

# THE AFTERMATH OF NAZI RULE

## *Report from Germany*

HANNAH ARENDT

**I**N LESS than six years Germany laid waste the moral structure of Western society, committing crimes that nobody would have believed possible, while her conquerors buried in rubble the visible marks of more than a thousand years of German history. Then into this devastated land, truncated by the Oder-Neisse borderline and hardly able to sustain its demoralized and exhausted population, streamed millions of people from the Eastern provinces, from the Balkans and from Eastern Europe, adding to the general picture of catastrophe the peculiarly modern touches of physical homelessness, social rootlessness, and political rightlessness. The wisdom of Allied policy in expelling all German-speaking minorities from non-German countries—as though there was not enough homelessness in the world already—may be doubted. But the fact is that European peoples who had experienced the murderous demographic politics of Germany during the war were seized with horror, even more than with wrath, at the very idea of having to live together with Germans in the same territory.

The sight of Germany's destroyed cities and the knowledge of German concentration and extermination camps have covered Europe with a cloud of melancholy. Together, they have made the memory of the last war more poignant and more persistent, the fear of future wars more actual. Not the "German problem," insofar as it is a national one within the comity of European nations, but

HANNAH ARENDT is author of a just completed work on totalitarianism, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, soon to be published by Harcourt, Brace. Her writings on history, philosophy, and political theory in *COMMENTARY* and other periodicals have won her a wide reputation. This report on Germany was written after a recent stay of several months in that country. Dr. Arendt was born in Germany, studied under Karl Jaspers in Heidelberg, and earned her doctorate at that university. She came to this country in 1941.

the *nightmare* of Germany in its physical, moral, and political ruin has become almost as decisive an element in the general atmosphere of European life as the Communist movements.

But nowhere is this nightmare of destruction and horror less felt and less talked about than in Germany itself. A lack of response is evident everywhere, and it is difficult to say whether this signifies a half-conscious refusal to yield to grief or a genuine inability to feel. Amid the ruins, Germans mail each other picture postcards still showing the cathedrals and market places, the public buildings and bridges that no longer exist. And the indifference with which they walk through the rubble has its exact counterpart in the absence of mourning for the dead, or in the apathy with which they react, or rather fail to react, to the fate of the refugees in their midst. This general lack of emotion, at any rate this apparent heartlessness, sometimes covered over with cheap sentimentality, is only the most conspicuous outward symptom of a deep-rooted, stubborn, and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened.

**I**NDIFFERENCE, and the irritation that comes when indifference is challenged, can be tested on many intellectual levels. The most obvious experiment is to state *expressis verbis* what the other fellow has noticed from the beginning of the conversation, namely, that you are a Jew. This is usually followed by a little embarrassed pause; and then comes—not a personal question, such as "Where did you go after you left Germany?"; no sign of sympathy, such as "What happened to your family?"—but a deluge of stories about how Germans have suffered (true enough, of course, but beside the point); and if the object of this little experiment happens to be educated and intelligent, he will proceed to draw up a balance between German suffering and the suffering of others, the implication being that one side cancels the other and

we may as well proceed to a more promising topic of conversation. Similarly evasive is the standard reaction to the ruins. When there is any overt reaction at all, it consists of a sigh followed by the half-rhetorical, half-wistful question, "Why must mankind always wage wars?" The average German looks for the causes of the last war not in the acts of the Nazi regime, but in the events that led to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

**S**UCH an escape from reality is also, of course, an escape from responsibility. In this the Germans are not alone; all the peoples of Western Europe have developed the habit of blaming their misfortunes on some force out of their reach: it may be America and the Atlantic Pact today, the legacy of Nazi occupation tomorrow, and history in general every day of the week. But this attitude is more pronounced in Germany, where the temptation to blame everything under the sun on the occupying powers is difficult to resist: in the British zone everything is blamed on British fear of German competition; in the French zone on French nationalism; and in the American zone, where things are better in every respect, on American ignorance of the European mentality. The complaints are only natural, and they all contain a kernel of truth; but behind them is a stubborn unwillingness to make use of the many possibilities left to German initiative. This is perhaps most clearly revealed in the German newspapers, which express all their convictions in a carefully cultivated style of *Schadenfreude*, malicious joy in ruination. It is as though the Germans, denied the power to rule the world, had fallen in love with impotence as such, and now find a positive pleasure in contemplating international tensions and the unavoidable mistakes that occur in the business of governing, regardless of the possible consequences for themselves. Fear of Russian aggression does not necessarily result in an unequivocal pro-American attitude, but often leads to a determined neutrality, as though it were as absurd to take sides in the conflict as it would be to take sides in an earthquake. The awareness that neutrality will not change one's fate makes it in turn impossible to translate this mood into a rational policy, and the mood itself, by its very irrationality, becomes even more bitter.

**B**UT, whether faced or evaded, the realities of Nazi crimes, of war and defeat, still visibly dominate the whole fabric of German life, and the Germans have developed various devices for dodging their shocking impact.

