

From Destruction to Deliverance: Shifting Allied Policies for the Occupation of Germany 1944-1955

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In the wake of the Second World War the nations of the world wished to tear down and destroy Germany and its industrial capacity, dividing the nation up and imposing harsh policies upon it in an attempt to 'denazify' the country and to prevent it from ever achieving power again. Due to the destructive nature of these policies and rising tensions during the Cold War, Allied policy shifted to recovery and rehabilitation. By examining the division of Germany and the policies both proposed and imposed by the Allies, this paper seeks to examine the shift in Western Allied occupation policy from the demilitarization and denazification of Germany to policies of support and partnership. Moreover, the paper looks to analyze the extent to which harsh Western Allied occupation policies forced the Allies to eventually turn back on those policies and support the German economy to undo the damage which they had caused.

After the conclusion of the Second World War and the defeat of Nazi Germany, Europe was left ravaged and war-torn, struggling with economic collapse, while trying to come to terms with what had occurred. The Nazi Party left behind a horrific legacy of tyranny and genocide, and the rest of the world was determined to exact retribution for the destruction which Hitler's war had caused. One of the key Allied occupation policies rested on the denazification of Europe. In the context of postwar Europe, denazification meant not only the erasure of Nazi ideologies, but taking judicial action against former Nazi Party members and removing anyone associated with the Party from civil service positions, dividing Germany, and crippling its economy to ensure that Germany could never make war again. The former Nazi state was split into four zones of occupation, each administered by one of the victorious Allies: Britain, France, the USA, and the USSR. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the major Allied goals in Europe were the denazification of Germany, the insurance of reparations for the losses the Allied nations had suffered, and the disarmament and disruption of German military and industrial capacity.

These goals were achieved through punitive economic policies that were intended to ensure that Germany would never be able to rise to its former power again. Alongside punitive economic policies, the Allies committed to judicial efforts including large scale internment and collaboration trials to ensure that all Nazi leaders and former Nazi Party supporters were properly punished. The destructive and draconian nature of these policies took their toll on Germany, and the country slipped fur-

ther towards starvation and destitution. At this point, the Western Allies were forced to adopt more supportive policies towards their occupied zones, thus they began to shift away from punishment and towards recovery and rehabilitation. This shift was also necessitated by the looming threat of the Cold War, which solidified simmering tensions between the Western Allies (Britain, France, and the USA) and the Soviet Union. The Western Allies recognized that a divided and crippled Germany was in danger of falling under communist influence, therefore their policies shifted towards cooperation between West Germany and the rest of Europe, eventually leading to European unification. In the 1950s, under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Germany ended its programs of denazification and began to rearm, which was supported by the Western Allies. This paper will examine the shift in Allied occupation policy in West Germany from its initial policies of demilitarization and denazification to ones of rearmament and economic revitalization and partnership. In doing so, this paper seeks to analyze the extent to which stringent Western Allied occupation policies in the immediate postwar period forced them to eventually turn back on those policies and support the German economy to undo the damage which it had caused.

Even before the official Nazi surrender on May 8, 1945, Allied plans were already in place for the dismemberment of the former Nazi state. Much like the Versailles Treaty of 1919, initial Allied plans looked to eliminate German capacity for industrialization and rearmament; thereby disabling the shattered German economy completely. One such plan was put forth in 1944 by American Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau. Morgenthau proposed an especially punitive occupation policy which aimed to destroy German military and industrial capacity, essentially returning Germany to an agrarian state.¹ The proposed plan followed five major points. First, the immediate demilitarization of Germany and destruction of key military industries; second, the partitioning of Germany between the victors and the division of smaller autonomous German states; third, the stripping of the Ruhr Valley and complete destruction of its mines and factories; fourth, restitution and reparations through the return of taken German territory and property, the transfer of German industrial equipment stripped from the Ruhr Valley to other devastated countries, and the use of forced German labour in other surrounding countries; and fifth, intellectual reform affected by shutting down all schools and universities as well as all media outlets such as newspapers and radio until an appropriate program can be put in place.² Although many wanted to punish Germany for the crimes of the Nazis, this plan was met with shock and opposition by most other occupation planners as they foresaw the economic consequences of the plan and its disastrous repercussions for the rest of Europe. Ger-

¹ John Dietrich, *The Morgenthau Plan: Soviet Influence on American Postwar Policy* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2013), 7. Accessed through eBook Central.

