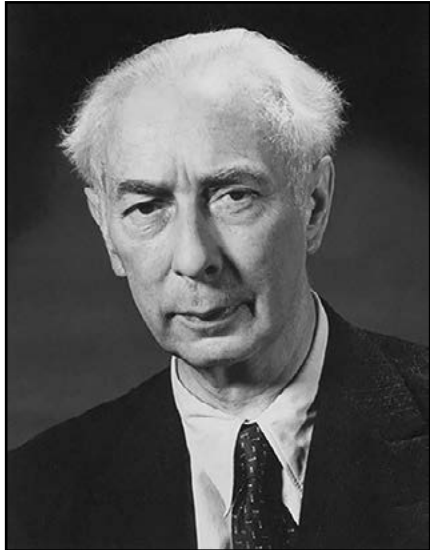


## US Intelligence, Theodor Heuss, and the Making of West Germany's First President

*By Thomas Boghardt<sup>1</sup>*

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Theodor Heuss, the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany. Courtesy of Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg, Sammlung Weishaupt, Germany

West Germany's first president, Theodor Heuss, passed away in 1963. A popular politician with an easy touch, Heuss had contributed markedly to the reimagining of his country as a nation that had learned its lessons from the past. His *New York Times* obituary praised the "gentle, scholarly" Heuss for his opposition to the Nazis and for his efforts at reconciliation with Germany's former enemies and with the Jews. "Dr. Heuss," the *Times* wrote, "came to eminence in postwar Germany, perhaps because he seemed to be the embodiment of liberal traditions in a nation that had been smothered in decades of totalitarianism. He was the fitting symbol of 'the new Germany,' and he was the chief architect of its democratic forms."<sup>2</sup>

While well-deserved, these accolades do not tell the full story of Theodor Heuss's ascendancy. Heuss's postwar career unfolded under the US military occupation, and this circumstance had a good deal to do with his path to political prominence. The intelligence services of the US Army played a significant role in the democratization of German society, and US intelligence officials enlisted Heuss in this effort. The practical and moral support extended by US intelligence to the future president is emblematic of the emergence of the new, pro-American political class in West Germany. Heuss was not the only product of this discreet partnership, but he was one of the most prominent postwar politicians to emerge from it.



With the defeat of Nazi Germany, the victorious Allies divided Germany into four occupation zones. While the Soviets received the eastern portions, Great Britain took possession of the north, and France occupied the South-West. Led by a military governor, General Lucius D. Clay, the US Army administered the southern portions of Germany, including the *Länder* (states) of Greater Hesse, Bavaria, and

Württemberg-Baden. The latter was comparatively small, rural, and had no international boundaries. Hence, the state gave the Americans little to worry about. An intelligence official of the US military government described it as "the least 'explosive' of the three *Länder*."<sup>3</sup> It was in this pastoral setting where American intelligence, in the person of an officer of the Allied Psychological

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The views, opinions, and findings of the author expressed in this article should not be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations or representing the official positions of any component of the United States government.

Warfare Division, first encountered Theodor Heuss.<sup>a</sup>

The Americans sought to rebuild Germany with the help of anti-Nazi and pro-democratic local officials. During the war, US intelligence officials had compiled so-called “White Lists” with the names of suitable candidates. When the occupation began, these lists served as points of reference for US officials who sought to appoint local administrators, politicians, and journalists. “Heuss, Theodor” is among the individuals found on such a list. An entry for the state of Württemberg describes him as a 60-year-old former journalist, liberal politician, and “Uncompromising Democrat.” The source of this information, probably a German émigré in the United States, told US intelligence that he was “not sure he [Heuss] would cooperate [with the Americans], but it would be worth trying.”<sup>4</sup>

Heuss’s political background made him an attractive partner for the Americans. Before the Third Reich, he had served as a deputy for the left-of-center progressive party in the German parliament (*Reichstag*). He had repeatedly criticized the Nazis, and he warned of Adolf Hitler’s rise in his 1932 publication, *Hitler’s Weg* (*Hitler’s Path*). A psychoanalytical study of Hitler, commissioned by the Office of Strategic Services during the war, used this book as a reference.<sup>5</sup>

