



Discovering Diversity

An integrative approach to the history of migrants

Educational Material: Case Study

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Forced migration of Germans from the Sudetenland in 1945



German refugees from Sudetenland 1945

At the end of the Second World War in 1945, people in the now-liberated Czechoslovakia began reacted to the hardships suffered during the Nazi annexation and occupation of Czechoslovakia since 1938. This resulted in a wave of attacks against [Sudeten Germans](#) – the German-speaking inhabitants of the Sudetenland, the border areas of Czechoslovakia since its formation in 1918-20. As a result of these attacks, many of the approximately 3 million Sudeten Germans were expelled (Czechs preferred the word ‘transfer’ to expulsions) and were resettled elsewhere, mostly in Austria and Germany.

A short History of the Sudetenland

Since the 16th century the provinces of Bohemia-Moravia had been part of the Habsburg Empire. The land-owning aristocracy and the towns were overwhelmingly Germanic in character, as were the border areas settled by German colonists from the 12th century onwards. German was the language of administration, with Czech the *lingua franca* of the peasantry which formed the bulk of the population. BY 1848 – the Year of Revolutions in Europe - a number of Czech-speaking intellectuals were beginning to agitate for recognition both of Czech political rights and of Czech language and culture.

Increasing industrialisation, particularly in Bohemia, led to migration of Czech peasants into the towns to serve the needs of the emerging and expanding industries. Whereas most towns in 1850 had German-speaking majorities, by 1914 the situation had been totally reversed (apart from in the border regions, which remained overwhelmingly German).

The outcome of the 1914-18 War was a disaster for Germans living in Bohemia-Moravia and also for the Magyars in Slovakia, which had been under Magyar rule for some 900 years. The Habsburg Monarchy had collapsed. Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia became part of the newly-created Czechoslovakia. The German and Magyar populations were now minorities in the new country. The resentment against this was particularly acute in those border regions which had overwhelming German and Magyar majorities.

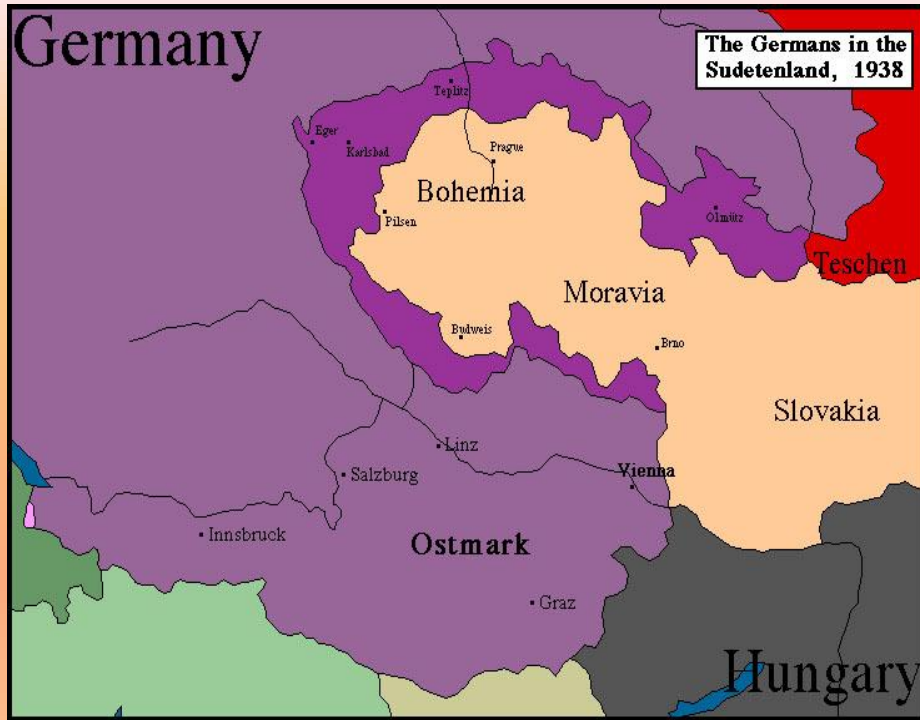
The economic depression of the 1930s hit the industrialised border regions of Bohemia particularly hard and support grew in these German-speaking regions for the newly-formed Sudeten German Party (which campaigned for autonomy for the areas with German-speaking majorities within Czechoslovakia. There were similar separatist movements amongst Hungarians in Slovakia. In 1938 the Czech government , under pressure from Hitler and without international support, agreed to the transfer of its border areas to Germany, Hungary and Poland (Munich Agreement and First Vienna Award) in return for an international guarantee of its new borders. Six months later , Germany occupied what was left of Bohemia-Moravia, and Slovakia broke away to become in effect a German satellite state.

