

## Anglo-American Responsibility for the Expulsion of the Germans, 1944-48

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American and British historians have not given the enforced flight and expulsion of fifteen million Germans and the end of World War II the attention that this important and tragic phenomenon deserves. In itself this deliberate avoidance of a legitimate field of historical research and publication merits our attention today, considering that the flight and expulsion of the Germans constitutes the largest mass transfer of population in history, a veritable demographic revolution in central Europe, and a form of genocide in the course of which more than two million human beings perished.

The reticence of historians is coupled by the failure of the press and other news media to fulfil their responsibility to inform the general public and to generate debate about these events. Quite to the contrary, the entire subject matter of the flight and expulsion of the Germans has been subject to taboos and remains largely ignored even to this day. Only the occurrence of "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia during the last decade of the twentieth century allowed obvious parallels to be drawn, and a beginning of a discussion on the earlier ethnic cleansing against Germans is now emerging. Much more general information, oral history, education in the schools, and reflection by policy makers is necessary.

As we have seen in the context of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, ethnic cleansing is evil *per se*. The world is now convinced that the way to lasting peace is that of human rights, of respecting the rights and cultures of minorities and not of excluding them or expelling them. The racist and vicious political tool euphemistically called "population transfers" is now not only discredited, but it is recognized as a crime against humanity.

Let us remember, however, that during the Second World War it was the Czechoslovak President-in-exile, Eduard Beneš, who

advocated ethnic cleansing of the entire German population of Czechoslovakia as a measure to guarantee peace, and tried to minimize the intrinsic barbarity of mass expulsions by pretending that the "transfers" could or would ever be carried out in an "orderly and humane manner"—a contradiction in terms, since an uprooting from one's native land could never be termed "humane," and any such transfer would necessarily constitute, at the very least, a form of cultural genocide against the targeted group.

The way to the ethnic cleansing of the Germans was thus so: first all Germans had to be defamed as Nazis, as traitors, as disloyal subjects; second, the idea of removing the Germans from their 700-year-old homelands had to be packaged as a positive measure for peace; third, the Allied peace plan set out in the "Atlantic Charter" had to be quietly abandoned, as if the Charter was valid for the victors only, but not for the vanquished; fourth, any objections of conscience had to be neutralized by postulating the unlikely scenario that the proposed transfers would really be carried out in an "orderly and humane" manner; fifth, a nexus had to be created between Nazi crimes and measures of retribution, even though the victims of the proposed expulsion had nothing to do with Nazi crimes and in many cases had themselves been victims of Nazism.

Not every observer, however, was caught in this web of lies and dishonest political manoeuvres. George Kennan, Bertrand Russell, Robert Murphy, and others warned of the madness of the scheme. And as early as 1946, the noted British publisher and human rights activist, Victor Gollancz, threw light on the reality of what had happened and was still happening, recognizing the moral implications of Allied policy: "If the conscience of men ever again becomes sensitive, these expulsions will be remembered to the undying shame of all who committed or connived at them .... The Germans were expelled, not just with an absence of over-nice consideration, but with the very maximum of brutality."<sup>1</sup>

But in order that the conscience of mankind should become sensitive—even half a century after the events—it is necessary to have full information, open discussion without taboos, to have

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Gollancz, *Our Threatened Values* (London, 1946), 96.

freedom of expression. The phenomenon of ethnic cleansing should be analyzed from all its aspects: not just historical or legal, but also cultural, demographic, economic, sociological and psychological. In this paper, however, the author will focus primarily on the historical aspects.

### **The Genesis of the Idea of Expelling the Germans from Their Homelands: The Role of Eduard Beneš**

On 9 February 1940 Churchill had stated: "We are opposed to any attempt from outside to break up Germany. We do not seek the humiliation or dismemberment of your country. We wholeheartedly desire to welcome you without delay into the peaceful collaboration of civilized nations."<sup>2</sup>

On 14 August 1941 at the conclusion of the Atlantic Conference, Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt proclaimed the Atlantic Charter in which they renounced "aggrandizement, territorial or other" and undertook a commitment to oppose "territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned."<sup>3</sup> This widely praised declaration represented an attempt to set a higher standard of international morality based on the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. It was subsequently endorsed by the Soviet Union and by representatives of the governments-in-exile of Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Eduard Beneš thus had an uphill battle to sell the expulsion scheme which he had concocted following his personal humiliation at the Munich Conference of September 1938. The first step in obtaining Allied approval for his programme of large-scale spoliation of billions of dollars worth of land and private property was to put the blame on the victims. The persons targeted for expulsion had to be brandmarked as morally evil and deserving of

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Stokes quoted this statement back to Prime Minister Churchill in the course of the debate in the House of Commons on 23 February 1944; *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 397, cols. 901-02.

