

So, why am I interested in politics and how did I become to be politically active? Basically, I'm a critical person and as a child of ten had already begun to read newspapers... I still remember a short newspaper article, which at the time, got me thinking about the business of politics. In 1941 I read that the Russian foreign minister Molotov¹ had met with Ribbentrop², the German foreign minister, to conduct "amicable discussions" and then war³ broke out scarcely six months later. That's when I understood that these "amicable discussions" were more or less a declaration of war, diplomatically packaged for the outside world. At the time I couldn't stop thinking about it and I remember it even now.

After my *Abitur*⁴ I did an iron - and ironmonger apprenticeship and then studied business administration. During my studies I was rarely politically active. I was against those fraternities⁵ that were so in vogue at the time – going through town in a railway man's cap disgusted me. After studying I built up a business, they were busy years. I began to get politically active when I was thirty. I joined a circle of young entrepreneurs and we discussed whether it sufficed to just do your job in your business, or whether you should become socially engaged too. Out of this was born the idea for me to become involved in local politics. So, why local politics? As an entrepreneur this is the point where you have to decide; I'm either going to become a professional politician and try and get into parliament, or I am going to do my job as company boss. You can't do both. So I went into local politics as a businessman.

In all the years of being active in the city and county council I experienced something that was to be confirmed over and over again: In politics, just as in clubs and associations, there is a fight for positions of power. Only those who form cliques gain the powerful positions. This game continues on into the upper ranks of politics. It is essentially a power play, where it's not the best who get ahead, but those who are the most skilled at building cliques; you help me trip up my competitors and I'll help you on your side. As the saying goes; enemy, arch-enemy, party ally. This carnage takes place within the parties, where the decisive power struggles take place and if you are in the right clique you get to the top. Angela Merkel⁶ is the best example. In the beginning she was just Kohl's⁷ "girl", nobody took her seriously, until she got rid of her opponents left and right and was finally right at the top – Kohl did it before her, he was a good teacher. No one had expected her to become a threat, but by then it was too late... These cliques in the world of politics are the reason that anyone who is proficient in business is very seldom successful in politics. Many politicians who originally come from a business background turn away from politics sooner or later, telling themselves: "If cliques count more than performance here, then it's not for me. I don't need to remain in politics; I can find a good job again in business." – These people often take on uncomfortable positions and are not easily intimidated. Because they have an alternative to a political career they are independent of cliques and party leadership. By contrast professional politicians, who have been

¹ V.M. Molotov, 1890 – 1986 :

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/388488/Vyacheslav-Mikhaev-Molotov>

² J. von Ribbentrop, 1893 – 1946:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/502062/Joachim-von-Ribbentrop>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov%E2%80%93Ribbentrop_Pact

⁴ *Abitur* German equivalent of British A'Levels

⁵ German fraternities: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burschenschaft>

⁶ Angela Merkel – German Chancellor 2005 - :

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/711465/Angela-Merkel>

⁷ Helmut Kohl – German Chancellor 1982 – 1998:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/321076/Helmut-Kohl>

building their political careers since university, have not usually got any career positions outside of politics to which they can turn. This leads to dependency: these people can only move within their cliques and are simultaneously dependant on the party leadership. As soon as they oppose their party leadership they are quickly dropped and when they fly out of politics they have no prospects. Under these circumstances it's tempting to watch which way the wind blows. Those who leave active politics from an influential position – such as minister or state secretary – can become lobbyists...You see that every day in Berlin. Lobbyists work on behalf of large companies and organisations, with the task of purposefully influencing political decision makers or political decisions, “He who pays the piper, calls the tunes” as they say. That’s how lobbying works. Churchill⁸ once said of our noble democracy: “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others have been tried.” Politics means power struggle and influence: You help me, I’ll help you. You’d need a lot of charisma to be able to say: That’s not necessary; I’ll be successful because I am convincing. That of course has its parallels in business. If I am a successful company boss my position is strong enough to be independent of any cliques. In party politics alliances change and intrigues are forged. I experienced this in local government. When I was a newcomer in the air conditioning business we had an old bull who had cornered 90% of the market and wanted to destroy us. He made a cooperative contract with us and then terminated it shortly after; giving reasons that couldn’t stand up in court. I was for the FDP⁹ in the district council at the time. Back in the nineties in our Hessen they used to say you had to have the “red hymn book” if you wanted to get anywhere, because the SPD¹⁰ controlled the communes. I represented the FDP in the district council, in those days the FDP was the tip of the scales and I was against those cliques. Therefore I was difficult and the “red” Sparkasse bank, to whom I was in debt, actually wanted to sell my firm to some competitors in Stuttgart behind my back. When there are party political intrigues like that, local politics can become dangerous. There is a quote from Talleyrand: “A politician looks to the next election and a statesman to the next generation.” Statesmen are an exception in politics; the sort of personalities who act from conviction and also manage to fight for unpopular decisions - Decisions that may be detrimental to them, or their image at the time, but which are beneficial to the people in the long term. There are many politicians, but statesmen are rare. Adenauer¹¹, Brandt¹², Schmidt¹³ were all chancellors who pushed things through despite their parties’ opposition. They were ready to put their beliefs before their careers. Schmidt was bullied in the SPD and to a certain extent I would say that Gerhard Schröder¹⁴ was too. Schröder gave the “sick Germans”, as we were then, a cure. Through

