

A GIANT STEPS DOWN

SIR,—As your readers will know, Germany has been through a government crisis because the Liberals suddenly left the Erhard coalition.

It is strange that it is the Liberals who have sacked the only liberal economist of world fame in our days. And this shows the weakness of our Liberals in political life. In some of our Länder they are in coalition with the Social Democrats, in others with the Christian Democrats (C.D.U.), and whenever they revolt against their greater partner the effect usually is a coalition of the two great parties. Then the Liberals are in opposition and begin again to gather all discontented people.

But even this function is ceded temporarily to meteoric radicalist parties. We have already had two of them that vanished like a mist. Now a new one has had some success in Hessen and Bavaria, and, of course, all enemies of Germany in East and West triumphantly shout that this proves that Germany is sticking to national socialism. Quite the contrary is true. It can be seen from the swift end of these parties. The first two are long forgotten, and the third, the NPD, will also vanish. At present it is only a rallying-point for the discontented,—a common apparition in all democratic countries.

Erhard is, or was, a true Liberal, a pupil of Oppenheimer, who advised a free economy and a 100 per cent increment tax on land value. Erhard was already well known in the Parliamentary Council of Tri-Zonesia. Originally he had wanted to join the Liberals, i.e., Heuss's party. But Heuss, seeing the importance of Erhard's social market economy in the reconstruction of Germany, told him to join one of the big parties, because only a big party could give him the political platform for his grand idea.

So Erhard joined the CDU/CSU and made his way because of the immediate success of his free market policy. He gained world fame and was soon the best election horse of the Christian Democrat stable. At first it seemed as if he would change the character of this originally neo-conservative party, or at least into a liberal one in economic respects. They even made him Chancellor when they were tired of authoritative Adenauer.

But Erhard's popularity waned when he began to preach moderation and an adaptation to the changed conditions in the world market. And when he failed in foreign policy and when the difficulty about the 1967 budget arose, not only the Liberals but also his own party abandoned him. Fortunately he did not simply resign, as is the custom in such cases in most democracies. Faithful to our constitution, he remained in office and forced the Bundestag to form a new stable and strong government under a new Chancellor. So his last service to Germany was to protect our young democracy from falling into a succession of fruitless elections as we have seen in France and in the Weimar era, and to force the democratic parties to co-operate. So, though he eventually failed as a politician, I think he was the greatest statesman in West Germany during the epoch which is now coming to its end.

Yours faithfully,

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