<sup>3</sup> United States, Executive Agreement, Series 236:4; Department of State, *Bulletin*, V, p. 125. See also Louise Holborn, *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1943-1948), 1: 2.

such treatment. One of the best tools to do that was to ignore cause and effect and construct an argument whereby the German minority of Czechoslovakia was accused of being disloyal, notwithstanding the fact that for two decades the Czech political establishment had engaged in systematic discrimination against its three and a half million ethnic Germans.

In order to justify the expulsion of the Germans, Eduard Beneš again and again referred to them as traitors: "We must get rid of all those Germans who plunged a dagger in the back of the Czechoslovak State in 1938."<sup>4</sup> Here Beneš was referring to the Munich Agreement of 1938. He neglected to mention, however, that this Agreement was a direct result of Czechoslovakia's failure to grant effective equality to its ethnic Germans, as reflected in a consistent pattern of discrimination in all areas of economic and cultural life, constituting violations of the minority rights treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. More concretely, the Munich Agreement was a result of Beneš' own intransigence in the 1930s that drove many loyal Sudeten Germans into the camp of Konrad Henlein and his Sudeten German Party and in turn drove Konrad Henlein into Hitler's arms, since Beneš only offered the Germans second-class citizenship in his very Czech Czechoslovakia.

As Arnold Toynbee noted in an article in *The Economist* in 1937, following a trip to Czechoslovakia and long before the Munich Agreement:

The truth is that even the most genuine and old-established democratic way of life is exceedingly difficult to apply when you are dealing with a minority that does not want to live under your rule. We know very well that we ourselves were never able to apply our own British brand of democracy to our attempt to govern the Irish. And in Czechoslovakia to-day the methods by which the Czechs are keeping the upper hand over the Sudetendeutsch are not democratic....<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Beneš in a broadcast from London, 1944, cited in Holborn, *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations*, 2: 1036.

<sup>5</sup> *The Economist*, 10 July 1937, p. 72.

After Toynbee it was Lord Runciman who travelled to Czechoslovakia and reported back to the British government:

Czech officials and Czech police, speaking little or no German, were appointed in large numbers to purely German districts; Czech agricultural colonists were encouraged to settle on land confiscated under the Land Reform in the middle of German populations; for the children of these Czech invaders Czech schools were built on a large scale; there is a very general belief that Czech firms were favoured as against German firms in the allocation of State contracts and that the State provided work and relief for Czechs more readily than for Germans. I believe these complaints to be in the main justified. Even as late as the time of my Mission, I could find no readiness on the part of the Czechoslovak Government to remedy them on anything like an adequate scale ... the feeling among the Sudeten Germans until about three or four years ago was one of hopelessness. But the rise of Nazi Germany gave them new hope. I regard their turning for help towards their kinsmen and their eventual desire to join the Reich as a natural development in the circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, when Beneš still refused every compromise on autonomy for the Sudeten Germans in 1937 and 1938, he effectively precipitated the complete separation of the Sudeten German areas pursuant to the Munich Agreement, which both Great Britain and France found fair at the time.

In a letter to the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, dated 14 September 1938, the US Ambassador to France, William Bullit, reported:

during the past few days the French newspapers have published many maps showing the racial divisions in Czechoslovakia ... public opinion has begun to develop the attitude, "Why should we annihilate all the youth of France and destroy the continent of Europe in order to maintain the domination of 7,000,000 Czechs over 3,200,000 Germans?"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, vol. 2, no. 3, 50.

<sup>7</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938*, vol. 1: 595.

