

ZERO HOUR

THE ALLIES AND THE GERMANS

In May 1945 a world seemed to have come to an end in Germany. So cataclysmic was the change that the Germans coined the phrase 'zero hour'. Their country was occupied and at the mercy of foreigners, who now took over the government. The victors' ideologies and values were imposed on the new Germany for good or ill; but nothing could be worse than what had gone before.

In the western zones of Germany, constituting two-thirds of the former Reich, the social basis did not radically alter. Factory owners, managers of industry, and the professional classes, despite their involvement with Hitler's Germany, adjusted themselves to the new circumstances. Only the best-known collaborators, such as Alfred Krupp, were arrested and tried. Expertise and efficiency does not have to coincide with morality. Defeated Germany did not lose the skills of its managers, engineers and workers, who thus made possible the later economic miracle of the 1950s. During the early years of the occupation from 1945 to 1949 their first task was to try to resist or circumvent and soften the draconian economic directives of occupiers bent on de-industrialising Germany.

In 1945, the Allies were amazed to discover how much of Germany's industrial strength had survived the war. The lost production of the steel industry did not exceed 10 per cent, and no key industry had suffered more than 20 per cent losses. Industrially, then, 1945 was not the zero hour, despite the huge problems of restoring some sort of normality.

The physical appearance of the German cities belied their underlying strength. Corpses still lay under huge mounds of rubble, and thousands were to remain entombed there. The new Germany would have to be built on top of streets turned into cemeteries. Parts of Berlin, Cologne and Hamburg were totally flattened. In Hamburg, one district had even been walled in. No one had been permitted to enter it for fear that disease would spread from the corpses left there.

The last weeks of the war, although it was lost for certain, had added to the needless destruction of life. The Germans had fought on, obeying orders. Some even believed that the Führer had a wonder-weapon that would rescue them or that the Americans and British would join them to fight the Russians 'to save civilisation'. There was also a good reason for holding on as long as possible in the east. The surviving German navy made it a last mission to evacuate the refugees stranded on the coast of East Prussia and now cut off from the rest of Germany by the Soviet advance. Tens of thousands were ferried to Hamburg and other ports in west Germany. Jewish survivors, however, were murdered on East Prussia's beaches. German losses during the war had been horrendous. More than 3 million German soldiers had been killed or were missing, millions more were wounded and disabled; the Western Allied camps were filled with prisoners of war. Those in Soviet captivity who survived would not return home for ten

years. More than half a million civilians killed were victims of the Allied bombing offensive.

Allied soldiers commandeered the more habitable buildings; military headquarters were set up; local administrative offices were supervised by Russian, British, French or American army officers. The war had displaced millions. German soldiers and civilians were trying to find their way home. Poles and Russians brought to Germany as slave labour were now stranded; there were also tens of thousands of Russians who had changed sides and had sought to escape death by helping the Germans. Some Ukrainians and Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians had participated with the SS in terrible atrocities. Victims and murderers were now all intermingled. The concentration-camp survivors were released. Millions of 'foreigners' were on German soil; many were sick and unable to work – what was to happen to them? What was to be done with the pitiful remnants of the European Jews? A new and prosaic term was found for this flotsam of humanity, 'displaced persons'. They were put in camps again, in simple huts, and were fed by relief workers. It was to take years to sort them all out and settle them – not always in the country of their choice.

More than 20 million were on the move in Europe in the early summer of 1945, escaping something, going from somewhere to somewhere else. The roads were crammed with people on foot, on bicycles and with bundles of possessions. Some arrived crowded into or clinging to the outside of the few trains that were still running. The sheer scale of the forced migration during the war and in 1945, continuing for another two and three years, almost defies the imagination. From mid-1944 Germans and their allies were fleeing from the advancing Red Army in the east, where the Wehrmacht tried to hold a front line even during the last days of the war to enable millions more to reach the west. The loss of life probably exceeded 2 million, as the fighting at times overran the fleeing civilian columns. Nazi Germans who had lorded it over the Poles deserved their fate but not the children. Tragedy overtook both the guilty and the innocent.