The reality of the death-factories is transformed into a mere potentiality: Germans did only what others are capable of doing (with many illustrative examples, of course) or what others will do in the near future; therefore, anybody who brings up this topic is *ipso facto* suspected of self-righteousness. In this context, Allied policy in Germany is frequently explained as a campaign of successful revenge, even though it later turns out that the German who offers this interpretation is quite aware that most of the things he complains of were either the immediate consequence of the lost war or happened outside the will and control of the Western powers. But the insistence that there must be a careful scheme of revenge serves as a consoling argument, demonstrating the equal sinfulness of all men.

The reality of the destruction that surrounds every German is dissolved into a reflective but not very deep-rooted self-pity, easily dissipated when ugly little one-story structures that might have been imported from some Main Street in America spring up on some of the great avenues to conceal fragmentarily the grimness of the landscape, and to offer an abundance of provincial elegance in super-modern display windows. In France and Great Britain, people feel a greater sadness about the relatively few landmarks destroyed in the war than the Germans do for all their lost treasures together. The boastful hope is expressed in Germany that the country will become the "most modern" in Europe; yet it is mere talk, and some person who has just voiced that hope will insist a few minutes later, at another turn in the conversation, that the next war will do to all European cities what this one did to Germany's—which of course is possible, but signifies again only the transformation of reality into potentiality. The undertone of satisfaction that one often detects in the Germans' talk about the next war expresses no sinister renewal of German plans of conquest, as so many observers have maintained, but is only another device for escaping reality: in an eventual equality of destruction, the German situation would lose its acuteness.

**B**UT perhaps the most striking and frightening aspect of the German flight from reality is the habit of treating facts as though they were mere opinions. For example, the question of who started the last war, by no means a hotly debated issue, is answered by a surprising variety of opinions. An otherwise quite normally intelligent woman in Southern Germany told me that the Russians had begun the war with an attack on Danzig; this is only the crudest of many examples. Nor is this transformation of facts into opinions restricted to the war question; in all fields there is a kind of gentlemen's agreement by which everyone has a right to his ignorance under the pretext that everyone has a right to his opinion—and behind this is the tacit assumption that opinions really do not matter. This is a very serious thing, not only because it often makes discussion so hopeless (one does not ordinarily carry a reference library along everywhere), but primarily because the average German honestly believes this free-for-all, this nihilistic relativity about facts, to be the essence of democracy. In fact, of course, it is a legacy of the Nazi regime.

The lies of totalitarian propaganda are distinguished from the normal lying of non-totalitarian regimes in times of emergency by their consistent denial of the importance of facts in general: all facts can be changed and all lies can be made true. The Nazi impress on the German mind consists primarily in a conditioning whereby reality has ceased to be the sum total of hard inescapable facts and has become a conglomeration of ever-changing events and slogans in which a thing can be true today and false tomorrow. This conditioning may be precisely one of the reasons for the surprisingly few traces of any lasting Nazi indoctrination, as well as for an equally surprising lack of interest in the refuting of Nazi doctrines. What one is up against is not indoctrination but the incapacity or unwillingness to distinguish altogether between fact and opinion. A discussion about the events of the Spanish Civil War will be conducted on the same level as a discussion of the theoretical merits and shortcomings of democracy.

Thus the problem at the German universities is not so much to reintroduce freedom to teach as to reestablish honest research, to confront the student with an unbiased ac-

count of what actually happened, and to eliminate the teachers who have become incapable of doing so. The danger to German academic life is not only from those who hold that freedom of speech should be exchanged for a dictatorship in which a single unfounded, irresponsible opinion would acquire a monopoly over all others, but equally from those who ignore facts and reality and establish their private opinions, not necessarily as the only right ones, but as opinions that are as justified as others.

The unreality and irrelevance of most of these opinions, as compared with the grim relevance of the experience of those who hold them, is sharply underlined by their having been formed before 1933. There is an almost instinctive urge to take refuge in the thoughts and ideas one held before anything compromising had happened. The result is that while Germany has changed beyond recognition—physically and psychologically—people talk and behave superficially as though absolutely nothing had happened since 1932. The authors of the few really important books written in Germany since 1933 or published since 1945 were already famous twenty and twenty-five years ago. The younger generation seems to be petrified, inarticulate, incapable of consistent thought.

A young German art historian, guiding his audience among the masterpieces of the Berlin Museum, which had been sent on tour through several American cities, pointed to the Ancient Egyptian statue of Nefertiti as the sculpture "for which the whole world envies us," and then proceeded to say (a) that even the Americans had not "dared" to carry this "symbol of the Berlin collections" to the United States, and (b) that because of the "intervention of the Americans," the British did not "dare" to carry the Nefretete to the British Museum. The two contradictory attitudes to the Americans were separated by only a single sentence: the speaker, devoid of convictions, was merely groping automatically among the clichés with which his mind was furnished to find the one that might fit the occasion. The clichés have more often an old-fashioned nationalistic than an outspoken Nazi tone, but in any case one seeks in vain to discover behind them a consistent point of view, be it even a bad one.

