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**PORTRAYING WEST GERMANY
TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC:
BRITISH HIGH POLICY TOWARDS
GERMANY ON THE EVE OF UNIFICATION**

ANTHONY GLEES

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ON THE EVE OF UNIFICATION

Dr. Anthony Glees

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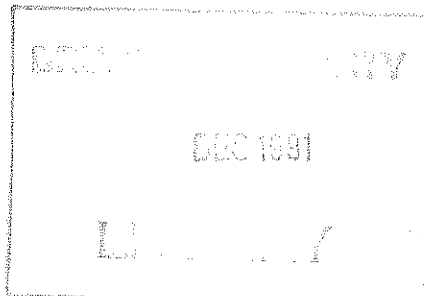
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Portraying West Germany to the British Public:
British High Policy Towards Germany on the Eve of Unification

By Dr Anthony Glees, Department of Government, Brunel University

The Full Text of a Lecture delivered in Munich, Frankfurt, Essen,
Kiel and Berlin in September 1990 under the auspices of the
Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft e.V. Bonn

1. Introduction and Summary

On the eve of German Unification (which took place at midnight on 2 October 1990) the British Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher told American Television "Germany (she was in New York for the United Nations General Assembly) will be very dominant in Europe so it will be up to the rest of us not to allow it to dominate. Others of us have powerful voices". She rejected any suggestion that the new Germany might be allowed a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations stating "the Security Council is at present constituted right...it has worked together more closely recently than ever before. It seems wrong to change a winning group". She noted that she had had doubts about the pace of unification "I thought some time ago that the transition from Germanies to one should be taken in slower time so we could get things sorted out more easily. That is not now to be..."Germany will be unified but the full united Germany will be part of the European Community so we must go ahead and accept it and expect its cooperation".

Earlier in 1990, speaking to millions of listeners to BBC Radio One's Jimmy Young programme on 18 June 1990, Mrs Thatcher said that "many people in Britain were a little bit apprehensive" about a unified Germany with a population of 80 millions. This certainly "worried" Mrs Thatcher "because of the history of this century which we cannot ignore". Although West Germany had been a "very good democracy" its parliamentary tradition compared to Britain's was "just a few years old". It is not surprising, she concluded, that many in Europe were "apprehensive given the history of two World Wars starting with Germany" [source: BBC Radio One 18.6.1990 and the Independent 19.6.90].

Whilst statements like these prove the British Government is quite rightly mindful of the lessons of German history, it could be argued that one lesson of history is that it is as dangerous to ignore the future as it is the past. The picture of the Federal Republic - the West Germany that will exist until 3 October 1990 - that emerges from the British Government, the British media and from the academic community takes, as we shall see, the Third Reich as its starting point. Does this offer a satisfactory basis for comprehending the exciting developments in Germany today?

Is the British Prime Minister whose fears have been made plain on numerous occasions, and who makes these fears the starting point of British thinking on Germany, showing admirable foresight or regrettable prejudice?

Is it fair to describe the political institutions of the Federal Republic as "just a few years old". Are the British entitled to be more apprehensive about the new Germany than any other European nation? The German Government has repeatedly stated that does not want a German Europe but a European Germany. This implies closer political union within the European Community. Is

this something Britain should support? Do we think they are being sincere about this? Or should we go down a different road by seeking to widen the membership of the Community, as the Prime Minister argued in Prague in September 1990, on the basis of her concept of a Europe of separate nations? Where do Britain's interests now lie?

This paper argues that the way that the British people perceive Germany and the way that Germany is portrayed to the British people forms, in the final analysis, the basis for the conduct of Anglo-German relations. Since Britain is a democracy, political leaders are obliged to take public opinion into account when formulating High Policy; equally, public opinion is itself formed by what the political leadership suggests. There have been very few British Prime Ministers more ready than Margaret Thatcher to lead public opinion rather than merely follow it so that very special emphasis must be put on her views and the views of her circle.

This paper takes as its chief thesis that the High Policy of the British Government on the process of German unification has been flawed and that this has had at least three major negative consequences. The first is that our lack of solidarity (as Germany perceives it) towards our German friends means that future cooperation inevitably must become harder and that this will make working together within the European Community infinitely more fraught and unsatisfactory. The second is that those perfectly ordinary differences that always occur between states will, in the case of Anglo-German relations, be more menacing than they might otherwise have been and that the further development of Anglo-German relations will become far harder to achieve. Third, that Britain will be listened to less carefully and Britain itself become more marginalised as the result of its apparent coolness towards the new German state.

None of this should be taken to imply that the making of a new German state does not give rise to quite legitimate questions about the future of Germany and of Europe nor that because High Policy may not be working as well as it might, nothing in Anglo-German relations is currently working. On a lower level, Anglo-German relations are very cordial. Finally, this paper does not question the Prime Minister's right to pronounce as she pleases: it is, after all, her constitutional right and duty to do so. It would be quite wrong to assume that Mrs Thatcher's anxieties about Germany are malicious or cannot be justified in some respects. It is not that she has not got a point about the lessons of German history but that this point she can be shown to be an inadequate basis for successful policy-making.

It is very hard indeed to deny that British Government thinking on Germany, as it has been publicly perceived in both countries, leaves considerable room for further development and even improvement. The paper therefore concludes by outlining the case for an Anglo-German Treaty of Cooperation, on the lines of the Franco-German Treaty of Cooperation of 22 January 1963 as a

measure appropriate both to mark the creation of a new Germany, one (unlike previous German states) that was established in peace and democracy, a new Germany which will be a full member of NATO and firmly entrenched in the Western grouping of nations.