When the war was over, under the terms of the Potsdam Agreement the Poles drove out most of the Germans who had settled in Poland during the war, as well as the ethnic Germans who had lived in Poland long before it became a sovereign state again; millions more were driven from the



Devastated Dresden a year after the RAF bombing. Life must go on. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

newly occupied German territories east of the Oder-Neisse, which to all intents and purposes became part of the Polish state. From Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten ethnic Germans were likewise expelled. It was supposed to be done humanely, but pent-up hatreds often got the better of humanity. In all, as many as 10 million Germans and ethnic Germans reached the Western zones of Germany without much more than the clothes they stood up in. At least they were 'home' with their own people, though not always welcomed by the local residents. They were not displaced persons (DPs for short) as the 1.5 million Russians, the million French citizens, the 600,000 Poles and the hundreds of thousands from every country the Germans had conquered, whose people had been forced to work in German factories were. Some had a home to go to; others, including many Russians, did not want to return – they knew what fate awaited them for collaborating with the Germans. The British, in accordance with agreements made with the Russians and Yugoslavs, forced thousands back at the point of the bayonet. Among the most pathetic DPs, were the Jews, the survivors of the death camps, who longed to enter British-controlled Palestine.

Rations for the Germans were very short, sufficient only to maintain life. Coal was lacking for heating and for industry. Hardly a tree that could provide fuel for a fire was left standing in the towns. The lovely Berlin park, the Tiergarten, was soon denuded of its trees. The destruction of the transport system made it even harder to provide basic needs for an estimated 25 million homeless and rootless people, as well as for the rest of the population. Many families had lost their breadwinner at the front, 'fallen for Führer and country'; many more men, women and children were crippled by war wounds. The immediate challenge in 1945 was mere survival. Curfews and the lack of postal and telephone systems cut off one community from another during the early weeks of peace; in Kassel the population did not know what was happening in Frankfurt. Only German farmers, in the countryside, were still relatively well off. They had their houses, their land, and flour, milk, vegetables and meat which they could exchange for a Persian carpet or jewellery



Not all these Jews from a concentration camp were strong enough to survive their liberation. © National Archives, Washington

brought to them by hungry city-dwellers. There was little fellow feeling in misfortune. Allied soldiers, too, swapped necessities and cigarettes for expensive cameras and watches. Cigarettes became a currency.

That mass starvation and epidemics did not sweep through Germany and central Europe in 1945 and 1946 is a remarkable tribute to the relief workers. It was also due to the efficiency of new pesticides: there was no repeat of the influenza epidemic that claimed millions of victims after the First World War; lice, the main carriers of disease, were killed by DDT. Much of the management of these huge tasks was entrusted to young inexperienced Allied officers. The Germans acted under their direction.

Contemporary observers remarked on the apathy and listlessness of the German population. In the towns only the bare rations to keep people alive could be distributed, and the first winter of peace, one of the coldest on record, claimed many victims among the elderly and the sick in Berlin,

Hamburg, Munich and other cities, where makeshift shelters had to serve as homes. Germany was completely defeated and at the mercy of the occupying armies.

The Allies distrusted the Germans: that was the one point, amid all the disputes, on which in 1945 they were agreed. But they still expected Germany to remain unified under their supervision. Soviet and Western leaders shared what turned out to be an accurate perception of the capacity of the German people for recovery; but they also feared that the Germans, unless controlled, would be capable of rebuilding not only their shattered industry and their cities, but also their destructive military potential. In their hearts, the Allies thought the German people had not changed and were only temporarily submissive in the face of overwhelming defeat. They saw the great majority of Germans as incorrigibly militaristic and as a threat to a peaceful Europe. By the end of the war, virtually every German was suspected of having been in league with the evil-doers. These Allied attitudes cannot be understood today without seeing again the newsreels of the liberated concentration camps shown in all the cinemas, especially (by Allied command) German ones, immediately after the end of the war, with their piles of naked corpses, the skeletal appearance of the survivors. For the first time, ordinary people in the West came face to face with the full evil of National Socialist Germany. In Russia and Poland newsreels were not necessary.