Bullitt concluded his letter sarcastically:

In view of the growing belief among the French and the British that Beneš in his heart of hearts has decided to provoke general European war rather than accept complete autonomy for the subject nationalities of Czechoslovakia, intense pressure will unquestionably be brought on Praha ....<sup>8</sup>

A similar message was sent by Joseph Kennedy, the US Ambassador to Great Britain, to Cordell Hull, in which Kennedy quoted Prime Minister Chamberlain as saying: "I can see no rhyme nor reason in fighting for a cause which, if I went to war for it, I would have to settle after it was over in about the same way I suggest settling it now."<sup>9</sup> In the same sense Arnold Toynbee spoke of a prevailing "feeling of acute moral discomfort" at the prospect of "fighting for the balance of power in defiance of the principle of nationality."<sup>10</sup>

In the light of this and many, many incontestable testimonies and written sources, it is nothing but blatant hypocrisy on the part of the British and the French after the Second World War to disavow the Munich Agreement as being unjust or even illegal. The Munich Agreement provided in September 1938 if not the best, at least a tenable solution, which was welcomed with relief by almost everyone other than Beneš himself. By its terms some three million Germans living in the affected districts were allowed to secede from Czechoslovakia and be united with Germany, while some 500,000 Germans still remained within the borders of the reduced Czechoslovak State. This entailed, of course, an economic loss for Czechoslovakia, but it was, essentially what the Sudeten Germans had been demanding in the name of self-determination since November 1918 and corresponds to the recommendations of the American commission under Harvard

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 596.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 622.

<sup>10</sup> A. Toynbee, "A Turning Point in History," *Foreign Affairs* (January 1939): 316. See also *The Times*, 2 June 1938, for a similar opinion expressed by the Dean of St. Paul's; *The Times* editorial of 4 June 1938 suggested that Czechoslovakia grant plebiscites to her minorities.

Professor Archibald Coolidge, which was discussed but not adopted by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.<sup>11</sup>

The Munich Agreement cost Beneš his job in Prague, and as an exiled politician in London he had started already in December 1938 to reflect on how to undo the Munich Agreement and how to keep the lands and the wealth of the Sudeten Germans without the annoyance of having to take their legitimate rights and interests into account. Thus, he launched a campaign of disinformation against the Sudeten Germans, which would have had no effect whatever but for the subsequent turn of events, for which the Sudeten Germans had no responsibility: Hitler's invasion of the rest of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939 and his megalomaniac bid for world power in the Second World War. Thus, it was the Sudeten Germans and the Germans from the German provinces East of the Oder-Neisse who would pay the bill for Hitler's crimes.

First, of course, Beneš had to soft-pedal and gradually sell the idea of population transfers as a measure of ensuring peace after the expected defeat of Nazi Germany. His first target was the British political elite. In September 1941 he wrote, "I accept the principle of transfer of populations.... If the problem is carefully considered and wide measures are adopted in good time, the transfer can be made amicably, under international control and with international supervision."<sup>12</sup> On the basis of these rather utopian representations, British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden informed Beneš as early as July 1942 that "his colleagues agree

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<sup>11</sup> "To grant to the Czechoslovaks all the territory they demand would be not only an injustice to millions of people unwilling to come under Czech rule, but it would also be dangerous and perhaps fatal to the future of the new state ... the blood shed on March 3rd when Czech soldiers in several towns fired on German crowds ... was shed in a manner that is not easily forgiven... For the Bohemia of the future to contain within its limits great numbers of deeply discontented inhabitants who will have behind them across the border tens of millions of sympathizers of their own race will be a perilous experiment and one which can hardly promise success in the long run." *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States--The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. 12, 273.

<sup>12</sup> Eduard Beneš, "The New Order in Europe," *Nineteenth Century and After* 130 (1941): 154.

with the principle of transfer."<sup>13</sup> A decision of the British Cabinet that it had no objection to the transfer of the Sudeten Germans was shortly thereafter communicated to Beneš.<sup>14</sup> Soviet<sup>15</sup> and American<sup>16</sup> approval followed in June 1943. And the initial proposal of removing a limited number of German "traitors" evolved into a maximalist expulsion syndrome affecting the entire Sudeten German population, including German Social Democrats and other anti-Nazis, merely on ethnic grounds.

