THE MEGALOMANIA OF THE NATIONAL IDEAL

EDVARD BENEŠ AND THE ORIGINS OF THE POSTWAR EXPULSION OF THE SUDETN GERMANs, 1918–1945

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in History

University of Sydney

SID: 310243866

October 2013
ABSTRACT

The expulsion of the German populations of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War was among the largest and most brutal forced migrations in human history. It is also one of the least understood. By focusing on the exile of one group, the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia, this thesis seeks to discover why the postwar eviction took place. It traces the origins of the purge from the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and argues that the Republic’s long-serving president, Edvard Beneš, played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the plan. Through a detailed analysis of interwar minority rights, population transfers and the notion of German collective guilt, this thesis takes the position that the motivations behind postwar expulsions were shaped by the bitter experiences of the interwar period and that they were not, therefore, carried out as an impulsive act of retribution in the hour of victory.
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INTRODUCTION

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Expelled from their homes in the Sudetenland, East Prussia and the whole vast region of Germany taken over by the Poles ... a horde of Germans is struggling daily into Berlin – and being turned away because there is no food for them. The majority are old men, women and children. Some of these persons, too weak to wander further, have been seen under the bomb-wrecked roof of the Stettiner railway station dead or dying ... the figure of those [throughout Germany] for whom no food can be provided rises to 13,000,000 at least. This proportion of Germany’s population must die before winter if nothing is done.

— Victor Gollancz¹

In the immediate years following the defeat of Germany, an ugly spectacle confronted Europe that was equal to all but the most barbaric acts of the Nazi regime. Despite the fact that the Second World War had been fought upon the principles of democracy and freedom, in the first years of peace that followed victory an event of unprecedented scale and suffering took place in the heart of the European continent. In an apparent act of retribution, twelve to fourteen million Germans were evicted from their ancestral homes in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary and forced into the American, British and Soviet occupation zones of postwar Germany.²

² There is no exact figure for the total number of Germans expelled during the ‘wild expulsions’ (1944–45) and the ‘organised expulsions’ (1946–47) due to a lack of population data during the Second World War. Alfred M. de Zayas places the total number of expellees at fifteen million using figures obtained from the German Federal Ministry of Expellees. More conservative estimates range between twelve and fourteen million. See Alfred M.
These expulsions, which had been approved in July 1945 by the Allied Powers at the Potsdam Conference, must surely rank among the greatest atrocities committed by humanity during the course of the twentieth-century. The overwhelming majority of expellees were women and children; the smallest group affected were adult males – the demographic most likely to have consorted with the Nazi regime. Contrary to the terms of the Potsdam Protocol, which sanctioned the ‘orderly and humane’ transfer of German populations, the expulsions were carried out with great brutality and vengeance. More than two million Germans did not survive this exercise in ethnic cleansing and many hundreds of thousands perished from starvation, malnutrition, disease and exposure as they made their westward transit in cattle trucks and freight trains to war-torn Germany.

**THE EXPULSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY EUROPE**


There is also considerable ambiguity over the number of Germans who died during the expulsions. Estimates typically range from 500,000 to 2,000,000. See Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p. xxv; Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, p. 1.
collusion with Nazi Germany as irredentist ‘fifth columns’. A far more robust analysis casts
doubt upon such an assumption and indicates that the motivations behind the purge of
German minorities and the machinery by which this project was achieved form part of a
broader historical narrative whose penultimate chapter is the period between 1939 and 1945.

The postwar expulsion of the Germans was a poignant example of the brutality and misery
that characterised the first-half of the twentieth-century. This period has been labelled ‘the
era of violence’ by Ian Kershaw due to the exposure of civilian populations to the effects of
total war and the increased capacity of the state to implement its political and racial
ideologies. Although such violence was not endemic to Europe, some of its worst examples
occurred on the continent between 1914 and 1945. As Tony Judt remarked, the vantage point
of the end of the Second World War left ‘little of which to be proud and much about to feel
embarrassed and more than a little guilty’. The expulsion of the Germans was a
manifestation of this violent era that, in many regards, did not distinguish between the
dictatorships and democracies. Both were the practitioners of state violence, whether on the
subaltern periphery or within Europe itself.

A second broader trend to which the expulsions form part was the rise of nationalism and
the process of nation-state formation in East-Central Europe. After the collapse of the
Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, the intermingled ethnic boundaries of their former
territories did not provide demographic foundations that gave way to naturally forming
nation-states. In 1918–1919, the borders drawn and states created at the Paris Peace

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5 De Zayas, Nemesis at Potsdam, p. 4.
7 Judt, Postwar, p. 41.
Conference were as much arbitrary as they were principled. The failure to implement President Wilson’s call for self-determination for all nationalities not only sealed the fate of the Versailles settlement, but further exacerbated ethnic tensions by making the nation the key unit of political organisation. This was evident in the political structure of ‘nation-states’ such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, whose borders extended far beyond the core national groups they represented and thus brought within their jurisdiction German, Hungarian and Ukrainian minorities. As such, the chaotic emergence nation-states in East-Central Europe followed the earlier example set in the Balkans. Indeed, the International Commission of Inquiry into the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) spoke as much for the tragedy that was to unfold in the Sudetenland, East Prussia and western Poland in 1945 when it attributed the subversion of the principles of international law and humanity in the pursuit of state aggrandisement to the ‘megalomania of the national ideal’.

As definitive expressions of violence and nationalism, the postwar expulsions were a symptomatic example of the dominant paradigms of twentieth-century Europe. In their immediate context, they were the final and most extensive forced mass migration of people arising from the Second World War. Its victims were millions of German peasants and villagers that for the most part had little or nothing to do with Hitler.

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND DISCOURSES

The postwar expulsion of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe has been largely neglected by historians of twentieth-century Europe. Only in recent decades has this unprecedented event featured in comprehensive studies and, even today, many elementary questions still remain to be fully answered: how were the expulsions implemented, who was responsible, how was the resettlement and integration of expellees into postwar Germany achieved, and what place does this traumatic event occupy in historical memory. Nonetheless, great scholarly advances have been made on the topic of the postwar expulsions since the first serious English-language study by Alfred de Zayas was published in 1977. The impetus for the recent proliferation of scholarship on the expulsions can largely be attributed to the efforts of historians to place them within the broader historical context of ethnic cleansing and genocide – a particularly relevant field of study given the new wave of ethnic violence that has accompanied the turn of the present century. The result of such scholarly endeavours has been to reopen a brutal chapter in European history that has for too long been dismissed under the assumption that the German people simply deserved to be punished for Nazism. While much of this debate has taken place amongst European academics, the last two decades have seen a considerable and growing body of English-language literature on the subject, to which this thesis is a contribution.

In contrast to the approaches mentioned above, my thesis will be concerned with the political origins of the postwar expulsions. To incorporate the stories of all expellee groups into a single dissertation would be an impossible task, and partly for this reason, I have decided to focus on the expulsions as they affected a single group – the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia. A further consideration behind this choice was the influential role played by President Edvard Beneš of Czechoslovakia in the development of expulsion as a remedy to Europe’s minority problems. As a long-serving foreign minister (1918–35) and president (1935–38 and 1945–48) of the Czechoslovak Republic and the leader of its London government-in-exile (1940–45), Beneš was uniquely placed at the helm of political power and at the centre of decision-making in both Prague and London.13 His political career, more or less, forms the bookends of this dissertation – from Czechoslovakia’s first national liberation in 1918 to its second in 1945. Between these years, the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans were engaged in a political and moral struggle over the very question of Czechoslovakia’s statehood and, more specifically, the legitimacy of Prague’s jurisdiction over the German-speaking border areas that would become known in due course as the ‘Sudetenland’.

The battle between the Czechs and Germans had both local and international dimensions, and by taking account of the broader movements and trends in twentieth-century Europe, a more complex picture emerges of this struggle and its fateful conclusion. The toxic nexus of nationalism and violence forms the overarching narrative. A closer perspective reveals the inherent tensions between minority rights and state sovereignty, the threat to multiethnic states posed by national chauvinism, and the radicalising effect of total war on ethnic relations. This thesis will argue that, while at no stage inevitable, the expulsion of the

Sudeten Germans was a characteristic expression of the fractured European order that emerged after 1918.

I unfold my argument across three chapters. In the first, I argue that the tense Czech-German relationship during the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) sowed the seeds for the repudiation of minority rights, which, by removing the means for the protection of German minorities, enabled their mass eviction from the Czech lands. During the interwar period, Prague attempted to consolidate its hold over the German-speaking border areas, and in many cases, this infringed upon the political and cultural rights of the Sudeten Germans who were protected by the League of Nations. Czechoslovakia’s international obligation to uphold minority rights was a contentious issue during the interwar years, particularly given the possibility under the League’s minority system for external intervention in Czechoslovak internal affairs and the threat to state sovereignty that such intervention entailed. The rise of more extremist German parties in the 1930s, such as the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP), and the coming to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in neighbouring Germany permanently discredited the minority rights regime due to the fact that it could be exploited by irredentist minorities and expansionist states. Such fears eventuated in the Sudeten Crisis of September 1938, which resulted in the amputation of the Sudetenland and the dismemberment of the Czechoslovak state.

The influence of the interwar minority rights system on nationalism and violence in Europe has been the subject of a growing body of historical scholarship. Carole Fink’s detailed study of minority protection from 1878 to 1938 in Defending the Rights of Others (2004) is a fine

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example of this approach and an important contribution to the history of international law and European ethnic-national relations. More recently, minority rights have increasingly featured in the discussion of human rights discourse and its evolution during the twentieth-century. The efforts of Mark Mazower and Dirk Moses in this field have yielded some important results, and in particular, on the genesis of population transfers and ethnic cleansing in Europe and beyond, which, as Moses states, ‘attests to divergent humanitarian norms and to internal tensions within the emerging human rights regime’ of the postwar world. These themes will be further elaborated in chapters two and three.

In the second chapter, I will outline the origins of the mechanism by which the expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia was implemented. Due to the opposition of President Beneš to the territorial changes enacted under the Munich Agreement, the 1919 borders of Czechoslovakia remained unchanged with the notable exception of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, which was transferred to the Soviet Union. To resolve the problem of Czechoslovakia’s ethnic minorities, Beneš advocated the large-scale ‘population transfer’ of the overwhelming majority of Sudeten Germans. Although the envisaged transfer was on an altogether unprecedented scale, the wartime plans of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and the British Foreign Office looked to interwar examples of population transfers in Asia Minor, the Balkans, South Tyrol, the Baltic and Bessarabia. The shortcomings of minority protection in Europe had been evident since the 1920s, and population transfers were seen as a means to

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ameliorate internal ethnic tensions by creating more homogenous nation-states. I argue that Beneš became an advocate of population transfers from mid-September 1938 and, although he did not advocate such plans publicly until 1941, from the outset of his exile, the Czechoslovak leader massaged Allied opinion towards the view that the Sudeten Germans would have to be removed as part of a lasting postwar settlement.

Discussions of Beneš’ wartime role in the development of Allied expulsion policy is fairly limited. Although there is a general consensus across what literature exists in regard to his role in the annulment of Munich and the agreement of the Big Three to the principle of population transfers, there is nonetheless a substantial gap concerning the evolution of transfer proposals and the influence of interwar examples on their development. Furthermore, many scholars quote Beneš’ public declaration of support for population transfers in September 1941 as the first instance of his conversion to the concept. This is not the case. As the historical record shows, Beneš first suggested a large-scale transfer of the Sudeten Germans through an intermediary to the French Government at the height of the Sudeten Crisis. This evidence indicates that the removal of Czechoslovakia’s German minority pre-dated the Second World War, and thus, future wartime initiatives were significantly shaped by the disastrous results of minority politics in the interwar era.

In the third and final chapter, I assess the notion of collective guilt as it applied to the Sudeten Germans for their ostensible association with the Nazi regime. President Beneš was among the foremost advocates of the ‘collective guilt’ doctrine, and used it to justify the drastic measure of wholesale expulsion. For many, the support that the Sudeten Germans

18 For Beneš’s role in the annulment of Munich, see Vít Smetana, In the Shadow of Munich: British Policy Towards Czechoslovakia from the Endorsement to the Renunciation of the Munich Agreement, 1938–1942 (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2008).
gave the SdP and their supposed mass collusion with Nazi authorities during the war marked them as traitors to the Czechoslovak state. These claims require re-evaluation, for Beneš determination that the Sudeten Germans had been disloyal citizens was based upon questionable assumptions.

The notion of the collective guilt of the German people also needs to be examined alongside the promotion of human rights by the Allies during the Second World War. Not only were both concepts contradictory, but they were on occasion proclaimed by the same person. Beneš’ advocacy of ‘individual democratic rights’ while he pursued a policy of retribution against the Sudeten Germans is undoubtedly one of the greatest ironies of history. Yet, if understood in the context of the interwar period, this paradox becomes less nonsensical. Beneš conceived human rights as the protection of individual against arbitrary state power. This model substantially differed from the interwar minority rights system that granted special provisions to national minorities. As the history of Czechoslovakia demonstrated, minority rights could be exploited to overthrow the state by appealing to an international forum or a hostile predatory nation. In Beneš mind, the only way to solve the problem of national minorities was their physical removal from the state.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

In terms of the primary sources used for this investigation, the vast majority have been drawn from government archives, official publications, political memoirs and speeches. Much of this material is in English, either by design or due to the efforts of translators. Archival material has primarily been drawn from the Cabinet Office (CAB) and Foreign

Office (FO) records of the United Kingdom, located at the British National Archives, Kew. I have, however, sought to complement this material with Czech and German sources where possible to include other perspectives. These documents have been obtained from the Londynsky Archiv (London Archive) of the Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (Presidential Office Archive of the Czech Republic) and the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry). I have also consulted the following publications on a regular basis for primary sources: Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945 (DGFP) for translated German documents, Documents on British Foreign Policy (DBFP), Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), and the League of Nations Official Journal (LNOJ). Where possible, I have sought to distil complex data into tables and have given direction where the reader may benefit by consulting them.

Historians are fortunate that President Beneš produced two political memoirs and many articles during his time in office at home and abroad. These have been invaluable sources in tracing the evolution of his thinking on the issues of minority rights, population transfers and postwar reconstruction. I have also drawn on the writings of Beneš’ contemporaries on these matters to provide different viewpoints of the events that unfolded between 1918 and 1945. These sources confirm that it was only by Beneš’ considerable diplomatic skill and his implacable hostility to the German people that the expulsions in Czechoslovakia took place as they did.

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Figure 1.1. President Edvard Beneš of Czechoslovakia (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.; LC-USW33-019089-C).
I

TWILIGHT OF INTERNATIONALISM

NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND MINORITY RIGHTS IN THE
THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Most states have been fashioned by the sword or have grown out of colonization.
Czechoslovakia is the child of propaganda.

— H. A. L. Fisher¹

For nearly two decades the German as well as various other nationalities in
Czechoslovakia, have been maltreated in the most unworthy manner, tortured,
economically destroyed, and, above all, prevented from realising for themselves
also the right of the nations to self-determination.

