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**A Year of Incoherence: Germanophobia in the
Thatcher Administration and British Policy
Regarding the Prospect of German
Re-unification between November 1989 and
November 1990**

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A Year of Incoherence

Germanophobia in the Thatcher
Administration and British Policy
Regarding the Prospect of German Re-
unification between November 1989 and
November 1990

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Introduction

This is a study attempting to characterise the influence of Germanophobia on British policy towards German reunification between the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the fall of Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. In this time, British foreign policy towards Europe was incoherent due to the disparate views held by government ministers and it changed markedly over the twelve months in question. Britain's policy regarding the prospect of German reunification was initially one inspired considerably by anti-Germanism, and promoted a slow and cautious approach, with an end goal of delaying reunification. I have identified a change around July 1990, after which an overall more positive response was adopted, seeking to mend the Anglo-German relationship and welcome German unity.

Colin Munro has highlighted that before 1989, Britain had boasted the most logical and consistent approach to the 'German Question' - that in the right circumstances reunification should be supported.¹ Moreover, Christopher Mallaby argued that the post-war relationship between Britain and Germany was, officially, "better than most people think."² As the prospect of German unity drew closer however, it unearthed deep-seated anti-German sentiments which had been lying somewhat dormant during Germany's partition. As a result, Britain's policy towards Germany became incoherent, on the one hand espousing citizens' rights and freedoms whilst on the other, turning into the most reserved and unenthusiastic supporter of German reunification amongst the Western powers. For example, it has been noted that Thatcher attempted to put together an "anti-unification front"³ with François Mitterrand and Mikhail Gorbachev. John Campbell's biography of Thatcher also claims she wished to slow down reunification for "10 or 15 years."⁴ Yet eventually, Britain came around to co-operate with, and celebrate the process

¹ G.Staerck and M.D.Kandiah (eds.) *Anglo-German Relations and German Reunification* (Witness Seminar, 2003) 39

² *ibid.*, 25

³ J.Bullard, 'Great Britain and German Reunification', in, J.Noakes, P.Wende and J.Wright (eds.) *Britain and Germany in Europe 1949-1990* (Oxford, 2002) 221

⁴ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 636

German unity. But it was not until February 1990 that Thatcher realised that reunification was inevitable and she supposedly took until the summer to accept that reality.⁵

A central reason for the UK government's incoherence was that it was not a homogeneous entity in its attitudes towards Germany. There was a school of thought which was sceptical of reunification, adhered to by outspoken Germanophobes like Nicholas Ridley, Lord Kagan and Thatcher herself. For the sake of simplicity this essay shall, perhaps presumptuously, label this theory as 'anti-reunification', the reality was more complex than this however, and the categories were fluid and in a constant state of flux. Germanophobia shall refer to the combination of both fear and dislike, it must be made clear that a rational fear alone should not be defined as Germanophobic. There was also a school of thought which was more sympathetic to German self-determination, advocating co-operation with the Germans to pursue British national interests. Which of these two schools of thought then, was the most influential in shaping British foreign policy towards Germany? Indeed, what drove an initially resentful political attitude into one of acceptance and celebration?

German scholars, such as Werner Weidenfeld and Michael Wolffsohn maintain more sympathetic accounts of Thatcher's role in the diplomatic relations. They claim that her actions do not display anti-Germanism, but rather a rational scepticism which prompted necessary clarifications from the Kohl administration.⁶ This study casts a more critical eye on Thatcher's administration. I argue that by failing to suppress bigotry and appearing absent of political realism, Britain marginalised itself in the diplomatic discussions, and yet, even when policy was changed to mend relations, one can still observe an under-lying trend of Germanophobia.

The topic of German reunification has received plentiful historiographical attention. However, to focus specifically on the British perspective through a lens of

⁵ Witness Seminar, 28

⁶ W.Weidenfeld, *Geschichte der Deutschen Einheit: Aussenpolitik 1989/90* (Stuttgart, 1998) 133; M.Wolffsohn, 'Der aussenpolitische Weg zur Deutschen Einheit', in, E.Jesse and A.Mitter (eds.) *Die Gestaltung der deutschen Einheit: Geschichte, Politik, Gesellschaft* (Bonn, 1992) 142

anti-Germanism is something quite novel. In 2003, Christopher Mallaby claimed that there had been no British account published of the inside story of their negotiations and diplomacy,⁷ although it is something commonly referenced in works of wider focus. This essay shall not only study Britain's policy in this period, but specifically focus on the very forces which influenced its actions. I shall challenge three widely accepted historiographical arguments. Firstly there shall be a re-examination of the idea that behind some isolated incidents of irrational Germanophobia in the British government, notable though they were, there lay a rational and calculated foreign policy which underpinned a desire to delay reunification. This has been argued by Julian Bullard, Lothar Kettenacker and Richard Evans for example. To summarise their arguments, they believe that the British government was not especially short-sighted because there existed a justified mistrust of Chancellor Kohl and concerns over Germany's ambiguous intentions, as well as rational hostility in Britain at the prospect of more powerful Germany and its threat to Gorbachev's position.⁸ I shall also challenge the idea that the bigoted comments which Nicholas Ridley disclosed to *The Spectator* in July 1990 were "outside the government consensus."⁹ And, finally contest the arguments made by Patrick Salmon and Fritz Stern who believe that British policy became more sympathetic to German self-determination and promoted a more constructive policy from late-January or February 1990,¹⁰ I would identify the change in policy to be later; around July.

This essay comprises three chapters. The first two shall assess the period in which Britain's foreign policy attempted to delay German reunification. Firstly, I shall examine the extent of the rationality of the concerns which justified an 'anti-unification' approach. This chapter will focus on Britain's fear of German reunification and whether it really was devoid of any prejudiced dislike of them or their history, as historians have previously suggested. The second chapter will focus

⁷ Witness Seminar, 41

⁸ R.J.Evans, *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996* (London, 1997) 213; Bullard, 'Great Britain and German Reunification' 226

⁹ 'Bowling to the Backbenchers – Ridley's German remarks', *The Times* 16 July 1990; J.Bullard, 'Germany and Britain: Public Attitudes', in K.Rohe, G.Schmidt, and H.P.von Strandmann (eds.) *Deutschland-Grossbritannien-Europa: Politische Traditionen, Partnerschaft und Rivalitaet* (Bochum, 1992) 205

¹⁰ P.Salmon, K.Hamilton and S.Twigge (eds.) *Documents on British Policy Overseas: German unification 1989-1990* (London, 2010) xv; 'Die Zweite Chance: Die Wege der Deutschen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 July 1990

on the fear of the *idea* and virulent dislike, of Germany. By looking at government language, the overt anti-German sentiments in government and some substantial political mishaps, this chapter will evaluate to what extent the Thatcher administration insisted on looking to Germany's past to predict its future. The third chapter will focus on the change in policy after Ridley's resignation in July 1990. This, in and of itself could warrant the attention of an entire study, so this section shall be used more as a tool to prove several arguments made throughout the essay. The third chapter also questions whether the UK government's change from scepticism to celebration was born out of a genuine change of beliefs, a realisation of its own impotence, or the result of a deliberate strategy to court, while at the same time maintain vigilance over, a still feared Germany.