² Henry Morgenthau, "Suggested Post-Surrender Program for Germany [The original memorandum from 1944, signed by Morgenthau] (text and facsimile)," (1944), Box 31, Folder Germany: Jan.-Sept. 1944 (i297), Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/PSF/BOX31/a297a01.html>.

many was an important producer of many resources including coal and bauxite, and the country was a significant exporter of industrial goods. This meant that destroying the German economy also meant harming the economies of other European countries.³ Even Winston Churchill, who had originally approved the Morgenthau Plan, expressed his objections on the grounds of how the policy would affect the people:

If our treatment of Germany's internal economy is such as to leave eighty million people virtually starving, are we to sit still and say, 'It serves you right,' or will we be required to keep them alive? If so, who is going to pay for that? . . . If you have a horse and you want him to pull the wagon you have to provide him with a certain amount of corn—or at least hay.⁴

Although the Morgenthau Plan was never adopted, it did guide US policy within Germany until around 1947, with the adoption of the Marshall Plan. On May 10, 1945, President Truman approved JCS1067, a policy created by the Joint Chiefs of Staff which directed the American forces occupying Germany to “Take no steps (a) looking toward the economic rehabilitation of Germany, or (b) designed to maintain or strengthen the German economy.”⁵ Similarly, a plan developed by Jean Monnet was put forward in 1945 and adopted by the French President, Charles de Gaulle, in 1946. The plan aimed to modernize and resuscitate the French economy, and by using cheap German prison labor, along with harvesting the region's coal and coke, the French planned to use their occupation zone essentially as an economic colony.⁶ Although these harsh denazification policies aimed at ruining German economic potential were later shifted to fit into the new goal of a strengthened Germany, their influence and adoption in these critical postwar years crippled the economy enough to force many Germans into starvation, making such a policy adjustment a critical concern.

Alongside economic policies, the Western powers pursued reprisals against individuals who were involved in the Nazi party. This was done through multiple different channels, including military tribunals for higher ranking Nazi officials as well as concentration camp guards and doctors, and directives and laws put forward by the Control Council removing and detaining those were deemed to have been “more than nominal participants in [Nazi Party] activities.”⁷ One major step towards denazification was to

3 Robert Paxton and Julie Hessler, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2012), 418.

4 Dietrich, *The Morgenthau Plan*, 64.

5 Ibid.

6 Alan S Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945-51* (London: Routledge, 1984), 98. Accessed through Taylor and Francis.

7 Coordinating Committee, and Germany (Territory under Allied occupation, 1945-1955). *Enactments and Approved Papers of the Control Council and Coordinating Committee: Allied Control Authority, Germany (1945-1948)*, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2004), 16. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/MilitaryLaw/Enactments/Vol->

deal with the surviving Nazi leaders. While Hitler himself; his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels; Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel, Heinrich Himmler; and the director of the German Labor Front Robert Ley had all committed suicide, there remained a significant number who could stand trial for their involvement with the Nazi party.⁸ Twenty-one senior Nazi officials were put on trial for conspiracy to commit aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity before a four-power International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. What resulted was the acquittal of three individuals, four sentences of 10-20 years of imprisonment, three life sentences, and twelve executions.⁹ What became known as the Nuremberg Trials received some international criticism: although none questioned the guilt of the accused, nor objected to harsh punishment, issues were raised stemming from an interpretation of victor's justice, where laws were created *ex post facto*.¹⁰ Despite their criticism, the Nuremberg trials were an effective statement by the victors that the Nazi Party was utterly defeated and destroyed and would never be allowed to rise again. Moreover, collaboration trials were also conducted in many other countries throughout Europe as a means of denazifying previously occupied territories. In France, there were nearly 125,000 collaboration cases tried after the liberation,¹¹ followed by nearly 10,000 executions, 26,289 prison sentences, 13,211 sentences of forced labor, and 40,249 punishments of “national degradation.”¹²

