

Anthony Glees

Churchill's Last Gambit

*What the "Secret Documents" Reveal about
the Prime Minister's Adventurous Initiative in 1953
on the Reunification (and "Neutralisation"?) of Germany
. . . and why Dr Adenauer Prevailed*



GERMANY REUNIFIED is not something that most non-Germans seem over-keen to see. The reasons for this are almost too obvious to bear listing. Such a Germany would be too powerful to fit comfortably into the contemporary world; it would be too strong economically; and it would be able to exert far too much pressure on its neighbours. But then few people would

ever expect such a Germany to materialise. Its division is now widely regarded as historically immutable, securely grounded in the fact that, once the great armies of the anti-Hitler coalition occupied their respective zones in 1945, *die deutsche Frage*, "the German problem", was apparently solved for ever by the simple expedient of dividing it.

Yet if this is really so, it is legitimate to enquire why the creation of a single German nation is an aim to which West German leaders—all of them—have remained committed. The current Chancellor is no exception. When he visited Oxford University last spring Helmut Kohl stated that:

"The German people expect every responsible German politician to work persistently for a state of peace in which they can determine their own unity."

Although he was clear both about his priorities and the length of time it would take to realise them, the emotional intensity of his personal commitment to reunification was remarkable. And while the D-Day anniversary occupied us last June, Herr Alois Mertes, a West German Foreign Office Minister, reminded the West that it had never actually solved the German question:

"Our allies must never forget that the German people, where they have been able to vote freely, have resolved to pursue their rights to security and reunification in harmony with the values of the Western democracies."

This statement of dissatisfaction with the division of Germany serves as a good illustration of the complexity of the issues involved. First, the right of Germans to national self-determination; then Bonn's insistence that it speaks for all Germans on this matter; and, finally, its rather touching reliance on others to deliver the goods.

There are those who assert that such sentiments are "mere window-dressing", that the many attempts at reunification were no more than part of an elaborate and cynical conspiracy to conceal from the German people the hard truth that they surrendered their right to self-determination on 31 January 1933, the day that Adolf Hitler took power. But can it really be assumed that German reunification, *die deutsche Wiedervereinigung*, is something that is simply talked about by politicians who in reality know there is no alternative to the present division? What such assumptions ignore is that politics are about alternatives; and although politicians like to justify their policies by pleading that they were inevitable, access to the archives of governments provides countless examples of alternatives which were on offer but were discarded by past policy-makers. The German question is a case in point: it should never be forgotten that the "solution" of 1945 was merely provisional, and that the possibility of reunification continued to preoccupy statesmen throughout the 1950s.

Significant new light has recently been cast on the most important attempt at reunification, the Berlin conference of 25 January to 18 February 1954 whose failure has usually been considered a foregone conclusion. The frozen stalemate with which it ended has been commonly seen as inevitable; although it may have produced serious discussion of the issues surrounding reunification, it was never a serious bid for reunification. The most recent evidence (which has emerged under the Thirty Year Rule at the Public Record Office) is bound to revise a number of these previously accepted judgments on the policies and the politicians who determined the fate of this conference. For although its failure may indeed have been a foregone conclusion *after* the summer of 1953, it was by no means inevitable *before* that summer. Indeed, during the period of intense diplomatic activity from March-July 1953, which spawned the Berlin talks, German

reunification really did appear to be in the offing. As we shall see, much of the failure can be ascribed to conscious and deliberate choices made by some of the protagonists.

Most remarkable of all, however, is the conclusion that the positions actually adopted by the statesmen at the time were very different from those they claimed to have, and were accepted as having, both at the time and afterwards. The person who in 1953 most wanted to see a reunified Germany was not, as had been supposed, Dr Konrad Adenauer—it was Winston Churchill. And the person who ultimately won by exploiting his opponent's severe weakness and his "special relationship" with the United States was not Winston Churchill—but Konrad Adenauer.

It should be said that this interpretation does not convey any moral verdict. There were good arguments in favour of reunification—and good arguments against it. On the whole, Adenauer's position was less dangerous and more beneficial to the West than Churchill's. On the other hand, then as now, the reasons for supporting reunification were extremely important: a divided Germany represented a source of Great-Power conflict in the heart of Europe; it had brought the Iron Curtain so far west that the Red Army could reach the Rhine in a day. As Herr Kohl pointed out in May last year:

"a genuine and lasting peace in Europe will only be achieved when the German people are given the same opportunities as almost all the peoples of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the whole world, to determine the course of their own history."¹

It is not merely Herr Kohl's rhetoric that possesses a Churchillian ring. His arguments, too, reflect those of the British Prime Minister some thirty years before (rather than those of Adenauer, which they were intended to mirror), at a time when, owing to a chance constellation of events, Churchill found himself in a unique position for breaking out of the Cold War and its concomitant arms escalation. His end was "peace with Russia", his means was "German unity."

The Well-Known Story



THE MAJOR SOURCE OF our knowledge of the events of 1953 until now has been Konrad Adenauer's memoirs (published in 1966), which reinforced the view that the reunification of Germany had not been a practical possibility. Adenauer states that the choice facing Germany was either a West Germany which was politically free but integrated into the Western defence system (the European Defence Community—which failed—and then NATO), or a single German nation which was politically

neutral and thus likely to be dominated by the USSR.