With the downfall of Nazism, the Germans found themselves again exposed to

facts and reality. But the experience of totalitarianism has robbed them of all spontaneous speech and comprehension, so that now, having no official line to guide them, they are, as it were, speechless, incapable of articulating thoughts and adequately expressing their feelings. The intellectual atmosphere is clouded with vague pointless generalities, with opinions formed long before the events they are supposed to fit actually happened; one is oppressed by a kind of pervasive public stupidity which cannot be trusted to judge correctly the most elementary events, and which, for example, makes it possible for a newspaper to complain, "The world at large once again deserted us"—a statement comparable for blind self-centeredness to the remark Ernst Juenger in his war diaries (*Strahlungen*, 1949) tells of having overheard in a conversation about Russian prisoners assigned to work near Hannover: "It seems there are scoundrels among them. They steal food from the dogs." As Juenger observes, "One often has the impression that the German middle classes are possessed by the devil."

THE rapidity with which, after the currency reform, everyday life in Germany returned to normal and reconstruction began in all fields, has become the talk of Europe. Without a doubt, people nowhere work so hard and long as in Germany. It is a well-known fact that Germans have for generations been overfond of working; and their present industriousness seems at first glance to give substance to the opinion that Germany is still potentially the most dangerous European nation. There are, moreover, many strong incentives for work. Unemployment is rampant and the position of the trade unions is so weak that compensation for overtime is not even demanded by the workers, who frequently refuse to report it to the unions; the housing situation is worse than the many new buildings would seem to indicate: business and office buildings for the great industrial and insurance companies have an unquestioned priority over dwelling units, and the result is that people prefer going to work on Saturdays and even Sundays to staying at home in overcrowded apartments. In rebuilding, as in almost all areas of German life, everything is done (often in a most spectacular way) to restore a facsimile of pre-war

economic and industrial conditions, and very little is done for the welfare of the masses of the people.

Yet none of these facts can explain the atmosphere of feverish busyness on the one hand and the comparatively mediocre production on the other. Beneath the surface, the German attitude to work has undergone a deep change. The old virtue of seeking excellence in the finished product, no matter what the working conditions, has yielded to a mere blind need to keep busy, a greedy craving for something to do every moment of the day. Watching the Germans busily stumble through the ruins of a thousand years of their own history, shrugging their shoulders at the destroyed landmarks or resentful when reminded of the deeds of horror that haunt the whole surrounding world, one comes to realize that busyness has become their chief defense against reality. And one wants to cry out: But this is not real—real are the ruins, real are the past horrors, real are the dead whom you have forgotten. But they are living ghosts, whom speech and argument, the glance of human eyes and the mourning of human hearts, no longer touch.

THERE are, of course, many Germans whom this description does not fit. Above all, there is Berlin, whose people, in the midst of the most horrible physical destruction, have remained intact. I do not know why this should be so, but customs, manners, speech, approaches to people, are in the smallest details so absolutely different from everything one sees and has to face in the rest of Germany, that Berlin is almost like another country. There is hardly any resentment in Berlin against the victors and apparently never was; while the first saturation bombings from England were pulverizing the city, Berliners are reported to have crawled out of their cellars and, seeing one block after another gone, remarked: "Well, if the Tommies mean to keep this up, they'll soon have to bring their own houses with them." There is no embarrassment and no guilt-feeling, but frank and detailed recital of what happened to Berlin's Jews at the beginning of the war. Most important of all, in Berlin the people still actively hate Hitler, and even though they have more reason than other Germans to feel themselves pawns in international politics, they do not feel impotent but are con-

vinced that their attitudes count for something; given half a chance, they will at least sell their lives dear.

The Berliners work just as hard as other people in Germany, but they are less busy, they will take time to show one around the ruins and will somewhat solemnly recite the names of the streets that are gone. It is hard to believe, but it seems there is something in the Berliners' claim that Hitler never entirely succeeded in conquering them. They are remarkably well-informed and have kept their sense of humor and their characteristically ironical friendliness. The only change in the people—apart from their having become somewhat sadder and less ready for laughter—is that "Red Berlin" is now violently anti-Communist. But here again there is an important difference between Berlin and the rest of Germany: only Berliners take the trouble to point out clearly the similarities between Hitler and Stalin, and only Berliners bother to tell you that they are of course not against the Russian people—a sentiment all the more remarkable if one remembers what happened to the Berliners, many of whom had welcomed the Red Army as the true liberator, during the first months of occupation, and what is still happening to them in the Eastern sector.