— Adolf Hitler²

On 28 October 1918 an independent state was declared in Bohemia by the Prague
National Committee, and after administrative authority was surrendered in the afternoon by
Vienna, enthusiastic crowds gathered in Wenceslas Square to remove the symbols of
Austrian rule that had represented nearly four centuries of Hapsburg domination in Bohemia.³
On the same day at Hotel Beau Rivage in Geneva, Edvard Beneš and representatives of the

² Adolf Hitler, 'Letter from the Führer to the British Prime Minister', 23 September 1938, Documents on
German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945 (hereafter DGFP), Series D, Vol. 2, Czechoslovakia and Germany, 1937–
Nancy M. Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech (Cambridge:
Czech National Council met a delegation of politicians from Prague to determine the organisation of the newly declared Czechoslovak state. It is strangely fitting that these negotiations concerning the creation of a new national democracy in the heart of Europe took place in Geneva, the future home of the League of Nations. Although Czechoslovakia was already a *de facto* state by the time the Paris Peace Conference convened, its independence was only officially recognised on 10 September 1919 with the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and a separate treaty outlining provisions for the ethnic minorities that were to fall within its recently drawn borders.

This latter agreement constituted part of a general framework adopted under the auspices of the League of Nations to guarantee the political rights and cultural autonomy of Europe’s national minorities. Like its immediate neighbours, Poland and Yugoslavia, which emerged in the wake of the First World War, the Czechoslovak Republic that had been forged out of national revolution was, in fact, a multiethnic conglomeration of Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Poles and Ruthenes (Map 1.1). The greatest threat to the viability of these new

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states in the vast ethnic sea of Eastern Europe – where the intermingling of national identities made the imitation of the nation-state model of Western Europe highly problematic – was the temptation to national chauvinism. This resulted in the political exclusion of minority groups and the infringement of their cultural autonomy as outlined by the League’s minority treaties. Despite the principle of national self-determination espoused in President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, many ethnic minorities were denied this right and would suffer under the nationalist policies of the political regimes which replaced the multiethnic Hapsburg and Russian empires. Principal among this group were the Auslandsdeutschen – the German communities beyond the borders of the Reich after the peace settlement of 1919–1920.

The injection of minority politics into international affairs during the interwar period – a product of the importance of national identity to Wilsonian internationalism – created the political and intellectual milieu in which statesman and bureaucrats would later consider mass expulsion as a remedy for civil strife and state conflict. The tenuous position of ethnic minorities had been appreciated in 1919, and in the years between the world wars international solutions were sought through the forum of the League of Nations that would address their grievances by strengthening the international protection of minority rights through legal means. It was the combination of the demise of the League, the intransigence of domestic politicians and the rise of fascism in the 1930s that brought about the renunciation of such international mechanisms in favour of nationalist solutions, including population transfers and mass expulsions that were practiced in the 1940s by both Nazi Germany and the Allied Powers.


The traumatic years from 1918 to 1938 form the first chapter of events that led to the postwar expulsions. This can be discerned in the changing attitudes towards minority rights in Geneva and among the European political class over the period. In the era of liberal optimism in the 1920s, the principle of international protection was readily adopted and exercised by the League of Nations. However, in the 1930s, the perceived abuse of this system by an expansionist Germany and its infringement by the signatory states themselves led to the abandonment of minority rights in preference for the greater national homogeneity.  

In Czechoslovakia, the consequences of this broader trend can be perceived in the domestic struggle of Beneš and his national compatriots against an increasingly subversive Sudeten German minority. The former had carried out a ‘Czechoslovak’ national revolution in the closing months of 1918 under the principle of self-determination, whereas the Sudeten Germans, without their consent, were forcibly included in this new democracy. Under the leadership of Konrad Heinlein’s Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP) the Sudeten minority became increasingly radicalised, and with the active support of Nazi Germany, triggered a political crisis in 1938 that resulted in the partition and dissolution of the First Republic, and thus, the fall of Europe’s last democracy east of the Rhine. It would also prove the genesis of a belief that German minorities were a Nazified ‘fifth column’ that had sabotaged Czechoslovakia from inside – an auspicious portent of their future mass expulsion from Central and Eastern Europe.

CREATING AN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR MINORITY PROTECTION

The need to protect Europe’s ethnic minorities was not a new consideration when the issue was brought before the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Indeed, since the consolidation of the nation-state the need had existed to protect the civic and cultural rights of those outside the majority from its ‘centralising, homogenising and organising tendencies’. Such forms of protection have historically been enshrined in bilateral treaties between states or in diplomatic agreements conferring extra-territorial rights. Prior to the nationalist fervour of the nineteenth-century, minorities were typically defined by their religious beliefs and practice.

The religious upheavals and state conflict caused by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to a series of treaties that protected the religious liberties of minorities that were brought under the jurisdiction of a ruler who was not affiliated with their religious confession. Notable examples include the treaties of Vienna (1607) and Dresden (1745), which affirmed the tolerance of Protestants in Central and Eastern Europe. Similarly, the Treaty of Oliva (1660) that awarded Livonia and Pomerania to Sweden and the treaties of Nijmegen (1678) and Ryswick (1697), which altered the Franco-Dutch border in Flanders, contained clauses that protected the religious liberties of Catholics who inhabited these regions. In the Balkans and Near East, the persecution of Christian minorities provoked frequent intervention by members of the Concert of Europe in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. The crumbling of Ottoman authority in Greece and the outbreak of rebellions elsewhere within the ‘sick man of Europe’ attracted foreign support throughout the

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13 Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, p. xvi, 17.
nineteenth-century. Two such examples are the interventions of France in the Druze-Maronite conflict in Lebanon (1860), and Britain and Russia in the aftermath of the Bulgarian Atrocities (1876). In these instances, the persecution of minorities was used to further the diplomatic objectives of the Great Powers – a legacy to be disowned by the peacemakers in 1919.

It was, however, the rise of nationalist sentiment in the nineteenth-century that resulted in a more conscious perception of civic and cultural rights beyond those of religious freedom. This was apparent in the Treaty of Berlin (1878) that recognised the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, all of which had been provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The move towards reconstructing the Balkans around Slavic nation-states established two important precedents that would also be apparent in 1919–1920. The first was a trend away from multiethnic empires towards the nation-state model in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The second was the imposition of clauses that protected minority rights within the treaties that established successor states to the retreating Ottoman Empire. Their adoption became a condition for international recognition and a means by which the internal governance of these states could be supervised by the Great Powers. The minority treaties signed after the First World War were also shaped by the principle of international oversight, however, the responsibility to guarantee minority rights would now be exercised by the League Council to

17 Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, pp. 37-38.
‘ascertain that the provisions for the protection of minorities are always observed’.\textsuperscript{18} It can be argued, as has been done by Carole Fink, that some of the key principles guiding the protection of minority rights in the interwar era were derived from the Berlin Conference of 1878.\textsuperscript{19}

There were, however, some important innovations made under the interwar regime that differed from the precedents established in 1878 surrounding the legal procedure for the enforcement of minority rights. Throughout the first decade of the League’s existence, the mechanisms for the resolution of minority questions were improved and enhanced, and it is worthwhile outlining this process in some detail. The provision for minority rights was first established in the Polish Treaty, signed on 28 June 1919, which formed the basis for successive minority treaties with Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece.\textsuperscript{20} These treaties were a ‘tripartite agreement’ between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, the state concerned, and the League of Nations. They did not constitute a universal framework for minority rights for two principal reasons. Firstly, the minority treaties were only applied to a handful of national governments that included: the defeated Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey; the emergent states of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia; and states already bound by minority clauses, such as Romania and Greece. These treaties were strengthened at the Paris Peace Conference in response to territorial adjustments.\textsuperscript{21} Secondly, the provisions of the minority treaties were to be upheld in the national laws of these individual states. For this reason, they did not establish in international law a basis for minority rights.

\textsuperscript{18} Stone, \textit{International Guarantees of Minority Rights}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{19} Fink, \textit{Defending the Rights of Others}, pp. 152-153, 154.
protection of minority rights within national law was outlined in the first article of the Czechoslovak Treaty, which stated that the minority provisions ‘contained in Articles 2 to 8 shall be recognised as fundamental laws and that no law, regulation or official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation or official action prevail over them’. The nature of the rights to which minorities were entitled was elaborated in Article 8. It identified both individual and collective rights, asserting that:

Czecho-Slovak nationals who belong to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Czecho-slovak nationals. In particular they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions, schools and other educational establishments, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely therein.

The limited application of minority rights weakened the League’s scheme from the outset, and throughout the interwar years there were many efforts directed towards improving the scheme and making it more universal. The association of the minority treaties with the defeated nations and historic notions of Western tutelage caused much resentment in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Both of these nations saw themselves as partners in the Allied cause, and Czechoslovakia styled itself as a nation that was culturally part of Western Europe. As Beneš declared to the Council of Ten at Versailles, ‘the [Czech] Nation felt itself to be a

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22 BNA, FO 608/27/4, Czecho-Slovakia, p. 7.
23 BNA, FO 608/27/4, Czecho-Slovakia, p. 11.

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European Nation and a member of the Society of the Western States’. Furthermore, the exemption of the Great Powers and their colonial empires, particularly Italy given its jurisdiction over non-Italian communities in South Tyrol and Fiume, led to the impression that the treaties were unequal and unjust.

**THE POLITICS OF MINORITY RIGHTS**

The recognition of national minorities created as many conundrums as they resolved, and throughout the interwar period the disapproval of the Polish and Czechoslovak governments to the discussion of their internal affairs at Geneva was palpable. They primarily objected to the right of minority organisations to petition the League Council to notify its members of possible infractions of the minority treaties. The provision for international oversight had been established in Article 12 of the Polish Treaty and Article 14 of the Czechoslovak Treaty, which stated that minorities ‘[constituted] objects of international concern’ and placed them under the guarantee of the League of Nations. It is important to note that both articles gave neither minorities nor minority organisations the right to bring cases of infraction before the Council, but rather placed this responsibility on Members of the Council. Minority organisations, however, were able to lodge petitions to the Minorities Section of the Secretariat that, if deemed legitimate, would be sent to the government of the state concerned.

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27 Most of the petitions lodged to the League of Nations pertained to alleged infringements of minority rights in Polish Silesia. Petitions were lodged by German groups in Czechoslovakia in 1921, 1922, 1924 and 1936. These petitions have been assessed in Cornwall ‘“National Reparation”: The Czech Land Reform and the Sudeten Germans 1918 – 1938’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (April 1997), pp. 271-277; Cornwall, ‘The Manoeuvres of the Henlein Movement in Czechoslovakia’, p. 139.
for a written response. A ‘Committee of Three’ would then convene to consider both sources of information, and decide whether Members of the Council should be notified of a possible infraction of the minority treaties. The Council could then resolve the issue through its own mechanisms, or refer the matter to the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) for a final settlement. There was, however, no legal obligation for members to act upon the information presented to them by the minorities committee. This precedent was formalised in the Tittoni Resolution of October 1920, which affirmed that petitions did not constitute a legal document and, therefore, did not ‘create a new legal situation’.

Nonetheless, the legal nature of minority petitions remained a contentious issue in Geneva throughout the 1920s. The debate centred upon whether petitions were legally binding, and by implication, whether minorities were a legal personality beyond national jurisdiction, or if petitions were merely of an informational nature that could be freely heeded or disregarded by Members of the Council. The representatives of states bound by the minority treaties adopted the latter view, fearing encroachment on their sovereignty by minority groups and the international scrutiny of the League in their internal affairs. This view was expressed in the Polish memorandum of 16 January 1923, which asserted that the process of lodging petitions was ‘devoid of legal foundation’ and ‘contrary to the stipulations of the [Polish] Minorities Treaty’. The memorandum was a product of Warsaw’s indignation over petitions submitted in 1920 by its Ukrainian minority during negotiations with Soviet Russia settling

31 A dispute between Poland and German over minority schools in Upper Silesia was referred to the PCIJ in 1928. See, ‘Rights of Minorities in Upper Silesia (Minority Schools)’, 26 April 1928, Publications of the Permanent Court of International Justice, Series A: Collection of Judgments, No. 15 (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1928); Stone, International Guarantees of Minority Rights, pp. 8-10.
Poland’s eastern border. Hence, it is not surprising that Poland affirmed the protection of the ‘freedom and equality’ of minorities only ‘within the limits of the states to which they belong’. According to the government in Warsaw, minority problems were temporary in nature and would be resolved by the reconciliation of minorities to the new political realities of the 1920s, rather than through external intervention and granting minorities a ‘privileged position’ both domestically and internationally. The memorandum, therefore, revealed tensions between the political orthodoxy of state sovereignty and the more recent treatment of minorities by the League as non-state entities. Beneš conferred with the opinions expressed by the Polish memorandum in his address to the League Assembly in September 1925, stating that any attempt to establish legal competence in minority questions beyond Members of the Council was not in accord with the provisions of the minority treaties. This reasoning lay behind his resistance to discuss the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia with the German foreign minister, Gustav Stresemann, at Locarno in October of the same year.

Beneš’ advocacy of a ‘minimalist’ approach to minority rights was influenced by the many interwar disputes that occurred between states over the sovereignty of contested territories. Invariably, these disputes were couched in terms of the nationality of the inhabitants in the contested region, and those states that wished to alter the status quo could either demand plebiscites in the spirit of national self-determination or attempt to gain extra-territorial influence through the mechanisms of the League. This was a particularly dire threat to a

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multi-national state, such as Czechoslovakia, that could count on each of its neighbouring countries having their own territorial designs on its sovereign territory. During the ‘active’ life of the League between 1920 and 1935, the list of such disputes that involved minority questions was extensive. The clashes between Poland and Sweden over the Aaland Islands (1921), Poland and Germany in Upper Silesia (1921), Poland and Lithuania over Memel (1923) and Vilna (1927), Greece and Turkey over the expulsion of Greeks from Constantinople (1924–1926), Greece and Albania over the transfer of Albanians to Turkey (1924), and Britain and Turkey over Mosul (1920–1928) demonstrated how grievances over the treatment of minorities could quickly impair relations between states, or more alarmingly, how minorities could be used as pawns in the conduct of international relations.\footnote{Stone, \textit{International Guarantees of Minority Rights}, pp. 133, 141-146.} Thus, in the resolution of such disputes the first priority of the League was to separate the potential for state conflict – which was dealt with under Articles 11 to 15 of the Covenant – from minority questions, which were dealt with under the provisions of the relevant minorities treaty.\footnote{Stone, \textit{International Guarantees of Minority Rights}, p. 137.}

On other occasions, a lack of common agreement on minority issues came down to fundamental disagreements over the purpose of the minority treaties. Whereas the minorities themselves and their advocates at the League saw minority rights as a means to protect cultural autonomy, the states bound to protect these rights initially saw them as a means to facilitate cultural assimilation by providing equal opportunity regardless of language, race and creed. These contrasting views were palpable in a dispute between German and Poland over questions raised in petitions lodged by the \textit{Deutscher Volksbund} concerning German
minority schools in Polish Silesia. At the 53rd Session of the Council in December 1928 when this issue was discussed, a heated debate ensued between the German foreign minister, Gustav Stresemann, and his Polish counterpart, August Zaleski, that revealed the shortcomings of the minority treaties respective to the national interests of the states these ministers represented. The German-Polish Convention of 1922, which augmented the existing minority treaty with Poland, mandated that the declaration of language by children of school-age would determine the number of minority schools. Zaleski claimed that due to ‘false declarations of language’ a significant proportion of students at minority schools were unable to follow German instruction because they did not have a sufficient understanding of the German language. Language was, of course, fundamental to the maintenance of German culture among minority communities and, from the perspective of the Polish Government, this impeded the process of cultural assimilation of the German minority. For Stresemann, the threat of the mass removal of students from minority schools posed a vital threat to the cultural autonomy of the German minority in Poland. He argued that the Polish position, which forced parents to nominate their child’s language as either German or Polish, did not grasp the complexity of Eastern Europe’s intermingled ethnic landscape in which many communities were bilingual or spoke regional dialects.