2. High British Policy Towards Germany: Preliminary Remarks:

Despite the recent difficulties alluded to above (and despite the theories of some contemporary historians [Sharp, 1975; Kettenacker, 1989]), British policy on Germany from the Potsdam Conference of summer 1945 until the present has been to regard Germany as a single nation and, after 1949, support what it has regarded as the legitimate desire for German unification.

This was not, however, seen as a very likely prospect [Moreton, 1989]. Those who believed that unity might occur saw it developing against the backdrop of a Soviet offer of unity in return for German withdrawal from NATO; a German nation becoming a neutral Germany [Foschepoth, 1985; Glee, 1985]. What no one foresaw was that Gorbachev's accession in 1985 would lead to a situation where the Soviet Union was ready to abandon East Germany. It is hard to be certain about precisely when this readiness was first expressed but it seems certain that by the time of his state visit to Bonn in the summer of 1989, he was able to give a guarantee to the West German Government that the Soviet Union would not use its troops to secure the position of the East German leadership in the event of any threat to its position.

There had been indications of widespread popular discontent in Eastern Germany since 1985 [Kielinger, 1990] although the lesson of the abortive 1953 uprising which was put down by Soviet tanks which was widely held until the autumn of 1989 was that

opposition was both dangerous and futile. By 1989 this was no longer the case and the thousands of East Germans who fled to the West via Hungary ended up in triggering a peaceful revolution. This revolution which itself soon became a revolution for unification (possibly despite the wishes of many of the initial opposition groups) could be portrayed not merely as an enormous symbol of the success of western liberalism and the - literal - bankruptcy of Socialism but also as vindication of the policy pursued by the British Government towards the dissidents of Eastern Europe. It had, after all, been Margaret Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe who between them had sought out dissident leaders during visits to Poland and Czechoslovakia; indeed Mrs Thatcher had herself been the first western leader to regard Mr Gorbachev as "a man with whom we could do business". Many Germans thus found it particularly surprising, even hurtful, that Mrs Thatcher seemed so hesitant about supporting the drive to German unity or welcoming the collapse of Communism in Eastern Germany which it presaged. It was hard to deny that Herr Kohl had been extremely successful and that he deserved considerable praise.

When at the beginning of December 1989 it was clear that the Wall was beginning to be breached, Mrs Thatcher spoke to journalists outside No 10 Downing Street and in response to a question on unification declared that the issue of border changes was not on the agenda nor would it be. During the next weeks, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office let it be known that the idea of German unity was not something that Britain would wish to press not least for fear of de-stabilising Mr Gorbachev. It was thought

that to make such a request to which Gorbachev might have to accede, would prove intolerable to the Old Guard in the Kremlin who might stage a coup. During the March 1990 DDR elections, the British Government and Mrs Thatcher personally argued that if unification were ever to occur it would only be as the result of a long process of negotiations - negotiations in which Britain was determined to play its full part as a victor over Germany in 1945.

Once the March elections produced their unexpected but resounding victory for Chancellor Kohl (in a 93% turnout, the CDU and its analogues got 48.1%, the SPD 21.8% and, curiously, the PDS, the successor to the Communist SED, got 16.3%), it was plain that unification could not be held up and that it would come sooner rather than later. There were both economic and High Policy reasons for this. The economic crisis in the DDR combined with a desire to move to western Germany came together with a West German feeling that unless unification were achieved fast, it might not be achieved at all. The logic behind this was that Mr Gorbachev's position was allegedly insecure and that since unification was his policy, another leader might take a very different line. This led perforce to a re-appraisal of British policy towards Germany.

So how was this changing situation portrayed in Britain? Here I shall look at only three categories of opinion formers: academics, the media and the political leadership, dwelling most on the the most important - the latter.

As far as British academics were concerned, they fell into two distinct groups - those who claimed that they had predicted

unification and those who said they had been taken totally by surprise. Academic experts on the DDR had for some time conveyed the impression that the DDR was a durable state which commanded public sympathy [Childs, 1969; 1990] and few experts on West Germany suggested that unification was a live political issue. One unfortunate (and otherwise useful) textbook published at the very end of 1989 made no mention of unification at all [Smith, Paterson and Merkl, 1989]. A book by a respected British correspondent in Bonn, similarly gave no indication of that which was already well underway when his book (entitled "The Germans, Rich Bothered and Divided") was published [Marsh, 1989].

The media had provided relatively good coverage of the East German revolution, beginning with Gorbachev's state visit and the mass exodus into Hungary. There was, however, very little informed discussion of the more problematical implications of unification (what to do about the ubiquitous secret police, parallels with de-Nazification and so on) and some good film of East Germany (for example the luxurious living conditions of the SED elite in Berlin-Wandlitz) which was widely shown on West German television was not seen at all or to only a very limited extent on British television.

Against this, however, one has to set the often-described - and often-decried - trivialisation of the Third Reich in the form of popular TV programmes like "Allo, Allo" and the endless diet of war films which undoubtedly shape popular attitudes towards Germany. It is, of course, quite true that the Second World War showed Britain in a very favourable light and that the British

people have every right to be proud of what their country did at that time. Furthermore, one cannot be serious all the time and to laugh at Nazism can, on occasions, be beneficial. Against this, however, one has to set the fact that Germany becomes over-associated with Nazism and, above all, that the very real achievements of the past forty years get virtually no coverage. The evils of Nazism are undoubtedly more interesting copy than the benefits that accrue from democracy. But there is a price that has to be paid for this in the form of a poorly informed general public and the line taken by the Prime Minister on Germany may owe more than a little to her perception that public opinion has been more moulded by the trivialisation of the evils of the Third Reich than an understanding of what post-War German democracy had managed to establish.

