

Obituaries for Helmut Schmidt (96) (23 December 1918 – 10 November 2015)



Photograph taken in 1969 by Bundeswehr-Fotos *Wir Dienen Deutschland* (We serve Germany). © Bundeswehr/Archiv (Verteidigungsminister Helmut Schmidt) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons. The photograph is in the public domain.

- **AFP, Ahram Online (10 November 2015)** <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/164220/World/International/World-leaders-react-to-Helmut-Schmidt-death.aspx>>
- **BBC (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34778565>>
- **CNN (11 November 2015)** <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/10/europe/former-west-germany-chancellor-helmut-schmidt-dies/>>
- **Deutsche Welle (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.dw.com/en/ex-german-chancellor-helmut-schmidt-dies-aged-96/a-18626429>>
- **Die Zeit online (11 November 2015), Theo Sommer** <<http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2015-11/helmut-schmidt-obituary-english>>
- **Independent (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/helmut-schmidt-dead-former-chancellor-of-west-germany-dies-aged-96-a6728706.html>>
- **Los Angeles Times (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-helmut-schmidt-20151111-story.html>>
- **New York Times (11 November 2015)** <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/world/europe/helmut-schmidt-assertive-west-german-chancellor-dies-at-96.html?_r=0>

- **Reuters (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/11/us-germany-schmidt-idUSKCNOSZ1T020151111>>
- **The Daily Telegraph (11 November 2015)**
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/11986614/Helmut-Schmidt-West-German-chancellor-obituary.html>>
- **The Economist** <<http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21678156-social-democrat-chancellor-west-germany-died-november-10th-helmut-schmidt-has-died>>
- **The Guardian (11 November 2015)**
<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/10/helmut-schmidt>>
- **The Times (11 November 2015)** <>
- **The Wall Street Journal (11 November 2015)** <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/former-german-chancellor-helmut-schmidt-dies-aged-96-1447166658>>
- **Washington Post (11 November 2015)** <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/helmut-schmidt-dies-west-german-chancellor-was-transformative-leader/2015/11/10/f6f26fee-87b7-11e5-9a07-453018f9a0ec_story.html>
- **XinHua (11 November 2015)** <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/11/c_134806881.htm>

Interview with Helmut Schmidt by Hartmut Soell **(in German and English)**



Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Prof. Dr. Hartmut Soell in 1982 as members of the German Bundestag. *Source:* Deutscher Bundestag, Bildarchiv, Press Service Steponaitis. Permission is granted by the Archives of the German Parliament (Bundestag) for publication for educational purposes.

No Contemporary Politician has his Public Standing

His biographer Hartmut Soell <http://www.afes-press-books.de/html/SpringerBriefs_PSP_Helmut_Schmidt.htm> on Schmidt's achievements, his greatest challenges and his relationship to the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)

By Alexander R. Wenisch¹

„Kein aktueller Politiker seines Formats“

Biograf Soell über Schmidts Leistungen, seine größte Herausforderung und sein Verhältnis zur SPD

Von Alexander R. Wenisch

Heidelberg. Hartmut Soell (76) ist der Helmut-Schmidt-Biograf. Mehr als 2000 Seiten hat der emeritierte Professor für Neuere Geschichte an der Uni Heidelberg über das Leben des Altkanzlers verfasst. Von 1965 bis 1968 war Soell Schmidts persönlicher Assistent in der SPD-Bundestagsfraktion; 1980 bis 1994 Abgeordneter für den Wahlkreis Heidelberg.

> **Herr Soell, wann haben Sie Helmut Schmidt zuletzt getroffen?**

Vor zwei Jahren. Wir haben in Hamburg in seinem Haus in Langenhorn an einem Buch mit seinen Reden in englischer Sprache gearbeitet.

> **Wie haben Sie ihn persönlich erlebt?**

Wir kannten uns seit nun 50 Jahren. Ich habe ihn 1965 zum ersten Mal interviewt für eine Studentenzeitung der Offizierschule II, die heute Helmut-Schmidt-Universität heißt.

> **Sie waren sein persönlicher Referent. War er ein guter Chef?**

Er hat mich immer gefordert und gefördert. Als Referent musste ich viel für ihn schreiben. Da war er bei der Bezahlung sehr fair: ein Drittel für ihn, ein Drittel für die Steuer, ein Drittel für mich.

