

Of course, even in the midst of a civil war normal life adapts. Aside from the war (or perhaps because of it), Lebanon is in most respects a libertarian paradise. There are no exchange controls, for example, so it is one of the few places left where a man can enter and leave with a million dollars and no questions asked. There are several different private armies, most of them superior to the government's. Even the

traffic betrays a laissez-faire spirit: Not a single traffic light seems to exist in the entire country, and the Lebanese driver tends to go for his horn when his more delicate American counterpart would go for the brake.

This does have its down side. The lack of monetary controls that made Lebanon the banking capital of the Middle East has made it the drug capital as well. The existence of effi-

cient and well-financed private armies is a major obstacle to Lebanese unity and political reform. And although there are no meter maids to hand you a parking ticket, there's also no one to protect you from being shot by the irate driver whose fender you just dented. All in all, a visit to Lebanon demonstrates why men born free tend everywhere to prefer at least some chains.

Whether the Damascus agreement

will really bring the peace the Lebanese so desperately want is anybody's guess; the signs are not promising. Still, the people are optimistic. Ironically, places like Lebanon—where the different segments of the populace are busy cutting one another's throats—are invariably promoted in travel books as having people known for their "warmth and friendliness." The greater irony is the travel books are right. □

EUROPEAN DOCUMENT



HI, I'M JOHANNES RAU

by Amity Shlaes

Europeans are taking a long time to surrender their jokes about Ronald Reagan's movie theater past. The student hogging the window in your train compartment is still likely to ask in his best ironic tones about that "cowboy-actor"; a Brussels audience watching Steven Spielberg's *Back to the Future* laughs loudest when the time machine takes it back to a 1955 theater with a Ronald Reagan billing on the marquee. Even when they get used to Reagan, Europeans still don't quite understand him. The big lesson politicians here seem to have abstracted from American politics is that appearance is all, and the campaigns for several coming elections are replete with examples of hard-bitten old ideologues sweating to "out-image" one another. Television coaching and questions of style are shaking up the old issue-bound coalitions, and parties scarred from forty years of battle under the proportional representation system are working hard to polish up candidates for the coming round of elections. In no country is this more evident than in the Federal Republic of Germany, where in 1987 the hoary Social Democratic party has a good chance of electing to chancellor the prime minister of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Johannes Rau.

The center-left SPD is a century-old creaker badly in need of help. In an earlier incarnation it helped oversee the enactment of Bismarck's social welfare laws, establishing Germany's tradition as a social welfare state, and since the end of World War II it has been the

party of unions and intellectuals. Back in the early 1970s, when Willy Brandt brought the party to its postwar zenith with his popular Ostpolitik, the Social Democrats were winning nearly 50 percent of the vote. But things went downhill from there, and lately the party has been registering closer to 40 percent. In 1982, Helmut Schmidt's coalition with the centrist Free Democrats finally collapsed. Since then there's been additional hemorrhaging as some voters depart for the new radical environmentalist party, the Greens.

A variety of good old-fashioned plots are afoot in the SPD to woo back the organization's fading constituency. Brandt, the party patriarch, and his

fellow Ostpolitik pioneer Egon Bahr are busy dropping in on East Bloc capitals and have even signed an agreement with Communist leaders in hopes of reminding voters of their past achievements. Their unofficial—and, opposing Christian Democrats charge, illegal—foreign policy is intended to undercut the government in much the same way Jesse Jackson aimed to upstage President Reagan at the Geneva summit. On the homefront, Brandt's ideological godchild, Saarland state prime minister Oskar Lafontaine, won voters with a heavy-weight anti-NATO pitch. And the prime minister of the state of Hesse has entered into a coalition with the Greens that some Social Democrats see as a model for a federal-level government.

None of these ideological SPD figures, though, is the party's candidate for chancellor. Instead the party last September decided, somewhat surprisingly, to go with the 54-year-old Rau. In a way the choice was an obvious one—Rau scored a resounding victory for his party in his home state last year. But there were other SPD winners in the same elections—Saarlander Lafontaine, for example, was the first Social Democrat since 1966 to win a state back from the right. What got Rau the job was widespread recognition that his handsome, preacherly air (his father was a Protestant pastor) and his moderate principles mark him as a new kind of German politician, a change from the run-of-the-mill, puffed-up professional that one is likely to encounter in Bonn.

In his platform the North Rhine-Westphalia leader hawks a brand of populism that is something novel in today's Europe, but it also reminds one of the appealing, conciliatory populism that in the U.S. went out with Jimmy Carter. At a December party convention in the town of Ahlen, Rau swore he would never "snivel or dissemble. I will remain who I am." Rau's answer to Germany's biggest problem, continuing high unemployment in the face of growth, seems vague and long term: he wants to overcome the "social, technological and ecological challenges" that unemployment represents, a task he estimates will take a generation. He supports cutting taxes for those with annual incomes under DM 80,000 (about \$33,000) but raising them for Germans in the highest brackets. With the rest of his party he opposes a change in labor law currently



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being debated that would make it harder to strike. "Rau believes a little bit of everything, but not all of it," writes commentator Herbert Kremp in the conservative national paper, *Die Welt*.

On foreign policy, Rau couches his statements even more vaguely. "We continue to insist," he declared, "that Pershings and Cruise Missiles must be negotiated away, just as the Soviet equivalent weapons must be. I will, as chancellor, initiate action in our alliance and towards the Soviet Union [regarding the matter]." His low tones and pleasant demeanor at the Ahlen meeting reflected the motto posted under his microphone: "Reconciliation Instead of Separation."

