Treatment of Germans in Post War Poland and Czechoslovakia

By Paul Philbrick

The Nazi empire decimated countries in East-Central Europe during the Second World War, but how did those people treat ethnic Germans when the tables were turned? This paper analyzes how Poles and Czechoslovaks treated ethnic Germans in their respective countries following the Second World War. The history of ethnic relations during the interwar period is crucial for understanding how ethnic Germans were treated after the war. The tensions between Poland and Germany only grew worse during this period, leading to the Polish government's plan to expel ethnic Germans in the early 1920's. Anti-German Polish sentiment pushed those Germans into the arms of the Third Reich. Minorities living in Czechoslovakia, however, were more fairly represented in Parliament than in almost any other European country. Ethnic identities were ambiguous in Czechoslovakia, and people often adopted whichever was most convenient at the time. Although there were much better conditions in Czechoslovakia than in Poland, the Sudeten Germans still had grievances with the Czechoslovak government. They complained that they had insufficient work and were not represented in the military or the postal service. The differences between the two countries during the interwar period shaped how they dealt with ethnic Germans after World War Two.

Poland

The Habsburg, Prussian, and Russian empires partitioned Poland from 1772 until 1918. The occupiers treated Poles poorly, creating animosity toward Germans – who were the
dominant ethnic group in two of the three occupying powers – that carried over into the interwar period and beyond. After World War One, Poland received lands from Germany and inherited 2.1 million Germans in the process.\(^1\) Between 1919 and the census of 1931 an estimated 500,000 Germans left Poznania and West Prussia, which were now under Polish control.\(^2\) In 1921 the Polish government took a census which showed that 18.7 million or 69.7 percent of Poland’s population was in fact Polish, while one million or 3.8 percent was ethnically German.\(^3\)

A speech given by Stanisław Grabski (1871-1949), the foreign policy spokesman for the Polish Sejm, outlined Poland’s views toward Germans: “We want to base our relationships on love, but there is one kind of love for countrymen and another for aliens. Their percentage among us is definitely too high and Poznania can show us the way by which the percentage can be brought from 14 percent or even 20 percent to 1.5 percent. The foreign element will have to see if it will not be better off elsewhere. Polish land for Poles.”\(^4\) Poland’s Interior Minister Cyryl Ratajski (1875-1942) stated in 1924 that, “every German that we can somehow get rid of must leave.”\(^5\) Tensions were high and the Polish government made its feelings toward the Germans extremely clear from the beginning. Over the 21 years that Poland controlled Poznania and West Prussia, pressure slowly increased for ethnic Germans to either assimilate or leave. Some of the animosity toward the Germans stemmed from over 120 years of “German” rule and the Prussian and Habsburg policies towards Poles during the partitions. Polish leaders argued that because Poland was for Poles, non-Poles – including Jews, Ukrainians, Roma, and Germans – would have to leave or undergo

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2 Ibid., 88
4 Blanke, “The German Minority,” 89.
5 Ibid., 90.
Polonization.\textsuperscript{6} In Poland’s fight for a homogenous Polish state, its leaders failed to realize that by alienating the ethnic Germans they were in fact pushing them into the welcoming arms of extremist parties within Germany such as Hitler’s National Socialist Democratic Party.

Between 1926 and 1933 Germany repeatedly appealed to the League of Nations to force Poland to uphold the treaties it had signed which protected the minorities. In 1934 Colonel Józef Beck (1894-1944) renounced Poland’s obligations under the minorities treaties, making matters between the German and Polish governments even more tense.\textsuperscript{7} So long as Germany was a member of the League of Nations it brought more accusations about the mistreatment of minorities than any other member state. Poland was the nation-state most often blamed for the mistreatment of its minorities.

