

CASE STUDY

RECONSTRUCTING SOCIETY

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There are many examples in history of attempts at reconstructing society. Five examples are of particular interest to historians and history teachers: the South of the USA after the Civil War, Russia after the November 1917 revolution, the republics of the Free State and the Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer War, and Germany and Japan after the Second World War. These five examples represent good topics for school assignments. We hope to offer articles on each in due course. In commemoration of the end of the Second World War we start with Germany in this issue. We hope to publish one on Japan in the May 1996 issue.

The term revolution is generally used to describe a drastic substitution of one group in charge of the running of a territorial political entity for another group¹. The immediate and direct manifestation of a revolution occurs in the removal and demolition of the existing political elite and replacing it with a new elite. The new elite then act as the promoters of a new society. A natural revolution occurs when the new elite are the indigenous leaders of a popular uprising. But a revolution can also be led from the outside by an elite who are predominantly external, but who may include some indigenous leaders without a majority popular following. The denazification policy adopted by the Allies in Germany after the Second World War is generally regarded as such an artificial revolution ("pseudo revolutionäres Verfahren")². It is interpreted as an attempt by an external force to introduce not only a new political elite, but a new social order.

While the war was still in progress the Americans and the British agreed on the three basic aims for post-war Germany: the elimination of the totalitarian elite, the encouragement and support of a new leadership and the construction of legal and constitutional safeguards for and assurances of a new democratic order for Germany on the Anglo-American model. The policy of denazification and democratisation, representing a negative and a positive approach, was adopted as the best means for achieving this dual purpose.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the denazification policy in the Western zones of Germany and to assess its results and consequences for Germany. In what way

did the negative element promote or endanger the positive element?

1. THE ORIGINS OF DENAZIFICATION

Wars are normally terminated either by the complete subjugation of one party and the annexation of its territory by the victor or, more frequently, by a treaty of peace which leaves the parties legally intact as independent states. The situation in which Germany found itself after the Second World War was a strangely confused and peculiar one. She was not formally annexed nor was any German government allowed to emerge. No German political leadership was acknowledged and Germany found itself in a situation which has ever since been a matter of serious argument amongst theorists of international law.³ The victors claimed the right to rebuild the political, economic and social life of Germany. External forces and non-German officials were to take over the administration of Germany. The victorious Allies formulated their ideal for Germany: it must be purged of all political, social, economic, military and ideological influences on which the Nazi régime was based. This was a necessary prerequisite for building a new Germany which, apart from being politically, economically and militarily weak, was to be democratic. The precise meaning attached to the term democracy was never officially defined and incorporated into a document accepted and signed by all four occupying powers.

At the Yalta Conference Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agreed "to destroy German militarism and Nazism", to "wipe out the Nazi Party, Nazi laws, organizations and institutions", and to "remove all Nazi and militarist influences from public office and from the cultural and economic life of the German people".⁴ These were only general provisions which were augmented at the Tripartite Conference at Potsdam. Between the Yalta and Potsdam meetings the occupation and division of Germany into zones took place and denazification policies based on the vague declaration of intentions at Yalta were introduced. The occupying powers were left more or less free to follow any policy and to discriminate at their own will. The Soviet Union interpreted the Yalta declaration as giving it the right to

uproot not only the political and military elite but to destroy the entire social structure of its zone. This was justified on the argument that Hitler's domination was due to the social structure of Germany and any purge that did not first and foremost aim at the destruction of capitalism was no purge.⁵ They did not introduce a mechanical process of removing Nazis but made a distinction between those who were well disposed to Communism and the Soviet Union and those who were not. Those ex-Nazis who were willing to join the KPD were accepted as friends no matter what their previous history was.⁶

In the Western zones the Americans took the initiative. Their interpretation of the Yalta declaration was based on the principle of the collective guilt of the German people, which meant that the entire German population was to be scrutinized and denazified. As early as the summer of 1944 two distinct approaches on a post-war policy for Germany began to develop in the United States. The one group, associated with Hans Morgenthau, was of the opinion that in order to eliminate Nazism and its roots, and to prevent Germany from ever again becoming a danger to peace, the structure of German society must be changed, and a comprehensive political purge and decisive economic measures had to be instituted.⁷ The similarities between this "hard-line" approach and the aims of the Soviet Union are self-evident. The opponents of this doctrine argued that such a policy would diminish the chances of a lasting peace in Europe. They agreed on the necessity of a purge but, believing that America had unlimited time for re-educating the German people they wanted to bring about fundamental change by the gradual process of changing the German character through a sustained programme of education. Their policy was aimed at the new generation of Germans.⁸

The initial American policy was a compromise between the "hard-line" and the gradualist plan. It was embodied in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive (JCS) 1067 of April 1945 to the Commander-in-Chief of the US Forces of Occupation. The purging of Germany was the central theme and the aim of this directive, and although the phrase collective guilt is never mentioned, it was very distinctly implied in the directive.⁹ A discussion of the moral and legal aspects of the concept of collective guilt is beyond the scope of this essay, but it must be noted that the concept represented a true reflection of the general mood in the United States in 1945, which generally accepted that denazification could not be severe enough.¹⁰

JCS 1067 showed great mistrust of the German people and no desire at all to cooperate with those Germans who were opponents of National Socialism. The Commander-in-Chief of the United States Forces of Occupation in Germany was instructed to dissolve the

