



**Sabine Lee.** *Victory in Europe?: Britain and Germany since 1945.* Harlow, England: Longman, 2001. 282 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-29483-7.



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## Whose Victory in Europe?

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Sabine Lee's *Victory in Europe?* is an interesting and insightful examination of Anglo-German relations since World War II. Together with her previous works, *An Uneasy Partnership: British-German Relations between 1955-1961* (Bochum, Germany: Brockmeyer, 1996), and (edited with Richard Aldous) *Harold MacMillan: Aspects of a Political Life* (London: MacMillan, 1999), this book should cement Lee's reputation as a leading expert in modern European diplomatic history.

As the title of the book suggests, *Victory in Europe?* poses a rather simple question of the Anglo-German relationship since 1945: whose victory has it been? Drawing upon an impressive array of primary and secondary materials in both English and German, Lee tackles this in straightforward fashion by looking at political, economic, and social developments in each country during the period from 1945 to roughly 1990. Not surprisingly, her analysis is comparative in nature, and framed within the context of superpower relations and the Cold War. Predictably, the book is organized chronologically, with chapter divisions based primarily on transitions in

political power, or seminal events in international relations. Lee's conclusions, and her command of the material are, however, anything but routine. The simple question upon which the book is based is probed with precision, giving careful weight to the multitude of factors that affected the relationship.

Lee begins simply by looking at the fundamental contrast between the two countries at the end of World War II, with Germany vanquished and Britain victorious. At this early stage, she introduces an important consideration that further dramatizes the contrast. Physically isolated, and with a well-defined historical sense of itself, Britain's post-war focus was primarily on reconstruction. Germany, however, faced not only the immediate needs of recovery, but also the much more difficult search for its nationhood. Lee argues that this juxtaposition was primary to the Anglo-German relationship, giving life to a "feindbild": an image of German evilness and aggression, compared to the goodness of being British (p. 2). Rooted, of course, in the two world wars, Lee contends that this concept survived well into the 1980s. Alongside detailed discussion of economic and political events

between the two countries, Lee emphasizes the importance of this psychological and cultural perception. From Ernest Bevin to Margaret Thatcher, images of Germany's historical crimes have lingered, and significantly shaped British policy. In fact, Lee argues that this "phobia" ultimately helped to undermine Britain's global power. In its predilection for the "Atlantic Alliance" with the United States and maintaining its Commonwealth, Britain failed to fully embrace the emerging postwar balance of power in Europe. Lee contends that throughout the Cold War, Britain was not able to realize the extent to which Germany was rising as the principal player on the continent, and, by extension, as a chief ally of the United States. This "de-emphasis" on Anglo-German relations was, Lee argues, made worse in the early post-war years by Britain's financial crisis, and its problem in foreign affairs. The Labour government's "Keynesian interventionist" policies precipitated a drift to the left, which made reconciliation with German elites politically difficult. Moreover, the impact of decolonization, with conflicts in India, Palestine, and Malaya, preoccupied Labour leaders, as did, in the case of Greece, Turkey, and Iran, the realization that British power was no longer pre-eminent.

By way of contrast, the search for a new German identity was, in effect, made easier by the total destruction of the Nazi regime. Lee notes that 1945 saw Germany at "die stunde null," or "zero hour."

With twelve million refugees, and forty-five percent of all housing destroyed, the struggle to recover was amplified by the emerging superpower conflict and the need to somehow "reintegrate" the German state within a European order. Effectively, Lee points out that the absence of democratic institutions and positive leadership models in Germany made this process more difficult. She also points out that British leaders did little to assist in this respect, thereby missing an opportunity to take the lead in reshaping their shattered foe. Instead, the United States emerged as the principal German ally. In fact, in the quest for a new, responsible and well-defined German nation, even France became more important than Britain. Lee details the somewhat surprisingly close relationship between Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle, which in the late 1950s further debilitated Anglo-German affairs. Particularly important in this regard for Lee was Britain's "defeatist" attitude towards the Berlin crisis in 1958-59, which, coupled with Harold MacMillan's trip to Moscow, led Adenauer to believe that Britain had abandoned him. The affinity between MacMillan and John Kennedy, with their emphasis on negotiation, intensified this feeling, as did the tepid

British response to the construction of the Berlin wall in 1961. Lee presents an emerging Franco-German convergence in western Europe during the 1960s, in contrast to the Anglo-American nexus. This became manifest in such things as Adenauer's opposition to the UK-USA nuclear agreement of 1962, as well as his support for the French veto on Britain's application to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963.

Lee stresses the fact that even when leadership changes in Britain and Germany afforded better bilateral ties, other factors kept the relationship from regaining a sense of primacy. Far less the Francophile than his predecessor, Ludwig Erhard assumed the chancellery in 1963 with expectations of improving Anglo-German relations. However, the focus on economic issues in both countries overshadowed any substantial changes on the diplomatic front. Similarly, there was great hope for improvement from 1969 to 1974, with a strong personal affinity between Willy Brandt and Edward Heath. Heath's emphasis on a more "European" British foreign policy certainly added to the optimism. Other interests, such as the "Ostpolitik," were, however, more important.

Lee points out that perhaps the closest convergence of interests between the two nations came during a time of crisis. Between 1974 and 1979, when both countries endured the aftershock of the oil crisis, rising unemployment, and spiraling inflation, bilateral relations enjoyed a renewed vigor. The specter of terrorism in both countries also helped bring them closer. Once again, policy differences, particularly in the realm of economics, ultimately undermined any commonalities, setting the stage for the 1980s and what Lee characterizes as an era of frosty relations. Downplaying the notion of a "conservative revolution" that swept Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl into power, Lee stresses that in fact the two leaders' views were often very divergent.

*Victory in Europe?* is at its best in detailing Thatcher's negative view of Kohl, and her serious apprehension towards the prospect of a unified Germany after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Pointing to media and public concerns in Britain about a reinvigorated Germany, Lee comes full circle with the "feindbild" concept. In the book's epilogue, Lee notes a general improvement in Anglo-German relations during the 1990s, and points out that despite its problems, the relationship remains integral to both Europe and international affairs on the whole. Clearly, if unintentionally, Lee nonetheless expresses some regret that the relationship has not been much closer. *Victory in Europe?* is in this regard a lament

for what could have been a much more involved and mutually beneficial relationship between two of the world's most important players.

There is little doubt that some readers will find fault with Lee's discussion of the psychological obstacles confronted by Germany and especially Britain in putting history behind them. Some may also critique the book's emphasis on individual leaders in both countries, and their respective personal attitudes. Historians of the Cold War

would likely want to see more discussion of the relationship within the context of international affairs and the super-powers. However, when considering the great assets of the book, such criticisms pale by comparison. The link established between domestic issues and foreign affairs in both countries is a particular strength of Lee's scholarship. Her research seems exhaustive, and the narrative is both engaging and effective, making *Victory in Europe?* an invaluable contribution to modern European history and the study of international relations.

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