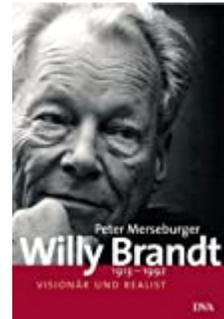




**Peter Merseburger.** *Willy Brandt 1913-1992: Visionär und Realist.* München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002. 927 S. EUR 32.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-421-05328-2.



**Martin Rupps.** *Helmut Schmidt: Eine politische Biographie.* Stuttgart: Hohenheim Verlag, 2002. 488 S. EUR 24.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89850-073-9.



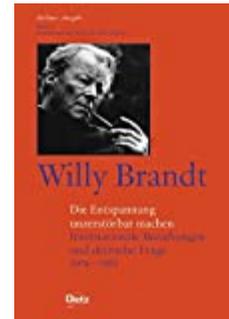
**Michael Schwelien.** *Helmut Schmidt: Ein Leben für den Frieden.* Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2003. 368 pp. EUR 22.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-455-09409-1.



**Hartmut Soell.** *Helmut Schmidt: Macht und Verantwortung. 1969 bis heute.* München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2008. 1082 S. EUR 39.90 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-421-05352-7.



**Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung, ed.** *Die Entspannung unzerstörbar machen: Internationale Beziehungen und deutsche Frage, 1974-1982.* Bonn: Dietz, 2003. 500 pp. EUR 27.60 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-8012-0309-2.



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### Building a Social Democratic Hall of Fame

In a democratic society, the passing of a political generation is always fascinating to watch, since it usually happens in multiple stages on both a political and historical level. First, the old politicians leave the active political scene and are replaced by a new group of leaders. More often than not, if the older politicians did great things, the successors, seeking in distance from their immediate predecessors a surer way to their own path, run from the past. Usually, they are unable to carry the burden of the historical responsibility and serve through a transitional period, before a new successful cadre emerges, a third generation that manages to balance fidelity to principles with a practical ability to win elections. One thinks of Tony Blair and New Labour succeeding Attlee, Bevin, and Wilson after two decades of undistinguished muddle; or Bill Clinton's attempt to rebuild the Democratic Party. The political transformation of the third generation is accompanied by a historical transformation, where the leaders of the older generation, by this time either safely dead or old enough to be beyond the petty disagreements of the past, are reintroduced to the public as apolitical symbols of national success. For American examples, think of the increasing scholarly and political apotheosis of Jimmy Carter or, for the other side of the spectrum, the canonization of Ronald Reagan. This is not to say that the historical process is completely politically motivated. Not all of the scholars involved are active partisans, but there is an interesting congruence between the cycles of

politics and the politics of historical production.

In Germany, the models for this process include Helmut Kohl, who rebuilt the CDU after the retirement of Konrad Adenauer and the failure of the immediate successors, and, more recently, Gerhard Schröder, who took a SPD rent by internal disputes and returned it to power after sixteen years in the wilderness. Kohl and the CDU/CSU supplemented their return to political power with a flood of scholarly works analyzing the Adenauer era, crowned by Hans-Peter Schwarz's monumental biography of Adenauer himself and the (continuing) publication of his correspondence, interviews, and speeches. This project was well under way even before the *Wende* encouraged further Christian Democratic efforts to connect Adenauer to his political "grandson." By the time Kohl and the CDU/CSU were driven from office in 1998, the construction of the Christian Democratic Hall of Fame, literally and figuratively, had reached noticeable proportions, even if some parts continue to receive work here and there. (One still awaits the definitive scholarly biography of Ludwig Erhard, for example, not to mention Franz Josef Strauss.) As the SPD revival has passed its seventh and apparently last anniversary, we can see that the scholarly construction of a Social Democratic Hall of fame is beginning as well. The books under review here, which offer various impressions of Schröder's colleagues as Federal Chancellor, include full-scale scholarly

biographies, a document collection, a brief political biography, and a biography-cum-memoir. Viewed together, they offer an interesting glimpse of how the current generation of the SPD is trying to imagine their “founding fathers,” and offer parallels to the already existing monuments to Adenauer erected by the CDU.