The lack of direct historiography regarding the British account is perhaps due to the 30-year-rule attributed to official British governmental documents. However, due to the early declassification and publication of the documents on British policy towards German reunification, this task has now been made possible. Indeed with analysis of these very documents, released in 2010, I shall try to gain an understanding of themes discussed between government ministers which may help to show some of the private concerns they harboured and sought to solve. I also conducted research in the Ludwig Maximilian University and Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte in Munich, analysing newspaper archives and government documents. This has provided an opportunity for examination of both British and German perspectives. I have also researched British media archives, including those of the Daily Mail and The Times. This was used to help gain insight into the public perceptions of events, as well as contemporary impressions of the actions and statements of government members. Other significant source materials include the minutes from the 2003 Witness Seminar at the Institute of Contemporary British History and discussions from the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it”

The idea of a strong and united Germany was something which unnerved many in British government, this was at least in part due to rational concerns for the empirical threats which such drastic geo-political changes could bring. The political and economic status of Britain was in jeopardy and the future security of Europe seemed unpredictable. To make matters worse, the pace of reunification was something spearheaded by popular demands of the German people, and governments of Europe lacked control over events. The British government identified three perceived threats. Firstly, the prospect of German reunification potentially eroded the political stability of Gorbachev, which threatened to undermine Thatcher's aims to use his position as a means to achieve steady and deep-rooted democratisation in Eastern Europe. Secondly, it was predicted that German unity would have a detrimental effect on British economic power, and thirdly, the personality and management of affairs by the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, was feared for his perceived untrustworthiness. Understanding the relationship between fear and dislike is crucial in understanding what influenced British policy, and any suspicions of Kohl were not necessarily related to Germanophobia. By assessing the rationality or otherwise of British fears, one can consequently gain an understanding of whether Britain's initial policy to delay reunification was influenced by calculated fears, or pre-existing antipathy.

The threat to the political authority of Gorbachev was something of widespread concern in British government. His political and social reforms such as Perestroika and Glasnost, introduced throughout the 1980s, gained him popularity in the West despite continued suspicions of other Soviet politicians. The prospect of Gorbachev being toppled, and replaced by Communist hard-liners, unsettled Britain. Media reports predicted that he would be the chief victim of reunification¹¹ and some Conservative politicians like Lord Kagan, speaking in Parliament in 1990, predicted a reinstatement of Stalinist values after reunification.¹² For the USSR,

¹¹ 'Go slowly, Maggie tells two Germans' *Daily Mail* 26 Jan. 1990 *Daily Mail Historical Archive*

¹² 'Germany: Unification Prospect', House of Lords Debate 17 Jan. 1990 [Accessed 03/03/15: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1990/jan/17/germany-unification-prospect>]

losing sovereignty over East Germany was believed to endanger the Warsaw Pact because a united Germany was likely to align with the West. This would fundamentally alter the structure of the Soviet empire, as well as signify a loss of pride. Some British government officials like Charles Powell, believed Gorbachev's position in authority fought off the forces threatening to extinguish these new freedoms in Eastern Europe,¹³ whereas Thatcher, more assertively believed that Gorbachev was the key to achieve democracy in the USSR.¹⁴ In any case, the British government was in consensus that aiding Gorbachev's stability was a priority of their foreign policy. Evidence suggests this consensus was shared by the Kohl administration too. Retrospective oral testimonies from Herman von Riechthofen claim that Thatcher was “reassured”¹⁵ that Germany was equally concerned to maintain his stability. This suggests that there existed some degree of unity in Anglo-German policy, and that Thatcher was aware that the German government did not wish to prioritise unity over everything else.

However, opinions as to exactly how Gorbachev's sympathy for freedom could be negotiated and developed into a Western diplomatic success story was not consistent between the British and Germans, nor even within the British governmental machinery itself. Thatcher still advocated a policy to delay reunification for Gorbachev's stability well after it was rendered unnecessary by many other senior officials. On inspection of British intra-governmental communications, the last call for delaying reunification explicitly due to Gorbachev's unstable position in government can be pinpointed on 8th December 1989 in a letter between Charles Powell and Stephen Wall.¹⁶ After 8th December, Nigel Broomfield, for example, argued that he saw no reason to object a reunited Germany.¹⁷ Reunification was widely considered “inevitable”¹⁸ and therefore it, and Gorbachev's stability, was somewhat out of British control. Thatcher, rather backwardly believed, or perhaps hoped that reunification could be delayed, and used Gorbachev's instability as justification to try to do just that. While she may simply

¹³ Letter from Mr.Powell to Mr.Wall [WRL 020/4] 14 Nov. 1989, in, *Documents on British Policy* 121

¹⁴ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 632

¹⁵ Witness Seminar, 32

¹⁶ Letter from Mr.Powell to Mr.Wall [PREM: Internal situation in East Germany] in, *Documents on British Policy*, 164

¹⁷ Letter from Mr.Broomfield to J.Fretwell [WRL 020/4] in, *Documents on British Policy*, 180

¹⁸ ‘Germany’ HL Deb 28 Nov.

have lacked a sense of political realism, other factors influenced her argument.

Thatcher's memoirs suggest that her support for the Soviet president may have actually been motivated by her personal perception that the Soviet Union, with Gorbachev in power, was a lesser evil than a strong and united, albeit democratic Germany. When writing about the prospect of the collapsing Soviet Union, she sounds almost nostalgic for the Cold War era. She was more worried by what “profound implications” the post-Cold War era may usher in, in which “Germany would be dominant.”¹⁹ An article from the *New York Times* highlights the shared belief of Thatcher and Gorbachev, that a united Germany would be likely to throw its weight around in Eastern Europe.²⁰ Furthermore, George Urban recalled a conversation in which he suggested reunification should be welcomed as a victory over Communism, to which Thatcher replied, “don't you realise what is happening? I've read my history.”²¹ ‘My history’ indicates she was convinced that Germany’s past was a warning of how it would act in the future and perhaps her desire to maintain Gorbachev's political stability was driven by their mutual fear of German expansionism. Yet to jeopardise the freedom of the entire Soviet population for the sake of a quicker German reunification would have been illogical, this was not an example of an anti-German policy but a “respectable intellectual opinion.”²² Her attempts to prevent the Germans from putting themselves “before anything and anyone else”²³ however, was not well received overseas. This was probably due to the fact it seemed ignorant of the fast pace of proceedings in this period and that world leaders were simply playing “catch-up.”²⁴ These misjudgements were perceived as her willingness to prevent freedom and democracy from growing organically in East Germany. While in principle, Gorbachev’s stability was a rational justification for delaying unity, it excluded her from diplomatic reality and rendered her “a pygmy on the world stage.”²⁵ Her belief that she could somehow influence proceedings was mistaken and oblivious to diplomatic reality. Despite perhaps being influenced by anti-Germanism, her concerns for the freedom of the Soviet

¹⁹ M.Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993) 769

²⁰ ‘Concerns about German Unification, *The New York Times*, 19 Nov. 1989

²¹ G.Urban *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher: An Insider's View* (London, 1996) 112

²² Bullard, ‘Great Britain and German Reunification’, 222

²³ ‘Go Slowly’ *Daily Mail*

²⁴ Witness Seminar, 38

²⁵ ‘Germany’ HL Deb 28 Nov.

population cannot be criticised.