Allied planning was based on the belief that, since Europe and the world had to go on living with some 70 million Germans, they represented a threat for the future unless they could be led to change fundamentally. The Russians, as well as the British, French and Americans, meant to impose these changes from above – though they had very different conceptions of what needed to be done. They were agreed, however, on the wholesale removal of the Nazi political leadership as a prerequisite.

Germany had to be taught a lesson in defeat that would allow no false sense of military honour to survive. Germany's neighbours would not be able to live in peace unless control over Germany

was taken away from the Germans – as had conspicuously not been done in 1919. That meant occupation and Allied rule over a completely powerless Germany (some spoke of this lasting twenty-five, even forty, years).

The first solutions suggested during the war to this problem of containing Germany proposed to render it harmless by standing down its armed forces and eliminating the general staffs, supposedly imbued with Prussian military traditions. In its original form, the Morgenthau Plan of 1944 allowed Germany no heavy industry to manufacture cars and no machine tools; instead, light industries could make furniture and tin-openers. Germany would thus become a 'pastoral' country; the industrial region of the Ruhr would be no more. The standard of living of the Germans would be at subsistence levels, no higher than that of the poorest of the countries in the east which Germany had occupied. There was, of course, a strong punitive element in these plans, felt to be justified by Germany's barbaric behaviour during the war. The large labour force, which would not be able to find employment in Germany, would provide reparations as forced labour working for the Allies to make good some of the damage done. But the plan was too unreal to survive. Seventy million Germans could not live without export industries. Europe could not manage without Ruhr coal and steel. Short-term reparations would not make up for the cost the Allies would have to bear to keep the Germans alive. The plan's shortcomings were realised immediately, but its opponents could not eliminate it altogether; they could do no more than introduce some changes.

After the war was won, US occupation aims were embodied in the order of the joint chiefs of staff (US) JCS 1067, dated 26 April 1945, Germany; British policies did not differ from it significantly, though they embodied a more constructive view of the future rehabilitation of Germany. Sweeping de-industrialisation and the dismantling for reparations of German factories were mandatory. The German people would be allowed only the lowest standard of living that avoided death and disease. Yet they could not be condemned to mass starvation: \$700 million

annually were needed to pay for food imports to keep the Germans in the British and American zones alive. For Britain especially, with its desperate dollar shortage, this was an unacceptable drain. The Germans should be made to pay for what they needed themselves, but could do so only if they were allowed to manufacture goods again for export. This stimulated a revision of thinking about limitations placed on industrial production from the early draconian four-power decision of March 1946, to reduce it to 50 per cent of that in 1938. The economic occupation policies from 1945 to 1949 were a mass of contradictions: continuing to dismantle factories as reparations, desiring to break Germany's industrial potential for war, and removing possibly successful commercial rivals from world markets, such as the pharmaceutical industry. Patents became war booty. At the same time there was growing acceptance that Western Germany had to be rebuilt, that its prosperity was an essential

support of West German and European democracy, threatened by the Cold War. Not until 1952 were all attempts to limit Germany's basic heavy industry, steel, abandoned.

Through the hardships of the early years, the Germans had survived better than anyone would have thought possible in 1945. They accepted certain limitations – for example, not to manufacture nuclear weapons or poison gas. For the rest, Allied efforts to restructure German industry, break up the powerful cartels and loosen the hold of the banks were soon reversed.

