

# President Clinton snubs Blair, honors Kohl

by Michele Steinberg

One day before the beginning of the 50th Anniversary of NATO meeting, on April 22, President Clinton chose to highlight the role of Germany as a U.S. strategic partner, and awarded the Medal of Freedom to Helmut Kohl, former Chancellor of Germany. The Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian honor, rarely awarded to non-Americans. It was an honor for Kohl, but it was also a rebuff of London's "Mad Hatter" Tony Blair, who had been at the White House a day before, pressing Clinton to send ground troops to Kosovo.

Clinton's honoring Kohl was directed not only against the British, but against BAC agents in the United States such as Sir George Bush, who committed the disgrace of giving the same award to Baroness Margaret Thatcher in 1991. This was part of Bush and Thatcher's vicious, joint campaign *against* German reunification: At the time, top British officials were declaring that a unified Germany would be a "Fourth Reich," in the mold of Hitler. In return, Bush, a few years later, after he was voted out of office, became Sir George Bush, a Knight of the British Empire.

Despite the way Bush tarnished it, the Medal of Freedom, from its very inception under President John F. Kennedy, has been a symbol of the U.S. hope that Germany could be re-united.

As the following excerpts show, Clinton's award to Kohl should be seen as part of a much-needed turn against the BAC. Here are excerpts from the President's remarks:

## 'Du bist ein Amerikaner'

Today, it is my privilege to confer America's highest civilian honor on a great statesman of the 20th century, the Federal Republic of Germany's longest-serving Chancellor, Helmut Kohl.

President Kennedy first saw the design for the Medal of Freedom on July 3, 1963, just a week after he had gone to Berlin and challenged a new generation of Germans to forge a future of freedom and unity, of European integration and American partnership. No one did more to fulfill the hopes that President Kennedy expressed on that trip than Helmut Kohl. . . .

In 1991, the world was very different. The Berlin Wall had come down, but a profound gulf separated the eastern half of Europe from its more affluent neighbors to the west. Everyone agreed that something had to be done . . . but not everyone had a clear idea of what that something should be. . . .

Helmut Kohl understood that we needed a bold vision backed by a practical blueprint. . . . He said, "We are all called upon to construct a new architecture for the European house, a permanent and just peace-order for our continent."

The story of Helmut Kohl is the story of twentieth-century Germany. He was born in 1930 in Ludwigshafen, a small city on the Rhine. He saw firsthand the ravages of Nazism. His brother Walter perished in the war that tore Europe apart. . . .

[After the war, Kohl] was quick to see the possibilities of hope and rebirth in the post-war world. Through the Marshall Plan, he saw firsthand what Europeans and Americans could do together. . . . When he was only 16, he was one of the very first people to join the Christian Democratic Union. . . . And 50 years ago, at the age of 19, he and his friends were actually briefly detained at the French border. . . . They tried to remove some of the barriers between the countries and carried banners in support of Franco-German friendship. . . . *Der Lange* ["Tall Guy" — Kohl's nickname] was not your everyday teenager.

He always maintained that the new architecture of Europe must be built on the foundation of trans-Atlantic partnership. And he reached out to Russia, to Ukraine, to the other former communist countries to make them a part of 21st century Europe.

He served as chancellor for 16 years. Future historians will say Europe's 21st century began on his watch. In the months that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, he conceived a generous vision for Germany's unification and for a new partnership between the West and a democratic Russia. He saw the imperative of Europe's unification politically and economically. He saw the need to embrace other nations into Europe's family, putting Germany in the center, not on the edge any longer, of a united, democratic Europe. . . .

Germany was buoyed by hope through the Marshall Plan. . . . Central Europe was helped by the West in this decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Those were wise investments. We must be equally farsighted toward southeastern Europe.

As Helmut understood so well, our vision of a Europe whole and free will not succeed unless it embraces a partnership with democratic Russia. And it will not succeed unless it is embraced by Russia. That is the kind of alliance that must and will emerge from the Washington summit. I can think of no better way to begin this week of allied solidarity than by honoring Helmut Kohl. . . .

In 1989, the year of Germany's rebirth, we heard Beethoven's 9th Symphony as if for the first time, with Schiller's "Ode to Joy" capturing the feeling of a world coming together. In that same poem, ironically written just after the American Revolution, Schiller wrote that the circle of universal freedom begins very simply with the friendship linking two people. Helmut, President Kennedy stirred the world at the Berlin Wall when he said, along with freedom-loving people everywhere, *Ich bin ein Berliner. Today, a grateful United States says to you, Du bist ein Amerikaner.*