Press coverage has been good; particular mention should be made of Timothy Garton-Ash's writing in the Spectator and the Independent, not merely because many considered his reports to be the most brilliant by far but because he was destined to become an actor in the Chequers debacle described below.

By far the most important portrayal of German affairs emanates from the British political leadership. As already suggested, political leaders both reflect public opinion and form it when they develop High Policy.

Normally, any analysis of High Policy would have to confine itself to a mixture of a description of official speeches and statements and a hazardous guess at the extent to which the official word provides an accurate explanation for what High Policy truly is. Mrs Thatcher herself has provided some clues to

her views as already recorded in one example, the Jimmy Young Show. Rather bizarrely, however, given the secrecy of the British state, on this particular issue our understanding of the thinking of the British political leadership emerges clearly from two documents, one a record of an interview with the ex-Minister for Trade, Mr Nicholas Ridley, the other in the form of the leaked Chequers memorandum.

3. The Ridley Interview, published on 14 July 1990 (but made public two days earlier).

Mr Nicholas Ridley was well known to be one of Margaret Thatcher's keenest supporters in the Cabinet; he was an ardent Thatcherite who had played a key role in most of her more radical policies. Here he gave his views on a whole range of issues which included European Monetary Policy, the Deutschmark, the institutions of the European Community and those who head them, on Germany, on Herr Poehl (the Bundesbank chief) and his own position.

Let me highlight some of the more remarkable things that Mr Ridley said (after having had "merely the smallest glass of wine at lunch"): European Monetary Policy was "all a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe. It has to be thwarted. This rushed take-over by the Germans on the worst possible basis with the French behaving like poodles to the Germans, is absolutely intolerable".

Of the West German currency he declaimed: "The DM is always going to be the strongest currency because of their [German] habits". As far as the EC was concerned: "When I look at the institution

of the EC to which it is proposed that sovereignty is to be handed over, I am aghast. Seventeen unelected reject politicians with no accountability to anyone who are not responsible for raising taxes just spending money who are pandered to by a supine parliament which also is not responsible for raising taxes already behaving with an arrogance which I find breath-taking - the idea that one says "OK we'll give this lot our sovereignty...you might just as well give it Adolf Hitler, frankly".

Mr Ridley was then asked whether his views were not coloured by the second world war - both he and the Prime Minister were over sixty. "Jolly good thing too" he replied "About time somebody said that. It was pretty nasty. Only two months ago I was in Auschwitz, Poland. Next week I'm in Czechoslovakia. You ask them what they think about the second world war. It's useful to remember".

The question was put as to how relevant to today's politics was what Germany did forty years ago. "We've always played the balance of power in Europe. It has always been Britain's role to keep these various powers balanced and never has it been more necessary than now, with Germany so uppity...it's not the German economy, it's the German people. They're already running most of the community. I mean they pay half of the countries. Ireland gets 6% of its gross national product this way. When's Ireland going to stand up to the Germans?"

Was it not possible that the Bundesbank (known to oppose inflationary policies) might discipline the British economy? Mr Ridley was not prepared to have any of that: "You can't change

the British people for the better by saying "Herr Poehl says you can't do that". They'd say "You know what you can do with your bloody Herr Poehl". I mean you don't understand the British people if you don't understand this point about them. They can be dared; they can be moved. But being bossed by a German - it would cause absolute mayhem in this country, and rightly so, I think. I've been elected to Parliament nine times. I've been in office for 14 years, I'm still at the top of the political tree, and I'm not done yet".

Here Ridley's views are examined not just as the views of a member of the Prime Minister's circle but also in terms of the picture of Germany that they convey. It must of course be pointed out that these views are not policy and it has to be stressed with emphasis that the expression of these views cost Mr Ridley his job. At the same time, however, two very important qualifications need to be added.

First, Mr Ridley resigned (largely as a result of back bench Conservative pressure) but was not dismissed by the Prime Minister. Second, she did tell Parliament on 12 July 1990 that she did not share his views.

Against these qualifications, however, one must set both the widespread agreement in the press that Mr Ridley's fears about Germany were shared by the Prime Minister and the hard fact that this could be demonstrated by examining previous statements she had made.

On 6 February 1990 Mrs Thatcher said told the Commons that a "lengthy transition period is needed so that international

agreements can be properly worked out so that the unification of Germany does not give rise to more (sic) worries but to greater security" [Independent 13 July 1990]. In private, it has been reliably claimed, Mrs Thatcher made it clear to several Conservative politicians that she had not forgotten that "the German people were responsible for unspeakable crimes" [Ibid].

On 18 February 1990 Mrs Thatcher addressed the Board of Deputies of British Jews and stated that German unification was bound to be of "particular concern to this audience". She implied that Jews would have more to fear from a united Germany of 80 million inhabitants than a divided one of 60 millions, apparently seeing Germany's division as a means for keeping Germany weak and the presence of foreign troops on German soil as a device for policing the German people. Neither of these assertions stands up to close analysis as a legitimate fear. If the Germans are held to be wicked and their wickedness is held to be compounded by their economic strength then 60 millions is sufficient to constitute a threat. And if 60 millions do not constitute a threat, it is hard to see how an additional, impoverished 20 millions can do so. If anything, they would surely weaken the new Germany. Secondly, the foreign troops stationed in Germany have for many years not been forces of occupation but part of a NATO force guaranteeing the freedom of West Germany.

The Prime Minister added that "there is no doubt that this coming together of the two parts of Germany is going to happen...But it is understandable that for some bitter memories of the past should colour their view of the present and the future"...[Ibid]. Mrs Thatcher thus plainly believes that a sovereign Germany which

had no British, American, French and Russian troops stationed there was more likely to become dangerous to minorities within Germany and to Germany's European neighbours without than a divided Germany.