Thus, it is Beneš that bears the responsibility for the dynamic that eventually led to the expulsion not only of the 3.5 million Germans from Sudetenland, but also of the 10 million Germans from East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, East Brandenburg, from pre-war Poland, from Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. Once the principle of "population transfers" was accepted, the floodgates were open and the ethnic cleansing of the Germans could begin.

### **The Anglo-American View on Limited Transfers**

Although neither Churchill nor Roosevelt were at the origin of the expulsion program, they did not reject it outright because they found aspects of it useful for political and strategic reasons.

Pursuant to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, Poland was invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union and divided along the Ribbentrop-Molotov line. This arrangement largely corresponded to the old Curzon Line, which the British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon had proposed as Poland's eastern frontier, but which Poland had succeeded in pushing eastward during its war against the Soviet Union in 1920.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter by British Foreign Office to Rudolf Storch (German Social Democrat leader in London exile), *Der Sudetendeutsche*, 29 October 1955, p. 1; see also Radomir Luza, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans* (New York, 1964), 238.

<sup>14</sup> Eduard Beneš, *Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš: From Munich to New War and New Victory* (London, 1954), 207.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 195, 223.



Whereas the loser of the war, Germany, would obviously have to abandon its occupation of the western half of Poland, it soon became apparent that Stalin had every intention of keeping the eastern part of Poland. This situation constituted an acute embarrassment to England, which had entered the war because of Poland and was now faced with the prospect of ending it by accepting the Soviet annexation of Eastern Poland.

It thus became a matter of national honor to provide Poland some form of compensation in the West--at the expense of Germany. Initially this compensation was to be proportional to the loss. There were some two and a half million Poles living East of the Curzon Line, and they should have the opportunity of being resettled in what was left of Poland. Thus, if the German province of East Prussia were to be allocated to Poland after the war and its 2.5 million Germans were to be transferred to Western Germany, there would be a solution that would allow Stalin to keep his booty, give the Poles adequate compensation, and punish the Germans for starting the war. The ominous extension of the principle of population transfers would claim larger groups--not just the German population of East Prussia, but eventually that of Pomerania, Brandenburg and Silesia as well.

Upon concluding talks with Roosevelt in Washington in July 1943, Beneš cabled to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile that Roosevelt "agrees to the transfer of the minority populations from Eastern Prussia [*sic!*], Transylvania and Czechoslovakia...."<sup>17</sup>

By the time the Allies met at the Teheran Conference (28 November to 1 December 1943), Stalin had decided that it was to his advantage to extend Soviet influence in the West by pushing Poland's western frontier as far as possible. Instead of negotiating hard and making Stalin understand that this would not be acceptable, Churchill and Roosevelt quite light-heartedly let it happen: "Eden said that what Poland lost in the East she might gain in the West.... I then demonstrated with the help of three matches my idea of Poland moving westward. This pleased Stalin, and on this note our group parted for the moment."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>18</sup> Churchill, *Closing the Ring* (London, 1953), 362.

The landgrab had by now advanced to include not only East Prussia, but large tracts of German lands east of the Oder River, including Danzig, West Prussia, and Upper Silesia. As Churchill pointed out: "It was industrial and it would make a much better Poland. We should like to be able to say to the Poles that the Russians were right, and to tell the Poles that they must agree that they had a fair deal. If the Poles did not accept, we could not help it."<sup>19</sup>

In summing up the results of the Teheran Conference, Churchill observed: "it is thought in principle that the home of the Polish state and nation should be between the so-called Curzon Line and the line of the Oder including for Poland East Prussia and Oppeln; but the actual tracing of the frontier line requires careful study, and possibly disentanglement of population at some points."<sup>20</sup>

This formulation, however, exceeded the compensation favored by the United States. Half a year after Teheran, in May 1944, the Committee on Post-War Programs in the State Department prepared a memorandum containing policy recommendations with respect to the treatment of Germany in the light of long-term United States interests. On the matter of the German-Polish frontier it recommended:

This Government should not oppose the annexation by Poland of East Prussia, Danzig and in German Upper Silesia the industrial district and a rural hinterland to be determined primarily by ethnic considerations. The United States, however, would not be disposed to encourage the acquisition by Poland of additional German-populated territory in the trans-Oder region.<sup>21</sup>

On 18 December 1944 *Pravda* published a long article by Dr Stefan Jedrichowski, propaganda chief of the Lublin Committee, the Communist-led Polish provisional government at Lublin, in which Jedrichowski recommended that the western frontier of

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>21</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, vol. 1: 302-3.

