

*"In the name of the German people":
The political language of Konrad Adenauer & German-
Jewish relations after World War II*

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Following the collapse of the Third Reich and the end of the Second World War, Germany was a war-torn country whose most recent past left it with great internal and economic hardship, which was compounded by the responsibility to repair the damages brought upon other nations and peoples during the German-waged war. As the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer had at hand the task of addressing and making amends for that past. His speeches were to be the voice of the new West Germany, and his use of particular language in various settings set the stage for Germany's own memory of (and removal from) the Nazi period, helping to set the terms by which West Germany's place would be understood in the postwar international arena.

His speeches, like much postwar political discourse, were tailored specifically to appeal to the interests of each of the audiences he had to address, and he used them to finesse Germany's relations with other countries and to make promises on all sides regarding restitution and rebuilding following the war. Driven in large part by an abhorrence of the Soviet East and a desire to integrate Germany into the West, Adenauer exploited East-West relations to a certain extent as the Cold War intensified, chiefly in order to attain his goal of closer ties with the West, and to maneuver West Germany into a more prominent political position both within Europe and on the global stage.

Political Background

Adenauer's political career had been interrupted when the Nazi party came to power, and he was dismissed from his position as President of the Prussian State Council by the Nazi leadership. Following his arrest by the Gestapo in 1934, Adenauer left the political scene and became a "passive opponent of Hitler's tyranny"¹ rather than a martyr. However, at the end of the war, his removal from politics became a major political advantage to him. His own suffering during the war gave him a certain moral stature as the head of the country, and that he had opposed the Nazis made him an acceptable leader to the occupying Allied forces. Elected chancellor in 1949, he emphasized that it was to be a priority of the government to bring Germany to terms with the past, and to reintegrate Germany into the Western world. He denounced the Soviet Union and its disrespect for the value of personal freedom, and sought to distance West Germany as much as possible from their laws and practices, which he asserted were "diametrically opposed to the Christian view of the value and dignity of the individual."²

Himself devoutly Roman Catholic, Adenauer sought a Western Christian ideology-based agenda, and claimed as one of his deepest personal beliefs that the dignity and equality of every human being should be of the highest priority, particularly in the process of lawmaking in the new West Germany, and the power of

¹ Weber & Kowert, "Language, Rules, and Order." In Debrix, *Language, Agency, and Politics*, 202

² Adenauer, "Hope for Europe," August 28, 1948. Stackelberg, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 395

the state should not be extended at the expense of personal liberty.³ According to Adenauer, "respect for the dignity of man was thoroughly destroyed"⁴ under National Socialism, and the Christian Democratic Union under his leadership purportedly wished to restore the law around respect for man regardless of race, denomination, origin, or religion. In essence, the goal in the postwar era would be to deal with the past, as well as to ensure that Nazism would not return to postwar West Germany.

Adenauer's use of certain language when discussing politics and plans for the future effectively satisfied the demands of his interest groups, but in reality, while he may have sincerely believed in many of his initiatives, some of his promises to different groups were little more than rhetorical statements intended to legitimate and garner support for Germany, for his government, or for his party. While he does not appear to have lied outright, he did sometimes make inflated statements or promise more than could have been delivered in order to satisfy an interest group.

In many of his speeches as chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, Adenauer had already discussed his intention for Germany to make amends for the past. In particular, when the Federal Republic was to receive its autonomy following the Allied occupation, Adenauer had to show the Allies that Germany was committed to a democratic path for the future, one which renounced the National Socialist past and would fit into the Western idea of democracy. He faulted a "materialist, collectivist,

³ Weber & Kowert, 202

⁴ Adenauer, "Konrad Adenauer's first interview," Nov. 11, 1949. Vogel, *The German Path to Israel*, 17

anti-Christian ideology”⁵ for the rise of National Socialism, thereby exonerating conservatives and Christians, all the while appealing to the West with plans for democracy. Yet he was also determined to avoid the sort of “exaggerated liberalism”⁶ which, in his opinion, had been primarily responsible for the fall of the Weimar Republic. His plan for democracy in Germany was for a more controlled sort than that which had existed in the Weimar Republic between the two World Wars, which he likened to near anarchy and which the new Germany could not afford to risk.

