criteria of responsible behavior. Only through these self-delusions is it explicable how such "duty-conscious" people can often—apparently from one day to the next—throw away a seriously assumed responsibility, like an overcoat, when for some reason, someone else suddenly influences the belief structure of the caste. If inner feeling is separate from thought, it is also separated from morality.

Lessing's statement is also valid today: that the most empathic man is the best man. Only a person who develops his cognitive and emotional capacities, in Schiller's sense, into a harmonious whole, can protect his autonomy of thought and take personal responsibility for reality. To that idea also belongs the statement that one learns to look beyond the proverbial edge of the plate; that one doesn't only stand up for his own hobby horse, but develops the capability to take responsibility for the whole.

It is also clear that, in the Federal Republic as an occupied country in the postwar period, it was "normal" to adapt to the existing power structures, or to submit to these structures; that is, the external determination was practically built into the political system. It has not simplified the problem that Germany, although we have won reunification and national sovereignty through the peaceful revolution of 1989, has betrayed the fruit of this battle. The peaceful revolution, which really occurred, was quickly degraded into a mere "change," and reunited Germany was subjugated under the yoke of the Maastricht Treaty, thanks to Margaret Thatcher and François Mitterrand.

But history is full of examples, in which the population allowed itself to be led around by the nose for a very long time, but sooner or later came to the point where it threw off the yoke. A very good example of that at the current time is the ongoing revolt in the United States, on a bipartisan basis, against Cheney. German politicians who seek to imitate his politics here, are obviously in the Valley of the Clueless.

One thing is certain in any case. Germany can only be saved, in this extremely dangerous world situation, if we dramatically raise the portion of our fellow human beings who are independent-thinking, certain of inner autonomy and love of truth, and passionately compassionate. The BüSo has set exactly this as its mission.