

Chapter 13

The Cold War in Europe: 1945-49

The origins of the Cold War

Relations between the Western Allies (Britain, the United States and France) and the Soviet Union were always likely to be strained once the war was over. Indeed, evidence of that strain was apparent before the war ended. Stalin had always suspected that Britain and the USA had deliberately delayed the opening of the 'Second Front' – the invasion of Normandy – so that Russia would suffer further casualties against Germany. There is no proof of this but in the situation of tension and distrust that existed between the former allies the truth did not and does not matter. What matters is what each side *believes* to be the truth. Besides, the Russians could always point to the efforts by Britain, France and America to overthrow the **Bolsheviks** in 1919-20 as evidence of their hostility to the Soviet Union. The Russians, on their part, had never made any secret of their eventual aim: the overthrow of the **capitalist** system.

The 'Big Three' at Yalta

As long as the Allies faced a common enemy in the shape of Nazi Germany these differences were put to one side. Once the defeat of Hitler was secured these differences emerged more strongly. In February 1945 Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Yalta in the Crimea in Russia to discuss what was to be done in Europe once Germany had surrendered. There was agreement on most issues. Germany was to be divided temporarily into

three zones of Allied occupation, and a fourth, that of France was added later. Berlin was to be divided in the same way, as was Austria and Vienna. Free elections were to be held in the liberated states of Eastern Europe and Stalin agreed to declare war on Japan. On the whole the meeting was successful and friendly. The only cloud concerned Poland. The British and Americans eventually agreed to Stalin's demand that all territory east of the line formed by the rivers Oder and Neisse should be handed over by Germany to Poland. Poland had been occupied by the Red Army and already had a Communist government. Stalin was determined that the states of Eastern Europe would act as a buffer zone against any possible attack from the West. There would be no repetition of Germany's sudden attacks in 1914 and 1941 or, for that matter, Poland's in 1920. Stalin did agree to allow some members of the London-based Polish government to join the Communist government in Lublin and also to support the setting up of the United Nations Organisation.

When the next Allied meeting took place in July at Potsdam near Berlin the situation was very different. Roosevelt had died in April and had been replaced by his Vice-President, Harry Truman. Churchill was replaced during the conference as a result of his defeat in the General Election by Clement Attlee's Labour Party. The death of Roosevelt was bad news for Stalin. Roosevelt had always been prepared to go out of his way to see things from Russia's point of view. Roosevelt had shared Stalin's suspicion that Britain was determined to use the post-war



A different big three at Potsdam – Truman has replaced Roosevelt

settlement to strengthen her **empire** and force monarchies on post-war states like Italy and Greece. Truman, however, had no illusions about Russia's stand on **democracy** and anti-imperialism. Indeed, Roosevelt had come to much the same conclusion himself after Stalin had made his view clear about the future of Poland at Yalta. The Russians had continued with their

occupation of Germany up to the Oder-Neisse on behalf of Poland and had driven out some 5 million Germans.

Once Germany had surrendered, the Yalta agreements could be put into effect at Potsdam: the division of Germany was begun and the Russians started collecting **reparations** from the eastern zone. 'De-Nazification' was the priority in all four zones and local Nazis were purged from any important posts. There were 21 top Nazis who were put on trial at Nuremberg and 11 who were hanged. Himmler, the SS chief, Goering, head of the Luftwaffe and Goebbels escaped the hangman's noose by suicide. Four days after the Potsdam conference closed Truman ordered the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan on 6 August. The Russians had not known about this terrible weapon. Stalin was alarmed at its power and, no doubt, felt threatened too. The '**Cold War**' tension tightened still further.

The trial of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg: Goering, left, and Ribbentrop (the Nazi Foreign Minister) right, with Rudolf Hess (the Nazi Party deputy leader in 1941) in the centre. Ribbentrop was hanged and Hess sentenced to life imprisonment



Exercise 1

- Why did Stalin distrust the Western allies in 1945?
- What action was agreed over Germany at Yalta?
- What issue at Yalta caused friction between the Allies?
- Why was the death of Roosevelt a disappointment to Stalin?
- The idea of 'war criminal' was a new one. It was used to try, imprison or execute many Nazis. What sort of arguments do you think the Allies put forward to justify these trials?

The Cold War - further tension

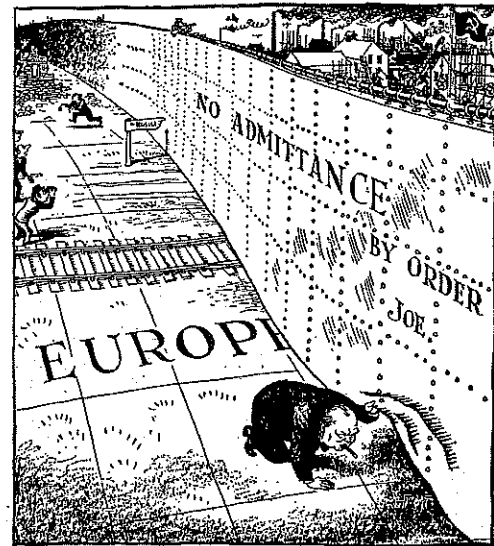
Relations between Stalin and Churchill had never really been friendly and Churchill and the Russian leader viewed each other with great suspicion. Although no longer Prime Minister, Churchill continued to warn of the dangers of Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe and elsewhere. In March 1946 he made a speech at Fulton, Missouri, in which he spoke of this threat: 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line are all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe - Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia. All these famous cities and the populations around them, lie in the Soviet sphere.'