In March 1933, the Nazis asked the parliament to vote for the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enactment Law), which conferred absolute



Chaplain John T. Fournie and Lt. John Weisensee of the 253rd Infantry Regiment take in the view of Heidelberg one day after its capture. Heuss waited out the war in the city during 1943–45. U.S. Army; National Archives, College Park, Maryland

power to Hitler. Despite his opposition to this measure, Heuss bowed to pressure from his party and voted in favor of the law. During the Third Reich, he lost his seat in parliament and his job as a professor. The Nazis outlawed *Hitler’s Path* and in 1933 publicly burnt the book along with other banned works. While not openly challenging the regime, Heuss privately uttered his opposition to Hitler and met with members of the resistance. In 1943, he and his wife, Elly Heuss-Knapp, left Berlin to await the end of the war in Heidelberg, the picturesque university city in Heuss’s native state of Württemberg.

On March 30, 1945, the 63rd Infantry Division (“Blood and Fire”) of the US Army occupied Heidelberg. A few weeks later, in late April 1945,

1st Lt. John H. Boxer of the Psychological Warfare Division arrived at the Heuss home. The warfare division and its postwar successor, the Information Control Division, sought to promote a free press in Germany by enlisting democratically-minded publishers and journalists, and Boxer was to determine Heuss’s suitability. The encounter between the two men



John H. Boxer, the first American to confer, in April 1945, with Heuss. Courtesy of Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

a. The Psychological Warfare Division—staffed by the British and Americans—was part of SHAEF—Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.



The residence of Theodor Heuss and his wife, Elly Heuss-Knapp, at 4 Kehrweg in Heidelberg, where John Boxer first met the future president. Courtesy of Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus, Stuttgart, Germany

serves as an apt metaphor for the trajectory of US-German relations after the war: awkward and fraught with misunderstandings at first but cordial and cooperative in the end.

His driver by his side, Boxer rang the doorbell only to find it out of service. He then climbed over the fence and knocked repeatedly at the door. After a while, Heuss cautiously opened it. Neither he nor his wife spoke much English, and both were initially reticent to engage with the visitors. Boxer, however, spoke some German, and soon the two men warmed up to each other. Eventually, Heuss turned to his wife and said, “Elly, I think the time has come.” He asked her to bring “the precious bottle of wine,” which they had kept in reserve for “the end of the Third Reich.” Heuss poured all four of them drinks, but when Boxer was about to take a sip from his glass,

his driver grabbed his arm, yelling: “Don’t drink that—it’s poisoned!” Boxer dismissed the warning as ridiculous and downed the drink. Heuss and Boxer became lifelong friends.<sup>6</sup>

In due course, Heuss attracted a steady stream of American visitors curious to meet him and learn more about local conditions—drawn to him despite his rudimentary English. Unlike many of his more formal German contemporaries, Heuss was witty, thoughtful, and courteous without being servile. A Heidelberg-based soldier wrote home in the summer of 1945, “Theodor has come to know the Americans pretty well—there is hardly a day, he tells me, when half a dozen don’t come and call on him. Apparently his name has gotten on a white list, so that everyone takes every possible opportunity to interview him on one thing or another, and they usually come back, too.”<sup>7</sup>

Heuss’s new-found fame catapulted him into local politics. In July, the Americans appointed a friend of his, Karl Holl, as *Landeskommissar* (county commissioner) of the districts of Mannheim and Heidelberg. Like Heuss, Holl had come to the Americans’ attention through the White List. “Before 1933 liberal Democrat and attacked Nazis,” his entry reads.<sup>8</sup> With US approval, Holl hired Heuss as his political adviser. The military government abandoned the office of county commissioner within a few months, but Heuss’s brief tenure offered him a window on the political landscape in American-occupied Germany and raised his standing with US officials.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Boxer recommended Heuss as a newspaper editor to Maj. Shepard Stone, Boxer’s boss. Stone



