

Textbook pages PPT

Changing Borders

As World War Two came to an end, borders within Europe began to change once more. In some places these changes were dramatic. However, there were less border changes than there had been after World War One. There was more ethnic and political cleansing across borders. The new frontiers that were established were sometimes ideological as well as physical. Just a few years after the War ended the new terms of 'Eastern' and 'Western' Europe and 'Iron Curtain' had entered the vocabulary. The Iron Curtain border area became a heavily militarised zone and families were once again divided. However, some of the borders were very temporary. For example, the three western Allies reunited the three separate military zones of the defeated Germany by 1949, and Austria was reunited in 1955.

THINK! Was your character affected by changes in borders and/or being forced to move? Was your character on the east or the west of the Iron Curtain?

Destroying the National Socialist world

National Socialism was decisively defeated in 1945. The victors were determined to prevent it rising up again. However, the depth, breadth and detail of how to achieve this varied from place to place and over time. For example, by 1947 the western Allies in Germany had an approach focused upon the individual, and they developed questionnaires to investigate past deeds. In contrast, the Soviet controlled lands were changed at a societal level to destroy the power-structures of the past, though even here some active supporters of defeated regimes continued to serve new governments. In some parts of Europe it was decided to educate people about recent events; citizens in the German town of Weimar were taken to Buchenwald and one of the purposes of the Nuremberg Trials was to inform the world about the horrors of National Socialism.

THINK! Was your character affected by attempts to impose new ways of working and organising society? Was your character affected by denazification or other attempts at re-education?

Displaced people and refugees

The war in Europe ended in May 1945, for many of her people the hardship did not. An estimated 60 million Europeans had been displaced during the War. Most of these were still displaced as it ended. Some had homes to go to, some did not. Some did not know if they had homes to go to, some did not want to find out. Others were about to lose the homes they had. A network of agencies, such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Red Cross began the huge task of repatriating people, locating people, resettling people. Many people simply walked; alone or with their families, or as whole communities. Some displaced people were easy to help: a British prisoner of war had a number, a country and usually a home to go to. Others were not: a Hungarian Jew might have no papers, no family, no property and no community to reconnect with. Some were in danger: the Soviet Army shot many prisoners returned to them from western Europe, and minority ethnic German communities found themselves the target of revenge attacks, with many being ethnically cleansed from their homelands. In a Europe of traumatised people, destroyed infrastructure and lack of functioning administration, many of the displaced did not resettle for months and even years.

THINK! Was your character a displaced person or refugee? Did they have family who were displaced?

Hunger and hardship

Although the fighting ended in 1945, for many European people life continued to be hard, and for some the hunger and hardship got worse before it got better. Food and other essential supplies continued to be in short supply. Rationing continued; in some countries until well into the 1950s. Many people were unemployed, and many children's education continued to be disrupted. 1947 saw the worst winter of the century, bringing more misery to Europe's hard-pressed people. Millions of people who had lived in advanced, industrialised societies found themselves living to survive in a way that would have been familiar to people in medieval Europe. Each day was filled with labour simply to find enough to keep going for another week. The black market flourished and there was much injustice and social inequality.

THINK! Was your character affected by hunger and hardship? If so, in what ways?

Infrastructure destruction

If you went back in time to many parts of Europe in the summer of 1945, the first thing you would see would be the destruction. You would smell the decay, feel the dust and hear the fall of stones from buildings. Cities across the continent, from Hull in the UK to Naples in Italy, and from Caen in France to Minsk in the Soviet Union, had been bombed from the air. Some cities, such as Warsaw and Berlin, had been further destroyed during street by street fighting as the German army was pushed back. Buildings were unsafe, bodies were still buried under the ruins, rats grew large. Meanwhile people lived in cellars and in makeshift dwellings. Even towns and cities relatively untouched by destruction were grimy, scruffy, war weary; just like Europe's people. And the people of Europe faced a huge challenge. How could food and coal for fuel be transported with bridges, road and rail networks out of action? How could the sick be cared for with hospitals damaged? How could disease be prevented with water and sewerage systems disrupted? How could justice systems function with prisons and court buildings in ruins? How could children go to school with so many school buildings destroyed? Who was going to organise the reconstruction? Who could carry it out? What would be reconstructed? Who would pay?

THINK! Was your character affected by infrastructure destruction? If so, how?

Life goes on!

Human beings can be very resilient. Many people from the generation that emerged from the Second World War say that they had no option but to look forwards and to carry on. It is also important to remember that in the midst of difficult times there is usually some hope and happiness somewhere. Perhaps a much wanted child is born to a family, perhaps people find love, perhaps people find new talents or purpose, perhaps someone gets a new job or another opportunity, perhaps they even feel somehow stronger because of surviving a bad experience. Although the war had been a huge part of many people's lives, it was for most European people not the only part of their lives. Nevertheless studies on the impact of war suggest strongly that there will have been a terrible physical and mental cost inflicted by the traumas of war upon people in Europe. Much of this physical and mental pain will have emerged in private and was never been officially recorded.

THINK! Does any part of your character's life story suggest that 'life went on' with happiness after 1945? Or is there evidence of their lives being limited or of some sort of trauma that stayed with them?

New governments

Across Europe the process of rebuilding began. Some people hoped for liberal democracy, some people hoped for a communist future, some people were too preoccupied with survival, or too exhausted, to be politically engaged. In countries such as France, Belgium and the Netherlands, work began to rebuild liberal democracies after occupation. Although the UK had not been occupied, she emerged from the war almost bankrupt and her people had a strong desire for a new change; they voted in a left-wing government. In Soviet controlled eastern Europe it soon became clear that the people were not to be permitted to choose the type of government that the majority wanted; communist dictatorships were established. In western Germany the western Allies oversaw the establishment of a new democratic nation state, with a Basic Law that had federalism and protection of human rights at its heart. In a spirit of 'never again' many people from across Europe's nations looked to integrationist solutions as the way to prevent future wars. Meanwhile, in Spain and Portugal fascist dictatorships persisted.

THINK! What sort of new government does your character live under? How interested in the wider world and politics does your character seem to be?

Never again!

While many people simply wanted to put the past behind them and to live on, others were concerned to make sure that the mistakes of the past could never happen again. Communists debated how to restructure society on the ideals of equality. Left-wing democratic politicians looked to build welfare states. Internationalists called for closer cooperation, even union, of European states to build peace. The 1948 Hague Congress set out the principles for a European Union. Historians, politicians, even film makers tried to explain what had 'gone wrong', especially with Germany. The United Nations was founded. The state of Israel was founded. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights came about in response to the horror of the evil of National Socialism.