

Rebuilding Postwar Europe

With the end of World War II, Europe was in ruins. As the Nazi-controlled government of Germany surrendered in May of 1945, many Europeans lived in states formerly occupied and controlled by the Nazis.

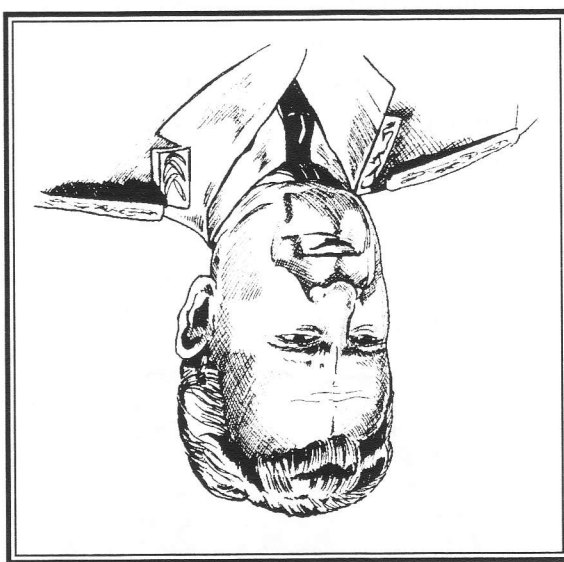
With the collapse of Nazi control across Europe came the desire for revenge by those formerly held by German military and political control. As liberating Allied armies drove across Germany and eastern Europe in the latter days of the war, they discovered the many Nazi death camps established to exterminate ethnic minorities such as Jews and Slavs. Local leaders, angered and frustrated after years of Nazi persecution, rounded up and executed tens of thousands of German officers and party officials.

They turned on any of their citizens who cooperated with the German occupation of their land. In France, any woman accused of associating with the Germans had her head shaved and was forced to walk the streets of the local community naked.

As political control returned to the citizens of formerly occupied areas, local authorities organized denazification programs to reestablish local law and ban any remnants of fascism the Nazis had established.

Among the more public instances of denazification were the Nuremberg Trials. These Allied tribunals brought 24 high-ranking Nazi officials to trial for war crimes in Nuremberg, Germany. The judges at these trials ordered 12 of the defendants to be executed and the others imprisoned. (One of those ordered executed—Hermann Goering—cheated his captors by committing suicide in prison.)

Meanwhile, new European governments were formed, restoring national rule once again. The French established a new republic and a new constitution in 1946, which included granting women the right to vote. Formerly fascist Italy eliminated its monarchy. Other political reforms brought the Labour



Josip Broz ("Tito")

Party to power in Great Britain (Prime Minister Winston Churchill was voted out of office just weeks following the end of the European war), promising increased social programs for the poor. As the western European powers set out on a course of reform and restoration, eastern Europe began facing new oppressive challenges from the Soviet Union. The Soviets systematically cracked down on democratic movements in central and eastern Europe. Between 1945 and 1948, the USSR forced communist governments in Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. With the Soviet army in control of these eastern states, Stalinist control was taken with ease. Only two eastern European nations escaped Soviet dominance after World War II—Yugoslavia and Albania. But communists controlled these two states as well. While Albania remained closely tied to the Stalinist movement, Yugoslavia went its own way under the leadership of Josip Broz, popularly known as Tito, who had led the communist resistance against the Nazis during the war. During the years following World War II, most of the nations of Europe were lined up in two distinct camps—the democratic West, and the communist East.

1. How did European nations respond to the defeat of Germany and the end of Nazi control? What were some of the goals of "denazification programs?"

Review and Write

2. During World War II, the Allies were led by Churchill, FDR, and Stalin. By the summer of 1945, what leadership changes had occurred?

3. Describe the Soviet Union's extension of power over eastern Europe after World War II.