Building a New Germany: Denazification and Political Re-education, 1944–1948

Teaching Pack

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Introduction

Building a New Germany: Denazification and Political Re-education, 1944–1948, is a collection of documents from the UK Foreign Office records held at The National Archives (UK). It explores the policies adopted by the British authorities towards the end of the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period as they sought to re-educate German soldiers and civilians and create a freer, more democratic, and thoroughly "denazified" society from the ruins of the Third Reich.

The documents included within this teaching pack represent a tiny sample of the material in the collection at large. They touch upon the early decisions to embark on a denazification and re-education programme, some of the resources utilised as part of this process, and the responses of the German people involved. The activities contained within this teaching pack could easily take around **30–40 minutes**, though the exact duration will depend on reading time and the breadth and depth of accompanying discussion.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand British attitudes towards the Third Reich and their policies on how to handle the future of Germany as the war came to an end.

2. Explore the different techniques used in re-education programmes and how these relate to ideas such as indoctrination and "brainwashing".

3. Investigate how German prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians responded to the denazification process and what its longer-term legacies were.

Historical Background and Context

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in Germany in January 1933. In the years that followed they built a powerful regime, which won over many German people through a mixture of practical successes, political indoctrination, targeted censorship, fear and intimidation, and ideological infiltration throughout the public and private spheres.

In 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, triggering the outbreak of the Second World War. By 1942, they were opposed by a powerful alliance, led by Britain, the Soviet Union, and the USA. Slowly and inexorably, Allied forces rolled back Nazi domination in Europe and Africa, taking large numbers of prisoners of war along the way.

As the end of the war drew near, and Allied victory appeared all but certain, the Allies began to consider what to do with defeated Germany. Haunted by the failures of the peace-making process at the end of the First World War, their top priority was to ensure that a resurgent Germany would not, or could not, threaten peace in Europe again.

SOURCE ONE

Source Intro

This memorandum was prepared by staff in the Political Warfare Executive (overseen by the Foreign Office) and the Ministry of Information. It was submitted to the War Cabinet, the highest policy-making body in Britain at that time, and used to secure their support for a re-education programme. This was forthcoming on 18 September 1944.

Source

"The Re-education of Prisoners of War", 1944.

FO 9/39/445, images 10–14.

Ref. P(G)10. SECRET.

THE RE-EDUCATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR.

There are two important aims to be achieved by the re-education of German prisoners of war. The first, which may be described as the short-term aim, is to assist the Allied war effort by using converts, or partial converts, as instruments of political warfare; how they can be so used is explained more fully below. The second - the long-term aim - is to ensure that as many as possible of the prisoners shall return to Germany or Austria after the War as pro-Allied advocates of democratic ideals.

THE SHORT-TERM AIM.

Experience has shown that the re-education of prisoners of war can, for the following reasons, make an important contribution to the Allied war effort :-

(1) By providing the means to spread the belief in enemy countries that our prisoners of war are well treated. This belief not only encourages enemy troops to surrender when they are hard pressed but, because it tends to discount Axis home propaganda which maintains that the only alternative to victory is doom, helps to weaken the will to resist of the enemy peoples.

The belief that we treat our prisoners kindly, with its implication that the Allies will not be ruthless in victory, will also be spread by repatriated prisoners (when exchanges take place), provided that those who are repatriated have not only been well treated but, because of re-education, are no longer Nazi or Fascist extremists.

(2) By providing the means to increase the numbers of listeners to our broadcasts in enemy countries. This is secured by inviting prisoners to broadcast messages to their relatives stating that they are in good health and well treated. The Germans employed such "listeners' bait" with considerable success after Dunkirk.

(3) By providing intelligence, particularly the kind of information which is required for the purposes of political warfare.

(4) By subversive broadcasts voluntarily given by prisoners who are opposed to the Nazi or Fascist regimes. In this connection it should be noted that such broadcasts can be very effective even if they are anonymous, since the prisoner can, by referring to details which could not well be known to the Allies, convince his listeners that the speaker is in fact an anti-Nazi or anti-Fascist prisoner of war.

(5) By providing personnel who, because they are anti-Nazi or anti-Fascist, volunteer for secret service work with the Allies.

THE LONG-TERM AIM.

After Germany has been defeated the Allies will be confronted with a most difficult problem namely, how to counteract the results of the long years of intensive Nazi indoctrination of the populations not only of Germany and Austria but also, though to a lesser extent, of those

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of Western Europe as a whole. The difficulty of this task will be aggravated by the fact that the well organised and far-flung Nazi "Underground" has long been preparing the way for the perpetuation of the Nazi ideology in the event of a German defeat.

Hitherto little has been done by Great Britain or by the United States to prepare for the coming struggle of ideologies in post-War Europe by converting to democratic views the large numbers of prisoners of war now in their hands. At the present time there are 133,000 combatant German prisoners in the United States, 20,000 in Canada, and about 2,000 in Great Britain yet, owing to the neglect of re-education, not more than perhaps 200 could be counted upon as missionaries if the War were to end tomorrow. These facts, together with the certainty that the numbers of German prisoners are destined to increase greatly in the coming months, emphasize the need to create without delay adequate organisations to carry out the vital work of re-education.

If such steps are not taken, Nazi ideology in Europe will receive a strong reinforcement after the War in the shape of many hundreds of thousands of prisoners, for the vast majority of those in the hands of the Allies will, under the tutelage of the Nazi extremists, return to their native lands as fanatical supporters of Nazi-ism and of all it stands for.

THE TECHNIQUE OF RE-EDUCATION.

The technique employed in the re-education of prisoners of war is governed by the following considerations :-

(1) Prisoners have not only been subjected for years to systematic Nazi indoctrination but have received as members of the German armed forces special instructions as to what questions they may answer in the event of being taken prisoner, how these questions should be answered and what subjects should be carefully avoided. The majority of prisoners are not only on guard against disclosing information which may be of use to the Allies but are "propaganda conscious" to such an extent that they suspect attempts at subversion even when none has been made.