The rise of institutionalized antisemitism in Hitler’s Germany undermined the basis of the League’s approach to minorities because Germany now completely rejected the idea of assimilation.\textsuperscript{8} The German government eventually took matters into its own hands and began sending money to ethnic Germans in Poland through private organizations. These organizations were secret, however, and the Polish government was very upset when it became public that Germany was sending money to Poland. Polish officials felt that this assistance made ethnic Germans in Poland dependent on Germany’s Nazi government, which became increasingly threatening after 1933.\textsuperscript{9}

Before 1939, the Third Reich asked German Poles to suffer in silence and to not cause any trouble with the Polish government.\textsuperscript{10} After years of fighting for their

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 96.
Germanness, ethnic Germans in Poland were suddenly told by the German government to stay quiet and prepare themselves for a long life in a Polish state. The minorities in Poland provided next to nothing for Germany. Arming the German Poles was a waste of time because against trained troops they would fail. Eventually Germany did invade Poland. The German provocation in Gliwice on August 31, 1939 allowed Germany to use Poland’s mistreatment of its German minority as a pretext for invading Poland the next day.\textsuperscript{11} The SS used a prisoner, a German Silesian with Polish sympathies, whom had been arrested on August 30, 1939 and dressed him up as a saboteur. They then injected him with a deadly fluid and shot his body and placed him at a radio station. The propaganda surrounding the event portrayed the man as having attacked the building and being shot. This event gave the German leaders the ability to invade Poland with full support of their people. During World War Two German and Soviet armies swept the country three times in five years. The Polish elite perished, and the occupiers annihilated or forcibly expelled ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{12} The war absolutely devastated Poland, leaving millions dead in its wake.

World War Two and the Nazi occupation of Poland was not the first time in which the country had been occupied by a foreign power. Poland had been occupied for over one hundred years before the outbreak of World War One, during which time the Polish people “proved their ability to endure and their capability to resist,” as stated by Jan Szczepański (1913-2004).\textsuperscript{13} The Nazis were ruthless during their occupation of Poland, especially in their hunt for Jews. On the Morning of July 10, 1941, eight Gestapo men came to the Polish town of Jedwabne. The Germans had a meeting with representatives of town authorities and when

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\item Cordell, “Memory,” 6.
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the Gestapo men were asked their plans in respect to the Jews they stated that all the Jews must be killed. There were thoughts of leaving one family from each profession alive but they ultimately decided against it, the next morning the bloodbath in Jedwabne began.  

During Germany’s occupation of Poland the punishment for hiding a Jew was death. If a Jew was found in a household an entire family could be executed because of the severity of the crime. The Germans did not stop with the Jews though, and one third of Poland’s urban residents disappeared during the German occupation. Fifty-five percent of Poland’s lawyers, forty percent of doctors and one third of university professors and Roman Catholic clergy died. During the war Polish citizens faced two different invading armies, lost friends and family members and by the war’s end they had reached their breaking point.

In postwar Poland the uprooting of foreigners began almost immediately. Before the large scale uprooting of Germans, the Soviet-sponsored Polish Government had already signed agreements with the Soviet Union to carry out large-scale ‘population exchanges’ with the Soviet Socialist Republic Ukraine, Belorussia and Lithuania. The exchanges allowed the Poles to forcibly uproot half a million ethnic Ukrainians eastward between 1944-1946, tens of thousands of ethnic Belorussians and Lithuanians. After the fall of Germany, many millions of Germans were left with the decision to either leave everything they had ever known and flee to Germany, or stay in Poland and take their chances. Most chose to flee, especially with the Red Army approaching. An estimated six million Germans fled Poland in the wake of the Red Army’s invasion in late 1944 and early 1945; most without the assistance

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16 Ibid., 74.
of evacuation actions by the German authorities.\textsuperscript{18} Altogether, an estimated eight million Germans left Poland between 1944 and 1949. Those who fled to Germany were not necessarily safe either; an estimated 150,000 babies were born in West Germany as a direct result of German women being raped by the Red Army.\textsuperscript{19} The majority were not uprooted by Polish authorities but rather by the massive, largely spontaneous flight of German civilians from the Red Army in the final months of the war.\textsuperscript{20} It was not until the late summer of 1945 that deliberate forced migrations occurred. The Potsdam Agreement of August 1, 1945 meant that countries expelling Germans had to follow specific rules to ensure the safety and well being of those being transported; rules the Poles found hard to follow.