The great titan of the postwar SPD is of course Willy Brandt. As governing mayor of Berlin, the SPD Chancellor who “dared more democracy” and opened the door to new relations with the East, and the leader of the Socialist International who advocated more justice in North-South relations, Brandt represents the very best that the SPD imagines that it has to offer. His commitment to social justice at home and peace abroad, not to mention his lifelong commitment to the unity of the German nation, have already been the subject of a variety of popular and scholarly works. The two volumes under review here reflect the degree to which Brandt has officially become a historical figure. The massive biography by veteran journalist and Brandt adviser Peter Merseburger is a full-scale work of scholarship, heavily researched and judiciously argued, offering a monumental version of Brandt’s life in every sense of the word. As the subtitle suggests, Brandt was both a practical realist and a visionary dreamer, and Merseburger makes no secret of his admiration for the man and his works. At the same time, the book strives to emphasize the universal appeal of Brandt’s policies and ideals. It is no accident that the biography appears from the same solid publisher (DVA) as Schwarz’s Adenauer volumes, a further demonstration that, political differences aside, both men have risen to the status of national statesmen above the political fray. The effort to praise Brandt and also to emphasize his *Äberparteilichkeit* is most apparent in Merseburger’s discussion of his state funeral in 1992. Unlike the funerals of earlier SPD leaders such as Kurt Schumacher, Brandt was mourned not only by the party faithful, but also by the entire German nation, if not the world. Merseburger offers a moving description of the lines of people filing into the Berlin city hall to mourn “their” mayor. “For in Berlin Willy Brandt stood for more than his party; he was the speaker for all Berliners, the defender of their freedom” (pp. 860-861).

The parallels to Adenauer are even more marked in the volumes of the *Berliner Ausgabe*, the official series of Brandt’s correspondence and speeches edited by the *Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung*. This organization, focused directly on Brandt and founded in 1994, is legally and programmatically distinct from the official SPD party foundation (the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung). Based in Brandt’s old office building, the SchÄ¶neberg

Rathaus in Berlin, it organizes regular symposia on Brandt and his works, maintains a museum devoted to the man, very much like the Stiftung-Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus in RhÄ¶ndorf, which functions both as Adenauer museum and the repository of his papers. The *Berliner Ausgabe* follows the model of the *RhÄ¶ndorfer Ausgabe* of Adenauer’s writings, though the Brandt collection, with ten volumes either published or in preparation so far, follows a different organizational procedure. The Adenauer papers have been offered in separate series: his informal press briefings, his letters, and his correspondence and meetings with President Theodor Heuss. The Brandt publications are organized chronologically and topically, with parallel volumes for foreign and domestic policies in the same years, and include correspondence sent and received, personal memoranda, and public documents such as interviews, articles, and texts of speeches. Individual volumes, which also include extensive introductions that set the political and personal context, have come out in order of completion rather than according to their place in the series. Each, however, has been a valuable resource for scholars.

This volume is a worthy addition, as it covers the years after Brandt’s resignation from the Chancellorship amid spy scandals in 1974. In the documents we see Brandt, who remained SPD chair, attempting to maintain his contacts with the great and good, and also using his position as leader of the Socialist International to maintain the momentum for international dÄ©tente that he had helped start. It is ultimately a sad story, as the new Cold War of the late 1970s and the missile debate within Germany exposed the fragility of the dÄ©tente that he hoped to make indestructible. One also sees the contradictions in Brandt’s desire to recognize international realities while maintaining a commitment to human rights and dÄ©tente. One example is his response to an impassioned letter from historian and SPD member Immanuel GeiÄ¶ in December 1981. GeiÄ¶, appalled by the declaration of martial law in Poland, wrote Brandt to protest the failure of either Chancellor Schmidt or the SPD leadership to criticize the suppression of democracy. Brandt responded by admitting that he shared GeiÄ¶’s reaction, but adds the weary observation that “it is better to avoid strong words than to raise hopes for which there are no practical justifications.” Brandt claimed that he had learned to avoid “empty demonstrations” even if they lead to disappointment, and concluded: “In general, I have always considered it a basic element [*Grundelement*] of *Ostpolitik* that one must recognize realities in order to do more to change them than would come

from mere demonstrations of moral superiority [*Demonstration guter Gesinnung*]” (p. 350). Such comments demonstrate the combination of realism and idealism in Brandt’s political conception, and are but one example of the this volume’s value as a resource for students of the dÄ©tente era.