(2) The extreme Nazis, who are frequently N.C.O's, immediately assert themselves in the camps and organise a system of supervision and control. As a rule this process is facilitated, though not of course deliberately, by the Camp Authorities, who appoint the extreme Nazis as Camp Leaders because they make the best sergeant-majors and thus offer convenient instruments for imposing discipline and maintaining order. The net result is that very quickly there is established in every camp, or at any rate in every large camp, a secret Nazi hierarchy which rules with an iron hand; prisoners are intimidated by man-handling, by torture and by threats that any lack of loyalty to the regime will be reported to Germany, through various channels, e.g. repatriates, and that reprisals will be taken against their families. The severity of the "camp rulers" varies in proportion to their power, how great this power may be was exemplified in a Canadian Camp last year when two prisoners were hanged for disloyalty to the Nazi regime.

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Terrorisation, which is carefully hidden from the Camp Authorities, is accompanied by rigorous supervision of the attitude of the prisoners towards their captors and care is taken to ensure that prisoners shall not read literature, or listen to broadcasts or lectures, or see films, of which the Nazi leaders disapprove.

SEGREGATION OF NAZI EXTREMISTS.

For the reasons indicated above it is essential, before attempting to begin re-education, to remove from the camps and segregate in a separate camp the Nazi leaders and their "staffs". If the Camp Commandant is willing to co-operate he and his staff can as a rule supply a list of many of the hostile elements. The remainder can be discovered by the following means :-

(a) Posting to the camp agents who are ostensibly Sergeant-Interpreters. As in the course of their duties as interpreters these agents constantly mix with the prisoners and overhear their conversations, it is not difficult for them to glean the requisite information.

(b) The censorship of prisoners' letters, incoming as well as outgoing.

(c) Hidden microphones in the camps.

(d) Agents who visit the camps ostensibly as Welfare Officers. They are as a rule civilians, if not they should when visiting the camps drop their titles and dress in civilian clothes.

When, as a result of this system of investigation, a list of the "Blacks" in a camp has been compiled, the procedure recommended by P.W.E. is that they should be paraded without warning and be removed to a camp which has been prepared for them. Thereafter there should be no communication whatever between them and their fellow prisoners. Among the precautions necessary to ensure this is the selection of a hospital to which "Blacks" alone should be sent in the event of illness. Since the Nazi extremists are as a rule a minority our practice has been to leave them to their own devices and to concentrate upon the task of re-educating the remainder, i.e. the "Greys" and the "Whites".

In a mixed camp of this description, i.e. containing "Whites" and "Greys", re-education can begin, but, while it is proceeding, the "Whites" should be listed and removed to a separate camp. A valuable aid to this sifting process, which is a gradual one, is the camp newspaper. This should contain mainly straight news, news about the camps and articles to which the bulk of the prisoners will not take exception. By inserting here and there a paragraph which might be construed as indirect propaganda the periodical can be made to serve as a test of political views as well as a vehicle for propaganda. Prisoners who object to such items are "Greys", who may or may not in due course become "Whites", their subsequent segregation will depend upon their reaction to these and other influences. These other influences are English newspapers and periodicals, both of which are placed on sale in the camps, carefully selected German literature, B.B.C. broadcasts in English, to which the prisoners need not listen, and suitable films. In addition there is the influence of the "Whites", whose views in turn are influenced by the above-mentioned Welfare Officers. These representatives of the Prisoners of War Section of P.W.E. speak German fluently and are ostensibly interested only in the comfort and amenities of the prisoners. They provide games, listen sympathetically to complaints, which if they are well founded are unostentatiously remedied, if the Camp Commandant is willing to help, and advise in regard to the

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BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

organisation of choirs, bands, debating societies, etc. They avoid political discussions until friendly relations have been established and are fully qualified to discuss any political issue which the prisoners may raise, or which they themselves may lead up to in the course of a discussion. They assist in the task of compiling lists of "Whites" for segregation.

It is only in "White" camps that re-education by direct methods can be carried out and the converts brought up to the "Sixth Form" standard, and it is from this source alone that 100 per cent. collaborationists, consisting as a rule of men who are convinced that the Nazi regime has exploited and ruined Germany, are drawn. These converts should also provide the "missionaries" to post-War Germany.

THE NEED FOR SECRECY.

In all arrangements for the re-education of prisoners of war secrecy is imperative, not only as a safeguard against reprisals but as cover for propaganda itself; nothing is more fatal in this field than to let the prisoners discover that a deliberate attempt is being made to re-educate them, indeed no effort should be spared to lull their natural suspicions on that score. Although in "White" camps re-education can be carried out openly it is still unwise to reveal the machinery which has been created to deal with the work in the camps or the methods employed. Apart from unintentional leakage there is always the possibility that a "White" may regret his conversion, or feel that he has gone too far in collaboration, and in a remorseful mood take action which may imperil the "security" of the whole propaganda machine. For obvious reasons it is most undesirable that the camps should be aware that such machinery exists; there is also the certainty that should its existence become known the news would sooner or later reach Germany, in which event the probable result would be that it would be fully exploited by German propaganda and that a special warning on the subject would be issued to the German armed forces. In addition the information might be used as a pretext for reprisals against Allied prisoners - the incident cited by the Germans in an attempt to justify the chaining of British prisoners showed how slender a pretext will serve German ends.

LITERATURE, LECTURES, FILMS.

