

# The *Spiegel* Affair and the Strengths and Weaknesses of German Democracy (November 12, 1962)

## Abstract

---

The editor-in-chief of the conservative tabloid *BILD-Zeitung* joins in the nearly unanimous press condemnation of the proceedings against *Der Spiegel*. At the same time, however, he emphasizes the strengths of West German democracy.

## Source

---

*Dear BILD-readers!*

The federal government has disgraced itself. It is a disgrace for the weakest and worst cabinet we've had since 1949.

- The justice minister has failed.
- The defense minister has concealed the whole truth.
- Under pressure from the FDP, the chancellor axed two deserving undersecretaries in an “emergency culling.” People were too late in heeding the Bavarian SPD parliamentary representatives who said: “Come clean now, even if means admitting you're dirty.”

In parliament, the opposition struck hard and kept asking questions until the truth came to light. In the German Bundestag, they nearly bashed each other's heads in, and the intellectuals, who had already declared freedom of the press dead two weeks ago, are now mourning democracy. Among those who are so quick to see the negative side of things, the evil word was spoken: “It's like in Weimar.”

But what came after Weimar? Hitler!

Do we want that again? No!

And therefore, *BILD* is appealing to politicians: Restrain yourselves! Come back to your senses!

We need freedom, but we also need the state.

Do not destroy the citizens' delicately and slowly growing trust.

Even if German cabinet ministers were to behave even more foolishly and more simple-mindedly than they have over the last few days:

- Our domestic liberty is not in danger.
- The Federal Court and the Federal Constitutional Court deserve our confidence. They are staffed with independent judges appointed for life, judges who don't go around arresting people for the fun of it or to do somebody a favor. No matter how many phone calls Mr. Strauss makes to Spain, even he can't incarcerate anyone without a court-ordered arrest warrant.
- Our Basic Law is exemplary. There are no strongmen threatening our personal liberty, and the alleged strong man has just offered up a weak performance.
- Our parliament has just demonstrated—even if it can't always demonstrate good manners—that it is capable of tracking down scandals even without *Der Spiegel*.
- And the press has shown that it is free and will remain so.

One day we will even catch the traitors in the ministries. And if we scream loud enough, those eavesdroppers on our telephones will disappear.

---

• Fellow countrymen! Do not let pessimists, bellyachers, hysterics, and quasi-Communists spoil this young state of yours. This liberal state is better than its reputation and also better than its cabinet ministers.

Fellow countrymen! Argue when it's necessary—and over the last few weeks it has been necessary. But reconcile, too, since this is necessary, as long as

- the Wall still stands
- as long as 17 million countrymen are being subjugated
- as long as Communism threatens us.

Fellow countrymen, take note of the little enemies and fight them, but do not forget the big red danger!

Think about our national anthem. Live it—don't just sing it.

Everyone learned the first verse—the “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles”—down to the bitter end.

We still have to learn the third verse: Unity and justice and freedom for the German fatherland. Let us all strive for that in a brotherly fashion with heart and hand.

Yours, Peter Boenisch, editor-in-chief of *BILD-Zeitung*

Source: Peter Boenisch, *BILD-Zeitung*, November 12, 1962; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970*. Göttingen, 1988, pp. 515–16. Republished with permission.

Translation: Jeremiah Riemer

Recommended Citation: The Spiegel Affair and the Strengths and Weaknesses of German Democracy (November 12, 1962), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-14>> [April 20, 2026].