

Summary

After the capitulation of the Third Reich in the spring of 1945 the new political order of Europe was established at Potsdam by the three leaders of the allied war coalition: J. Stalin, C. Attlee and H. Truman, the successors of respectively the resigned Minister of War W. Churchill and the deceased president of the United States, F.D. Roosevelt. The period in between 1945 and 1949, when the founding of two German states became a fact and the bipolar world order gradually took shape, was a period of great uncertainty. Initially the Potsdam Conference was meant to deal with the most urgent issues at hand, however it soon became clear that a common ground lacked on the issue how to deal with the future of Germany in particular and Europe in general. Great disagreements on how to treat postwar Germany both economically and politically, eventually led to a split in the allied triumvirate.

Not only became Germany a politically and ideologically divided nation, behind the Iron Curtain strong anti-German attitudes led to the persecution, deportation and/or the killing of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans that lived in the former German territories. The founding of the new Polish state that was placed about two hundred kilometers to the west created a large German minority that immediately fell prey to violent and unorganized actions of the partisan armies and/or infuriated civilians. A distinction between 'good' or 'bad' Germans was seldom made. In Czechoslovakia the persecutions of ethnic Germans, who largely resided in Bohemia (Sudetenland), had great resemblances with the Polish case. The period in between 1945 and 1949 formed a transition period from the German occupation to the consolidation of political power under the Soviet flag. The largest persecutions took place in this short period of about five years in which one could speak of a power vacuum that was filled up by either communist or capitalist state systems.

Not only in Central and Eastern Europe, the area on the right side of Germany that probably suffered most under German occupation and after, but also elsewhere Germans were persecuted. In the Netherlands there was also started a campaign – 'Operation Black Tulip' – against ethnic Germans that lived there. Not only in the 'undemocratic' East, but also in the democratic West ethnic Germans fell prey to political mud-slinging and unorganized acts of aggression. In most cases, as in Poland and Czechoslovakia the Germans were innocent and became involved in pro-German activities not because they chose to do so, but because they were expected or even forced to do so because of their ethnic backgrounds. Proper juridical frameworks to deal with the 'German problem' lacked in general and even *if* they existed (as was the case in the Netherlands), they were largely followed arbitrarily. The unfortunate aftermath of Potsdam made an intervention in the German question of the Western allied powers behind the Iron Curtain almost impossible.

This research paper primarily focuses on the period between 1945 and 1949; however there will also be a closer look into what happened in the decades that followed the Second World War towards the end of the Cold War. A distinction will be made between 'formal', strictly political, and 'informal', or psychological, normalization. How did these states deal with Germans and Germany on the long run? How did the national situation of the states contribute to the stances that were taken against Germans? To what extent the Second World War is still present in how we look at Germans and Germany?