Shepard Stone in Washington, DC, 1943. Courtesy of Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

had studied in prewar Berlin and had attended some of Heuss’s lectures at the German Academy for Politics. Upon his return to the United States, he worked for the *New York Times*. During the war, he joined Army intelligence. In the summer of 1945, he returned to Germany as chief of intelligence of the 6871st District Information Services Control Command (DISCC), an operating agency of the Psychological Warfare Division, headquartered at the baroque Hohenbuchau Castle near Frankfurt. The mission of his unit included the establishment of “a new and democratic press and radio and book and magazine publishing houses free of Nazi influences and strong enough to carry on in the coming years.”<sup>10</sup>

Heuss’s 1933 vote for the Enactment Law could have easily eliminated him from consideration for a newspaper license. His political opponents later used this vote repeatedly against him, but for US intelligence it was a non-issue.

Special Agent Edward W. Hoffer of the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) summarized the American take on this potential red flag in Heuss's biography thus: "It is an unfortunate political custom in Germany, however, that the member of a political party which he represents in a legislative body such as the former Reichstag . . . cannot and does not vote to represent his personal opinion but must subject this opinion to resolutions taken by the governing body of his party leadership. HEUSS, therefore, had to follow his party chairmanship's resolution and against his better judgment was forced to vote for the Enabling Act."<sup>11</sup>

Stone reached the same conclusion and became an enthusiastic supporter of his former professor's return to public life.<sup>12</sup> With Stone's approval, Boxer revisited Heuss on June 21 and suggested he join the editorial board of a local newspaper. According to Heuss, he agreed only at the insistence of the Americans who were keen to add a liberal voice to the new publication.<sup>13</sup> Within a few weeks, a group of four men led by Heuss submitted an application to the local branch of the Information Control Division for a license for a new regional newspaper, the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*.<sup>14</sup>

Acquisition of a newspaper license involved a thorough vetting process. Initially, things went smoothly. On July 16th, the division's "Chief of Inquisition," Cedric H. Belfrage, interviewed Heuss and his co-applicants. Belfrage considered the group "capable of putting out a good paper," and he recognized Heuss as the "strongest figure" among the men. Although Belfrage noted with displeasure the publication

of several—albeit apolitical—articles by Heuss in a blatantly pro-Nazi weekly before 1945, he concluded that the applicant "is obviously a man of very superior quality and the fact that he is respected by active anti-Nazi groups in Heidelberg speaks strongly for him."<sup>15</sup>

The application hit a snag when it reached the desk of Alfred Toombs, the director of the Information Control Division's Intelligence Branch. Toombs was responsible for weeding out former Nazis and had a reputation for applying the term rigidly.<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging that Heuss "had a truly democratic background and . . . was willing to speak up in support of his principles to a certain extent even under the Nazis," the intelligence chief pounced on the applicant's publications during the Third Reich. "From a purely Intelligence standpoint, no firm objection can be raised against Heuss," Toombs conceded, yet he would "not vote to approve his application, on the ground that by accepting the profits of the Nazi system, this man has compromised himself."<sup>17</sup>

Toombs' verdict might have doomed Heuss's fledgling post-war career had it not been for his ally and protector, Shepard Stone. Taking aim at Toombs' purist approach to who was a Nazi and who wasn't, Stone noted:

*If one takes the attitude that only those Germans are good who are dead or who have been*

*in concentration camps, then Heuss obviously must be eliminated. If, on the other hand, we assume that there are a few good Germans who were never in a concentration camp, then Dr. Heuss is a very good man indeed. His personal behavior and his books indicate that he was a courageous man who left no doubt that he was anti-Nazi. Dr. Heuss, in the opinion of the undersigned, is an outstanding man and we would commit a serious error, both in the accomplishment of our mission and in the eyes of anti-Nazi Germans, if we removed him from among the licensees.*

Stone concluded: "It is recommended that Dr. Heuss be licensed."<sup>18</sup> Stone's arguments carried the day, and on August 25, 1945, Robert D. Murphy, the political advisor to the