That Jewish people should be entitled to be fearful of any change in Germany's status quo naturally goes without saying. But one must also note that the Bonn Government had by 1980 paid individual restitution of Jews of eighty billion DM and three billion DM to the state of Israel (the German Democratic Republic refused until the late 1980s to even admit it had any responsibility for the crimes committed by its predecessor).

Mrs Thatcher told the Sunday Times on 25 February that "we dared to say the realities and talk the sense which are other people are fearful of saying, lest they should be misinterpreted" [Sunday Times]. She insisted that "You cannot just ignore the history of this century as if it did not happen and say 'we are going to unify and everything else will have to be worked out afterwards' - that is not the way". She also opposed taking East Germany into the European Community which she said would be worse than taking in Belgium, Denmark and Ireland combined "much worse than that. This would mean taking a state that has either been Communist or Nazi since the 1930s". She told the Daily Mail in March 1990 that she deserved praise for her stand "I am the first person who said 'what about the borders?'" and she drew attention to the fact that Herr Kohl had not ratified the Oder-Neisse line and that the Polish Government had told Britain how worried it was about this.

Finally, she argued in her Sunday Times interview that that closer political union in Europe would make Germany even more dominant, implying that the Deutschmark would do for the new Germany what force of arms failed to secure for Hitler: "Yes the new Germany would be even more powerful because with everything else linked to it, it would be by far the most powerful country in the federal state and everyone else's freedom of action would have been diminished..."

"If you want to really have a counterweight to that, you want to have the counterweight of sovereign countries able freely to cooperate together and to limit the duties of the European Community to that which people really intended when it was first set up".

It is perhaps not remarkable that the Prime Minister should have sought to distance herself from Mr Ridley after his position became untenable but it is very remarkable that her public utterances are so similar in spirit to those of Mr Ridley and, in addition, that they mirror closely several of the statements made at the Chequers meeting in March, examined below.

Nor was the Prime Minister the only person to offer Mr Ridley intellectual support. Mr John Redwood, a junior Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry said to a Financial Times seminar in July 1990 "not for us replacing the Queen's head with a profile of Charlemagne. We can see what can happen to national independence after currency union by looking at the experience of eastern Germany. Once people decided that they wanted Deutschmarks in their pockets, there was not a great deal of point in continuing with an East German Government...."

This was a highly extraordinary statement. In addition to portraying the hard currency of the Deutschmark as a means for taking over an independent polity, Mr Redwood plainly argued that it was in some way regrettable that East Germany no longer had an independent government and that some virtue was to be attached to it. What he seemed to ignore was not only that the East Germany Government was simply the puppet of the Soviets but that in March 1990 the Communists gained only 16% of the vote in East Germany whereas the parties committed to unity gained almost 80% [The Independent].

Let me leave poor Mr Ridley on one side for the moment although I don't want you to lose sight of the fact that his remarks cannot simply be dismissed. After all, he wasn't.

Britain, Germany and the European Community—these were the deep and important themes on which Mr Ridley touched and upon all of them he showed his real convictions to be fundamentally anti-German and fundamentally anti-EC as it is today. For most Conservatives Mr Ridley's remarks brought into the open the fundamental cleavage in the Party on the issue of Europe and of Britain's role in Europe. They prefer it to be kept beneath the surface - because it one which divides them so deeply - and this is why he he had to go.

It is not my argument, I should repeat, that this view of Germany which takes as its starting point the appalling crimes of the Third Reich and expresses worries about the new Germany should simply be dismissed. I do not believe that it should. My quarrel with this historicist platform is that it not only appears to

ignore the strength of West German democracy for more than forty years but also that it does not provide a sound basis for cooperating with the Federal Republic or with the European Community as we move into the 1990s and into the 21st century.

4. The Chequers Memorandum of 24 March 1990.

It is only very rarely that an official Government memorandum gets into the public domain before thirty years have elapsed under the thirty year rule governing the release of public records. On 24 March 1990 (some four months before the Ridley affair) a meeting took place at Chequers. Significantly, it was arranged by No 10 Downing Street rather than by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Its aim was to explore British policy towards Germany by bringing together six independent experts, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Mr Charles Powell, one of Mrs Thatcher's leading policy advisers (the other is Sir Percy Cradock). It provides some insight into the input into British policy and, as we shall see, into the thinking of No 10 itself.

This memo was leaked both to the Independent on Sunday and to the Spiegel magazine in West Germany in circumstances which still have to be explained. It is plain from the text that what was leaked was the internal Government record of the meeting (which the academic experts invited to the meeting would not have possessed) rather than a note of the meeting which academics present could have taken for their own purposes.

It would be fair to say that one of the academics present, Timothy Garton Ash, has said that the record of the meeting was not accurate in that the anti-German tone of the comments and the apparent policy-conclusions were not present in what the experts

had said although he did remark that one said things "about one's neighbours which one would not say to them" [Independent 17 July 1990]. Professor Norman Stone, on the other hand, argued that the minutes were accurate but that they were not truly anti-German although there was an implied view that the Germans were indeed either "on their knees or at your throat" [The Times 17 July 1990].

In some senses, however, if the anti-German tone and the policy-conclusions of the meeting did not emanate from the academics they become rather more significant than if they had done for the simple reason that if the academics did not express these opinions, they must be the opinions of Government and of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. Indeed, so many of these opinions match up so clearly with things the Prime Minister has said elsewhere that it is not an unreasonable assumption to argue that in one way or another they do accurately reflect her High Policy viewpoint.