He was consistent throughout his speeches in emphasizing the new political order in Germany and its intentions. Much of his political agenda was expressed through “promises regarding future action”⁷ to his many domestic and international interest groups, but rarely were these promises described in more concrete terms. As a politician, Adenauer attempted to make some concessions to everyone who wanted something from the government, and quite often this resulted in contradiction. He could not possibly have carried out all of his proposed plans, and it is interesting that, with such a careful international eye on Germany, he was successful in leading the country out of its postwar collapse and maintaining some level of domestic and international support for his government.

⁵ Stackelberg, on Adenauer’s “Hope for Europe” speech, 394

⁶ Adenauer, address to Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, April 11, 1953. *Journey to America*, 79

⁷ Weber & Kowert, 213

Adenauer's Audiences

From the very beginning of the postwar period, when referring to the Nazi past, many Germans did so in such a way as to remove themselves from having been personally responsible for its horrors, and competing pasts of victimization pervaded public policy debates in the early Federal Republic.⁸ A nation full of victims themselves, many were not prepared or willing to accept guilt for crimes in which they had not participated firsthand. That crimes had been committed "in the name of the German people" by a criminal government was the argument also adopted by those in power, and this very careful phrase became a trope of public discourse in the early postwar years and throughout the Adenauer era. Adenauer and his government, and eventually many others in the public sphere, used this specific phrasing in speeches and discussions over the course of the next several years, when addressing German responsibility for the actions of National Socialism during the war.

When speaking of the past, Adenauer condemned the origins and actions of the Third Reich and laid out a new political philosophy for Germany, "based on the spiritual principles developed by Western Christianity," and opposed to the "collectivist idea" of communism and what he saw as the worship and misuse of power in the Soviet East.⁹ By appealing to the traditional spiritual values of the West and renouncing communism and the Nazi past, Adenauer attempted to distance West

⁸ Moeller, "Remembering the War in a Nation of Victims." In Schissler, *The Miracle Years*, 85-86

⁹ Adenauer, "Hope for Europe." Stackelberg, 395

Germany from the Soviet influence in the East, and to facilitate the West's continued cooperation with and support of the Federal Republic as the East-West tensions of the Cold War deepened.

Yet it is important to realize that none of his audiences existed in a vacuum; all of his speeches could fall on the ears of any or all of his interest groups. It was therefore important, in order to maintain a certain level of approval on all sides, that he sound as unbiased as possible, unambiguous in his intent, and at the same time attempt to satisfy everyone's demands. Because he could not have committed to any one position without offending or angering one of the concerned groups, there are contradictions in his speeches and politics, and he was often criticized for his "feeble" and "weak" statements regarding the National Socialist past.¹⁰

In a speech made to the CDU in August 1948,¹¹ Adenauer addressed the Christian purposes of his party, and stressed the importance of personal freedom and the dignity of the individual as central to the Christian ideology to be pursued in postwar Germany. His interpretation in this speech of the history and future of National Socialist thought provides an excellent example of his ability to appeal to at least some of the interests of all of his audiences simultaneously. He does not, however,

¹⁰ Here, the words of Kurt Schuhmacher, leader of the Social Democratic fraction in the Bundestag, who rejected what he considered Adenauer's inadequate commitment to perpetuating a clear understanding of the reality of the crimes of National Socialism. Herf, 273

¹¹ Adenauer, "Hope for Europe." Stackelberg, 394

make any actual promises, and the overall tone of the speech remains sufficiently general and removed, so that he could appease everyone without being contradictory.

For example, Adenauer's admission here of past German guilt starkly contrasted with the denial of any such responsibility by Soviet-controlled East Germany, whose communist government rejected all claims that they had taken part in National Socialism. This cast a more favorable light on the Federal Republic in the eyes of the West. In addition, although Adenauer referenced the crimes of National Socialism, nowhere in this early postwar speech did he actually place blame for the horrors of that period. Through his careful choice of words, he managed to avoid charging the Germans, the current government, or his party for those atrocities, yet admitted that these needed to be rectified. That he was able to accept responsibility for these crimes on behalf of Germany—without attributing any actual blame to Germans—gained him the support of his international audiences as well as his own constituents.

Adenauer also described the forced partitioning of Germany and the Soviet abuse of power as damaging factors in Germany's postwar efforts, both of which had caused great German suffering in the East. He thus struck a note of German victimization at the hands of the Soviets, which would hit closest to home for his German audience. In this sort of speech, it is quite clear that he already knew the groups he had to be addressing very early in his postwar political career. Therefore, while he made no clear statements on any particular action to be taken in their favors,

he appealed to each group he identified as crucial somehow, even within this brief speech.