From left to right: Theodor Heuss; Lt. Col. James C. Chestnutt, chief of the press section; Lt. Col. John B. Stanley (holding paper); Maj. David Smith, deputy chief of the press section; and unidentified reviewing the first edition of the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, September 5, 1945. US Army Signal Corps, National Archives, College Park, Maryland

military governor, granted Heuss and his co-applicants the license.<sup>19</sup>

Stone left Germany the next year to rejoin the *New York Times*, but he and Heuss had become friends and remained in touch. In a letter to Stone in New York, Heuss described himself and other Germans supported by Stone as “your former foster children.” He also praised the Americans for providing much-needed food to their occupation zone during the winter and noted having mentioned this policy in “all his speeches.” The people, Heuss wrote, “know this and are grateful.”<sup>20</sup>

The significance of the newspaper license for Heuss’s postwar career can hardly be overestimated. The *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* was only the third newspaper licensed by US authorities in occupied Germany. Heavily subsidized by the Americans, the paper started with a print run of 200,000 copies in early September. Without local competitors, it became the principal source of information for many in Württemberg-Baden. As a co-editor and frequent contributor, Heuss became a household name in southwest Germany. In the fall of 1945, the Information Control Division noted that the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* was on its way to becoming “a strong instrument for democracy in Germany.”<sup>21</sup>

The Americans continued to promote Heuss’s return to public life. In the summer of 1945, they appointed Reinhold Maier, another anti-Nazi politician identified by means of the White List, as the first German *Ministerpräsident* (governor) of Württemberg-Baden.<sup>22</sup> Maier submitted a list of candidates for his cabinet to the military government, which

agreed to all but one of Maier’s choices. In the case of the ministry of culture, the Americans wanted their own man—Theodor Heuss. When US officials visited Heuss in Heidelberg, they found him beating a carpet in his yard. “Yes,” he replied to the job offer, “if you get me a servant.”<sup>23</sup>

Probably in the context of the military government’s approach to Heuss, the CIC once more reviewed his activities during the Third Reich. Unlike the Intelligence Branch of the Information Control Division, the Corps found no fault in his biography. In a summary of his career, the CIC pointed out the interference of the Nazi *Gestapo* (secret police) with his work and dismissed the payments he received for “historical articles” published during this time as “free-lance” writing. In conclusion, the brief biographical sketch praised Heuss as “a strong representative of South German Democracy” who “made no compromise with the Nazis.”<sup>24</sup> Four days later, on September 24th, the military government appointed Heuss as Württemberg-Baden’s minister of culture.<sup>25</sup>

The appointment raised Heuss’s political profile from the local to the state level. According to a document from the East German secret service archives in Berlin, it may also have ushered in closer ties between Heuss and US intelligence. In January 1961, Soviet intelligence sent their East German colleagues the purported statement of an unnamed individual who appeared to have intimate knowledge of the CIC in postwar Germany. The document and its context suggest an American defector as the source. Due to its explosive content, the text deserves to be quoted at length. According to the East German

translation of the Russian original, the Soviet source made the following statement:

*In December 1948, the civilian [CIC] employee John Seitz worked in Stuttgart/West Germany in the counter-intelligence sub-division. Seitz had been with the CIC in Stuttgart since June or July 1945. Seitz was born in Germany and went to elementary school there; later he immigrated to the United States. Seitz was known as the best employee we ever had in counter-espionage in the first [CIC] region Stuttgart. One time, Seitz and I attended an evening party. At the end of the event, Seitz suggested we visit a night club on the way to [local CIC headquarters at] the “Reiter Kaserne.” Seitz was usually taciturn, talked little about his work, but this night he drank too much. He told me that a source recruited by him in 1946 was Theodor Heuss. Heuss provided Seitz with numerous reports on political conditions in the districts (Bezirke) of Stuttgart and Heidelberg in the period of 1946 to 1947. Seitz also told me that the CIC operational branch concluded that, while Heuss’s information was interesting, it had little value for headquarters. This assessment was issued at the end of 1947. As a result, the payments to Heuss for his information were terminated.*