Even if all that happened was that the individual writing the memorandum wrote it to please his mistress, that still becomes a matter of concern since it gives a good insight into the sorts of views about Germany that he knows she would like to read.

Furthermore, it is not idle to speculate on the source of the leak, occurring as it did within two days of the publication of the Ridley interview. Only a few copies of the memorandum were circulated but some went to the Foreign Office: was it the case that an official in the Foreign Office - illegally - leaked the document in order to try to get rid of the Prime Minister as well

by tarring her with the Ridley brush? It is hard to sustain this idea because at that the leak was made, it was by no means certain that Mr Ridley would be forced to resign. The leak, if anything, gave a certain credibility Mr Ridley's views because it showed - superficially at any rate - that they were shared, it appeared, by academic experts as well.

This leads one to the admittedly preposterous notion (though one to be heard whispered by someone in a position to know) that No 10 Downing Street might itself have leaked the memorandum in order to try to preserve Mr Ridley by making it plain that others took a similar line on the German question. It would not, of course, have been the first time No 10 had leaked a sensitive document as shown by the Westland Affair and the resignation of Mr Michael Heseltine that it brought about. What is more, to date, no culprit had been found despite the fact that this was a very serious leak of a secret Government document, that MIS presumably were investigating it and that the number of possible sources of the leak were very limited indeed.

At any rate, whether leaked by No 10 or not and whether the views expressed were hostile towards Germany because of the input of the academics or the input of the Prime Minister, the fact remains that this documents is an important document and the High Policy conclusions it puts forward seem to convey a real idea of what Britain's political leadership thinks about the new Germany and how it could best be contained.

Mrs Thatcher began the meeting by saying that Europe had come to the end of the post-war period and that in the crucial meetings she had planned for the months ahead, German unification would be

the main topic. We therefore needed to reach an assessment of what a united Germany would be like. History was a guide but one could not just extrapolate. We also had to devise a framework for Europe's future, taking account of German unification and the sweeping changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was important to get the balance right between the lessons of the past and opportunities of the future.

The meeting then considered the Germans' national characteristics:

"like other nations, the Germans have certain characteristics, which you could identify from the past and expect to find in the future. It was easier and more pertinent to the present discussion to think of the less happy ones: their insensitivity to the feelings of others (and the example of this was Herr Kohl's attempt to trade off the acceptance of the Oder Neisse by the Federal Republic against an indemnity for German war crimes by the Polish Government); their obsession with themselves; a strong inclination to self-pity and a longing to be liked; angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality; a capacity for excess, to overdo things, to kick over the traces. A tendency to over-estimate their own strengths and capabilities (and the example for this was the view that Germany's victory over France in 1870 stemmed from moral and cultural superiority rather than the real cause, advances in military technology).

The purpose of the exercise was, it has been claimed, to identify national characteristics that make Germans distinctive;

there is plainly not much point in mentioning the things that make the Germans like everyone else. Yet these negative qualities are ones shared by every people everywhere because they are the negative qualities of every human being. There are, of course, such things as national characteristics, things that both the outcome of specific shared historical experiences or merely things that one culture finds acceptable but which another culture might not.

In listing these particular characteristics, however, not only did the Chequers experts display a low standard of sophistication but they also missed out those cultural qualities that really do make the West Germans different - their fine secondary educational system, their capacity to utilise new technologies, their fairly relentless drive for quality and their rather reserved and frequently apologetic attitude towards their non-German colleagues.

It was confusing that in seeking to defend this list of characteristics the British Foreign Secretary, Mr Douglas Hurd, said the meeting had been obliged to consider them because they were the ones "constantly trotted out as belonging to the Germans" [The Times 16 July 1990]. He added that it was "acceptable to discuss national characteristics of one of Britain's allies because Germany was about to go through an important transformation...to look how far the past was throwing its shadow over the future". The Prime Minister was "worried about the strength of the economy which the Germans had built "by doing the things we ought to have done and had failed to do". But it could be argued that the roots of Germany's economic strength

lay more in the Germans' capacity for hard work whether in industry or whilst at school or in apprenticeship, of which their foreign language competence is but one example. Yet these are things which the British Government has so far not succeeded in realising in the United Kingdom.

It has to be pointed out that the meeting said quite firmly that "today's Germans were "very different from their predecessors". "1945 was quite different and a sea change. No longer a sense of historic mission, no ambitions for physical conquest, no more militarism. Education and the writing of history had changed. Mrs Thatcher's experts added that there was "an innocence of and about the past on the part of the new generation of Germans. We should have no real worries about them".

This latter assertion, however, is quite idiotic. If it were true that the younger generation of Germans had "an innocence of and about the past" this would not be a reason to have no worries about them but a reason to have worry about them a great deal. In the event, however, it is, on the whole, very hard to think of the young people of any nation who know more about their own recent history or who question the crimes of the Third Reich with greater rigour.

Even so other experts did not share this view of a sea-change. They stated that it still had to be asked how a cultured and cultivated (?) nation had allowed itself to be brain-washed into barbarism. If it had happened once, could it not happen again. As far as Germany's position in the European Community was concerned, the meeting produced the following view: attention was

drawn to the "way in which the Germans currently used their elbows and threw their weight around in the European Community suggested that a lot had still not changed". It is tempting to argue that the only people who could have made this statement with real authority were the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary since no one else there could possibly have the sort of inside knowledge of this subject whereas the experts must all have known that the two political leaders were in virtual daily contact with their colleagues in Europe.

The next statement worth looking at went as follows "While we all admired and indeed envied what the Germans had achieved in the last 45 years the fact was that their institutions had not yet been seriously tested by adversity such as a major economic calamity. We could not tell how the Germans would react in such circumstances".