Nazi Party, its formations, affiliated associations, supervised organisations and all Nazi public institutions; to remove and exclude from public office and private enterprise all supporters of the Nazi regime and to confiscate all property that belonged to Nazi organizations or leaders.¹¹ All individuals whose names were listed in the so-called automatic arrest categories were to be interned pending their trial. This preliminary blacklist contained not only the names of all Nazi leaders and the high officers but also more than a thousand industrialists.¹²

The American denazification procedure in the early period was based on the guidelines of this directive. The whole concept of an external purge was so unique and alien to the American officers that serious differences amongst them on the implementation of this policy was natural. Denazification was soon to develop into a plethora of directives and practices. In September 1945 the American war hero, General S. Patton, who was not only regarded as too lenient in his approach to denazification, but also dared to criticise its aims, was relieved of this command by General Eisenhower because of the outrage in America on Patton's display of "weakness" to the Germans.¹³

Patton's protest was mainly against the very wide sweep of denazification. The Americans in this early period regarded denazification as the vital aspect of their German policy and they pressed it very strongly at the Potsdam Conference. In the Potsdam Agreement the negative and legalistic American approach was adopted in an effort not only to spell out in more detail Allied intentions with Germany, but in this way to try and create some uniformity in treatment. But the positive element of the Allied occupation was also emphasized: the reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis.¹⁴ The British and the French henceforth tried to model their policies on that of the United States. But as the American policy began to change rapidly, differences became obvious. In spite of these differences the important aspect of denazification, its impact on Germany and its people, was very homogeneous.

The Potsdam decisions on denazification led to distinct but interlocking operations. The first was the internment of those who were liable to automatic arrest. By the time of the Potsdam Conference about 245,000 Germans were already under arrest. In the US zone the figure was 92 250, in the British 64 500, the French 18 963 and the Soviet zone 67 174. Of the total number about 100 000 were released by January 1 1947.¹⁵ A special International Military Tribunal was set up to deal with the major criminals. The famous Nuremberg trial took place from November 20 1945 to October 1 1946. The Western occupying powers also established a number of special military courts. As a

result of these trials the top leaders of the Third Reich who were still alive and could be captured were punished. The very top political and military elite was eliminated.¹⁶

Denazification proper was the problematic and controversial aspect of the purge and represented the most important link between the negative policy of elimination and the positive task of reconstruction. In terms of the Potsdam Agreement denazification involved determining who were "more than nominal participants in its (NSDAP) activities" and who had the necessary "political and moral qualities" to replace them and assist the occupying powers in "developing genuine democratic institutions in Germany".

The Americans tackled the problem in a spirited but clumsy and inarticulate way. A US Directive of July 7 1945 announced that the entire German population was to be registered and categorised. To achieve this the entire population had to be screened by means of questionnaires. The Directive listed 136 categories of people who were to be excluded from public positions. The questionnaire, which the Germans regarded with distaste, created a restlessness in the community which often found expression in ridicule.¹⁷ It listed 131 questions which were supposed to provide a comprehensive case history of each German in the American zone. It bordered on the absurd with questions on people's voting behaviour in the elections of November 1932 and on the titles of their grandparents.¹⁸ United States Military Government (USMG) Law 8 of September 26 1945 extended denazification to the private sector by authorizing the removal of all ex-members of the NSDAP and its affiliated organisations from private positions. Employees refusing to cooperate in the implementing of the law were threatened with withdrawal of their registration.¹⁹ In the US zone, for example, about half of the 25 000 bank officials were removed from their positions under this law.²⁰ Once removed an employee could only be restored by proving that he was not an active member of the NSDAP. This reversal of the legal procedure was justified on the grounds of the impossibility of providing each ex-Nazi with a public trial.²¹ The implication of being classified as a party member was not only loss of employment, security and pensions, but the humiliating experience of being stamped unacceptable for responsible work and thus forced to work as a common labourer.

As a direct result of this law and the tremendous amount of administration it necessitated, denazification in the American zone became bogged down in its own operations. No fewer than 13 000 000 questionnaires were distributed and by June 1 1946, 1 613 000 were received back by the Special Branch of the USMG.²² The strain that this complex and clumsy system put on

the American administration soon made itself felt. General Clay acknowledged that even 10 000 Americans devoted full time to the job could not succeed in purging the German people.²³ Disillusionment with denazification grew and the USMG began to consider ways of relieving the burden. The high financial costs of the operation made Clay realise that the Germans would be better able to judge their countrymen at much lower cost and their detailed knowledge of local conditions could accelerate the procedure. The new German political leaders emerging after the war had been for some time exerting pressure on the Military Government not to proceed with the mechanical process according to external criteria, but to give a greater weight to individual behaviour. General Clay began to realise the dangers of estrangement of the German population and the creation of political martyrs. To prevent this, he decided denazification must become a German affair.²⁴

2. AMERICAN DISILLUSIONMENT

On November 24 1945 it was announced that the new Länder governments would take over the responsibility for the denazification programme. Denazification Committees were organized in all towns and **Kreisen** to assist the Americans. On December 4 1945 General Clay declared that Germans should not only be responsible for implementing a denazification policy but that they should also be made responsible for formulating such a policy. Where at first the Western powers blatantly refused to cooperate in any way with the Germans and the Anti-Nazi Committees formed by each liberated German community,²⁵ it was now expected of the Länder governments to draw up a draft denazification law which would ensure a coordinated policy in all three Länder of the American zone.