> **Was war Ihrer Ansicht nach seine größte politische Leistung?**

Seine Ministerkämmer und seine Kanzlerschaft fielen ja in eine wirtschaftspolitisch nicht einfache Zeit. Die Weltwirtschaft geriet durch die Aufhebung des Goldstandards 1971 und die beiden Ölpreis-Krisen erheblich in Unordnung. Hier hat er – zusammen mit Frankreichs Präsident Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – regulierend eingegriffen. So ist es ihnen gelungen, die stärksten Verwerfungen an den Finanzmärkten einzudämmen. Zudem gründeten die beiden den G7-Weltwirtschaftspakt und haben damit den



Historiker Hartmut Soell war lange persönlicher Assistent von Helmut Schmidt. Foto: waf

westlichen Industrienationen in der Krise zu mehr Koordination verhelfen.

> **Was war seine persönlich größte Herausforderung?**

Was die emotionale Seite angeht, war das sicher das Zurückdrängen der RAF. Mit den beiden Höhepunkten: der Entführung von Hanns-Martin Schleyer 1977 und der Entführung der „Landstut“ in Mogadischu und der Befreiung der Geiseln. Da hätte er auch Glück – ist aber sicher an die Grenze der seelischen Zumutbarkeit gekommen. In manchen Stunden vielleicht auch darüber hinaus.

> **Wo ist Schmidt politisch gescheitert?**

Mit dem Begriff Scheitern würde ich vorsichtig sein. Er wollte mit dem Nato-Doppelbeschluss den nicht-nuklearen Ländern Westeuropas die gleiche Sicherheit

geben wie den Atommächtigen. Das „Schweigenspiel“ des Kreml verhinderte, dass Schmidt mit seinen Warnungen an Moskau durchdringen konnte.

> **Als Kanzler war er in der SPD immer umstritten ...**

... das muss man differenzieren. Sicher war Schmidt in intellektuellen Kreisen, bei Leuten, die Politik aus seminaristischer Perspektive beschreiben und begreifen, wenig beliebt. Es sah anders aus bei Leuten, die die Wirkungszusammenhänge begriffen. Und insbesondere bei Gewerkschaften war Schmidt beliebt. Er hat sehr viel Zeit dafür verwendet, das gute Verhältnis der SPD zu den Arbeitnehmern zu pflegen.

> **Wann hat die SPD angefangen, ihren Fräuden mit ihm zu schließen?**

Ab den späten 80ern. Die Entfremdung zwischen Willy Brandt und Schmidt ist vor Brandts Tod überwunden worden – das hat sicher zur Befriedung beigetragen. Schmidt galt ja über Jahre als der beliebteste deutsche Politiker.

> **Hätte er seine beste Zeit gar nicht als Kanzler, sondern in den vergangenen zwei Jahrzehnten als Elder Statesman?**

Was die Zustimmung auch in Teilen der Linken angeht, kann man das so sagen. Es ist eben ein Unterschied, ob man nur publizistisch tätig ist – obwohl das natürlich einen Wert hat –, oder ob man politisch entscheidet oder Dinge unterlassen muss, an denen sich manche stoßen.

> **Schmidt war lange die politische-moralische Instanz in Deutschland. Wer wird uns nun die Welt erklären?**

Das wird schwierig. Schmidt hat Kompromissbereitschaft vorgelebt, er konnte Situationen präzise analysieren und wusste, dass er mit kleinen Schritten, die strategisch ineinandergreifen, mehr erreicht als mit großen Ankündigungen. Ein aktueller Politiker seines Formats? Da fällt mir niemand ein.

¹ This interview by Hartmut Soell was published in German by the *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* in Heidelberg (Germany) on 11 November 2015, page 2. Hans Günter Brauch, Mosbach (Germany) translated it into English and Mike Headon, Colwyn Bay, Wales, UK, carefully language edited the translation.

Heidelberg. Hartmut Soell (76) is the pre-eminent biographer of Helmut Schmidt. The professor emeritus of modern history at Heidelberg University has written more than two thousand pages on the life of the former Chancellor. From 1965 to 1968, Soell was Schmidt's personal assistant within the parliamentary group of the SPD; from 1980 to 1994 he was a member of parliament for Heidelberg.

