

Karl Hauff: Memorandum on the Condition of Victims of Political, Racial, and Religious Persecution by the Nazi Regime (1947)

Abstract

In the immediate postwar period, the public was receptive to demands for restitution for Nazi victims. Over time, however, the public grew increasingly critical of victim compensation payments that were perceived as overly generous and of alleged abuses of existing regulations. In February 1947, Karl Hauff, head of the Württemberg-Baden State Committee of Victims of Political Persecution by the Nazi Regime, attempted to dispel the popular misconception that Nazi victims were benefitting from widespread preferential treatment. He criticized what had been accomplished to date as inadequate, demanded greater efforts to help persecutees find housing and work, and recommended that the restitution program be separated from the welfare system so that Nazi victims would not feel like welfare recipients.

Source

The Head of the Württemberg-Baden State Committee of Victims of Political Persecution by the Nazi Regime, Karl Hauff

Memorandum on the Condition of Victims of Political, Racial, and Religious Persecution by the Nazi Regime

Stuttgart, February 5, 1947

Bureaucratic offices and broad circles of the population have a false conception of the situation of former political prisoners and persecutees of the Nazi regime. Many are of the opinion that former persecutees are benefitting from great advantages and that, when compared with the general population, they are in a better position all around and are largely provided for.

In light of the unimaginable psychological and physical suffering they endured and the consequences thereof, and given the fact that most people returning from National Socialist jails and concentration camps had absolutely nothing after their release, the occupation authorities ordered that they be given preferential treatment. This preferential treatment is supposed to allow these returnees to lead normal lives again, and it is supposed to give them a new start.

Many victims of political persecution by the Nazi regime had lost everything and a considerable number had been so devastated physically by the methods of the Gestapo and the SS that the recovery of their health was the first precondition for their return to regular work. In fact, the officially ordered preferential treatment did not really represent an advantage vis-à-vis the rest of the population, but rather only an equalization.

In some ways, the officially ordered preferential treatment has proven disadvantageous to the victims of Nazi persecution themselves, since constant references to their preferential treatment have created the impression among the general population that persecutees are receiving the majority of the available goods and that not much is being left for the rest of the population. In order to cover up their own guilt, certain circles blamed the lack and shortage of goods, which was [actually] caused by the disastrous policies of the Third Reich, on the victims of political persecution. [...]

Contrary to the general view, the fact remains that many of the victims of Nazi persecution are still suffering severely today. Even after accounting for current circumstances, it is clear that many who spent years resisting the Nazi regime, at the risk of their lives, are badly provided for in comparison with those who profited from the regime for years and who are living in relatively good circumstances today.

Due to the lack of government institutions back then [i.e. right after the end of the war], the first returnees from the concentration camps and jails, mostly political prisoners who had served long sentences, established the support office here in Stuttgart in cooperation with the local welfare office. In order to meet the most basic expenses associated with livelihood, every returnee received the sum of RM 30 from the Stuttgart welfare office as well as the usual welfare support. A single person, for example, received RM 39 per month, which translates into RM 1.30 per day. This rate of support was subsequently increased by 50%. In light of current prices, however, it is evident that it is impossible to get by on 2 RM per day. A small number of people also received an honorary gift of RM 200–300 from the city of Stuttgart.

A relatively small number of people were granted several hundred Reichsmark for new acquisitions.

In Württemberg-Baden even less was done in the districts and communities outside of Stuttgart, except in places where collections were carried out; in some cases, nothing at all or nothing worth mentioning has been done up to this day. It is unacceptable, for example, that family members of those who lost their lives in jails and concentration camps have not been sufficiently provided for to this day. It is true that some emergency laws have recently been passed to address this issue; however, they are thoroughly insufficient considering that a surviving widow, unless she is unable to work, receives a monthly payment of RM 40 from the main provisions office [*Hauptversorgungsamt*].

Many former victims of political persecution who spent years in jails, prisons, and concentration camps regarded the support by the welfare office as a humiliation from the start and preferred to take out private loans since this kind of [government] support made them feel like the recipients of charitable gifts.

It would be a matter of course and an act of justice if a law was passed stipulating that:

1. The support of victims of political, racial, and religious persecution and their families is not to be regarded as social welfare.
2. The support paid to their relatives, also during periods of incarceration or exile, carries no obligation for repayment.
3. The granting of support, if no other income is available, is not subject to the welfare office guidelines for entitlement due to poverty.

Only a relatively small number of people could be supported with government funds allocated by the Office for Restitution [*Amt für Wiedergutmachung*]. A large part of them, including many long-term inmates who usually modestly remain in the background, have not received anything up until now. There is a pressing need for the allocation of significant funds to be paid towards eventual restitution. [...]

In various German federal states [*Länder*] (including in the American zone), tax-free payments have been granted, and it would be an act of justice and a form of partial compensation if, in Württemberg-Baden, too, the victims of Nazi persecution, who are already shouldering enough of a burden due to indirect taxation, were granted a tax-free payment.

Today, there are still victims of political, racial, and religious persecution who are living in bad conditions (in Stuttgart about 200 are still homeless). There is a great lack of furniture and other necessities of daily life as well.

There has been great resistance to employing victims of political persecution by the Nazi regime. While everything is being done to reinstate former party members in good positions, there still are former political prisoners who spent more than ten years in jail who still do not have work or who are being given the worst kind of employment. [...]

The responsibility for providing healthcare to victims of Nazi persecution was assumed by the Southern German Physicians' and Medical Aid Organization [*Süddeutsche Ärzte- und Sanitätshilfe*]. In the rehabilitation facilities established by this organization, it was possible, thanks to additional shipments of food and medication from Switzerland, to restore the health of many.

A general regulation of government support has been expected for some time. Law no. 133 on the establishment and tentative use of a special fund for compensation purposes, which was recently published, did not meet these expectations. On the positive side, the law creates the possibility of separating the care and support for victims of political persecution by the Nazi regime from general welfare services. However, the achievements of this law can only be considered partly satisfactory.

[...]

For all enlightened minds, it goes without saying that it is the moral obligation of the state government to assume responsibility for support in its entirety. This has already happened in other federal states [*Länder*], in the American zone, in Bavaria and Hesse as well.

Among other things, the Hessian minister president declared in his inaugural address that providing compensation to the victims of political, racial, and religious persecution was a matter of honor for the Hessian government.

It is not inappropriate to demand a government solution in Württemberg-Baden as well, one that does justice to the victims of Nazi persecution. They fought for freedom by trying to save the German people from today's misery, and a people is only deserving of freedom if it honors those who risked their lives for freedom.

Württemberg-Baden State Committee

of Victims of Political Persecution by the Nazi Regime

signed Hauff.

Source: HStA Stuttgart, EA 1/90, Bue. 725; reprinted in Udo Wengst and Hans Günther Hockerts, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*, Bd. 2/2: 1945–1949: Die Zeit der Besatzungszonen. Sozialpolitik zwischen Kriegsende und der Gründung zweier deutscher Staaten. Dokumente. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, pp. 278–80.

Translation: Insa Kummer

Recommended Citation: Karl Hauff: Memorandum on the Condition of Victims of Political, Racial, and Religious Persecution by the Nazi Regime (1947), published in: German History in Documents and Images,

<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4503>> [May 12, 2024].