Since propaganda to prisoners of war must be adapted to the political complexions of the prisoners as well as to the standards of education prevailing in camps no hard and fast rules for the framing of syllabi of instruction can be laid down. The experience of P.W.E., which has been mainly with Italian prisoners, has shown that the general atmosphere, standards of education and "receptivity" of camps vary in accordance with a number of factors, such as the social classes from which the majority of prisoners have been drawn and the provinces of their native land from which they have come. While broadly speaking each camp presents a separate educational problem, a line of demarcation can be drawn between a mixed camp comprising "Whites" and "Greys" and a camp in which "Whites" alone have been segregated. Nevertheless some of the material selected for a "White" camp may also be suitable for use in a mixed camp. The accompanying Appendix, which has been prepared by our German Region, gives lists of books and periodicals (in English as well as in German) which are recommended for re-educational purposes, a list of subjects for lectures to prisoners, and some suggestions in regard to suitable types of films. These lists are by no means comprehensive, they have been compiled mainly to give a general idea of the nature and scope of the instruction which is suggested.

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.

Experience, particularly with the 90,000 Italian prisoners of war in India, has proved that instruction in the English language is, as might be expected, a most valuable aid in the task of re-education. Since the quickest method of gaining a working knowledge of the language is to learn "Basic English" P.W.E. concentrated upon instruction in this. The lessons were not given free of charge as it was thought preferable that the prisoners should regard them as a as a privilege, which would be more highly prized if they paid for it themselves. This plan proved to be so successful that progress was soon hampered by a lack of teachers and, at a later stage, it was found necessary to call for the assistance of the more advanced pupils.

THE CO-OPERATION OF THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES.

While success in the re-education of prisoners of war depends upon the creation of an organisation comprising an adequate staff of trained agents, whose watchwords should be "secrecy, subtlety and segregation", and the continual adaptation of propaganda to the political complexions and standards of education of the prisoners, progress will be very slow unless the full co-operation of the military authorities who are in charge of the prisoners can be secured. Nothing is to be gained by blinking the fact that lack of this co-operation is the greatest handicap to the difficult task of re-education. When it is not forthcoming, and it is seldom forthcoming in the necessary degree, the reasons are :-

(1) Failure on the part of the military authorities to grasp the vital importance of re-education.

(2) That the requirements of re-education are apt to aggravate the difficulties of camp administration. For example, the main task of a Camp Commandant is to ensure that the prisoners carry out the work - usually agricultural labour - upon which they are employed. For this purpose the prisoners are formed into working parties, each under its own leader, who is responsible for supervision and discipline. From the Camp Commandant's point of view the best leader is obviously a tough Nazi N.C.O.; to dispense with him may entail less discipline and, consequently, less work, and perhaps more trouble in the camp. The segregation of prisoners in accordance with their political views must inevitably interfere, to some extent, with the smooth working of the system; and so also must the continual sifting of prisoners which the propagandist demands.

It is difficult to convince the military authorities that in the long run re-education will pay, even in terms of labour, since a friendly worker will not only get through more work than an unfriendly worker but may be trusted not to resort to "ca' canny" methods or to sabotage. Nor does the argument that a "convert" will carry out skilled labour or war work which a hostile prisoner will refuse to do, carry any weight, although in India P.W.E. was instrumental in raising two battalions of skilled workers from among the Italian prisoners. These converts were released and voluntarily enlisted in a special branch of the British Pioneer Corps.

Since the co-operation of the military authorities, and of the Camp Commandants in particular, is indispensable, it is suggested that action should be taken on a high level, preferably on a ministerial level, to explain the political importance of re-education to the authorities concerned. In addition it would seem desirable that their instructions should include directions as to the facilities which should be granted for re-educational work inside the camps.

26th May, 1944.

BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did the British authorities seek to launch a re-education programme for German prisoners of war?
2. How necessary was this objective? How realistic was it?
3. What can this document tell us about British concerns and priorities as they looked ahead to the end of the war and the period to follow?

SOURCE TWO

Source Intro

The headquarters of the British re-education programme was at Wilton Park, a country house in Buckinghamshire, which had been an interrogation centre for captured senior Nazis during the war. In January 1945, the first re-education course was launched there, delivered to a handpicked cohort of German prisoners of war. The document below contains the opening address, given by Major-General Kenneth Strong, Director-General of the Political Intelligence Department (successor to the Political Warfare Executive), the agency responsible for the programme.

The address was originally written and given in German, which Major-General Strong spoke well. The document below is a translation.

Source

Opening Address Delivered by Major-General Kenneth Strong, 19 January 1945.

FO 939/214, images 37–44.

Translation of the address given in German by Major-General Strong, C.B.,O.B.E Director General of the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office to the Ps/W assembled for the first course at the P.I.D. German P/W Training Centre - Wilton Park. - 17th January 1945

As Director General and Head of a Department of the Foreign Office dealing with prisoners of war, I declare Wilton Park to be open and bid you all welcome.

The work to be undertaken in Wilton Park is an experiment that has no precedent in previous war or post-war periods. It is now recognised by mankind that the internal structure of a country and its spiritual and political constitution is of direct interest to other countries, and that it is no longer possible for nations to live beside each other if their ideologies and conceptions of history are fundamentally irreconcilable, without such a state of affairs leading to friction and ultimately to war with its terrible consequences.

We believe that an attempt must be made to bridge the gap that exists in the trends of thought between victor and vanquished. We believe that this can be a most important contribution towards future good relations between Germany and those countries which were compelled to oppose the policy of the Third Reich with force, and to overthrow it. We hope that this attempt to bridge the gap will assist to build up, within a well-ordered social and economic framework, a peaceful and co-operative Europe.

Here is the answer to the question which so many of you will have asked on arrival at Wilton Park. Why is Britain concerning herself at all about us and the way we think? What are British intentions? My introductory words have already given you the reasons why we are undertaking this experiment. Let us be clear about this from the start: in all its essentials it is an experiment.