Adenauer claims that this was a position adopted with equal conviction by his Western Allies. Unity could be achieved only if the USSR were to see West Germany so securely locked into the West that there was no longer any point in preventing its reunification.

Adenauer offers only the vaguest suggestion that in 1953 this common front was under strain; writing about Winston Churchill's Commons speech of 11 May 1953, he recalled his "surprise" at Churchill's plans. This surprise was soon to vanish. Following an official visit to London on 14-15 May 1953, Churchill's position was clarified for Adenauer and he became totally certain that Britain would never negotiate with the USSR on Germany's future over his head. Churchill had agreed with Bonn's position, that only a fundamental accord with the USSR could produce a single Germany even if there were minor disputes over tactics:

"The question of reunification cannot be considered a question in isolation . . . as much as I, as a German, wished to see reunification in peace and freedom . . . as a responsible politician I had to be clear that it was connected with a whole series of other issues."

Churchill, on the other hand, says Adenauer, was also "correct to say that one could not expect to solve all problems at once." Apart from this minor difference, then, it seemed that there was complete agreement between the Palais Schaumburg and 10 Downing Street.

Indeed, it seemed—until very recently—that in his memoirs Dr Adenauer had wildly exaggerated the implications of Churchill's speech of 11 May 1953. Its full text (*Hansard*, Vol. 515, p. 885 ff) demonstrated that Churchill had spoken only very generally, and that the future of Germany was but one aspect of many that were touched upon. After stressing that his advice had been ignored by the Americans in 1945 (when they insisted the Western armies draw back from their forward positions before a settlement with the USSR had been reached), he went on to state that due to Stalin's "very hostile line the immense and formidable problem of Germany" now presented itself in "an entirely different aspect." Britain, he went on:

"now has a new and remarkable relationship with Western Germany. The policy of HMG is to adhere most faithfully in the spirit as well as in the letter to our agreements with West Germany. Dr Adenauer may well be deemed the wisest German statesman since the days of Bismarck. I have greatly admired his perseverance, courage, composure and skill . . . strong as is our desire to see a friendly settlement with Soviet Russia—or even an improved *modus vivendi*, we are resolved not in any way to fail in the obligations to which we have committed ourselves about Western Germany. . . . It will in no way be sacrificed or—I pick these words with special care—cease to be master of its own fortunes within the agreements we have made with them. . . ."

However, Churchill continued,

"We have been encouraged by a series of amicable

¹ The latest opinion poll results (Institut für Demoskopie, Allensbach, June 1984) show 78% of West Germans in favour of reunification, 8% against, and 14% undecided. In the age range 16-19, 70% were in favour.

gestures on the part of the new Soviet government. . . . It would, I think, be a mistake to assume that nothing can be settled with Soviet Russia unless or until everything is settled. A settlement of two or three difficulties would be an important gain . . . piecemeal solutions should not be disdained. . . . I do not believe that the immense problem of reconciling the security of Western Europe [to this] is insoluble . . . the master-thought which animated Locarno might well play its part between Germany and Russia [today]. I believe that a conference on the highest level should take place without delay. But this would be the most fatal moment for the free nations to relax their comradeship. To fail to maintain our defence effort up to the limit of our strength would be to paralyse every beneficial tendency towards peace. . . .”

Apart from Churchill’s reference to Locarno, his acceptance that the Russians had a right to security, and his recognition of friendly gestures from Moscow, it really is very difficult to understand why Adenauer’s feathers had become so ruffled. Indeed, Churchill had paid him rather a handsome personal compliment by comparing him to Otto von Bismarck.

THIS, AT ANY RATE, was the view of two Labour MPs—Michael Foot and Barbara Castle—who spoke in the same debate. The former argued that Bismarck had been a menace and that it was, therefore, strange to use him as a comparison with Adenauer; Churchill was told to “brush up his history.” Furthermore, the ideas of Dr Adenauer’s political opponents, the *SPD*, should be taken into account. Finally, Michael Foot suggested, Churchill was merely paying lip-service to the idea of *détente*:

“Like Adenauer, he is saying that the whole plan for building Western defence should go ahead in precisely the same terms as had been laid down before we had any of these developments in the Soviet Union. Herr Ollenhauer [has taken a different line]. He said, ‘a Four Power conference on Germany could not come a day too soon. . . . And no Government of Germany has the right to bind by treaty commitments a future all-German Government.’”

Mrs Castle amplified this point:

“The Prime Minister’s most significant phrase ‘that despite our desire for friendship with the Soviet Union we are resolved not to waive our commitment to Dr Adenauer’ . . . is a formulation which makes the unification of Germany impossible. The *SPD* [furthermore] does not believe that if we had a unified Germany with free elections, the head of the Government would be Adenauer.”

It might, therefore, seem that whatever Churchill had in mind, it was not something which permitted a belief that it would be either new or radical. Indeed, one could assert that Foot and Castle had got to the bottom of it because all that Churchill was really trying to do was tie West Germany even more firmly to the West by supporting Adenauer (rather than

the *SPD* who were clearly more neutralist), and was making friendly, if deceptive, noises towards Moscow solely to reassure the domestic critics of his policy.

