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A Difficult Balancing Act: Honecker's Visit to West Germany (September 11, 1987)

In an interview with *Deutschlandfunk* radio, Rupert Scholz of the Christian Democrats (who represented the state of Berlin in the federal government), evaluates Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic and discusses the ambivalent nature of East-West German relations. On the one hand, says Scholz, West Germans have to accept certain realities and respect the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic; on the other hand, reunification – as Chancellor Kohl stressed – has to remain a goal.

Interview with Senator Rupert Scholz on Honecker's Visit

by Karl Wilhelm Fricke

Fricke: Professor Scholz, as Berlin Senator for Justice and Federal Affairs you also have a direct say in the policies on Germany and Berlin, insofar as Berlin policy [*Berlinpolitik*] is always also "Germany policy" [*Deutschlandpolitik*]. Thus, my first question is: What is your fundamental appraisal of Erich Honecker's official visit to Bonn? How do you judge the political results from a Berlin perspective?

Scholz: As the chancellor correctly emphasized again in the Bundestag debate, Berlin is and will remain a special kind of acid-and-scratch test in "Germany policy." As long as "Germany policy" as a whole has to concentrate on structuring intra-German relations, that is, relations between the two partial German states, and changes corresponding to questions of principle are not possible, Berlin will always be the most difficult point because the other side, as we know, is not prepared to accept Berlin as part of the Federal Republic to an unlimited extent. The results of this visit must also be assessed against this background; one must say that they are generally good in the sum total, and they bring essential progress for Berlin. I'll give special mention here to the two examples of railroad traffic and the electric power system.

Fricke: We'll come back to that. First, I'd like to ask another critical question referring to the protocol, the rules of protocol according to which Honecker was received in Bonn. Were people here in Berlin sympathetic to that?

Scholz: I think the situation and the feelings in Berlin are certainly no different than in the rest of the Federal Republic. The feelings are ambivalent, and they have to be; in Berlin perhaps in a special way because people here have to live with the Wall every day. On the other hand, I think that by now Germans in general – in East and West – have a sense that our immediate situation is not going to change totally, that we have to live with reality. And since the conclusion of the Basic Treaty, part of that reality is the sovereignty of the GDR, though not in the sense of full

recognition under international law. In particular, this involves legal questions that cannot always be immediately explained to the citizens.

Fricke: They are also hard to understand internationally.

Scholz: Yes, that's entirely correct. These are also problems and we need to carefully analyze the international response to this visit. On the other hand, we have to consider what has been said in front of a large public – through television and radio. For me, that includes, for one thing, the very, very clear words of the chancellor on the unresolved German Question, on our unaltered goal of reunification. Honecker had to accept that. It was all printed in [the GDR daily] *Neues Deutschland*. That means it is now very topical for people in the GDR and in East Berlin; it is an issue. You have to imagine, even Mr. Honecker had to applaud the words of the chancellor. These are things that I believe will have a great impact on the political landscape in the future.

[. . .]

Fricke: You just mentioned the Gera demands.¹ They evidently did not play any role in the two-day exchange of opinions in Bonn; was that because the basic positions of both sides were clear?

Scholz: The Gera demands were in fact not at all significant in the talks. The federal government allowed absolutely no doubt – neither beforehand nor during the talks themselves – that the question of citizenship, the conversion of Permanent Missions, and any questions raising any doubt about the openness of the German Question in general, would not be up for discussion. The other side understood that. The other side also made it very clear that it was interested in practical solutions, practical steps, and that it did not want the two sides to be mutually overwhelmed by fundamental demands. That is a sensible, reasonable course, and it gives occasion for optimism in the future.

Fricke: The chancellor stressed in the Bundestag that Berlin was to be included in all regulations between the two German states. Do you think it is conceivable that the GDR will show greater respect or tolerance for Berlin's connections to the Federal Republic in the future?

Scholz: Time and again, the GDR tried to make things difficult as regards the inclusion of Berlin in intra-German agreements. The Eastern bloc countries as a whole try to do the same thing. That, of course, has always been a strategy that is supposed to call into question what was guaranteed in the Four Powers Agreement on Berlin: namely, not only the safeguarding of the existing connections between Berlin and the Federal Republic but also their further development. That is a policy that is unacceptable. It violates the treaty. This was made very clear, especially when the chancellor firmly said (before the Bundestag but also during the talks): if the GDR truly wants progress in intra-German relations, then it cannot ignore Berlin; success is only possible *with* Berlin and especially also *for* Berlin. I think these clear words were also understood. In this respect, Berlin remains the acid-and-scratch test, as I said earlier, for the continued cooperation, the further dialogue between the two states in Germany.

¹ Demands expressed by Erich Honecker in a speech in Gera on October 13, 1980, including: (1) fixing the common border along the Elbe in the middle of the river; (2) recognition of GDR citizenship; (3) renaming permanent missions to be embassies; (4) closing the registration center for SED crimes in Salzgitter (West Germany) – trans.

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