

PERSONAL



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From the Private Secretary

24 July 1990

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 16 July about the document published in the Independent on Sunday, and to reply. I know she will be very grateful for your book and will read it during the summer break.

The points in your letter are perfectly fair: and I can understand that, seen in black and white, some of the points in my note do not go down well in Germany. They were not, of course, supposed to be seen. One always faces a dilemma with this sort of occasion; the purpose is to produce a fair summary of the discussion, as any rapporteur at a conference or seminar does. One cannot include in the note things which were not said. Equally one does not attempt to produce a verbatim record, recording every point made and attributing it to a speaker. As regards the point in the very last sentence of your letter, I would refer you to the second part of the penultimate paragraph of my note, particularly the sentence: "We were also reminded that Anglo-German indoctrinism since the fall of Bismark had been injurious to Europe as a whole and must not be allowed to revive once more."

Personally I share your admiration and affection for Germans, having some modest knowledge of the language and having lived in Germany for a little over three years in the mid-1970s.

(CHARLES POWELL)

David Marsh, Esq.

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July 16th 1990

Dear Prime Minister,

Please allow me to share with you some of my thoughts upon reading Charles Powell's memo on the Germans drawn up after your March meeting at Chequers. The document was published, as you know, both in The Independent on Sunday and in Der Spiegel.

1. I realise that the document was not written for general release, and was meant to throw a light mainly on the historical rather than purely on the current perspectives relating to Germany. None the less, I feel it offers an imperfect guide to policy-making. In addition, publication in full in Germany's top news magazine, with a circulation of 1 million has, as you can imagine, added to the general cynicism here about Britain's policies towards Germany already kindled by last week's interview in The Spectator by Mr Ridley.

2. The prominence given to the Germans' negative traits suggests a somewhat imbalanced and prejudiced view of Germany and the Germans. Despite the memories of two world wars, this may not be the best starting point for policy. Certainly, the stated attributes - Angst etc - are present in "the German character", if one may use that generalisation. The memo exaggerates the negative qualities however by failing to note that opposite traits do co-exist - assertiveness is accompanied by a certain lack of self-confidence, for instance - and by ignoring completely the "good" characteristics. Thrift, precision, pride in doing a job well, capacity for hard work, organisational talent - virtues of which you, Prime Minister, are known personally to be very much in favour - are character traits which run through and influence German history, whether during the Third Reich, the post-war recovery, or the present drive to reunification.



3. Some of the observations in the memo about present-day Germany are false. The tendency for Germans to triumph about reunification or "to take the credit for unification themselves" is in fact not very high. Apart from the revelry over Germany's World Cup victory, there have been no flags out on West German streets. In utterances by ordinary people or by political leaders such as Mr Kohl, it is above all Mr Gorbachev who gets the credit for making unity possible. It is wrong to suggest that the Germans have been unworried about Mr Gorbachev's position vis-a-vis East Germany. Far from proposing any move to "just shove the Russian troops out", the Bundeskanzleramt has been stressing for several months the need for a three to four year transition period for removing the Soviet troops. This was formalised in Mr Kohl's agreement with Mr Gorbachev today.

4. The reference in the Conclusion about British post-war policies on a united Germany is a central point, made belatedly and rather grudgingly. One awkward characteristic which goes unremarked in the memo is the Germans' attachment to legalisms. They remember that Britain and the other western powers gave binding support to a united Germany "with a liberal-democratic constitution...integrated within the European community" in the Deutschlandvertrag of 1955. Your government has on occasion acted as if this undertaking was valid only at a time when unification was plainly impossible.

5. I write, in a personal capacity, as a journalist who has recently published a book on Germany. I argue that unification - for which hardly anyone was prepared - will bring pitfalls as well as opportunities, both in Germany and abroad. Since you obviously have a great and growing interest in the subject, I enclose a copy, in the hope that you will have time to read it.

6. I would add that my insight into the paradoxical ways of Germany has been heightened by the fact that my wife is German. We met in Brighton (my home town) in 1971 while she was on a language course very similar to the ones attended by the German students who were attacked in the town recently after the England v. Germany football match. It is disappointing that so much anti-German prejudice persists in England. It would be tragic if, just at the time when barriers are coming down between East and West, such resentment should flare up again.

With best wishes,

David Marsh

David Marsh
Bonn Correspondent