When the forced migrations began there were still those who were willing to leave on their own, and in Poland the German citizens, and ethnic Germans who were Polish citizens that were willing to leave were given special travel passes. In the second half of 1945, thousands of Germans left by foot, horse-drawn cart, motorized lorry, and trains headed for Allied-controlled Germany. In October 1945 there were 35,000 Germans in Jelenia Góra, a town in southwestern Poland near the border with Czechoslovakia; by January 1946 there were only 19,589. Altogether in Poland by 1946, 550,000 Germans had left for Germany voluntarily.\textsuperscript{21} However, both before and after the Potsdam Agreement Poles took laws into their own hands and reopened Nazi labor camps. Karl Cordell writes that “it is an open secret” that on occasion the actions of those carrying out of the expulsions were clearly criminal in nature.\textsuperscript{22} Roughly 400,000 people died during the expulsions. That number

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 535.
\textsuperscript{20} Hugo Service, “Reinterpreting The Expulsion,” 535.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 539.
\textsuperscript{22} Cordell, “Memory,” 7.
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includes those who died while being expelled, those caught in crossfire or killed by Polish citizens, but the largest portion of those deaths are attributed to the concentration camps run by the Polish and the Red Armies.\footnote{Ibid., 7.}

With the labor camps reopen, the Soviet and Polish governments broke the remaining Germans into different groups. The first group included Germans from interwar German territory that did not fulfill necessary criteria for the verification process applied to (former) German citizens and were expelled. The second group consisted of people who met the criteria to be expelled but due to their expertise in a certain field were forced to stay. The third group was considered to be Germanicized Poles.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} The expulsions of Germans continued until 1949. By that date those Germans left in Poland were considered Germanicized Poles and were given the opportunity to stay in Poland, but Poland was still not accommodating towards them. The Polish government could fine or imprison people for speaking German but eventually those laws were abolished, mostly because there were still a large number of Germans living in Poland who did not speak one word of Polish. In the years after the war Germans slowly gained more rights within Poland and it was not until the 1970s that German was taught in Polish schools again.

The problems of German refugees did not cease after they had been expelled from Poland. Millions of Germans were now homeless, many of them children. Over 300,000 requests to trace missing children between 1945 and 1958 were made to various countries throughout Eastern Europe in an effort to locate the families and children.\footnote{Tara Zahra, \textit{The Last Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families After World War Two} (MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.} Once expelled, the refugees were sent to Displaced Persons Camps where they were screened, given medical examinations and awaited the official word to be eased back into German society. Officially,
Germany and Austria accepted them, but many Germans considered them foreigners. They even thought they were “Gypsies” because of the way they were poorly dressed and called the refugees “Banater” (literally: “from the Banat”) which had the connotation of “ riff-raff”.

Expellees, many of whom found themselves in considerably reduced circumstances, complained of marginalization and of feeling unwelcome.

At the beginning of the war Germany was doing well and it is understandable that ethnic Germans in Poland would have wanted to be members of the Reich. However, it would also be their undoing after the war. Poles wanted control of their country and to rid themselves of Germans who committed atrocities against their people or supported those who did. In an effort to get rid of these people they resorted to violence, murder, concentration camps, and did not properly supply expellees with enough food, water, or clothing to make the journey to occupied Germany. Once in Germany there was very little acceptance for the refugees. The German people treated these people as foreigners, and indeed they were. The refugees were from a completely different country and though they spoke German they were not from Germany. The German people had to deal with the burden of the postwar economy as well as incorporating in 14 million more Germans from other countries including Poland and Czechoslovakia. That was 14 million more mouths to feed, more people to cloth, shelter, and to find work for. Many refugees were left homeless, most of them children. Those left in Poland were treated as second-rate citizens. In fact, they were not allowed to become citizens until the 1970s, and could not study in German until the same decade. Poland was not the only Eastern European country that expelled Germans after World War Two; Czechoslovakia did the same but its approach was very different.