The belief that German reunification would threaten Britain's economic and political status was shared almost unanimously, regardless of whether some wished to advocate reunification or whether they wanted to delay it. In the context of Britain's post-1945 relative decline, the rise of Germany as a political and economic powerhouse was particularly resented. In hindsight it became clear that a unified Germany's potential for economic dominance was hamstrung by the vulnerability of the East German economy. However it is vital to realise that the weakness of the GDR's economy was not known or predicted. Only Lord Swynnerton, in the House of Lords, in January 1990 predicted economic difficulties in Germany for “many years” after unity.²⁶ There was little awareness of just how corroded the GDR's infrastructure and industry really was, von Richthofen even claimed that the West Germans, despite the extent of their communications with the GDR were “blind to the statistics”²⁷ which hugely exaggerated the productivity and output of East Germany. There is widespread evidence that in the UK the vast majority of politicians believed that a reunified Germany would dominate Europe economically and politically. Campbell's biography of Thatcher claims that one of the main reasons she wished to resist reunification was the fear of Germany's economic strength causing imbalance in the European Community (EC).²⁸ Douglas Hurd believed that “great efforts” had to be made to avoid “German predominance in the European market.”²⁹ Evidence from newspapers at the time also suggests that there was an awareness of reunification posing major challenges for British industry.³⁰ The proposed policies to make the best of this situation can be categorised into two independent opinions in the UK government. Some believed that the method least detrimental to British status was for it to keep its distance from federal European links and to delay reunification until Eastern Europe was strong enough to fight off German dominance. This was the thinking which motivated the initial British policy. On the other hand, some British politicians believed that reforming and strengthening the EC and allying the UK with Germany, through co-operation and

²⁶ ‘Germany’ HL Deb 28 Nov.

²⁷ Witness Seminar, 48

²⁸ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 632

²⁹ Minute from Mr.Hurd to Mrs.Thatcher [WRL 020/1] 16 Jan. 1990 in, *Documents on British Policy*, 209

³⁰ ‘Challenge in the East Wind’ *Daily Mail* 14 Nov. 1989

support for reunification would foster a relationship which would allow Britain to curb Germany's potential to dominate Europe.

In January 1990, Douglas Hurd advised Thatcher that Germany had to be kept allied to the West through close associations to the EC.³¹ He and many in the British government believed a strong British presence in Europe, alongside France and Italy would represent an adequate counterweight to a unified Germany. Media reports, too, signify a widespread belief that the newfound power of the Germans had to be “absorbed” into a more comprehensive community of European nations.³² The far more serious danger that some saw, lay in the possibility of Germany being non-aligned, or even associating with the Warsaw Pact.³³ The future of Germany's alignment was feared by some, but viewed by others as an opportunity for co-operation. Baroness Ewart-Biggs argued that if the West wanted to be trading and political partners with the new Germany, they had a “self-interested obligation” to assist economically.³⁴ This suggests that there existed a belief that interference with German unity was counter-productive, and could in fact exacerbate Britain's predicted post-reunification decline.

Thatcher and the reunification sceptics however, disagreed with the idea that the EC could prevent German dominance. They instead believed that within exactly these parameters of international treaties such as the EC, Germany could most effectively exercise its political and economic dominance, thereby creating a “new empire.”³⁵ Professor Eda Sagarra, identified that many ministers feared that Eastern Europe could become Germany's backyard and a source of cheap labour and exploitation.³⁶ In the House of Lords debate on 28th November Lord Gladwyn argued that a unified Germany would be an “impossible member of the EC”.³⁷ Lord Greenhill took this further, claiming that it would be “foolish” to believe Germany could be neutralised or anchored within the Community against its will.³⁸ These

³¹ Hurd to Thatcher, in, *Documents on British Policy*, 209

³² ‘Berlin: Where it all began’, *Daily Mail*, 13 Nov. 1989

³³ Witness Seminar, 51

³⁴ ‘Germany’ HL Deb 28 Nov.

³⁵ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 638

³⁶ E.Sagarra, ‘German Reunification: After Euphoria’, in, *Irish Quarterly Review*, vol.80, 1991 [Accessed 10/3/15: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30091515>]

³⁷ ‘Germany’ HL Deb 28 Nov.

³⁸ *ibid.*

fears of German predominance in Europe manifested themselves in a policy advocating the status quo with regard to the question of reunification. In an interview in with Hessische Rundfunk, former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, David Howell, argued that due to the success of the West German economy, and the success of its democracy, the Thatcher administration believed that Germany had no need to change; “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”³⁹ This argument, masked as flattery for the Germans, lacked both sympathy for German self-determination and political realism about the inevitability of German reunification. I would argue that there were other factors influencing policy, behind this masqueraded flattery for German post-war economic success. For example, Thatcher's memoirs suggest that her desire to delay reunification may have been fuelled by her virulent Euro-scepticism and reluctance to see a more federalised Europe, alongside the genuine fear of economic dominance. Her memoirs display how she did indeed realise a new European structure could restrict Germany's dominance,⁴⁰ suggesting that she was not totally blind to the advantages of tighter European links. I would argue Thatcher was aware that German reunification would create a European consensus that the EC would have to be tightened in order to ensure Germany would not become non-aligned and thereby remedy Europe’s atavistic fears. Her personal principles and adamant rejection of a federal Europe, seen most evidently in her September 1988 speech in Bruges, suggests she may have attempted to delay reunification in favour of her own priorities. A more centralised Europe may have been a pre-requisite for reunification and perhaps this is why she attempted to disrupt the path of German self-determination. This was a rational policy perhaps, but it should not be considered praiseworthy to prioritise one’s own ideologies over the rights of a nation.

Fears of Germany dominating Europe can be identified throughout the British government and were based on what was genuinely believed to be empirical evidence and rational predictions. Within Whitehall there was a theory that welcoming reunification would alleviate the fears that Britain may be demoted to

³⁹ David Howell interview with Hessische Rundfunk, 3 Oct. 1993 [cited in] Bullard, ‘Great Britain and German Unification’ 222

⁴⁰ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 759

insignificance on the world stage. However, through Thatcher's personal principles in rejecting a stronger Europe and by failing to realise that reunification was inevitable, she instead encouraged delay and interference with reunification which was completely counter-productive. The belief that she could somehow postpone reunification was interpreted as resentful and unrealistic by Germany and indeed other world leaders and it jeopardised future co-operation and partnership. By doing this she threatened Britain with the exact eventuality she set out to avoid; political and economic marginalisation. If she had listened to the advice from Hurd and Ewart-Biggs, and worked with the Germans to achieve unity, the prospect of reunification would have been far less threatening to Britain's future. However, Thatcher's belief she could interfere created a feeling in Germany that Britain was not a major player in Europe or NATO, nor a worthy ally.⁴¹ What is significant to this study in particular is the shared belief across government, that Germany somehow had to be tamed. It is interesting to see how both plans of action were hatched in the context of a Germanophobic idea that Germany was "not built to be neutral"⁴² and could or would turn Europe into its new empire.