The first draft of the Denazification Committee appointed by the Länder governments was approved by them but rejected by the USMG. It became clear that the much publicized gesture of handing the policy over to the Germans was a propaganda stunt, and that the Germans were not going to be allowed to develop their own ideas of a purge into a constructive policy. The Americans used Control Council Directive 24 of January 1 1946 - which was in actual fact the Allied version of the American denazification procedure - to force the German leaders to continue the American policy. The German leaders, well aware of German embitterment at the heavy restrictions placed on ordinary people who played no active role in politics in the Third Reich but were forced to become nominal members of the NSDAP, wanted to restrict punishment to major offenders, militarists and the politically incriminated.²⁶ The USMG insisted on including all the categories provided for in the CC Directive 24.

The German leaders had no choice but to accept this and the new draft law was promulgated on March 3 1946. It became generally known as the **Befreiungsgesetz**. The German leaders were responsible for implementing a law which did not embody their view of or policy for denazification.²⁷

Under this law a new questionnaire was circulated and all Germans above the age of 18 had to complete it. Special German Tribunals were created to classify the German people into the five categories provided for in C.C. Directive 24, and spelled out in more detail in C.C. Directive 38 of October 12 1946.²⁸ The first category - Major Offenders - were liable to 2 to 10 years in a labour camp, loss of employment, pension and citizens' right and restrictions on eventual reemployment. The Offenders of Category II (activists, militarists, profiteers) were liable to similar punishments. Categories III and IV - Lesser Offenders and Followers - were liable to fines from 50 - 2 000 marks and temporary expulsion from employment. The last category - Exonerated - would entitle a person to take an active part in the reconstruction of Germany.

All ex-members of the NSDAP and its affiliated organisations were restricted from accepting any public employment until their cases had been decided on. The rules and regulations for classification were listed in detail in C.C. Directive 38. The definitions of the different categories are partly based on a general description of activities, and they are partly the automatic test of the importance of certain organisations as laid down by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal.

The implementation of these measures was entrusted to German Purging Tribunals (*Spruchkammern*). Only the chairmen of these tribunals had to have some legal training. In the American zone 545 tribunals with 22 000 officials were set up. Progress was hampered by the serious problem of getting people to serve on these tribunals, and the *Länder* governments eventually had to draft people. This did not help to improve the popular attitude towards denazification. People were also compelled to complete the new questionnaires on the threat of forfeiting their ration cards.

The *Länder* governments still hoped to get around their reservations on the **Befreiungsgesetz** by using the tribunals to concentrate on getting the leading Nazis to court. Unfortunately the tribunals were not allowed to concentrate on this but had to deal with an avalanche of cases - three million Germans were regarded as chargeable under this law.²⁹ On the basis of a completed questionnaire the tribunals placed the respondent in one of the five categories. It was the respondent's responsibility to prove to the tribunal that he had a right to a lower placement. This resulted in

the tribunals being flooded by what may be called exculpation certificates which became known as **Persilscheine**, whitewash slips, after Persil, a brand of soap flakes.

The Americans used the liberation law and its implementation as an important political test for the new German leaders: if they did not carry it through energetically they would not be allowed to take over any further responsibilities. This was the message of General Clay's stinging rebuke to the German Authorities in November 1946 for what he regarded as their laxity and flaws in the execution of the policy. He said: "I can only state that we are at present highly disappointed in the results and that we have yet to find the political will and determination to punish those who deserve punishment. It becomes more and more obvious that the de-Nazification procedure is rather being used to restore as many people as possible to their former position than to find the guilty and punish them. I fail to see how you want to prove your ability for self-government and your will to democracy if you escape or evade the first unpleasant and difficult task that has fallen to you".³⁰

Little more than a year later these very same words would ring ironically in the ears of the Germans when they were protesting against the American policy of cancelling denazification at such a speed that the really guilty profited by it. The German leaders did believe that the real culprits should be well and truly punished, but these, they emphasized, were only a small minority. They resented the sweeping purge that the Americans wanted and the procedure which buried the tribunals under an avalanche of questionnaires and **Persilscheine** and left them with the impossible task of getting at the serious cases. These were the time-consuming ones, which required a thorough investigation and a full public trial. Being locked in with questionnaires, the tendency which developed in the American phase of denazification to postpone the difficult cases until sufficient evidence could be collected and conditions were more favourable for a legal trial, continued. It was also correctly argued that while the vast majority of Germans lived in uncertainty about the future as long as their classification was unknown, the classification should proceed as rapidly as possible. According to Balfour only 10% of the German population could be regarded as true Nazis.³¹ If the German proposals for concentrating on this group instead of classifying the entire population had been adopted, many later difficulties could have been avoided. The Germans knew that the American procedure would lead to estrangement of the vast majority of the population and this, not the thoroughness of the purge of the minor Nazis, would endanger democracy.