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27 Ibid.
Czechoslovakia

In 1891 many believed that gentlemen of Bohemia must be German speakers.\textsuperscript{28} The Enlightenment and Industrial Revolutions in France and the United States had sparked a political awakening throughout Europe. Workers and peasants believed that their lives could be better than those of their ancestors who had to live under harsh conditions in the Austria-Hungarian Empire. Czechs and Slovaks began fighting for their rights in Austria-Hungary. People spoke of forming a separate nation-state at this time but the nationalists did not have the political connections necessary to make it happen. The Czech and Slovak nationalists wanted the right to form their own political parties, elect representatives to parliament, exercise more control over local government, and operate their own schools. By the late nineteenth century ethnicity was vague and difficult to define. The mix of Czechs and Germans made it hard for anyone to make a claim to being a “pure blood” German or Czech. The Mayor of Budweis, Franz Josef Klawik stated that “as regards myself, and claims that I circulate among Germans as a German, and among Czechs as a Czech, I am in truth proud to have learned how to do this. People will surely find my comportment quite natural, and all the more forgivable when they consider that it is desired by the government, in which both nationalities are to be represented.”\textsuperscript{29}

The Austrian-Hungarian Empire wanted to know who belonged to which nationality and in the process fueled the fight between the two ethnic groups even more. Agents of the Austrian-Hungarian government went into towns with questionnaires to fill out and each citizen had to check either Czech or German. In most cases everyone went with whatever the majority was in the town because the larger the group the more schools it could have,


the more votes it would be given in parliament, and the more local officials it could elect. Furthermore, if a family was Czech but there were not enough Czechs in the town to warrant their own school it was convenient for the family to be German. If a shopkeeper had a business in a Czech town it was not smart to speak German while conducting business transactions. Choosing your ethnicity became a choice of convenience rather than of “true” ethnic background.\textsuperscript{30}

In August of 1914 a campaign for Czech independence swept through America thanks in large part to an immigrant newspaper in Omaha, Nebraska.\textsuperscript{31} Throughout 1917 and the early months of 1918 the U.S. State Department opposed dismembering the Austria-Hungarian Empire in hope that Vienna would agree to a separate peace. At the same time, Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850-1937) tried to change the mind of the United States government because separating the Austria-Hungarian Empire could have ended the war more quickly.\textsuperscript{32}

On May 31, 1918 Tomáš Masaryk and Vojta Beneš (1878-1951), the leaders of the Czech-Slovak independence movement, met in Pittsburgh (USA) with members of the United States government. Both Masaryk and Beneš tried to win support from their countrymen who had immigrated to the U.S. At this meeting the two leaders drafted a document that helped formalize relations between the groups and encouraged President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) to champion the cause of an independent and democratic Czechoslovak state.\textsuperscript{33}

The creation of a Czechoslovak state meant that Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, and Roma would have to coexist within one country.

\textsuperscript{30} Albright, \textit{Prague Winter}, 29-32.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. 42.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. 42.

On October 28, 1918 the U.S. recognized Czechoslovakia as an independent state. After the war the borders of Czechoslovakia were officially determined by the victors and it was agreed upon that the southern border would be along the Danube, annexing three quarters of a million Hungarians; to the east the Carpathian Ruthenia was added, contributing half a million Ukrainians, and in the north a bitter compromise left Czechoslovakia with less land in a coal-rich railway hub than it wanted but also gave it jurisdiction over 100,000 Poles. By the end of the negotiations the Czechoslovak government had achieved most of its goals but the country was still threatened by Germany in the west and Austria and Hungary in the south.