We are convinced that it is not only the concern of the German people how Germany adapts itself to the world, but the concern of all who now bear the responsibility for the reconstruction of a world destroyed by war.

Through work carried out by my Department in the Prisoner of War camps, I am aware that the problems of the future and of reconstruction are uppermost in your thoughts. We know that many of you, not only those here in Wilton Park, not only those who are Ps/W, but also many millions of Germans in Germany, are ready to declare: "Certainly, National Socialism and the policy of the Third Reich was a wrong turning which brought Germany to disaster, the consequences of which the Germans will have to suffer a long time. But now we know it; therefore, we want to draw a veil over the terrible past, and to use all our energy for the restoration of a new Germany."

We know that many of you think like that. But I would like to point out the following. It is a matter of life and death that you here at Wilton Park, and the present generation of Germans in general, should learn to understand quite clearly why we believe that this attempt to forget the past involves the greatest dangers for Germany and the world.

For without a complete understanding of the background and of the conditions which led to this catastrophe, it will not be possible to begin reconstruction on a solid foundation. You must acquire a clear impression of the picture which the rest of the world has of Germany and its deeds, and you must honestly convince yourselves that this picture corresponds with the facts. Without this, it will be impossible to re-enlist Germany among the nations of Europe. It is necessary for Germany to win back the confidence of its neighbours; but it will only happen when these neighbours are convinced that the new Germany which is born out of defeat has started on the way to friendly co-operation with the peoples of Europe.

For this reason, a large part of the course will be devoted to working out with you the main points of German development during the last 80 or 100 years. I say purposely "with you", for your active co-operation in everything which happens here is an indispensable condition for the success of the experiment.

We believe that such an approach to German affairs must be made,

because without it all attempts at reconstruction will inevitably break down. You have no need to fear that in the picture we give you of the development of Germany we will leave out any essential of the contribution Germany has made to Western civilisation. Were we not of the opinion that many such contributions have been made, we would have regarded this experiment as quite hopeless. For we are perfectly clear in this, namely, that the reconstitution of Germany cannot be based on an imitation of the institutions and political ideas of other peoples. Reconstitution must in the main rest on forces and principles which are healthy and which have themselves been developed in Germany.

Let us cast away all illusions! First of all, it must be said that healthy forces and principles have never had the upper hand for a long time in Germany; and further that the mere existence of these forces can in no way mitigate all that Germans have recently done both in and outside Germany.

I should like to enlarge upon this. The experts who will speak to you will not try to deny or pass over the forces which in the past were striving for a free and peaceful development of Germany. On the contrary, many of the younger ones among you will hear perhaps for the first time of periods in German history omitted from your education, and of individuals whose mission it was to build a different and better country from that which Bismarck and his successors have made out of Germany. It is not in our interest to ignore these forces, for without them there would be little hope of a peaceful reconstruction of Germany. Regrettably - I say "Regrettably" not only in the German but also in the British and world interests - these forces have remained but potentials. The Germans who subscribed to these constructive and European ideas have, unfortunately never succeeded in carrying the day against the men of "Realpolitik", of "Blood and Iron" and "Blood and Soil". To establish and to explain why they were too weak will be one of the most important tasks of this part of your plan of study.

Further, we do not intend to deny nor to ignore that the world and Western civilisation owes a great deal to Germans, especially in the fields of music, science and technical achievements. Nevertheless, we do not intend that the achievements of these men should be reckoned in any way against the abominations of the recent past. To express myself concretely:

Beethoven cannot excuse Belsen, nor Goethe the Gestapo. The good name of Germany lies deeply buried under the millions of corpses and under the shattered structure of Europe.

I am aware that many, especially among those here, know this already, and that this knowledge has in fact stirred them to action both before and during this war. Such individuals are in a particular degree called upon, after their return to Germany, to open the eyes of their countrymen, to make it clear what a rift has been opened up between Germany and Europe, and to rouse their countrymen to do everything they can to close this rift honourably and thoroughly.

What are the forces which created this rift? I am convinced that much depends upon the right answer. And I know that in your course of study the attempt will be made to find the right answer to this decisive question.

Let me indicate, at this point, very briefly along what lines the solving of this question can be conducted. An obvious and quite undisputed factor leading to the breach between Europe and Germany was National Socialism. Today this is so clearly recognised, that in this circle in particular it will not be necessary to dwell for long on the proofs. The Nuremberg Trial presents us once again with all the aspects of the policy of the Third Reich and its leading personalities. ~~Not that one had need of this Trial, battered Europe - battered Germany itself - are the most striking witnesses. Nevertheless,~~ The revelation of the machinations of National Socialism through the Nuremberg Trial is a necessary object lesson. Every one of you who takes part in this course will, therefore, have the opportunity to study with legal and political experts how the prosecution has been built up and the development of the proceedings.

It appears to me that Nuremberg again and again emphasises the fact that the outstanding characteristic of National Socialism was its inhumanity. Certainly brutality and cruelty have existed at all times and among all peoples; but in such cases these actions were those of individuals and not the result of a policy cunningly prepared by the State. The inhumanity of National Socialism was not a by-product of the Third Reich. It was a consciously premeditated policy. The Germany of the Third Reich employed inhumanity as an instrument of state policy, and developed it into a method of governing human beings.