In fact, as the secret documents reveal, the truth of 1953 was very different. Foot and Castle were quite wrong to assume that Churchill’s olive-branch to the Kremlin’s new leaders was “phoney”, and Dr Adenauer was perfectly right to assume that Churchill’s plans amounted to the most serious threat to the maintenance of the Federal Republic since 1949. The evidence shows that Churchill was indeed ready to sacrifice West Germany in return for peaceful coexistence with the East, and had Churchill not suffered a major stroke in June 1953 which prevented him continuing to direct British foreign policy, Dr Adenauer might have been forced to accept the prospect of an “Austrian solution”, with all that that entailed. What the British public took to be British policy was, in consequence, not the policy being pursued by their Government.

Winston’s First Move



CHURCHILL REASONED THAT the events of 1953 would give him a unique opportunity to forge a settlement with the USSR. There were new political leaders in the USA as well as in the Kremlin; France had a new Government; and the West German Republic was due to have a general election. If that election were to be fought against the background of “Reunification”, it would be well-nigh impossible for Adenauer to block a British move towards it. Moreover,

Anthony Eden’s severe illness had allowed Churchill to take direct control of the Foreign Office. It was the last time in his life he was to possess such power, and he was determined to use it. In addition, since the fledgling leaders—Eisenhower in Washington and Malenkov in Moscow—lacked his political experience, and Adenauer’s hands seemed tied, Churchill believed that his deal with the Kremlin could come off; its fears about Germany could be assuaged with “a new Locarno”, and the Iron Curtain be transplanted eastward.

At 07.54 on 4 March 1953, the first link in the chain was forged. The Foreign Office received a cable from its Moscow Embassy stating:

“Stalin is unconscious and his condition is very serious.”

Subsequent cables enclosed precise details about the extent of his physical decline. (It was ironic that the Kremlin should be far more candid and specific about Stalin’s illness in March than Whitehall was about Churchill’s stroke in June.) It was plain that Stalin was dying and on 6 March 1953 Churchill became the sole survivor of the “Big Three.” His first concern was to see who would emerge as new leader. A Foreign Office paper on 10 March (it was also shown to Mrs Churchill) assumed it would be Malenkov, although it

concluded that he might not remain leader for long. On 13 March they supplied Churchill with further intelligence:

"The apparent departure from attitudes which while Stalin was alive seemed immutable is astonishing enough. But even more remarkable is that the process of change should have been initiated before he was cold in his grave and by men who were apparently his devoted associates. . . . It is important to remember how personal was Stalin's contribution to the Revolution. Whatever Communism might have been, it was, so long as he lived, stamped with his stamp. He did this coldly and with calculation, by combining the methods of Ivan the Terrible with 1984. He destroyed the old Revolutionaries and replaced them by Soviet Man. . . ."

On 22 April the Foreign Office told Churchill that a "Committee of Five" now ruled the USSR, and had already made itself felt. It had stressed its friendliness towards the USSR's satellites, released the Kremlin doctors (on trial under Stalin), and issued a "condemnation of anti-Semitism and arbitrary police methods." Finally, there had been "noteworthy changes in public attacks on the USA and the West."

CHURCHILL, BY 12 APRIL 1953, had resolved to exploit what was obviously a major change in Soviet affairs. He wrote to the President of the United States:

"A new hope has been created in the unhappy, bewildered world. It ought to be possible to proclaim our unflinching determination to resist Communist tyranny and aggression and at the same time declare how glad we should be if there was a real change of heart."

Privately, however, Churchill was more than a little worried about Eisenhower's readiness to accept such messages. Churchill had been asked by the President through Sir John Colville (his Private Secretary) to avoid defending the wartime Yalta agreement with the USSR. Churchill believed that the Republicans were trying to argue that the USSR had not kept its side of the bargain whereas, in reality, they had.

"The facts of what happened at Yalta should be disclosed [he minuted to Colville]. The agreements were made between Stalin and President Roosevelt direct, and secret commitments were given to the Russians."

These had as their necessary result the spreading of Communist power in many areas—"Sakhalin, the Kuriles, Manchuria, the Polish Frontier, Königsberg and Germany. . . ."

At about this time, Churchill noted his thoughts on Foreign Policy recorded in a minute marked "TOP SECRET."

"At the end of World War Two, all men hoped for a just and lasting peace but the amassing of Soviet power has compelled the free nations to rearm . . . the result is that mankind seems to face alternatives of Atomic War at worst, and a life of perpetual fear and tension at best. Is

there no other way? With the death of Stalin, the new Soviet leadership has the opportunity to make its own future and to free itself from the past. This new Soviet leadership knows that western Europe can and will be made secure against attack. Will the Soviet leadership take advantage of this to help turn the tide of history? We are ready, to reduce the burden of armaments, to most solemnly agree to: (1) limit sizes of military and security forces of all nations and (2) have international control of atomic energy to ensure its use for peaceful purposes only and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction. . . .