The German embitterment against the denazification measures increased rapidly. In March 1946, according to American surveys, 57% of the people questioned were satisfied that the policy was fair, by December 1946 - i.e. since the **Befreiungsgesetz** had been introduced - this had dwindled to 34%.³² The resentment was directed at both the Americans and those Germans who served on the tribunals. As public opinion grew more antagonistic these people found themselves not only socially and politically ostracised, but even their lives were threatened.³³ In the spring of 1947 the official prosecutor of the denazification court of Freiburg in the French zone, Hub, was murdered.³⁴

Denazification became a nightmare for the emerging German political parties. The KPD, originally the staunchest supporter of the purge because they saw in it the ideal opportunity to create the necessary conditions for a revolution,³⁵ were the first to withdraw from the tribunals in early 1947. Their new strategy of trying to generate German antagonism against the process into support for the KPD did not pay off.³⁶ A little later the Christian Democrats and the Liberals withdrew many of their officials from the tribunals so that in the end often the Social Democrats alone hung on.

The myth of German responsibility for the purge was further revealed by the American decision to counter the growing dissatisfaction by introducing amnesties. On August 6 1946, the so-called "Jugend Amnestie" was introduced by which all people born after January 1 1919 were freed from taking reconciliation measures. It was argued that they were generally too young to have taken an active part in Nazi activities. The fact that they were 18 by 1937 and had every opportunity of taking a very active part in the regime, disclosed the real intentions of the amnesty: to accelerate the process and get denazification completed as soon as possible. A few months later the "Weihnachtsamnestie" followed.

Americans began to realise the impossibility of the task they had undertaken.³⁷ In America itself serious doubts about the results of denazification began to develop. The way in which the KPD and the SPD tried to use the tribunals as a basis for changing the entire social and economic structure of Germany³⁸ alarmed conservative circles in America at a stage when they began to realise how important Germany's speedy economic recovery was for the protection of Western Europe against the spread of communism.³⁹ The collapse of four-power occupation and the developing tension between the West and the East led to a growing feeling in the United States that denazification was an obstacle to the economic and social stabilization of Western Europe.⁴⁰ At the same time the high costs of the process led to a call for its immediate termination by the Appropriations Committee of the 80th Congress of the Republican Party.⁴¹

The USMG appreciated the burden of denazification and had been pressing for its acceleration ever since the Germans took over responsibilities. But even the amnesties introduced did not help to speed up the process. On October 24 1947, for example, the Bavarian Minister President Hans Ehard announced in the State Parliament that in Bavaria alone, 541 662 cases had still to be dealt with. Of these 400 000 were serious cases in Categories I and II. It is ironical that at the stage when the Americans became irritated and wanted to end denazification, it had only reached the stage which was of most importance to the Germans: the punishment of serious offenders. Two years had been wasted in prosecuting minor Nazis.

Although the American Army was receptive to the desire to get denazification over and done with, they supported General Clay when he pointed out that it would have devastating moral and psychological consequences if denazification was to be suspended abruptly. New pressure was exerted on the German tribunals and March 31 1948 was set as a deadline for completing the process. In spite of genuine efforts to achieve this goal, there were still 540 000 untried cases and 17 000 people in internment when the deadline was reached.⁴²

By the spring of 1948 Washington came to acknowledge what the German leaders had been saying since the start of the denazification procedure. A report of a Subcommittee of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Foreign Aid dated February 28 1948 recommended that all pending trials of Minor Offenders and Followers be disposed of. "It seems reasonably clear now", the report reads, "that American denazification policy went too far and tried to include too many. Its categorization was too broad and too rigidly applied. Particularly, it left the German people in such a state of uncertainty as to their status that the programs for economic reconstruction and democratization were definitely hampered ... Nevertheless, it was something that had to be attempted and did at least demonstrate the sincerity of the Americans in wishing to provide conditions under which democracy would have a chance to grow".⁴³

The insistent demands of the German leaders to expedite procedures for all but the heavily incriminated only now produced results. In their new haste to get denazification completed the US went to the other extreme. For each **Kreis** the USMG officials set up quotas of cases to be retained for trial. The officials personally selected these cases and the German tribunals were ordered to declare all the others followers.⁴⁴ Under the pressures of the Cold War denazification had become wholly discredited. The steps which led to its liquidation convincingly proves the myth of German responsibility for denazification.

3. DENAZIFICATION IN THE BRITISH ZONE

The British approach to the task of purging Germany was based on its assumption that Nazism was a disease of the body politic which can only be cured by removing the germ carriers. This meant that their approach came very close to that of the Americans in the early period. But the fact that Britain at that stage had a Labour government in power was to be significant.

In contrast to the Americans the British adopted a very conciliatory attitude to the leftist opponents of the Nazi regime and they tended to favour the SPD.⁴⁵ They did not hesitate to use Socialist leaders not only to purge Germany of Nazi leaders, but also of some capitalists. They did not introduce a sweeping denazification programme because they could not shoulder the cost of such a huge operation and because they did not regard it as the main aim of their occupation. Britain's own post-war economic weakness enabled her to be more appreciative of the economic problems facing Germany. She was therefore more inclined to concentrate on the economic problems and at the same time to use the opportunity offered for introducing a mixed economy in Germany. To a certain extent the British were more seriously inclined to use denazification not only to remove the political elite but also to introduce a limited social revolution.⁴⁶

Britain did not introduce automatic arrests, lengthy questionnaires or compulsory registration, and they did not leave it to the accused to prove that he was not an active socialist. They tried to follow the C.C. Directives in as practical a way as possible.⁴⁷

The British were much slower in handing over aspects of the political administration to the Germans than the Americans because of their serious lack of confidence in the Germans to manage their own affairs. Political parties were only allowed in September 1945 and the first elections for **Landtage** were held in April 1947, almost six months later than in the American zone, except for Hamburg. Although a German council to advise the British, the **Zonenbeirat**, had existed since February 1946, the British Military Government (BMG) did not consult them on denazification measures until 1947.