The dissention between Stresemann and Zaleski demonstrated how minority politics continued to poison international relations despite efforts to provide international oversight and arbitration. As well intentioned as Stresemann’s minority policy seemed, the posture of Weimar Germany as the champion of minorities was in part self-serving, since the

43 Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, p. 303; Fink, The Weimar Republic as the Defender of Minorities, pp. 109-118.
46 League of Nations, ‘Minutes of the Fifty-Third Session of the Council’, p. 64.
mechanism of the League enabled the German government to claim that it continued to represent the interests of German nationals who lived beyond the borders of the Reich.Indeed, the opprobrium Stresemann directed towards Poland over its ‘spirit of hatred’ towards its German minority was foreboding of the rhetoric to be employed in Nazi propaganda during the crises of the 1930s with Poland and Czechoslovakia.

The international guarantee of minority rights was, therefore, already starting to be discredited in its inaugural decade due to manipulation of the system by national governments in pursuit of irredentist goals. Under Stresemann, Germany provided financial subsidies to the Auslandsdeutschen, the influential journal on minorities, Nation und Staat, which came under the direct control of the German Foreign Ministry in 1927, and supported the goals European Minorities Congress – an organisation that would later become infamous for its connections with Nazi Germany. In the 1930s such behaviour would turn into outright abuse with Nazi Germany’s withdrawal from the League in 1933 and its pursuit of Heim ins Reich through military conquest – a policy to bring all German minorities living abroad into the German nation. Similarly, the termination of the League’s oversight of Poland’s minorities in 1935 was a further indication that the minority rights regime was

unravelling under the pressure of nationalist ideologies. In Prague, Beneš continued to publicly affirm his support of the League and minority rights, however, the events of 1937–1938 that brought about the end of his presidency would ultimately prove too much for any residual commitments to such declarations after the Second World War.51

‘NEW SWITZERLAND’ OR NATION-STATE?

The minority treaties were instituted as a compromise measure in response to the political reorganisation of Europe in 1919 around the largely unfulfilled promise of national self-determination. The Czechoslovak Republic epitomized the failure to enact Wilson’s ideal, and in this regard the new state represented little improvement over the multiethnic empire of Austria-Hungary that it replaced. The discrepancy between the ideal of national self-determination proclaimed at Paris and the political framework that emerged in East-Central Europe leaving millions of people without a national homeland or living beyond its borders lay at the heart of the domestic struggle between Prague the Sudeten Germans. Although Germans constituted the second largest nationality after Czechs, numbering more than three million, they were neither asked to express their wishes in a plebiscite nor granted political representation at the National Assembly that negotiated the peace settlement with the Allies and crafted the new state’s constitution.52 Throughout the life of the First Republic, the Germans of Czechoslovakia were excluded from the upper echelons of government and generally occupied a secondary position in national life. This harsh reality stood in stark contrast to the pronouncements that Beneš made to Western politicians and bureaucrats in


1919, proclaiming that the new republic would be a ‘little Switzerland’ of national cantons. The contradiction between the romantic and humane vision of Czechoslovakia espoused at Paris and the actual Czechoslovak nation-state that emerged understandably earned Prague the antipathy its Sudeten German subjects.

From the outset of his diplomatic service in 1915, Beneš had sought to obtain the favourable opinion of the Allied Powers towards the creation of an independent Czech state. In both Paris and Geneva he actively cultivated the image of a statesman of Western pedigree that Britain and France could trust to represent their interests in East-Central Europe. For this reason, Beneš tended to play a cautious role when it came to minority questions. To both protect his position at home and further his cherished dream of a Czech state at the Paris Peace Conference, Beneš had to be seen by his Czech compatriots as a nationalist yet, at the same time, assuage British and French fears of Czech chauvinism. Beneš’ deft performance in balancing these two considerations at Versailles secured his reputation as a skilled diplomat and admired national leader. However, his reception was rather less generous among those who thought Czech claims were excessive or deceptively construed. Lloyd George, infamous for his capacity for invective, privately referred to Beneš as ‘the little French jackal’ whose statements ‘reeked with professions of sympathy for the exalted ideals proclaimed by the Allies in their crusade for international right’. A more reserved yet equally revealing critique of Beneš was made by Archibald Coolidge, an American academic who conducted a commission into the political conditions of former Austria-Hungary.

53 Zeman and Klimek, The Life of Edvard Beneš, p. 51; Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, p. 26; Orzoff, Battle for the Castle, p. 93.
Map 1.1. Ethnographic Map of Czechoslovakia Showing Minorities

BNA, FO 925/2118 (with permission)
Map 1.2. Ethnographic Map of Czechoslovakia Showing Density of the German Minority

BNA, FO 925/2118 (with permission)
In response to the Czech’s territorial demands, he remarked:

In Bohemia they demand ‘historic frontiers’ regardless of the protests of large numbers of Germans who do not wish to be taken over in this way. In Slovakia they insist on the rights of nationality and pay no heed to the ancient and well marked ‘historic frontiers’ of Hungary.  

This double-standard on the question of nationality was a conspicuous thread that ran through Czechoslovakia’s case for independence when it was presented to the Allied Supreme Council on 5 February 1919. Beneš, in his new capacity as foreign minister, and Karel Kramář, as prime minister, were charged with the crucial task of convincing Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson to grant the Czechs the Hapsburg territories of Bohemia, Moravia, Austrian Silesia and Slovakia, or as Beneš had declared with great hubris in October 1918, the ‘frontiers they should like to have’. The justification for the inclusion of these territories into a Czechoslovak state was based on historical precedent, economic and strategic necessities, and the principle of national self-determination. On the issue of the Bohemian (Sudeten) Germans, Beneš on the one hand declared they would be accorded ‘full minority rights’, yet on the other, argued that they should not be granted a plebiscite because they would vote for exclusion from the Czechoslovak state. His reluctance to extend national rights to the German minority was a manifest contradiction of the principles upon

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80 ‘Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay’, pp. 876-887; Joseph Rothschild, East Central Europe between the Two World Wars (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), p. 78.
81 ‘Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay’, p. 877; Zeman and Klimek, The Life of Edvard Beneš, p. 34.
83 Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay’, p. 881.
which the Czechs claimed their own right to independence. Moreover, Beneš’ expression of deep-seated Germanophobia in his declaration that the Czechs would act as ‘the protectors of democracy against Germanism’ and fulfil their ‘duty at all times to fight the Germans’ should have raised serious doubts about granting Prague jurisdiction over three million Germans.  

While French support for the excessive territorial claims made by the Czech delegation could be assumed given the strategic need to contain Germany, Anglo-American support was by no means an historical certainty. The Czech delegation was fortunate in that the so-called ‘New Europe’ group came to occupy key positions in the British Foreign Office as the First World War drew to a close. These influential advocates of an independent Czechoslovakia included the historian Robert Seton-Watson and foreign correspondent for *The Times*, Wickham Steed, who became key advisors on the Hapsburg Empire. Both had extensive contacts with anti-Hapsburg émigré communities and were close friends of both Masaryk and Beneš. They propagated a romantic view of the Czechs as a people of democratic and liberal traditions that were exceptional among the Slavs for their rationalism, efficiency and tolerance.

Such racial propaganda, however, did not entirely render voices of criticism to the bureaucratic margins. Cecil Gosling, Britain’s Charge d’Affaires in Prague in 1919, wrote to London of his ‘a deep pessimism about the internal and racial condition of the [Czechoslovak] republic’ and serious doubts about ‘its capacity to survive’. Gosling even

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84 ‘Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay’, p. 878.
87 Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, pp. 8-9, 11. Such views were actively encouraged by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile during the Second World War. See AKPR, LA, Carton 11, Ministerstvo zahraničnich vecí Informaci oddelení, 1942, ‘Press References to some of the Allies etc. in British Papers over a Six-Month Period’.
recommended that British troops should be sent to the Sudeten territories to prevent tensions escalating into civil unrest.\(^{89}\) In response to these dismal warnings Seton-Watson was dispatched to Prague, arriving in May 1919, to investigate the condition of Czechoslovak internal relations.\(^{90}\) He wrote back to the Foreign Office expressing confidence in Masaryk’s capacity as president and dismissed the seriousness of Czech-German hostilities.\(^{91}\) Seton-Watson’s report allayed the fears of the Foreign Office and allowed Britain, with clear conscience, to give Prague continued diplomatic support well into the 1920s. This was evident in Britain’s decision to prevent Sudeten German petitions on land reform coming before the League Council on numerous occasions and the Foreign Office’s general view that the long-term resolution of minority questions would be achieved through national assimilation.\(^{92}\)

The inconsistencies in Beneš’ case and the potential for Czechoslovakia’s multiethnic character to cause internal instability were thus known, yet not adequately heeded at the time by the Allied Powers. Beneš and Kramář were either given the benefit of the doubt or were protected by the widespread anti-German sentiment that prevailed in the wake of the Armistice. More importantly, they presented Britain and France with a *fait accompli* by creating facts on the ground that gave legitimacy to their excessive territorial claims. The Czechoslovaks had been the first of the new states to be recognised by the Allied Powers and, upon assuming control in Prague in October 1918, the National Assembly claimed authority over the German inhabitants of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia. This declaration went against the wishes of the German members of the *Reichsrat* (Austrian Parliament), who

passed a resolution that all German settlements were part of Austria. The authority of the Reichstrat over these areas, however, was extremely limited given the decision of the National Assembly to send Czech militia units to occupy the Bohemian hinterland and western Slovakia in order to consolidate its control over these areas. In Bohemia, the Czech occupation provoked widespread resistance in German areas that lasted until the Czechoslovak delegation concluded negotiations with the Allies in September 1919. The bloodiest confrontation occurred on 3/4 March 1919, resulting in the death of fifty-four German civilians and eighty-four wounded. Otto Bauer, the Austrian foreign minister, directly protested to the Allies against the inclusion of the German populated borderland and asked for plebiscite, which was duly rejected. Similarly, the military occupation of Slovakia led to clashes with Hungarian forces throughout November 1918, and an outright retreat of Czech forces behind the Moravian-Slovak border was only prevented by French diplomatic intervention. The non-Czech territories awarded to Prague were thus obtained by military occupation and bloodshed that had the imprimatur of France, and to a lesser extent, Britain. The way in which these lands were conquered would have dire ramifications for the viability of Czechoslovakia once the key foundations of the state were undermined in the 1930s.

Beneš’ lack of empathy towards the Bohemian Germans was by no means isolated. Indeed, Czech chauvinism was far from lacking among the Czech émigrés during the First World War. Behind Masaryk’s liberal program of democracy, the rule of law and Rights of Man that he professed in Britain and America was an avowed Czech nationalism: ‘our politics must be

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95 Zeman and Klimek, The Life of Edvard Beneš, p. 44.
96 Orzoff, Battle for the Castle, p. 140; De Zayas, Nemesis at Potsdam, pp. 25, 27.
97 Beneš, My War Memoirs, p. 481.
98 Beneš, My War Memoirs, p. 475.
above all Czech ... and thus also Slav’. 99 In later personal correspondence with the National Democrat Viktor Dyk, Masaryk wrote, ‘That we must lead the Germans is a matter of course... Who, please, is for a non-national state?’ 100 Thus, having abandoned any pretentions of supporting Hapsburg federalism, the Czech émigrés had become passionate advocates of a Czech nation-state that would civilize any German, Magyar or Slav minorities that came under its jurisdiction. This nationalist sentiment was reflected in the organisation of the Czech independence movement and the early republic. Out of 256 seats on the self-appointed National Assembly in November 1918, fifty-five were given to the Slovaks and none to the German, Hungarian, Polish or Ruthenian minorities. 101 The marginalisation of these ethnic groups was also a product of the political ideology around which the state was formed. In his interwar memoirs, Beneš expressed his deep Francophile sensibilities and stressed the importance of the French Revolution on his political development. While the French revolutionary tradition did pass down, in Beneš’ words, the ‘traditional humanitarian, universal, and cosmopolitan tendency, which sought the genuine cult of humanity’, it also bequeathed the concept of a powerful central government that was not conceptually in accord with a Swiss model of national-linguistic autonomy. 102 Indeed, the national cult built around the Czech democratic tradition and the Masaryk presidency were prime examples of conscious initiatives to construct Czechoslovakia around ‘an imagined political community’ that was fundamentally Czech. 103 The First Republic was thus less cosmopolitan and less democratic than its nationalist myth purported.

99 Orzoff, Defending the Castle, p. 52; Taylor, The Hapsburg Monarchy, p. 257.
100 T. G. Masaryk, as quoted in Orzoff, Defending the Castle, p. 109.
101 Rothschild, East Central Europe between the Two World Wars, p. 92; Orzoff, Defending the Castle, p. 62.
102 Beneš, My War Memoirs, p. 17.
ENEMY WITHIN, ENEMY WITHOUT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA UNRAVELS, 1937–1938

The recognition of minority rights in peace treaties of 1919-1920 greatly increased the influence and agency of minorities in both international and domestic politics. For most of the interwar period, however, the plight of the German minority in Czechoslovakia was not a matter of great concern either at the League or in Prague. In large measure, this was due to the fact that the Sudeten Germans were not subjected to the abuses and excesses committed against minorities by state authorities elsewhere in Europe. Nonetheless, from the perspective of the Sudeten Germans, systemic discrimination was perpetrated against their community by Czech authorities, which constituted legitimate grievances and created grounds for feelings of resentment towards the Czechoslovak state. The exclusion of German political parties from government until 1926, Prague’s pursuit of ‘anti-German’ land reforms and the 1920 language law that made ‘Czechoslovak’ the national language constituted the principal grievances before the onset of the Great Depression. The economic malaise of the 1930s that resulted in mass unemployment and social dislocation was acutely felt in Sudeten German areas and contributed to the rise of Konrad Henlein’s Sudeten German Party (SdP) that caused considerable political instability from 1935.

Henlein’s movement drew on the hostile passions aroused by past and present injustices among the Sudeten German community and, prior to the involvement of the Third Reich, it demanded significant internal political reform that would have fundamentally transformed the national character of Czechoslovakia. The intransigence of Beneš, who had succeeded

Masaryk as president in 1935, and his fellow Czech nationalists led to the fateful involvement of Nazi Germany in what had been a domestic political crisis. In this sense, the politics of interwar Czechoslovakia conformed to the general European trend towards political and national extremism that brought long simmering prejudices and hatred to the fore. It is therefore worth examining the grievances of the Sudeten German minority in the early years of the republic, as these set the tone of Czech-German relations prior to the irreparable damage which occurred at Munich.

The large-scale expropriation and redistribution of rural land in the first decade of the republic created a lasting distrust and hostility among the Sudeten German minority for the Czechoslovak state. They perceived land reform as a means by which Prague could carry out its policy of ‘Czechification’ by settling Czech ‘colonists’ in predominantly German areas. In contrast, the redistribution or nationalisation of some four million hectares of arable and non-arable land was proclaimed by Czech politicians as a shining example of the republic’s capacity to implement social justice on a grand scale. Indeed, Masaryk had triumphantly referred to the land reforms as the ‘crowning act’ of the Czechoslovak national revolution. Mark Cornwall has assessed in great detail the controversy over land reform in Czechoslovakia. He concludes that the veracity of the conflicting claims made by Czechs and Germans depends as much on one’s perspective as their veracity when compared with official statistics of land expropriation and redistribution.