If we fail to strive to seize this moment's precious chances, the judgement of future ages would be harsh and just. But if we strive and fail, it will be clear who has condemned humankind to this black fate."

On 15 April, Eden's bile-duct problem became so severe that he was forced to yield control of the Foreign Office to Churchill. The Prime Minister's personal power therefore became enormous—and he was clearly disposed to use it. On 21 April he sent Eisenhower a secret telegram which contained, in addition to a concrete proposal, an unveiled threat—

"In my opinion, the best would be that the three victorious powers who separated at Potsdam in 1945 should come together again . . . perhaps at Stockholm. If nothing can be arranged, I shall have to consider seriously a personal contact. . . ."

This was fighting talk. A "personal" approach by Churchill, direct to the Russians, was bound to have major international repercussions. In particular, it would suggest that a rift had developed in the Anglo-American relationship, and the Russians would have been bound to exploit this, not necessarily in ways beneficial to the West. There is no precise outline of what Churchill intended to say to the Russians at this juncture, although the documents make it clear that Germany was one of the most important subjects. But the telegram proves that Churchill was intent on a new line of approach.

Suspicious Grow



IT WAS AT ABOUT THIS TIME that Konrad Adenauer appears to have got wind of Churchill's intentions, and he was understandably greatly perturbed by them. He faced a crucial election where his foreign policy was bound to be one of the major issues. If the choice before the West German electorate were to be "national unity or Adenauer", he could not be certain of winning—and Churchill might well ensure that it was precisely this choice that materialised.

Adenauer's response was to fly to America in order to mobilise the support of the White House for his policy. Support was forthcoming and generous. He then made

certain that Downing Street knew that the US was behind him and approved his basic proposition—that the integration of West Germany into the Western Alliance system had to take precedence over reunification, even if it made reunification impossible. On Adenauer's return from America, Sir Frank Roberts prepared a full report for Churchill on 20 April 1953:

“Adenauer confirmed that his reception in America had been most encouraging both on the official and on the popular side. He asked me to let the Prime Minister know that it was his firm conviction that despite appearances, the new President knew what he was doing and had his ship well under control. He had, however, been shocked to find the strength of popular sentiment behind Senator McCarthy. The United States Commissioner Mr McCloy confirmed that Adenauer's visit had been a great success.”

Adenauer's possibly insincere state of shock at the popular appeal of McCarthyism served as an implied warning to Churchill: any attempt by the British Prime Minister to “go it alone” would force Adenauer to play his anti-Communist card in America and possibly suggest that Churchill was being duped by the Kremlin.

TWO DAYS LATER, Dr Adenauer dispatched the German Counsellor at the West German Embassy in London, Dr Rosen, to see the Foreign Office in order to maintain the pressure. Churchill's reported view that “conversations at the highest level were now appropriate” had caused the West German Chancellor to

“wonder whether there was any modification of our previous attitude towards Russian peace feelers.”

The Foreign Office gave a professional response, which was perhaps less reassuring than it was intended to be, although probably a fair statement of where British policy was at the time.

“There is certainly no change in our attitude. We continue firmly with our present policies looking carefully to see if Russian professions of peaceful intentions are matched by deeds.”

The Foreign Office understood that the “chief German anxiety was lest we were contemplating Four Power talks on Germany over the heads of the German Government.” Dr Rosen was informed that Sir Frank Roberts had already made it plain that “there was no question of our failing to keep the Chancellor informed if and when it were possible to reopen discussions on the future of Germany. . . .” In short,

² There were some signs that the Foreign Office, and particularly Frank Roberts, was personally committed to Dr Adenauer's standpoint—to an extent which suggests that even at this stage the Foreign Office was, for its own reasons, putting Adenauer's objections in the best possible light. Although the reasons for this were entirely respectable (for Churchill's plans were far-reaching and radical), the very great courtesy with which the Foreign Office treated Adenauer's case must have greatly encouraged him in his mission.

although nothing had happened so far, it might well happen soon, and Adenauer would be “informed” about what was happening although he would not be allowed to be a party to it.²

Adenauer was, however, not satisfied with what he learned. The British Prime Minister was not going to allow him to participate in his initiative, but the President might be more forthcoming. Once again, then, he turned to America for help, and once again it was forthcoming. On 25 April 1953 the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (who was in Paris), told Churchill that Eisenhower:

“felt it unwise to embark on the work of disarmament until the Soviet Government had passed some test of sincerity.”

He suggested an armistice in Korea and an agreement on Austria (both subsequently took place). Eisenhower sent an additional confirmation of his reluctance to go Churchill's way. On 27 April, marking it “TOP SECRET”, Eisenhower wrote:

“I feel we should not rush things too much with the Soviets. Premature action by us in that direction might have the effect of giving them an easy way out. . . .”

In diplomatic language, Eisenhower was telling Churchill to stop making a fool of himself—which is how both West Germany and America viewed the prospect of early talks with the Soviet Union.

ADENAUER CONTINUED TO exert pressure on Churchill. On 1 May he sent Herbert Blankenhorn, one of his most intimate advisors, to see Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, the British High Commissioner in Germany. The ostensible reason for the visit was a matter of diplomatic nicety. Adenauer wished to have some British guidance about what to say about the Soviet Union during his official visit to Britain (planned for 14-15 May), and “recognised that it was more difficult to discuss this in London than in America. . . .”