I think it is important to have this out: for the full significance of this policy and in particular its relation to the future of Germany may perhaps otherwise never be fully appreciated, even by those who are ready to agree in the main that this was part of National Socialism. But it would be completely erroneous to think that the reason for the separating of Germany from Europe is to be found entirely in National Socialism. This is a problem with which ~~English~~ British public opinion was very concerned during the war, and in your course of study an attempt will be made to deal with it. We are convinced that it is not National Socialism alone that is responsible for the catastrophe, but also those German circles which helped National Socialism to power; namely, the supporters of that devilish type of policy which, since Bismarck, has borne the name of Realpolitik. It was this policy which tried, internally as well as externally, to keep in power a form of society which had become obsolete and impossible, using all and every means to do so, including war and dictatorship. Here in my opinion lies a very important field of activity for Wilton Park. Today I will not say anything more detailed on the subject, but to put it in a nutshell I would remind those of you who know Berlin what struck me during my tour of duty there. It seemed to me to be not without symbolical meaning that the Bismarck-Strasse led, via the Kaiserdamm, to the Adolf Hitler Platz.

You have already been told the sphere in which the work here will be conducted. You will not only listen to lectures, but after every lecture you will have the opportunity of asking questions and of taking part in the subsequent discussion. It seems important to me - especially in connection with the problems which I have just mentioned - to refer to three matters which could be extremely obstructive in your discussions, and even rob them completely of their value.

The first is what I would call the distortion of history and the creation of myths. The majority of you, not only those who have grown up since 1933, but also those who were at school before or after the first World War, have imbibed an official version of history which has very little to do with reality and truth. I appreciate, of course, that it is impossible to measure historical truth objectively, as one can measure reactions in chemistry or physics. How then is it possible to declare a certain

version of history to be more correct than another? This question is justified. The answer is not hard in our special case. It will be quite easy to show you that there have been many German historians who have come to the same conclusions as their British or French colleagues. Only, it was not these men who were entrusted with the compiling of the official school books. The results of their researches were available, but the majority of the German people did not read them. They read instead the official version which one can only describe as mythology.

The second factor that can hinder discussion is the tendency to avoid facing unpleasant facts by pushing the responsibility for them on to supernatural powers. I think it is a great temptation for many not to look truth in the eye, but rather to declare that "Fate" willed it so, or that the "Law of History" was responsible for the whole development. "Fate" and the "Law of History" are good scapegoats, but they do not help to bring a discussion nearer to the truth.

The third factor in your work about which I should like to warn you is the attempt to blame everything on to other people. I know I am telling you something which many of you will find difficult to accept. That is why it is all the more important that it should be made quite clear. I am convinced that nothing useful furthering the cause of reconstruction can be achieved either here at Wilton Park or ~~in Germany~~ anywhere else, if you try to evade problems by pushing the blame and the responsibility on to others. It would be like an emergency exit that does not lead to safety, but back into the burning building. I do not deny that other states and other peoples have also made mistakes. In your studies we do not propose to ignore this, just as we shall not ignore the positive German achievements of which I have already spoken. But the mistakes of others cannot excuse, far less justify, previous German policy.

I have been dealing mainly with one of the spheres of study with which you will occupy yourselves at Wilton Park. It is not that I consider the other three less important, but I believe that in these there will be fewer differences between us concerning facts and their consequences. It is quite understandable, after all, that the greatest of our difficulties will probably be the treatment of the German problem, and I therefore thought it advisable to acquaint you with the ideas which underly our point of view.

I will now briefly explain the other three spheres of study which you will be able to pursue here at Wilton Park. First, we have the field of international relations and the forms of international organisations in the past and in the future. We shall attempt to explain the relationship between Britain and her Russian Ally, as well as with her cousin America. Since all sources of information are open to you, you know as well as we do that it is not all plain sailing and that difficulties arise from time to time. Here, too, I believe that it is best not to erect a façade, but to consider facts as objectively as possible. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that each one of you who really takes the reconstruction of Germany seriously can only have one wish, namely, that co-operation with the Powers which at present occupy Germany is as frictionless and friendly as possible. For the consequences of any other kind of development will be borne first and most of all by Germany.

As I have already observed at the beginning, we are at a turning point in the strength of international relations, and for this reason the place of the different international organisations, which at this moment are being built up in London, will be examined with you and by you.

Further we will try to make you acquainted with present-day Britain. One can only hope to understand Modern Britain when one has gained an insight into its growth and development, into the customs and traditions which together make up its social, political and cultural changes and structure. We have not chosen this as a branch of study, expecting you to transplant English institutions and ideas direct to Germany. On the contrary, a deeper understanding of English conditions will show you that this is not feasible. No, we consider this part of your course to be valuable, because it can help to remove many misunderstandings which exist even among those of you who are friendly towards this country. Apart from this, we also believe that to know how the British "do things" might give a few of you ideas for the peaceful reconstruction of Germany and your own lives. We wish, therefore, to give you a general picture of Britain, not only of its parliamentary and political structure, but of all spheres of life, such as literature, sport, art and science which are of interest to you.

Finally, you will be concerned here with the problem of the relations

between the individual and society, between citizen and State. In this field it will be possible to link up with the matters dealt with in the lectures on German problems. I think many will agree with me when I declare that in general Germans have had no opportunity of envisaging a relationship between the individual and the State other than one in which the State is but a machine for passing on orders to individuals.

Here, perhaps, lies the basic problem for the reconstruction of Germany and its incorporation into Europe. The duties of the individual towards the national and international community, and his attitude towards Law and Administration - an understanding of which is the starting point for the success of your work.

The fundamental fact can of course not be changed: namely, that you are Prisoners of War in Britain, but, above this fact, the spirit which will pervade Wilton Park lies in your own attitude. We have set up this Training Centre on the model of the British Residential Colleges, establishments where people pursuing collective intellectual studies live and work together. The art of creating a free community is that of living together and working in harmony, without the indiscipline of irresponsible individualism. In England we regard this quality very highly and call it Team Spirit. It reveals itself in all spheres of life, in the seat of parliamentary government, just as much as on the playing field. We believe that without this quality no free society can be developed.