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THE CONTEXT

Why were so many Germans living in the Sudetenland and why was this a problem?



Three million citizens of Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten Germans, lived in the northern, western and southern border regions (the Sudetenland) of the new state that was formed after the collapse of the Hapsburg Monarchy in 1918. In the 1930s Hitler's Germany demanded that these regions be incorporated into the Third Reich.

Germany

The Germans in the Sudetenland, 1938





After the Munich Conference in 1938 between Germany, Britain, France and Italy it was agreed that the Sudetenland should become part of the Third Reich. In 1939 after the German invasion, the Czech lands became a protectorate and Slovakia became a puppet state of the Third Reich. Many Czechs felt angry and resentful about this and these feelings intensified during the six years of occupation.



This photograph shows a woman in the Czech town of Eger watching the arrival of the German troops in October 1938. How would you describe her feelings?

**For more information
click on the photograph.**



Congratulations if you find 4+ clues

The is the complete photograph from which the previous picture was cropped. Does this change your view of the woman's feelings towards the occupation? How many clues can you identify to support your answer?



“We give thanks to our Führer”.

What does this postcard tell you about the reactions of Sudeten Germans to the occupation by the Third Reich?

WIR DANKEN UNSERM FÜHRER



Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich and Secretary Karl Frank who were appointed as the Third Reich rulers of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Nazi rule was seen by many Czechs as oppressive. Heydrich was assassinated by Czech resistance fighters in 1942.

For more information about the resistance click [here](#).

The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under Nazi Rule

The Gestapo took over the police, Jews were dismissed from the civil service, communism was banned and many Czech communists fled the country. Czechs were drafted to work in coalmines, the steel industry and armaments production. 30,000 Czech workers were sent to Germany to work there.

From autumn 1941, under Reinhard Heydrich ,German rule became more severe. Arrests and executions increased. Numbers vary but approximately 45,000 Czechs and 80,000 Jews were sent to the camps and almost all of them died there.

There were several resistance groups: including the communists, the social democrats and groups organised by political leaders in exile, such as Eduard Benes. After the assassination of Heydrich by Czech partisans in June 1942, the Gestapo eliminated almost all Czech resistance for a time. They began to re-group in 1943 and resistance activity increased in 1945 as the red Army advanced from the east.

In May 1945 there was a national uprising in Prague where 30,000 Czech men and women battled against German troops in the city.

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NAZI LAND POLICY IN THE PROTECTORATE

The Nazi concept of Germanisation (in Bohemia and Moravia) favoured German ownership of Czech land. The Czech Land Office was taken over by the Nazis...The German Settlement Society in Prague acquired 53,100 hectares of land in the areas of south Bohemia and Moravia alone by September 1940. Under the responsibility of the re-organised Land Office, a long-range programme was started to re-settle the land with Germans. By February 1943 almost 5,000 German peasant re-settlers were installed in the Protectorate. Some 80,000 Czech peasants were driven from their lands by the establishment or enlargement of German military training camps. The expropriation of Czech land was closely connected with the gradual and systematic Germanization of Czech properties.

Radomir Luza, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, New York University Press 1964 pp.194-6



When Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated in Prague in 1942 Hitler ordered collective punishment as a revenge. The men of the village of Lidice, near Prague, were rounded up and killed. Afterwards Lidice was razed to the ground.

Why do you think Czech people disagreed about the assassination of Heydrich and what followed?



Erecting barricades in Prague just before liberation in May 1945.

By 1944 it was becoming obvious that Germany was losing the war and resistance by Czechs and Slovaks became much bolder. In the spring of 1945 the Red Army liberated Slovakia and then advanced westwards towards Prague. Many Czechs wanted to take action against the Germans, even those Sudeten Germans who had lived there for generations.



WHY DID PEOPLE MOVE?