This meant that Adenauer knew the British would not wish to hear the same intensity of anti-Communism that had gone down so well in the USA. But Blankenhorn also wanted to have confirmation that reunification would not be discussed without his knowledge, and that it would not form the object of any secret East-West deal. Kirkpatrick told him he believed that:

“The Prime Minister is resolved not to sell Germany. On the other hand, it was most important to avoid any language in England which could be regarded as provocative to the Russians or impeding the chances of any accommodation on outstanding issues. . . .”

Once again, the chances are that Adenauer was not greatly reassured. It was clear that something was afoot which would inevitably involve the future of Germany.

Dream or Delusion



THE INTENSE SPECULATION in Bonn was probably slightly lessened by the news that the British, French, and Americans had decided to precede a Four-Power conference by a Three-Power meeting scheduled to be held in Bermuda in July. But in order to have a further go at inhibiting Churchill,

Adenauer hit upon a new tactic. On 29 May 1953, the Bonn Government produced a memorandum on German reunification which contained clauses giving a unified German state the right to belong to NATO and rejected "the Oder-Neisse line" as the Eastern frontier for Germany. Both these items were obviously aimed against the Soviet Union which was bound to reject them; and Adenauer continued to press for the ratification of the European Defence Community and to contrast his plan for a westernised Federal Republic with the plans of unnamed others for a "neutralised and isolated Germany." "The German way", he wrote, must "lead to Europe, not to national isolation." On 10 June the *Bundestag* passed a resolution based on this memorandum, and Adenauer showed once again that his diplomatic skills were indeed of Bismarck's order.

Churchill appears to have been distinctly unimpressed by Adenauer's tactics. Adenauer had decided to dispatch Blankenhorn to Washington with a letter to Dulles, in which Adenauer insisted that the *Bundestag* Declaration should form the basis of talks with the Soviet Union whether Adenauer was to attend them or not. When Churchill received intelligence of Blankenhorn's mission he wrote a short but succinct minute:

"But we won the War, did we not? Unconditional surrender. . . ."

Although Churchill clearly believed Adenauer had a right to express his viewpoint, he did not believe the Allies were obliged to accept it. The West German Chancellor would have to do as he was told: the Germans had lost the War, and had surrendered unconditionally.

It was at this stage that Churchill appears to have produced the draft of his grand strategy for reaching an accommodation with the Soviet Union. It was based on the fundamental assumption that a new leadership in the Kremlin presented the West with an opportunity it could not afford to miss. If there was to be a lessening in tension, Germany and "the German question" constituted one of the most critical areas. So strong was Churchill's desire to have a new beginning in East-West relations that he was fully prepared, despite the reassuring noises emanating from the Foreign Office, to sacrifice a West Germany led by Dr Konrad Adenauer for a new, reunified Germany led by someone else.

There can be no doubt that Churchill's strategy for 1953-54 is surprising. Had he not described Adenauer as someone "who may be deemed the wisest German statesman since

Bismarck"? Or had he, by this careful formulation, avoided saying that he himself believed him to be so? In any case, by ditching Adenauer Britain and the West would be taking an enormous risk. A West Germany fully integrated into the Western Alliance system could be thought to serve British interests far more closely than a neutralised and reunified Germany. Secondly, on the face of it, it was impossible to conceive of any German political leader who had been more forthcoming in his dealings with the West. Although Erich Ollenhauer (then, as Dr Schumacher's successor, the *SPD* chief), and some of his advisors (notably his chief aide Fritz Heine) were totally committed to the West (in particular to Britain, for which they had worked during World War II while in exile in London), this was not true of many other leaders and members of the *SPD* which would almost certainly be the main beneficiary of Churchill's plan.

But in another sense, it should not be so surprising after all, Churchill had been the Conservative leader most closely associated with the moves to bring the Soviet Union into the Second World War in 1940 and 1941. It had been Churchill more than anyone else who accepted that only by allying itself with Stalin did the West stand any real chance of defeating Hitler; and, as the record shows, Churchill was ready to go to great lengths in order to cooperate with the Kremlin. Furthermore there were deemed to be practical reasons for believing that the scuttling of Adenauer's Bonn Republic would not, in fact, rebound in Moscow's favour, however much Adenauer protested that it would.

There will be those who may come to the conclusion that Churchill's aims were a further indication of his accelerating mental and physical decline, the unpredictable inspirations of an old man, a declining Prime Minister, a senile party leader. Lord Moran's diaries provide much evidence of Churchill's parlous condition in the early summer of 1953 which culminated in the massive stroke he suffered in the night of 23 June. Churchill was increasingly prone to depression, musing on "black velvet" (his private word for death) and the need for peace, and then bursting into tears. He was haunted by strange dreams—that a large woman had become President of the United States, that he had little boxes with bombs in them which he used to blow up the Bolshevik leaders. But, equally, such evidence should not be overrated. After all, Lord Moran mainly saw Churchill when he was unwell, and his stroke had not in fact killed him.

Changing Policies?