This was not a unfair question to ask but it appeared not to get the obvious answer that it deserved namely that not only has the Federal Republic already had made than its share of calamities (one need only think of the multiple terrorist attacks on public figures) but that the massive vote by the East German people in favour of joining the Federal Republic (itself an indication of the standing of these institutions in East German eyes) is currently proving yet another test upon them which to date these institutions have passed with flying colours. British institutions, however, whether at local government level or in regional level, in Wales, Scotland and Ulster, have not proved conspicuously successful in attracting the support of the people who are involved most closely with them.

This institutional argument is interesting if only because it so closely mirrors a point that Mrs Thatcher herself made on the Jimmy Young show (which took place after the Chequers meeting). The minutes continue: "we could not tell how Germans would react in such circumstances [nor indeed how anyone would]. In sum, no one had serious misgivings about the present leaders or political elite of Germany. But what about 10, 15 or 20 years from now? Could some of the unhappy characteristics of the past re-emerge with just as destructive consequences?". Of this it need only be said that this possibility needs to be balanced by the inherent improbability of the emergence of future Hitlers and whilst always a possibility, not only is nothing that Britain could do about this now but also that German unification - if anything - lessens the chances of successful virulent nationalism because its chief trigger - Germany's division - has been removed.

The experts then considered the consequences of unification and Germany's role in Eastern Europe. "Even those most disposed to look on the bright side (the implication of "looking on the bright side" is interesting because it suggests an objective analysis would conclude that current developments are gloomy) admitted to some qualms about what unification would for German behaviour in Europe. We could not expect a united Germany to think and act in exactly the same way as the Federal Republic which we had known for the last 45 years and this would be true even though a united Germany would almost certainly inherit the Federal Republic's institutions. The Germans would not necessarily think more dangerously they would think differently.

There was already evident a kind of triumphalism in German thinking and attitudes which would be uncomfortable for the rest of us".

Yet again one is forced to comment that no serious expert could - in March 1990 - have detected a "kind of triumphalism". There was no Falklands spirit in the Federal Republic before 3 October 1990 and German government spokesmen repeatedly said they were not interested in nationalism nor wished to exploit any nationalist tendencies. Pride in the achievement of unity should certainly not be confused with chauvinist triumphalism. One wonders what Margaret Thatcher would have made of the process of unity had she been Federal Chancellor.

There was "worry about the effects on the character of a united Germany of bringing in 17 million predominantly protestant north Germans brought up under a mendacious orthodoxy". It could not be assumed that "a united Germany would fit quite so comfortably into Western Europe as the Federal Republic. There would be a growing inclination to resurrect the concept of Mitteleuropa". A united Germany could be "less western and less politically stable than the Federal Republic. At worst the extremes at both ends of the political spectrum could grow in influence leading to a return to Weimar politics (although no one argued this with any conviction).

Oddly enough, the experts here, despite concluding that these matters were not sufficiently problematical to lead to another Weimar, were arguably too bullish. Several West German analysts have pointed to the fact that the politics of the new Germany will be different in several essential respects from those of

West Germany. The Roman Catholic vote will be significantly smaller as a proportion of the whole, there will be a considerably stronger Communist Party (whose wealth of two to four Billion Deutschmarks will make it the richest party by far) and there is no reason why a new nationalist party on the right should not make a serious attempt to enter the lists. This could certainly produce a Weimar-like scenario.

The group then turned their attention to Germany's "likely role and ambitions" in Eastern Europe. "It was widely agreed that Chancellor Kohl's handling of the Polish border issue in particular his reference to the need to protect the German minority in Silesia had given the wrong signals. Historic fears about Germany's 'mission' in Eastern and Central Europe had been revived. Some of President von Weizsaecker's comments had contributed to this". It is impossible to know precisely what the group had in mind here but it would appear that this comment about the President was ill-informed for he was on record as having strongly criticised Herr Kohl's policy on the Polish border issue. It is noteworthy, too, that Herr Kohl and the Germans are treated as synonymous when to do so shows either in an unfavourable light.

However, the "facts were more reassuring" since the German minorities had been reduced in number and the "ambition of most of them was to move within the borders of Germany rather than have the borders of Germany come to them". There was "no evidence that Germany was likely to make further territorial claims, at least for the foreseeable future". What problems there might would

arise from wealthy Germans buying land in Poland or Czechoslovakia since Poland would be only forty minutes drive from the "assumed capital".

Yet it was "likely that Germany would indeed dominate Eastern and Central Europe economically" although this did not "necessarily equate to subjugation". "Nor did it mean that a united Germany would achieve by economic means what Hitler had failed to achieve militarily" since the pressure for German economic involvement in Eastern Europe came as much from the East Europeans as from the Germans.

How could the benign effects of unification be encouraged and the adverse consequences be diminished? "The East/West aspects roused the greatest concern. There was a tendency on the part of the Germans to take the credit for unification themselves. In fact the real credit should go to the people of Eastern Europe and to Mr Gorbachev".

It is obviously the case that without Mr Gorbachev unification could not have occurred. But it is both odd and badly-informed to play down the role both of the West German Government (and Herr Kohl in particular who had, since 1982, made the achievement of unity a personal political aim) and, more importantly, to play down the role of the East German people. Without their courage and without their dedication to liberty (itself a positive attribute) there would have been nothing for Gorbachev to agree to.

The meeting took the view that Britain should be "nice to the Germans" but this does not necessarily mean that the meeting believed either that the new Germany could be trusted or that

British High Policy should support the process of unity and seek actively to work closely with Germany in the future. Indeed, the Chequers memorandum illustrates the precise reverse. Although it was claimed - in the document - that no firm conclusions were drawn, in the event three main ideas were put forward all of which were concerned with the containment of the new Germany.

