

CONTACT REPORT

[] with Hans Henning Crome (at times with [] residence and James III Restaurant.
31 March 1971, 1730 to 2300, []

1. Hans Henning Crome
31 March 1971

with []

By arrangement I picked Crome up at the Embassy after work. We drove to my house for drinks and hors d'oeuvres, went to the James III Restaurant for dinner and returned to my house for coffee and dessert. I drove Crome back to Blum's residence, where he is staying, at about 2300. We did not talk a great deal about his job here in the States, I had been informed that that had been done earlier in the day. I gained the impression, however, from the little we did discuss, that he is not at all sanguine that he will ever really come back to do a full tour in New York.

2. General Discussion of Morale at CATRIBE

Crome spoke first of all the Spiegel series and the rather negative effect which these articles have had on CATRIBE. He hastened to add, however, that the articles and the effect they had are merely manifestations of a general deterioration of the political climate now evident in Germany. He said that since last summer there had been a considerable polarization in the body politic of Germany. He blamed primarily the right wing of the CSU led by Franz Joseph Strauss, on the one hand, and the left wing JUSOs and New Left student groups on the other hand. In his opinion these two numerically small but very militant groups are succeeding extremely well in their attempt to radicalize the political atmosphere in Germany. The process, according to Crome, has reached a point where items such as the Spiegel articles create a much greater echo than they deserve because people react emotionally to a political stimulus where some years ago they would have had no more than a slight intellectual reaction. Speaking of CATRIBE, Crome said a few years ago most people of CATRIBE would have shrugged the Spiegel articles off or might even have laughed about it. Under the strong guiding hand of General Gehlen, at least up until 1961, but to some extent even beyond that time, most senior officers at CATRIBE were quite self-assured and articles of the Spiegel type, if they had appeared at all, would not create much of a stir. He also said, that it would have been unlikely that anyone would have attacked CATRIBE quite as viciously in those days. Now, however, he felt the political climate permitted such attacks and several factors work to make them an effective irritant at CATRIBE. First there is the comparatively weak leadership of General Wessel, who himself is

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not very surefooted in any political discussion. Then there is the appointment, by the SPD, of several outsiders to key positions at CATRIBE, a development which, if nothing else, brought CATRIBE closer to and made them more aware of party politics. Finally there were various attacks on CATRIBE's professional competence, not only by the Spiegel but also by various other media and personalities. As a result of all this there is today, according to Crome, a much more pronounced political atmosphere at CATRIBE than there ever was before. The polarization of the body politic has, to some extent, reached into the compound but it ever so well hidden under the surface.

3. Herbert Rieck, [] and Crome 31 March 1971

We then spoke of personalities. Crome gave me a much more positive and favorable assessment of Rieck than anyone else had given me previously. (It must be remembered that Crome was part of the team which assisted Rieck in his initial introduction to the job and that Crome was, for a time, personal assistant to Rieck.) Crome considers Rieck a well-qualified administrator who learns quickly and whose actions had some beneficial effect on CATRIBE personnel policy. Apparently Blum, his predecessor in the job, had started on a new policy for promotion and assignments of junior officers. But Blum had procrastinated. Rieck had looked at the plan, improved it decisively and got it put into effect. That step alone had brought him admiration and sympathy from the younger generation at CATRIBE. Apparently it was not so much what Rieck did but the energy and decisiveness which he showed that brought him the accolades. Crome thinks that Rieck stands a good chance of success in his job and of surviving whatever may be the next storm in personnel changes at CATRIBE. Crome considers him not only qualified for the job by education and experience but also by temperament and ability. Crome pointed out that Rieck's administrative job does not require much special knowledge of intelligence work, and where it does, Rieck is apparently willing to listen to the pros.