It was only after the Moscow Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the four Allied Powers that Britain decided to entrust the Länder governments with the responsibility for denazification. Like the Americans the British refused to accept the German proposals for a less categorised approach.⁴⁸ They insisted on implementing the five categories of C.C. Directive 38.

There was no general denazification law in the British zone and each German Land followed its own thinking along the general guidelines laid down by BMG. Only in Schleswig-Holstein was a denazification law adopted. The **Landtage** of Nordrhein-Westphalen and Niedersachsen refused to pass denazification laws.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the British policy was its efforts to re-educate the German people. This was specially aimed at the German civil servants and members of local government. The British forced the Germans to adopt a system of local government very different from the traditional German system and modelled more on the British system. The Americans consistently refused to intervene in the traditional system of local government.⁴⁹

Special week-long school sessions were organised to teach the Germans the British system of local government.⁵⁰ Their effort to force the Germans to accept the British civil service system, however, failed.⁵¹

The Education Branch of the British occupation was responsible for reorganising the educational system and for introducing British democratic ideas into German education. They succeeded in reorganising youth groups, establishing education centres and designing a scheme of sponsored visits to Great Britain to bring the German youth into contact with British democracy. The policy failed to instil the German university staff with an attitude of complete independence from the state and to prevent or reform the traditional **Korperschaften**.⁵²

In spite of the differences in certain policy matters the British procedure did not result in a reaction significantly different from the German reaction to the American policy.

4. DENAZIFICATION IN THE FRENCH ZONE

Although the French policy was very similar to that of the British and the Americans, the ultimate aim was not the same. For the French Hitler was the end product of a line of development which began with Bismarck and this meant that Nazism was bound up with Prussianism. The totalitarian state was a natural outcome of a unitary Germany and therefore the French aim was to destroy German unity permanently. France was the only Ally to remain an enthusiastic supporter of the original policy of dismemberment. After three wars against Germany one would expect the most revengeful policy from the French. Dismemberment, the permanent economic weakening of Germany and maximum reparations for France served this purpose. But in its

denazification policy the French showed a greater understanding of the Germans. They did not believe in scrutinizing and categorizing the entire German population and succeeded even more than the British in treating the Germans as individuals.⁵³ The main aim of their denazification policy was to reconcile as many Germans as possible with the French regime so as to win their support for a French policy of annexation of parts of Germany. From the very beginning they entrusted the Germans with the task of purging because the idea of a self-purge (Selbstreinigung) was more important to them than formal punishment. Each German mind had to be confronted with the moral problem of Nazi war atrocities⁵⁴ and through a programme of re-education each German had to be brought into contact with the "superior" French culture. The French were convinced they could use the shattered German spirit to build a pro-French loyalty within a European context.⁵⁵

Each state in the French zone was allowed to develop its own denazification policy with the least possible enforcement of uniform rules. The system adopted by the provisional government of Carlo Schmid in Württemberg was later incorporated into the Ordinance for Political Cleansing, passed by the German Secretariat on May 1946. In each **Kreis** an Examinations Committee (Untersuchungsausschuss) consisting of five permanent and three temporary members taken from the professional group whose members were being examined, was appointed. Above these committees, who were of purely local significance, was a Purging Committee (Säuberungsausschuss) which made the final decision in each case and passed it on to the Military Governor of the State for his approval.

The committees were entirely made up of Germans and concentrated on purging the public administration. Very little attention was given to the private sector. Membership of the NSDAP and its affiliated organisations was not regarded as prima facie evidence of guilt, but non-membership accepted as proof of innocence. This made it possible to concentrate on individual cases rather than a mass purge. In each Land a Land Political Advisory Council and a Land Commissioner for Political Cleansing was appointed. The Council was appointed by the Land government on nomination by the political parties. The Council decided on the sanctions to be applied to those classified as punishable by the Purging Committee.

The five categories of C.C. Directive 38 were never adopted in the French zone. This led to criticism from the Allies that the French were too lenient and that they employed people dismissed from their posts in the American zone. It is true that the French policy was not so thorough-going as the initial American policy⁵⁶

and that the French did employ people from other zones, but these included men like Konrad Adenauer and Carlo Schmid. They did this because of their aim at a future rapprochement with Germany in a newly created Europe.

5. GERMAN CRITICISM OF DENAZIFICATION

In 1951 the weekly **Christ und Welt** summed up the German feeling about denazification: "Mit Gesetzen, Verordnungen und staatlichen Hoheitsakten ist der unseligen Entnazifizierung nicht mehr beizukommen. Nur ein Akt menschlicher Hoheit kann sie in die Tiefe des Vergessens bannen. Da gehört sie hin".⁵⁷

Since the Battle of Stalingrad German disillusionment with the war grew and with it a general resistance to the war. But the concept of "unconditional surrender" formulated by the Allies at Casablanca in 1943 made it difficult to resist the new war propaganda unleashed by Goebbels for keeping Germany in the war. The failure of the July 20 1944 coup was a severe setback for those Germans who desired an end to the war. Between 1943 and 1945 a deep-rooted and fundamental change in the German attitude had taken place.⁵⁸ Before the end of the war the Germans were preparing for a self-investigation and a self-cleansing (Selbstreinigung) never before experienced in history.⁵⁹ But the Allied policy of denazification took the right of self-cleansing from the German people and replaced it with a mechanical and legalistic approach which had exactly the opposite effect. The Germans became estranged from the process of cleansing Germany and this estrangement rapidly evolved into open hostility.

