

Letter from Karl Lewke to the Central Committee of the SED (December 2, 1945)

Abstract

The letter by KPD functionary Karl Lewke and the enclosed memorandum from December 1945 made clear the difficulties that the Communist leadership in the Soviet occupation zone faced in reintegrating prisoners of war from the East. After their experiences in the Soviet camps, the returnees firmly rejected Communism and distrusted any party-political influence.

Source

Karl Lewke

Berlin 034

Frankfurter Allee 333

Berlin, December 2, 1945

To the

Central Committee of the Party

Gen. Köppe, BL – Greater Berlin, charged me with the Kgf-work on November 2, 1945.

After some initial back and forth and several negotiations with the Central Administration for Resettlers, I undertook an informational trip to Frankfurt/Oder on November 22 and laid the first foundations for purely organizational work.

From November 26–29, I, once more, and again without means of political and material power, clarified purely organizational issues in Frankfurt/Oder. My work to date has consisted of overcoming organizational difficulties, which cannot be considered as having been resolved even now. But be that as it may, what is needed now is the political support of the party, for which reason I am submitting the attached text.

Karl Lewke [signature]

Appendix: 1 Text!

One million anti-Bolshevists heading our way.

The democratic rebuilding of Germany is endangered by the most serious threats.

Every day, between 1,000 and 2,000 prisoners of war pass through the camp gates of Frankfurt/Oder to

freedom. Tired, broken, and ragged, they disperse across Germany. Each one an agitator, each one an instigator against “communist” conditions. Each one, on account of his external appearance, a living demonstration of these very “communist” conditions. All things are twisted, appear in a bad light – if civilians and released prisoners of war meet.

What about acknowledging the shared responsibility of the German people – what about an objective, political discussion? Who in these chance group meeting speaks of reconstruction, collaboration, and the like? No, there is never any talk of that. Here, the consequences of a total war, the effects of a total defeat are merely the evil intentions of the even more evil Bolshevism. Forgotten is Hitler, forgotten Nazism. Indeed, even the awful terrors of the battlefield, the fears, the horror of the thundering bombing nights of biting smoke – all this seems pushed into the distant past. They see only today, all their anger, their hatred is directed against this. They eagerly indulge in the hope of an imminent military confrontation between Russia and England-America. All Nazi insinuations fall on willing ears. The German legion set up by the English is already marching in the English zone. In fact, people know precisely: for four weeks the starved men are first nursed back, six weeks of home vacation makes them ready for new military training.

War, war, and only war, with this obsession thousands of released men are filtering back into the homeland that is hard at work rebuilding and are thus acting like a brake block.

Up to 2,000 men a day are being released from the 3 camps (69 Horn Barracks, Nuhmenstrasse – 2/69 Hoffbauer Barracks, Birnbaumühle – Camp Kliestow)

November 15, 1945 1,400 men

November 16, 1945 12,000 „

November 17, 1945 900 „

November 20, 1945 1,600 „

November 21, 1945 950 „

November 22, 1945 800 „

November 23, 1945 1,670 „

November 26, 1945 1,200 „

November 27, 1945 1,100 „

November 28, 1945 1,800 „

The recruited men are recruited almost entirely from the so-called OK-Group [*ohne Kraft* – without strength], who were brought in from the interior of Russia as well as from Siberia.

(The Russian prisoners of war are divided into

I – heavy workers,

II – workers,

III – light work,

IV – weak and without strength.)

After a journey of up to seven weeks, they climb out of the railway cars. It takes them several hours to get from the train station to the barracks, since they can only drag themselves forward with great effort. A brief stay in the camps of Frankfurt refreshes them to the point that the figures familiar from the streets of Berlin still have a misleading effect. But it is precisely during this time that they are subjected to anti-communist insinuations. Women from West Germany in search of their husbands bring beguiling accounts with them. Even the bread is supposedly already ration-free over there. And the conditions in Frankfurt/Oder are not suited for the prisoners to get a sliver of hope for the road from the civilians. Constantly threatened by assaults from three sides (Red Army personnel minimally involved, to be described as “normal” – the worst category, the East workers traveling eastwards, who don’t want to miss their last chance – third, Poles coming over the Oder), they are also living under very bad conditions.