Poland should run from Stettin south along the Oder and Western or Lusatian Neisse River to the Czechoslovak border. Having read this ominous article in Moscow, where he was stationed at the time, George F. Kennan immediately reported to the American Ambassador Averell Harriman on the far-reaching implications of the new arrangement. First and foremost he noted that Poland's dependence on the Soviet Union would be immeasurably increased. In a memorandum written a full six weeks before the Yalta Conference, Kennan expressed his misgivings with a frontier arrangement which

makes unrealistic the idea of a free and independent Poland. It establishes a border in Central Europe which can be defended only by the permanent maintenance of strong armed forces along its entire extent. Despite Churchill's unconvincing optimism as to the ease with which new homes can be found in Germany for six million people (I believe the figure is too low) it renders the economic and social problems of the remainder of Germany ... highly difficult of solution, and reduces radically the possibilities for stability in the area.... We may not be able to prevent the realization of this project.... But I think we are being unrealistic if we fail to recognize it for what it is and give it its proper place in our thinking about the future of Europe. Above all, I see no reason why we should have to share responsibility for the complications to which it is bound to lead.<sup>22</sup>

The die was cast. What followed were the unsuccessful and half-hearted attempts of the Western Allies to limit the expulsions. The United States Delegation to the Conference of Malta on 1 February 1945 proposed that "We should resist vigorously efforts to extend the Polish frontier to the Oder Line or to the Oder-Neisse Line."<sup>23</sup> But a few days later at Yalta, President Roosevelt caved in to Stalin's demands. Churchill had meanwhile understood what it would mean to have to house and feed millions of expelled Germans in the British zone of occupation in postwar Germany and tried to put the brakes on. So he argued

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<sup>22</sup> George Kennan, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (New York, 1967), 1: 214.

<sup>23</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States--The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 510.

that "a considerable body of British public opinion... would be shocked if it were proposed to more large numbers of Germans."<sup>24</sup> He therefore insisted that any transfer of populations should be "proportioned to the capacity of the Poles to handle it and the capacity of the Germans to receive them."<sup>25</sup> This, of course, was too little, too late.

At a parliamentary debate on 1 March 1945 the Labour MP Strauss observed:

According to the Prime Minister some parts of Germany, certainly Upper Silesia, are to go to Poland. I hope the Government will hesitate before it finally gives its approval to a proposal of this sort, which can hold out no advantage to anybody but may be exceedingly harmful to the general prospects of a lasting European peace. On what ground is such a proposal put forward? That it is going to be some compensation to Poland. But the whole justification for the Curzon Line is that it was agreed in 1919 at Versailles. Not only was the Curzon Line, but also Poland's Western boundary was agreed at Versailles. If one is fair to Poland, so, presumably, is the other.<sup>26</sup>

Five months later the entire area in question was occupied by Soviet forces, millions of Germans had already fled the Soviet onslaught, and the remaining Germans were being expelled by the Poles and the Czechs. Tens of thousands arrived exhausted and dying in Berlin and elsewhere in Brandenburg and Saxony.

As George Kennan observed in his *Memoirs*:

The disaster that befell this area with the entry of the Soviet forces has no parallel in modern European experience. There were considerable sections of it where, to judge by all existing evidence, scarcely a man, woman, or child of the indigenous population was left alive after the initial passage of Soviet forces;

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<sup>24</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, the Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 717, 720.

<sup>25</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, the Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, 717.