German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl's 10-Point Plan for German unity was badly received by the Allies and his own coalition partners due to the lack of consultation and its unexpected delivery. The following day, the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was ordered to London to clarify the Plan, which had irritated Thatcher in particular. In this instance, evidence from the German minutes of the meeting between, most notably Genscher, Richthofen, Thatcher and Hurd, gives an insight to the German perspective on Thatcher's rationale and perhaps a more candid observation of Thatcher's resentment. In these minutes, Thatcher never once approached the question of reunification other than claiming "other things should be left as they are."⁴³ Her supposed outrage of Kohl's unexpected delivery of the plan is not to be found in this document. So, while there is historiographical consensus that Thatcher resented Kohl's plan, it is unclear whether

⁴¹ B.Heuser, 'Britain and the FGR in NATO 1955-1990, in, *Britain and Germany* 160

⁴² 'Germany' HL Deb 28 Nov.

⁴³ '(Dok.10) Vermerk des bundesdeutschen Botschafters in London, von Richthofen, ueber das Gespraech von Bundesaussenminister Genscher mit der britischen Premierministerin Thatcher am 29 Nov. 1989', in, A.Hilger (ed.) *Diplomatie fuer die deutsche Einheit: Dokumente des Auswaertigen Amtes zu den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen 1989/90* (Munich, 2012) 50

this is instigated by a genuine fear of Kohl's untrustworthiness or whether it was for more personal reasons. Interviewed in *Der Spiegel*, Christopher Mallaby reported that Thatcher and Kohl's relationship had always been "very bad,"⁴⁴ which may suggest that the mistrust Thatcher cited in her memoirs originated from their personal relationship rather than Kohl's plan itself or the way it was released. Indeed, while its unexpected presentation did surprise world leaders, the Plan's content was inoffensive and actually in accordance with Thatcher's ostensible aims of reform within the Soviet Bloc. Most significantly, perhaps, was its lack of time plan for reunification which would have been something undeniably incompatible with British policy.⁴⁵ Kohl must not be considered entirely innocent in this crafty political move. After originally agreeing to consult his allies, the unexpected plan was a deliberate reversal of his previous intentions. Perhaps following the clarification of his plan's content, Thatcher could have been more forgiving. Nevertheless, to her, the trust was already broken.

The British suspicion of Kohl, and Germany more generally, did not end there. The media were particularly concerned by the ambiguous border situation with Germany's former lands like East Prussia and Silesia. They reported the matter incessantly throughout the first months of 1990, believing that Kohl had "unleashed dismay"⁴⁶, or "persistently refused to allay Polish fears."⁴⁷ Although perhaps not overly reflective of Kohl's intentions, it is still interesting to note that German maps of Europe like the *Shell Atlas Deutschland* of 1965, referred to these former Eastern territories as "temporarily under foreign administration,"⁴⁸ So, perhaps justifiably, the House of Lords expressed concern that the claims to these former lands were not being officially renounced. Lord Callaghan believed it was "imperative" for Germany to do this, while Lord Beloff and Lord Kennet argued that Kohl's silence was a genuine cause for concern.⁴⁹ What is clear here, however, is that there was no discussed threat of some kind of neo-Nazi militaristic expansion. Yet this does not

⁴⁴ 'Thatcher versus Kohl: They didn't naturally enjoy each other's company' *Der Spiegel*, 14 Sept. 2009 [Accessed 19/03/15: www.spiegel.de/international/germany/thatcher-versus-kohl-they-didn-t-naturally-enjoy-each-other-s-company-a-648901.html]

⁴⁵ (Dok.10) 53-4

⁴⁶ 'Fears grow over Kohl's plans for one Germany', *Daily Mail*, 6 Mar. 1990

⁴⁷ 'The spectre that stalks this border', *Daily Mail*, 6 Mar. 1990

⁴⁸ Heuser, 'Britain and the FGR' 157

⁴⁹ 'Germany' HL Deb 28 Nov.

necessarily mean that Britain's mistrust and scepticism of Kohl's intentions were entirely justified or rational. Kohl had frequently announced in speeches that the loss of the old German territories was "the price of unity."⁵⁰ More significantly still, is the testimony of Mallaby in the 2003 Witness Seminar. He claims that not only were Kohl's intentions never to repossess lost lands, but that his silence was because he wished not to speak for East Germany without proper authority, and he wished to avoid alienating the electorate and some members of his party. Mallaby adds, "Thatcher knew that that was Helmut Kohl's intention."⁵¹ To gather a comprehensive conclusion from this one testimony alone may be unwise, but it does seriously question the rationality of Thatcher's undying mistrust of Kohl and his intentions. Both with the 10-Point Plan and the border issues, there may well have been genuine, unprejudiced fear that Germany was harbouring secret intentions, perhaps not military ones, but still ones which were unpredictable. However, if Mallaby is correct, evidence presented here suggests that communications between the British and German governments were more transparent than has been previously suggested. We can only speculate whether or not this transparency was known by the entire Thatcher administration, but Thatcher herself was certainly aware so her reservations about Kohl may have originated elsewhere, in more irrational territory.

In short, communications between the top echelons of government in Britain and Germany seem to have been more extensive than has previously been argued. The stability of Gorbachev was mutually beneficial to Britain and to Germany; in fact he was viewed as the motor for reunification. The Germans had no desire to deliberately undermine his power in favour of their own self-determination, but may have done so inadvertently, so for Thatcher to promote caution in this instance, should be considered rational. The fears of Germany dominating Europe was one of genuine concern, although Thatcher's initial policy to deal with this (to somehow delay reunification) should be considered irrational in light of its counter-productiveness and given that many other British ministers saw co-operation, and not interference, as the best guard against marginalisation. Similarly, the British government seems to have been largely aware that Kohl was working towards

⁵⁰ Witness Seminar, 43

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 41

similar aims to the West, despite some examples of crafty politics. So the stigmatisation of Kohl as an untrustworthy and devious politician in the British media and by Thatcher, is most likely to have been born out of a personal dislike.