The assertion that land expropriation had a disproportionate effect on German landholders is supported to some extent by the statistics of the Czech Land Office. By 1931, when the majority of expropriated land had been reallocated, Germans had received a mere 28 per cent

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of distributed land in Bohemia’s ‘mixed regions’ – a bureaucratic euphemism used to describe areas with a significant or majority German population.\textsuperscript{107} They did, however, receive 58 per cent of smallholdings and former German aristocrats were in many cases permitted to retain a large portion of their estates.\textsuperscript{108} What was particularly ominous to the Sudeten Germans was the resettlement of Czech legionnaires in the Bohemian hinterland that threatened to alter the fragile Czech-German demographic balance. This program was jointly supported by the ministries of Agriculture and Defence and was aided by the creation of a ‘colonization fund’ during Beneš’ term as prime minister (1921–1922).\textsuperscript{109} In what was to prove one of the more remarkable repetitions of history, the interwar model of land reform, which had facilitated the extension of the Czech linguistic border, was revisited in 1945 as part of Beneš’ postwar policy to consolidate Czech control of the Sudetenland. However, under the ‘Beneš Decrees’ – a form of emergency powers exercised by President Beneš between 1940 and 1945 – the process was undertaken in a far more brutal manner. Upon liberation, all the property of German inhabitants was expropriated and then redistributed to loyal Czech and Slovak citizens.\textsuperscript{110} Like the interwar example, a national fund was established to provide assistance for resettlement.

The question of land reform was linked from the outset to Czechoslovakia’s development as a nation-state. In the First Republic, grievances over dispossession and Czech encroachment were seen through the prism of minority rights and petitions on the matter were summarily lodged by German organisations to the League of Nations. Czech-German

\textsuperscript{107} Cornwall, ‘The Czech Land Reform and the Sudeten Germans 1918 – 1938’, p. 264. The 1930 Czech census showed that in the German districts of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia a total of 618,960 persons were engaged in agriculture. See AKPR, LA, ‘Committee on Reconstruction: Economic and Statistical Seminar’, Table No. 9, p. 14.


nationalists and the German Parliamentary Union had submitted petitions to the Minorities Section in 1921, 1922 and 1924, however, were unable to provide evidence of systemic discrimination against Germans.\textsuperscript{111} When Erik Colban, the director of the Minorities Section, appointed a Committee of Three in 1922 to investigate claims made in a petition submitted by Wilhelm von Medinger, both Colban and the British representative, Sir Cecil Hurst, contacted Beneš directly.\textsuperscript{112} They accepted his explanation, without thorough investigation, that the land reforms had been applied equally to all nationalities and that any apparent discrimination was due to the fact that Germans had been the majority landholders under the Hapsburgs.\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, Beneš disclaimed any responsibility for colonisation programs, and attributed them to the activities of legionnaire organisations. The dismissal of petitions on land reform was emblematic of the failure of the internal processes of the League and the unwillingness of its members to enforce minority rights. Abandoned by their guarantors, the Sudeten Germans would turn to more radical means to address their grievances.

By the 1930s, this was manifest in Czechoslovakia’s polarized political environment. Up until this point, Czechoslovakia had been notable for its democracy and political stability as its neighbours drifted towards authoritarianism. Its governing coalition could rely upon a broad base of support that included a number of moderate German parties, which served in government from 1926 onwards.\textsuperscript{114} To some extent, this political settlement continued into the mid-1930s due to the immense personal appeal of Masaryk. Yet the broad-base of support for Masaryk only concealed underlying political fragmentation, which was revealed by Beneš’ fraught succession to the presidency.\textsuperscript{115} In contrast to Masaryk’s overwhelming re-

\textsuperscript{114} Mamatey, ‘The Development of Czechoslovak Democracy’, p. 133; Evans, ‘Introduction’, p. 3;
\textsuperscript{115} Rothschild, \textit{East Central Europe between the Two World Wars}, p. 125.
election in 1934, Beneš succeeded him with difficulty in 1935, and only by securing the support of German Agrarians, the National Union, and Fascists. The most fundamental political change, however, came with the rise of Konrad Heinlein’s SdP. The party had been formed in 1933 as the **Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront** (SHF) but was renamed prior to the 1935 parliamentary elections in order avoid being banned from campaigning. Its success in these elections, in which the SdP obtained two-thirds of the German vote and emerged as the single largest party, introduced a new and more hostile political agent into Czechoslovakia’s democracy. Its links with the Nazi Party (NSDAP) were particularly threatening, given Hitler’s goal of *Anschluss*, and led to the somewhat inaccurate accusation that the SdP was a vehicle for German irredentism.

Like its German counterpart, the economic depression allowed the SdP to convert the memory of past grievances into political capital. In addition to the party’s cry that the Sudeten Germans had lost ‘600,000 hectares of their national soil’ through Prague’s land reforms, Henlein could also point to disproportionate levels of suffering in German industrial areas. These export-orientated industries were particularly vulnerable to global economic conditions, and in the early 1930s the level of unemployment in the German borderlands was double that of the Czech interior. Moreover, the situation was not helped by reports that the high level of German unemployment was also due to the replacement of German workers with Czech labour, and the awarding of government contracts to Czech firms in German

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areas as a form of industrial welfare. Indeed, the National Defence Law of 1936 granted the government extensive control over industry and permitted the dismissal of all persons deemed ‘unreliable in the eyes of the state’.

Henlein’s solution to the plight of the Sudeten Germans was not initially separation from Czechoslovakia and union with the Third Reich. The party had begun as a ‘broad church’ that incorporated a ‘range of political outlooks’ that had not yet become an agent of Nazism. In the mid-1930s, Henlein’s approach was rather one of internal political reform that would fundamentally alter the national character of the Czechoslovak state and, in many regards, it took the ideas contained within the minority treaties to their next logical step. The party’s main policies were best summarised by the eight-point Karlsbad Program, announced on 24 April 1938, that included provisions for German self-government in German districts and the recognition of the German minority as a legal personality.

The SdP, however, had long articulated the need for radical political reform since becoming a parliamentary force. In April 1937, SdP representatives had introduced a series of bills that would have made it a requirement for all Czechoslovak citizens to register as a member of a national organisation, each of which would constitute a legal personality and have a right of appeal to a Verfassungsgericht (Special Court of Appeal). Compensation for the infraction of minority rights would also be guaranteed and penalties would apply in cases where an individual was forced to use a language other than their own. Each of these

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125 De Zayas, Nemesis at Potsdam, p. 29.
126 Conversation between Henlein and Prime Minister Hodža, September 16, 1937, quoted in Eisenlohr, ‘The German Minister in Czechoslovakia (Eisenlohr) to the German Foreign Ministry’, Minutes, 8 October 1937, DGFP, Vol. 2, pp. 5-6.
initiatives sought to rectify the injustices faced by the Sudeten German minority by reforming the state rather than seeking its destruction. As Henlein stated to Prime Minister Milan Hodža in a private meeting on 16 September 1937:

I could equally have denied the constitution, as the Sudeten German Party had no hand in voting for it in 1920; I could have demanded the right of self-determination. I did not do so, but accepted the State and the constitution as established facts. The bills do not alter the constitution, but represent a supplement thereto; they were already to some extent promised in the constitution only they have hitherto not been enacted.\textsuperscript{127}

The SdP program would have transformed Czechoslovakia into a federal multinational state, much like the ‘new Switzerland’ that Beneš had advocated in 1919. However, the attempt by the governing parties to marginalise the SdP only drove Henlein into closer association with Hitler and, in a vicious circle, increased the suspicions of Prague. As Hodža remarked to Henlein, the outcome of successful negotiations was dependent on the SdP avoiding being seen as ‘a branch of Hitlerism’.\textsuperscript{128} The Nazi \textit{Anschluss} with Austria in March 1938, however, ended any possibility of an internal settlement to the ongoing dispute between the SdP and the Czechoslovak Government. Without the means of resolving the crisis through the mechanisms of the League and also having lost their high standing in Britain and France, the Czechs were at the mercy of the sword.

\textsuperscript{127} Conversation between Henlein and Prime Minister Hodža, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{128} Conversation between Henlein and Prime Minister Hodža, p. 9.
Figure 1.2. Adolf Hitler and Konrad Henlein, 1938 (Courtesy of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin; F 66/127).
II

FROM MUNICH TO POTSDAM

THE PATH TO EXPULSION IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

The problem of national minorities will have to be considered far more systematically and radically than it was after the last war. I accept the principle of the transfer of populations.

— Edvard Beneš

There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble … A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed by the prospect of the disentanglement of populations, nor even by these large transferences, which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before.

— Winston Churchill

On 1 October 1938, the Wehrmacht began its bloodless occupation of the Sudetenland in accord with the Munich Agreement. Four days later the President of Czechoslovakia, Edvard Beneš, resigned his post and departed the country. The Czechoslovak Republic then underwent further dismemberment at the hands of Poland and Hungary before the Slovaks

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declared independence from Prague on 14 March 1939. On the following day, the remaining rump Czech state was annexed by the Third Reich as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The destruction of Czechoslovakia has remained in historical consciousness as an unedifying symbol of the betrayal of Anglo-French appeasement and another fateful step on the road to the Second World War. For Beneš, the collapse of the First Republic from external aggression and internal subversion dealt a mortal blow to Czech independence – a dream for which he had strived and served for a quarter-century.

Beneš’ arrival in London on 22 October 1938 marked the beginning of a political exile that was to last until his triumphant return to Prague nearly seven years later on 16 May 1945. During this period, Beneš established a London-based government-in-exile and pursued a relentless campaign to re-establish a Czechoslovak state in the heart of Europe. The mass expulsion of the Sudeten German population was a crucial component of this policy; for in Beneš view, the Czechs and Slovaks could only flourish as an independent people by ridding themselves of the traitorous German minority. This Carthaginian policy would form the basis of his crusade to once again obtain Czechoslovak independence within its ‘historic’ pre-Munich borders. Once again, as in 1918–1919, Beneš had to convince the Great Powers to support his proposals to fundamentally reshape East-Central Europe. The main difference, however, between the first and second struggles for Czech independence was that Beneš

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8 The Czechoslovak National Committee formed on 17 November 1939. This body was replaced by the Czechoslovak State Council 21 July 1940, with Beneš as president. The State Council was recognised as the Provisional Government of Czechoslovakia by the United Kingdom on 23 July 1940. It was granted full legal recognition on 18 July 1941. See Louise W. Holborn, ed., *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations*, Vol. 1, *September 1, 1939 – December 31, 1942* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1943), pp. 404-405.
envisaged an ethnographic as well as a political revolution for Czechoslovakia’s second national awakening in the 1940s that would complete the process of nation-state formation.

Czechoslovakia’s second national revolution was thus built upon the principle of national homogeneity. The failure to attain cooperation among its national minorities in the interwar period meant that the exact restoration of the First Republic was neither advisable nor desirable in the mind of Beneš and his political allies.10 Their conclusion spelt the end of cosmopolitan democracy in East-Central Europe. Exactly how the antebellum situation would be rectified, however, was not immediately apparent and was debated throughout the war between the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, the British Foreign Office and Beneš’ fellow exiles, the Sudeten German Social Democrats led by Wenzel Jaksch. As a victim of Nazi aggression, it is tempting to conclude that it was only a matter of time before Beneš, as the representative of the Czechoslovak state, convinced the Allied Powers to support his policy to drastically reduce the size of the Sudeten German minority. The path to the postwar expulsions, however, was far more arduous than a retrospective cursory glance would suggest. Both the agreement to implement these expulsions and the nature of their execution was greatly owing to the considerable wartime efforts of Beneš and the radicalising effect of the Second World War.

The years between the Munich and Potsdam conferences marked the period in which proposals for the expulsion of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe were formulated and developed. Beneš played a crucial role in this process, both as the leader of a government-in-exile that had extensive grievances against a German minority and as a

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leading proponent of population transfers to strengthen nation-states.\textsuperscript{11} There are two important questions concerning Beneš during this period: firstly, the origins and development of his plans to expel the Sudeten Germans; and secondly, the extent of his influence over Allied policy in East-Central Europe, which became increasingly favourable during the course of the war to the expulsion of troublesome minorities. Britain was the most important player, given that it alone of the Big Three was a signatory to the Munich Agreement. Beneš’ diplomatic manoeuvres in London, therefore, form a crucial chapter in the genesis of the expulsions. His final triumph came in August 1945 with the inclusion of Article 12 in the Potsdam Protocol, which outlined the ‘orderly and humane’ transfer of the German populations of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{POPULATION TRANSFERS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, 1919–1939}

The conceptual framework behind the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia lies in the two decades that preceded the Munich Conference. The eviction of German nationals from lands beyond the German state as envisaged in the Potsdam Protocol drew on the precedents established by interwar and wartime population transfers and exchanges that were conducted in both the presence and absence of international oversight. These ‘experiments’ formed part of a concerted effort in the first-half of the twentieth century to align ethnic boundaries with state borders – a process that concurred alongside the emergence of Central and Eastern Europe from under the aegis of multiethnic empires and the region’s traumatic


reorganisation around the nation-state model. The project of creating a Czechoslovak nation-
state had only been partially fulfilled in 1918 through revolution and independence; the
political conditions of the 1940s, however, made possible a second ‘national’ revolution
whereby the multiethnic state could be rearranged to reflect its Slavic political character. The
population transfers of the 1920s and 1930s formed the basis upon which this national project
could be realised.

The expulsion of the Sudeten Germans thus fit into a pre-existing pattern of state-enforced
population removals between 1919 and 1949 that sought to bring about the ‘ethnic unmixing’
of Europe.¹³ These so-called ‘population transfers’ were closely associated with the growth of
nationalist ideology and the process of state formation in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. As
outlined in the preceding chapter, these two factors greatly exacerbated tensions between the
regions’ intermingled ethnic groups and undermined the civic and cultural rights of those
minorities whose livelihood could not be guaranteed under national law. The realisation that
the rights of minorities could not be protected by an international body, such as the League of
Nations, or that such protection could undermine national sovereignty, resulted in a
preference for the creation of greater national homogeneity. Population transfers and
exchanges were increasingly promoted as the means by which this goal could be attained.
This alternative allowed the establishment of a more stable political and social framework
than that bequeathed by the Paris Peace Treaties and avoided extensive territorial revision or
armed conflict. These early experiments in nation-state engineering would form the
blueprints for the postwar expulsions that were to be executed on a much greater scale.