If Brandt represents the beating heart of German Social Democracy, Helmut Schmidt represents its more coldly calculating brain. A brilliant organizer and manager, who served as SPD Bundestag caucus leader, Defense Minister, Finance Minister and “Super Minister” of Finance and Economics before replacing Brandt as chancellor in 1974, Schmidt enjoyed one of the most successful careers in postwar German politics. After his 1982 defeat (or, as SPD supporters prefer to see it, his betrayal by FDP Chair Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who led the FDP into a new coalition with Helmut Kohl’s CDU/CSU), Schmidt has gone on to an equally successful career as elder statesman and political commentator, serving as a co-publisher of the influential weekly *Die Zeit* and continuing to speak publicly about national and international problems. All his success, however, could not win him the kind of deep admiration and affection that Brandt enjoyed. His reputation for hard-nosed politics, his determinedly realistic demeanor, even his documented success at attracting support from voters of the center-right, all made him appear a bit too “establishment” for the German Left that had cheered Brandt’s idealistic humanism. That his chancellorship corresponded to the dismal 1970s, where dÄ©tente euphoria and hopes for social revolution succumbed to somber news of oil crises, driving bans, and budget cuts, further diminished his appeal in many traditional SPD circles. The final blow to his popularity within his own party came with his advocacy of stationing the Pershing II and Cruise Missiles in Germany after 1979. What Schmidt saw as a necessary step in preserving the Atlantic Alliance, while also maintaining some momentum for *Ostpolitik*, much of the SPD saw as war mongering. The split within the SPD would set the stage for the FDP’s defection in 1982 and continues to overshadow his reputation.

As he approaches the twilight years of his life, however, even Schmidt is ready for his transformation into a historical figure. Heidelberg historian Hartmut Soell’s massive biography (the first of a projected two volumes), from the same DVA that is publishing Merseburger’s Brandt biography, makes extensive use of archival sources (including Schmidt’s own privately held papers) to strike a balanced picture of the man and his times. Soell, who has already written a biography of an

earlier Social Democratic worthy, Fritz Erler, and who worked with Schmidt in the SPD Bundestag caucus, is an appropriate scholar for the job. His choice of subtitle suggests the effort at balance, as Soell tries to show that the rational Schmidt was more than a calculating machine, that he could also be passionate about his work to establish a successful and internationally respected German democracy. This volume covers Schmidt’s early life, ending with his work as SPD Bundestag caucus chair during the Grand Coalition of 1966-69, years where his managerial skills were on special display. Soell is respectful, admiring at times, but not uncritical. He offers important insights into Schmidt’s motivations and his place in the history of West German democracy. The second volume, which will cover Schmidt’s career as cabinet minister and chancellor, is likely to be equally valuable, and will make this biography stand as the definitive version for years to come.

Soell’s self-consciously magisterial work makes the short political biography from Martin Rupps pale by comparison. Rupps, a young journalist, has more modest aspirations, and presents the “outside story” of Schmidt as public figure, surveying his career in an engaging if unspectacular manner, based on published sources and interviews. The greater distance he has from the insiders or from the documents means that his analysis does not have the depth of Soell’s, but students looking for an introduction to Schmidt and his era could still read it with profit.

Michael Schwelien’s book, in contrast, is different from both Soell and Rupps. Written by one of Schmidt’s protÄ©gÄ©s from *Die Zeit*, it is a memoir and a biography in one, an attempt by someone who worked regularly with Schmidt to present insights into his character beneath the famously cool exterior. Schwelien’s choice of subtitle alone, “A Life for Peace,” must come as a shock to a generation of West Germans who participated in the anti-Pershing protests of the late 1970s and early 1980s and who accused Schmidt of being a calculating neo-Cold Warrior. Schwelien offers a corrective to those simplistic visions of Schmidt, presenting him as a man with humor and heart who was genuinely committed to peace as well we stability at home and abroad. Ultimately, Schwelien admits that Schmidt remains something of a puzzle, concluding with a quote from Marion DÄ©nhoff, who worked with both men at *Die Zeit*: “He would always be there to help—but what moved him deep inside, I have never been able to figure out” (p. 358). His complexity will make Schmidt a worthy historical subject for years to come, and this engaging if idiosyncratic

book can stand alongside the more monumental biography from Soell to round out the image of Schmidt.

Constructing monuments is no easy process. Balancing humanity and history is hard, and some political figures are difficult to imagine completely separated from the partisan politics that led them into the public

eye from the start. It is progress, however, when scholars can begin to assess political figures in light of the actual achievements and defects, with some critical distance from the views attached to them during their careers. There will still be much to discuss and debate about Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, but these works will provide the foundation for all future work on them.

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