This is quite a different thing from marching "step by step with one another". The distinction is especially apparent in the claims made on the initiative of each individual. For the basis remains in the God-given individual human personality. The duty before all of us is to develop this personality to the utmost, for its own self-fulfilment and for the benefit of the community. You will have an opportunity to do this at Wilton Park, for our experiment demands your constant and active co-operation.

I will end by saying this. We are quite clear as to the limits that can be reached here. At best we can only give you the tools. But incentive for work does not depend entirely on tools. Moral factors are decisive. Adults cannot be taught moral factors through lectures; they must themselves develop them.

I wish you all a fruitful period at Wilton Park.

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Questions for Discussion

1. What is the tone of the address? What does it suggest about the spirit and character of the re-education programme?
2. How do you think this address would have been received by an audience of German prisoners of war?
3. What does the source tell us about British attitudes to the Third Reich and Nazi ideology more widely?

SOURCE THREE

Source Intro

As Allied troops moved through Germany in 1945, they discovered evidence of Nazi atrocities, most notably the concentration and extermination camps. A British film crew was dispatched to make a documentary about these camps which did not shy away from showing the horrors, including piles of corpses and footage of emaciated and tortured survivors. This film was used in a number of re-education contexts: it was shown in German cinemas (with local people marched in at gunpoint to watch) and it was also screened in prisoner of war camps. The document below details the responses from prisoners of war in a camp in Egypt, after seeing the film, in July 1945.

Source

"Excerpts from [POWs'] letters showing the reaction to the German Concentration Camp Atrocities Film during the 1st week of showing", 1945.

FO 939/72, images 26–31.

SECRET

EXCERPTS FROM Ps/W LETTERS SHOWING THE REACTION TO THE GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMP ATROCITIES FILM DURING THE 1ST WEEK OF SHOWING

This film was shown to 379 P/W Camp from July 9th. to July 16th. and it elicited 190 letters in reaction to it. Herewith excerpts from about 90 of them, which are typical of the rest.

CAMP 379

Cage 5.

(SGD) KLAAPA ... As good soldiers we do not wish to have anything to do with men who ordered or committed such cruelties.

Cage 13

KRAUSE Hugo (184395) ... I knew KZs existed but after having seen the film I feel deeply ashamed to have fought for such a regime.

MINNER W. (184396) ... I have but one wish: the guilty must be duly punished.

WIRZ P. (184660) ... I could never think such things were possible but I believe the film to be true.

KRAUSE H. (184395), SCHNARRE Julius (185521), PAUSE F. (188556), HEART (184986), FARREN 181398), HAAK (185729), MEYER (185728) - they all expressed: "we deeply regret to have fought for such ideas.

DREYER (182958) ... I am very young - 19 years old - I cannot understand things shown on the film.

NEDLETZ ... I know it is true, I have seen men who have lived inside KZ

MUELTIN ... I know it is true because men I knew were there - never returned.

STRAHL (181921) ... We never thought such things could happen in Germany.

DORRER (185731) ... It is good for every German to see the film

GABRIEL J. (186275) ... It is only now since Germany is brought down to a deep misery that her people begin to see the truth.

Cage 16.

TENT 32 ... We, Ps/W out in the desert hope that a new Germany will arise from the ruins in which fate has justly thrown her to-day.

TENT 33. ... We are filled with shame to see what we have fought for and to which end our comrades have sacrificed their lives.

TENT 34 ... "down with Nazism - long live democracies".

"E. SCH." ... I am glad the KZ no longer exist. When I go back I shall work for a new Germany in which there will never be another KZ.

ZACHEND Heinz ... Now that I have seen the film I denounce the Nazi Regime for ever.

(Unsigned) ... The film has torn to shreds the veil of Goebbels propaganda.

REMYCH (?) ... We, Germans, hope that the mighty allies will restore our Fatherland and help her to recover from the present desolation.

SUESSMUTE F. (182136) ... We feel we cannot agree that there existed such a large number of KZs. We also feel that the film is showing rather exceptional cases. Thus, I am afraid this film will give the world a wrong picture of what was really going on inside Germany. This point of view is shared by practically all of us.

TENT 36. (SGD) WILHELM Lois ... We are deeply moved by what we have just seen. We dare not say more because of the "youth" in our tent.

BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

CAGE 28.

WAGNER O. (226929)	... The film is a faithful picture of the natural consequences of the Nazi Regime.
VIERBOECK J. (28622)	... The leaders of the political parties and not the German people should be made responsible for the crimes shown in the film.
MILLER A. (227154)	... The world will never forget the immeasurable guilt of the German people.
NEWMANN P. (187120)	... The part of the film that impressed me most was the map showing a large number of spots - centres of cruelties and murders - and these in a country considered highly cultured and civilized.
NELLESSER H. (156657)	... I cannot accept that every one of us Germans should feel guilty for what was going on in KZs. Many of us thought and believed that inmates of these camps deserved punishment because they were politically dangerous... Those who came out alive did not speak for fear of the death penalty. We must remember there were similar camps in Cayenne, Siberia, and during the Boer War At any rate I maintain that the German nation as a whole should not be made responsible.

CAGE 29.