*I must correct myself, Seitz told me that in December 1949, not in December 1948. He told me on the occasion of Heuss’s election as president [of the Federal Republic of Germany]. Seitz*

*explained that Heuss's signed reports were deposited with us, and we could use them if at some point we wanted to put pressure on Heuss.*

*He received money when he worked as an informant for the CIC.*<sup>26</sup>

The document defies a facile explanation. A CIC record, confirming Heuss's work as an informant, would be the surest way to verify the Soviet-East German claim. The CIC kept two files on Heuss, covering the postwar years and his tenure as president, respectively, but neither references his alleged recruitment as an informant.<sup>27</sup> Yet the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The first file is rather thin and gives the impression of being incomplete. The CIC investigation of Heuss's background in September 1945 would have involved interviews and assessments by agents working the case, but merely one document survives, the above-mentioned biographical sketch absolving Heuss from the odium of having collaborated with the Nazis. It is entirely possible that CIC agents discarded documents considered unimportant at the time, including records pertaining to Heuss's work as an informant.

Was the document part of a disinformation campaign to tarnish Heuss? The Soviets and the East Germans routinely spread malicious rumors about West German politicians, often by linking them to the Third Reich.<sup>28</sup> As the president of the Federal Republic, Heuss would have been a worthy target of a disinformation campaign. The accusation of being an "American spy," however, would have carried little weight in

the staunchly pro-Western Federal Republic. If the Soviets or East Germans had wanted to damage Heuss politically, their weapon of choice would have been his vote for the Enactment Law.

Either way, the date of the East German document makes it an unlikely candidate for a Soviet Bloc disinformation campaign. After completing his second term as president in 1959, Heuss had retired from politics. By 1961, when the Soviets provided the document to the East Germans, he had ceased to be a valuable target for a disinformation campaign.

In all likelihood, an American intelligence defector told the Soviets about Heuss's alleged recruitment by the CIC. Unfortunately, the document does not name this individual, but defections of Western intelligence officials to the Soviet Bloc occurred throughout the Cold War. Indeed, an unusually large number of such defections took place in 1959 and

1960, i.e., just before the East Germans received the interview transcript from their Soviet colleagues.<sup>29</sup> The Soviet source on Heuss was probably among them.

An individual who may have known the truth was Edward Hoffer, the special agent who had dismissed earlier charges of Heuss's support of the Nazis. Born and raised in Germany, Hoffer had left the country in the late 1930s due to his Jewish background.<sup>30</sup> He immigrated to the United States, joined the Army, and trained for intelligence at Camp Ritchie in Maryland.<sup>31</sup> In 1945, he returned to Germany, where he served for the next nine years. Hoffer monitored West German political leaders, such as Heuss, and he participated in Operation Campus, a CIC effort to penetrate the West German government in the early 1950s.<sup>32</sup>

In 1954, Hoffer's intelligence career came to an abrupt end. Earlier that year, the director of the West German domestic



The Wallace Barracks, headquarters of Region I of the 66th Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment in Stuttgart. US Army Signal Corps, National Archives, College Park, Maryland



security service, Otto John, had defected to East Germany. Hoffer and John had known each other since childhood, and Hoffer shot himself to death shortly after John's defection.<sup>33</sup> While not doubting Hoffer's loyalty, US officials suspected a link between his suicide and John's disappearance.<sup>34</sup> Whether Hoffer played a role in John's defection and whether he knew anything about Heuss's affiliation with the CIC remains a mystery.

The information provided by the Soviet source testifies to his (most intelligence officials were male) familiarity with the CIC. For example, the Stuttgart CIC office was indeed located at the Reiterkaserne, which the Americans had renamed Wallace Barracks at the end of the war. The Heuss document was just one in a series of reports submitted by the Soviets to the East Germans, and at other times the same unidentified individual gives additional evidence of his familiarity with the CIC. Among other things, he correctly notes the civilian status of many CIC employees, the Corps' liaison arrangement with the West German domestic security service, and the identity of "the most experienced" CIC special agent, Edward Hoffer.<sup>35</sup> According to his own statement, the anonymous source had arrived in Germany at the end of the war and had left the country at the end of July 1956.<sup>36</sup> During this timespan, he would have been able to learn all of this information.