Israel & Reparations: Political Motivation

Following the War and the occupation period, one of the most important and contentious issues facing the new German government was the issue of making amends to the victims of National Socialism, especially its Jewish victims, and the majority of Adenauer's government agreed that this should be a priority. Relations with the new state of Israel and the issue of reparations to Jewish victims were also to be critical parts of Adenauer's international political maneuvering, particularly because the Western Allies had supported the creation of the new Jewish state.

In his first interview as Chancellor, interviewer Karl Marx asked Adenauer about compensation for the "wrong done in the name of the German people."¹² Then editor of the *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland*, it is interesting that Marx should have used this particular phrasing, as if, in a way, exculpating the German people from personal participation in or accountability for the Nazi crimes. In reality, it appears that this phrase had, at this point, already caught on as a conventional way of referring to the past. Adenauer, of course, answered that the Germans were "resolved to make

¹² Karl Marx, "Konrad Adenauer's first interview." Vogel, 17

good the wrongs done to the Jews in their name by a criminal regime.”¹³ In this purposely passive construction, employed by all sides, no criminals were named, and the vast majority of Germans were thereby symbolically pardoned from any firsthand guilt in the “unspeakable crimes”¹⁴ committed under National Socialism.

This apparent removal of some level of guilt from the German conscience also paved the road to discussions on reparations to the new Jewish state of Israel as the most appropriate form of amends that could be offered. Adenauer spoke of this plan for restitution differently to his various audiences—specifically, to Israel and his Jewish audiences, to the German citizens, to the German government, and to the West. Met with little domestic support (indeed, often considerable opposition) but significant international support for them, he framed his objectives varyingly to make them sound like the most necessary step for everyone, obligatory for some reasons, advantageous for others. He understood the significance of the gesture of reparations for the image of Germany in the world; yet in his speeches, he was careful exactly how he referred to the reasoning for them, while not taking away from the necessity of or the motivation driving them.

More often than not, Adenauer and his government officials spoke about the crimes of the Third Reich in the passive voice. There was little alteration in the phrasing: unspeakable crimes had been committed “in the name of the German

¹³ Adenauer, *ibid*, 17

¹⁴ Adenauer, German Diet session of September 27, 1951. Vogel, 33

people,"¹⁵ but rarely were any criminals actually named. Over the course of several years, this phrasing became extremely commonplace in many circles when discussing the past and the responsibility of Germany to make amends for it. Most people seemed to be of the understanding that those currently in power in Germany were not the same as those who had been responsible for the crimes of the past. This particular phrasing seems to have allowed the blame to still be on the Germans, but abstractly enough so that German citizens did not feel personally vilified by their government or by other sides. Yet as Moeller has pointed out, the chancellor nonetheless left no doubt that West Germany would need to confront the claims of Jewish victims.¹⁶

However, while his speeches and promises regarding this matter often seem impressive at surface level, closer analysis shows many to be internally contradictory and sometimes ambiguous, and there are inconsistencies across speeches he made to different audiences. It is therefore difficult to know exactly what his intentions were, though it is probable that he was attempting to gain a sense of legitimacy for Germany and establish power for the Christian Democratic Union. While it is likely he believed that Germany was morally obligated to provide restitution to the victims of National Socialism, the discourse surrounding this issue in particular was extremely delicate, so it had to be approached very cautiously when speaking to the public. At the time, he

¹⁵ Adenauer, *ibid*, 33

¹⁶ Moeller/Schissler, 86

was apparently able to sufficiently appease all sides with promises of future action in everyone's favor.

Relations with Israel

The Jewish state of Israel had been established in 1948 with significant backing from the West, and had already, since the end of the war, become a haven for millions of surviving Jewish refugees from Germany and elsewhere in Europe. This overflow of people became a severe economic strain on the country, and initial reparations were intended to help alleviate some of that pressure. That this state represented the people most damaged by the actions of Nazism made it seem appropriate for the German government to offer reparations to Israel first, as an attempt to extend an offering of peace and penitence, in order to "make good the wrong done to the Jews" in the name of the German people.¹⁷

In his 1949 interview with Karl Marx, Adenauer assured him that "[m]oral reparations are part of our reconstruction as a state under the rule of law."¹⁸ That is, he emphasized that the Germans felt morally compelled to right the wrongs of the past, which is a statement he would clearly not have stressed when speaking to his constituents about the same issue. Here, he highlighted that it would be written into the law of the Federal Republic that special care be given to the Jewish population in

¹⁷ Adenauer, "Konrad Adenauer's first interview." Vogel, 18

¹⁸ Adenauer, *ibid*, 17

particular, so as to safeguard their political and individual rights and avoid the sort of large-scale persecution that had happened under National Socialism. Reparations to Israel would not take the place of individual reparations for those affected, but rather would serve as a gesture of penitence and respect from Germany to Jews internationally.