At the start of the occupation there was a haphazard mass internment of those deemed to have served the Third Reich in an important capacity. German prisoners of war in Allied hands and labouring abroad, on British farms for instance, were not sent home at the end of the war. The Western Allies only agreed to return them by the end of 1948. But most of the millions taken prisoner in Germany itself during the last stages of the



Booty for the Russian meets resistance; bystanders are afraid to help. An everyday event in the Berlin of 1945.
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war were released after a short time. Hundreds of thousands never returned from Soviet captivity. German women had to undertake the heaviest manual labour, clearing the rubble. Where were the strongmen? Three and a quarter million were missing or dead, millions were crippled, and millions had been taken prisoner. Shortly before his death Roosevelt wrote: 'The German people are not going to be enslaved. . . . But it will be necessary for them to earn their way back into the fellowship of peace-loving and law-abiding nations.' They would never be entrusted again to bear arms. The captains of industry and the National Socialist leaders would be tried and treated as criminals. What was left of industry would be supervised and ceilings of production imposed.

The Germans were told they had been liberated, but Allied soldiers were strictly ordered not to 'fraternise' with them - to avoid all social contact. Shunned and struggling to survive hunger and cold, the German people were obliged to submit to 're-education', the attempt to change their hearts and minds. Punishment and 'denazification' was one side of the coin, the inculcation of virtue and democracy the other. Control of the media and the re-establishment in schools of sound teaching of the right values were priorities. Gradually, decentralised political life was encouraged. The adoption of punitive measures, it was quickly realised, ran counter to the attempt to reform the German people. If they were to be treated as pariahs, how could they be convinced at the same time of the blessings of liberty?

Within occupied Germany, despite many absurdities and contradictions, denazification and re-education made a positive contribution. The Nürnberg Trials of the leaders of Hitler's state, which began in November 1945, culminated in the death sentence on twelve of the accused eleven months later, and revealed the barbaric nature of the occupation in the east. This evidence confronted the ordinary German people with unpleasant truths which many of them had known about but could not face, and only the totally incorrigible still insisted that the gas ovens of Auschwitz were propaganda. No respect was felt for Hitler's lieutenants, who had led Germany into destruction and suffering, though some sat-

isfaction was felt that Göring had outwitted his jailers by committing suicide before he could be hanged. The SS was condemned wholesale by the Allies as a criminal organisation.

Rough justice was meted out to the lesser supporters. All Germans were required to fill out a questionnaire, the famous *Fragebogen*, which served as a basis for denazification. Many millions of Germans had been National Socialists out of conviction, many opportunistically in hope of gain, some only under pressure; most had joined the party or one of its organisations. But only a minority, some 209,000 out of a population of 44.5 million, were actually prosecuted in the special courts set up in the British, American and French zones (more were tried in the American than in the British zone). In the Soviet sector, with a population of 17 million, the figure given for those tried is also small, just over 17,000. This did not imply that the Russians were more forgiving; they simply did not trouble with court procedures. Tens of thousands were put in former Nazi concentration camps and thousands lost their lives, not only Nazi criminals but also opponents of communism. When categorised, of those charged with being Nazis only 1,667 were regarded as chief perpetrators of crimes, 23,060 as partially guilty (*belastet*), 150,425 as less guilty and just over 1 million as 'fellow travellers'. Over 5 million suspects were not prosecuted in any way. Even the Allies came to realise how unsatisfactory the process was. Minor offenders were not infrequently treated more harshly than men with far more on their conscience, including the Gauleiter of Hamburg, who after imprisonment and a quiet period, prospered again in post-war West Germany. Justice proved too subjective, too haphazard, and punishment too arbitrary; there was no clean sweep of all those involved in the crimes of the Third Reich. The judges, with few exceptions, continued to sit in judgement, as they had in the Nazi years; the majority of civil servants now served their new masters and the files they kept frequently show no break. There were simply too many National Socialists; the task of punishment had to be abandoned for all but the worst criminals and it took years to bring them to court, many escaping altogether.