“No one is ready for a Fourth Reich”

The language used by many ministers in the British government suggests that Ridley's opinions were not exceptions to the government consensus. Linguistic comparisons between the Third Reich and a feared Fourth Reich are commonplace. There was a generational mistrust which can also be identified in the Lords debate on the 17th January 1990. Lord Hankey claimed that the Germans were not built to be neutrals, “they are altogether too purposeful.”⁵² Lord Kagan, meanwhile, compared Germany's economic ambitions to “blitzkrieg.”⁵³ These examples, among several others in the debate suggest not just a dislike of the German past, but, with explicit comparisons to Nazism, it also indicates a belief that the German people had not changed in their ambitions or national character since Hitler. They were selective with their theories on which parts of history defined Germany, however, and refused to acknowledge how they may be comparable to the far richer history which had gone before and, for that matter, after the world wars. In the context of the last chapter which suggested that there had been more transparency in the German intentions than previously believed, these Germanophobes seem particularly misguided. However, the extent to which Thatcher and her senior ministers would have properly conveyed this transparency must be put into question. If many journalists at the time, and historians since, genuinely believed that there had been cause for concern about Kohl's intentions and that the border issue was indeed as ambiguous as the top echelons of the UK government had indicated at the time, then the inconvenient truth of Germany's benign intentions may well have not have trickled down to the wider governmental machinery either. So, although we can evidently see that Germanophobic language was used, this alone is not conclusive evidence that it reflected a virulent dislike and may instead have been caused by a lack of understanding. What is worth noting is the extent of selectivity in linguistic comparisons, and an insistence to define the Germans by their darkest phase of history. This implies that there was indeed prejudice in wider government.

⁵² Germany' HL Deb 28 Nov.

⁵³ *ibid.*

Evidence from media outputs indicates that re-ignited nationalism in Germany was a widespread fear amongst the electorate too. Historian Beatrice Heuser has argued that the Anglo-German 'special relationship' in the 1970s and early-1980s was never backed by popular feeling.⁵⁴ Primary evidence suggests the same, with Mallaby recalling that even West Germans had voiced some concerns over reunification due to the “examples [of Germany's erratic tendencies] throughout history.”⁵⁵ In Britain, an estimated 55% were not in favour of reunification in January 1990.⁵⁶ Newspapers were also littered with reports of mounting British anxieties of German nationalism. A particularly unambiguous example is from the *Daily Mail* on 10th February 1990, reading; “just how many wars are needed before people realise that the menace of Germany is constant?”⁵⁷ Even as late as 16th July, the *Daily Mail* reported a re-awoken “nightmare of a goose-stepping Fourth Reich”⁵⁸ The *New York Times* also reported that no one in Britain was ready for a 'Fourth Reich'.⁵⁹ What this archival research suggests then, is that because major newspapers were printing quotes like those mentioned above, it was in all likelihood a representative opinion of some of the electorate, albeit mostly the right-wing demographic. Therefore, for Whitehall to ignore the possibility of resurgent German nationalism, expansionism and militarism would have been a political error and viewed as contemptuous of the electorate's concerns. Indeed, mere mentions of Germany's Nazi past is not a sign of anti-Germanism, nor for that matter is the mere existence of Germanophobia a sign that it necessarily motivated British policy. The two are not in all certainty intrinsically linked. However, for historians to argue that Ridley's comments were outside the government consensus is a slight overstatement, atavistic Germanophobia does seem to be a theme in politicians' language.

If, however, we shift focus somewhat we can determine how far Ridley's comments were 'outside' the consensus of overall British policy as well. Firstly one must assess Thatcher's opinions, which largely dictated initial British policy. George

⁵⁴ Heuser, 'Britain and the FGR', 161

⁵⁵ Witness Seminar, 40

⁵⁶ 'Go Slowly' *Daily Mail*

⁵⁷ 'The lesson we dare not ever forget', *Daily Mail*, 10 Feb. 1990

⁵⁸ 'What experts...' *Daily Mail*

⁵⁹ 'Concerns...' *NY Times*

Urban and John Campbell describe Thatcher's attitude to Germany as “not all that different to the Alf Garnett version of history,” and characterised by “saloon bar clichés”⁶⁰ Indeed her language when describing the German people clearly indicated some prejudice. In her memoirs, she claimed Germany had forever veered between aggression and self-doubt and it was territorially aggressive,⁶¹ and Donald Cameron Watt has claimed she regarded Germany as a “perpetual threat to European stability, and to Britain.”⁶² But Thatcher’s role in the Ridley affair and the Chequers Seminar are of more significance than just her language when determining the extent of her atavistic Germanophobia. In July 1990, Secretary of State for Industry, Nicholas Ridley was interviewed by the Spectator, in which he disclosed derogatory opinions about the Germans and the consequences of their unity. Most strikingly, when answering whether Kohl was preferable to Hitler he said, “I'm not sure I wouldn't rather have... [Ridley paused]... the shelters and the chance to fight back, than simply being taken over by... [he paused again] economics... I mean, he'll [Kohl] soon be trying to take over everything”⁶³ When pressed further about the fear of a dominant German economy, he replied “I don't know about the German economy... it's the German *people*.”⁶⁴ Thatcher was slow to react to the exposé. It took strong and persistent advice from Hurd for her to reluctantly offer Ridley a voluntary resignation two days later. Thatcher's reluctance to sack Ridley supports Campbell's belief that her ministers knew that she shared Ridley's opinions.⁶⁵ Indeed, her personal memoirs dismissed Ridley's comments as “an excess of honesty”, or an “inconvenient truth.”⁶⁶ He briefly excused himself in his own memoirs, suggesting that the press disliked, and thus targeted him.⁶⁷ That aside, as Bullard has argued, the fact that a cabinet minister harboured those beliefs and disclosed them to a national magazine perhaps indicates the extent of Germanophobia at the top of government.⁶⁸ His opinions were neither rational nor empirically backed, and took shape in a decidedly anti-German form, focusing on a blatant dislike as well as fear. Thatcher's

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 633-34

⁶¹ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 791

⁶² Witness Seminar, 60

⁶³ ‘Saying the unsayable about the Germans’, *The Spectator* 14 July 1990, [Accessed 1/4/15: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111535>] 8

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 9

⁶⁵ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 635

⁶⁶ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 312

⁶⁷ N.Ridley, *My Style of Government: The Thatcher Years* (London, 1991) 222

⁶⁸ Bullard, ‘Great Britain and German Reunification’ 223

hind-sighted support for him only give further credence to the view that her political motivations were at least to some extent based on their shared belief in some “special psychology”⁶⁹ and pre-Churchillian perceptions of Germany.