Berlin is an exception, but unfortunately not a very important one. For the city is hermetically sealed off and has little intercourse with the rest of the country, except that one meets people everywhere who because of the uncertainty there left Berlin for the Western zones and now complain bitterly of their loneliness and disgust. Indeed, there are quite a number of Germans who are "different"; but they use up their energy in efforts to penetrate the stifling atmosphere that surrounds them, and remain completely isolated. In a way these people are today worse off psychologically than in the worst years of Hitler's terror. In the last years of the war, there did exist a vague comradeship of opposition among all who for one reason or another were against the regime. Together they hoped for the day of defeat, and since—apart from the few well-known exceptions—they had no real intention of doing anything to hasten that day, they could enjoy the charm of a half-imaginary rebellion. The very danger involved in even the mere thought of opposition created a sentiment of

solidarity all the more consoling because it could express itself only in such intangible gestures of emotion as a glance or a hand-clasp, which assumed a significance out of all proportion. The emergence from this overheated intimacy of danger into the crude egotism and spreading shallowness of post-war life has been a truly heartbreaking experience for many people. (It may be remarked that today in the Eastern zone, with its police regime, this time almost universally detested by the population, an even stronger atmosphere of comradeship, intimacy, and half-spoken sign language prevails than under the Nazis, so that it is often precisely the best elements in the Eastern zone who find it difficult to make up their minds to move to the West.)

## II

**P**ERHAPS the saddest part of a sad story is the failure of the three devices used by the Western Allies to solve the moral, economic, and political problem of Germany. Denazification, revival of free enterprise, and federalization are certainly not the cause of present conditions in Germany, but they have helped to conceal and thus to perpetuate moral confusion, economic chaos, social injustice, and political impotence.

Denazification rested on the assumption that there were objective criteria not only for clear-cut distinction between Nazis and non-Nazis, but for the whole Nazi hierarchy ranging from little sympathizer to war criminal. From the beginning, the whole system, based upon length of party membership, ranks and offices held, date of first entrance, etc., was very complicated, and involved almost everyone. The very few who had been able to keep alive outside the stream of life in Hitler Germany were exempt, and of course rightly so; but they were joined by a number of very different characters who had been lucky or cautious or influential enough to avoid the many annoyances of party membership: men who had actually been prominent in Nazi Germany but now were not required to go through the denazification process. Some of these gentlemen, mostly of the upper middle classes, have by now established open contact with their less fortunate colleagues, jailed for some war crime. This they do partly to seek advice in economic and industrial matters, but also because they have

at last become bored with hypocrisy. The injustices of the denazification system were simple and monotonous: the city-employed garbage collector, who under Hitler had to become a party member or look for another job, was caught in the denazification net, while his superiors either went scot-free because they knew how to manage these matters, or else suffered the same penalty as he: to them, of course, a much less serious matter.

Worse than these daily injustices was the fact that the system, devised to draw clear moral and political distinctions in the chaos of a completely disorganized people, actually tended to blur even the few genuine distinctions that had survived the Nazi regime. Active opponents to the regime naturally had to enter a Nazi organization in order to camouflage their illegal activities, and these members of such resistance movement as had existed in Germany were caught in the same net as their enemies, to the great pleasure of the latter. In theory, it was possible to present proofs of anti-Nazi activity; but not only was it difficult to convince occupation officers without the slightest experience of the intricacies of a terror regime; there was also the danger that the applicant might compromise himself in the eyes of the authorities, who were, after all, primarily interested in peace and order, by showing too convincingly that he had been capable of independent thought and rebellious action.

It is doubtful, however, that the denazification program has stifled new political formations in Germany that might conceivably have grown out of the resistance to Nazism, since the resistance movement itself had so very little vitality in the first place. But there is no doubt that denazification has created an unwholesome new community of interest among the more-or-less compromised, those who for opportunistic reasons had become more-or-less convinced Nazis. This powerful group of slightly dubious characters excludes both those who kept their integrity and those who participated in any resounding way in the Nazi movement. It would be inaccurate in either case to think of exclusion as based on specific political convictions: the elimination of confirmed anti-Nazis does not prove the others to be confirmed Nazis, and the elimination of "famous" Nazis does not mean that the others hate Nazism. It is simply that the denazification program has been a direct

threat to livelihood and existence, and the majority have tried to relieve the pressure by a system of mutual assurance that the whole thing need not be taken too seriously. Such assurance can be gained only from those who are as much and as little compromised as oneself. Those who became Nazis out of conviction as well as those who kept their integrity are felt to constitute an alien and threatening element, partly because they cannot be frightened by their past, but also because their very existence is living testimony that something really serious happened, that some decisive act was committed. Thus it has come about that not only the active Nazis but the convinced anti-Nazis are excluded from positions of power and influence in Germany today; this is the most significant symptom of the German intelligentsia's unwillingness to take its own past seriously or to shoulder the burden of responsibility bequeathed to it by the Hitler regime.

The community of interest that exists among the more-or-less compromised is further strengthened by the general German—but not only German!—attitude to official questionnaires. In contrast to Anglo-Saxon and American habits, Europeans do not always believe in telling the absolute truth when an official body asks embarrassing questions. In countries whose legal system does not allow one to give testimony in one's own cause, lying is considered no great sin if the truth happens to prejudice one's chances. Thus for many Germans there is a discrepancy between their answers to military government questionnaires and the truth as known to their neighbors; and so the bonds of duplicity are strengthened.