Nevertheless, the great majority of Germans did change after the war. Allied re-education contributed to this but it was not the only or even the main reason for it. Correct as Allied assumptions were about Germany's capacity to recover from defeat, so they were wrong in believing that, given half a chance, the German people would once again turn to another Hitler with a policy of expansion and conquest. The total military collapse and its immediate consequences did, in fact, convince the German people (except for a small extremist fringe) that in Hitler they had followed a false prophet. To the surprise of the Allies, the expected Nazi underground movements came to nothing. The German people soon showed themselves anxious to learn from their victors, who had after all proved themselves stronger and more successful. Defeat of all things German had proved a radical cure for the mentality of *Deutschland über Alles*. British representative institutions now became the model, and the American way of life an aspiration – at least that part portrayed in Hollywood films and by the comparative illusion of wealth now sustained by the occupying GIs in their smart uniforms. From the Russians the benefits were less obvious and no one in Germany, except hardened communists, wished to emulate their style of life and lower standards of living. The year 1945, marks a decisive breach in German history. The lure of conquest and physical expansion, of lording it as the supposed *Herrenvolk*, had ended in evident ruin. Most were sorry they had lost the war; fortunately some did recognise that they had been 'liberated' by the Allies – they would form a small nucleus for creating a better society.

Living conditions proved desperate during the first two years of occupation, and its rule by Russian, American, British and French soldiers and administrators brought home to every German the totality of the defeat. They were now faced with the practical task of material survival amid the ruins of their cities. Feelings of guilt did not in the circumstances spring first to mind; there were more immediate needs to attend to. Many of the older generation of Germans did not repudiate the Nazi past, but Hitler was dead and new masters had to be served, new political real-

ities to be faced. It was different for the young. They increasingly questioned the values of their parents and could find no pride in German history or indeed in being Germans at all. They saw a way ahead in showing themselves to be good Europeans. And so the two Germanies became the first modern nations whose citizens consciously turned their backs on the past, some concentrating on building a new life and giving little thought to moral questions, others genuinely feeling shame for the past. The Western Allies were not confronted with a task they had thought would take at least a generation to complete. Instead, within two years of the German surrender, the East-West confrontation of the Cold War hastened Soviet and Anglo-American readiness publicly to accept at face value the 'new' reformed Germany, though in private there were still strong reservations about the trustworthiness of Germans. This residual suspicion of the dangers of too strong a Germany remained alive after almost half a century when German unity once more became a reality.

Stalin was just as anxious to 're-educate' the German people in the Soviet zone his way. His own life experiences in the USSR may well have made him more optimistic about the prospects than the West was. The German people had shown an enviable readiness to follow strong leadership. For some it was only a question of exchanging a brown for a red shirt. It was particularly easy to form new red youth brigades. The Russians and their German nominees would now provide that leadership. As the victors they would carry away from Germany all the reparations they could, but Stalin saw no reason why he should wait before undertaking political re-education and the transformation of German society. Confident that sufficient power at the top could ensure the loyalty of those below, he was ready to use as instruments not only the Moscow-trained communists, but even leaders of the Wehrmacht, taken prisoners of war, who as early as 1943 had been formed into the Free Germany Committee. Former supporters of Hitler, provided they were useful enough, could now rehabilitate themselves by promising unswerving loyalty to Moscow.

Others were simply set to work, like the scientists and rocket specialists. The Western Allies in this respect acted no differently. For Stalin the struggle in Germany would be between 'capitalism' and 'socialism', and the only safe Germany would be a country whose previous political and social patterns had been transformed. Given Stalin's ideological assumptions he was bound to be extremely apprehensive about developments in the Western zones of occupation, where the majority of Germans lived. In such fears the blossoming of the Cold War can be traced.