> **Herr Soell, when did you meet Helmut Schmidt for the last time?**

Two years ago. We were working at his home in Langenhorn in Hamburg on a volume of his speeches in English.

> **What are your personal memories of him?**

We knew each other for fifty years. I interviewed him for the first time in 1965 for a student magazine at Officer Training School II, today the Helmut-Schmidt University.

> **You were his personal assistant. Was he a good boss?**

He was always demanding but always supported me. As his assistant I had to draft many texts for him. When it came to pay he was quite fair: one-third for him, one-third for the taxman and one-third for me.

> **In your opinion, what was his greatest political achievement?**

His time as a Federal Minister and as Chancellor was not an easy one as far as economic policies were concerned. The global economy was in disarray after the gold standard was abandoned in 1971 and after the two oil crises. Here he intervened, together with French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, in order to regulate things. In that way he managed to contain the most severe upheavals in the financial markets. In addition, together they established the G-7 global economic summits and so helped the western industrial nations to improve their coordination during this crisis.

> **What was his biggest personal challenge?**

From an emotional point of view, this was the overcoming of the Red Army Faction terrorist group, particularly in the case of two events: the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer in 1977, and the hijacking of the Lufthansa plane "Landshut" in Mogadishu and the liberation of the hostages. Certainly he was lucky, but he also reached the limits of his emotional capacity. And at times went beyond those limits.

> **Where did Schmidt fail, politically?**

I would be cautious about using the word 'fail'. With the so-called NATO double decision he wanted to achieve the same level of security for the non-nuclear countries of Western Europe as for the nuclear powers. The Kremlin's "silent game" meant that he was unable to get his warnings through to the Soviet leadership in Moscow.

> **As a Chancellor he was always controversial within the SPD ...**

... Here you have to differentiate. Certainly Schmidt was not well liked or appreciated in intellectual circles, by people who looked at and understood politics from the perspective of a seminar. But for people who understood the cause-and-effect relationship it was different. And he was held in high regard particularly by the trade unions. He spent much time nurturing a good relationship between the SPD and the labour movement.

> When did the SPD begin to make its peace with him?

In the late eighties. The estrangement between Willy Brandt and Schmidt was overcome before Brandt's death, and that certainly contributed to a reconciliation. Schmidt was considered for years as the most popular German politician.

> Was his best time not as Chancellor but during the past two decades, when he had become an elder statesman?

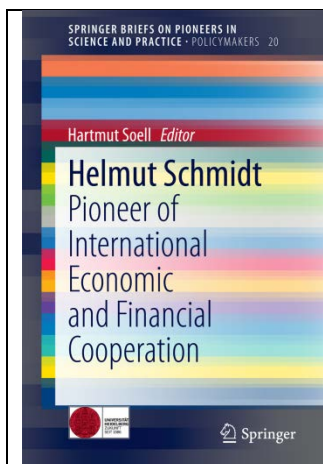
When it comes to support from certain parts of the left, this is certainly true. It makes a difference if you are only active as a communicator and popularizer – although this is, of course, valuable in its own right – rather than if you have to make political decisions that some may disagree with.

> Schmidt was a political and moral authority in Germany. Who will now explain the world to us?

This will be difficult. Schmidt showed a willingness to compromise, he was able to acutely analyse situations, and he knew that small steps, strategically linked, can achieve more than fancy declarations can. A contemporary politician of his stature? Nobody comes to mind.



Hartmut Soell welcoming Helmut Schmidt and at a press conference at the Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung in 1981 during Helmut Schmidt's visit to Heidelberg. **Source:** Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung, Mosbacher Nachrichten edition, Wednesday 11 November 2015, p. 11.



Hartmut Soell: Helmut Schmidt: *Pioneer of International Economic and Financial Cooperation – Presented by Hartmut Soell*. SpringerBriefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice No. 20. Policymakers Subseries No. 1 (Cham – Heidelberg – New York – Dordrecht – London: Springer-Verlag, 2014).