Given that Thatcher did force Ridley to resign (albeit under considerable pressure), her retrospective support of him is not adequate evidence that these beliefs shaped British policy. In truth however, Douglas Hurd, and not Thatcher, required Ridley's resignation, to disassociate Ridley's views from those of the official government. But the leaking of the Chequers Seminar minutes wholly undermined Hurd's gesture. The seminar, held in March 1990 unmistakably highlighted her reliance on history, or as Norman Stone wrote in the *Sunday Times*, her inclination to use “the German past... [to] signpost the future.”⁷⁰ Leaked to the *Independent* on Sunday in July, the discussions were eventually revealed to have centred on a group of experts attempting to persuade Thatcher to “hide her violent antipathy to German reunification in the interests of more effective British diplomacy.”⁷¹ The significance of the content itself is almost of secondary importance to answering the question of policy motivations however. The fact alone that Thatcher called a meeting of historians to discuss Germany's past in order to extrapolate a path of policy and action is evidence, at least, of her attempts to shape policy through historically-based anti-Germanism. In the context of the previous chapter's conclusions that policy often lacked rationality, analysing the Seminar's content can shed light on whether Britain's relative irrationality was due to well-intended miscalculations, or atavistic Germanophobia. The Seminar discussed Germany's national character. The final summary concluded that Germany was insensitive, aggressive, sentimental, self-pitying, and egotistic, with a tendency to bully and a capacity for barbarism.⁷² Charles Powell identified a widespread and strong belief at the seminar, that Germany had moved on from these characteristics, and that the past was irrelevant to today's Germany. Thatcher however, seemed not to share this belief. Indeed, historians present were “appalled” to find Thatcher totally unaware of the Germans'

⁶⁹ C.Mallaby to G.Howe [WRD 020/3] 10 April 1989, in, *Documents on British Policy*, 1

⁷⁰ ‘Cold War: “Germany? Maggie was absolutely right” (Norman Stone on 1990 Chequers Germany seminar)’ *The Sunday Times*, 23 Sept. 1996

⁷¹ ‘Thatcher's personal struggle to accept reunification of Germany’, *The Times*, 16 July 1990

⁷² C.Powell, ‘Seminar on Germany: Summary Record’ [Accessed 3/4/15:
<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/111047>]

guilt and their consistent efforts to expunge the shame of their forefathers.⁷³ From the Chequers Seminar, it seems that Thatcher was looking for confirmation that Germany possessed an eternally threatening nature, using its past as evidence. Just like the lower level political machinery, Thatcher could be credited with having merely approached the fears of British society head on. However, the fact that she unequivocally sought advice from historians to prepare her for the “crucial meetings”⁷⁴ with George Bush, Gorbachev and Kohl which lay ahead shows she was doing more than just discussing Germany’s past. By calling the Chequers Seminar, Thatcher was attempting to use the history books (or historians, in this case) to characterise Germany and to define and predict their future behaviour. I would argue that this is clear evidence of Thatcher using prejudices and bigoted 'characteristics' to influence her policy and should be considered a deliberate rejection of rational politics.

The crux of this argument however, and the most conclusive evidence that Britain’s policy shared some similarities with Ridley’s comments, can be found in reflective testimonies from some of Thatcher’s closest colleagues Michael Alexander, Rodric Braithwaite and Julian Bullard. All three highlight that by this stage in her political career she had become a victim of hubris. They argue Thatcher had “lost her political skills... she thought she could walk on water by then.”⁷⁵ If true, this is hugely significant considering the breakneck speed of reunification, which, as Alexander recalled, left an absence of time to reflect or act pragmatically.⁷⁶ This chapter has shown that Thatcher possessed the same deep-seated anti-German sentiments as Ridley, through her support of him and her reliance on historians to guide her. These beliefs can be said to have motivated her 'anti-reunification' policy because, as Bullard, Alexander and Braithwaite's testimonies all highlight, due to the speed of events, Thatcher's prejudices and instincts were central in formulating her policies, which suggests that the relationship between co-existing anti-German attitudes and seemingly anti-German policies was more than incidental and that while Ridley’s comments were outside

⁷³ Campbell, *Thatcher*, 634

⁷⁴ Powell, ‘Seminar on Germany’ 1

⁷⁵ Witness Seminar, 54

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 30

the consensus of the majority in Whitehall, it was rather in accordance with Thatcher's beliefs which spearheaded Britain's initial 'anti-reunification' policy.

“Far from agitated, we should be pleased!”

Britain's response to the prospect of German reunification was not entirely negative or apprehensive, and there is continuous evidence of a second, co-existing school of thought within the Thatcher administration. Other than Thatcher and a vocal minority of sceptics, hitherto loosely categorised as 'anti-reunification' advocates, the majority of Britain's governmental machinery took a more welcoming stance to German self-determination and, as a result, German unity. This chapter shall focus on motivations behind this perspective and also on the political discourse which allowed this more positive approach to originate, survive and eventually become the dominant voice in Britain's official attitudes. First, evidence will be used to identify and characterise this school of thought. It will then be analysed in the context of an anti-German culture, which had by no means vanished from British attitudes. It shall be asked whether, in any way, this Germanophobia itself motivated a pro-unification stance. Finally, there shall be a re-evaluation of the Chequers and Ridley affairs, and other circumstances which transformed this widespread opinion from a co-existing, but politically insignificant force, into the main motor of British policy.

On the day the Berlin Wall collapsed, Leon Brittan argued that it was essential not to hinder reunification, but instead to “smooth its path.”⁷⁷ Government sources suggest a similar belief. In a telegraph from Nigel Broomfield to Douglas Hurd it was argued that the “people of the GDR should be given the genuine opportunity to decide their futures without having their options foreclosed through overwhelming political or economic pressures.”⁷⁸ Whilst Thatcher never publicly denied the Germans’ self-determination, her policy was, by nature, infringing on this right. Thatcher did however publicly advised a slow and cautious approach on many occasions. In one instance her statements were swiftly followed by Douglas Hurd undermining, or at least re-phrasing her words and giving German reunification the “full blessing” of the British government.⁷⁹ These examples clearly indicate the

⁷⁷ ‘A new Europe in the making’, *Daily Mail*, 9 Nov. 1989

⁷⁸ Mr.Broomfield to Mr.Hurd no.387 Telegraph [WRE 014/2], in, *Documents on British Policy*, 117

⁷⁹ ‘Hurd: One Germany fine by us’, *Daily Mail*, 20 Feb. 1990

existence of some significantly different opinions in Whitehall. Indeed evidence from official documents show that advocating reunification was far more widespread belief. Thatcher's insistence on advising caution should be seen as an exception to the trends in government. The long-standing belief that Germany should decide its own future was underpinned by a desire to continue good relations with the Germans to maintain an alliance, but also by a loyalty to the principal ideals espoused by the West. Markus Meckel argued the latter, suggesting that the idea of reunification had originated on categorically democratic ground and Britain could not physically nor morally stop it without contradicting their values of freedom and democracy."⁸⁰ Lord Beloff argued that it would be "wrong and incompatible with our own beliefs to stand in their [Germany's] way."⁸¹ William Waldegrave stated on German radio that not welcoming reunification made a "mockery of all our polic[ies] since the War."⁸² This opinion was perhaps heightened by the widespread awareness of human rights abuses in East Germany.⁸³ And eventually confirmed by the outcome of the first and only democratic election on 18th March 1990, in which the pro-unification parties won resoundingly. But even before then, claims of its democratic nature underpinned the reunification proposal. To paraphrase Lord Callaghan's words in the House of Lords, the 'pro-reunification' school believed that a rare opportunity to peacefully progress lay before them, one which would ensure security for the people of Europe.⁸⁴ The belief in a 'peaceful progression' is the key to his opinion. Most British politicians believed that the 300,000 strong unification demonstrations in Leipzig and other East German cities were not on nationalist grounds, nor did many politicians see the unity of Germany as preceding expansionist, militarist nor indeed nationalist threats. There was a common belief that a distinctly "rational mood" existed in Germany at the time.⁸⁵

It was not just pragmatic acceptance which contributed to the evolution, or even the origins of the 'pro-unification' school of thought. German reunification was the will of the German people, and its pace was dictated by them too. Evidence

⁸⁰ Witness Seminar, 36-7

⁸¹ Germany' HL Deb 28 Nov.