¹³ Rogers Brubaker, ‘The Aftermath of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples,’ in Karen Barkey and Mark von
Hagen, eds., After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian,
The term ‘population transfer’ is somewhat misleading since its practice in the twentieth century has typically occurred under conditions of duress, compulsion and the threat of systematic discrimination against any persons who did not avail themselves of departure. It is therefore understandable that the term has become somewhat of an Orwellian euphemism for the assault by state authorities on undesirable ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{14} Certainly, the majority of state-enforced migrations in the first half of the twentieth century are more accurately described by ‘expulsion’, ‘genocide’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’ than the more benign term ‘population transfer’. This is primarily due to the arbitrary nature of state retribution carried out both during and in the wake of the two world wars that corresponded with the collapse of the old order in Europe.\textsuperscript{15} The first example of modern genocide in Armenia (1915–1916) introduced humanity to state violence on a hitherto unknown level.\textsuperscript{16} The infamous ‘death marches’ of women, children and the infirm into the Syrian Desert that resulted in as many as 1,300,000 deaths was but the first step of the wider ethnic cleansing in Anatolia of its non-Turkish inhabitants; and this in turn foreshadowed the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{17}

The advent of total war and the increasingly powerful machinery of state apparatus meant that more systemic forms of national engineering could be achieved over shorter periods of

\textsuperscript{14} Orwell himself reflected upon the euphemistic nature of the term, writing ‘Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called “transfer of population” or “rectification of frontiers”’. See Orwell, \textit{Politics and the English Language}, in Robert Neale, ed., \textit{Writers on Writing} (Auckland: Oxford University Press 1992), p. 180.


time to greater effect.\(^8\) Such practices were utilized in the name of nationalism and were practiced by both totalitarian states and liberal democracies. Indeed, the racial classification system used by France in Alsace-Lorraine to purge both provinces of their German population between 1918 and 1921 was an early example of de-nationalisation followed by expulsion.\(^9\) This model would form the basis for the mass displacement of persons in Nazi and Soviet-occupied Europe and the postwar expulsion of the Germans carried out by the Allied Powers and their wartime partners in Prague and Warsaw.\(^\text{20}\) Population transfers were thus part of a broader movement of state violence employed for nationalist objectives.

Amid these brutal and violent displacements, however, was a narrow window during the mid 1920s when a concerted effort was made to enact controlled population resettlement under international auspices. The realisation that ethnic minorities could not be protected from hostile national governments despite the best efforts at international protection lent favour to the notion of internationally regulated population transfers that would prevent large-scale loss of life and bring about a more stable political and social framework by reducing inter-state and intra-state tensions.\(^\text{21}\) The first of such transfers occurred between Greece and Bulgaria under Article 45 of the Treaty of Neuilly, concluded on 27 November 1919.\(^\text{22}\) A mixed commission under the League of Nations was appointed to oversee ‘the reciprocal and voluntary emigration of the racial, religious and linguistic’ minorities between

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both states. Between 1924 and 1926 a total of 101,800 Bulgarians and 52,891 Greeks emigrated and property compensation was completed by 1931.

This example was closely followed by the more historically significant population exchange between Greece and Turkey under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Under this agreement, the Orthodox and Muslim minorities of both states were transferred under international guarantee. Yet at the time the treaty was signed, much of what it envisaged had already been achieved in regards to the Greek population, which had either been massacred in the ethnic cleansing of Anatolia or fled as refugees across the Aegean after the sacking of Smyrna in September 1922. Of the 1,268,000 refugees that made their way to Greece between 1922 and 1933, only 150,000 were transferred in an orderly manner. The plight of the Orthodox Greeks was in stark contrast to the more orderly emigration of nearly half a million Muslim Turks after 1923 under the supervision of the Mixed Commission. The resettlement of the Greek minority, however, was somewhat more successful. Responsibility for the resettlement program was given to a commission appointed by the League and it was funded by a generous Anglo-American loan. The immigrants proved to be an important source of skilled labour and contributed to the much needed urban development and agricultural growth in a nation that was still reeling from nearly a decade of constant

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warfare. Moreover, the influx of Greek refugees into areas recently vacated by their Muslim and Bulgarian inhabitants achieved the desired Hellenisation of Macedonia and Thrace, and thus, further consolidated the nation-state model in the Balkans.

For these reasons, the Greco-Turkish population exchange was generally referred to in glowing terms and seen as a model to be emulated elsewhere in the troubled European continent. The observation of the English historian John Stephens that the exchange had ‘worked wonders’ and must be applied as an immediate solution to minorities ‘whose sufferings under alien rule excite their brothers to a warlike fury’ was characteristic of confidence held in the potential for population transfers to resolve the tension between nationalism and minority rights. More importantly, the Greco-Turkish model continued to be lauded by none other than Winston Churchill as a prime example of the ‘disentanglement of populations’ in the closing years of the Second World War. However, the relative successes of the Greco-Bulgarian and Greco-Turkish exchanges were to prove exceptions to the rule and any benefits resulting from their implementation must be balanced against the uprooting of historic communities, immense bloodshed and suffering, and considerable financial expense. It is also important to realise that in comparison with the postwar expulsion of Germans, these exchanges were on a much smaller scale and occurred over a more extensive period of time.

There were two further instances of population transfer that had considerable influence on the formulation of the postwar expulsion of the Germans, although these were not conducted

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under the League of Nations. They include the eviction of German-speakers from South Tyrol (1939) and the population transfer of Baltic and Bessarabia Germans that took place under the Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939–1941). A proposal was also mooted by Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany, in the days leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War for an exchange of populations between Germany and Poland. Unlike the earlier population exchanges in the Balkans, these agreements were not reflective of expedient measures reached in the aftermath of armed conflict; rather, they had been reached by bilateral negotiations between ‘friendly’ nationalist states. Although the numbers involved in these transfers were dwarfed by wartime cases of ethnic cleansing, population displacement and the postwar expulsion of the German populations, they were nonetheless important examples of state-organised ethnic reorganisation to consolidate a new racial order in Europe.

The arrangement between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to transfer the German-speakers of South Tyrol was reached in a preliminary agreement signed in Berlin on 23 July 1939, and a final agreement was signed in Rome on 21 October 1939. This German minority had displayed limited potential for assimilation since the inclusion of South Tyrol in the Italian state in 1919, and their transfer into the German Reich offered the prospect of dissolving potential disputes between the Axis Powers over the issue of ethnic minorities. A notable feature that this agreement shared with past and future population transfers was the introduction of ethnicity alongside citizenship as a legal category. Both ethnicity and forms of citizenship determined the treatment of German-speakers under the South Tyrol transfer. This was apparent in the distinction drawn between the Reichsdeutsche – former Austrian

34 Schechtman, European Population Transfers, pp. 48-213; Douglas, Orderly and Humane, pp. 39-64
36 Schechtman, European Population Transfers, p. 52, 54.
nationals that had not accepted Italian citizenship in 1919 – and Italian citizens of German ethnicity.\textsuperscript{37} The former group was not given the option of remaining in Italy, and their evacuation was put under the control of Heinrich Himmler and the SS.\textsuperscript{38} Conversely, the latter were able to opt for resettlement under a plebiscite that lasted until 31 December 1939, with a three year extension for the settlement of property.\textsuperscript{39} Any German-speakers that chose to remain were faced with the prospect of national assimilation. In effect, this meant that German-speakers in South Tyrol renounced their cultural rights in Italy, either by migrating to the Reich or by becoming Italian. Despite the looming threat of total assimilation to induce their departure, approximately 100,000 Germans chose to remain in South Tyrol.\textsuperscript{40} As a 1942 British study into population transfers correctly observed, ‘voluntary’ transfers did not produce a ‘clean frontier’ because there was no assurance of the complete removal of the minority in question.\textsuperscript{41} If such a result was desired, the only option was to carry out a compulsory transfer.

\section*{BEGINNINGS: THE NEČAS MISSION}

Edvard Beneš was an early convert to the idea of population transfers and first considered their application in Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1938 during the height of the Munich Crisis. This significantly predates his first major public declaration in September 1941 of support for the principle of population transfers in his oft-cited article, ‘The New Order in Europe’.\textsuperscript{42} Although the idea of undertaking population transfers in the Czech lands had first

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Schechtman, \textit{European Population Transfers}, pp. 54-55.}
\footnote{Schechtman, \textit{European Population Transfers}, p. 53.}
\footnote{Schechtman, \textit{European Population Transfers}, p. 55.}
\footnote{BNA, FO 371/30930, Foreign Research and Press Service (hereafter FRPS), \textit{Memoranda on Frontiers of European Confederations and the Transfer of German Populations}, Report, 20 February 1942, p. 14.}
\footnote{FRPS, \textit{Memoranda on Frontiers of European Confederations and the Transfer of German Populations}, p. 22; Beneš, ‘Towards Peace in Central and Eastern Europe’, p. 166.}
\footnote{Beneš, \textit{The New Order in Europe}, p. 154.}
\end{footnotes}
been raised by the French sociologist Bernard Lavergne after the First World War, the prospect of population transfers ‘was rejected [at the time] as being apparently in contradiction to the idealistic tendencies governing the 1919 plans for a new Europe’. By 1938, however, the Versailles settlement had become thoroughly discredited and the liberal principles espoused by the League of Nations ceased to carry much weight in the conduct of international affairs. The possibility of reorganising Europe along ethnic-national lines, as had been achieved in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey through population transfers, was heralded as an alternative to territorial revision and the now moribund League’s defence of minority rights. This was the political context in which European statesmen, including Beneš, approached the Munich Conference.

It is often forgotten that a limited Czech-German population exchange was envisaged under the Munich Agreement. Provisions for a voluntary migration of Czech and German nationals were contained in Clause VII, which stated:

There will be a right of option into and out of the transferred territories, the option to be exercised within six months from the date of this agreement. A German-Czechoslovak commission shall determine the details of the option, consider ways of facilitating the transfer of population and settle questions of principle arising out of the said transfer.\footnote{\textit{Agreement concluded at Munich, September 29, 1938, between Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy}, Project Avalon, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/munich1.asp>, viewed August 9, 2013.}

Such a transfer would ostensibly prevent a new minority problem by removing the Czech minority from the Sudetenland and transferring Germans who lived outside the Sudetenland.

\footnote{\textit{Beneš, ‘The Organization of Postwar Europe’}, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Vol. 20, No. 2 (January 1942), p. 235.}
into the ceded areas. An orderly process of population exchange did not, however, take place. Despite proposals to establish an international body to be ‘charged with the question of the possible exchange of populations on the basis of the right to opt within some specified time-limit’, neither the organisation nor envisaged conditions of migration eventuated. Instead, the responsibility for population transfers was given to the German-Czechoslovak Commission, which had been formed at the behest of Hitler’s Godesburg Ultimatum in place of Neville Chamberlain’s preference for an international body.\(^{45}\) Free from international control, the commission denied right of Sudeten Germans to opt out of the Reich.\(^{46}\) This violation of the ‘right of option’ principle that had been a feature of the interwar transfers resulted in the chaotic flight of 160,000 refugees of both Czech and German nationality from the Nazi-occupation of the Sudetenland.\(^{47}\)

A more systematic proposal for population transfer in the Sudetenland, however, was secretly proposed by President Beneš during the height of the Munich Crisis. On 16 September 1938, Beneš entrusted Jaromír Nečas, Minister of Social Welfare, with the task of communicating a secret offer of territorial concessions over the Sudetenland to the French Government through Léon Blum, the leader of the French Socialist Party.\(^{48}\) Blum passed on the terms of Beneš’ message to the French Prime Minister, Edouard Daladier, before the latter’s crucial meeting with Neville Chamberlain and Viscount Halifax at the Anglo-French


Conference in London on 18 September. In return for the cession of four to six thousand square kilometres of territory beyond Czechoslovakia’s defensive fortifications (which was inhabited by half a million German-speakers) Beneš proposed that Hitler accept the transfer of an additional 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 Sudeten Germans into the Reich. The combined effect of the territorial cessation and population transfer would have reduced the German minority from approximately 3,200,000 to a mere 650,000 (Table 2.1). If this proposal had been enacted, Czechoslovakia would not only have become a more ethnically homogenous state, but would also have retained its extensive border defences that were surrendered under the Munich Agreement. As subsequent events would prove, the loss of these fortifications mortally impaired Czechoslovakia’s viability as an independent nation. In contrast to the proposal extended by Beneš to the Allies in mid-September, the Munich Agreement which was concluded a mere two weeks later, deprived Czechoslovakia of 27,000 square kilometres of land by forcing the state to cede areas with a population that was fifty percent German or greater (Map 1.2). In a less than an ideal state of affairs, a total of 2,806,000 Germans and 750,000 Czechs subsequently came under the jurisdiction of the German Reich as a result of the agreement.

The ‘Nečas Mission’ is a largely forgotten but vital episode in the death throes of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Overshadowed by Munich and largely omitted from the historical

50 Beneš, ‘President Beneš instructs Minister Nečas to propose cessation of ethnic German territory’, 16 September 1938, reprinted in Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, trans. Kurt Glaser (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963), p. 455. In Nečas private papers from 1943, the former minister claimed that 1,000,000 were to be transferred. See Zorach, ‘The Nečas Mission During the Munich Crisis’, pp. 55n, 63; Douglas, Orderly and Humane, p. 18.
51 The figure of 3,200,000 is based upon the 1930 Census. See BNA, FO 925/21188, ‘Ethnographic Map of Czechoslovakia’; Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, p. 304.
record due to the efforts of Beneš himself, its importance has been lost on subsequent generations of historians. It was, in fact, the first serious proposal to expel the Sudeten Germans from their ancestral home in Bohemia and Moravia and established the suite of measures that would be considered throughout the war to reduce Czechoslovakia’s postwar German population. These consisted of three key measures that would form the basis of future wartime proposals: large-scale population transfers, selective expulsions and limited territorial revision. Throughout the course of the war the emphasis given to certain aspects of this formula was naturally dependent upon political conditions, however, all three measures survived as part of an evolving plan for the organisation of postwar Czechoslovakia. It was only in late 1944, as total victory over the Axis Powers became all but inevitable, that these three criteria gave way to a single solution: the wholesale expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.

If mid-September 1938 is taken as the point at which proposals for the removal of the German minority of Czechoslovakia began to be formulated, it therefore follows that the origins of population transfer in the Czech lands preceded the Second World War. The expulsion of the Sudeten German minority would therefore seem to be predicated on the systemic tensions of the Czech-German relationship throughout the interwar period. The relationship came to breaking-point in the 1930s due to both economic depression, which induced a domestic political crisis along ethnic cleavages, and the expansionist pan-German foreign policy of Nazi Germany. Viewed from this perspective, rather than being the ultimate cause, the war provided the political circumstances by which such an ethnographic transformation could be realised, expanded and implemented.

54 Beneš had instructed that the note be destroyed and assumed that Nečas had complied with his wishes. He was informed otherwise by Nečas in 1943. Beneš made no mention of the affair in his postwar memoirs. See Jaromír Nečas, ‘Remarks about the Political Events Before and After Munich’ (1943), Štefan Osuský Papers, Box 99/File 5, Hoover Institution Archives, excerpt in Zorach, ‘The Nečas Mission During the Munich Crisis’, p. 65.
THE UNDOING OF MUNICH AND THE ADOPTION OF THE
PRINCIPLE OF EXPULSION

The repudiation of the Munich Agreement formed the centerpiece of Beneš’ activities as the leader of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. Although this topic has received adequate historical treatment, it is important to relay its implications on the development of Beneš’ expulsion policy.\(^55\) Indeed, the expulsions were only necessary in postwar Czechoslovakia due to the restoration of the state’s pre-Munich borders. On this issue, Beneš was unyielding and saw the annulment of Munich as a fundamental moral question.\(^56\) His diplomatic efforts were primarily directed towards Great Britain, since the United States and Soviet Union were not signatories to the Munich Agreement. Thus, the political manoeuvres that played out in London between Beneš and Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, and Wenzel Jaksch, the leader of the Sudeten German Social Democrats, are an important chapter in the exile period.

