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German 2320W

Lesson 7

Adenauer and Post-War Germany

Tattered, bombed, and destroyed, this was what post war Germany looked like after the Hitler’s Third German Reich came to a crashing halt in 1945. Germany’s population was decimated after the war, accruing nearly 6.5 million casualties both military and civilian during the war. The widespread destruction left many of the survivors homeless and famine swept the country leaving many starving. The infrastructure of roads and train tracks were destroyed along with factories, mines, and other industrial assets and anything that wasn’t destroyed was taken back to countries such as Russian and France who also had much of their infrastructure destroyed. In order to prevent a repeat of the failures of the Treaty of Versailles the allies took control over Germany and began a reeducation campaign to convert fascist values into normal western values this also included trials for top Nazi officials to punish them for their war crimes. Along with reeducation and convictions the allies hoped to lift the German people out of there defeat and help rebuild Germany, this was the essence of the Marshall Plan.

The Marshall Plan’s namesake is of its creator George Marshall, the American Secretary of State. Marshall’s plan was to help Germany to recover economically, which was first done by distributing nearly twenty million dollars to Germany and other effected countries, such as France, to help them rebuild what was destroyed during the war. The goal was not only to rebuild Germany and Europe, but help prevent the rise of radical ideas and leaders in crushed and vulnerable state, as Hitler did after World War 1. The Marshall Plan, however, was not the only idea put forth as a solution to deal with post war Germany, the Morgenthau Plan was also put forward. The Morgenthau Plan would enforce strict punishments on post war Germany and would force Germany to return to a rural and agriculture based country by baring and dismantling all industry. The reasoning for this plan was to prevent Germany from ever having the means to go to war again, but this plan was less favorable to the Marshall Plan mainly because many believed the strict war reparations of the first world war caused the resentment and anger that led to the second world war. So, in an effort to take more friendly approach with post war Europe and Germany the Marshall Plan was adopted.

As with most political decisions, the Marshall plan was not all charity and good will. The United States saw an opportunity gain economically in implementing this post war plan. Since most of the infrastructure and industrial assets of European nations were considered war assets and therefore destroyed at some point during the war Europe lack the raw materials and factories to produce the necessary goods to rebuild their own nations. This is where America saw its opportunities, because during the war many factories productions were ramped up or new one were opened up, mines and raw material production was at very high levels, and on top of this many men were returning home and in need of jobs. So, this left America in the perfect spot to benefit from the sale of American good to rebuilding Europe. The Marshall plan was a success, America profited greatly and Germany was on the fast track to being a modern western economy where cars were common and industry was profitable. Germany also began to reform government to make sure a Hitler style uprising was not possible again. This success also helped strengthen ties between the new Germany and the United States.

Although the results of the Marshall plan were not all sunshine and rainbows, Uncle Joe and red menace loomed greatly as the cold war escalated between the USSR and the United States the new dominate super powers of the world. The speed at which the United States rebuilt Germany and its infrastructure was viewed as a threat to Joseph Stalin who began a blockade of West Berlin (All of Berlin was in Russian held East Germany, but Berlin was split between Russian and the other Allies) to which the allies responded with the Berlin Airlift where they dropped tons of food and supplies into West Berlin. After 13 months Stalin lifted the blockade, defeated. Although this further strengthened the bond between Germany and the United States and worsened the Cold War.

The fall of the Third Reich and Nazi Germany left a potential power vacuum that could have ended with another tyrannical ruler, but thanks to the Marshall plan Germany was quickly rebuilt and industry restored. Although the plan was a success the effect caused the Cold War to escalate.