

The First Year 1946, Problems and Progress



This information comes from a leaflet (*left*) published by the Control Commission for Germany (British Element), at the end of the first year of the occupation of Germany by the Allies in 1946.

Hostilities in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of the Germans at Rheims. Military victory had been achieved but the ultimate aim of the Allies, the defeat of Nazism and the establishment of a democratic and peaceful Germany was far from accomplished.

POTSDAM: In July 1945 came the Potsdam Declaration. War criminals were to be arrested together with the leaders of the Nazi regime. All members of the Nazi party who had been more than nominal participants in its activities were to be removed from office, the judicial system was to be re-organised in accordance with the principles of democracy, justice under law and equal rights.

Other points in the declaration were the encouragement of Democratic Political Parties with rights of assembly and public discussion; there was to be freedom of speech, press and religion; and the formation of free trade unions was to be permitted. Production of war material was to be prohibited; production of supplies essential to a war economy such as metals, chemicals and machinery was to be limited to peace-time needs. The concentration of economic power in cartels and other monopolistic concerns was to be broken up. Primary emphasis was to be laid on the development of agriculture and peaceful domestic industries. Germany was to be able to subsist without outside help, on a standard of living not exceeding the average of the standards of other European countries, excluding the United Kingdom and Russia. Surplus productive capacity was to be removed as reparations, or destroyed.

CONTROL MACHINERY: Each of the four powers agreed to occupy and administer a separate zone with a Commander-in-Chief in supreme authority in each zone. For Germany as a whole, supreme authority was vested in the Commander-in-Chief of the four powers sitting as the Control Council. A feature of this Four-Power Government was that the decisions of the Control Council must be unanimous. Cooperation has been good and there has been substantial achievement.

Special arrangements had to be made for Berlin. All four powers had to operate there, although the city itself was inside the Russian Zone. It was agreed therefore, to divide Berlin into four national sectors and an Inter-Allied Governing Authority, the Kommandatura, was set up.

The control machinery in the British Zone has a twofold origin: (a) The Military Government staff of 21 Army Group which was the British element responsible for short term civil administration in the wake of the advancing Allied armies, and (b) the long term Control Commission for Germany (British Element): This had been built up in London before the defeat of Germany.

Before the Control Commission was deployed in Germany, fine work was done by Military Government staffs. A beginning was made with the disbandment of the disarmed German Forces. The restoration of German roads and railways was taken in hand. Displaced persons were collected into camps, 300,000 repatriated westwards, 430,000 eastwards. Local administration was put into some kind of working order.

In early autumn, the Control Commission moved to Germany and the Commission and Military Government staffs were responsible for regional and local administration. The Control Office for Germany and Austria which was established in London in October 1945 is the link between H.M. Government and the Control Commission in Germany (British Element). The responsible minister is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

DISARMAMENT AND DEMILITARISATION: When the German Forces surrendered, some 2,500,000 Wehrmacht came under the control of British Forces. By the end of February 1946 the total had been reduced to 271,000. Since then all Germans except those held for security reasons or as prisoners of war and except those employed on vital work have been discharged.

Industrial disarmament to remove the economic basis of Germany's war potential has begun. Quadripartite agreement has been reached on the elimination or restriction to peace-time requirements of industries vital to a war economy. The future level of German industry has been agreed. At the end of March, plants in the British Zone had been declared available for reparations.

The elimination of excessive concentrations of economic power is part of the industrial disarmament process. A law which vested in the Control Commission the assets of I.G. Farbenindustrie throughout Germany was signed on 30th November. In the British Zone, the Rheinisch-Westfälisches Kohlen-Syndikat [*this was a cartel established in 1893 in Essen bringing together the major coal producers in the Ruhr*], has been dissolved and the leading members arrested; we have taken possession and control of Krupps; the assets of the Ruhr mines have been taken into custody and will not be restored to the German owners.

DENAZIFICATION: Eradication of National Socialism is closely linked with demilitarisation. The first steps in the British Zone were the arrest and internment of some 50,000 Nazi leaders; influential Nazi supporters and high officials in the Nazi organisations. Investigation and arrest of persons in the lower ranks followed. In all, the cases of between 700,000 – 800,000 persons have been investigated. Some 100,000 former Nazis have either been removed from positions of responsibility or forbidden to hold them.

DISPLACED PERSONS: Displaced persons in origin were 'slave' labourers imported into Germany from other countries formerly under German occupation. Over 2 million displaced persons were found in the British Zone. They were collected into assembly centres and given special treatment in the matter of food, shelter and clothing. Now more than 1.7 millions of them have been repatriated to their countries of origin.

TRANSFER OF POPULATIONS: It was agreed at the Potsdam Conference that the German minorities were to be moved to Germany from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. A plan was eventually drawn up for the reception in the four zones of Germany, six and a half million Germans. Of these, one and a half million are to be received into the British Zone from Poland. The British Zone is receiving a relatively small proportion of the whole because it is in our zone that the effects of bombing have been most serious and where the shortage of accommodation is most grave.