From the outset of his exile, Beneš was emphatic in his belief that Czechoslovakia should be restored within its historic pre-Munich borders. In a report dated 21 August 1939 to the Czech underground resistance movement, the ÚVOD, he declared ‘the restoration of Czechoslovakia is today already a certainty’.\(^57\) This declaration not only predated the extension of any formal diplomatic recognition to Beneš and his future government-in-exile but also the creation thereof. The formation of the Czech National Liberation Movement would occur somewhat later in October 1939 after the outbreak of war and full diplomatic

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recognition was only granted to the Beneš Government in London in July 1941.\textsuperscript{58} Beneš’ claim, however presumptuous, was in fact more than wishful thinking on the part of an exiled national leader in the possession of enormous self-belief. In the same report, Beneš went on to outline the pragmatic approach he would take in exile to regain Czechoslovak independence:

For the time being, of course, not even we ourselves can say under what conditions and within what boundaries. The fight on these issues is about to begin and it will depend exclusively on the way the war develops, on the situation under which peace is achieved, what will happen also on our territory, who will be in the war and who will keep out of it. It is self-evident that we will have to start cautiously. Our demands will for the time being be put forward with reserve and then we will gradually try as resolutely as possible for the attainable maximum.\textsuperscript{59}

Beneš’ exposition of the challenges facing the exile movement revealed his understanding, gained during the previous conflict with Germany, of the vicissitudes of political fortune and his awareness that they could be turned to Czechoslovakia’s advantage during the course of the war. Indeed, the possible means that Beneš laid out in late-1939 for attaining the maximum postwar territorial settlement for his countrymen was particularly far-sighted and the Czech leader did well to follow his own pragmatic advice.

\textsuperscript{58} Beneš, \textit{Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš}, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{59} Beneš, \textit{Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš}, p. 159.
From the outset of his dealings with the British Foreign Office and Jaksch’s Social Democrats, Beneš engaged in a double game of Machiavellian proportions in order to bring about the annulment of the Munich Agreement and a favourable settlement over the future of the German-speaking border regions. In order to reclaim the Sudetenland, Beneš had to assure Eden and the Foreign Office that its inclusion would not cause any future Czechoslovak state to suffer the same fate as its interwar predecessor.⁶⁰ His solution from the outset was to reduce the size of the German population, although he did not reveal any specific proposals to Eden until the beginning of 1942.⁶¹ Concurrently, Beneš and Milan Hodža were conducting negotiations with Jaksch’s Social Democrats over the entry of the latter into the Czechoslovak State Council.⁶² Wartime cooperation between both of these anti-Nazi groups was highly sought after by the Foreign Office and was a condition for further diplomatic recognition for the Czechoslovak government-in-exile.⁶³

Negotiations began during the summer of 1939 on the express understanding that no population transfer of the Sudeten German minority would occur after the war. The first meeting between Beneš and Jaksch took place at the former’s Putney residence on 3 August 1939, and was followed by a second on 4 December after the outbreak of war.⁶⁴ Beneš also met with the Sudeten German Social Democrat representatives Franz Kögler, Robert Wiener and Fritz Kessler on 3 September in order to discuss the possibility of wartime cooperation.⁶⁵ In all three meetings, Beneš rejected any claim that he intended to expel the Sudeten German minority after the war. According to Jaksch’s postwar recollections, the Czech leader declared that ‘we shall in any case have many German citizens’ after the war and that any

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⁶² Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, pp. 358-366.
⁶³ BNA, FO 954/4A/1017, Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 154)’, 7 July 1942, p. 2.
⁶⁴ Beneš, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš, pp. 213-214; Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, p. 356.
⁶⁵ Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, p. 357.
talk of expulsions was ‘nonsense’.  

This account would seem to correspond with Beneš’s claim in his memoirs that he sought to conceal any expulsion plans from Jaksch.  

The prospect of Czech-German cooperation, however, reached an impasse in 1941 before finally dissolving in 1942. The main reason for this outcome was that London became more forthcoming in its support for Beneš after the massacres and reprisals carried out by Nazi authorities throughout the Protectorate in retribution for the assassination of Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich as part of the Czechoslovak-led Operation Anthropoid. Indeed, in a memorandum presented to the War Cabinet in July of the same year Eden stated:

In the view of the hard trials through which the Czechoslovak people have been passing since the death of Heydrich, I consider it desirable, mainly for psychological reasons, to give Dr. Benes such satisfaction as is possible.

Soon after, Eden presented a draft formula approved by the War Cabinet to Beneš, Jan Masaryk and Hubert Ripka that went a long way towards recognising the key demands of the Czechoslovak delegation. It reaffirmed Churchill’s declaration of 30 September 1940 that the Munich Agreement had been ‘destroyed by the Germans’ and further stated that the British Government ‘regard themselves free from any engagements in this respect’ and ‘will not be influenced by any change effected since 1938’. With this statement, Britain joined

66 Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, pp. 357-358.
67 Beneš, Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš, p. 214.
68 Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, p. 355.
71 Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 154)’, p. 1.
72 Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 154)’, p. 2.
the United States (May 1939) and the Soviet Union (June 1942) in declaring Munich null and void.\textsuperscript{73} The prospect of expulsions, however, was not included in the formula, although the matter had been discussed on 2 July by the War Cabinet. Eden informed his colleagues of Beneš’ proposal for a sizeable population transfer, which had first been communicated to the Foreign Office in January 1942, and concluded his deliberations with the following statement:

A population transfer on this scale would be a formidable undertaking. It will probably be impossible to avoid some measure of this kind in post-war Europe, but, if they are not carried out in an orderly and peaceful manner it is only too likely that the Czech and Polish populations will forcibly expel the German minorities from their midst. The question is whether we should not commit ourselves to the principle of such transfers, and let both Dr. Benes and the Sudeten German representatives know that this is our view. I should not be in favour of discussing the application of the principle until a much later stage.\textsuperscript{74}

The fact that Eden was now open to the large-scale population transfer of the Sudeten Germans represented a significant progression from six months earlier when he had been reluctant to consider the idea at all.\textsuperscript{75} On 6 July, the War Cabinet adopted in principle the


\textsuperscript{74}Eden, ‘Anglo-Czechoslovak Relations’, p.2.

\textsuperscript{75}Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 13)’, p. 3.
population transfer of German minorities throughout Central and Eastern Europe after the war."}

Between September 1938 and August 1942, the fortunes of Beneš and his Czech compatriots underwent a propitious transformation. With the repudiation of Munich and the adoption of the principle of expulsion, the Czechoslovak leader had achieved his immediate goals for a new postwar settlement. In large measure, his success can be attributed to his skilful, if double-handed, management of the Sudeten German Social Democrats and the British Foreign Office. By concealing his true intentions until he could be sure of British support, Beneš was able to dispense with Jaksch and after August 1942 no longer sought nor required an understanding with the Social Democrats.

**WARTIME PLANS FOR EXPULSION: CZECH AND BRITISH PERSPECTIVES**

As has already been outlined, plans for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans had begun in September 1938 on the initiative of President Beneš. Had the policy of Anglo-French appeasement continued and war been averted, such plans would have come to naught and been consigned to the dustbin of history. The outbreak of the Second World War, however, provided a new scenario in which the possibility of expulsions could again be considered. Between 1940 and 1945, many proposals were considered, although more humane options that included contingencies for re-settlement and compensation were ultimately overtaken by wartime events. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile put forward a number of proposals during the war, and of these, those presented to Anthony Eden in January 1942 and the

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76 BNA, CAB 65/27/2, Meeting of the War Cabinet, ‘Czechoslovakia – Relations with the Czechoslovak Government (No. 3)’, Minutes, July 6, p. 120.
European Advisory Commission November 1944 most clearly demonstrate how Czech demands increased during the course of the war.\textsuperscript{77} In addition, the Foreign Office had the Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS) produce two reports in 1940 and 1942 on population transfers in Axis-occupied Europe under the chair of Professor John Mabbott of Balliol College, Oxford.\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{Memoranda on Frontiers of European Confederations and Transfer of German Populations} of 20 February 1942 is the most informative on the matter of the extent and perceived consequences of the transfer of German minorities in postwar Europe.\textsuperscript{79} From this study emerges a clear picture of the degree to which the Foreign Office understood the implications of uprooting millions of Germans from their ancestral homes and forcing them into a much reduced and war-torn postwar Germany.\textsuperscript{80}

The first Czechoslovak wartime plan for the mass removal of Sudeten Germans that was presented to the Foreign Office in January 1942 bore significant resemblance to the Nečas offer of September 1938. Although this proposal was less ambitious in its goal of reducing the overall size of the Sudeten German population, it built upon the earlier plan by introducing a three-point program of territorial cession, population transfer and expulsion. In a meeting with Eden on 21 January, Beneš outlined these key measures. The Czechoslovak President was willing to cede territory to Germany that had limited strategic value in the west, north and north-east (including the Egerland-Karlsbad Triangle), which contained


\textsuperscript{80} FRPS, \textit{Memorandum on Frontiers of European Confederations and the Transfer of German Populations}, pp. 18, 20-30.
between 600,000 and 700,000 Germans.\textsuperscript{81} In return, Beneš asked for the right to evict two Germans from the remaining Czech lands for every inhabitant of the transferred territory. These Germans would be divided into two categories: those to be expelled as war criminals and associates of the Nazi authorities, numbering an estimated 300,000 to 400,000, and removal by population transfer of an additional one million Germans.\textsuperscript{82} The combined effect of all three measures would reduce the size of the pre-war Sudeten minority from 3,200,000 to a little over one million (Table 2.1). The similarities between the plans of January 1942 and September 1938 are striking. Both involved the sacrifice of non-strategic German-speaking territory in order to obtain the right to forcibly remove a far greater number of Germans from the integral Czech borderlands and interior.

The latter plan, however, would have ceded more territory to Germany, and for this reason, Beneš asked that it remain secret as it might be ‘quoted against him later’.\textsuperscript{83} If the proposal had become official, it would have both attracted considerable personal criticism of Beneš from extreme elements within the ÚVOD in Prague, and permanently impaired relations with Jaksch. The Social Democrats had made clear that they were unwilling to accept the principle of expulsion from the outset of their negotiations with the Czech leaders.\textsuperscript{84} Nonetheless, Beneš had presented Jaksch with a number of expulsion proposals in September 1942 after gaining the agreement of the War Cabinet to the principle of expulsion in July 1942.\textsuperscript{85} None, however, revealed the true extent of the number of Germans to be expelled. Beneš’

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 13)’, p. 2.
\item Eden, ‘Anglo-Czechoslovak Relations’, p. 2.
\item Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 13)’, p. 2.
\item Jaksch, \textit{Europe’s Road to Potsdam}, pp. 357-358.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
suggestion that any expulsions would be limited to between 600,000 and one million persons was duplicitous, given his earlier indications to the Foreign Office and the ÚVOD.\textsuperscript{86}

The hardening of anti-German sentiment after the Nazi atrocities of June 1942 and the formal annulment of the Munich Agreement in August created a political situation in which more comprehensive population transfers could be considered. From this point onwards, Beneš displayed greater reluctance to cede territory to Germany, and therefore came to rely upon the method of expulsion to create the sweeping ethnographic changes desired by his government. In this endeavour, he was greatly assisted by growing support from the United States and the Soviet Union. During the course of 1943, Beneš made considerable progress in obtaining commitments from Roosevelt and Stalin to support his postwar policy for Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{87} In mid 1943, Beneš toured the United States and had meetings with the leading figures of the Roosevelt Administration, including the president himself.\textsuperscript{88} In discussions with Roosevelt in May and June, Beneš twice received assurances that the United States would agree to the transfer of ‘as many [Germans] as possible’.\textsuperscript{89} A similar commitment was given by Stalin and Molotov during Beneš visit to the Soviet Union from November to December 1943, during which he renewed the 1935 security treaty in a new Czech-Soviet Pact.\textsuperscript{90}

Having obtained the support of the Big Three to the principle of expulsions by the closure of 1943, Beneš was able to contemplate the ‘attainable maximum’ for which he had dreamed

\textsuperscript{86} In Beneš’ communications with the ÚVOD, he suggested that between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 Germans would be expelled. See Kopper, ‘The London Czech Government and the Origins of the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans’, p. 257, 261.


\textsuperscript{89} Beneš, \textit{Memoirs of Dr. Eduard Beneš}, p. 193, 196.

in 1939. This found its expression in a new expulsion proposal presented by the Czechs to the European Advisory Commission in November 1944 (Table 2.1).\textsuperscript{91} On the question of ‘transfers’, Beneš now insisted that all but 800,000 Germans would be expelled from Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{92} As he was only prepared to surrender territory inhabited by 350,000 to 400,000 Germans, this would mean the expulsion of nearly two million, which was considerably more than had been proposed under the 1942 program. It is not surprising that such a drastic increase caused much consternation in the Foreign Office. Before Beneš departure to recently liberated Slovakia in February 1945, Eden cautioned reserve until the matter of German minorities could be discussed by the principal Allied Powers at a peace conference.\textsuperscript{93} On this meeting, Eden wrote to Sir Philip Nichols:

His Excellency [Beneš], while not disputing that this might be a wise course, said nothing which could be interpreted as acceptance of this advice, and I am left under the strong impression, that, unless we reinforce this advice in some way, he may, on his return to his own country, commit himself on this subject to his people.\textsuperscript{94}

No doubt, Eden was aware of the consequences of an expulsion of the magnitude proposed by the Czechoslovak President. Indeed, the challenges of economic dislocation, transportation, resettlement, compensation, and reconstruction arising from the mass expulsion of German minorities from Central and Eastern Europe had been outlined by Professor Mabbott in the FRPS report of February 1942, which estimated that if expulsions were to proceed after the war, the number of Germans to be uprooted would be in the vicinity

\textsuperscript{92} Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 13)’, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{93} BNA, FO 954/4A/1041, Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 38)’, 23 February 1945, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{94} Eden, ‘Mr. Eden to Mr. Nichols (No. 38)’, p. 2.
of three million to 6,800,000.\textsuperscript{95} This figure turned out to be surprisingly accurate, especially given that the report did not anticipate the westward movement of the German-Polish border to the Oder-Neisse Line, which increased the number of Germans to be expelled from Poland alone from 3,300,000 to approximately 9,600,000.\textsuperscript{96} If Mabbott’s figures of February 1942 are adjusted for the redrawing of the Polish border, the total number of expellees reaches a maximum figure of somewhere between 12 and 14 million – the actual number of Germans that were expelled in the postwar period. The potential scale of these transfers was indeed unprecedented, and with this in mind, Mabbott suggested that a timeframe of ten years would be necessary to achieve them in an ‘orderly’ manner.\textsuperscript{97} This assumption was based upon the time required for earlier population transfers in the Balkans, South Tyrol and Eastern Europe. For example, the Greek-Bulgaria exchange involving some 170,000 persons took place over six years, the larger Greco-Turkish exchange of 550,000 over two years and the South Tyrol transfer of 180,000 over a year with a three year extension for property settlement.\textsuperscript{98} In the event, the expulsion of nearly three million Germans from Czechoslovakia was completed in little more than one year.\textsuperscript{99}

When Allied leaders grasped the full implications of expelling millions of Germans in mid-1945, it was too late to repudiate the blank cheque that had been given to the leaders of Czechoslovakia and Poland to purge their homelands upon liberation. Indeed, Churchill only began to express misgivings during the proceedings of the Potsdam Conference.\textsuperscript{100} By this

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{95} FRPS, ‘Memoranda on Frontiers of European Confederations and the Transfer of German Populations’, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{97} FRPS, ‘Memoranda on Frontiers of European Confederations and the Transfer of German Populations’, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{100} BNA, FO 934/3, Churchill minute to Eden, No. 14/5, 23 July 1945.
\end{flushright}
time, nearly one million Germans had already been evicted from Czechoslovakia before any formal agreement had been reached on the question of transfers (Table 2.2).
Table 2.1. Expulsion Proposals Presented by President Beneš to the Allied Powers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>September 1938</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>January 1942</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>November 1944</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduction by Territorial Cession</td>
<td>500,000 – 550,000</td>
<td>16 – 17</td>
<td>600,000 – 700,000</td>
<td>19 – 22</td>
<td>350,000 – 400,000</td>
<td>11 – 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction by Population Transfer</td>
<td>1,500,000 – 2,000,000</td>
<td>47 – 63</td>
<td>900,000 – 1,000,000</td>
<td>28 – 31</td>
<td>1,250,000 – 1,300,000</td>
<td>39 – 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction by Expulsion*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>300,000 – 400,000</td>
<td>9 – 13</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated wartime casualties</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>2,000,000 – 2,550,000</td>
<td>63 – 80</td>
<td>1,800,000 – 2,100,000</td>
<td>56 – 66</td>
<td>2,400,000</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining German Population**</td>
<td>650,000 – 1,200,000</td>
<td>20 – 37</td>
<td>1,100,000 – 1,400,000</td>
<td>34 – 44</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In the 1942 proposal, Beneš intended ‘expulsion’ as a separate measure for war criminals.