As part of the Allied denazification and demilitarization policies, hundreds of thousands of captured German soldiers were held in internment camps along the Rhine.¹³ These camps were established to help keep control over the vast number of disarmed combatants following the conclusion of the war, but they were also intended to prevent any German insurgency attempts by guerrilla forces against allied occupation (such as those conducted by *Werwolf* units).¹⁴ The Allied Control Council served as the governing body of the Allied Occupation Zones, working to create post-war plans for the country as well as prioritizing the denazification of societal, military and legal structures. Such an effort came in the form of Directive 24, which was applied to German occupation zones on January 12, 1946, and was aimed at the “Removal from office and from positions of responsibility of Nazis and of people hostile to Allied purposes.”¹⁵ The definitions of those deemed Nazis or otherwise hostile to

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8 Paxton and Hessler, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 418.

9 Ibid., 427.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Tom Buchanan, *Europe's Troubled Peace: 1945 to the Present*, 2nd ed., (Chichester UK: Wiley, 2012), 28. Accessed through eBook Central.

13 Perry Biddiscombe, *Werwolf: The History of the National Socialist Guerrilla Movement, 1944-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 253.

14 Ibid., 253-254.

15 Coordinating Committee, and Germany, *Enactments and Approved Papers of the Control Council and Coordinating Committee*, 16.

the Allied occupation extended to those who had joined the party before 1937 when membership became compulsory, and those who in any way had “voluntarily given material or moral support or political assistance of any kind to the Nazi Party or Nazi officials and leaders.”¹⁶ This classification extended to millions of German citizens, and by the end of the winter of 1945–46, 42% of public officials had been removed from their posts.¹⁷ The denazification policies of the occupying powers removed millions of citizens from their positions, clearing the way for new political institutions and new political elites. However, the harsh justice of the purges wreaked havoc on the German economy and its population as millions were detained or removed from their jobs, causing the country to slip further into destitution and starvation.

In stark contrast to the early plans for the Allied occupation of Germany which focused on Germany’s dismemberment and overtly opposed revitalization, the dynamic of Allied policy in West Germany by 1946 had clearly shifted towards promoting economic rehabilitation and supporting the people who were suffering in the shattered ruins of the war-torn nation. This assessment is not applicable to the Soviet occupied zone of East Germany, where the USSR continued to extract reparations for the losses it had suffered at the hands of the Nazis. It had been agreed upon by the occupying powers that, as historian Tom Buchanan states: “reparations would be taken in kind by each power from its own zone, such that the German people would be left with sufficient resources to subsist without external support.”¹⁸ However, the Soviets continued to focus on squeezing out maximal reparations from its territory, eventually leading to their refusal to allow Western access to food supplies from the east. The Soviet controlled eastern region had traditionally been the source of food and grain for the rest of Germany. Once the Soviets shut the eastern zone off from the rest of the nation, Britain and the USA were forced to provide resources to their occupation zone from alternative sources. The introduction of food subsidization was the beginning of a shift in policies leading away from punishment and towards supporting Germany. To the Western Allies, it became clear that an economically weak Germany serves no purpose and would continue to hinder the rest of the European economy. An oppressed and starving Germany would also be more likely to embrace communism, a point which concerned American military officials, notably General Clay who said in March 1946: “There is no choice between becoming a communist on 1,500 calories [a day] and a believer in democracy on 1,000 calories.”¹⁹

As divisions grew between the Western powers and the Soviets, the Western Allies began to look towards unification and cooperation. On January 1, 1947, Britain

16 Coordinating Committee, and Germany, *Enactments and Approved Papers of the Control Council and Coordinating Committee*, 16.