Instead of providing a sound foundation for the policy of building democracy in Germany, denazification left the German people in great doubt about democracy. Dr. Hans Ehard, Minister of Bavaria, expressed these doubts in a speech in 1946 in which he said: "The mention of the word democracy, or democratic, especially before a young audience, arouses a wave of distrust in Germany [not because it is considered bad but because of the] ... contradiction between democratic illusions and the reality of power relationships in the world of today".⁶⁰

The Germans were critical of denazification because the clumsy procedure adopted meant that the ordinary members of the Nazi Party were more severely punished than some of the leaders. "Die Kleinen werden gehängt, the Grossen lässt man laufen", was an opinion quite generally held in Germany. The development of denazification as discussed above proves this. It happened not because anybody desired to be more lenient to the "big" Nazis but because of the

immensity of the purge and the complexity of determining who was a "big" Nazi. The trials of offenders in Categories I and II were extremely difficult, expensive and prolonged. The natural tendency was to postpone these trials because it was more important to relieve the majority of the population from the uncertainties under which they laboured while their classification was still pending. With the changing American attitude it was the more serious offenders who benefited from the accelerated process. People with influence and a good lawyer could play for time, while the pressure to complete the task engendered weariness and indifference.⁶¹

In February 1947 a delegation of high British Church representatives paid a visit to Germany and in their findings they emphasized the German bitterness at the thousands of followers and nominal party members who suffered for no real crime.⁶² But it is also true that the Germans sometimes tended to oversimplify the distinction between "big" and "little" Nazis. General Clay made this point in a special report to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in December 1950: "The 'big' Nazi referred to was sometimes a man of influence, possibly a devoted Nazi, who made large contributions to the party and urged his employees to join. But he may have been a benevolent employer, and one who never persecuted anyone. So when he came before his peers and neighbours who sat on the courts, these people had no grievance against him. They did not judge him by his ideological beliefs but on his day-to-day activities which, from their point of view, were all in his favour. On the other hand the 'little' Nazi, who may have been a cobbler, a postman, or a petty foreman, and who received severe sanctions and is often cited by the critics, may have been a fanatical Nazi. He may have denounced his neighbours to the Gestapo, belonged to the 'hoodlums' of the community, caused the arrest of his neighbors, their internment in concentration camps, or damage to their property".⁶³

More serious, and less easy to explain away, was the category of "economically useful Nazis" - managers, technicians, economists, administrators who were not punished because their cooperation with Hitler was explained as technical and not political and because their abilities were required for coping with the economic chaos. On the other hand lesser officials, teachers and university lecturers were treated severely.⁶⁴

The most deplorable effect of denazification was that it was at once too lenient and too severe, too broad and too restricted. While serious offenders got away the harsh treatment of others created an embittered group who developed an anti-political attitude. They refused to accept any responsibility for or role in constructing a new Germany. The "Ohne mich" attitude of a great

number of Germans created the fear amongst German leaders that denazification was in fact laying the foundation for renazification.⁶⁵ The basic error, as the Germans saw it, was that no distinction was made between the "Will" and the "Muss" Nazis.⁶⁶ The authoritarian structure of the Third Reich was such that a great number of Germans who wished to advance in their jobs had no choice but to become members of the NSDAP or its affiliated organisations. The classification of people because of this membership did not serve democracy. It stimulated the belief that they were being punished for their democratic right to have a political opinion. And, as Eugen Kogon pointed out in 1947, this included the "Recht auf den politischen Irrtum": "Es ist nicht Schuld, sich politisch geirrt zu haben. Verbrechen zu verüben oder an ihnen teilzunehmen, wäre es auch nur durch Duldung, ist Schuld. Und Fährlässigkeit ist ebenfalls Schuld, wenn auch eine von anderer und von geringer Art als Verbrechen und Verbrechensteilnahme. Aber politischer Irrtum - in allen Schattierungen - samt dem echten Fehlentschluss gehört weder vor Gerichte noch vor Spruchkammern".⁶⁷

But the foundations of democracy were also threatened by another aspect of the denazification process. Category V and the reversal of the proof of guilt created, as indicated, a group of people exonerated or whitewashed. This meant, as Konrad Adenauer pointed out, that the German people were divided into two classes: the blameless (Eindwandfreie) and the not-blameless (Nichteinwandfreie). For the political development of Germany this unnatural division provided no guarantee of the acceptance and stability of a new order. The fact that many Germans lost their electoral rights made the problem even more serious. In some German Länder only Categories IV and V had the right to vote and only those in Category V were eligible for office. In other Länder like Bremen, Südbaden, Württemberg-Baden and Württemberg-Hohenzollern those in Category III were also entitled to vote. Adenauer wanted to solve the anomalies and overcome the developing a-political attitude by an early amnesty, but the political forces of the left resisted it.⁶⁸

The Left had another reason for criticising denazification: it did not bring about the revolutionary change in the social structure of Germany they had anticipated.