According to Adenauer, racial persecution of the Jewish people as a nation had been written into the doctrine of the German government under National Socialism, and this sort of policy had to be confronted and dealt with in the politics of the new government. The establishment of the Jewish state following the war made the Israeli government, according to some, the only authority that should be considered legitimately able to prosecute a claim for reparations.¹⁹ However, Germany also faced severe economic hardship, and was hardly able to afford the rebuilding efforts and to support the millions of refugees and expellees settled at the end of the war, so no one knew how much the country could be expected to pay in reparations.

In March 1951, the Israeli government directed a note to the four occupying powers in Germany, demanding reparation payments from both the Allied and Soviet zones, to be used for resettling the thousands of Jewish refugees who had settled in Israel. The note made very clear that material reparations could never atone for the

¹⁹ Hendrik van Dam, Secretary General of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, in a report submitted to the Israeli Finance Ministry in 1950. Vogel, 23

guilt of "the entire German people;"²⁰ no amount of indemnity could "make good the destroyed human lives"²¹ of this chapter of history.

This note went virtually ignored by the Soviet zone of Germany, a statement which would have been seen by the West as an indication that the government of the Soviet Union was not accepting that responsibility or willing cooperate with the new Jewish state of Israel. In contrast, Adenauer brought these demands to his government later in the year, in an address to the German Diet on September 27, 1951, a speech which became a milestone in postwar German-Jewish relations. Adenauer understood that more would be demanded of Germany than could be provided, and said in his speech that the federal government was "prepared, jointly with representatives of Jewry and the State of Israel ... to bring about a solution of the material indemnity problem, thus easing the way to the spiritual settlement of infinite suffering."²² This speech was an attempt, not to gain support for the measures to be taken, but to announce them, to explain their necessity, and to begin to lay the basic political groundwork for putting them in place. Adenauer addressed the concerns put forth in the note from Israel to the occupying powers, including that no amount of monetary compensation could ever make up for the wrongs endured by the Jews under National Socialism.

²⁰ Quoted from the note of the Israeli Government, March 12, 1951. Vogel, 27

²¹ *ibid*, 30

²² Adenauer, German Diet session of September 27, 1951. Vogel, 33

Addressing German Citizens

Despite his best intentions with regards to making amends for the past, when speaking to his German constituents, Adenauer rarely discussed reparations to Israel in terms of the extent of suffering brought upon them as a people. While this was clear from several of his other speeches regarding the matter of Israel, speaking to the Germans about their own guilt as a nation would have garnered no support for such a measure. Germany itself was home to many victims of other war-related hardship, so charging them in the victimization of another population would not have been received well. This is not to say that the Germans refused to acknowledge the past—as Moeller has put it, “remembering selectively was not the same as forgetting.”²³

However, in describing the path for the future, Adenauer had to take into account that his constituents were suffering in their own country, and he had to consider their needs and demands when making policies that would affect them. Particularly where it concerned assignment of guilt and the issue of the unfair treatment of Germans, he could not continually maintain a positive attitude toward the West. Although he expressed gratitude to the United States and the Allies for supplying provisions to Germans following the war,²⁴ he also faulted them for the suffering brought upon Germans through the denazification processes.²⁵ It is a significant

²³ Moeller/Schissler, 86

²⁴ Adenauer, speech at the Petersberg Ceremonies. Schweitzer, 22

²⁵ Adenauer, inaugural speech in the Bundestag, September 20, 1949. Stackelberg, 397

contradiction within his discourse that he often spoke highly of America and thanked them for their efforts when he was speaking to a sympathetic audience, yet he sharply criticized America for its failures in adequately meeting the needs of Germany when speaking to his constituents.