The first was that "Soviet and Eastern European interests parallel those of Western Europe. We want Germany to be constrained within a security framework which had the best chance of avoiding a resurgence of German militarism. We wanted a continuing American military presence as a balance to Germany's power".

The second was: "We want a renewed self-denying ordinance on the acquisition by Germany of nuclear and chemical weapons". "In the long term, the Soviet Union would be the only European power capable of balancing Germany".

Finally, the memorandum asked "would there be a nationalist drive of a united Germany into something broader?". The latter was considered not wholly convincing given "that the structure of the EC tended to favour German dominance, particularly in the monetary area. Against this, it was pointed out that the more assertive Germany became, the easier it ought to become to construct alliances against Germany on specific issues in the Community".

As far as the Europeanisation of Germany is concerned - a European Germany rather than a German Europe - it is clear that Mrs Thatcher's experts did not believe the Federal Republic's

stated policies. Instead they insisted that "German behaviour in the EC - 'we pay so we must have our way' " - was "the harbinger of Germany's economic dominance over western Europe".

In short, High Policy in the future would be constructed on the preceived need to make coalitions against Germany and to enlist the help of the United States and the Soviet Union in "balancing" the new Germany. How eccentric this argument is may be seen by reflecting on the simple truth that both the United States and the Soviet Union have gone to great lengths to act in concert with the new Germany. Not only is the Soviet Union not likely to be in any position to act as a balance to anyone anywhere in the foreseeable future but it also can have no interest in rubbing Germany up the wrong way.

It is equally important to realise that the Chequers remedy was not, as has sometimes been alleged, an acceptable Euro-tactic. It is quite true that bilateral alliances play an important role in European Community policy-making. But what is being suggested here is qualitatively different (because alliances within the Community are based on the notion of trying to reduce conflicts of interest between respective partners) and, what is more, since neither the United States nor the Soviet Union are members of the Community, British policy seeks to go over the heads of its partners in Europe rather than cooperate within the EC framework. In short, this High Policy is not only entirely consistent with other aspects of British policy towards Europe (in particular the Prime Minister's Bruges speech of September 1988) but also shows the virtually total lack of any sensible policy strategy towards the European Community, particularly, it would seem, on the Prime

Minister's part.

This, in turn, points to a far graver problem for British Government, one which has produced a number of severe crises. It should not be forgotten that the some of Mrs Thatcher's most dangerous moments have been caused by her policy of reluctance towards Europe. Sir Geoffrey Howe, Michael Heseltine and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, were all forced out of Government in highly damaging and destabilising circumstances by the Prime Minister on account of their pro-European Community stance (Heseltine wishing to sell Westland helicopters to a European consortium, Howe and Lawson wishing to see Britain in the Exchange Rate Mechanism).

It is now said that both the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, and the new Chancellor, John Major, are more Communitaire than their chief and that a similar show-down over Britain's entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism might occur. But it seems that even if Britain does join (which appears probable) their chief remains so suspicious of Europe that even if they prove more successful than their predecessors, Britain remains condemned to always be the European state that follows not just very late in the date but with a lack of enthusiasm and a reluctance which makes this country a difficult partner in Europe [see Anthony Glee: 1990].

5. Conclusion

It has, of course, to be pointed out that if the present British Government is not the only British government to have problems in understanding Germany. Generally, it may be said that at various

times in the 20th Century when Britain's view of Germany became a critical policy issue, Britain invariably took the wrong view. In 1919, it (with others) made German democrats assume responsibility for the First World War and thus saddled them with the acceptance of war guilt which was not, by rights, theirs. When Hitler came to power in 1933, the British (with others) gave him what he wanted - and far more than they had been prepared to give his democratic precursors. In 1989-90, when Helmut Kohl achieved German unification under conditions which much to his credit were those the West - and Britain - had demanded, Britain was grudging and fundamentally hostile to his enterprise. It is hard to imagine that the new Germany will forget this.

Nowhere, of course, were the failures of British understanding of Germany more fateful than in the late 1930s. Chamberlain did not want to believe that Hitler was a power mad criminal; he then did not want to believe that the German people could really be supporting him. He took the view that there was a difference between Germans and Nazis and that Hitler did not represent the true essence of Germany. When Churchill took over, however, he decided that the British people would never fight unless they believed they were fighting Germany and the Germans. On one occasion, Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, told the BBC off very firmly for having talked about "Nazi ships" rather than German ones. Churchill, of course, went even further than this, referring frequently to the "Huns"; it is curious that, as a term of abuse, "Huns" was used by both sides - the RAF being described by a Nazi Mainz newspaper as "Lufthunnen" "in the pay of international Jewry".

Lord Vansittart - a former chief diplomatic adviser to the British Government - believed that the Germans were "a race of bone-headed aggressors" that they were congenitally wicked and would have to be "hamstrung and broken up". His notorious book "Black Record" was based on a 1941 BBC radio series which said that Germans had been wicked ever since the dawn of time.

If in public Britain's leadership appeared to be very certain that the German problem could be explained by the fact that Germans were Nazis and Nazis were Germans, in private they were much less sure. This can be seen clearly as in the papers of the Foreign Office.

Privately, there was much confusion about what to do about Germany were she, as seemed increasingly likely, to be defeated. Certain elements were identified as being possible causes of trouble - Prussian Militarism, the Nazi Party, the centralisation of political power, the strength of the German economy (in particular possession of the Ruhr), Hitler's personality, the Bismarckian Reich and so on.