Why Sudeten Germans migrated in 1945



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1996-030-01A
Foto: Höber, Brigitte | Februar 1945

German refugees from the east at the port of Danzig in February 1945

There were forced migrations all over Europe in 1945. As the Red Army advanced westwards about 12 million ethnic Germans living in Nazi-occupied countries became refugees. The Sudeten Germans were one part of this mass displacement. The mass expulsions wiped away centuries of German life in eastern Europe. This was partly decided by governments but it was also driven by immense popular anger towards the Germans in the regions they had occupied.

Why Sudeten Germans migrated in 1945

“When the day comes, our nation will take up the old battle cry again: Cut them! Beat them! Spare nobody! Everybody has to find a weapon to hit the nearest German.”

A Czech army officer on BBC radio in late 1944.

Many Czechs desired revenge against those Germans they blamed for atrocities committed under Nazi rule.

“The German people have behaved like a monster. We must liquidate the German problem definitively.”

President Edvard Benes, May 1945

Why Sudeten Germans migrated in 1945

“The hardship of moving is great, but it is less than the constant suffering of minorities and the constant recurrence of war.”

Former US president, Herbert Hoover, 1942

Foreign powers also supported the idea of transferring populations to reduce the dangers of future conflicts involving ethnic minorities.

“The total expulsion of the Germans will be the most satisfactory and lasting guarantee of stability after the war. There will no more mixture of populations to cause endless trouble. A clean sweep will be made.”

British prime minister, Winston Churchill, speaking in December 1944

Why did so many Sudeten Germans leave their homeland?

There were many different reasons why Sudeten Germans were forced to leave at this time:

At local level there were spontaneous attacks on Sudeten German workers and families. Many were killed and many others were intimidated into fleeing. This process is often referred to as “Wild Expulsions”. Approximately 700,000 people were forced out in this way.

At national level the restored democratic government led by Eduard Beneš made it official policy to “remove undesirable elements from the country”. Under the Beneš Decrees more than 2 million people were rounded up, put in holding camps and deported. This included not only Sudeten Germans but also many Hungarians.

Why did so many Sudeten Germans leave their homeland?

A German account of the massacre at Usti nad Labem (Aussig)

“My name is Therese Mager. I was a nurse with the Red Cross living in Aussig. On the afternoon of July 30, 1945, around 4:30 p.m the Czechs stormed through the streets, beat up the Germans or shot at them when they tried to flee. I ran to the bridge that crosses the Elbe river, and here I saw hundreds of workers who were coming from the Schicht manufacturing plant, being thrown into the Elbe. The Czechs shoved women and children and even baby carriages into the river. These Czechs were mostly wearing black uniforms with red armbands (SNB men). Other Germans were thrown into the big water-tank on the market-place. Whenever one of them rose to the surface, the Czechs would push him down again and keep him under water with long poles. The mass persecution of the Germans lasted until late in the evening. Neither any official authority or the Russian occupation forces took steps to curb this mass murder. In Aussig the total number of people who lost their lives was almost 1000.”

Edict of the President (Eduard Beneš) of the Czechoslovak Republic 21 June 1945

Concerning the Confiscation of Property of Germans, Magyars and Traitors and enemies of the Czech and Slovak people

Following the demand of the Czech and Slovak people without land for an effective implementing of the land reform and led by the desire once and for all to take Czech and Slovak soil out of the hands of the foreign, German and Magyar landowners as well as out of the hands of the traitors to the Republic and to give it into the hands of the Czech and Slovak farmers and persons without land, I decree upon proposition of the government as follows:

