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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AIRGRAM

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NO. _____ HANDLING INDICATOR _____

TO : Department of State

INFO : Berlin, Bonn, Cairo, Jerusalem, London, Moscow, Paris

FROM : Embassy TEL AVIV DATE: July 21, 1966

SUBJECT: Controversy over Speech of German Ambassador

REF :

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On June 30, 1966, the occasion of "German Day" at the Tel Aviv Trade Fair, West German Ambassador Dr. Rolf PAULS delivered a speech that provoked widespread press comment, most of which was critical, followed by conciliatory statements by Foreign Minister Abba EBAN and the Israeli Ambassador to Bonn, Asher BEN-NATHAN. The prime targets of the press were statements by Dr. Pauls to the effect that: 1) West Germany has already regained a position of honor in the international community and thus was no longer in need of any special dispensation; 2) some Israelis were unfortunately prone to stirring up the past "for political reasons," and 3) the quality of Israeli-West German relations would largely depend on Israel's attitude to certain key problems such as that of the Oder-Neisse Line.

Although clearly situated within the context of a full and frank admission of Germany's special obligations toward Israel and of her understanding of Israeli sensitivities regarding Germany and Germans, these remarks were nevertheless interpreted by most of the press as offensive, if not insulting, to the memories of the Jewish victims of Nazi Germany. In the eyes of the organs of the three religious parties (Hatzofeh, Shearin and Hamodia) the German Ambassador's remarks were respectively described as "depressing," "insolent," and "enough to anger every Jew and make his blood boil." According to Lamerhay and Al Hamishmar, mouthpieces for left-wing and anti-German Coalition partners Ahdut Avoda and Mapam, Dr. Pauls' insistence that despite disturbing signs of Nazi revival in Germany,

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Germany had regained a respected international position merely confirmed that there has not yet been any real normalization of relations between Israel and Germany. A more extreme sentiment was expressed by a columnist in mass-circulation Yediot Aharonot (independent) who suggested that the West German diplomat should "go to h-ll." Even the normally pro-BEN-GURION newspaper Haaretz (independent) queried the wisdom of the speech. Thus, while admitting its strict propriety on the grounds that Israeli diplomats in general, and Ambassador Ben-Nathan in particular, often deliver themselves of critical remarks, Haaretz found Dr. Pauls "altogether too sure of himself" in speaking about Germany's return to an honored place in the international community. In any case, Israel is not the place to express such an opinion. An editorial in the Jerusalem Post similarly questioned the prudence of the speech.

Apparently not at all daunted by the reaction of the press, Dr. Pauls allowed himself the liberty of further comment on July 5 in the form of an interview given to Yediot Aharonot. Speaking aboard a ship in Haifa harbor just prior to departing on home leave, he told the reporter that he considered the speech to have been moderate and balanced. He pointed out that, far from declaring that the past should be forgotten, he had explicitly stated that the Jewish people could not be asked to forget the past and that the Germans should not be asked to do so. What he had done was express some criticism. After all, "full diplomatic relations mean full mutual rights, including that of criticism. Criticism is not Israel's exclusive right, and you will have to get used to it." On the whole, he felt that the results of his first year in Israel could be described as positive.

While no official Government statement of comment was issued at any time on the subject, initial "unofficial" comments of "dismay" were carried in many papers. This trend was substantially changed on July 10 when Mr. Eban reportedly complained to the Cabinet that the Israeli press had treated the German envoy in a discourteous fashion. Admitting that certain of Dr. Pauls' remarks constituted legitimate grounds for criticism, he allegedly suggested that the press criticism be "expressed in conformity with the rules of courtesy and moderation customary towards diplomatic relations." According to the Jerusalem Correspondent of Yediot Aharonot, there was a direct link between Mr. Eban's task and efforts being made by Israel to establish some relationship with the European Common Market.

A far-more outspoken voice in favor of Israel-German rapprochement in general, and of Dr. Pauls' freedom of expression in particular, was that of Ambassador Ben-Nathan, currently in Israel on personal business. At a press conference on July 11 Mr. Ben-Nathan vigorously protested against unfair, one-sided criticism levelled in Israel against West Germany and against/widespread tendency to see only the negative side of Germany while ignoring many positive features. Such an attitude is unjust to worthy Germans, and, if allowed to continue, is liable to harm the moral credit which Israel currently enjoys in Germany and will damage essential national interests in the economic and political spheres. The Israeli Ambassador was particularly critical of the cold treatment given

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German students in Israel. As far as Dr. Pauls was concerned, his Israeli counterpart declared that "if I can criticize over German TV trials of Nazi criminals, then Dr. Pauls may for once air his views."

COMMENT: Pauls' deputy at the German Embassy in Tel Aviv told the DCM recently that the Embassy had expected some reaction from the Israeli press and public to the Ambassador's remarks but had underestimated its intensity. He added that the need for such a speech by Pauls had arisen, in the German Government's estimate, because of what it considers to be frequent upbraiding from the lecture platform by Ben-Nathan in Germany; such a relationship should be a two-way-street, they feel. Our only reaction to this is that the German Embassy has so far proved itself to be staffed with intelligent, personable, hard-working men who are doing a full, efficient job in the face of innumerable difficulties. There has, however, been a recent personnel change which may in this case have proved important -- the veteran First Secretary in charge of relations with the press, Wilhelm S. HONDRICH, left the diplomatic service to take a job in Germany, and his replacement Dr. Herbert LIMMER, arrived at the time of Pauls' statement. Moreover, the heavy tasks facing the small staff of German officers daily have so far kept them too occupied to permit the type of contacts with various areas of Israeli life, and consultations with members of other foreign missions, which over a period of time build "feel" for the local situation into any Embassy's operations. The kind of things Pauls has said may be relatively innocuous in many other contexts, but they certainly represent a meaningful, if small, departure from the "turn-the-other cheek" public posture exhibited by the Germany Embassy up to relatively recently in Israel. Perhaps some of this can be traced to the contretemps experienced at the time of Adenauer's visit (A-973, May 17, 1966), which brought out some of the more subterranean feelings in even top Israeli leaders, as well as the steel in Ambassador Pauls' character.

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