Yet not only were British (and American) policy-makers unclear as to which of these elements were the truly decisive ones and therefore the ones where radical changes needed to be made after Hitler's defeat and which of them were marginal.

An event like 20th July 1944 could be dismissed in public as Nazis fighting amongst themselves. Secretly, however, the attempted assassination of Hitler by a group of aristocratic Prussian officers shed doubts on the theory that Nazism and Prussian militarism were one and the same. Furthermore, of

course, Prussia was Prussia and Hitler was Austrian.

British policy-makers explored a whole variety of policies ranging from the dismemberment of German national unity, its pastoralisation (the Morgenthau plan, which Churchill and Eden strongly supported) to far more enlightened policies such as re-education, de-Nazification and de-centralisation [Kettenacker, 1989; Glees, 1982 and 1987].

The fact is that this confusion over the source of German wickedness meant that by 1945 the western allies had a non-policy towards the question of German national unity and what to do about the German economy. It is often argued that Germany was divided in 1945-49 because the western allies wanted to dismember Germany. This is quite untrue: by 1945 they wanted to treat Germany as a single unit but because the Russians had such clear plans about what to do about their zone of Germany, Germany's division became the only means of stopping the Russians from pushing Communism even further west.

The British, meanwhile, devoted themselves to staying out of the European Community - to their grave cost - and applied the three principles which governed their attitude towards European affairs until 1973, namely to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down". And no one became keener on Germany helping them to do the first of these than Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden.

Although High Policy at present is not satisfactory, it has to be conceded that there is a German problem. But not only is it not as grave as the Prime Minister makes out but also to tackle it solely as something dangerous and contrary to Britain's interests

cannot provide a solution to it.

Furthermore, it is dangerous to forget that Fascism and anti-Semitism were European phenomena rather than German ones and that for this reason they need to be watched in all European countries including Britain. It is precisely because some people are prepared to use terror to overthrow democratic politics that democratic institutions need extending and strengthening and that means that the institutions of the European Community require nurturing and not knocking. It is precisely because the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe proves the strength of western Liberalism that we need to work together with our partners there to ensure that there can never be a return to aggressive nationalism.

It is of course perfectly right for Mrs Thatcher to articulate the fears that many ordinary people have about Germany (fears which are not unjustified where they are the starting point to thinking on Germany) and it is right for her to draw from Germany's history the lessons that she does draw. But to dwell solely on the starting point is not enough and there ought to be others drawing other lessons so that people can then decide - as it appropriate in a democracy - whose lessons are the more meaningful.

There is, in addition, much evidence to suggest that Mrs Thatcher finds it far harder to get on with Herr Kohl than with his predecessor (Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary, is said to like Hans Dietrich Genscher despite their disagreements at the final Four plus Two talks in Moscow in September 1990). Mrs

Thatcher may not be entirely to blame for this. Herr Kohl is said to find it hard to share information about his policies with the British (and with others). President Mitterrand found German unity a difficult concept (and his visit to Herr Modrow in Dresden and to Mr Gorbachev in Moscow early in 1990 caused resentment in West Germany). By the time of the 56th meeting of French and German Ministers in Munich in September 1990, however, a measure of French support for unity appears to have been successfully achieved.

Yet Herr Kohl's July 1990 trip to the Crimea was in many ways secretive (even his Foreign Minister Herr Genscher complained about this) and further incidents have shown that he wishes to keep from Britain his policy aims (though one might add that he can hardly be blamed for this, under the circumstances which now prevail). On the other hand, if it should be the aim of High British Policy to avoid this, then Mrs Thatcher's line makes it easier and not harder to avoid informing Britain of his aims. Furthermore, it justifies Germany's misgivings about Britain rather than making them appear unnecessary and allows Herr Kohl to score points off Britain. The new Germany is a sovereign state and it is entitled to behave like one within the constraints placed on it by membership of the European Community. It is, after all, Mrs Thatcher who has argued in favour of a Europe of nationally aware sovereign states and Herr Kohl who has declared himself in favour of a European Germany. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that Mrs Thatcher should resent the exercise of sovereignty in others even when that sovereignty is so strongly played down as it has been in Germany's case. The German

Government, of course, would argue that sovereignty needs to be deconstructed in the future rather than emphasised.

It is hard not to believe that the time has now come for a new beginning in Anglo-German relations, one that does not depend solely on that reactive non-policy of Britain's political leadership.

There is, perhaps, one very concrete thing that could be done to put Anglo-German relations on a sounder footing for the 21st century. What seems to lie at the heart of Britain's failure to perceive German affairs correctly are the dictates of party politics. The way that the British Government perceives Germany is coloured by the political consequences of that perception and the Prime Minister's apparent belief that more Britons oppose German unification than support it. This means that domestic political logic appears to demand a hostile attitude towards Germany even if the facts contradict it.

One way of reducing the negative effects of this without abolishing the politicians' perfectly legitimate duty to speak as they please would be to establish an official tier for Anglo-German cooperation that functioned independently of Government policy on Germany. Some weeks ago, James Elles, the Conservative MEP for Oxford and Bucks and Elmar Brok of the CDU proposed the setting up of what they called an Anglo-German Friendship Treaty, on the lines of the Franco-German Treaty of Cooperation. Whilst wondering whether the proposed title is right, the sense behind it is impeccable. It should be set in motion as soon as possible. By the same token, the Anglo-German Groups in Britain and the

Federal Republic should consider now whether a political institution - Stiftung - should not be established to conduct a variety of necessary activities including the monitoring of policy, the publication of alternative policy programmes and the promoting of Anglo-German relations in particular at secondary school level.

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