⁸² Bullard, 'Great Britain and German Reunification', 224

⁸³ House of Commons Debate 24 October 1989 [Accessed 11/3/15:
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1989/oct/24/east-germany]

⁸⁴ Germany' HL Deb 28 Nov.

⁸⁵ *ibid*

suggests that the Thatcher administration was rather insignificant in the proceedings. In January 1990 in the House of Lords debate about reunification, Baroness Blackstone identified that, in reality, Britain had “next to no influence in the decision-making process”, while Lord Callaghan added that it was the people and not governments who were in control.⁸⁶ Colin Munro and Markus Meckel reached the same conclusions in the Witness Seminar, stating that until a democratic government was elected, even the East German leaders had no power; “no one really had control of the situation, no one could stop it, only shape it.”⁸⁷ In reality then, much of the pro-unification sentiments in British government may well have been born out of a realisation of their own impotence. With the British government's role so marginal, and reunification widely accepted as inevitable, many believed that only a positive attitude would bring Britain positive results in a post-reunification era, and getting in their way could be “extraordinarily unfortunate”⁸⁸ Moreover, government communications in response to the mass emigration from east to west which ensued after the opening of the Berlin Wall, show a grave concern for the socio-political impact which delaying reunification could have caused. Christopher Powell noted how the impression of forbidding reunification from Western powers could gift the far-right Republikaner party 30% of the votes in forthcoming elections in West Germany,⁸⁹ not to mention the economic issues faced in the GDR as up to 10,000 emigrants a day fled west, threatening widespread disorder, economic collapse and a breakdown of authority.⁹⁰ Those with knowledge of history were all too aware of how the Germans could react to economic dislocation. Indeed, it is quite possible that some minister's support of German self-determination derived from the inherent fear of Germany which has been discussed in the previous chapters. In this instance however, a fear of Germany if it was denied reunification, not granted it. To some members of the British government, Meckel suggested that allowing the German people a genuine say in their own future was a means to fend off fears of repeating the mistakes of the Versailles Treaty and it's all too familiar consequences.⁹¹ Granted, Meckel had a German perspective, but, due to his position

⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁸⁷ Witness Seminar, 36

⁸⁸ *ibid*, 30

⁸⁹ Minute from Mr.Powell to Mr.Cooper [WRL 020/4] 22 Nov. 1989, in, *Documents on British Policy*, 133-4

⁹⁰ Letter from Mr.Powell to Mr.Wall [RS 020/2/3] 8 Dec. 1989, in, *Documents on British Policy*, 162

⁹¹ Witness Seminar, 43

as Foreign Minister in the GDR in 1990, his opinions on British government should not be ignored. To label this fear an anti-German sentiment is perhaps too presumptuous. However there certainly is weight in the argument that even some pro-unification Britons were motivated by an irreconcilable fear of Germany's potential. To be regarded as anti-Germanism, this fear must co-exist with a virulent dislike, and yet, evidence for hatred as well as fear in the 'pro-unification' school of thought could not be located in my research. What this could suggest however, is that the relationship between Germany and some members of the British governmental machinery who advocated unification, was much like that of a tyrannised parent and a spoilt child; a 'child' far bigger than them, with the capability of upsetting the peace and security of Europe. British ambassador, Michael Alexander has since claimed that he was not “the least bit worried about the threat of the Germans dominating Europe”⁹² so this analogy is by no means be applicable to everyone. However, evidence of fear in the pro-unification camp is identifiable, albeit as a result of a fear of Germany not having their way, rather than the contrary.

While humanism, trust or in some instances fear, all motivated many in the British political class to advocate reunification, this positive approach was driven to the background of official policy. Initially, this was due to Thatcher's refusal to start planning for reunification, citing it as an “unreasonable” use of time.⁹³ And, thereafter it was because of Thatcher's stubbornness to stick to her principles, as the previous two chapters have highlighted. After the uncovering of the Chequers Seminar and the domestic and international outcry against Nicholas Ridley's comments however, this began to change. Three of Thatcher's key advisers, Douglas Hurd, Geoffrey Howe and Christopher Powell became more assertive in their efforts to rectify the damage done to Anglo-German relations by Ridley, Chequers and, what the Americans called, 'the Thatcher problem'.⁹⁴ In July 1990, *The Times* argued that Ridley's comments had been rather counterproductive and actually weakened Thatcher's “slow-down reunification campaign.”⁹⁵ As her policy weakened, her three advisers took greater control. In efforts to save the Anglo-German alliance, The

⁹² *ibid.*, 30

⁹³ *ibid.*, 28

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 51

⁹⁵ 'Bowling to the Backbenchers', *The Times*

Times reported that Hurd “emphasised friendship with... Germany”, while Howe “paid tribute to Germany's achievements and 'civilised values’”⁹⁶ This is the evidence and the specifics which were lacking in Julian Bullard's statements that British government eventually marched “to a different drum.”⁹⁷ The leaking of information about the Chequers Seminar, in the immediate aftermath of the Ridley affair, also instigated the change in policy.

While the mere existence of the Chequers Seminar has been used to show Thatcher's atavistic principles, the consequences actually signified a break-away from these very principles that had defined British policy until the summer of 1990. The conservative-leaning *The Times* suggested that “contrary to the widespread impression, the Prime Minister [did] listen to advice”⁹⁸ given to her by the historians and social scientists present at the conference. Some left-wing newspapers like *The Guardian* deliberately left out some crucial details of the Chequers Seminar, thereby tarnishing it with an almost pseudo-scientific reputation. In truth, while the seminar did identify some controversial 'characteristics', it also summarised that the Germans were now “much readier to recognise and admit this [their faults throughout history] themselves.” Christopher Powell's summary also concluded that “far from agitated, we should be pleased”, and perhaps most significantly, there was a realisation that “Anglo-German antagonism since the fall of Bismarck had been injurious to Europe... and must not be allowed to revive once more”⁹⁹ Fritz Stern, the German-born, American historian also present at the Chequers Seminar, spoke about his perspective in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. He believed that the seminar had allowed historians to warn the British politicians present “not to jeopardise the future with recollections of a past that is over and done with.”¹⁰⁰ I would be more cautious than to suggest the positivism of the seminar radically influenced and resonated with Thatcher as much as *The Times* and Fritz Stern suggest. Indeed, even after the Chequers Seminar, evidence shows Thatcher still lacked subtlety in her remarks towards Germany. In March 1990, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*