⁸ Sir Winston Churchill 1874-1965:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117269/Sir-Winston-Churchill>

⁹ FDP/ Freie Demokratische Partei – Free Democratic Party:

<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Free-Democratic-Party-political-party-Germany>

¹⁰ SDP/Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands – Social Democratic Party of Germany:

<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Social-Democratic-Party-of-Germany>

¹¹ Adenauer, Konrad 1876-1967 - Chancellor of West Germany 1949-1963:

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Konrad-Adenauer>

¹² Brandt, Willy 1913 -1992 – Mayor of West Berlin 1957-1966, Chancellor of West

Germany 1969-1974: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Willy-Brandt>

¹³ Schmidt, Helmut b1918 – Chancellor of West Germany 1974-1982

¹⁴ Schröder, Gerhard b1944 – Chancellor of Germany 1998-2005:

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Gerhard-Schroder>

Hartz¹⁵ and the Agenda 2010¹⁶ at the beginning of the 2000s, he brought us to where we are today – currently the strongest nation in Europe. He achieved this by making some brutal decisions which were unpopular with his party. Although his comrades in the SPD followed him at the time, they weren't happy. To me Statesmen are personalities who push things forward without considering any advantage to themselves. Gabriel¹⁷, for example, is the exact opposite, he's a populist, who always goes with the flow and basically Merkel is exactly the same.

In 1960 I joined the FDP. The reason I chose the FDP is because I don't like to be tied to a particular political leaning. The CDU was the alternative in those days, but to me it was too conservative in its leaning towards the church. On the other hand there was the SPD – at the time the SPD was all about nationalising businesses with a leaning towards socialism. That wasn't an alternative for me. You can look wherever you will, you can't build a state with state controlled industries. You've only got to look at which people are sent to manage state controlled industries. It's not about being competent in business. They're sent by politicians and in some cases they are even politicians, who go straight into industry. Czechoslovakia was a good example. There was a revolt there in 1968, the Prague Spring¹⁸, but why did it happen? We, of the young entrepreneurs, invited Oto Šik¹⁹, one of the most prominent economic reformers of the Prague Spring, to speak on this topic; he spoke about the economic background of the Prague Spring. One of the reasons for the peoples' dissatisfaction was that industry was getting worse and worse, the country got into debt and pressure was put on them, from Moscow included, to perform better. Ota Šik used an example to explain to us how controlled economy worked in those days. You have to understand that the economic performance of Czechoslovakia was measured in steel. One day a young engineer went into a business which produced tug boats. This engineer went to the boss and said: "We've developed a tug which has 40% less weight, similar to those which are produced in the West and because of this it's much cheaper." The boss answered: "Yes, that's a great construction, but I may as well pack it all in, as produce one of these. It would mean using 40% less steel and then...they'll fire me." So much for the mechanisms of state controlled industry. In any case the country's economy collapsed even further and an opposition movement arose which demanded economic reform. The people said: these party barons who are in charge of the firm are all incapable blokes, let's get ourselves some efficient managers and engineers to bring our economy up to scratch, we'll make a profit and the economy will be healthy again. That was the first step, the government under Dubcek²⁰ gave free rein to technocrats like Ota Šik for economic reforms and as the movement towards democratisation continued the totally communist state was shaken to its core and Khrushchev sent in soviet troops.