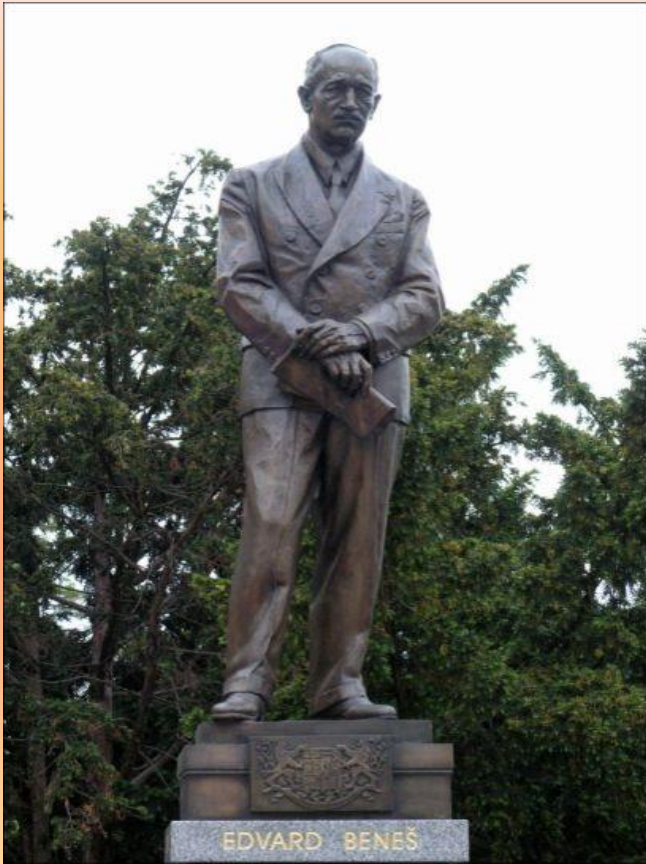
Article I

1. With immediate effect and without compensation and for the purpose of the of the land reform such rural property shall be confiscated as is owned by all persons of German or Magyar nationality, without regard to their citizenship.
2. The agricultural property of persons of German or Magyar nationality who participate in the combat for the protection of the integrity and for the liberation of the Czech Slovak Republic shall not be confiscated under the provisions of subsection 1.
3. The District National Committee is competent to decide upon application of the competent farmers committees whether an exception according to subsection 3 shall be made. Doubtful cases shall be submitted by the District National committee to the Provincial National Committee which shall forward them with an opinion to the Ministry for Agriculture for final decision. The latter shall decide by agreement with the Ministry of the Interior.

Article 2

Those persons shall be considered as of German and Magyar nationality who on the occasion of any census since 1929 acknowledged their German or Magyar nationality or who became members of national groups, organizations or political parties in which persons of German or Magyar nationality were united.

Why did so many Sudeten Germans leave their homeland?



Statue of Edvard Beneš outside Government building in Prague

Edvard Beneš was President of Czechoslovakia from 1935 to 1938. He was president of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London from 1940 to 1945. He returned to Prague after the 1945 uprising there and became president of the restored Czechoslovak Republic from 1945 to 1948. The Beneš Decrees, passed in June 1945, provided for the expulsion or 'transfer' of the ethnic German and Hungarian minorities out of post-war Czechoslovakia. This policy was first proposed by the government-in-exile in 1943. The laws were issued as soon as possible after the Beneš government came into power. The laws were never officially repealed and have remained controversial ever since, even after the Czech Republic and Slovakia joined the European Union.



WHAT WERE THEIR EXPERIENCES?

What happened to so many Sudeten Germans in 1945?



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1083-0422-315
Foto: Donath, Herbert | 1946

Sudeten Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia arriving in Berlin in 1946 to take a train to other parts of Germany.

Many Sudeten Germans were placed in 'holding camps' (often camps that had been used by the Nazis during the war) before being deported to Germany or Austria. Many faced greater hardship as they made long journeys in search of safety and somewhere to live. At first, they believed their new homes would only be temporary but, over the years, it gradually became clear that they would not return to the Sudetenland. Demands for an apology, or for compensation, were rejected.

What happened to so many Sudeten Germans in 1945?

A blog posted by Aneesah Ingrid on 26 July 2010

“Hello Mark,

I have been looking over your blog and I am in awe and deeply moved. My mother could be one of those young women in any of the pictures you have. Her family was expelled from the Sudetenland at the war's end. I was a product from a 'friendship' in the refugee camp before moving on when they could find housing. I was placed in an orphanage and adopted by Americans – just like so many children after the war”

After the period of 'wild expulsions' ended, many Sudeten Germans were rounded up and detained in holding camps. Some of these camps were former Nazi concentration camps re-opened for a new purpose.



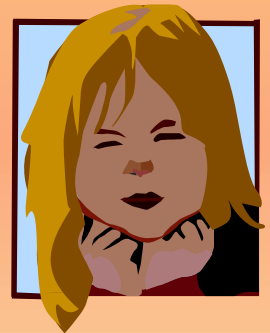
Refugees from Brno forced to march to Austria

“I am 72 years old. My wife is 68. We had to leave home with only two hours notice on May 31st 1945. Following a night spent under the sky, several thousand of us were herded to Pohrlitz (Pohorelice, near Brno). It was a death march. The road on either side was lined with the people who had died from exhaustion. After one night in Pohrlitz, we were forced to cross the border into Austria.”