⁹⁶ ‘Conservative Party fights to control internal fallout – Ridley German remarks’, *The Times*, 16 July 1990

⁹⁷ Bullard, ‘Great Britain and German Reunification’, 225

⁹⁸ ‘Thatcher's personal struggle’, *The Times*

⁹⁹ Powell, ‘Seminar on Germany’ 7

¹⁰⁰ ‘Die Zweite Chance’ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

regarding a peace treaty between Germany and Poland, she said “you know what happened with previous assurances, they were overturned by the German[s].”¹⁰¹ These comments caused great concerns amongst British ministers who had been making considerable efforts to improve relations with Germany. Indeed, the process of changing policy had indeed began in the early months of 1990, however criticisms and accusations of anti-Germanism in the UK government continued throughout spring and summer. The revelation that the term “fourth reich” was still being used in the inner circles of Whitehall as late as 16th July was again detrimental to the relationship.¹⁰² I would argue that perhaps Douglas Hurd was most inspired by the seminar’s finding and consequently put more efforts into pursuing a positive strategy for the sake of national interests. The outcry against the seminar, revealed just days after the Ridley affair also contributed to this push from Thatcher’s senior advisers to attempt to shift the power-balance within Whitehall away from her and towards themselves. The extent to which Thatcher was falling victim of Hubris is shown again by the extent to which most government ministers felt they had to rectify Thatcher's personal mistakes in order to save Anglo-German relations. Indeed, if the seminar had so markedly altered Thatcher’s opinions about Germany, a historians have suggested, surely a weaning of anti-Germanism could be observed in March 1990 directly after the seminar. However, evidence of her resentment for Germany is shown thereafter, and even in her memoirs written in 1993. In overall British government, a welcoming reaction to reunification can be observed right throughout the period in question, yet this only became the driving force behind British policies in July, following the exposure of Chequers and the Ridley affair, after which Thatcher’s three key advisers began to 'beat the drum' of foreign policy themselves.

¹⁰¹ Mallaby to Hurd, no.388 telegraphic [WRG 020/3] 26 March 1990, in , *Documents on British Policy*, 354

¹⁰² Neville-Jones to FCO, no.855 telegraphic [PREM: internal situation in East Germany] 16. July 1990 in , *Documents on British Policy* 433

Conclusions

The Thatcher administration contained an unmistakable strand of anti-Germanism throughout the period in question, Mrs Thatcher herself was only perhaps outdone by Nicholas Ridley in entertaining these prejudices. Numerically, this Germanophobia was far from endemic, however it did hold considerable political significance in shaping Britain's initial policy. This study has challenged the historiographical arguments that Britain's initial policy to delay reunification was justified and that Ridley's comments, which displayed clear atavistic Germanophobia, were outside the government consensus. While this study has highlighted only a vocal minority harboured these beliefs, there is clear evidence that Thatcher herself was influenced by an inherent mistrust of the Germans and shaped a policy based on these beliefs.

This study has attempted to challenge some key historiography about the rationality of British policy by uncovering new evidence from both British oral testimonies and German government documents. There are consistent examples suggesting that Britain had a culture of anti-Germanism, both in the political sphere and in society, so for Thatcher to consider the fears held by the electorate could have been seen as addressing the urgent needs of the country and therefore it could be defined as *Realpolitik*. However, with this new evidence I conclude that the extent to which the two governments communicated and the extent of the Kohl administration's transparency has been somewhat understated until now. This would suggest that Thatcher's 'anti-reunification' policy would have been drawn up with full knowledge of Germany's benign intentions, leaving only Thatcher's personal mistrust and prejudices to blame for influencing Britain's sceptical approach. Indeed, the idea that Germany might upset the peace and security of Europe in favour of their own national interests was influenced by atavistic mistrust of Germany, over and above any rational predictions. Not dissimilar to the motivations behind Ridley's comments.

Those who wished to prevent or postpone reunification were to some extent driven by an atavistic Germanophobia, sometimes directly, as shown by their

language or characterisation of the German people, and sometimes indirectly through inherent mistrust. Yet, anti-Germanism was not entirely absent in the minds of those supporting reunification either. There was a belief that through not interfering with Germany, Britain could prevent Europe from being doomed to a repeat of the Versailles Treaty. So while anti-German sentiment were by no means universal in government, its influence can be observed throughout the political sphere, both in 'pro-unification' and 'anti-unification' schools of thought. Some feared what Germany would do if it achieved unity, whilst some feared the consequences of denying it.

While it may be unlikely that Thatcher genuinely believed Germany posed a military threat to Europe, her belief that it would in some way dominate Europe again were born out of deep-seated fear and dislike, typical of her generation. Her decision to gather historians at the Chequers Seminar proves her reliance on history to characterise the Germans. Furthermore, her shamefully slow and reluctant response to Ridley's outburst, and her retrospective support for him indicate this fear was coupled with the same unappeased dislike as he displayed. This study has provided a detailed examination of Thatcher's personal opinion, but perhaps a larger, more in depth study may be needed to analyse other British politicians' influences and thereby more comprehensively determine the extent to which Germanophobia shaped British policy. But what is clear is that British policy until July 1990 was inextricably linked to Britain's culture of anti-Germanism, and yet even thereafter, when Douglas Hurd, Geoffrey Howe and Charles Powell restored the political realism and pragmatism which British policy so desperately needed, it cannot be said that the Germanophobia of the Thatcher administration had miraculously disappeared. Examples of attempted interference and Germanophobic language is still evident throughout the spring of 1990, and what motivated this change in policy was a response to Thatcher's mismanagement of diplomatic procedures, and not the advice given to Thatcher at Chequers, as some historians argue.

That aside, the stability of Gorbachev was considered central in aiding democratisation of Eastern Europe, thus to prioritise the freedom of half a continent over half of Germany should not be considered anti-German. In this case, it was

diplomatic misjudgements rather than Germanophobia which was detrimental to Britain. Failing to see both the inevitability of German unity and the impotence of British political control meant that Thatcher's pursuit of national interests were perceived world-wide as an attempt to infringe on the rights of Germany. These misjudgements caused further repercussions for Britain by leading them to believe interfering with reunification would somehow prevent economic marginalisation and a loss of prestige. In truth, Britain's 'anti-reunification' sentiments exacerbated this eventuality. Underpinning the outward reservations regarding German unity was Thatcher's own anti-Germanism. The difference between British and German historians' arguments is perhaps reflective of this loss of political status. The British academics are critical for the stained reputation and marginalisation caused by Thatcher's persistence to defy Germany's right to self-determination, whilst the German historians perhaps credit Thatcher for demanding more clarity. German historians could also offer praise, in a sense, by the *shadenfreude* of declining British political influence (not originated, but certainly exacerbated by Thatcher's policy) which inadvertently allowed the Germans to determine their own future, irrespective of British opinion.

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