17 Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (New York, Bloomsbury Publishing: 2011), 243. <https://archive.org/details/exorcisinghitler-0000tayl>.

18 Tom Buchanan, *Europe’s Troubled Peace*, 37.

19 *Ibid.*, 40

and the USA merged their occupation zones to form the ‘Bizonie’ which was a major step towards unified German statehood.²⁰ The most blatant indicator of change in Allied occupation policy was the enactment of the Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program). Proposed by the US Secretary of State George Marshall on June 5, 1947, the plan aimed to rebuild war-torn regions, increase European industrial and agricultural capacity, improve European prosperity, and to encourage cooperation between European states. In essence, the Marshall Plan was a complete rejection of the Morgenthau Plan with regards to Germany, as it sought to build up and restore the economic capacity and strength of the nation instead of actively destroying it. As historian Manfred Knapp points out, West Germany was a key component of the Marshall Plan, since if West Germany was integrated into a broad European recovery plan it would be held accountable by the other nations, while also relying on them to hasten its own recovery.²¹ What Knapp fails to observe however, is that Germany’s need for aid was in large part exacerbated by the draconian policies of the early occupation period, including those influenced by the Morgenthau Plan, which he writes off as merely “controversial.”²² The Marshall Plan came into effect on April 3, 1948, and over the next 4 years it delivered \$12.3 billion in US aid to sixteen European countries to stimulate recovery as well as to stave off communist advances in the region. In March of 1948, the USSR withdrew its representatives to the Allied Control Council, which effectively ended any attempts at a consolidated governance of occupied Germany between the four powers. In response to the aid delivered by the Marshall Plan, alongside currency reforms instituted by the USA in Germany on June 20, 1948, the Soviets blockaded Western access to Berlin, which was entirely situated in the Soviet zone, forcing the Allies to supply the city with provisions in a daring airlift. Although the blockade was eventually lifted, the growing division between the East and West helped to further influence Western policy towards the rehabilitation and eventual rearmament of Germany as a strong independent buffer state to the USSR.

The 1950s marked the greatest changes in Allied occupation policy as Europe moved towards unification and cooperation. Although the Marshall Plan introduced much needed capital into the war-ravaged continent, the nations there would have to lead their own recoveries by creating comprehensive recovery plans and cooperating with other states if they wished to rebuild their economies. France had been guided by the influence of the Monnet Plan for much of their occupation period up to 1950, remaining focused on exploiting German labour, resources, and industrial capacity as a platform for France’s own economic recovery and modernization. However, as it became clear that both the USA and Britain were no longer interested in oppressing the German economy but rather in supporting it, France concluded that

20 Tom Buchanan, *Europe’s Troubled Peace*, 38-39.

21 Manfred Knapp, Wolfgang F. Stolper, and Michael Hudson, “Reconstruction and West-Integration: The Impact of the Marshall Plan on Germany” *Zeitschrift für Die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 137, no. 3 (1981): 418-422.

22 *Ibid.*, 417.

the German economy could not be controlled forever and that it was in their own best interest to follow policies of cooperation and partnership. The Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, was a proposal to create a Franco-German coal and steel production agreement, within the context of an organization which would be open to the participation of other interested European nations.²³ Besides the goal of encouraging economic growth within the partner nations, the Schuman Declaration also aimed to create a lasting peace within Europe, namely between France and Germany who were longstanding enemies. The Declaration also had the goal of creating common markets and establishing a European Federation based on supranationalism and leading to the unification of the continent. The Schuman Declaration led to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which was formally established in 1951 by the Treaty of Paris, signed by Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany.²⁴ Although France was behind the initial proposal for the ECSC, West Germany was extremely keen on agreeing to such a partnership not just for the benefit of their economy, but to legitimize a new sovereign democratic Germany on the world stage. Only years before, Germany had been responsible for plunging the world into a devastating conflict, so their inclusion in a supranational organization such as the ECSC was welcomed by the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany.