Yet it was not even conscious dishonesty that defeated the denazification program. A great number of Germans, especially among the more educated, apparently are no longer capable of telling the truth even if they want to. All those who became Nazis after 1933 yielded to some kind of pressure, which ranged from the crude threat to life and livelihood, to various considerations of career, to reflections about the "irresistible stream of history." In the cases of physical or economic pressure, there should have been the possibility of mental reservation, of acquiring with cynicism that absolutely necessary membership card. But, curiously, it seems that very few Germans were capable of such healthy

cynicism; what bothered them was not the membership card but the mental reservation, so that they often ended by adding to their enforced enrollment the necessary convictions, in order to shed the burden of duplicity. Today, they have a certain inclination to remember only the initial pressure, which was real enough; from their belated inner adjustment to Nazi doctrines, dictated by conscience, they have drawn the half-conscious conclusion that it was their conscience itself that betrayed them—an experience that does not exactly promote moral improvement.

Certainly the impact of an everyday life wholly permeated by Nazi doctrines and practices was not easy to resist. The position of an anti-Nazi resembled that of a normal person who happens to be thrown into an insane asylum where all the inmates have exactly the same delusion: it becomes difficult under such circumstances to trust one's own senses. And there was the continual added strain of behaving according to the rules of the insane environment, which after all was the only tangible reality, in which a man could never afford to lose his sense of direction. This demanded an ever-present awareness of one's whole existence, an attention that could never relax into the automatic reactions we all use to cope with the many daily situations. The absence of such automatic reactions is the chief element in the anxiety of maladjustment; and although, objectively speaking, maladjustment in Nazi society signified mental normality, the strain of maladjustment on the individual was just as great as in a normal society.

The deep moral confusion in Germany today, which has grown out of this Nazi-fabricated confusion of truth with reality, is more than amorality and has deeper causes than mere wickedness. The so-called "good Germans" are often as misled in their moral judgments of themselves and others as those who simply refuse to recognize that anything wrong or out of the ordinary was done by Germany at all. Quite a number of Germans who are even somewhat over-emphatic about German guilt in general and their own guilt in particular become curiously confused if they are forced to articulate their opinions; they may make a mountain out of some irrelevant molehill, while some real enormity escapes their notice altogether. One variation of this confusion is that Germans who con-

fess their own guilt are in many cases altogether innocent in the ordinary, down-to-earth sense, whereas those who are guilty of something real have the calmest consciences in the world. The recently published post-war diary of Knut Hamsun, which has found a large and enthusiastic audience in Germany, gives testimony on the highest level to this horrible innocence that transforms itself into a persecution complex when confronted with the judgment of a morally intact world.

Ernst Juenger's war diaries offer perhaps the best and most honest evidence of the tremendous difficulties the individual encounters in keeping himself and his standards of truth and morality intact in a world where truth and morality have lost all visible expression. Despite the undeniable influence of Juenger's earlier writings on certain members of the Nazi intelligentsia, he was an active anti-Nazi from the first to the last day of the regime, proving that the somewhat old-fashioned notion of honor, once current in the Prussian officer corps, was quite sufficient for individual resistance. Yet even this unquestionable integrity has a hollow ring; it is as though morality had ceased to work and had become an empty shell into which the person who has to live, function, and survive all day long, retires for the night and solitude only. Day and night become nightmares of each other. The moral judgment, reserved for the night, is a nightmare of fear of being discovered by day; and the life of the day is a nightmare of horror in the betrayal of the intact conscience that functions only by night.

**I**N VIEW of the very complicated moral situation of the country at the close of the war, it is not surprising that the gravest single error in the American denazification policy occurred in its initial effort to arouse the conscience of the German people to the enormity of the crimes committed in their name and under conditions of organized complicity. In the early days of occupation, posters appeared everywhere showing the photographed horrors of Buchenwald with a finger pointing at the spectator, and the text: "You are guilty." For a majority of the population these pictures were the first authentic knowledge of what had been done in their name. How could they feel guilty if they had not even

known? All they saw was the pointed finger, clearly indicating the wrong person. From this error they concluded that the whole poster was a propaganda lie.

Thus, at least, runs the story one hears time and again in Germany. The story is true enough so far as it goes; yet it does not explain the very violent reaction to these posters, which even today has not died down, and it does not explain the affronting neglect of the content of the photographs. Both the violence and the neglect are called forth by the hidden truth of the poster rather than by its obvious error. For while the German people were not informed of all Nazi crimes and were even deliberately kept ignorant of their exact nature, the Nazis had seen to it that every German knew some horrible story to be true, and he did not need a detailed knowledge of all the horrors committed in his name to realize that he had been made accomplice to unspeakable crimes.

This is a sad story which is not made less sad by the realization that, under the circumstances, the Allied powers had very little choice. The only conceivable alternative to the denazification program would have been a revolution—the outbreak of the German people's spontaneous wrath against all those they knew to be prominent members of the Nazi regime. Uncontrolled and bloody as such an uprising might have been, it certainly would have followed better standards of justice than a paper procedure. But the revolution did not come to pass, and not primarily because it was difficult to organize under the eyes of four foreign armies. It is only too likely that not a single soldier, German or foreign, would have been needed to shield the real culprits from the wrath of the people. This wrath does not exist today, and apparently it has never existed.

