

Background of the Publication

Holly McElrea, University of Winnipeg

Karen Brglez, University of Winnipeg

This publication was born out of a seminar course for undergraduate and graduate students from the History department at the University of Winnipeg. The seminar was directed by Dr. Alexander von Plato, recipient of the 2012 John G. Diefenbaker award. Von Plato is a prominent historian in the field of oral history and has extensively researched Cold War politics concerning German unification. The seminar was intended to examine the international diplomacy behind German unification and its subsequent influence on the end of the Cold War. The first half of the seminar focused on the role of the major powers involved in the direct diplomacy, which included Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, and East and West Germany. Drawing from a vast selection of secondary scholarly sources available, the students were able to trace the trajectory of the international diplomacy during this period.¹ The second half of the course was devoted to determining whether Canada played a role in the German process and accessing the level of its political involvement at the end of the Cold War. The role of the “middle powers” in the international diplomacy of German reunification has been neglected in historical scholarship. In addition, little has been written on Canadian history at the end of the Cold War forcing the students of the seminar to examine archival sources, government documents, and conducting oral history interviews in order to gain insight into Canada’s role during this period. By using a wide variety of sources the students were able to attain an understanding of the various political maneuvers of the time.

The primary research for this publication includes a combination of both written and oral sources. The first half of the seminar utilized von Plato’s personal collection of oral history interviews and documents from his own historical research made with high-ranking diplomats. Some of the interviews that were consulted for this study included (former): United States (U.S.) President, George H. W. Bush, U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, U.S. Chief of Internal Ministry, Brent Scowcroft, U.S. National Security Councillor, Condoleezza Rice, advisor to Margaret Thatcher, Charles Powell, advisor to François Mitterrand, Jacques Attali, and advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev, Anatoliy Cernaev. Drawing

¹ A number of texts provided the basis for our understanding of the political events of the late 1980s. These included Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

from their knowledge on the subject, the interviewees provided an analysis of the end of the Cold War from their respective positions. For the Canadian component of the seminar, student's examined published documents from the National Archives of Canada; dignitary speeches made by Canadian politicians, and issued government reports on the situation in the Soviet Union and the Germanies throughout 1990.

Since many of the documents within the Canadian Federal Archives are still closed to the public at this point, oral history interviews became a large component in the Canadian research portion of this publication. Before the student's conducted their interviews, as a seminar they analyzed the methods, problems, and possibilities that are apparent in the discipline of oral history. Oral history is the recording of an individual's personal recollections. However, the main critique of oral history is the subjective nature of personal memory. Yet oral historians argue that all material forms of individual memory are subjective. Historians constantly deal with memory embodied in material form, but oral historians have the privilege of assessing how their participants shape their memories, categorize them, or silence others. This knowledge adds an intriguing element to the historical process that had previously been ignored in historical study. Once a basis in the methods of oral history had been established, the students were able to conduct and interpret interviews for the purposes of this study.

The students from the seminar in conjunction with von Plato conducted seven interviews with Canadian politicians to examine Canada's role at the end of the Cold War. Interviews were made with (former): Foreign Minister of Canada Lloyd Axworthy, member of the Canadian House of Commons Bill Blaikie, Canadian Deputy Minister of National Defense Robert Fowler, Canadian Ambassador to Germany Paul Heinbecker, Canadian Ambassador to the Russian Federation Jeremy Kinsman, Canadian Ambassador to Bogotá and Bonn Gaetan Lavertu, and DFAIT official (who served as Director General of the U.S. Relations Bureau) John Noble. The interviewees were not only helpful in a time when files remain classified, but they also provided the possibility to analyze the experience of the people involved: their motives and self-explanations, their reasons for decisions, their judgments of other politicians, their networks, as well as their religious and personal backgrounds. When interpreting the interviews, the student's also took into consideration that interviewing politicians holds some unique challenges. Politicians have extensive experience answering questions whether personal or political, and often have the ability to quickly shape their answers in a form that is self-benefitting or self-correcting.

Questions

The following essays that make up this publication are divided into two sections. The first part of this publication attempts to explain the complex transformation process of German unification that involved several states and their respective interests. The importance of the civil movements, the role of the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, West and East Germany will be presented, as well as the difficulties during the international negotiations. The second part of the publication addresses the role of Canada as a middle power and its part in the German unification process and the subsequent end of the Cold War.

Some questions that will be raised:

- Did the detente policies of former Prime Minister Trudeau have any importance for the end of the Cold War?
- Was there an alternative to the extension of NATO to the East? Was there a possibility of a new alliance instead of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty which would include the North Americas and the Soviet Union?
- What was Canada's role in the process? Was Canada a promoter of the unification of Germany under the roof of NATO and the extension of the alliance to the East? Were there any discussions within the House of Commons or even in the Committee for Foreign Affairs about new security architecture in Europe and the Military Alliances?
- Did Canada want to play a bigger role in the "Two plus Four" process? Did they want more of a role than just being a "housekeeper" at the Ottawa Open Skies Conference at the beginning of February 1990 as one of our interviewees, Robert Fowler, formulated?
- Did Canada try to get closer contact as one of the leading middle powers to others like Italy or the Netherlands?
- Was the government of Brian Mulroney an uncritical supporter of the US-German connection?
- Did Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who usually supported Chancellor Kohl try to convince him to confirm the Polish-German border before unification? What was the role of immigrant organizations in Canada, in this case, of the Polish and Ukrainian immigrant organizations?
- How did our interviews judge the various politicians in Canada, the United States and Europe?
- Was there a special connection between Canada and Gorbachev? What was the influence of one of his main advisors, Alexander Jakovlev, who had been the Soviet ambassador to Canada, on Gorbachev's thinking and policies?

- Was the expansion of NATO up to the boundary of the Soviet Union, an exclusion of Russia from Europe? Was Bush's strategy from the beginning to strengthen American dominance in Europe?

We will try to answer these questions as they provide the framework to offer an informative guide to German unification, the end of the Cold War, and Canada's special role in the complex and multifaceted process.