6. DENAZIFICATION AND THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF GERMANY

The Germans early realised that a process of "Selbstreinigung des deutschen Volkes" would not only be a personal moral problem for each German who supported the Third Reich, but would inevitably

become a political problem. There were broadly two basic attitudes to this problem: the plans and ideas of the leftist underground movement and those of the bourgeois resistance group (bürgerlichen Widerstandsgruppen) who were responsible for the July 20 1994 complot.

The leftist ideas came nearest to the later denazification programme of the Allies. They believed that to root out national socialism and reaction altogether it was necessary to destroy its foundations in Junkerdom, military, economic and civil service forces. The two most important political representatives of the leftist forces were the KPD and the SPD.

For the KPD "Selbstreinigung" had to lay the basis for revolution: it had to uproot all vestiges of fascist organisation, influence and power and the overturning of capitalism and the socialisation of production would follow naturally. The SPD also believed in a revolutionary process of "Selbstreinigung" that would undermine the structure of the old society followed not by socialisation of production but by a government apparatus controlled by the masses. A new social structure would then be introduced by democratic parliamentary procedure.

The leaders of the July 20 coup did not regard political purging as their most important programme. They wanted to remove the important and influential leaders of Nazis, but they did not plan a political revolution.⁶⁹ They were convinced that the overwhelming majority of Germans did not support the Third Reich regime and could not be held responsible for the deeds of its leaders.

The Allied policy for Germany took the right of "Selbstreinigung" from the German people and presented them with a fait accompli. The new post-war political parties were all agreed on the necessity of denazification of some sort but they disagreed on its extent and the method to be adopted. These differences were sometimes covered by the unity they showed against aspects of the Allied denazification policy. Their opposition was in particular aimed at the standardization of the policy, its sweeping scope, the too harsh punishment of ordinary Nazis and certain peculiar characteristics of the policy of individual occupying powers, for example the American censure of certain occupations.⁷⁰

The KPD and SPD were initially keen supporters of denazification because its drastic nature promised the destruction of the entire social structure. The KPD used every opportunity offered by the tribunals or denazification committees to get their men into key positions, which were used to load denazification bodies with communists.⁷¹ In the first months they

were helped by the Americans who, for instance, appointed a Communist, Heinrich Schmidt, as Bavarian minister responsible for denazification. He used his position as a political instrument and tried to remove influential capitalists.⁷² The Americans at first justified their appointment of Communists and the actions of people like Schmidt with the argument that by removing the elite in Germany Soviet collaboration with the Western Allies could be secured.⁷³

Artur Straeter, post-war Minister of Justice of Rhineland-Westphalia, drew attention to the political use made of denazification: "Most of the commissions turned out to be the revengeful revolutionary tribunals of the class struggle, of corruption, venality, and political egotism. Thus it often happened that the issue decided was not activity in the National Socialist Party during the Third Reich, but the defendant's present party attachment. Under the very eyes of the military government these commissions have been and are eliminating the political opponent, the economic competitor, or the manager, who loses his job not because he was a National Socialist but because he is a pawn in the class struggle. Yet every child knows that we need every man in the reconstruction of Germany under the Marshall Plan, except those dangerous Nazis who due to their influence might sabotage it".⁷⁴ The fact, however, that in 1947 the KPD was the first to withdraw from the tribunals indicates that they did not consider Western denazification measures an appropriate means of pursuing their policies. They also tried the opposite: to use their attacks on denazification procedures and results as a rallying point for the disillusioned and embittered German voters. The effort failed.

The bourgeois parties were strongly against the anti-capitalist, revolutionary tendencies of denazification. They also resented the manhunt introduced after the war. They regarded it as very necessary to expel the small clique of leaders of national socialism but in their view it was wrong to wrack one's brain and burn up all your energy in sweeping measures like those introduced by the Americans. They wanted a speedy return to political normality which to them was the democratic legal state (Rechtstaat). They wanted denazification by ordinary trial according to penal code.⁷⁵

Denazification eventually became a serious party political issue. By 1948 the original show of unity and agreement amongst the parties on this issue had completely disappeared. The founding of new right radical parties such as the Sozialistische Reichspartei, the Deutschen Reichspartei and the Deutschen Partei in the American zone introduced a new development. The Americans saw in this a serious threat to democracy and they feared a revival of right-wing nationalism.⁷⁶ Between 1949 and 1951 right-wing radicalism once

again became a potent political force.⁷⁷ Efforts by these parties to gain the sympathy of the ex-Nazis forced the other parties to disassociate themselves from the image of being the real developers or originators of the denazification policy. All major parties now refused to acknowledge any responsibility for, or accept any further participation in, denazification. The threat of being stigmatised as the "collaborator" with the Allies in formulating and executing the denazification policy was something of which the SPD, as the party which most distinctly identified itself with denazification, became particularly afraid and they took pains to show that the bourgeois parties also played a role in the denazification process.⁷⁸ The SPD leaders became disenchanted with the consequences of the purge. Their leaders had to admit, albeit reluctantly, that their attempt to initiate a political revolution in a constitutional way had failed.

On the other hand, it is fact that those groups in society on whom the bourgeois parties generally rely for their support suffered most under the denazification measures. According to a public opinion poll it was the middle and upper classes who were severely affected, as the following percentages of purges affecting different social groups indicate⁷⁹:

- 41% of people with "Abitur" or University education were purged, 31% with education up to "Mittlere Reife" and 19% of those who attended "Volksschule".
- 35% of those who had a monthly income of more than 400 DM were purged compared with 20% in the 250-399 and 19% in the less than 250 DM income per month categories.
- 33% of those who were classified as independent business and professional people were subjected to a purge, 32% of the civil servants (Beamte), 29% of other white-collar workers (Angestellte), 24% of farmers, 16% of the labourers and 13% of the labourers in agriculture.