** Assuming a pre-war population of 3,200,000 (1930 Census).

Table 2.2. Number of Germans Expelled from Czechoslovakia, 1945 – 1946

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Wild’ Expulsions (pre-August 1945)</td>
<td>700,000 – 800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potsdam Protocol (August 1945 – October 1946)</td>
<td>2,100,000 – 2,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>2,900,000 – 2,950,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining German Population (October 1946)</td>
<td>250,000 – 300,000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The majority of those Germans that were not expelled had emigrated by 1948.

III

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY

COLLECTIVE GUILT AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE POSTWAR ORDER

After the First World War about seventy or eighty percent of our German nationals failed to grasp the democratic revolution that we Czechs had gone through. They accepted the pan-German counter-revolution and Nazism instead. It will be necessary to cleanse the Republic of guilty citizens even if there are hundreds of thousands of them.¹

—Edvard Beneš

No one who has seen and heard what the Germans did in this country can doubt that it is impossible now to keep Germans here as citizens. This terror wasn’t the act of a few SS men. It was really the expression of the spirit of a whole people. The Germans have to go.²

—A. J. P. Taylor

In what was to become a conspicuous scene across war-torn Europe, an impecunious seventy-year old woman found herself far from home at an unknown train station.³ Given only ten minutes to flee from Silesia, her only possession was a Bible.⁴ Such was the fate of

¹ Edvard Beneš, Edvard Beneš in His Own Words: Threescore Years of a Statesman, Builder and Philosopher (New York: Czech-American National Alliance Eastern Division, 1944), p. 60.
millions of German refugees forced to leave the lands they had inhabited for nearly several centuries in the aftermath of the Second World War. The vast majority, often peasants and townspeople, had little or nothing to do with the Nazi regime; however, they were nonetheless connected by language and ethnicity with the Germanic race. In the context of 1945, this association alone was enough to justify their expulsion as punishment for their complicity in the crimes of the Nazi regime.

One of the most startling aspects of the German expulsions must surely be how the liberal democracies of Britain and the United States and liberal-minded statesman, such as President Beneš, chose to deny the most basic of human rights to millions of Germans on the premise of collective guilt. For much of the postwar period, their role in the expulsion of twelve to fourteen million Germans was a chapter of the war preferred to be forgotten. The similarities between the Allied-condoned expulsions and the atrocities committed by the Nazis were far too uncomfortable to contemplate for most contemporary participants and observers, and in any case, the expulsions were clearly at odds with the over-arching narrative of the war that celebrated the triumph of democracy and liberalism over totalitarianism and fascism. Yet, at the time, the forced removal of German minorities was perceived as a necessary measure for peace and the consolidation of democracy by expelling anti-democratic ‘Nazified’ elements from the reconstituted states of Central and Eastern Europe.

It is crucial to understand the central paradox of the postwar expulsions – of the suppression of democratic principles by the Western democracies in order to facilitate forcible state-led ethnic cleansing analogous to the deeds of Nazism. Scholars have too often

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either dismissed this act as a lapse of conscience on the part of Britain and the United States in the hour of victory, or more simply, adopted the assumption that the German people deserved to be punished for Nazism, and in 1945, the removal of German minorities from lands beyond the German state seemed a reasonable, if barbarous, course of action. Both of these interpretations are fundamentally lacking in historical rigour and do not contemplate the possibility that the expulsions, if considered within the prism of 1943–1945, were viewed as a crucial component in the reconstruction of Europe around functional, social-democratic national states.

Indeed, in the mind of President Beneš, the removal of the Sudeten Germans would provide the demographic foundations that would allow the repudiation of national rights and the adoption of the individual rights of the citizen. It was his firm belief that with the removal of German minorities from Poland and Czechoslovakia, these countries would be allowed to prosper as democratic nation-states and thus avoid the fate of their multiethnic predecessors of the interwar period. In other words, Western statesmen and their Czech and Polish counterparts decided that it was necessary to commit the excess of expulsion in order to guarantee regional stability in East-Central Europe. This blatant contradiction between the advocacy of democracy and citizenship on the one hand and the execution of mass expulsions on the other has perhaps been summed up best by the legal historian A. W. Brian Simpson: ‘enthusiasm for human rights and hypocrisy not uncommonly go hand in hand’.

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GERMANOPHOBIA AND THE ‘FIFTH COLUMN’ MYTH

Of all the German minorities of interwar Europe, the Sudeten Germans were the most likely to justify the concept of collective guilt. According to well-established Czech nationalist pedagogy, they had, in Beneš’ words, ‘plunged a dagger in the back of the Czechoslovak State in 1938’ and then subsequently assisted the Nazi authorities in suppressing the Czech people during the years of the Protectorate. This behaviour was commensurate with the actions of a ‘fifth column’ – a term coined during the Spanish Civil War that referred to civilian elements within Madrid that supported General Franco and the Nationalist cause. After 1939, the term was increasingly used to cast German minorities as ‘traitors’ and ‘saboteurs’ as part of a concerted effort by those who desired their forcible removal as part of the peace settlement. It is necessary, however, to re-evaluate from a position of critical distance the entire notion of the collective guilt of the Sudeten Germans. This assumption gained widespread acceptance in large measure due to the radicalising effects of the war – not a promising milieu for the propagation of truth – and has since continued to shape the historical record.

The successful campaign carried out against the Sudeten Germans by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile resulted in a dramatic reversal of attitudes, and particularly that of Britain, towards their role in the events between 1935 and 1938. At the height of the Munich Crisis, Neville Chamberlain’s envoy to Czechoslovakia, Lord Runciman, had been express in his sympathy for the Sudeten cause and had likened Prague’s jurisdiction over the

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11 De Zayas, Nemesis at Potsdam, p. 4.
Sudetenland to the rule of an ‘alien race’. A similar sentiment was shared by Sir Joseph Addison, the British Minister in Prague, who once referred to the Sudeten Germans as ‘this Cinderella in the Czechoslovak household’. By 1943, however, favourable views of the Sudeten Germans were all but extinguished by the rising tide of anti-German sentiment, no doubt abetted by the vitriol expressed towards them by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. One of the political realities ostensibly established by Munich was that the Sudeten German minority had been disloyal subjects to the Czechoslovak state. Indeed, Beneš spoke of the necessity ‘to punish all those who, directly or indirectly, have participated in acts of treason and bestialities perpetrated by the Henleinites, the Nazis, and the Gestapo’. Such was the level of antipathy that Beneš felt towards the Sudeten Germans that, upon his resignation from the presidency in 1948, the British Ambassador to Czechoslovakia made the observation, in what was otherwise a generally praiseworthy political obituary, that ‘Munich had left him [Beneš], more even than most Czechs, with a fear and loathing of Germany amounting to obsession’. This attitude was certainly well-documented, and is pervasive throughout Beneš’ writings during his years in exile.

Although it is understandable that Beneš was more hostile than most to the Sudeten Germans, his Germanophobia was neither unique nor newly learnt. As an avowed Czech nationalist, Beneš had displayed a lack of sympathy with the plight of the German citizens of

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Czechoslovakia – a tendency that was deeply grounded in Czech historical consciousness. In announcing his postwar program in 1941, he invoked the historic struggle between the Czechs and Germans and saw Nazism as the most recent manifestation of a far older pan-Germanism.\(^{16}\) His interpretation was no doubt aided by the fact that Hitler, in his early years, was a disciple of the Austrian pan-German Georg Ritter von Schönerer, who Benes referred to as ‘a drunken and incompetent anti-Semite who hated the Czechs’.\(^{17}\) Such sentiments had long been expressed by Czech politicians. The nineteenth-century statesman and historian František Palacky had likened the Czech-German relationship to an uninterrupted historic conflict been the two peoples over the lands of Bohemia and Moravia.\(^{18}\) In this battle of antitheses, the heroic resistance of the peace-loving Czechs was pitted against aggressive German encroachment and colonisation.\(^{19}\) This was nationalist history par excellence and, like other conscious efforts throughout Europe to construct national identity, the historical narrative espoused by the Czechoslovak Republic that was founded in 1918 and restored in 1945 celebrated its Slavic identity and Hussite past to the exclusion of its German and Magyar minorities.\(^{20}\)

The rhetoric of a racial struggle was continuously evoked by Beneš throughout the war, and intensified as the full scale of Nazi atrocities became known. Even anti-Nazis, such as Wenzel Jaksch, were not spared. In a private conversation with Anthony Eden in January


1942, Beneš sought to undermine the leader of the Sudeten German Social Democrats, stating that it would be impossible to offer Jaksch a place on the State Council due to Heydrich’s oppression of the Czechs and that Jaksch was inclined to make threats against the Czechs and ‘always carried a little pistol in his pocket’ during negotiations.\(^\text{21}\) Hubert Ripka, a Minister of State in the Czechoslovak cabinet, was more scathing: ‘it has been the deplorable lot of this German socialist to bring to a climax the work of destruction which was begun and continued by Henlein, the Nazi’.\(^\text{22}\)

Such animosity and mistrust was given further justification by the Nazi reprisals of June 1942. Upon his return to liberated Czechoslovakia in 1945, one of Beneš’ first ceremonial acts as president was to commemorate the three year anniversary of the destruction of Lidice, a small village in central Bohemia that had been razed by the Germans.\(^\text{23}\) In his address, Beneš was adamant in his belief that the German people bore collective responsibility for its destruction. He declared:

> Lidice is the hallmark of Nazi culture and of the German system. I say the ‘German’ system and I add ‘Nazi’, because I cannot dissociate the German nation as a whole from the barbarous massacre of Lidice. I hold the entire German nation responsible for Nazism ...\(^\text{24}\)

Beneš’ belief in the inherit connection between the crimes of Nazism and the German people was a continual theme throughout his wartime pronouncements. It was intricately tied


to the notion that German minorities constituted a ‘fifth column’ that were an ongoing threat to the new states in which they resided, particularly Czechoslovakia and Poland. In the same month that Beneš made his Lidice address, Dr Vladimír Clementis, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), echoed Beneš’ sentiments when he called for the removal of both the German and Hungarian ‘fifth columns’ that had been used as the ‘willing tools of the policy of aggression directed against the Republic from the outside’.

Clementis’ speech also drew upon the notion of collective guilt by placing the blame for the events of 1938 solely upon the German population, stating ‘it is a question of removing not thousands but millions of enemies and saboteurs from our soil’. At first inspection, Beneš’ invocation of racial themes to justify expulsion would seem out of step with such liberal sentiments. In many regards, this was certainly the case; however, his belief in the collective guilt of the Germans was also based upon their demonstrable disloyalty to the Czechoslovak state from the rise of the SdP in 1933 until liberation in 1945. The criteria he used to reach this conclusion simply marked the overwhelming majority of Sudeten Germans for expulsion.

26 Clementis, ‘Fifth Column Must Go’, p. 192.
In terms of the guilt of the Sudeten Germans, he drew little distinction between those Germans that had ‘acquiesced’ as observers and those who had actively participated as ‘collaborators’ and ‘executors’ in the crimes of the Nazi regime. In the President’s estimation, approximately ninety percent of Czechoslovakia’s Germans fell into these two categories. The basis for such a high figure has a complex origin. In order to claim that such an overwhelming proportion of the Sudeten Germans had been disloyal to the Czechoslovak Republic, Beneš determined their national allegiance upon the question of their support for Henlein’s SdP, a party that had close political and financial links with the NSDAP in Germany. In the 1935 parliamentary elections, the SdP had polled two-thirds of the German vote, and in the May 1938 municipal elections in the Sudetenland the party’s support increased to between 82 and 85 percent, and in some districts this figure reached as high as 90 percent of the vote. The size of the party’s membership was equally impressive. After only two years since its formation in 1933 the SdP had 400,000 members, and its membership continued to climb to 770,000 in March 1938 and then dramatically increased to 1,300,000, or 40.6 percent of the Sudeten German population, in July 1938 after the Anschluss.

The immense electoral and popular support enjoyed by the SdP would seem to justify Beneš’ assertion that the overwhelming majority of the Sudeten Germans harboured irredentist objectives and had openly flirted with Nazism. This would certainly be the case if voting intentions were taken as the only criteria. A more accurate barometer of where national loyalties truly lay was the Sudeten response to mobilisation orders issued during the

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May Crisis of 1938. In response to reports of German military movements on the Czechoslovak border, a partial mobilization was ordered by the Minister of National Defence on 21 May.\(^{32}\) According to Wenzel Jaksch, as reservists occupied the border forts of the Sudetenland a ‘political paradox’ took place: Sudeten German men of military age obeyed mobilisation orders and members of the SdP did not attempt insurrection or mutiny at the prospect of fighting their German brothers.\(^{33}\) Cowed by the display of Prague’s resistance to invasion, party members quietly removed the swastika from public buildings overnight.\(^{34}\) Hubert Ripka recounts a similar course of events that took place on 11 September 1938.\(^{35}\) A series of revolts were instigated in the Sudetenland on the eve of the Munich Crisis by some more extreme elements within the SdP. They failed, however, to gain any active support from the majority of Sudeten Germans.\(^{36}\) Indeed, according to Ripka, ‘in several places Henlein’s extremist agitators were driven away by actual members of the Sudeten-German Party’.\(^{37}\) This remarkable behaviour, which indicated the limit of the Sudeten Germans’ support for the SdP, led Ripka to remark in the lull between Munich and the outbreak of the Second World War that:


\(^{33}\) Jaksch, *Europe’s Road to Potsdam*, p. 291.

\(^{34}\) Lukes, *Czechoslovakia between Stalin and Hitler*, p. 145.


This is surely proof … that the majority of the Sudeten Germans were not in sympathy with revolutionary National Socialism … If it had been true that the majority of the Sudeten Germans really regarded Hitler, represented among them in the person of Henlein, as their leader, one might have expected them to grasp eagerly at this opportunity to revolt and free themselves from the Czech yoke.  