BURKHARD Valentin (227159)	... The film shows the true face of the Nazi regime. Such a disgrace should not be attributed to the entire German nation. Let us hope that these pictures will serve to convert the very last believer in Nazism.
EGGERT R. (109533)	... Men who underwent such unspeakable tortures because they have believed in personal freedom, these men we should consider our true forefathers.
GRIMM (190533)	... We must all strive to prevent such happenings taking place in our country again.
HUBUSCH P.	... as a soldier I am profoundly shocked by the knowledge of such atrocities... We must all curse men responsible for such acts.
MAISER G. (189070)	... We all remember how shocked we were at the cruelties committed in the forests of Katyn, but a few years later we have to look at pictures which by far surpass everything heretofore seen or heard, anywhere in the world. To atone, in a certain measure at least, we must pledge ourselves that the martyrdom of so many shall not be in vain.
KAPLE F. (222612)	... We thank the Allies for incarcerating and punishing the criminals responsible for the existence of the Kzs.
KOECHE G. (185786)	... Pictures of utter horror and bestiality - and to think that it took place in a country of the highest culture! ... Such is the consequence of Nationalsozialismus... Each one who took an active part in that regime must be duly punished. The majority of Ps/W in fact the majority of Germans who see this film must be convinced now that the last dictatorship was a great curse... At last the German people are free from Goebbel's propaganda, free to think for themselves.
KORNAS (183674)	... Not one man in our tent (Zelt 33) could have thought it possible for such horrors ever to take place.
MOGHA P. (189759)	... Not a propaganda film but the bare truth... Everyone of us who gave his vote to these murderers bears full responsibility for such bestialities.
MONNIKES H. (189279)	..I am only 25 years old and during this war I have seen many ugly things but no horrors to compare with those that prevailed in these unfortunate camps and which were performed by German men and women: Words fail me to express fully my feelings of utter disgust. I was once proud to be a German, but since I have seen the film I feel I must lower my eyes in deepest shame before God and Mankind.

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CAGE 29 (cont).

"F.R."(OFZ)	.... during the last six years the German soldier has seen every possible kind of death but what this film unrolled before our eyes was too much for the hardest among us.
RODLE. (190246)	.... for the sake of our future we must endeavour to prevent a repetition of such deeds through a better political education.
SIEG H.E. IFZ (28541)	I have seen men who had marks of this inhuman treatment on their bodies. They are dumb witnesses of these unforgettable crimes and should be known to all those who still maintain the atrocities' film is but propaganda ...We should consider the Allied Nations not as oppressors but as true liberators.... we must abandon all hatred and all war thoughts and give our full co-operation towards the world's peace.
WIRF H.(?)	... In spite of prevailing difficulties at the present moment we ought to consider ourselves as most fortunate to be free at last from this clique which stood lower than the wild beast.
METTE S.(UFZ)	... there should never be another Hitler in the history of Germany.
SCHWANDA K. (aus Wien)	... the film held nothing for me as I lived inside KZ and my body is covered with marks of the cruelties. I could write a book about it.

CAGE 32.

GUENTHER von Amin.	...In our group there are men who have never heard of KZs before. The showing of the film is sure to be of a very great educational value for such specific cases in particular. Now they ask questions and learn.
KALUSA K. (107135)	We shall never forget what Nazis looked like. There is a great deal of suffering awaiting us but let us face it and accept it as an incentive in our fight against fascism.
HELMUT P. (180300)	... to us anti-fascists this film will give strength to fight Nazism until our last breath.
W.PAUSENWAG.	....men, women and children have suffered because they believed in a different, a better idea.
TENT 13.	... the film left us speechless for a long while. Later in the night we all had the same thought: to do all in our power in order to repair the evil committed by these murderers in charge of KZs.
WENZEL K. (186935)	... I have lived in the horror camps, therefore the film brought nothing new to me. One thing should be borne in mind however: it was just a handful of criminals and not the German people as a whole who should be held responsible.
LORENZv.der ring.	... it would be wrong to condemn the whole of the German nation as among us there are many who fought against Nazism and have experienced themselves the horrors shown on the film.
FUHRMANN K. (125194)	... It is not true that we Germans did not know of KZs existence, only the Gestapo was far too dangerous in those days. It is up to every German to help the Allies in their search of the really responsible ones who must not escape the due punishment.

BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

CAGE 34.

FUSS B. (054804) ... Should one in the course of rebuilding of Germany come across Nazi-minded people, these should be handed over immediately to the Control Commissioners.

KIRSCHNER K. ... Before condemning the entire German nation one should remember German anti-fascists who fought in Spain and who were later delivered to the Nazis by Hitler's France. These were great men and martyrs and one must remember them and their exploits before condemning the whole of the German nation.

DREWS K(UFZ) Very few Germans knew what was going on in KZs therefore it is difficult to accept the statement that every one of them should be made responsible.

REITZ F. (068829) ... one question: How is it that these KZ criminals are still alive and living under better conditions, while we, their bitterest enemies, are still kept as Ps/W? Have we not given sufficient proof of our anti-fascist ideas? Why cant we be free and help clean up Germany to the last Nazi?

ARMBRUSTER A. (188986) ...I believe the film should be shown over and over again in the cages where the opinion is divided.

HERMANN B. a soldier. ... If I am to say anything I would like to express the wish that the guilty ones should be punished by being sent to the desert to build and mend roads - with very little water, very little bread.

KLAUSNER B. (123025) ... whether we know about KZ or not must we, and only we Germans be made responsible? What about the rest of the world. Just because Napoleon behaved very much in the same way as Hitler did has anybody ever considered condemning the entire French nation?

BORDTKE E. (175313) ... We all knew the two letters: KZ, but could never imagine what they truly stood for ! not until we had seen the film.

BUTTNER W. ... things we have seen on the film may fill us with shame; we behind the barbed wire can judge the difference of our guards and these in charge of KZs.

FLACH W. (126736) The film explained the real meaning of the National-Socialism better than any words ever could.

HAMMELRATH H. (104259) .... I must repudiate the statement: every German is responsible for the existenc of the Kzs. I belonged to the Boys Scouts' organisation until 1933. After it ceased to exist I became an active anti-nazi. I knew of the KZ but its whole truth I saw only on the film.

HUTTERER X. (186299). ... I belong to a catholic family and as such I have experienced great hardships ... Hitler's youth laughed at and mocked everything Christian.

CAGE 35.