NOT only was the denazification program inadequate to the moral and political situation at the end of the war; it quickly came into conflict with American plans for the reconstruction and re-education of Germany. To rebuild the German economy along lines of free enterprise seemed a plausible enough anti-Nazi measure, since the Nazi economy had been a clearly planned economy, although it had not—or perhaps not yet—touched property conditions in the country. But the factory owners as a class had

been good Nazis, or at least strong supporters of a regime that had offered, in exchange for some relinquishment of private control, to bring the whole European trade and industrial system into German hands. In this, German businessmen behaved no differently from businessmen in other countries in the imperialist era: the imperialist-minded businessman is no believer in free enterprise—on the contrary, he sees state intervention as the only guarantee of safe returns from his far-flung enterprises. It is true enough that the German businessmen, unlike the old-style imperialists, did not control the state but were used by the party for party interests. But this difference, decisive as it might have become in the long run, had not yet appeared in its full force.

In exchange for state-guaranteed expansion, the German business class had been ready enough to liquidate some of its more conspicuous positions of power, especially over the working class. A controlled economic system, with greater safeguards for workers' interests, had therefore come to be the strongest single attraction of the Nazi regime for both working class and upper middle class. Here again, the development did not run its course, and state-owned, or rather party-owned, slavery as we know it in Russia had not yet become a threat to German workers (though of course it had been the chief threat to the working classes of all other European countries during the war). The result has been that planned economy in Germany, with no Communist connotations, is remembered as the only safeguard against unemployment and over-exploitation.

The reintroduction of truly free enterprise meant handing over the factories and the control of economic life to those who, even if a little wrong about the ultimate consequences of Nazism, had been staunch supporters of the regime for all practical purposes. If they had not had much real power under the Nazis, they had enjoyed all the pleasures of status, and this regardless of actual membership in the party. And since the end of the war, together with almost unlimited power over economic life, they have regained their old power over the working class—that is, the only class in Germany which, though it had welcomed state intervention as insurance against unemployment, had never been wholeheartedly Nazi. In



other words, at the time when denazification was the official watchword of Allied policy in Germany, power was returned to people whose Nazi sympathies were a matter of record, and power was taken away from those whose untrustworthiness with regard to the Nazis had been the only somewhat established fact in an otherwise fluctuating situation.

To make things worse, the power returned to the industrialists was freed even of the feeble controls that had existed under the Weimar Republic. The trade unions which the Nazis had wiped out were not reinstated to their former position—partly because they lacked competent personnel and partly because they were suspected of anti-capitalist convictions—and the efforts of the unions to regain their former influence over the workers failed badly, with the result that by now they have lost the little confidence they may have inherited from memories of former times.

The socialists' stubborn attack on the Schuman plan may look foolish to the outside world. This attack, however, can be properly understood (though hardly excused) only if one bears in mind that, under present circumstances, the combination of the Rhine-Ruhr industry with French industry might very well mean an even more concerted and better supported assault on the workers' standard of living. The mere fact that the Bonn government, frequently considered a mere façade for the interests of the industrialists, has supported the plan so heartily, seems reason enough for suspicion. For, unfortunately, the German upper middle classes have neither learned nor forgotten from the past; they still believe, despite a wealth of experience to the contrary, that a large "labor reserve"—that is, considerable unemployment—is a healthy economic sign, and they are satisfied if they can keep wages down in this way.

**T**HE economic issue is considerably sharpened by the problem of the refugees, which is the greatest economic and social problem of present-day Germany. So long as these people are not resettled, they will constitute a grave political danger, precisely because they have been driven into a political vacuum. In common with the comparatively few convinced Nazis who are still left in Germany and who almost without exception

were former members of the SS, the expellees have a clear-cut political program and can rely upon a certain group solidarity, two elements conspicuously absent in all other strata of the population. Their program is the re-establishment of a powerful Germany which would make it possible for them to return to their former homes in the East and take their revenge on the populations that expelled them. In the meantime, they are busy hating and despising the native German population, which received them with something less than fraternal sentiments.

As distinguished from the problem posed by the remnants of the Nazi movement, the refugee problem could be solved by energetic and intelligent economic measures. That, failing such measures, the refugees have been driven into a position where they had virtually no choice but to establish a party of their own if they wanted their interests to be represented at all, is in no small part the fault of the present regime, and more specifically of the influence of the free-enterprise slogan as it has been understood or misunderstood by Germans. Public funds are used for credit to big enterprises; encouragement of small enterprises (many of the refugees are skilled workers and craftsmen), especially in the form of cooperatives, has been almost completely neglected. The amount of money spent for the benefit of the refugees varies from one Land to the other, but the amounts are nearly always hopelessly inadequate, not only in terms of absolute help but also in proportion to the general state budget. Recent proposals by the Bonn government to reduce business taxes—a clear index to the government's economic policy—would have decreased the available funds for refugees even more sharply. The fact that the occupation authorities vetoed this measure may offer some hope that the American authorities are coming to understand that the free-enterprise slogan has different connotations in Germany, and in Europe in general, from those that surround it in the United States.