If the identity of the defector remains obscure, the document is unambiguous about the ultimate source of Heuss's link to US intelligence: a member of the CIC named "John Seitz." A John H. Seitz did indeed serve with the CIC in southwest Germany at the end of the war;

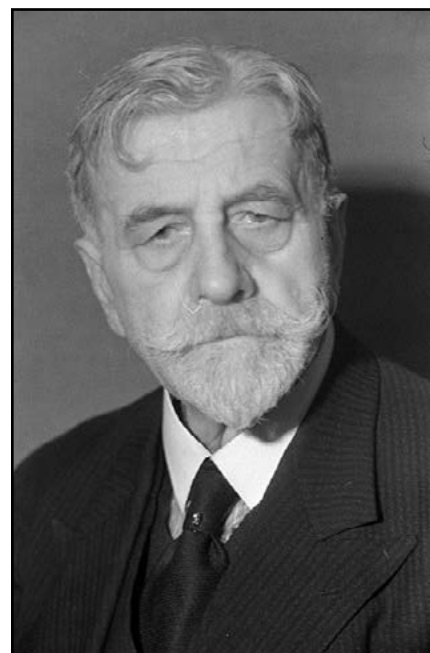
a CIC report from April 13, 1945, places him near Heidelberg. Seitz held the rank of staff sergeant and the status of special agent, i.e., someone authorized to conduct investigations and recruit informants.<sup>37</sup> Otherwise, little information is available about Seitz, either during his tour of duty in Germany or after his return to the United States. The Soviet source states that Seitz was "currently" (around 1960) working for a large insurance company in the United States.<sup>38</sup> Afterward, his trail peters out. Only officials working for the CIC in Stuttgart would have known Seitz at the time. His relative obscurity suggests the Soviet source was, in fact, who he appeared to be—a former CIC agent in postwar Germany.

The available evidence does not suffice to refute or confirm the Soviet Bloc allegation of Heuss's recruitment by the CIC. Nevertheless, the East German document is consistent with the close and cordial relationship the future president had developed with representatives of the US military government and US intelligence. Heuss met frequently with US officials, freely dispensed political advice, and received ample support from the Americans. Whether he technically was an "American spy" is historically less important than his well-documented association with representatives of the occupation forces.

Paid informant or not, Heuss continued to enjoy US assistance. For example, in early 1946, the freshly minted *Kultminister* received an invitation from a cultural association to visit Berlin, but traveling to the former German capital from Stuttgart was easier said than done. Heuss needed logistical support and a permit for his trip. The Americans provided both. "I

just returned from Berlin," he subsequently wrote to a friend. "I was taken by American officers in a military train to and from the city; otherwise this would have been a rather questionable adventure, since zonal border crossings are always risky."<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, Heuss had entered the political arena by joining the re-established Liberal Party and gaining a seat in the regional legislature. The promise of Heuss's political talent in combination with his access to voters in the traditionally liberal state of Württemberg-Baden was not lost on US intelligence. As a report from the Strategic Services Unit—the entity that bridged the gap between dissolution of OSS and CIA— noted, the liberals appealed to a large spectrum of the electorate in southwestern Germany.<sup>40</sup> Heuss enhanced his party's popularity through his contributions to the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*.



Wilhelm Külz in 1946. Courtesy of Deutsche Fotothek, Dresden, Germany

In late 1946, Heuss's political career suffered a brief setback when elections reduced the Liberal Party's representation in the parliament of Württemberg-Baden, and Heuss resigned his post as minister of culture. The US reaction, as Heuss described it, was telling: "The gentlemen from the military government regret my exit since we always had very pleasant interpersonal relations," Heuss wrote to a friend in the United States. "[T]hey sent me, in the right moment of this low point, a large box of cigars as a farewell."<sup>41</sup> Cigarettes and other commodities had largely replaced money as a means of payment on the thriving black market, and a large box of cigars represented a small fortune in postwar Germany.

