

### Teaching notes

This resource is one of a sequence of eight resources, originally planned for OCR's Unit 2 Option: Democracy and Dictatorships in Germany 1919-1963 (Y221). The sequence focuses on the key topic 'The impact of war and defeat on Germany 1939-49'. Although the content of the resources is drawn from this particular specification, there is no reason why they couldn't be used to support the teaching of other similar courses, perhaps with some adaptation of the suggested activities.

The eight resources in the sequence are:

1. The war economy and Total War (search '25206' to find it on [Teachit History](#))
2. The impact of bombing (search '25207')
3. Racial policies and the Final Solution (search '25208')
4. Morale (search '25209')
5. Opposition and resistance (search '25210')
6. **Consequences of the Second World War (this resource)**
7. The Cold War and Potsdam (search '25212')
8. Bizonia and the Berlin Blockade (search '25213')

Each resource contains a section of reading followed by some suggested tasks. These could be completed in class or as independent homework tasks.

### Background

On 8 May 1945 the Second World War came to an end. Adolf Hitler had committed suicide in a bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, surrounded by a small coterie of supporters and loyalists, but for the rest of Germany there was no end to the horrors of war and destruction. The country had been overrun by enemy armies and faced division. It is estimated that in the immediate aftermath of the war a further 2.5 million Germans died of hunger, cold and violence. The largest refugee crisis in European history was unfolding, with millions of hungry displaced people from all over the continent desperate to make their way home. Many had been forced workers from eastern and western Europe, kept in conditions of virtual slavery in Germany.

In the east, from mid-1944 onwards a mass exodus of ethnic Germans fled the anger and hatred of Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs and others and the largest act of ethnic cleansing in history saw 15 million expelled. In Germany the world became aware of the full horror of the Holocaust as allied forces discovered the Nazi death camps. For German women the horror stories propagated by Joseph Goebbels about the Red Army turned out to be more than propaganda, as a million women were raped by Red Army soldiers and countless others took their own lives before they could be attacked. Allied war crimes investigators scoured Germany to capture some of the most wanted war criminals, but a large number vanished into hiding or fled to South America.

### Destruction

In the last two weeks of the war, 40,000 tonnes of Soviet artillery shells fell on Berlin reducing much of the city to ruins. Across Germany, 20 million people were made homeless and two thirds of all adult men born in 1918 were dead by the end of 1945 which resulted in a long term imbalance between the numbers of men and women in Germany after the war. Germany was struggling to feed herself; by May 1945 millions of livestock had been killed and men who were capable of farming conscripted. Entire rural populations abandoned their farms as the Soviets advanced and the roads and rail networks connecting food producers with their markets were destroyed by allied bombing. In addition to this, inflation in Germany had rendered the Reichsmark worthless, and even if it had been able to hold its value, there was little of any worth to buy with it. This meant that farmers were reluctant to sell their food and instead chose to hold on to it. The German average daily intake of calories in 1941 had been 2,441, by 1945 it was 1,412.

### Refugees

German colonies and communities had existed throughout Europe and deep into Russia since the Middle Ages. As the tide of war shifted against the Nazis, these ethnic Germans found their lives in danger from the Red Army that swept across Russia and Eastern Europe and Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs and others, hungry for revenge on any German they could find. These communities had been added to during the war by millions of Germans who had moved to Eastern European countries as colonial settlers, taking control of farms where local people had been expelled, and taking over homes and businesses often stolen from local elites and Jews. The anger against ethnic Germans developed at a grass roots level, but also with newly installed governments in Eastern Europe who wanted to expel their unwelcome German ethnic minority. They



**Refugees drying washing 1945**

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thought that it would be easier to rule an ethnically homogenous nation. In Poland, the Communist Party, in the process of seizing power at the behest of Stalin, thought that having just one ethnic group would make it easier to impose communist ideology. At the Yalta Conference it was agreed that the Poles and Czechs would be able to remove Germans from their territory but it was not realised at the time the degree of violence that this would entail. It is estimated that half a million ethnic Germans were killed by forced deportations.

### Forced labour

As early as 1943 it was proposed by Stalin that millions of German civilians be transported from a defeated Reich to the USSR to work as forced labourers rebuilding the country. Before the war ended, 111,000 ethnic Germans were transported from the Balkans to Russia to work in slave labour conditions, along with any Nazi officials captured as the Red Army marched westwards. When the Soviets invaded Germany and occupied the eastern part of the country they sent over 150,000 German civilians and former Nazi officials to the USSR to work, a quarter of whom died. They were sent to work in heavy industry, construction and in the mines of the coal producing Donets region. They were treated much as Stalin had treated his own slave labourers in the gulags, with a poor diet and over work killing thousands. Soviet records indicate that in total, some 271,000 Germans were sent to Russia and just over 200,000 returned by 1950. Another group of Germans trapped in Russia were prisoners of war, some three million were captured by the Red Army and historians differ over the exact numbers of those who died. A broad consensus agrees that approximately 350,000 died of hunger, violence, disease and exhaustion, but some studies place it as high as one million.