Adenauer also made a clear distinction between the “real” war criminals and the “condemned soldiers” who, he asserted, had really only been guilty of following orders, and argued that the Germans who had been “seduced” by Hitler and his party were in no way responsible for the crimes their government had committed. As Frei has noted, whether or not Adenauer himself believed in this distinction guilty is unclear,²⁶ but it provided him with an excellent opportunity for gaining the support of his domestic interest groups. In a way absolving most Germans of guilt, Adenauer could grant his government legitimacy in the eyes of many citizens of the new Republic. The government rejected the idea of “collective guilt,” that all Germans were to blame for the crimes of the National Socialist government. Most were satisfied with the promise that those at fault would be brought to justice, and were otherwise content to move on.

Moeller argues that in the early 1950s, few West Germans denied the guilt of their previous government for the war crimes in question, and were willing to acknowledge the horrors of what Adenauer called the “saddest chapter” in their

²⁶ Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past*, 307

history.²⁷ However, the passive structure of the phrase “crimes were committed in the name of the German people” allowed them to at once agree that those crimes had been committed and that someone needed to be made responsible for them, but also to pardon themselves from guilt for those crimes. This allowed the population to face and make their peace with the past to some degree.

Following the note from the Israeli government demanding reparation payments, the speech in response to it in September 1951 was made with the purpose of promising restitution to Israel, as well as explaining the moral obligation thereof to his government. However, while this speech may not have been intended to obtain greater support for the reparations, he was still speaking to a German audience. Even here, when responding directly to the request from Israel, he still stressed that the “majority of Germans abominated the crimes committed against the Jews, and did not participate in them,”²⁸ in direct contradiction to the statement in the Israel note. He had already rejected the notion of collective guilt, and he once again mentioned here that these were “committed in the name of the German people.” However, particularly in this speech, he seemed to bury these statements within the larger promises of moral and material indemnity to be paid to Jewish fugitives and to the state of Israel itself, as if still trying to appeal to his German audience when making promises to Israel. He was therefore

²⁷ Moeller/Schissler, 83; Adenauer quoted in Moeller from *Verhandlungen des deutschen Bundestags*, March 4, 1953.

²⁸ Adenauer, German Diet session of September 27, 1951. Vogel, 33

able to do this on behalf of the German government, while also making sure not to expressly incriminate the German population.

German Government & CDU

When seeking support in his government for the reparations to Israel, Adenauer had to take into account that he was still speaking to German citizens, and was still quite careful in phrasing the responsibility of the Germans to repair what had been broken. However, he could not fail to mention that this liability did fall on the shoulders of some German citizens, many of whom were not only guilty, but who also became quite rich as a result of their participation.²⁹ They had not disappeared after the war; they were still in society, and these, he asserted, were criminals who needed to be prosecuted. But their crimes still rested on the conscience of Germany, and it was the assignment of the new federal government to make amends for these wrongs.

Yet to this audience, he had to find a new angle of appeal beyond simply stressing a moral obligation. Instead, he generally focused on the more crucial public issues of economics and political consequence, in order to maintain his party's and his government's favor and gain support for his political initiatives. The issue of reparations to Israel played a large role in Adenauer's strategy to appeal to the West,

²⁹ Adenauer, address to CDU Party Committee, September 6, 1952. Stackelberg, 400

but without the support of his government, the proposal would not go far, so he had to convince his party that it was necessary to them personally.

In his interview with Karl Marx and in the period immediately following that meeting, Adenauer put forward initial amounts for reparations to help Israel with the overflow of refugees and the costs of rebuilding. Although clearly not attempting in this particular interview to win over his party (Marx was editor of a Jewish newspaper), such proposals cannot be made independent of the rest of the government, and it was evident that these had been discussed beforehand. In response to the proposals from Adenauer, a top foreign policy associate on his staff reported on his conversations with Adenauer in October 1949:

[T]he new German state could regain confidence, reputation, and credibility in the world only if the Federal Government in the Diet, in a freely decided act of will, disavowed the past and contributed through impressive reparation payments to the relief of the incredible extent of distress suffered, helping those who had lost everything to build up a new livelihood. We were aware that such an act of will could not undo the unspeakable cruelties committed *in the name of the German people* and the resulting infinite suffering in the past.³⁰ [emphasis added]

When reparations talks began with Israel in 1950, the German delegation was not greeted warmly by the Israeli parliament. Many Jews at that time, including those present at the Israeli parliament meeting, did not feel that the reparations should be strictly economic, but also moral in nature. Many expressed concern that Germany expected to reduce their guilt in the matter by way of monetary compensation, and were doubtful that Germany could adequately accommodate the need for moral