SCHINDER W. (185033) ..... About 90% of people in cage 35 are just as ignorant about politics as an ordinary schoolchild. They have no notions whatsoever about the rights or duties of a citizen. Should England earnestly desire peace and safety, we, the Anti-Nazis should be allowed to deal with the Nazis until the last of them disappears from this world. Also I propose to send Nazi girls to wait on the black soldiers or work on farms in Egypt, all over Africa and India. No less than 10,000 of these proud maids should be put to work for ten whole years and without pay.

N.B. (the rest of the letter is a petition for the release from the camp).

BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

ANS O. 109098. ... In my opinion the film does not give a complete picture of what was really going on inside KZs. It ought to have shown not only the instruments of tortures but also how the inmates endured them, phase by phase ... Anti-fascists all believed the film but there were many in our midst who openly said: "why dont they give a real film instead of such awful rubbish!" Also: "why did these wretched men misbehave? - otherwise they would never gotten themselves inside those camps!" Two young ones (cage 27) openly declared "it is nothing but an English propaganda film". There is a large field for re-education and this is one of the main reasons why the anti-fascists should be given greater opportunities.

KLAZMER A. ... the film shows the dead piled in a heap but it does not show the suffering of these people before their death.

GEHM L. (181591) ... I feel that every German who has not lived inside KZ should be shown the film at least once every six months. Should he refuse, he ought to be forced to see it through... we are most impatient to hear that the responsible ones are duly punished for their crimes. We rather fear that many of them will escape ... while men, who for the last 12 years fought against such horrors, are sitting here in the desert ... You can easily judge how hard it is for us to hear round us creatures who still maintain that the film is but English propaganda. Men like these must be closely watched out here and at home as well. Also this film should be shown over and over again in Germany.

CAGE 36.

WERTSCHIESS,O. (108767) ... Comrade, you have seen the film about Hitler's Germany. As I watched it, I had a vision and, beyond the screen I saw Krupp, Thyssen, Roechling, Bosch and a few more of these industrialists - Hitler's gang. ... Comrade, we are in the hands of the Allies, with their help we can start a new life. Let us hope that it will not be long before we, the anti-fascists, will be set free and allowed to return home ... what about you, Comrade? Are you ready to co-operate.?

THIELMANN,H. (050622) ..... It is only thanks to the film on atrocities in Germany and which we saw yesterday, that we have discovered what sort of people we have in our midst!

ABENDROTH. Dr.W. (088 833) ... The KZ film ought to have shown the daily suffering of the unfortunate inmates. Another shortcoming of the film: the number of Germans who have lost their lives in KZs should have been more emphasised instead of merely mentioning the fact of their presence.

HANSEN,D. (186 789) ... KZ held a number of German highly cultured men with high ideals. They could not accept Hitler's dictatorship nor Nazis' terror, they spoke and this they paid with their lives.... Very few people dare speak the truth. To-dayin this Cage 36, we are placed together but how very different we all are from each other ! People remain quiet. Everyone alone with his thoughts.

W.FLESCH. (068 717) ... Personally I have witnessed something of the sort in my home town in Hamburg. It never will occur to me to blame the Allies for it because I knew that it was Hitler who started this total warfare.

RABBENKAMP,H. .....As the film was about to be shown in our camp I heard people expressing pleasure to see it but there were many who openly protested why are they not left in peace as if they did not know enough of misery as it is. I think the latter ones are wrong and I told them that it is up to us young ones to be interested in things of that sort. Some went on saying "After all, it was quite good for us in Germany under the 3rd Reich !"... Some maintain politics should never be discussed in Ps/W Camps. Not to speak of it means "forget it"; forget it means "forgive". And what about the tyrant who has done so much destruction?

BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES

No. of Cages not given.

BECK R. 18 yrs old.	... to think that they are our brothers and sisters these monsters in charge of KZs.
WITSCHE G. 20 yrs.old.	May the KZs serve as a holy lesson to all mankind. How low men can fall ! But nobody, not even Germans, must think that there cannot be a better, sounder world.
HERZ,H. 105 093.	To think that all these atrocities were considered "legal" and justified because they were to be means for a victorious war .. Fortunately the criminals have failed in their aim and they now appear in their true light.
SEIF,F. 125 648.	... I am pretty certain that the crimes committed in the Middle Ages were not so atrocious as the ones we saw on the film showing the KZs in Germany in the twentieth century.

Camp Hospital.

BORK,K. 119070.	... How can the German uniform ever free itself from the most awful shame: to have worn it inside these KZ Camps as authorities in charge !
BALL O. 181 900.	We must have our children, and our children's children, properly instructed as to what the Nazi-regime in Germany truly meant.
SIENING,H. 120376.	Is this the end he brought us to, this man who dared call himself "leader" of the entire German nation ? The world no longer thinks of us: people of poets and thinkers - but people of murderers and criminals.
MUELLER,H.G. 125 612.	... This film represents one of the most horrible documents of the world history. As a medical student I was taught to assist men in giving them every chance to live and what I have seen on the screen is far worse than I could have imagined.
WILLI. 128720.	...The film has given us sufficient evidence to maintain that the Nazism has turned men into beats.

24895/GHQ(SS) - 8/45

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Questions for discussion

1. What are the different sentiments expressed by German prisoners of war in response to this film?
2. How can we explain the range and diversity of responses? Should we take them all at face value?
3. What can this tell us more generally about German attitudes towards the crimes of the Nazi regime in the period immediately following the end of the war?

Questions for General Discussion

The following questions are designed to prompt a wider discussion on the events, issues, and themes highlighted in the sources.

1. What were the top priorities for the British (and the other Allies) as the war came to an end and they became responsible for the occupation of Germany?
2. Alongside re-education programmes such as those detailed above, what other strategies would you consider essential in order to “denazify” Germany?
3. How successful do you think initiatives such as these would have been? What potential challenges would they have likely faced?
4. Do you think it is possible to politically re-educate the population of an entire country?

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