In their relations with the Allies the Germans were not entirely supine. A nucleus of post-war German political leaders, unsullied by the Nazi years, resurfaced, hardened and toughened. They had a vision of a new Germany and a better future. It was difficult for the communist leaders Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, returning from Moscow in 1945, to be anything but cynical after Stalin's terror years, which had claimed so many of their German comrades as victims, and after Stalin's sacrifice of the German Communist Party to the Nazis. But there were also idealistic communists, survivors of the concentration camps and returning exiles, who preserved their illusions of Stalin's Russia and now were ready to work for an 'anti-fascist' Germany.

It was the Soviet authorities in their zone of occupation in June 1945 who first announced the revival of the democratic political process by permitting the setting up of political parties – the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), of course, but also the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the new conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party, better known in the West as the Free Democratic Party (FDP). One-party rule, the cornerstone of the Soviet political system founded by Lenin, was refined into Stalin's totalitarian state, in which no dissenting group was permitted any voice or even the right to exist. In Germany, then, Stalin was ready, according to his own lights, to make enormous concessions and to provide communist predominance with a more acceptable face for the local population and for the Western Allies.

When the Austrian communists, in genuinely free elections in November 1945, secured only 5

per cent of the vote, Stalin knew that more would be required in Germany than just to let the parties compete freely. The Soviet authorities cajoled and pressurised the Social Democratic Party, led by Otto Grotewohl in their zone, to fuse with the Communist Party and so form the Socialist Unity Party (SED). In provincial elections in the autumn of 1946, the SED, despite Soviet help, failed to win outright majorities over the competing CDU and Liberals, so the SED had to resort to anti-fascist popular-front tactics to gain control in the *Länder* assemblies. Berlin, although it fell within the Soviet zone, had been placed under the joint authority of all the four powers, so its political parties could not be manipulated by Moscow like those in the Soviet zone. For that reason, moves to fuse the Socialist and Communist Parties in Berlin were comprehensively defeated.

This result marked a decisive split in Germany. Given the freedom to choose, the country's emerging political leaders rejected totalitarianism. Instead, the two most outstanding political figures of the immediate post-war German years, Kurt Schumacher (SPD) and Konrad Adenauer (CDU), laid the foundations of a party political system on which could be based the stable parliamentary democracy of the two-thirds of Germany that formed the Western zones, which together with west Berlin later became the Federal Republic of Germany. It is to the lasting credit of Schumacher as well as of Adenauer that German democracy was not stifled at birth. In the Soviet zone, on the other hand, the German people were not to be given a free choice until forty-five years later. It should also be conceded that the Germans in the Western zones did not have a completely free choice: after all, the Western Allies would not have permitted their zones to be turned into a totalitarian communist state. The more important point, however, is that the Allies' aim to create a democratic society reflected the wishes of the majority of Germans.

The contrast between the two West German leaders, Kurt Schumacher and Konrad Adenauer, was striking. Schumacher's health but not his spirit had been broken after long years of incarceration

in a concentration camp, an experience that had inspired him with a hatred of all forms of totalitarianism. He now looked to the British Labour Party as an example of a democratic socialist party supporting a parliamentary form of government. Schumacher was uncompromising on any issue he believed involved principle: it was a lack of firm principles that had driven the Germans into the abyss. He intended to lead a strong independent party committed to democracy, socialism and the recovery of dignity, and eventually sovereignty for a reunited Germany. The victorious Allies would once again be compelled to respect such a re-emerging German nation.

Adenauer was in an altogether different position. No political party except the SPD had emerged with credit during the Hitler years. They had either played Hitler's game before January 1933 or had compromised immediately after to hand him dictatorial powers. (The rank-and-file communists had no choice: they had to change allegiance or face persecution.) So Adenauer had to create an entirely new party, the CDU and its Bavarian ally, the CSU. This called for flexibility, adroitness and a high degree of political skill. Party political aims would need to be limited to essentials. A staunch Catholic and a Rhinelander, Adenauer enjoyed the better things in life and, although he had courageously defied the Nazis as mayor of Cologne in 1933, thereafter he had played no active role in Germany's opposition. He had lived a comfortable retired life, storing up his energies for a better future. It was only during the last six months of the war that he was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo in the wake of the Hitler bomb plot of 20 July 1944, in which, likewise, he had played no part.