Source One
(below)
Expansion of the Soviet Union and Communism after the Second World War

(Right) Daily Mail cartoon
'Churchill takes a peep under the iron curtain'



The map below clearly shows the extent of that Soviet expansion into Europe at the expense of the Baltic States, Poland, Germany and Rumania. Churchill and Truman were both convinced that this expansion was the result of Stalin's aggressive plans for the future. Others were later to see this growth of **Communist** control as a defensive measure to ensure Russia's own security against attack from the West. Whatever the truth of the matter, Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech served only to add to the sense of fear and suspicion that was now dividing Russia and the Western powers.



Stalin was encouraged to press ahead with the 'Sovietisation' of Eastern Europe. By the end of 1947 Bulgaria, Rumania, Poland, Hungary and Albania had Communist governments in power. Czechoslovakia followed in 1948.

Not everything went Stalin's way, though. Churchill had assumed that Tito's Yugoslavia was firmly part of the 'Soviet sphere' because it was a Communist state. But Tito's Yugoslavia did not owe its liberation from Nazism to the Red Army as did the other East European states. Tito's Communist partisans had driven the Germans out on their own and so there were no Red Army troops in Yugoslavia to ensure

that Tito followed Moscow's policies. When Stalin tried to force Tito to adopt Russian-style Communism in 1948 Tito refused and was expelled from the Cominform – the Communist Information Bureau set up by Stalin in 1947 and which all East European and some West European Communist Parties had joined. Its purpose was to ensure that these parties co-operated with each other and followed the policies laid down by Moscow. Stalin decided not to send in troops to bring down Tito as he was unsure of the reaction of the British and Americans. He was not prepared to risk a war and was confident that Tito could be overthrown from within Yugoslavia.

Exercise 2

Map work: Source one

- Pair up the capitals listed in the extract from Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech with their respective countries.
- Which two countries and their capitals were divided into zones of occupation after the war?
- Churchill's error in naming Stettin as the northern end of the 'Iron Curtain' is dealt with in another chapter. Why was he later to be proven wrong in naming Trieste as the southern end of the 'Curtain'?
- Russian, British, French and American troops were all withdrawn from Austria in 1955. Austria became an independent state. The Russians withdrew, after certain guarantees had been made that Austria would always be a neutral nation, without any fuss. Look at Austria's geographical position on the map. What evidence is there that Austria was not vital to Russia's security? A year later in 1956 Hungary attempted to break free of Soviet control. The rising was fiercely put down by the Russians. Looking at the map, can you suggest why the Russians could not permit the loss of Hungary?
- Write half-a-dozen lines on why maps are useful aids to understanding history.

The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid

It was not only Stalin who was having difficulty hanging onto his 'spheres of influence'. Since the end of the war Britain had been involved militarily in a campaign to crush the popular Greek Communist movement, EAM. The Greek Civil War seemed a clear example of the fate that awaited the rest of the Mediterranean – especially Turkey – if something were not done. Greece, it was agreed by Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, was to be part of the Western sphere of influence. As a result

Stalin would not come to the aid of the Greek Communists and raised no objection to Britain's involvement. But Churchill had made it clear that Britain would have to cease all military and financial aid to the Greek royalist army at the end of 1947 because of the cost.

Defeat of EAM

In March 1947 Truman made an appeal to the US Congress for \$400 million of military and financial assistance for Greece and Turkey to ensure their survival as 'free nations'. The speech, known as the Truman Doctrine, outlined the President's tough anti-Communist position and committed the United States to assist any nations having 'totalitarian regimes forced upon



Marshall Aid arrives in Europe. Marshall Aid put further strain on US-Soviet relations

them against their will'. It was a firm commitment to oppose the spread of Communism anywhere in the world, and by the use of military power if necessary. Its first significant success was the outright defeat of the Greek Communists by 1949. The Truman

Doctrine was also to lead to major American involvement in the wars in Korea (1950-53) and Vietnam (1965-73). (See Chapter 17.)

Truman was a shrewd man and knew full well that a more effective method of halting the spread of Communism was to ensure economic prosperity in Europe. Prosperous nations are stable nations and, what is more, they buy American goods. In the Europe of the late 1940s there was little prospect of a prosperous Europe without massive American help. In June 1947, the US Secretary of State, George Marshall, announced that the United States was willing to make funds available to all the states of Europe. To begin with the Americans sent food, and later fuel and raw materials. European output increased by 25% in two years. The \$13 billion spent under the Marshall Plan between 1948 and 1952 proved to be well spent: Communism made no further inroads into Europe. As Truman said, the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid were 'two halves of the same walnut'.

Exercise 3

- a What sort of countries lay to the east of Churchill's 'Iron Curtain'?
- b How would Stalin have justified this expansion of Russian influence in eastern Europe?
- c Why do you think that the Red Army in Europe in 1946 still stood at 5 million men while the Western powers had less than a million men under arms in the same year in Europe?
- d Why do you think that ensuring economic prosperity in Europe was a more effective method of halting the spread of Communism?
- e What reason of self-interest is hinted at in the text concerning the United States' offer of Marshall Aid?

Exercise 4

Extract: The Truman Doctrine (1947)

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria . . .

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life . . .

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is