THE FULLEST STATEMENT of Churchill's aims at this time emerges from a long and thoughtful memorandum which he wrote on or before 6 July 1953, after he had suffered his stroke. This memorandum is not, in my own view, the mumblings of a senile world leader but a shrewd and realistic assessment of the alternatives facing British policy-makers confronted with the end of Stalin and his personal rule. Indeed, it would seem more legitimate to question Churchill's mental clarity at this time had he not produced such a memorandum. Above all, Churchill, unlike Adenauer or Eisenhower, seems to have understood that it

was at least arguable that by making early rearrangements with the new Kremlin leaders, they would be strengthening the hand of more moderate forces in the USSR: and that by rejecting all overtures they would only be giving support to the hard-liners.

Churchill did not believe that, in terms of security against further German aggression, there was much to choose between a Western Germany of 55 million inhabitants and a unified Germany of 70 millions. If the German issue could be defused, this would be most beneficial to East and West alike. Finally, and this is perhaps the crucial point, although it might not be Adenauer who led a reunified Germany, Churchill simply did not believe that it would be the Communists. His point of departure was the EDC and its likely failure (a correct prediction, as it turned out). Thus, whether anyone liked it or not, Germany's future place in world affairs would continue to be unsettled for the time being. Churchill was anxious to see a West German army play a key role in the defence of Europe. But this was not an end in itself. He hoped the French would ratify the EDC, but, if they refused:

"We should not hesitate to make a joint declaration with the United States that we would meet Russia in conference. If the US refuses, we should reserve our freedom. A friendly conversation between the USSR and Great Britain, even if isolated, would be watched with intense interest and hope, and might well lead to an easement in world tension. . . . Whatever happens about the EDC or NATO and however Adenauer fares at the elections, we shall have to face very soon the problem of German unity. Nothing will turn the German people from unity and Adenauer himself, though a loyal partisan of the EDC, is being forced every day to emphasise it more. However the election goes, all parties will be ardent for unity. This is surely coming upon us and coming all the quicker for a French desertion of EDC."

Churchill continued:

"We must face the fact that there will always be a 'German problem' and a 'Prussian Danger'. But I am of the opinion that a United Germany would not become allies of Soviet Russia. First, the character of the German people rises superior to the servile conditions of the Communist world. Second, they have had a potent object-lesson in the fate of the Eastern Zone. Third, the hatred which Hitler focussed upon Bolshevism is stony in German hearts. The eyes of Germany are turned against Soviet Russia in fear, hate and intellectual antagonism."

This judgment seems alert: the notion that a reunified Germany would drift into the Soviet sphere of influence was something Churchill could not believe. Provided the Russians really did extricate themselves from their Zone (admittedly rather a large provision, for it was by now a full-fledged East German "Democratic Republic"), the evidence certainly did suggest that the new German Reich would want to be an ally of the West.

But another matter had to be borne in mind. Churchill argued. If the West failed to act, the West German population might jettison its pro-Western sympathies, not least

because the USSR would be able to claim that it was not the West that had the true interests of Germany at heart.

"I am sure that in the next twenty years Germany will not join with Russia against the West or lose her moral association with the Free Powers. The Russians, however, have certain very powerful bribes to offer. First, the unity of the Eastern Zone after free elections [*sic*]. Second, a readjustment of frontiers at the expense of Poland. We shall need all our skill so to steer events that we may gain as much credit for any future advantage as do the Soviets. The Americans contemplate that in a war between the USA and the USSR, the Germans would make a firm and lasting alliance with the American people. What must not be forgotten by us is the safety of Russia against another Hitlerite invasion. The real solution, of course, is a real UNO where all are bound to aid the victim and attack the aggressive intruder. . . ."

Thus, for Churchill, German reunification was somehow on the political agenda whether or not anyone wished it. Even if Dr Adenauer did not aspire to unity, the German people did (his point about Adenauer "being forced" to emphasise reunification was well made). It could be offered by the West, or it could be offered by Russia; and if the Russians offered it first, the West would have no option but to follow. This is why Churchill argued that the initiative should be seized by the West.

SO ENTRENCHED was Churchill's view that the Foreign Office appears to have been embarrassed by it. Although further research would be needed to confirm this notion, there are a number of indications that it was anxious to quash the Prime Minister's plan. On 25 June 1953, Sir William Strang, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, attempted to produce what appears to be a reassuring *aide-memoire* for his colleagues:

"The Prime Minister is in no hurry for a Four Power meeting. He has digested a paper about the neutralisation of Germany and though he is still toying with the idea as a possible alternative policy if the EDC is rejected, he is still open to argument. . . ."

"Political wisdom is not all on one side", he concluded, suggesting, perhaps, that he reckoned Churchill was barking up a gum-tree. Anthony Nutting, a junior Foreign Office Minister, seems to have been an ally of the Foreign Office in this matter. He pointed out that German reunification was not something the British should try to press:

"German reunification is very much an internal issue for the Germans. It is on the prospect of a Four Power meeting that the SPD will base its campaign accusing Adenauer of not doing enough to get Germany reunified and doing too much to get Germany into the EDC and thus dividing the country more than ever."