4. Dieter Bloetz [] and Crome 31 March 1971

Crome was much less optimistic about Bloetz's tenure. He admitted that Bloetz is a capable man, hard working, quick to learn, affable, interested and all that, but Crome sees three factors which may work against Bloetz's retention. Firstly, the job he holds is a substantive position. The man occupying that desk should have considerable intelligence experience. Bloetz has none whatever. Second, although he is a self-made man, he has earned considerable academic experience and education, he is not really qualified for the job and could never have reached it in professional competition. There are many people working for him who are, at least by training and experience, better qualified to hold his job than he is. Finally, he has never held any competitive job at all, nor any job for which he really required more than a party membership card. He has never had a job of any supervisory capacity outside of the SPD. Professionally he is nothing more than an aparatchik.

Crome feels that regardless of his human and technical qualifications these negative factors are too strong and will inevitably lead to his dismissal as soon as the SPD loses its position in the Government. Crome was quite matter of fact about that. He said "Bloetz cannot be held, he will not survive a change of Government." When I asked him what he thought would follow, he wrinkled his brow. "If Franz Joseph Strauss has his way, and he may well be willing to concede a great deal to have his way in that matter, CATRIBE will get a CSU apparatchik next and that might set a most dangerous pattern. The position might, by precedence, become a political plum." Crome's only hope was that wiser council would prevail and that the next time the job is vacant, it would be filled from within the organization or at least by a thoroughly unpolitical personality.

5. Richard Meier [] and Crome 31 March 1971

When I asked him how Meier was doing, he said Meier was doing well indeed. He is working out some good programs for collection, and if he is given time, he might really get CATRIBE into the big time as an intelligence collection service. But, here too, Crome had fears of sufficient time to accomplish the job. He said Meier's job was one of the most influential in the organization; and, although Meier himself is very capable, and not engaged politically, he was picked for his professional qualifications and not for his party membership card. He was, by the very fact that he had been appointed by an SPD dominated Government, tainted with the political brush. That fact alone, Crome feared, might make him vulnerable in the currently polarized political atmosphere and possibly cause him trouble with the next change of Government.

6. Helmut Schwenninger (@ STURM) [] and Crome 31 March 1971

While we were at the Spiegel articles I asked Crome about Schwenninger. He brushed him aside as incapable and unimportant. Crome said Schwenninger has been relegated to doing the administrative chores for Meier and seems to be satisfied with being left alone. In his current job he cannot do much harm and he does not have much influence.

7. Ebrulf Zuber (@ ACKERMANN) [] and Crome 31 March 1971

The man to watch at CATRIBE at the moment, Crome said, was Zuber, whose star apparently is really on the rise. Crome considers him the most important man in the "Beschaffung." As Chief of Operations, he has gained tremendously in influence and stature at CATRIBE. Crome did not seem overly happy with the development. He said that Zuber is a perfectionist who is forever looking for a mold which would permit standardized solutions for non-standard problems. Crome thinks that Zuber's idea of a "systematic method" is to prepare a set of solutions first and then fit his problems to the preconceived

solutions. In Crome's opinion Zuber is in danger of oversimplifying the very complex problems of intelligence collection. Crome felt that Zuber judged people in a like manner, deciding their qualifications simply by numerical successes regardless of the varying natures of their tasks. Crome wondered out loud whether a man of such mentality should really have as much power as Zuber has now. To my question he said that Zuber's history as an SS man would not be likely to hurt him. Crome thought that his intransigence and lack of imagination were more likely to cause him trouble. Crome characterized Zuber as tough and very strict, with few friends in the organization. He is feared far more than admired or respected, but he is very clever, hard working and dedicated and therefore likely to succeed.

8. Over-Age-in-Grade Officers

The conversation turned quite naturally to old friends and retired personnel. Crome said that if Wessel had gotten one thing through it was the abolition of the practice to retain retired personnel on the payroll. The retirees, according to Crome, are definitely gone from the scene. He said that there was a lot of dissatisfaction among the military personnel over the divergence in the retirement laws. (Military personnel must retire in their fifties, Generals at sixty, while all civilian personnel, regardless of grade, work until 65.) Crome said that that was a problem for the next few years when so many military personnel would have to retire, but that the problem would diminish as the percentage of military personnel at CATRIBE is reduced.