There was yet another issue to solve: what to do with all the ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland, a population numbering thirteen million people. Ethnic Germans in the area attempted to break away from Czechoslovakia and declare themselves Austrians, but they did not receive any support from Austria and the revolt was quickly put down. By the late 1930s the Sudetenland had become a very important region for the Third Reich because of the large number of Germans living there. Germans had lived in the Sudetenland for centuries and the region only contained a small percentage of Czechs. Czechoslovakia was a model democracy. It introduced women’s suffrage in 1920, six months before the United States. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia allowed minorities to become cabinet members; making it the only country in Europe to allow its minorities such good representation. The main reason for this being that unlike many other nations during the interwar period,

34 Albright, *Prague Winter*, 43.
35 Ibid., 45.
36 Ibid., 45-46.
38 Albright, *Prague Winter* 46-47.
Czechoslovakia remained a parliamentary democracy. Elections were held for every level of government and most importantly they were fair; the press was independent so citizens could say what they wanted without fear of retaliation, legislative power was exercised by parliament and guided by the Committee of Five, an informal body consisting of the heads of the leading parties and because of this moderation was encouraged which allowed communists and fascists to enjoy legal status. By 1930, the country ranked tenth among the world’s industrialized powers largely due to the emphasis on schooling from first grade through college, eight-hour work days, and great benefits such as disability payment, health insurance, and retirement pensions, and their exports mainly of textiles and glassware flourished.

Fearing military action from Germany after Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936; the Czechoslovaks placed their faith in the League of Nations, an alliance with France, and a partnership with Soviet Russia. Beneš wrote in 1942, “things came to such an extraordinary pass that the totalitarian and dictator states — Germany, Hungary, and Italy — persecuted the minorities in their own territories and at the same time posed as the protectors of minorities in states which were truly democratic.” To build the German empire, Hitler needed an industrial base, and he intended on taking it from the Czechoslovaks even before he seized power: “In these areas there is today a large majority of alien tribes, and if we want to put our Great Power on a permanent basis, it will be our duty to remove them… The Bohemian-Moravian Basin… will be colonized by German farmers.

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40 Albright, *Prague Winter*, 47.
41 Ibid., 47.
42 Ibid., 61
43 Ibid., 58.
The Czechs will be…expelled from Central Europe.” The rise of Nazi Germany catalyzed nationalistic sentiment among the Sudeten Germans and though many still expressed loyalty to Prague, others were attracted to the Third Reich. The Sudeten Germans had grievances with the Czechoslovak government such as a lack of representation in institutions such as the postal service and the military, and many unemployed Sudeten Germans claimed that jobs were given to Czechs first. There were complaints that the number of German schools had diminished but the true reason behind the growing separation between Czechs and Sudeten Germans is that the founder of the Sudeten German Heimat Front (the local branch of the Nazi Party) Konrad Henlein (1898-1945), told Germans in the area that they belonged to a superior race. Henlein also led a propaganda campaign to illustrate the support the Sudetenland Germans had for the Reich and to become apart of Germany. After taking over Austria in 1938, Hitler’s troops invaded Czechoslovakia. In the first few years of German occupation Czechs were both annoyed and mad. Jews faced severe discrimination, schools were closed, curfews were in effect, shops, government offices, and streets all had German soldiers. As long as Czechoslovaks kept their heads down and did not cause problems they could live their life semi-normally and could even show pride in being Czechoslovak as long as it did not disrespect Germany.

Over time, the relaxed nature of the German occupation allowed the Czech underground movement to organize. In response, Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942) the Acting Reich-Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, began to torture thousands of Czechs, imposed martial law and even sentenced to death the Prime Minister Alois Eliáš (1890-1942)

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44 Ibid., 62-63.
45 Ibid., 64.
46 Ibid., 65.
47 Ibid., 200.
48 Ibid., 200.
who had ties to the resistance. The families of those executed had to pay the Gestapo for the cost of the execution. As time progressed Heydrich implemented phase two of his plans for Czechoslovakia, which included better pay for those who worked in defense plants, payment for Czechs who informed on their countrymen and promotions for police officers who cooperated with the Nazis. With violence and rewards Heydrich was able to severely weaken the resistance but the Czechs did not go quietly.