The Americans needn't have worried about Heuss's political future. In fact, his exit from the Ministry of Culture turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Unburdened by local obligations, Heuss focused on his career in the Liberal Party, which was quickly coalescing into a supra-regional organization. In late 1946, he was elected chairman of the Liberal Party in the US zone. In March 1947, he became one of two leaders of the national party, representing the US and the British zones. His counterpart was the leader of the Liberal Party in the Soviet zone, Wilhelm Külz.

The short-lived liberal attempt to establish a pan-German party catapulted Heuss to the front line of the early Cold War. The Soviet-backed Communist Party in the eastern occupation zone sought to turn the local branch of the Liberal Party into a subservient tool, and Külz did nothing to fend off the communist takeover. Faced with the choice of either turning his back on the Western



Ferdinand Friedensburg, far right, looks on as Otto Ostrowski takes the oath of office as mayor of Berlin, November 26, 1946. Courtesy of Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany

powers by collaborating with the spineless Külz or of moving the Western factions of the party firmly into the American camp, Heuss opted for the latter. In early 1948, he terminated the pan-German liberal project. At the end of the year, he was elected chairman of the unified Liberal Party in the Western zones.<sup>42</sup>

Heuss had never been a communist sympathizer. Barely a year

before Winston Churchill's famous "iron curtain" speech, Heuss noted that Soviet-occupied Germany lay "behind a thick curtain."<sup>43</sup> Heuss's decision to align his party with the West was his own. Nonetheless, this move cemented his standing with the Americans, who remained the ultimate arbiter in political affairs and increasingly viewed local politics through a Cold War lens. The intelligence



From left to right: Josef Müller in conversation with the social democrats Emil Bettgenhäuser and Erich Ollenhauer, July 1948. Courtesy of Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany





Konrad Adenauer and Theodor Heuss, 1959. Courtesy of Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany

office of the military government in Württemberg Baden took careful note of Heuss's anti-communist rhetoric in the local parliament. In July 1948, the office reported approvingly on Heuss disparagement of the Communist Party in Württemberg-Baden.<sup>44</sup>

The fate of two other politicians reveals the political perils inherent in a different choice. Like Heuss, Ferdinand Friedensburg of Berlin featured on the American White List.<sup>45</sup> He became the leader of the city's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and briefly served as mayor in 1948. After Friedensburg's early run-ins with the Soviet occupation authorities, the US military government's intelligence office in Berlin praised him as "absolutely clean" and one "of the most outspoken men among the democratic politicians."<sup>46</sup> As the East-West divide deepened, however, Friedensburg sought to steer a middle course between the two sides, as a result of which the Americans became suspicious of his loyalties. In late 1947, the director of the US military government intelligence office dismissed Friedensburg as "an able administrator, but certainly not an able politician." If forced between

the two Cold War antagonists, the director suspected, the mayor "would choose the east."<sup>47</sup> His star quickly faded.

Josef Müller of Bavaria suffered the same fate. Imprisoned by the Nazis for plotting against their regime, Müller was liberated by US forces at the end of the war, and the Strategic Services Unit recruited him as an informant, codenamed "ROBOT."<sup>48</sup> Cleared for a political career by US intelligence, Müller assumed the chairmanship of the most powerful party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU). Like Friedensburg, he refused to commit unequivocally to the West. To the Americans' dismay, he repeatedly met with Soviet officials at their German headquarters in Berlin-Karlshorst.<sup>49</sup> The CIC warned against the possibility of Müller's becoming governor of Bavaria because "his government will probably have Eastern Zone sympathies."<sup>50</sup> The polarized atmosphere of the early Cold War left no room for a politician who, according to the CIC, "traveled along the center lane with feelers extended in both directions."<sup>51</sup> Müller's career declined, and eventually he withdrew from politics.