Recollections of Ed Kroboth, an elderly refugee from Moravia.

When the Soviet soldiers arrived in May 1945, Susanne was 16. She and her mother had to hide in the attic for fear of being raped. It soon became clear they could not remain in their home, which had been taken over by the local Czech National Committee. They lived for a year in a collection camp, where Susanne had to work in the local mill. In June 1946 Susanne was finally moved along with her family to the village of Rattelsdorf in Bavaria.

To find out what happened to Susanne in later life click [here](#).





In 1945 at Volary, Czechoslovakia the US Army forced these Sudeten German civilians to walk past the bodies of 30 Jewish women who had died on a death march across Czechoslovakia.

This shows that it was not only Czechs who thought there should be some retribution against Sudeten Germans for what happened in the War.

“In October 1938, after the German annexation of the Sudetenland, I had to flee from my home town of Pickau. I was stripped of my citizenship and forced to go and live in the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. My wife was not allowed to return home to the Sudetenland until she could prove that she had divorced me. In May 1945, after the German army had pulled out, I returned home. In July 1945 I was arrested by the Czechs and sent to Olmütz (Olomouc), where I was locked up even though five Czech people testified that I had helped to save them from the Nazis during the War. Later I was deported.”

Josef Schickling

As you can see from this source, some people were victimised by both the Nazis and later by the Czechs. But this is all the information we have and it is therefore hard to work out why he was treated this way by both sides.

Looking carefully at this source make a list of all the possible clues you can find that might help to explain his treatment?



WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?



What happened to Susanne?

After her deportation Susanne had to get used to living in a new Germany. It took her a long time. She was only able to close the door on the period of the war and the expulsions when she went to University. Later, in 1977, she visited the native country she had known as a child for the first time since the expulsions. She realised that it was no longer her home . She did not want to live in a Communist Czechoslovakia. She never became a member of the Sudetendeutsche Landmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association) because she was never keen on that organisation. Over recent years she has been involved in helping refugees, especially during the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia.

To find out what happened when Susanne was a young girl click [here](#)

The impact of the expulsions on the Sudeten border region was huge. Several hundred villages disappeared, many churches became ruins or remained dilapidated, and a large number of cemeteries were devastated. The arrival of a new population without links or roots in the region, meant that no-one was interested in developing the region. In addition a large part of the border region became a no-go zone where few had access and many settlements were destroyed on the grounds of military security.

‘Czech-German relations’, from www.czechkid.eu a website for Czech teachers



The Hartmanice mountain synagogue before its restoration in the 1990s.

“After the expulsion of the German population communities on the Czech-German border were initially settled by people, including many Roma, from elsewhere in Czechoslovakia. After 1948 some 200 of these border villages were razed to the ground by Czech communists as a security measure.”

Alan Midgley on his visit to the Hartmanice synagogue in 2010.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-A1721-0040-008
Foto: o. Ang. 1.13. Dezember 1962

The government of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1963

Large numbers of expellees made new homes in Austria and West Germany. Expellee organisations campaigned for the right to return home to the Sudetenland but there was little chance of this happening. In 1963, the government of Konrad Adenauer passed the Law of Return, giving citizenship rights to *Volksdeutsche* from eastern Europe.