After Germany’s surrender many ethnic Germans were left wondering what was going to happen to them, especially those in the Sudetenland. Initially the Sudeten Germans seemed surprised at the amount of Czechoslovak animosity they had generated. There is no evidence that they were aware of the hostility toward them and did not expect their coming expulsion. After the fall of Germany the Czechoslovak government, free from Soviet influence took control of the Sudetenland and immediately began looting German homes and mistreating their inhabitants. The Czechoslovak military took control of the area and began to forcibly remove Germans. Those who remained in their homes began to face persecution such as forced labor, loss of property, and internment camps. Some summary executions occurred as well as the maltreatment of the Germans—particularly former SS and SA members. The Czechoslovak government introduced many rules against the German population, including wearing white armbands to identify people as Germans, being able to shop only during certain hours, not being allowed to use methods of public communication or to change residency. In June of 1945 German schools were shut down and many Germans were sent to work on Czechoslovak farms. Also in the summer of 1945, a wide

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49 Ibid., 200.
50 Ibid., 201.
51 Ibid., 202.
54 Luza, Transfer of the Sudeten Germans, 269.
range of legal measures were introduced against the ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia. The first decrees targeted Germans on the basis of nationality. The fifth decree placed property owned by “unreliable people” in the control of national administrators. The twelfth decree targeted German agricultural property and defined Germans and Magyars as unreliable regardless of whether or not they had Czechoslovak citizenship. Decree No. 33 stripped Germans and Magyars of their Czechoslovak citizenship. Through these decrees the Czechoslovakian government was able to punish the Germans through collective means and gave the entire population the idea that Germans were unfit to remain in the country.

Furthermore, any German who had supported the Reich or gained citizenship within the Reich was prosecuted and immediately lost his or her Czechoslovak citizenship. On May 4, 1947, 713 people were sentenced to death, 475 of whom were Germans. Another 741 were sentenced to life in prison, of whom 443 were German, and 19,888 people were imprisoned. The only way to escape imprisonment or death was to prove that you had no involvement with the Reich or that you suffered because of the Reich and that you were completely loyal to the Czechoslovak cause. If one of those three things could be proven then that person was allowed to apply for Czechoslovak citizenship and was not subject to looting and persecution. If you were a German who did not qualify for Czechoslovak citizenship your property was at risk and often times was looted, taken, and sold with out compensation or remorse. The transfer of this confiscated German property not only served as retribution against the Germans but as an incentive for Czechoslovaks to populate the now vacant Sudetenland. This treatment did not stop with Germans; Czech traitors along

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56 Ibid., 273.
57 Ibid., 273.
58 Ibid., 273.
59 Stenographic Reports, 55th Session, May 29, 1947, quoted in Luza, Transfer of the Sudeten Germans, 270.
with Slovak traitors were treated as badly as Germans. If a German farmer was found guilty his land was sold to a Czech farmer, if the German owned an industrial business it was nationalized. In May, June, and July 1945 Czechs began to expel Germans from the country. Transportation of Germans was harsh. They were put on trains that were ill equipped with food and water or they were marched to the border of Germany. Often times those being expelled found out only hours before their expulsion that they were leaving, which left little time to gather belongings. The unorganized transportation of Germans ceased after the Potsdam Agreement in August 1945. A month before the agreement President Edvard Beneš (1884-1948) made a speech emphasizing that the transfer could be effected only in full agreement with the Great Powers, recognized that the state organs had not behaved correctly in some cases, and appealed to the Czechoslovaks to exercise “reason and patience” until the Sudeten question was solved.\(^60\) Benes’s goal was to make sure that the unfair treatment of Germans was stopped in order to gain the support of the Allied Powers, and he realized that the only way the Allied Powers would back Czechoslovakia was if the refugees were treated well.