The so-called permanent staff – the German camp leadership – is suffering from the moral strain that they are de facto excluded from the releases they prepare and carry out every day (I have submitted concrete proposals to that effect). Nor should the purely organizational strain be underestimated. Even the anti-Fascists in camp 69 lack precise guidelines and fixed working methods. They get their details only from the papers. Moreover, the average grunt puts up a certain inner resistance to the anti-Fascists – similar to how he once did to the “Free Germany” as an allegedly Russian agency.

This could be counteracted only by comrades sent in from outside, equipped with relevant documents. Whereby, of course, the practical support of the anti-Fascists should by no means be regarded as unnecessary.

The comrades there need them more so than at any other place. Nothing is accomplished with a few free papers. Special lecturer material would be the least one could do for them first off.

Other things will emerge from the collaboration.

The party on the ground is not able to fulfill such a task. The party comrades are also strongly influenced by the described material conditions.

The general question arises as to whether the KPD alone is able to deal with this problem, or whether all four anti-Fascist parties should proceed together. Since there are also women and girls – in the same starved, wretched state – among the arrivals, there is a new, additional task for the central Women’s Committee.

The work I have done so far has been purely organizational. The only goal was to guide the transport into more or less orderly paths, and especially to avoid Greater Berlin from being touched by those moving homeward.

To this effect, additional suggestions for improvement were offered to the Central Administration for Resettlers.

For the political work, a kind of welcoming letter (free!) after their return to the homeland would be of the utmost importance. The camp commander, Major Aljoschin (in charge of all releases in Frankfurt/Oder), indicated that it could be a million and more men who would arrive in the course of about a year.

The printed material need not be distributed only once, also, it could be designed such that it would be attractive for being passed along. If there is a possibility of financing the welcome letter independently, one should readily dispense with the signatures of political camps other than the SPD, signatures they would surely be happy to provide.

The common soldiers are actually very hungry for news and especially interested in precise information about conditions in Germany. If all agencies cooperate well, one could also integrate instructions for the way home.

All of my addresses were followed with intense attention and the appeals for collaboration on the reconstruction were loudly acclaimed.

Pure party speeches had to be dispensed with for lack of time, since, as I have said, my primary focus was on the organized departure to the destination station Brandenburg/H.

For us communists, however, the absence of Greater Berlin cannot represent a solution to the problem.

Until the return of the last prisoner of war, an apparatus would have to be created that deals only with this question. Given the attitude of many common soldiers that has been ascertained, this work is even more urgent than the work in the unions.

In this context I point to suggestions made several months ago concerning the exchange of German prisoners of war for former party comrades, which other parties are today using to their political advantage, without doing work to that end.

We must be the loudest shouters with the slogan that is becoming popular with wide segments of the population:

EXCHANGE THE PRISONERS OF WAR FOR PCs!

That this slogan is preventing the splitting up of the Nazis is no counterargument. It is a real political fact that Germany will have to make reparations in the form of workers. So if there must be some, let it be active Nazis. If strict guidelines are worked out, there would be a guarantee that this action would not turn into a politically unwise wave of persecution. But many a quarrel upon the return of old enterprise leaders would thus find a simple, quick solution.

All these are only the ideas of a single person. But the problems and work connected with the prisoners of war are so enormous that they can be resolved only by many.

The best men must be freed up for this. The party must not continue to watch without doing anything, and ignorance is hereafter no longer an excuse.

A MILLION ANTI-BOLSHEVISTS ARE ON THEIR WAY

The goal is to win them over ideologically.

Karl Lewke

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Berlin, December 2, 1945

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