The anxiety of the Christian Democratic Union, Adenauer's governing party after the 1949 elections, to put an end to the process of denazification is thus understandable. It is not possible to ascertain how many votes the CDU lost in the 1949 election as a result of the suspension of the voting rights of those classified in Categories I to III. It seems reasonable to assume that the CDU sacrificed more votes than its main rival the SPD, but the fact that there were so many political parties participating in the 1949 Bundestag election makes it futile to attempt to draw any conclusions on this point. The fact is the CDU

came out strongly in favour of suspending the denazification process.

The first problem to solve was a constitutional one. The denazification laws were the products of the Länder governments, introduced at a stage when no German central government existed. After a prolonged argument on who would be responsible for terminating denazification, it was agreed that the Bundestag would draw up guidelines for the Länder Parliaments which would then be ultimately responsible for passing laws to end denazification. These different laws were passed in the early fifties. Under the electoral law of July 8 1953 electoral rights were still withheld from the main offenders. This restriction was removed by an electoral law passed in May 1956.

Article 131 of the Basic Law represented another controversial aspect of denazification. Under the various denazification laws ex-civil servants in categories I-III were disqualified from holding office. Although Article 131 did not automatically reinstate these people, it did provide for the future reopening of the issue. The SPD Opposition in the Bundestag resisted efforts to reappoint these people and it was only after a serious political struggle that, by a law passed on May 11 1951, public bodies were compelled to reinstate suspended civil servants, except those who were originally classified as unfit for public service.

The Federal Republic accepted the responsibility of proceeding with the tracking down of guilty war criminals who succeeded in escaping trial. For this purpose the Central Agency for Investigating Nazi Crimes (Ludwigsburger Zentralstelle) was founded on December 1 1958. On September 1 1969 a federal law was enacted which extended the period during which war criminals could still be prosecuted from twenty to thirty years.

7. AN ASSESSMENT OF DENAZIFICATION

The problem of measuring the success or failure of the denazification policy depends on the yardstick used. For the socialist it was a disappointment because a psychological opportunity to replace the Nazis with their (as they saw it) only ideological democratic opponents was missed. A radically new social structure did not evolve. Although many industrialists were removed, several were reinstated. The denazification process did not for instance succeed in breaking up Krupps.⁸⁰

The mechanical mass purge and the reaction against it made very few Germans feel any humiliation at having been convicted by an American or British denazification

court for the crime of being a Nazi at a time when to be so was not only legal, but normal. The argument on the "Recht auf den politischen Irrtum" was mainly responsible for establishing the conviction that the German people were being punished not for a crime or crimes committed, but for their political allegiance. Denazification invalidated, for many years, the whole concept of justice in Germany. For some ten years after the creation of the Federal Republic this denial of guilt prevailed. The new German government rapidly gave amnesty to the convicted and many of them received a hero's welcome. Denazification had failed to extend and intensify the "Selbstreinigung" concept and led rather to the opposite: a total cutting off from the past and a denial of any concern with the Third Reich.⁸¹

Instead of laying the foundation of democracy in Germany, there was a period in which the reaction against denazification threatened the whole effort at building democracy. In spite of the licensing system for political parties and newspapers and the 5% barrier for representation in the Bundestag, the revival of a number of right-wing parties did present a threat to the future of democratic government. In 1947-48 there was a critical stage when the future of democracy in Germany was really in the balance. The coming of the Cold War and the German fear of Russian communism presented the Germans with what they regarded as a choice between two evils. They chose democracy and they used the democratic parliamentary process to remove the injustices left by denazification.

Although denazification did not result in any major alteration in the structure of German society, one important result was the removal of the political elite of

the Third Reich and its replacement not by the old Weimar elite but by a new post-war elite.⁸² Out of the 402 representatives in the first Bundestag only 25 were members of the Weimar Parliament. The rest were all newly entered into the business of politics.⁸³ In 1956 there was no major Nazi leader in any elite position in politics.⁸⁴

In the civil service some **Beamten** stayed in their positions from Weimar to the Bundesrepublik. With the exception of State Secretary Globke, none of them was controversial.⁸⁵ In 1956 only 7% of all the non-political elite groups occupied elite positions in the field of administration, armed forces, business organizations and communications comparable to those they occupied in the Nazi era. Of the 1956 elites 82% had neither been strong opponents nor strong supporters of the totalitarian regime.⁸⁶

What happened in Germany was that the old political elite was removed as a result of denazification. But a revolutionary change did not occur because they were not replaced by the opposing elite. Only 18% of all those occupying elite positions in 1956 were in a major way involved in the opposition to the totalitarian regime.⁸⁷ A completely new elite developed in Germany from those masses who played a passive role in the politics of the Third Reich. By removing the totalitarian political elite and by causing the discrediting of the revolution-inclined elite, who wanted to use denazification to establish their leadership, it can be said that denazification did not result in revolutionary change in Germany. But for some time it hovered on the brink of revolution and it was due to the Cold War and the German people themselves that this did not happen.

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