The accounts of both Jaksch and Ripka cast doubt upon the conventional wisdom that the majority of Sudeten Germans harboured irredentist goals, and thus, raise important questions about the justification for their expulsion. Their unwillingness to revolt against Prague at the opportune moment and unite with the German Reich would seem to support Jaksch’s claim that the Sudeten Germans were not voting for separation from Czechoslovakia, but rather thought that they could attain the long desired goal of political and cultural autonomy by supporting Henlein and the SdP. This conclusion is supported by a close reading of the SdP’s platform that, until the party came firmly under the control of Hitler after the Anschluss, only demanded territorial autonomy for the Sudetenland within a federal Czechoslovak state.

Despite the inherent flaws in determining the collective guilt of the Sudeten Germans upon the electoral support enjoyed by the SdP, Ripka came to distance himself from his pre-war statements and subscribed to Beneš’ opinion that the overwhelming majority of Czechoslovakia’s Germans were culpable of treason and of ‘wholeheartedly furthering the

38 Ripka, Munich, pp. 19-20.
39 Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, p. 291.
40 Henlein’s desire for autonomy was articulated in the Karlsbad Program and the ‘Nationality Statute’. See Jaksch, Europe’s Road to Potsdam, pp. 292-295. De Zayas, Nemesis at Potsdam, p. 29.
aggressive schemes of Hitler’s Third Reich’.\(^4\) In a 1944 polemic on the future of the Sudeten Germans, Ripka wrote:

> It should be borne in mind that the Germans in the Czech territories, ever since last century, have been zealous adherents and advocates of the doctrine of the German Herrenvolk ... the genuine anti-Nazis and anti-Fascists among the Sudetic Germans constituted only a small minority, less than one-third until 1938, and from Munich onwards even this small amount has been still further reduced.\(^5\)

The notion that the Sudeten Germans were a ‘Nazified’ fifth column, despite contrary evidence, had become a generally accepted fact by the time that President Beneš began to articulate his expulsion plans to the Big Three in 1942–1943. By determining German guilt upon the electoral support of the SdP, Beneš and his political colleagues ensured that the overwhelming majority would be expelled. Indeed, there is a striking parallel between the 250,000 to 300,000 Germans that remained in Czechoslovakia after the expulsions – slightly less than 10 percent of the pre-war population – and the number of Germans that supported the anti-Nazi Social Democrats in the 1938 municipal elections.

**A NEW CONCEPTION OF RIGHTS?**

In October 1945 at the London Conference of Foreign Ministers, John Foster Dulles outlined the key tenants that would govern the postwar order: territorial settlements that conformed to the will of the inhabitants concerned, an international bill of rights that would protect human dignity and fundamental freedoms for all, and the return to principles of

morality in international affairs.43 This ambitious program had been promulgated at the San Francisco Conference, at which Dulles had been a senior advisor, by the founding members of the United Nations and was an attempt to articulate the ideals for which the Western Allies had fought the Second World War. Two months before Dulles speech, however, the Allied Powers had agreed at Potsdam to the ‘orderly and humane’ transfer of German minorities from Central and Eastern Europe, including the removal of 2,500,000 from Czechoslovakia.44 Those Germans to be expelled would not be entitled to the rights and privileges of this new world order; they would be unable to make their views known through democratic means and, unlike previous population transfers, would be denied the option of departing or remaining in their homeland.

The spectre of millions of Germans fleeing their homes under the threat of retribution is difficult, nigh impossible, to reconcile with the high ideals that were proclaimed first in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, and then in 1945 at Potsdam and San Francisco. Nonetheless, some historians have sought to discover the cold rationalism under which two such contradictory phenomena could take place. Mark Mazower, for example, has argued that ‘behind the smokescreen of the rights of the individual ... the corpse of the League’s minorities policy could be safely buried’.45 This argument presents two great ironies. Firstly, the repudiation of minority rights required the mass expulsion of national minorities in order to dissolve ethnic tensions in Europe and thus establish a political and demographic environment that would enable the protection of individual rights within homogenous nation-states. Secondly, the

43 BNA, CAB 121/85, John Foster Dulles, Speech at the London Conference of Foreign Ministers, 6 October 1945, as quoted in ‘General Distribution from Washington Office’, 13 October 1945, pp. 2-4.
adoption of a universal, and what was to prove unenforceable, human rights regime allowed the Big Three a degree of deniability on the issue of the expulsions. As a result, they were able to shift the moral responsibility for the eviction of millions of German upon their wartime allies in Prague and Warsaw. This abnegation of responsibility was evident in the many protestations of London and Washington between 1945 and 1946 at the barbaric nature of the expulsions, which the Allies had authorized, and their alarm at the burden placed on occupation authorities in Germany by the chaotic arrival of expellees in the American, British and Soviet zones.\textsuperscript{46}

It should be remembered, however, that from the outset the precepts of the Allies’ new world order were not intended to be enjoyed by all nations and peoples. The Atlantic Charter, which has been lauded as the founding document of the postwar order, was deeply ambiguous and bore many of the hallmarks of war propaganda.\textsuperscript{47} Although the charter had forbade ‘territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned’ and respected ‘the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live’, these rights and privileges would not be exercised by the inhabitants of enemy nations or by those of European colonies.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, Churchill had been forthright on the extent to which its guiding principles would apply, telling the House of Commons:

\begin{quote}
... the Atlantic Charter in no way binds us about the future of Germany, nor is it a bargain or contract with our enemies. It was no offer to the Germans to surrender ... the principle of unconditional surrender, which has also been
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
promulgated, will be adhered to as far as Nazi Germany and Japan are concerned, and that principle itself wipes away the danger of anything like Mr. Wilson’s Fourteen Points being brought up by the Germans after their defeat ...

The political contradictions and apparent hypocrisy of politicians and bureaucrats in the 1940s on the issue of human rights is only explicable if the period is viewed as a transitional decade, during which those who professed the ideals and values of a postwar order looked to the future and those charged with the conduct of war looked to the past. In some notable cases, these roles overlapped. How else could President Beneš have proclaimed in the same speech in liberated Prague the promise of ‘a new humanity – a humanity better, more complete, more beautiful’ while also absolving the Czechs of any guilt over the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans: ‘in no way have we sinned against our human dignity, or against our great national tradition’. It was one of the bitter ironies of the twentieth century that such political ideals and odious practices could go hand in hand.

**A NEW CONCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY: INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS VS. NATIONAL RIGHTS**

The collective punishment of the Sudeten Germans can be traced back to the interwar minority rights regime. In order to protect the rights of national groups without a state, the minority treaties had created specific collective political and cultural rights. As a result,

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they bequeathed a group identity to disenfranchised minorities – a phenomenon that would have significant ramifications across the next three decades. For the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, the interwar experience of a democratic polity fractured along ethnic cleavages and divided by competing demands of Germans, Slovaks and Hungarians for greater political and cultural autonomy had a significant influence upon the creation of the postwar political system. Already inclined to treat its citizens according to their national identity, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile proceeded with the expulsion of Germans and Hungarians on the basis of collective guilt to establish a state that would ostensibly be structured around the ‘principle of individual freedom’.

The intended effect of the expulsions on Czechoslovakia’s domestic politics has been a much overlooked aspect of the state’s postwar reconstruction. It was a widely held belief that the removal of the ‘anti-democratic’ Sudeten German minority would rectify a fundamental structural weakness that had brought down the First Republic in 1938. Unlike the failed democracies of Weimar Germany, Austria, Poland and Hungary that were destroyed by the radicalisation of the middle-classes, political authoritarianism or military coups, Czechoslovakia’s democracy was undone by internal ethnic tensions. Its experience was therefore unique in the wider context of the failure of European democracy. When historians, such as E. H. Carr, talked about the crisis of liberal democracy in the 1930s, or political theorists spoke of the ‘necessity for re-stating the democratic idea’, as did R. W. G. MacKay, this was typically understood to signify the creation of social democracy and the

neutralisation of class conflict. In Czechoslovakia, however, the reinvention of democracy also entailed sweeping ethnographic adjustments.

President Beneš was adamant that the democratic future of Czechoslovakia would not reflect the experience of its interwar past. In an address to the Masaryk Society in 1941, he declared that:

The New European democracy must remain victorious not only on the military front but on the inner political front as well, and this principle must be carried to its consequence without compromise.\textsuperscript{55}

Beneš’ advocacy of democratic principles was intertwined with his equally held belief that ‘nationhood is an absolute value’.\textsuperscript{56} To entrench a stable and democratic Czechoslovak state in the heart of Europe, he sought to establish a national consensus among three democratic parties.\textsuperscript{57} This would represent a marked improvement upon the myriad of political parties of sectional interests that had beset the First Republic. In the 1935 parliamentary elections, no fewer than fourteen separate parties had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies and none approached a popular or parliamentary majority in its own right (Table 3.1). The combined support of parties associated with ethnic minorities rose to a staggering 32.9 percent of the total vote, and of this, nearly 70 percent was garnered by the German parties.\textsuperscript{58} More alarmingly to the mainstream parties that sought to protect the political \textit{status quo}, the SdP

\textsuperscript{55} Beneš, ‘Lecture at Rhodes House’, p. 410.
\textsuperscript{57} Beneš, ‘Postwar Czechoslovakia’, p. 404.
\textsuperscript{58} These included the SdP, German Social Democrats, German Christian Social People’s Party, and German Farmers League.
won two-thirds of the German vote and 15.2 percent of the total vote, making it the single largest party.

With the removal of Czechoslovakia’s troublesome minorities, a new democratic order did indeed take shape. In the 1946 parliamentary elections, the number of political parties was reduced to seven, of which only five could be considered as having a broad level of support, and the only parties that represented ‘minority’ concerns were Slovak (Table 3.2). The Communist Party emerged as the clear victor, albeit without an absolute majority of votes. The result was a clear vindication of Beneš’ position that the liquidation of Czechoslovakia’s minorities would produce a new and more cohesive national-democratic framework. It was the ultimate realisation of what he had envisaged in his triumphant speech upon returning to Prague in May 1945:

It will be essential…to evacuate the Germans in Czech lands and the Hungarians in Slovakia in uncompromising fashion as may be best accomplished in the interests of a uniform national state of Czechs and Slovaks. Our watchword must be: a definitive clearance of Germans and German influence from our country in the cultural, economic and political spheres.

The contradiction of achieving individual democratic rights and stable national statehood via such a profound violation of human dignity was not missed upon some contemporary observers. As Sir Philip Nichols remarked, the implementation of such an idea in the form of

60 Beneš, ‘Postwar Czechoslovakia’, p. 400.
61 Beneš, Speech delivered by President E. Beneš on the Old Town Square, Prague, p. 19.
mass expulsions cannot be ‘regarded as other than a bitter and ironic comment on the conditions existing in the twentieth-century’.\textsuperscript{62} Unlike the Nazis, who were true to their word, the Allies engaged in a form of ‘doublespeak’ by promising human rights while at the same time sanctioning ethnic cleansing at Potsdam. In the case of President Beneš, never did he waver in his belief that this was the right course of action to bring peace and justice to Europe.

\textsuperscript{62} Nichols, ‘Transfer of Germans from Karlovy Vary, p. 2.
Table 3.1. Czechoslovak Parliamentary Elections, 19 May 1935

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Chamber of Deputies</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>% of Votes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Czechoslovak Parties</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>1,176,593</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Democratic</td>
<td>1,034,774</td>
<td>12.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>849,509</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Socialist</td>
<td>755,880</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Populist</td>
<td>615,877</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Union</td>
<td>456,353</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Traders and Artisans</td>
<td>448,047</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fascist</td>
<td>167,433</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Minority Parties</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudeten German</td>
<td>1,249,530</td>
<td>15.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomous Bloc</td>
<td>564,273</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Social Democratic</td>
<td>299,942</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German-Magyar Christian Socialists</td>
<td>291,831</td>
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<tr>
<td>German Christian Social</td>
<td>162,781</td>
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<tr>
<td>German Farmers' League</td>
<td>142,399</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>16,190</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>8,231,412</td>
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</table>

Table 3.2. Czechoslovak Parliamentary Elections, 26 May 1946

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>2,695,915</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Socialist</td>
<td>1,298,917</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Populist</td>
<td>1,110,920</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovak Democrat</td>
<td>998,275</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Democrat</td>
<td>905,654</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovak Freedom</td>
<td>67,575</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Labour</td>
<td>49,983</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11,455</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,138,694</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSION**

I have already stated more than once in the past that evil is of an infectious nature and that the evil of the transfer was only a sad consequence of the evil which preceded it. There can be no dispute about who was the first to let the genie of national hatred out of the bottle. And if we, that is, the Czechs, are to recognize our share of responsibility for the end of the Czech-German coexistence in the Czech lands, we have to say, for the sake of truth, that we let ourselves become infected by the insidious virus of the ethnic concept of guilt and punishment...

— Václav Havel

Upon his triumphant return to Prague on 16 May 1945, President Edvard Beneš declared that ‘the Czechs and Slovaks again rise to new and great upswing, to new work and new life’. His proclamation of national liberation foreshadowed the impending tragedy that was to unfold for the non-Slavic inhabitants of Czechoslovakia. In the following months, Beneš would lay the groundwork for the ‘transfer’ of more than 2,500,000 Sudeten Germans – an event known as odsun in Czech and die Vetreibung in German. As we have seen, their expulsion brought about the fulfilment of Beneš dream of a national state of Czechs and Slovaks within the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. These former territories of the Hapsburg Empire had historically been a melting pot of European nationalities; however, like much of Central and

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Eastern Europe, they were transformed in the course of the first-half of the twentieth-century by the guiding principle of nationalism. Where once Slavs, Germans and Magyars had coexisted under the aegis of multiethnic empires, state violence and nascent nationalism battered these intermingled communities into distinct national units. This state-led process forever extinguished many ethnic groups, including the Sudeten Germans – a people that counted among its number Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, Kurt Gödel and Ferdinand Porsche.\(^4\)

By integrating the German expulsions into the broader historical themes of the twentieth century, this thesis has sought to shed a greater light upon the motivations and processes that lay behind them. It has also sought to demonstrate how the postwar expulsions formed part of and, in many regards, completed the process by which the continent of Europe was transformed into homogenous nation-states. The emergence and consolidation of Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1945 and the ethnographic transformation left in the wake of this process was an emblematic feature of the restructuring of Europe around the principle of nationalism.

The origins of the expulsions in Czechoslovakia are equally tied to the travails of the interwar years. The failure to realise national self-determination in 1919–1920 and the half-hearted adoption of minority rights had a profound impact on the Czech-German relationship. The rise of irredentist passions and Konrad Henlein’s SdP shattered the fragile political consensus that had held together the First Republic. After Munich, the possibility of national coexistence was rejected as impossible. From this point, Beneš and, in due course, the Allied Powers, sought to remove the Sudeten Germans from the Czech lands. They looked to experiments of population transfers in the 1920s and 1930s to form a blueprint for what became one of the largest forced migrations of people in history. With the removal of German elements from Czechoslovakia, it

was hoped that the resuscitation of minority rights would prove unnecessary. For Beneš, the momentary excess of expulsion could be justified by the collective guilt of the Germans and by the results yielded: a new order in Europe that was constructed around unitary nation-states that could protect the rights of individual citizens.

It is easy to pass moral judgement on the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans of Czechoslovakia. It is harder, however, to explain how and why this historical event, still within living memory, took place. From the perspective of their perpetrator, President Beneš, the expulsions were a necessary measure to not only undo a great wrong committed against his country, but to also place the postwar Czechoslovak state on a more secure foundation. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Beneš was certain beyond all doubt of their justice.\(^5\)

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