ISBN (Print): 978-3-319-03867-4

ISBN (Online/eBook): ISBN 978-3-319-03868-1

DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-03868-1

[Order this book on the Springer Website](#)

[Press Release of Springer \(New York, Heidelberg\), 19 December 2013](#)

- Compact biography of Helmut Schmidt by his chief biographer (available in English for the first time)
- Presents a selection of major texts on international economic and financial policy by German Chancellor
- Helmut Schmidt as a policymaker pioneering international economic and financial cooperation (1972-2007)

On the occasion of the 95th birthday of Helmut Schmidt, West German Chancellor 1974–1982, his biographer Hartmut Soell, Professor of History at Heidelberg University and former member of the German Parliament (1980–1994), presents H. Schmidt as a Pioneer of International Economic and Financial Cooperation. Influenced by the catastrophes of the early 20th century (global economic crisis, dictatorship and war), Schmidt entered politics as a trained economist and was one of the most innovative policymakers from the 1960s to the 1980s. As minister of defense, economy and finance and as Chancellor he was able to implement many of his ideas for closer cooperation between Western industrial states on currency issues and energy policy during the 1970s. Together with French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing he launched the G7 summits in 1975 and his proposals for a European currency system (1978–79) paved the way for the European economic and currency union. As editor of *Die Zeit*, he would later become an influential commentator.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Hartmut Soell: A Short Biography of Helmut Schmidt.- Major Publications by and on Helmut Schmidt.- Speech in Nairobi: World Currency Conference, 25 September 1973.- Washington Energy Conference, 11 February 1974.- The Energy Crisis – A Challenge for the Western World, Lecture at Roosevelt University, Chicago, 13 March 1974.- Interview by James Reston (New York Times) with Helmut Schmidt.- Speech to the British Labor Party 1974.- Address to the Council of Foreign Relations, New York, 6 December 1974.- Helmut Schmidt: Private Memorandum on International Concentration of Economic Action, 30 July 1975.- Speech in Rambouillet: World Economic Summit, 15. November 1975.- The Case for More Intra-European Monetary Cooperation.- Summary of Comments Made in Copenhagen, 7 April 1978 (Personal).- International Affairs Institute, Lagos, 27 June 1978.

About the Book

For the 95th birthday of Helmut Schmidt, West German Chancellor 1974–1982, his biographer Hartmut Soell, professor of history at Heidelberg University and former member of the German Parliament (1980–1994), presents Helmut Schmidt as a *Pioneer of International Economic and Financial Cooperation*.

Helmut Schmidt is one of the most imaginative German and European politicians and commentators of the second half of the twentieth century. Yet his family background was not political—his musical talents seemed to destine him for an artistic career. Influenced by the catastrophes of the early twentieth century—global economic crisis, dictatorship, war—, Schmidt entered politics as a trained economist and from the 1960s to the 1980s was one of the most innovative policymakers. Even in 1948, when he was still a student, he foresaw—unlike the leadership of his party—an opportunity for Europe in the internationalization of the Ruhr that could lead to cooperation in the European coal and steel industry. Two years later this idea became reality with the Schuman Plan.

Before he became minister of finance and for the economy in 1972, he had been active as a Member of Parliament in the area of international security policy. The ideas he developed in those years about arms control and disarmament for conventional and nuclear weapons were among the most innovative proposals in these areas, even though they were not put into practice until his time as a minister and Chancellor was over. Although in this area, as in Western politics in general, eventual success depended on the end of confrontation between the Eastern and Western blocs, he was able to implement many of his ideas in the realm of economic and financial policy during his period as an active policymaker.

As minister of economy and finance and as Chancellor he was able to implement many of his ideas for closer cooperation between Western industrial states on currency issues and energy policy during the 1970s. This was particularly true for cooperation on currency issues after the Bretton Woods system had come to an end in 1971/1972 and during the first oil crisis (1973/1974). With French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing he launched the G7 summits in 1975. These significantly contributed to the avoidance of the “beggar my neighbour” policies of the early 1930s that had had catastrophic consequences for Europe. Schmidt's proposals for a European currency system (1978/1979) eased the way for the European economic and currency union. As editor of *Die Zeit*, he became an influential commentator who continues to influence this process through his ideas and critiques up to the present day.

More on Helmut Schmidt and his many books is [here](http://www.afes-press-books.de/html/SpringerBriefs_PSP_Helmut_Schmidt.htm). <http://www.afes-press-books.de/html/SpringerBriefs_PSP_Helmut_Schmidt.htm>