Democracy to me means acting to avert damage from the community. To this end it's important to have overall concepts on which you can orientate yourself – whether it's

¹⁵ Hartz – Unemployment benefit reforms in Germany: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartz_concept

¹⁶ Agenda 2010, series of social reforms: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_2010

¹⁷ Gabriel, Sigmund b1959: Chairman of the SPD from 2009, vice chancellor of Germany, Minister of Commerce and Energy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmar_Gabriel

¹⁸ Prague Spring of 1968: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Czechoslovak-history>

¹⁹ Šik, Oto 1919-2004, Czech economist: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Ota-Sik>

²⁰ Dubcek, Alexander 1921-1992, first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1968-1969: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-Dubcek>

Kant²¹with his categorical imperative²², or a religion based on God, which demands that people live together under ethical maxims. It's all about limiting power, because uncontrolled power always leads to excess, whether in the monarchy, the church or dictatorships – power and injustice are quickly brought together. Democracy therefore aims to control power. In a real democracy power is only present for a while, and then there are elections with the chance for a change of power. The control of power and the powerful hold great value in our society. To a young person I would like to say; be careful don't enter into the things in the name of power that are against your morals, always be able to look yourself in the eye, be aware so that democracy can endure.

Any kind of peer pressure disgusts me and that is probably also a reason why I am in the FDP. There is room for very differing opinions in the FDP and you can voice them and advocate them freely. This freedom is important to me which comes from the fact that I...grew up as boy under National Socialism. I even believed in the Fuhrer and the ultimate victory and I was in the DJ²³, the German Young People. You were in the DJ until your fourteenth birthday and then you went into the HJ²⁴, the Hitler Youth. Every Wednesday and Saturday we had to attend German Young People, to take part in nonsensical drills, which didn't suit me. I loathed being forced to do something I found pointless – so I only went every other time and that had consequences. In 1944, when I was 13, I was put in a penal unit. All the delinquents from the local area were rounded up and the area leader of the HJ was responsible for drilling us. The area leader was an officer who had been wounded in the war and was no longer of any use. Anyway he drilled us in January, on a field in slushy snow and he reckoned that in this way he could change us for the better, he got the opposite results of course. I want my freedom and here in the FDP I have it. In the FDP you can be critical and I have always taken advantage of this freedom. After the Tsunami²⁵ in 2004 we built an orphanage in Indonesia and I founded a trust in order to do it. I have certain financial assets and I want to create something permanent, to use this money for providing immediate concrete help for people. As a father it's my duty to bring up my children wisely and make it possible for them to have a good education, but then they have to make it on their own. I don't want them to say: Well, I've inherited enough money to lead a comfortable life. I want to make the money available to poor people and that is why there is a foundation. Anyway, in those days the company was working in Indonesia, so after the Tsunami I looked for a way to help the orphaned children and came across a campaign in Bremen: A doctor's Indonesian wife had been collecting donations for an orphanage, but there wasn't enough money for long term financing. Sustainability is important for that kind of project. It doesn't make sense to start something – wonderful and if possible with lots of publicity – if the money is going to run out at some point. So we founded this orphanage together and that was a really good thing. The children were badly traumatised. They painted a lot, always ships and water; they were trying to rid themselves of the trauma. We made sure that we found carers who had a lot of empathy for the children. When visited I had 2 children on each hand. – Yes, when

²¹ Kant, Immanuel 1724-1804, German philosopher:
<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Immanuel-Kant>

²² *Categorical Imperative* – Kant's ethical system:
<http://www.britannica.com/topic/categorical-imperative>

²³ Deutsches Jungvolk- German Young People:<http://www.britannica.com/topic/German-Young-People>

²⁴ Hitler Jugend – Hitler Youth: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Hitler-Youth>

²⁵ 2004 Tsunami: <http://www.britannica.com/event/Indian-Ocean-tsunami-of-2004>

“Grandad” visited...Once one of the children asked me “How many Grandchildren have you got?” “Four”, I said. The child looked at me and said “Now you’ve got fourteen.” Yes. Every visit was always a great thing and it’s still like that now...You can tell how important the sustainability of that kind of project is by looking at a counter- example: The Singaporeans collected donations, opened an orphanage and ran out of money two years later. When a topic disappears from television and the press, donations also cease. At the beginning the orphanage received so many donations of money that it couldn’t all be used, but in the end they were all on the streets. Our orphanage project is also affiliated with a parallel initiative in Braunschweig. The project had enough money for five years. So we said, okay, we’ll take care of our young people until they have a profession and are able to feed themselves. When the first of our fosterlings finished university we took on the Braunschweig project as well. That’s what I mean with sustainability. When I start something I can’t just stop.