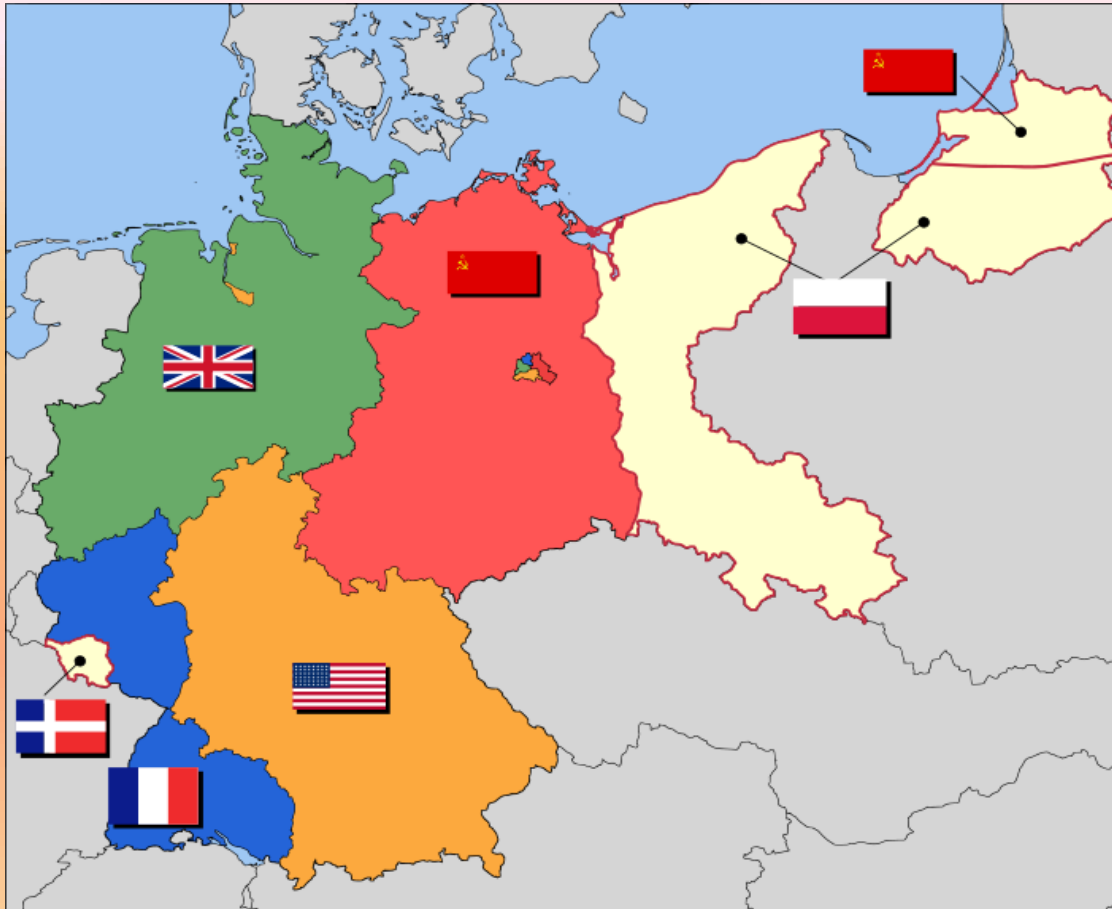
A modern historian's perspective:

By 1950, eastern Europe's minority populations had shrunk to a very small proportion of what they had been two decades earlier, and communities of ethnic Germans existed only in isolated pockets. In West Germany, well-funded refugee movements spearheaded calls for a return to the "German East", demanding the right to return to their homes. Across the border, their deserted villages in western Czechoslovakia crumbled into ruins. Yet most refugees were integrated (into West Germany and Austria) astonishingly quickly, their paths eased by post-war prosperity. Long before the 1990 Treaty by which the two Germanies finally acknowledged the permanence of the post-war borders, most people knew that the "lost East" had gone for good.

***from HITLER'S EMPIRE: NAZI RULE IN OCCUPIED EUROPE, Mark Mazower (2008)
p. 550***



WHAT WERE THE REACTIONS OF OTHERS



Map of the Allied occupation zones in Germany in 1945

Edvard Beneš and the Czechoslovak government got strong support from the Soviet Union for the policy of expelling the German and Hungarian minorities. Beneš also got the other Allied Power, the United States, Britain and France, to agree to accept exiles from Czechoslovakia into the Allied Zone of Occupation. As the Cold War developed in the post-war years it became less and less likely that the temporary arrangements made in 1945-47 would ever be changed.



Sudeten Germans waiting to be deported.

Most Czechs and Slovaks remained convinced that what they called “the transfer” of the German and Hungarian minorities out of the country was justified. Many Czechs were convinced that Sudeten Germans had collaborated with the Nazis. This feeling is shown by the swastika daubed on the back of the refugee in the foreground of the picture.

Governments of Czechoslovakia, supported by public opinion, consistently resisted any demands for an apology or for compensation to those who had lost their homes.