³⁰ Herbert Blankenhorn, in response to Marx interview with Adenauer. Vogel, 21

restitution in addition to the proposed economic reparations suggested. The Israeli delegation found this prospect insulting, and some of the representatives present referred to the reparations as blood money. Carlo Schmid, then Vice President of the German Diet, tried to assure the Israeli delegation: "Germany must never forget what had been done to the Jewish people and other people. We Germans, quite apart from any good or evil that the individual might be responsible for, had to answer collectively for what had been done in the German name."³¹

The support for the reparations came primarily from the left, not from Adenauer's own conservative base. When speaking to his party in 1952, he tried to earn their support by appealing to their specific interests, namely that reconciliation with the Jews was "morally, politically, and economically" necessary, particularly because "the power of the Jews in the economic sphere is extraordinarily strong."³² To this audience he stressed the importance of the fact that Germany did not as yet have "any legal obligations with regard to the Republic of Israel, but ... does have great moral obligations." However, although it seems that Adenauer may have believed this, it is also apparent throughout this and his other speeches that he considered the Jews a part or symbol of the West,³³ into which he hoped to reintegrate West Germany, and appealing to the fiscal concerns of his conservative party was a necessary tact in gaining

³¹ Carlo Schmid, describing the first meeting with members of the Israeli Parliament. Vogel, 19

³² Adenauer, address to CDU Party Committee. Stackelberg, 401

³³ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 273

their support. With this motivation, he elucidated to his party his plans for reparations through a primarily economic lens. He explicitly excused members of the Christian Democratic Union as having had anything to do with the crimes against the Jews, and instead attributed them to "a considerable number of German people."³⁴ However, he stressed that it would be a discrediting factor to Germany if the majority party in power in Germany was not supportive of restitution payments to the Jews and to Israel. Not wanting to stand in the way of Germany's economic development or cause any undue strain on Western relations, his party and the government were likely to support his proposed policies, at least insofar as they believed it would benefit them personally or Germany as a nation.

The West

From very early in his postwar political career, Adenauer aimed to see Germany accepted among and reintegrated with the Western powers, which was arguably one of the primary motivating factors for many of his political maneuvers. In his inaugural speech as chancellor, he declared, "We have no doubt that according to our background and our way of thinking we belong in the *West-European world*."³⁵ Demonstrating to the West that Germany was willing, able, and driven to pursue a democratic path in the

³⁴ Adenauer, address to CDU Party Committee. Stackelberg, 400

³⁵ Adenauer, inaugural speech in the Bundestag, emphasis in original. *ibid*, 399.

future and adequately make up for the past, was a theme central to much of his policy and international dealings.

It became clear quite soon following the war that the Soviet Union was not going to cooperate with the Western powers in the rebuilding of Germany. All plans for rebuilding in West Germany seemed matched with opposite plans in East Germany. The Soviets dismantled nearly every trace of potential for economic growth or reconstruction in the East, and had contrasting plans for the governance in their sector of Germany. Their unwillingness to cooperate with the Western Allies was a major reason for Adenauer to want to distance West Germany from the Soviets, which, given the Cold War and the East-West power tensions, put West Germany in a more promising position in relation to the United States.

In a speech in Bern, Switzerland in March 1949, he emphasized the serious ideological divide in postwar power between the West, who “defends the values of Christian and Western civilization, freedom, and true democracy,” and Soviet Russia.³⁶ In describing the German situation to the Swiss parliament, he criticized the handling of the governmental transfer of power to the Allies as having been disorganized and unsuccessful, but the Marshall Plan he described as effective, if gradual. Later that same year, days after his election as chancellor, Adenauer gave a speech in Petersberg in which he “acknowledge[d] gratefully that the German population was saved from

³⁶ Adenauer, *Memoirs*, 145

starvation ... by Allied help in supplying food," and described their aid as having "made possible the start of reconstruction."³⁷ While likely not attempting to win the favor of the West with flattery, Adenauer always seemed to manage to say something positive with regard to the West. Although it is clear from his speech in Bern that he did not think the occupation was going well, or necessarily what was best for Germany, it appears he was always catering to the desires of the West, and accomplishing what he could for everyone else while following that objective.