<sup>26</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, vol. 408, col. 1655.

and one cannot believe that they all succeeded in fleeing to the West.<sup>27</sup>

This was large-scale ethnic cleansing, and the Anglo-Americans were at this stage helpless to stop it. All they could do at the Potsdam Conference was to go on record objecting to the extent of the expulsions and to try to gain some control over the actual transfer. Thus emerged the "humanitarian" language of Article XIII of the Potsdam Protocol, published as a communiqué on 2 August 1945 at the end of the Conference: "The Three Governments having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner."<sup>28</sup>

In a letter dated 1 August 1945 from Sir Geoffrey Harrison, the British member of the negotiating party, to John Troutbeck, head of the German Section at the Foreign Office, Harrison explained:

The Sub-Commission met three times, taking as a basis of discussion a draft which I circulated.... the negotiations were not easy--no negotiations with the Russians ever are.... we had a great struggle, which had to be taken up to the Plenary Meeting, about including the last three and a half lines. Sobolev [the Russian negotiator] took the view that the Polish and Czechoslovak wish to expel their German populations was the fulfilment of an historic mission which the Soviet Government were unwilling to try to impede. The view of the Soviet Government was that it was the function of the Allied Control Council in Germany to facilitate the reception of the transferred populations as rapidly as possible. Cannon [the American negotiator] and I naturally strongly opposed this view. We made it clear that we did not like the idea of mass transfers anyway. As, however, we could not prevent them, we wished to ensure that they were carried out in as orderly and humane a manner as possible and in a way that would not throw an

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<sup>27</sup> Kennan, *Memoirs*, vol. I, 265.

<sup>28</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, the Conference of Berlin*, vol. 2: 1495.

intolerable burden on the occupying authorities in Germany. Uncle Joe finally agreed to join in requesting the Polish and Czech Governments and the Control Council for Hungary to suspend expulsions until the report of the Control Council was available. This may prevent mass expulsions for the time being, but I have no doubt that hundreds of Germans will continue to move westwards daily.<sup>29</sup>

The human catastrophe that ensued was predictable. On 16 August 1945 Churchill said before the House of Commons:

I am particularly concerned, at this moment, with the reports reaching us of the conditions under which the expulsion and exodus of Germans from the new Poland are being carried out.... Sparse and guarded accounts of what has happened and is happening have filtered through, but it is not impossible that tragedy on a prodigious scale is unfolding itself behind the iron curtain which at the moment divides Europe in twain.<sup>30</sup>

On 12 October 1945, Robert Murphy, the American political advisor to General Eisenhower, described to the State Department the Berlin refugee crisis as follows:

Knowledge that they are victims of a harsh political decision carried out with the utmost ruthlessness and disregard for the humanities does not cushion the effect. The mind reverts to other mass deportations which horrified the world and brought upon the Nazis the odium which they so deserved. Those mass deportations engineered by the Nazis provided part of the moral basis on which we waged war and which gave strength to our cause.

Now the situation is reversed. We find ourselves in the invidious position of being partners in this German enterprise and as partners inevitably sharing the responsibility. The United States does not control directly the Eastern Zone of Germany through which these helpless and bereft people march after eviction from their homes. The direct responsibility lies

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<sup>29</sup> Public Record Office, London, Document FO 371/46811.

<sup>30</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, vol. 414, cols. 83-4.

with the Provisional Polish Government and to a lesser extent with the Czech Government....

As helpless as the United States may be to arrest a cruel and inhuman process which is continuing, it would seem that our Government could and should make its attitude as expressed at Potsdam unmistakably clear. It would be most unfortunate were the record to indicate that we are *particeps* to methods we have often condemned in other instances.<sup>31</sup>

On 18 October 1945 General Eisenhower sent a telegram to Washington:

In Silesia Polish administration and methods are causing a mass exodus westward of German inhabitants.... Many unable to move are placed in camps on meagre rations and under poor sanitary conditions. Death and disease rate in camps extremely high. Germans who attempt to hold onto homes and land are terrorized into "voluntary" evacuation. Methods used by Poles definitely do not conform to Potsdam agreement.... Due to mass migration into Brandenburg and Saxony, health conditions in these regions tragically low.... Reasonable estimates predict between 2 1/2 and 3 million victims of malnutrition and disease between Oder and Elbe by next spring. Breslau death rate increased ten fold, and death rate reported to be 75% of all births. Typhoid, typhus, dysentery and diphtheria are spreading.... Attention is invited in this connection to serious danger of epidemic of such great proportion as to menace all Europe, including our troops, and to probability of mass starvation of unprecedented scale.<sup>32</sup>

In view of these distressing reports, Secretary of State James Byrnes sent a telegram on 30 November 1945 to the American Ambassador in Poland, Arthur Lane, instructing him to convey the American displeasure to the provisional Polish government:

US Govt has been seriously perturbed by reports of continued mass movements of German refugees who appear to have

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<sup>31</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. 2: 1290-2.