Statute issued in Kosice, Slovakia in April 1945

The bitter experiences of the Czechs and Slovaks with the German and Hungarian minorities (who for the most part) collaborated with the Nazi conquest of the Republic, and, the Germans especially, joined in a war of extermination against the Czech and Slovak nation) compelled the Government of the restored Czechoslovakia to take decisive action against the guilty. Loyal German and Hungarian citizens will not be affected but the guilty ones will be pitilessly punished – as the conscience of our people demands and in order to protect the peace and security of future generations.

This Statute shows the feelings which were behind the later decrees by Beneš. Clearly feelings against the Hungarian as well as the German minorities were very strong in Slovakia.

To see where the German and Hungarian minorities lived until 1945 in Czechoslovakia click [here](#).



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WHAT WAS THE LEGACY?

Reconciliation in practice; NOVY JICIN/LUDWIGSBURG

In 1945 the majority German population in the Czech town of Novy Jicin was, with few exceptions, forcibly expelled without compensation. People were allowed to take with them only those of their belongings they were able to carry. Many of them settled in the baroque town of Ludwigsburg, near Stuttgart. Since 1989 there has been close and harmonious co-operation between the two towns, with a notable absence of bitterness.

Since the first great visit of a group of former German inhabitants to Novy Jicin and its surroundings with the delegation of the town of Ludwigsburg led by the mayor (1992) early contacts were isolated. Then both of the communities took the initiative and exchanges and cooperation became more frequent and more varied. For example:

In the sphere of culture – exhibitions; music – choir (children: Ondrášek, adults (Ondráš), vocal sextet, Jugendorchester der Stadt Ludwigsburg, brass band; reciprocal lectures about monuments and cultural institutions; in 2007 summer festivities in Novy Jicin Square; presentation of Ludwigsburg: cuisine, dance, for example an old dance of former Kuhländchen (German witnesses) together with Czech dance circle in historical costumes; tours of historic places such as the castle and the baroque garden in Ludwigsburg; a film-photo-workshop, language courses, information for tourists etc.

In the sphere of sports – an “Olympic Games“ for young people; bilateral competitions; exchanges of information (eg. on architectural renewal); social working; invitations for special occasions; cooperation between the club of friends of the town of Novy Jicin and the “Verein Alte Heimat“; visits to the collection of German old memorials in the cemetery in Novy Jicin and the Johann Gregor Mendel Foundation.

The most recent activities include – a cycling tour from Ludwigsburg to Novy Jicin for visiting the traditional town festivities (September); a small celebration of the 80th anniversary of installation of the sculpture on the Masaryk square in Novy Jicin (in Ludwigsburg there is the copy of the same sculpture); the delegation of Novy Jicin visited Ludwigsburg in October 2009.

Source: Zora Kudělková, employed in the municipal office as responsible for international relationships of the town of Novy Jicin (1992 – 2005)

“My family was expelled from here in 1945 and we are not allowed to claim any compensation for our lost land, homes and property. So now I come over here every weekend and **** Czech women.”



A German tourist in Frantizkovy Lazne (Franzenbad), August 1991 in conversation with Alan Midgley.

Many Germans looked back in bitterness during the years after the deportations. Many joined organizations such as the Sudetendeutsche Landmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association) hoping that they might obtain compensation or receive an apology for the ‘collective punishment’ imposed on them in 1945. Most Czechs opposed this, although the Czech and German governments agreed a declaration of mutual apology in 1997.



“The Hartmanice Mountain Synagogue remained derelict for two generations but has recently been restored as a museum. The Hartmanice museum records what happened during and after the expulsions of 1945, along with the earlier deportations of the Jewish population during the Nazi occupation. It is a moving symbol of reconciliation between Czechs, Germans and Jews.”

Alan Midgley recalling his visit to the Hartmanice synagogue in 2010



Across Eastern and Central Europe monuments have appeared commemorating those who suffered in the forced migrations of 1945.

This photograph shows the monument in Elek, Hungary commemorating the Germans who lived in Hungary before they were deported by force.



Since the 1990s there has been an awakening of interest in remembering the post-war expulsions and in making gestures of reconciliation. The memorial at Pohorelice (Pohrlitz), erected in 1992, is one example of this commemoration of the difficult past.