By contrast, Heuss's partnership with the Americans flourished. In

September 1948, John Boxer sought to arrange a meeting between Heuss and visiting British parliamentarians in Stuttgart.<sup>52</sup> A couple of months later, Heuss asked the military governor of Württemberg-Baden for help on behalf of Heuss's nephew whose house had been requisitioned by the US Army.<sup>53</sup> Another time, Heuss asked an influential military government official in Berlin to intervene on behalf of the Liberal Party in a political squabble in the city of Bremen.<sup>54</sup> In his reply to one of Heuss's requests for help, a US officer summed up the official attitude toward the German politician: "Why, it is our duty to help our friends."<sup>55</sup>

Heuss returned the favor by promoting the creation of a pro-Western German state and by defending US policy, especially through contributions to the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*. The intelligence section of the Information Control Division, which regularly surveyed local opinion on American-licensed newspapers, must have been pleased at the following comment: "A merchant



US High Commissioner John J. McCloy, President Theodor Heuss, and the former US military governor of Germany, General Lucius D. Clay (ret.) Courtesy of Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus, Stuttgart, and Stadtarchiv Bonn, Germany

questioned about his opinion on the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* thinks it to be [a] paper which only brings those things which the Americans like to hear. The editors of the paper don't show themselves as Germans of true character and personal value. They undermine the last bit of German national pride."<sup>56</sup>

On 12 September 1949, Heuss reached the apex of his political career, when the West German parliament, the Bundestag, elected him president of the Federal Republic of Germany. Although largely ceremonial, the office carried a high symbolic value for a nation that was just beginning to emerge from the dark shadow of the Third Reich. His election was widely applauded. The *Washington Post* noted Heuss's opposition to the Nazis and lauded his desire to make the new state a "living democracy."<sup>57</sup> The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* portrayed him as a centrist politician with the ability to mediate between the conservative and the social democratic parties. Swiss national radio heralded him as the embodiment of "the good Germany."<sup>58</sup>

US intelligence, too, was pleased. Three days after his election, the CIC filed a "Personality Report" on

Heuss. "Though Professor Heuss as such is not a target of counter-intelligence interest," noted Special Agent Edward W. Hoffer, "it is felt that due to his eminent position in German public life, a reasonably complete personal history sketch should be available in the files of this headquarters." Hoffer concluded his review of Heuss's political career by judging his election to the office of president as

*"most probably the wisest choice taken by those who had to make this difficult decision, particularly in view of the fact that Professor Heuss is known to be friendly and open-minded towards Anglo-Saxon views of democracy. This should not be understood to mean that Professor Heuss simply prefers the American and British occupation to the Soviets and their occupation as the lesser of two evils but rather that he honestly believes that of the two worlds opposing each other at the present time, only the western one assures the ideals of freedom in which democracy can live."*<sup>59</sup>

In later years, Heuss joked that he "was discovered by the Americans," just as Columbus had discovered

America in 1492.<sup>60</sup> This analogy contained more than a grain of truth: While Heuss always remained his own man, his meteoric rise would have been inconceivable without US support. He received this support because of US regard for him as a kindred spirit, who would help transform the new state into a liberal democracy aligned with the Western powers. Whether their efforts would bear fruit remained to be seen at the end of the military occupation.

In May 1950, Heuss invited "his old friend" Shepard Stone and the US High Commissioner to Germany, John J. McCloy, to the presidential residence in Bonn. In a cordial atmosphere, the three men reminisced about the past and discussed the future. Afterward, Stone told his family, "It is trite to say that Germany is a crucial place. The big problem is to make Germany a country upon which you can rely to be peaceful and anti-totalitarian. If that fact can be accomplished [in] the next ten years, it will be a major achievement."<sup>61</sup>

A decade later, West Germany had made much headway toward this goal. As president, Heuss had played a big part in this endeavor. By steadfastly promoting and defending him, US intelligence had, too.



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## *Endnotes*

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