<sup>32</sup> National Archives, RG 165, Records of the War Department TS OPD Message File, Nr. S 28399 of 18 October 1945.

entered Germany from areas east of the Oder-Neisse line. These persons presumably have been expelled summarily from their homes and dispossessed of all property except that which they can carry. Reports indicate that these refugees--mostly women, children and old people--have been arriving in shocking state of exhaustion, many of them ill with communicable diseases and in many instances robbed of their last few personal possessions. Such mass distress and maltreatment of weak and helpless are not in accord with Potsdam Agreement... nor in consonance with international standards of treatment of refugees.<sup>33</sup>

Byrnes also sent a telegram to the American Ambassador in Prague, Lawrence Steinhardt, instructing him to approach the Czech government to impress upon it the need for suspending the expulsions and for using the most humanitarian methods in effecting any future deportations. He further explained: "We recognized that certain transfers were unavoidable, but we did not intend at Potsdam to encourage or commit ourselves to transfers in cases where other means of adjustment were practicable."<sup>34</sup>

But in the summer and fall of 1945 neither Great Britain nor the United States had an effective way of preventing the consequences of their earlier approval of frontier changes and compulsory population transfers as a method of peace making.

In reviewing the catastrophe of the expulsion of the Germans the International Committee of the Red Cross observed:

Had it been borne in mind that the repatriation of some 1,500,000 Greeks from Asia Minor, after the first World War, had taken several years and required large-scale relief schemes, it would have been easy to foresee that the hurried transplanting of fourteen million human beings would raise a large number of problems from the humanitarian standpoint, especially in a Europe strewn with ruins and where starvation was rife.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. 2: 1317.

<sup>34</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, vol. 2: 1294.

<sup>35</sup> ICRC, *Report on its Activities During the Second World War*, vol. 1: 673-4.



### Conclusion

Although the Anglo-Americans did not originate or invent the expulsion schemes, it was their approval of the principle of population transfer that led to the catastrophe that cost over two million Germans their lives.

This brings us to the unaccustomed perspective whereby the Germans—or at least some Germans—suddenly appear as *victims*, and not just as that familiar caricature of boot-stamping bullies bent on conquering the world.

In the light of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, it is worth reflecting on what happened to the Germans in 1945-48. The time is ripe for today's politicians to admit the Anglo-American responsibility for allowing a demographic catastrophe to unfold, including the savage revenge taken on all Germans, large scale murder, raping, and plunder. The time is ripe to recognize that at Teheran and Yalta both Churchill and Roosevelt connived at these expulsions that so completely negated the values for which the war had been ostensibly fought.

It is certainly time for Anglo-American politicians and historians to recognize that the racist and thoroughly inhuman proposals of Anglo-American politicians like Henry Morgenthau<sup>36</sup> and Lord Vansittart<sup>37</sup> are every bit as disgraceful as the genocidal utterings and practices of a Radovan Karadžić or Slobodan Milošević.

In the light of the expulsion and spoliation of so many innocent Germans, one must ask what happened to the noble principles of the Atlantic Charter? Perhaps no one put it as clearly as British Labour MP John Rhys-Davies when he spoke on 1 March 1945 before the House of Commons: "We started this war with great motives and high ideals. We published the Atlantic Charter and then spat on it, stomped on it and burnt it, as it were, at the stake, and now nothing is left of it."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Henry Morgenthau, *Germany is our Problem* (New York, 1945).

<sup>37</sup> Lord Vansittart, *Bones of Contention*, 1943.

<sup>38</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 408, col. 1625.

Let us hope that American and British historians will soon start to consider this much neglected subject matter as a legitimate field of research for themselves and their students. Surely thousands of dissertation themes await to be developed and assigned.