### The camps

As the Soviet, British and American armies entered Poland from the east and Germany from the west, evidence of the genocide of the Jews began to emerge. When the British Army arrived at Bergen Belsen concentration camp on 19 April 1945, the BBC journalist Richard Dimbleby, who had been reporting on the war since D-Day made this report:

*'I picked my way over corpse after corpse in the gloom, until I heard one voice raised above the gentle undulating moaning. I found a girl, she was a living skeleton, impossible to gauge her age for she had practically no hair left, and her face was only a yellow parchment sheet with two holes in it for eyes. She was stretching out her stick of an arm and gasping something, it was "English, English, medicine, medicine", and she was trying to cry but she hadn't enough strength. And beyond her down the passage and in the hut there were the convulsive movements of dying people too weak to raise themselves from the floor.*

*In the shade of some trees lay a great collection of bodies. I walked about them trying to count, there were perhaps 150 of them flung down on each other, all naked, all so thin that their yellow skin glistened like stretched rubber on their bones. Some of the poor starved creatures whose bodies were there looked so utterly unreal and inhuman that I could have imagined that they had never lived at all.'*

On 27 January 1945, the Red Army had discovered the almost abandoned Auschwitz Birkenau and had filmed the horrific scenes that confronted them there. In both instances, troops who had survived bloody battles were shocked and disgusted by what they saw. When allied populations heard the reports, they helped to morally justify the long years of war and sacrifice, but the German people had far more mixed responses. Many who were forced by allied commanders to walk through the camps claimed they had never known what had happened there; others claimed still that the Jews were at least partly to blame for their fate. Some Germans looked to their destroyed cities and lost loved ones on far away battlefields and claimed that Aryan Germans, not the Jews, were the biggest victims of the war.

### The Nuremberg Trials

Throughout the war, the British, Americans and Soviets agreed that the Nazi Regime should be punished for its crimes at the end of the conflict. When overwhelming evidence of the Holocaust was received by allied governments, they were forced to pledge, in November 1943, that the perpetrators would be punished. Stalin proposed, at the Teheran Conference, that the top 50,000 members of the regime and army should be executed, a suggestion fiercely opposed by Churchill. A major aspect of the wartime conferences was the discussion of how the tribunal should be conducted and which countries would dispense the justice. There were four main charges for defendants to answer and a series of trials that lasted until 1948. The crimes the Nazis were accused of were:

1. Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace
2. Planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression and other crimes against peace
3. War crimes
4. Crimes against humanity

The most notorious members of the regime, who had survived the war, including Albert Speer and Herman Goering, appeared before the International Military Tribunal. Other trials also took place but were conducted by the different allied powers individually. The USA conducted twelve trials and prosecuted a range of different defendants. These included Hitler's own doctor, Karl Brandt and major industrial concerns such as Krupp and IG Farben for their use of slave labour. Initially, American prosecutors wanted to put the directors of these firms on trial for helping Hitler to build a vast war machine, but allied chemical and engineering companies had performed similar services for their own governments. When the prosecutors discovered slave labour at sites such as Auschwitz Monowitz, they found a pretext to convict the company directors and began a process of prosecuting crimes against the Jews that has continued until the present day (2015). The trials were the first ever use of an international body to prosecute war crimes and much of the international law that developed throughout the post war era was based on the judges' rulings at Nuremberg. It led to the development of the permanent international court at The Hague in Belgium and the United Nations international convention on genocide. It was criticised by some ordinary Germans however, because it did not prosecute the allied bombing of civilians in Germany or Soviet war crimes against German civilians. This enabled many Germans to dismiss the tribunals as 'victor's justice'.

### Tasks

1. Working in pairs, read the instructions below and complete the following exercise.

The allied powers spent several years formulating how to punish the leaders of Nazi Germany. There were many issues about how the trials would be conducted, what crimes the Nazis would be charged with and which victims would receive justice. Discuss and then create a mind map showing the difficulties in:

- A. Deciding which crimes to prosecute (the bombing of civilians, the invasion of the USSR, the Holocaust, the sinking of passenger ships).
- B. Deciding who to prosecute and how to bring them to justice.
- C. Deciding on appropriate punishments.

2. Essay: 'The Nuremberg trials failed to deliver justice to the Nazis victims, but demonstrated the victory of the allies.' How valid is this statement?