The reconciliation Rau is after, though, may be hard to find even within his own party. True, Willy Brandt paid lip service to Rau's position in the party journal *Vorwärts*, telling fellow Social Democrats that "Rau is better" than a more ideological candidate. Rau wants to win an absolute majority, as he did in North Rhine-Westphalia, but if he is to gain power a coalition government seems

almost inevitable (no recent poll has the SPD winning more than 48 percent).

Many Social Democrats feel that coalition should be with the Greens, a group Rau refuses to have anything to do with. But the Greens are not going to go away. The SPD-Green coalition in Hesse, complete with a Green party minister of environment, was established after Rau was named the SPD candidate for chancellor. In the meantime, the rest of the SPD—which doesn't have the populist role to play—is biting into the government with more than the usual dose of venom. The SPD faction leader in the Bundestag charged on January 3, for example, that Minister of the Interior Zimmermann "endangers . . . the well-being of the state" in his interpretation of confidentiality laws in the wake of recent spy scandals. Attacks on the government's "piggish" social welfare cuts and charges about the "pitiless egoism of the right wingers" came from members of the same party that sponsors Rau's gentle statements. Rau may represent a new kind of politics, but the rest of the SPD continues the strident campaigns of the past.

The same differences pop up in foreign policy. Rau—like many a West

German politician of the left and right—has visited with officials in Moscow and with East German boss Erich Honecker. But he has not been involved in the Social Democratic party's campaign to conduct an independent foreign policy. Indeed, he's covering all bases, as demonstrated by his trip to Washington in early February. Social Democratic leaders, meanwhile, have gone so far as to conclude a model pact with East Germany on chemical weapons, one that in some respects supersedes international agreements between the Soviet Union and the United States. Egon Bahr and Willy Brandt say that the party, if elected, would immediately begin working to turn such drafts into real treaties. Rau hasn't had much to say about that, either.

At the beginning of Rau's candidacy it looked as if the bumbling chancellor, Helmut Kohl, might make up for all of Rau's internal party problems. Back in September, only 32 percent of Germans polled by the national weekly *Stern* magazine said they'd prefer Kohl as chancellor, while 43 percent chose Rau. But by December the gap between the

men had narrowed to a virtual tie. Although Kohl is still viewed as a problem for his party—"Kohl is a handicap for the Christian Democratic Union," read the headline of a lead story in the national news magazine *Der Spiegel* this January—Rau's "image success" apparently isn't permanent.

Pollsters right now are divided over who will win in 1987. But the West German economy may in the end be what breaks the "image" candidate. In Germany, which had an inflation in the 1920s that makes Argentina's today look insignificant and where unemployment encouraged the rise of National Socialism, economic points count more than others in an election. Although unemployment at 9.3 percent remains high, 3 percent growth is predicted for next year, and the stock market is booming. Most relevantly, *Stern* reports that the traditionally dour Germans are feeling more optimistic than they have in years—some 61 percent said they were looking forward to the next year, just about double the 31 percent who had hopes for the next twelve months back in 1981. For such a grumpy country, that's a change more interesting than any momentary shift in election tactics. □

THE NATION'S PULSE



MAKING IT

by Bruce Bawer

Standing in line at the supermarket checkout recently, I was intrigued to notice that the cover of the current issue of *Vogue*—a periodical to which I ordinarily do not pay a great deal of attention—boasted a "special report" on my hometown, little old New York. How could I resist? Eschewing the diverse attractions of the latest *Newsweek*, *TV Guide*, and *National Enquirer*, I grabbed *Vogue* and found my way to the "special report."

Alas, the report turned out to be less than special. It offered little more than the usual superficial survey of trendy restaurants, fashionable department stores, and high-toned hostelrys. But leading off the whole thing was a

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keynote piece that I found myself reading all the way through, and then (since the man in front of me was buying enough groceries to stock a fallout shelter) reading all the way through again. Written by one Joan Juliet Buck, it was entitled "New York: Life at the Center of the World," and it went—in part, at least—like this: "Today, any man who is a real man has to measure himself against New York City, and that goes for any woman, too. To refuse is to be a pacifist, a coward, and a ninny." Indeed, "the duty of everyone alive is to participate in its existence . . . to stay away from New York is to live in the past and to refuse the challenge of opportunity." For "the past century has made New York America's capital, no matter what the official truth is: and the last five years have made New York the center of the world."

The center of the world! As I slipped the magazine back into its rack, it occurred to me that I'd run across a lot of pieces like that lately. They all had that same breathless, hyperbolic quality, as if the writer were trying desperately to convince himself that, yes, New York in the eighties is Mecca, Camelot, and Shangri-La rolled up in one. Why, I wondered, was it so important for them to believe this nonsense? Shouldn't the important question be whether living in a given place contributes to one's happiness and sense of fulfillment?

It's not, after all, as if the city has, in the past five years, become the center of anything that it was not the center of before. It is, as it was a generation ago, the headquarters of American garment production and of publishing, the

home of the stock market, the location of great art museums and theaters and the New York Public Library and the United Nations. It is, as it was a generation ago, the city that young Americans migrate to in order to make their lives a little more interesting.

What's changed, though, is that these young Americans—who are now coming, as Miss Buck observes, in greater numbers than ever—are no longer drawn to Gotham so much by its real attractions as by the unprecedented and unrealistic hype of a hundred Miss Bucks. What started it all? Maybe it was Frank Sinatra's 1980 recording of "New York, New York," the song of the immortal if meaningless line: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." Or maybe it was Woody Allen's shamelessly romantic 1979 film *Manhattan*; or maybe it was the 1977 election of Ed Koch, that