Beginning in 1949, the period which became known as the Adenauer Era brought about immense social and economic change in Germany, as the new West German state worked towards ending denazification programs, rearmament, and cementing relations with the Western powers. Konrad Adenauer was the first Chancellor of the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany and oversaw the transition of West Germany from an occupied territory to a sovereign, democratic state. Adenauer had served as the mayor of Cologne from 1917 until his removal from power in 1933 by the Nazis, who also detained him on multiple occasions throughout the war. Adenauer was restored to mayor of Cologne by the liberating American forces, but his opposition to British occupation policies again resulted in his removal. He was, however, made president of a temporary parliamentary council which drafted the new constitution for the Western zones of Germany, and soon after was elected as the first chancellor of the new republic.²⁵ As chancellor, Adenauer worked to shift the focus from denazification to recovery in Germany, eventually bringing an end to the purging process by 1951. This was not opposed by the Allies, whose denazification efforts had subsided since 1946, as they came to the realization that the process was counterproductive to the region's stability and independence.²⁶ Adenauer fought to bring in laws which granted amnesty to hun-

23 Europa, "Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty" https://web.archive.org/web/20071213202339/http://europa.eu/scadplus/treaties/ecsc_en.htm (accessed November 3, 2020).

24 Ibid.

25 BBC History, "Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967)" https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/adenauer_konrad.shtml (accessed November 4, 2020).

26 Norman J. W. Goda, *Tales from Spandau: Nazi Criminals and the Cold War* (Cambridge:

dreds of thousands of people who had been charged during the Allied denazification period. The reintegration of thousands of civil servants and minor offenders back into the workforce was a significant boost to the economy, as it allowed the country to focus on recovery and rehabilitation instead of punishment. High ranking Nazi officials and those who had been classified as major offenders, however, did not receive amnesty.

One of the greatest adjustments in Western Allied occupation policy was demonstrated by their active support of German rearmament beginning in the 1950's. In the face of the growing threat of the Cold War, and disturbed by the communist North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950, the Western Allies abandoned their goal of destroying German military capacity in favour of its rearmament as a buffer state to the Soviet Union. Since the Allies and other European states remained distrustful of German militarization, the new army of the Federal Republic was to function under the military wing of the European Defence Community. The German rearmament movement was also closely tied to ending denazification, as Adenauer stressed that German military strength could only be achieved by incorporating former Wehrmacht soldiers who were still detained by the Allies.²⁷ German rearmament led to further integration into the world stage, as they joined the NATO alliance in 1955.

In conclusion, the drastic measures taken by the Allies in 1945/46 of full demilitarization and denazification of Germany exacerbated economic and social issues in a war-ravaged country. The harsh retributive policies enacted upon Germany brought the nation to a point of such desperation that the Allies deemed it necessary to actively intervene to correct the course of Germany's future away from economic devastation and towards revitalization. Alongside denazification policies and directives which removed millions from their jobs, draconian measures of economic incapacitation such as the highly influential Morgenthau Plan pushed Germany towards starvation and social collapse. It is clear however that after 1946, the Western Allies realized that they could not allow Germany to slide into ruin, and could no longer pursue such oppressive occupation policies, thus they shifted their intentions towards economic and social recovery in Germany. This was exemplified by their provision of food aid to West Germany and West Berlin, as well as the delivery of billions of dollars in economic aid to Germany and other European nations through the Marshall Plan. Europe also sought interaction and cooperation with a new democratic Germany, leading to the formation of the ECSC in 1951. This community allowed for the economic unification of former enemies and created the building blocks for a supranational future. The 1950's also marked the end of denazification and demilitarization, as Germany looked to transition towards recovery and reintegration in the international community by throwing off the punitive measures enforced upon them by the Allies.

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Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.

27 Goda, *Tales from Spandau*, 101.

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