Memorial at Pohorelice to those who died in the 'Brno Death March' in 1945



Memories of the past are kept alive, or reawakened, by following generations. The recently-erected memorial at Unterretzbach, near the Czech border in Lower Austria, commemorates the Sudeten German expellees who crossed into Austria in 1945 and tries to keep alive the memory of a lost homeland.

The Right to a Homeland is a Human Right



As a young child, Peter Klepsch was an eye-witness to the shootings in Postoloprty. From 1995, he has visited Postoloprty every year to lay a wreath in commemoration.

Memories of the long-buried past have been reawakened in recent years. In 1995 the Reporter David Hartl began investigating the events of June 1945 when almost 2000 Sudeten Germans were massacred near Postoloprty and Zatec. ‘When we asked people about what happened to the Germans they would only speak to us anonymously, if at all. They were afraid and asked us to drop the story. When the regional newspaper published a couple of articles about it threats started pouring in. Anonymous letters with Swastikas scrawled across them saying you’re going to hang for this you swine.’”

On Wednesday, Bavarian Minister Ludwig Spaenle and the spokesman for the Sudeten German Homeland Association, Bernd Posselt, laid flowers at the Lidice monument. “We are bowing before our fellow citizens from Lidice and we are asking for forgiveness of that part of the guilt that we, too, bear.” said Posselt.

Prague Daily Monitor 17.11.2010

Germany must return the Egerwald Forest in Bavaria to the Czech town of Cheb (Eger in West Bohemia) a court in Regensburg has ruled. The forest is a place of pilgrimage for Sudeten Germans who were expelled from Cheb after World War Two. Sudeten Germans also demanded that Germany keep the forest as compensation for the property confiscated from Germans after the war. Last Friday, however, the German court in Regensburg confirmed Cheb’s right to the forest.

Prague Daily Monitor 6.12.2010

How far do these accounts reflect reconciliation between Czechs and Germans?

It is undeniable that the Nazis committed horrendous atrocities against the Czech people. However, it was not the Sudeten farmers and factory workers who sentenced people to their deaths in Nazi concentration camps. The Czechoslovaks ultimately destroyed an entire ethnic community of more than 3 million civilians, sending into exile families who had been an integral part of the region for centuries.

A German retrospective view: The Institute for Research of Expelled Germans:

<http://expelledgermans.org/sudetengermans.htm>

I think I understand the feelings of the people who after hundreds of years being settled in the Czech lands were expelled or transferred to Germany or Austria. But, of course, the situation was not created by Czechoslovakia itself. It was the outcome of Munich, of six years of occupation and the situation at the end of the war. It was a tragic end to the coexistence of two nations in the Czech lands.

The view of a Czech historian, Jan Kulik when interviewed by Czech radio

www.radio.cz/en/section/talking/the-benes-decrees-a-historians-point-of-view

How far do these accounts reflect continuing disagreements between Czechs and Germans?



WHAT WAS THE BIGGER PICTURE?

German migration 1945: Expellees and refugees

From:	Numbers:
Eastern Germany	7 122 000
Czechoslovakia	2 911 000
Danzig	279 000
Poland	661 000
Baltic States	165 000
USSR	91 000
Hungary	198 000
Romania	228 000
Yugoslavia	271 000

There was a vast migration of ethnic Germans in 1945. Many were 'voluntary' refugees, fleeing westwards to escape from the advancing Red Army. Many were expellees, forcibly deported by the new governments that emerged after the collapse of the Third Reich. The statistical table shows the scale of this migration (though the totals given are only approximate because it was not possible to trace all those who moved in the chaotic conditions at the time).



Memorial to Latvian children deported to the USSR in 1941.

It was not only in 1945 that such massive movements of people occurred in Europe. During the Second World War there were many deportations. Many thousands of Poles were deported from their homes so that the areas they lived in could be 'Germanised'. At the same time, Stalin's USSR deported huge numbers of people from the Baltic States to Siberia. Another group deported on Stalin's orders was the Crimean Tartars. Much nearer our own time, there was mass 'ethnic cleansing' in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.



Rural Sikhs fleeing from Pakistan after the Partition of India, 1947.

The mass movement of refugees and expelled people after the end of the Second World War was not just a European story. When British rule ended in India in 1947, the sub-continent was partitioned between India and Pakistan. There were mass killings on both sides and millions of people were forced to flee. The Sikhs in the long train of ox-carts shown here represent one small part of vast human upheaval.