Somewhat despairingly, however, Nutting concluded that all

they could do was "make reassuring noises as loudly as possible to Dr Adenauer. . . ."

Frank Roberts, for one, took this advice. On 5 June, in London, he gave lunch to the German Ambassador, Baron von Herwarth, and Dr Rosen, and presented them with "reassuring messages for the Chancellor." He listened with apparent sympathy to the West German complaint that they were:

"not so much worried about our policy or Anglo-American unity but about the effects on the German internal situation. . . . For the next three months, foreign policy must give precedence to internal policy. . . . The Chancellor could only continue his foreign policy if he won the elections [and] it was quite vital to him to show he was being fully consulted on all German issues which might be discussed with the Russians. . . ."

It was Frank Roberts, too, who with his customary intellectual persistence tried to point out tactfully and firmly that Churchill's plans, if successful, would drive a coach-and-horses through existing arrangements:

"The policy of doing everything possible to help Adenauer win the elections is entirely inconsistent with any change-over to a policy of neutralisation as a result, say, of a Four Power meeting in the autumn. The first condition the Russians would make for an agreed German policy is the disappearance of Dr Adenauer and the European policies for which he stands. The German Socialists would be much more reliable and effective allies for a neutralisation policy although I have a feeling that if in power, they would pour a good deal of water in their wine. However, they are, perhaps, more pro-British than some of Dr Adenauer's allies and no one has ever suggested that we could not work with them. I am not, of course, advocating any such change in policy. As you know, I am firmly opposed to it. But it is surely only sensible at least to reflect at this stage upon what sort of Government we shall want in Germany if we have to carry out a different policy there. . . . I do not want the Foreign Office to be accused of lack of foresight if and when we are asked to turn over to a policy of neutralisation."

Sir William Strang wrote on the bottom of this paper: "We are still firmly for the EDC and Adenauer. . . ."

THIS IS NOT THE PLACE to ask whether the Foreign Office's attitude to German reunification was right or wrong, or, indeed, whether it was actually proper for it to "do everything possible to help Adenauer win the elections." If the *SPD* had got wind of this document, they would have been understandably less than pleased to learn that they were fighting some very formidable foes in London as well as in Bonn. A Socialist victory would have caused major changes in the development of the Federal Republic (particularly on the economic front) even if it had not produced a neutral and reunified Germany; and it was obviously something upon which Sir Frank Roberts, as a senior diplomat, was employed to have a view.

Dead End



CHURCHILL'S grand design came to nothing. There were a number of reasons for this. First, on 17 June 1953 (in the wake of the "panic and disarray" after Stalin's death) there was an uprising in East Germany and East Berlin, and the Soviet army put it down by force. This did much to destroy their political credibility as a reasonable negotiating

partner on the German question. Even here, however, there was an important discrepancy between the views of Churchill and the Foreign Office. When the FO issued a strong protest about the Soviet action, Churchill became furious.

"Is it [Churchill asked] suggested that the Soviet [*sic*] should have allowed the Eastern Zone to fall into anarchy and riot? I had the impression that they acted with considerable restraint in the face of mounting disorder."

The Red Army's action in the streets of East Berlin and Leipzig could be taken as confirmation of the Foreign Office view; as for Churchill's position, it could be argued that the uprising—*pace* "anarchy and riot"—was as much caused by Soviet zig-zag "liberalising" policies in East Germany as by quasi-Stalinist repression.

Secondly, Churchill's stroke forced him to surrender the personal rule which he had hitherto exercised on British policy; by the time he was sufficiently recovered Konrad Adenauer had been re-elected as *Bundeskanzler*, and changes in the Kremlin policy (and increases in its nuclear arsenal) made any fundamental change of direction by the West extremely hard to engineer. The "moment's precious chances" for a policy change had passed, and Churchill felt a keen sense of failure. On 7 December 1953, when the Bermuda meeting had finally taken place (it had been postponed on account of his stroke), Churchill complained to Eden that:

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"I can't find anything in this communiqué which shows the slightest desire for the success of the conference [on German reunification, to take place in early 1954] or for an easement in relations with Russia. We are going to gang up on them. . . . Many people would think we were deliberately riding for a fall. Perhaps we are."

Churchill's physician, Lord Moran, recalls in his memoirs a conversation during which Churchill told him of Eisenhower's declaration that "Russia was simply a whore who had changed her clothes but must still be driven from the streets" and said he had been powerless to oppose him. Churchill, Moran adds, "had been defeated by his own decay."

By 1954, as the newly available public records for that year reveal, even Churchill had come to accept the futility of pressing for a reunified Germany against the wishes of Washington and Bonn. To be sure, Dr Adenauer did not get everything his own way. At the beginning of 1954 he still tried to postpone the Four-Power meeting until after the ratification of the EDC by the French—which would, of course, have removed from the conference table the biggest incentive for the Russians to yield on the German question. But he knew that in this he would fail. As Frank Roberts was informed:

"Although the Chancellor has, in private, made no secret of his preference to avoid the Four Power Conference until after the EDC has been approved, the intense German interest in reunification should make it very difficult for him to appear to be obstructing a conference in any way. . . ."