Germans who had remained loyal to the Czechoslovaks and had fought against the Nazis were given equal rights with Czechoslovaks, their land was exempt from confiscation, and they were given special ID cards, which allowed them to become Czechoslovak citizens. However, many chose to move to Germany because the Czechoslovak government got rid of German schools and did not allow German culture to be publically celebrated. Those Germans who decided to leave were given special transportation, they were able to leave their property in the hands of someone of their choosing but those who had special skills such as doctors were not allowed to leave because they were valuable to the country. Of the

\(^{60}\) Luza, *Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 273.
3.32 million Germans who lived in Czechoslovakia before the Munich Agreement, some fled and others were killed, leaving 2.5 million Germans to be expelled.\(^{61}\) Women in mixed German-Czechoslovak marriages were allowed to stay, along with the Czechs and Slovaks who were forced to register as a Germans or Magyars, and Germans who had been anti-fascists. Assembly camps were set up in order to organize those who were being sent back to Germany. The trains that carried the passengers were able to hold a little over 1,000 passengers and upon arrival to the reception centers the refugees were screened, underwent medical examinations, and were classified according to the skills they possessed.\(^{62}\) Like the refugees from Poland, the people coming from Czechoslovakia were sent from the reception areas to Displaced Persons Camps and waited for the German government to integrate them into the German economy.

On May 30, 1945 some 20,000 Germans were forced to march from Brno to the Austrian border 30 km to the south in what became known as “The Brno Death March,” which claimed the lives of hundreds of its participants. The Austrian Government had not agreed to take these people so after many died on the way to the Austrian border, hundreds more died in makeshift camps in Pohořelice.\(^{63}\) In August 1945 transfers of Germans were suspended, but 373,000 people still found their way to the Soviet and American zones. In early January 1946 a series of meetings were held between American and Czechoslovak officials in order to set up plans to bring the expellees to Germany. At first one trainload holding 1,200 passengers was agreed upon. Families were not to be divided, clothing was adequate, and every German was allowed to take 30 to 50 kg of belongings; they were also

\(^{61}\text{Ibid., 281}
\(^{62}\text{Ibid., 283.}
\(^{63}\text{Ibid., 61.}

allowed 1,000 Reich Marks (RM). In February the number of trains increased to two. By April the number had increased to six trains that brought 7,200 passengers a day or 50,400 refugees a week. Furthermore, each of those passengers was given 500 RM by the Czechoslovak government. The transferees were moved as family units, they were allowed to bring 100 kg of personal belongings, and food. People who were not financially able to make the trip were given the money and were provided with proper clothing if needed.

In July a survey taken by the Americans stated that the people expelled from Czechoslovakia: “were in reasonably good physical condition, fairly well clothed and in possession of the 500 RM which are to be furnished them under the agreement. Many of the expellees brought household goods and working tools. The food they received and messing facilities en route were satisfactory. The former complaints that working males were being separated from their families had almost entirely ceased. By the time that official transfers ceased at the end of 1946, 1,859,541 Germans had been sent back to Germany. Some Germans were reunited with their families after 1946. Furthermore, around 30,000 more Germans emigrated on their own to Germany and abroad between 1947 and 1948. The Czechoslovak government was able to systematically and safely transport most of the Germans leaving their country. It provided them with food, clothing, and money and allowed them to bring belongings. This systematic transportation they enacted was in large part due to Czechoslovakia’s industrial capabilities, and the country’s ability to put personal feelings on hold in order to do “the right thing.”

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64 Ibid., 284.
66 Ibid., 287.
67 Ibid., 287.
Conclusion