**I**T is indeed one of the chief handicaps of American policy in Europe that this difference is not clearly understood. The American system, where the power of industrial management is strongly counterbalanced by the power of organized labor, would hardly seem acceptable to the European believer in free

enterprise; in Europe, the trade unions even in their best days were never among the established powers, but always led the uncertain existence of a mildly rebellious force operating with varying success in an everlasting battle against the employers. In America, moreover, there is a certain reluctance, shared by employers and workers, to resort to state intervention; sometimes the mere threat of state arbitration may bring the disputing parties back to bilateral negotiations. In Germany, both workers and employers have only one idea in their heads: that the state must throw its full weight on the side of their interests. With the possible exception of the Scandinavians, no European citizenry has the political maturity of Americans, for whom a certain amount of responsibility, i.e., of moderation in the pursuit of self-interest, is almost a matter of course. Furthermore, this is still a country of abundance and of opportunity, so that the talk of free initiative has not yet become meaningless; and the very dimensions of the American economy tend to defeat over-all planning. But in European countries, where national territories have continually shrunk in proportion to industrial capacity, most people are firmly convinced that even the present standard of living can be guaranteed only if there is some measure of planning to assure everyone a just share in the national income.

Behind the loose and wholly unjustified talk of American "imperialism" in Europe, looms the not so unjustified fear that the introduction of the American economic system into Europe, or rather American support of the economic *status quo*, can only result in a miserably low standard of living for the masses. The social and political stability of the Scandinavian countries results partly from strong trade unions, partly from the role of cooperatives in economic life, and partly from a wisely exerted state intervention. These factors indicate at least the general direction that the solution of European economic and social problems might take if unsolved political problems did not interfere and if the general world situation allowed enough time. In Germany, at any rate, the system of free enterprise has led quickly to cut-throat practices, monopolization, and trustification, regardless of all efforts of the American authorities to prevent these developments.

**P**OLITICALLY, the most serious aspect of the situation is not, as might be expected, the rising dissatisfaction of the working classes. The tragic history of the German socialist parties seems to have exhausted their vitality; never before has the German working class been in a less revolutionary mood. There is a certain embittered resignation to a system that is "sold" to them under the trade name of democracy, but this resentment will hardly cause any trouble; on the contrary, it is almost a guarantee that any regime, however good or bad, will be acceptable, as a matter of indifference. An altogether different and really dangerous side of the matter is that since the situation of the workers has become more hopeless, more insecure, and more miserable than before, the old fear of "proletarianization" has received new and powerful motivation.

This fear especially grips the middle classes, who once again lost their money through the currency reform, in contrast to the industrialists whose fortunes were secure in real properties. The financial status of the middle-class Germans, especially if they lost their belongings in the bombings or are refugees, differs in no way from that of the ordinary worker's family. But the idea of having to share the worker's lot for a lifetime is forbidding indeed.

To avoid this, the younger people therefore try desperately to scrape together a few marks to enter one of the many universities—all of them overcrowded. It is their only chance to keep their middle-class status and to escape the misery of a proletarianized life. Everywhere in Germany one is told that in a few years there will be enough lawyers, physicians, teachers, art historians, philosophers, and theologians to form a breadline stretching over all the highways. And most of these potentially unemployed academicians will have earned their degrees at the price of appalling sacrifices; many students live on a monthly income of sixty or seventy marks, which means chronic undernourishment and complete abstention from even the most modest pleasures, such as a glass of wine or an evening at the movies. Academic requirements in general are not much lower than they used to be, so that the fanatic devotion of these young people to their studies, prompted as it may be by quite non-intellectual motives, is interrupted only by re-

curing spells of hard manual labor to earn a little extra money.

Nobody in Germany seems to doubt that the tremendous sacrifices of the student generation can only end in severe disappointment, and nobody seems to give this problem much serious thought. The only solution would be the closing of a number of German universities, combined with a pitiless screening of the high school graduates, perhaps even the introduction of the otherwise questionable French system of competitive examinations in which the number of successful candidates is determined beforehand by the number of available places. Instead of a discussion along these or other lines, the Bavarian government only recently opened one more (the fourth) university in Bavaria, and the French occupation authorities, in some ill-advised urge to improve German culture, have actually opened a brand new university in Mainz—which means that six thousand students have come to aggravate the already quite hopeless housing situation in a city almost completely destroyed. And indeed a rather desperate courage would be required under present conditions to take measures that would forcibly empty the universities; it would be like depriving a despairing man of his last chance, even though this chance had become a gambler's chance. What course political development will take in Germany when a whole class of frustrated and starving intellectuals is let loose on an indifferent and sullen population, is anybody's guess.