Churchill did not abandon his dream of a major settlement with the USSR, but by early 1954 he realised that a reunified Germany would not constitute a part of it. Indeed, he went to some lengths to encourage Eden not to take the failure over Germany as a failure for the whole principle of an East-West understanding.

As far as German reunification was concerned, the failure of the 1954 Berlin Conference was a foregone conclusion. A reunified Germany and West German participation in the Western security system were held to be mutually incompatible alternatives and not part of the same process. The context in which any Soviet offer on Germany was to be taken was plain to the Foreign Office, as one of its minutes in January 1954 shows:

". . . the Russians have built up a most effective security system of their own in Eastern Europe. Their basic objective now is the withdrawal of the USA from Europe."

Thus, in turn, the failure of the Berlin Conference gave a green light to German rearmament and to the bringing of Dr Adenauer's Bonn Republic into the Western Alliance. In June 1954 Eisenhower and Churchill met in Washington, and their final communiqué made this explicit:

"It was agreed that the German Federal Republic should take its place as an equal partner in the Community of

Western nations where it can make its proper contribution to the defence of the Free World."

Dr Adenauer was plainly delighted with this, and he cabled the two leaders on 29 June that their proposal

"completely coincides with the concept of the Federal Government. I particularly want to thank you . . . for your affirmation . . . of the Federal Republic's place in the community of the Western nations where it can make its contribution to the defence of the Free World. This statement is in accordance with the ardent desire of the great majority of the German people. . . ."

That final sentence would be difficult to substantiate if it implied that Adenauer was speaking for the East as well as the West Germans. But his elation was well-founded, for he had achieved his aim.

AND WHAT IF CHURCHILL'S INITIATIVE had come off? Would the creation of a neutral and reunified Germany have served the world's interests better than a divided German nation? There is always some justification for arguing "Better the devil one knows. . . ." A reunified Germany would have injected further political uncertainty into an already dangerously uncertain world. Had that Germany been attracted, as Churchill probably correctly predicted, towards the West, Soviet anxieties would certainly have increased (if those anxieties had not, in the first place, subverted any move to prise loose their "Eastern Zone"). Had it swung the other way—a new Germany, falling under Muscovite sway—British policy-makers would have been confronted with an Iron Curtain on the Rhine. Yet if Churchill was right to realise that the division of Germany was only a provisional answer to the historic "German question", had he not over-estimated Britain's ability to produce a more lasting settlement? If he was right to argue that the views of the German people had to be taken into account, had he not failed to perceive that those views might not necessarily take an anti-Adenauer line? It is ironic that if the West Germans of today ever take to looking for a champion of reunification, they cannot invoke the spirit of Dr Adenauer as the symbol of reunification. For him Westernisation (and its immediate military security), not "the Reich" (which could be Finlandised), was the main post-War German priority.

Konrad Adenauer emerges from the events of 1953 as the real victor. He was, in truth, a diplomat of Bismarckian proportions, though his solution to the German question was less grandiose than the Iron Chancellor's. Furthermore, his particular solution, despite its difficulties, produced advantages both for the uncertain Bonn Republic and for the troubled West. It was a creditable historical achievement. Churchill's last political gambit in the "Great Game" has been all but forgotten.

John Gohorry

The Truth About the Past

In the days that money was money and men were men
a pound was a week's wages, but then again
sixpence would pay for a night out on the town;
you could fly to New York for half a crown.
The most beautiful books imaginable cost a penny
and as for bus and train fares, there weren't any.
You could travel (on foot) free for five hundred miles;
to go further afield, people used bicycles.

My pocket money was a halfpenny a year
and, being extravagant, I spent somewhere near
a quarter of that on toys and expensive things
—the rest I put carefully into my bank savings.
I bought a Cadillac when I was twelve
for a shilling, and pedalled it myself
at a hundred and sixty through the garage doors
in a loud red blur and a haze of exhaust vapours.

There were no televisions then, and a radio
was something for attentive listening to;
the man read the news in a bowler hat,
a pressed white shirt, and a clean cravat
so his voice would be dignified too, and quite formal.
Ties matching pyjamas were perfectly normal
(I wore one myself). Sometimes I stayed up late
until half-past seven, or rarely, ten to eight.

Houses then were not like our present poky affairs
—they had thousands of rooms, and vertical stairs
stretching up higher than you'd ever have guessed
possible, almost as high as Mount Everest.
Gardens were huge land-masses mapped
by intrepid explorers, continents wrapped
in this mystery of tulips, or that impenetrable
overgrowth, green, butterfly haunted, and vegetable.

Potatoes burst out of the earth like fat coins;
sunworshipping deckchair marrows varnished their loins
in the tropical heat; beans heaved, dangled and shook
to overweight bees bringing fresh insects to cook
in their scarlet ovens. Perpendicular rain
sluiced out of overblown thunderbags to drain
down the sheer cliffs of cabbagesides, daffodils
struck by lightning, sodden, drowned molehills.

Appetites were enormous with six cooked dishes
a day, and between meals sandwiches
thicker than haystacks layered with solid breeze-
blocks of butter, tomatoes and cucumber. Cheese-
burgers crowded with onions like an aircraft hanger
on Exhibition Day kept off the edge of hunger.