Unexpectedly, it was Adenauer in his seventies, and not Schumacher, who dominated post-war German politics. Adenauer's re-entry into politics was not at first auspicious. Reinstated by the Americans as mayor of Cologne, his gritty personality and the scheming of political opponents led to his dismissal after the British took over control of the city. He re-emerged to challenge the support for Schumacher and the SPD. A third party, smaller than the other two, was the Liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), which at times

exercised a disproportionate influence because it held the balance between the two major parties.

In the summer of 1946 regional states (*Länder*) were created in the British, French and US zones, and local and regional elected assemblies reintroduced two-thirds of the German people to the democratic parliamentary process. Political party organisations were revived. The Social Democratic Party, led by Schumacher, competed with the Christian Democratic Union, which was opposed to socialism and to centralised state power at the expense of individual rights, and emphasised Christian ethical values as the foundation of the state.

Each of the *Länder* was headed by a minister president answerable to a parliamentary assembly democratically elected. It was in the *Länder* that Germany's leading post-war political leaders first came to prominence – men like Reinhold Maier, minister president of Württemberg-Baden, Theodor Heuss, Heinrich Lübke and Professor Ludwig Erhard. The Western Allies, who had vetted and approved them (though not all had been active opponents of the Nazi regime) had chosen this leadership group wisely; in this they made a crucial contribution to Germany's post-war democratic development. Political life recovered. Its progress, however, depended on Allied willingness to transfer responsibilities to the Germans, to obtain their cooperation rather than their mere acquiescence. The process was accelerated by Western suspicions of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Cold War.

Political leadership is one thing, but how would the majority of Germans behave when asked to participate again in a democratic process after twelve years of dictatorship? How many politically active Germans were there who had been compromised? The majority of those whose hands were clean belonged to the left. They felt that their sufferings in concentration camps, their exclusion from the German state or their years in exile now gave them a moral right to lead the new Germany. Business, big and small, had formed a part of the National Socialist state. German businessmen and farmers had accepted the help of 'slaves' from the east, had frequently exploited their forced labour and had only rarely treated

them with humanity and consideration. The majority of Germans were saddled with the guilt of not having cared sufficiently for foreigners and for their own German Jewish neighbours. There were thus millions of Germans who wished to lie low. Survival might depend on not drawing attention to one's self unnecessarily by prominence in politics.

The more educated, the professional leaders of the state, civil servants, judges and lawyers, the better off and propertied, the doctors, many of whom had been implicated with Nazi measures, all those who had lived well and comfortably through the Hitler years and had provided expertise and leadership, were most heavily compromised and could least afford to play an active role in post-war politics. The workers, the poor, the conscripts in the army could more easily claim that they had been misled and were themselves the exploited, even though such a simple social division of those who supported and those who opposed National Socialism does not correspond to the facts. In the immediate months after the collapse, even the Western occupying forces

looked with more favour on the communist resistance than on Germans with an uncertain political past. Gradually, the Western Allies sifted out a small elite group of political leaders in the *Länder*. It seemed likely at first that the left would dominate post-war German politics; adherents to the centre and the right of the political spectrum were willing to share power with the left for two or three years, ostensibly for the sake of national reconstruction, but in truth because they were too obviously compromised to assert their residual electoral strength more forcibly.

In the ill-fated Weimar Republic, there had been a disastrous political backlash from the extremists once Germany had regained most of its independence. That did not happen after 1945. The political leaders who convinced the Western Allies that democracy was safe in their hands, and who complied with their terms, were subsequently endorsed and won power through free elections. Germans had been cured of aggressive nationalism by their total defeat and the disastrous consequences. A new Germany was born of prosperity.