

'The Occupation of Germany' from Le Monde (8 June 1945)

Caption: On 8 June 1945, the French daily newspaper Le Monde explains the arrangements made for the occupation of a defeated Germany and describes the four zones of Allied occupation.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 08.06.1945, n° 147; 2e année. Paris: Le Monde. "L'occupation de l'Allemagne", p. 1.

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The Occupation of Germany

There is no real need to emphasise the importance of the document published yesterday, which defines the supreme authority over Germany that is vested in the Allied Governments. There is no historical precedent with which it might be compared, as this is the first time that a great nation such as Germany has surrendered unconditionally and been left without a government able to act in its name. When it collapsed, the Nazi dictatorship left behind a total vacuum. The outcome of totalitarianism: it takes everything, and leaves nothing behind.

The 15 articles that may be consulted lay down the rules for this surrender and for German disarmament. The way in which the Allies will take the place of the German Government could only be outlined. Several stages are included, of which only the first is known. It will apply to the period known as the 'occupation period which will follow the surrender of Germany, during which Germany will carry out all the terms of unconditional surrender.'

It is known that the territory of the former Third Reich is divided into four zones, allocated to the USSR, Great Britain, the United States and France. The four Commanders-in-Chief will exercise authority in their respective zones, where the administration will be military. Two joint bodies will have their headquarters in Berlin: the Control Council, with the four Commanders-in-Chief, served by political advisers, and a Permanent Coordination Committee. The occupation of Berlin will be divided between the Four Powers.

It is worth noting that German territory, as defined in the Allied Declaration, is that of 31 December 1937: it corresponds to the borders as laid down in the Treaty of Versailles, plus the Saar, which was annexed in 1935. It does not include Austria or the Sudetenland, annexed in 1938. Nor does it take into account the territorial claims that might be asserted by various countries (the most important are those of Poland): these will be considered at the Peace Conference, where the necessary decisions will be taken.

The delimitation of the occupation zones has been the subject of negotiations for some time now. In Yalta, it had been decided that France would not be allocated an individual zone, and that its zone would be taken from the British and American zones. According to the latest reports, it seems that these boundaries have not yet been fixed. Have those that will divide the Soviet zone from the British and American zones? Their outline was supposed to have been indicated yesterday on a map published in Moscow.

The Soviet zone would be much larger than had been originally thought. It was to stop roughly at the Elbe; this is where the armies of Marshal Zhukov and Marshal Koniev had stopped during their advance. Recently, the Soviet Government pointed out that its zone had only 15 million inhabitants, compared to the 55 million living in the Western zones: it asked for further territories to be added to its occupation zone, namely part of the former State of Saxony, Prussian Saxony and Thuringia, along with Magdeburg, Halle, Leipzig, Chemnitz and Weimar. If this request is met, then, at certain points, US troops will have to withdraw 250 kilometres.

While the main outline of an agreement has been reached on the future administration of Germany, it cannot be denied that the delay in reaching the definitive and complete delimitation of the zones constitutes a serious problem. This delay will force French troops, and those of the other powers, to evacuate some districts and take over others. Such changes will do nothing for Allied prestige. They demonstrate a regrettable lack of certainty, when we should be showing the Germans that there is complete consistency between the victors, a uniform approach and a coherence beyond reproach.

Austria is no longer part of Germany. It should be noted in passing that it will, nonetheless, be subject to occupation by the Four Powers, an occupation that will be of a shorter duration and which might be compatible with the authority of a local government. The delimitation of the occupation zones has apparently been agreed, with only those in Vienna remaining to be fixed. Vienna will, like Berlin, be placed under joint occupation.