In the Diet speech from September 1951, he once again managed to maneuver his politics into a West-friendly position. Particularly in contrast with the fact that the Soviets essentially ignored requests for any admission of guilt or responsibility, his speech in response to the note from Israel further separated him and West Germany from the communist East, thus moving the Federal Republic more into the Western sphere. The West's watchful eye on the newly self-governing Germany, as well as its support for the state of Israel, therefore made Adenauer's policy for reparations to Israel a rather strategic political move, as well as one genuinely reparative in spirit. Particularly during the occupation years, the Allies—in particular the United States—strongly supported Jewish claims for restitution from Germany.

³⁷ Adenauer, speech at the Petersberg Ceremonies, September 21, 1949. Schweitzer, 22

On his first trip to the United States in 1953, Adenauer described the budding democracy in Germany as a politically stable and lasting state. He discussed how the new government, in writing the constitution and the Grundgesetz, had tried to learn from the mistakes of the Weimar Republic, which he argued had been “far too lenient ... towards its mortal enemies.”³⁸ This, he claimed, is dangerous for a country “in which the foundations of democracy are not yet as firm as they are in [America].”³⁹ Particularly at this point in history, the United States prided itself on its unique form of democracy, and while he surely wanted to see Germany prosper as a democratic country, Adenauer appealed to that here, as if to express to the United States that theirs exemplified the ideal of democracy. It is unlikely that he actually held this opinion, but this provides an interesting example of the sort of appeasement tactic he seemed to employ in many such addresses: to let the current audience hear what they want to hear, without having to make any promises.

Regarding the issue of Israel, he referred to the new reparation treaty as “a moral obligation taken by all the German people, [which] has been taken very seriously.”⁴⁰ Although in reality, the reparations did not enjoy the tremendous support among the German population that Adenauer said or might have wished they did, the Bundestag did approve the treaty at his prompting, which made a statement to the world that this

³⁸ Adenauer, address to Council on Foreign Relations, April 16, 1953. *Journey to America*, 117

³⁹ Adenauer, address to Council on Foreign Relations. *ibid*, 117

⁴⁰ Adenauer, address to the National Press Club, April 8, 1953. *ibid*, 39

treaty was “the most emphatic proof of the break with the National Socialist past.”⁴¹ He acknowledged that “there can be no real amends for the atrocities perpetrated against the Jewish people by criminal elements abusing the name of the German people.”⁴² Interestingly, Adenauer maintained this passive construction even in his speeches in America, as if to subtly emphasize that the Germans had not been responsible, but were making the amends where necessary. Yet in renouncing the Nazi past and facing the responsibility to make up for that past in a way that was agreeable to the West, Adenauer showed America that Germany was committed to learning from the country’s mistakes, and moving forward. The show of support for the state of Israel and the regret regarding the devastation to the Jewish population made an impression on Western leaders, who were more likely to cooperate with and support a Germany which made policies principally of the nature of the Western vision for democracy.

Conclusion

The first government of the independent Federal Republic of Germany had a great deal of work to do in order to bring Germany through the postwar era. Compounding the problems with the reconstruction of society, government, and infrastructure, however, were the demands on the new government from many different, usually conflicting, sides. Although it could by no means be argued that

⁴¹ Adenauer, address to Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, April 11, 1953. *ibid*, 80

⁴² Adenauer, address to Council on Foreign Relations. *ibid*, 127

Adenauer's speeches alone miraculously put Germany on the democratic path or in the favor of the West, much of his politics was based on promising his many interest groups different things in order to appease them. His primary objective was most likely to create a place for Germany in the Western economic and political circle. He managed to frame many of his speeches in such a way as to make it seem like his policies were in the best interest of everyone involved, yet even looking at speeches made one day apart, one can find contradictions in his viewpoints, usually based on the audience he was addressing at the moment and the goal he had in mind for that particular speech.

While his words were ambiguous or indefinite at times, and though he most likely did not express his personal opinions in his speeches, it seemed to be the case that he made many smaller comments and promises which sounded good at the time, but which may have gone unnoticed, and on which he was not always likely or required to act. He tended to only make bigger promises or plans when they would help to improve Germany's position vis-à-vis the West, and when he could actually accomplish those plans to some degree or another. These are the proposals which he most strongly advocated, until his government supported and followed through on them. For the most part, many of his speeches were very superficial, which allowed his audiences to hear what they wanted to hear, and then some measure of what each of them wanted actually came to fruition, but primarily to the end that Germany take its place among the Western world.

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