FOOD SITUATION: The British Zone of Germany (*above*) has always been a food deficiency area. Germany herself in the pre-war years was only about 85% self-sufficient in food supplies. The British Zone containing about one third of the total population, contributed in principal foodstuffs in 1937 only one-fifth of the wheat and sugar production; one quarter of the oats and an even smaller proportion of the potatoes and barley. The fighting and consequent devastation had further reduced the productivity of the British Zone. The shortage of foodstuffs in the British Zone has had its effect on the level of rations. In July 1945 the ration level was 1,000 calories a day for the normal consumer but was supplemented from private stocks. In October this was raised to 1,550 calories. The figure of 2,000 calories had been recommended by nutrition experts who surveyed the three western zones in August, as a minimum necessary to maintain the population in full working efficiency. But in view of the shortage it was agreed to keep to the level of 1,550 calories which would be sufficient to maintain health for a period. In the meantime, a world food crisis has developed and imports of grain have had to be curtailed. The bread ration had to be cut at the beginning of March, reducing the ration scale for the 'normal consumer' to about 1,000 calories a day. Certain classes of the German population, e.g. heavy manual workers, get preferential treatment. So also do displaced persons.

ECONOMIC SITUATION: The long term economic tasks of the Allies are; (a) the economic disarmament of Germany; (b) the establishment of a balanced self-supporting economy devoted mainly to agriculture and peaceful domestic industries in which Germany will be able to export enough goods to pay for her essential imports and for the cost of occupation; (c) the maximum contribution from Germany towards the reconstruction of the United Nations through the payment of reparations.

These tasks required a plan for the future level of German industry. Each of the four powers had its own views which have now been reconciled.

The Ruhr coalfields which are in the British zone are the key to industrial recovery in Western Europe. Bombing and demolitions carried out by the Wehrmacht, had stopped production when the British authorities arrived. The task was to take control of the mines, re-start production and achieve maximum exports to liberated countries. By July, the monthly production of hard coal was 1,800,000 tons. In November, December, January and February, it was between four and five million tons. Now, with the reduced food rations, the output is declining. Only that quantity of coal is retained in Germany which is necessary for the purposes of the occupation. No coal is allowed to the Germans for domestic heating. The quantity available for export is determined by a committee in Berlin on which the four occupying powers are represented.

FINANCIAL SITUATION: Financial control by the Reich Government broke down several weeks before the final surrender in May 1945, and since then there has been no effective centralised control of German finance. Nevertheless, much has been done to maintain financial stability.

We have maintained control on prices and wages. We are enforcing greatly increased taxation. Germany is now the most heavily taxed country in the world. We are pressing for the utmost economy in internal administration at every level.

REBIRTH OF DEMOCRACY: One of our constructive tasks is to lay the foundation for the growth of democracy. The Allies can only create conditions in which democracy can best develop; the change of heart must come from within the German people. In the British zone permission has been granted for the formation of political parties. They are given facilities for holding meetings and publishing their programmes. Party newspapers began on 1st March 1946. Trade Unions have been encouraged. By February 1946 trade unionism was in the initial stages of development in nearly 150 areas in the British Zone. In a few areas, such as Hamburg, Hannover, Bremen, Osnabruck and Helmstedt, development has reached a more advanced stage. In November 1945 a delegation from the Trade Unions Congress visited Germany to examine the German Trade Union Movement and to discuss problems with the British Authorities. Over 30 industrial trade unions have since been formed in the Ruhr.

The field of education provided the best opportunity to foster a firm growth of democracy. By the end of February over 10,000 elementary and intermediate schools were open out of a pre-war total of 13,000. Nearly 500 secondary schools had re-opened.

In the British Sector of Berlin over 100 schools of all types were functioning. An emergency programme of text-book printing was put in hand and German Text-book Committees were set up to advise on the production of text-books for long-term use. Parallel to this goes the provision of

efficient and reliable news. Twelve newspapers were initially published in the Zone by British Military Authorities. These appeared only twice weekly owing to the shortage of newsprint and had a circulation based on one newspaper to five people. British policy is gradually to transfer the control of these newspapers to the Germans, under British supervision. Over thirty newspapers and about a dozen periodicals have already been licensed to Germans.

TRANSITION: In the early days of occupation the system of administration was necessarily direct and designed primarily to serve our military requirements. It was administration through Military Government.

But it is our policy to change the system by progressive steps so that it becomes civil in character rather than military and operated not directly but indirectly in supervising and controlling German Administrations.

The Germans know best how to solve Germany's many difficult problems. It must be our constant aim to make the Germans run their own affairs. If we fail to do this, we shall leave chaos behind us when we go. For we are not going to remain in Germany indefinitely.

We must therefore train the Germans to govern themselves on the lines which we believe to be right, gradually and cautiously transferring more and more responsibility to them.

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Imagine how different things would have been in Britain if the Germans had won the war! At this time, before they finally left, the aim of the Allies was to get Germany back on its feet, on a solid financial footing and with a democratic government. Clearly the Russians had different ideas, resulting in the Berlin Airlift in 1948, but for now they appeared to be 'on side.' If Hitler had won the war, Britain would have become a farm for the production of food for the greater German Reich. Its people would have been imprisoned, murdered, or worked to death as slaves. I wonder if the German people today realise how lucky they are.