The interwar period played an enormous role in the manner in which ethnic Germans were treated after World War Two. In Poland, Poles and Germans disliked one another and had done so for hundreds of years. Before becoming a nation-state in 1918 Poland had been part of the Prussian and Habsburg empires and had been poorly treated the Germans in both places. After World War One the Polish government wanted to completely expel all ethnic Germans living in the country in order to create a country that was only for Poles. There was some leniency toward those ethnic Germans who were willing to renounce their ethnic German background and become completely Polish. Such people were few and far between however, and Polish hostility pushed those ethnic Germans living in Poland to seek refuge with the Third Reich. This is in complete contrast to Czechoslovakia. In 1918 after the Pittsburgh Agreement and negotiations Czechs and Slovaks created their own nation-state called Czechoslovakia. During the inter-war period Czechoslovakia became a highly industrialized and democratic country. Symptomatically, Czechoslovak women were given the right to vote before American women were. Citizens of Czechoslovakia whether Czechs, Slovaks, or ethnic minorities were able to find jobs, get an education, and were properly represented within the Sejm. The Sudeten Germans complained that they could not get work and they were not represented in the military or the postal service, but these grievances were minor compared to the manner in which ethnic Germans were treated in Poland. The one major problem that Czechoslovakia had was the fact that often times ethnic lines between Germans and Czechoslovaks were so ambiguous that people would literally change their ethnic backgrounds to suit the convenience of the situation. This was clearly a major problem after World War Two when the Czechoslovak government began to expel the Germans.
When the war ended both Poland and Czechoslovakia behaved violently towards the ethnic Germans living within their borders. People were dragged out of their homes and shot; homes were looted for their valuables and property sold for the money. In Poland labor camps were reopened and Germans were sent to perform forced labor. Many died on the way and in the camps themselves. Violence was not aimed just at Germans; any Polish or Czechoslovak citizen that helped the Reich in any way was either killed or sentenced to prison. In Czechoslovakia hundreds of people were sentenced to death and nearly 20,000 to prison, along with nearly 500 people sentenced to life in jail. Both countries were disorganized until the Potsdam Agreement in the late summer of 1945 was created. In Poland, Polish citizens still acted as they pleased after the agreement, killing Germans and transporting them in poorly supplied trains. This caused hundreds of deaths along with those who perished in the labor camps. The total estimated number of German deaths during the expulsion is around 400,000. In Czechoslovakia the government decided that it would follow the rules laid out by the Allied Powers and began to systematically expel Germans by train. The Czechoslovaks did act violently toward Germans before the Potsdam Agreement was made public; murdering ethnic Germans, forcibly removing them and stealing their belongings especially their homes and property. However, after the Potsdam Agreement most of the hostility toward ethnic Germans was controlled and the Czechoslovaks were able to humanly expel Germans. Those Germans who chose to leave Czechoslovakia were allowed to bring some of their belongings; they were provided with proper clothing, along with money if they were without means. Proper amount of supplies for the journey were also provided. The process began with one train carrying 1,200 passengers and by the end of the year there were six trains each carrying 1,200 passengers arriving daily in Allied controlled Germany. The number of refugees from both countries arriving in Allied controlled
Germany was staggering and would have completely crippled the German economy, so Displaced Persons Camps were set up in order to slowly ease the new arrivals into the country’s economy. The people who stayed behind in both countries were not treated as equals and were not allowed to show their “Germanness” in public.

The inter-war period is crucial for explaining why Poland and Czechoslovakia handled the expulsion of Germans differently. Neither country existed before 1918. After World War Two the Soviet Union took control of Poland and was involved heavily in the expulsions of the Germans. The Czechoslovaks however, had their own government after the war and were able to handle the manner in which the expelled the Germans much more systematically. Poland during World War Two was absolutely decimated. It was controlled by Germany and the Soviet Union, at different times, and the country suffered high death tolls. After the war the Polish people were furious at Germany and wished to get rid of the Germans within their country in order to have a Poland for Poles. Czechoslovakia was merely occupied during the war. Without downplaying the hardships that Czechoslovakia endured, it is clear that they were not as severe as in Poland and this enabled the Czechoslovakia to act more rationally. Most importantly, in Poland there were sharp ethnic differences. The inter-war Polish government wanted to completely expel all minorities in order to have a completely Polish state. The animosity between the Germans and Polish in that period was terrible, but the Polish were expelling other minorities within the state as well so it was not limited to only Germans. Czechoslovakia had quite the opposite problem. In Czechoslovakia ethnic lines were so blurred that the citizens would often chose a nationality based on convenience making it difficult to determine who to expel after the war. Ethnic relations before the Second World War, the nature of the wartime occupations, and
the fact that Czechoslovakia had some degree of autonomy in the years immediately after the war meant that ethnic Germans suffered less in Czechoslovakia than in postwar Poland.