**E**VEN those observers of Allied policy in Germany who viewed denazification with misgivings and saw that a system of free enterprise could lead only to the aggrandizement of politically undesirable elements, placed considerable hope on the federalization program, under which Germany was divided into Laender (states) with extensive powers of local self-government. It seemed indisputably right in so many ways: it would act as a safeguard against accumulation of power, and thus appease the understandable if exaggerated fears of Germany's neighbors; it would prepare the German people for the hoped-for federalization of Europe; it would teach grass-roots democracy in the field of communal or local affairs where people had their immediate interests and were supposed to know the ropes, and thus

might counteract the Nazi megalomania which had taught Germans to think in continents and plan in centuries.

But the failure of the Laender governments is already almost a matter of record. It is a failure in the only political field where the Germans have been left alone almost from the beginning of the occupation, and where success or failure was independent of Germany's status on the international scene. To some extent, of course, the failure of the local governments can be blamed upon the general climate of German life created by denazification and the social consequences of a ruthless economic policy; but this explanation sounds valid only if one wilfully ignores the great degree of freedom that was granted to the Germans in the Laender governments. The truth is that centralization, as it was accomplished by nation-states and as it was established in Germany, not by Hitler but by Bismarck, succeeded in destroying all authentic desire for local autonomy and in undermining the political vitality of all provincial or municipal bodies. Whatever is left of such traditions has assumed a hopelessly reactionary character and has petrified into the cheapest kind of folklore. Local government in most instances has liberated the most vicious local conflicts, creating chaos everywhere because there is no power great enough to overawe conflicting factions. The element of public responsibility and even of national interest being conspicuously absent, local politics tends to deteriorate quickly into the lowest possible form of plain corruption. The dubious political past of everybody who is experienced (and the "inexperienced" elements have by now been rather ruthlessly eliminated), and the low salaries paid to the civil servants, together open the door to all kinds of mismanagement: many public officials can easily be blackmailed, and many more find it very difficult to resist the temptation to augment their salaries by accepting bribes.

The Bonn government has little direct connection with the Laender governments: it is neither controlled by them nor does it exercise any noticeable control over them. The only functioning links between Bonn and the Laender governments are the party machines, which rule supreme in all questions of personnel and administration, and which, in sharp contrast to the "small state" structure

of the country, are more centralized than ever and therefore represent the only visible power.

This is a dangerous situation, but in itself it is not necessarily the worst that could have happened. The real trouble comes from the nature of the party machines themselves. The present parties are continuations of the pre-Hitler parties—that is, of the parties that Hitler found it so surprisingly easy to destroy. They are in many cases run by the same people and are dominated by the old ideologies and the old tactics. However, only the tactics have somehow preserved their vitality; the ideologies are carried along simply for tradition's sake and because a German party cannot very well exist without a *Weltanschauung*. One cannot even say that the ideologies have survived for want of something better; it is rather as though the Germans, after their experience with Nazi ideology, have become convinced that just about anything will do. The party machines are primarily interested in providing jobs and favors for their members, and they are all-powerful to do so. This means that they tend to attract the most opportunistic elements of the population. Far from encouraging initiative of any kind, they are afraid of young people with new ideas. In short, they have been reborn in senility. Consequently, what little there is of political interest and discussion occurs in small circles outside the parties and outside the public institutions. Each of these small groups, because of the political vacuum and the general corruption of public life around them, is the potential nucleus for a new movement; for the parties have not only failed to enlist the support of the German intelligentsia, they have also convinced the masses that they do not represent their interests.

**T**HE melancholy story of postwar Germany is not one of missed opportunities. In our

eagerness to find a definite culprit and definable mistakes we tend to overlook the more fundamental lessons this story may teach us. When all is said, the twofold question remains: What could one reasonably expect from a people after twelve years of totalitarian rule? What could one reasonably expect from an occupation confronted with the impossible task of putting back on its feet a people that had lost the ground from under it?

But it would be well to remember and try to understand the experience of the occupation of Germany, for we are all too likely to see it repeated in our lifetime on a gigantic scale. Unfortunately, the liberation of a people from totalitarianism is not likely to come to pass merely through "the breakdown of communications and centralized control [which] might well enable the brave Russian peoples to free themselves from a tyranny far worse than that of the Czars," as Churchill put it in his recent speech to the Assembly of the Council of Europe. The German example shows that help from the outside is not likely to set free indigenous forces of self-help, and that totalitarian rule is something more than merely the worst kind of tyranny. Totalitarianism kills the roots.

Politically speaking, the present conditions of German life have a greater significance as an object lesson for the consequences of totalitarianism than as a demonstration of the so-called German problem in itself. This problem, like all other European problems, could be solved only in a federated Europe; but even such a solution seems of little relevance in view of the imminent political crisis of these coming years. Neither a regenerated nor an unregenerated Germany is likely to play a great role in it. And this knowledge of the ultimate futility of any political initiative on their part in the present struggle is not the least potent factor in the Germans' reluctance to face the reality of their destroyed country.