

Newspaper Commentary, “Where Clay is Wrong” (October 5, 1948)

Abstract

In the fall of 1948, the military governor of the American zone, Lucius D. Clay, rejected German complaints about the burden posed by “Displaced Persons” by pointing out that these people had in fact been brought to Germany by the Germans themselves. This commentator for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* contradicted Clay and asserted that a large portion of the refugees had come to Germany after the end of the war. He did not believe that Germans were responsible for the stream of refugees; rather, he placed the blame on political conditions in the refugees’ Communist-ruled homelands and on Allied policy.

Source

Where Clay is Wrong

General Clay recently responded to a German complaint by saying that the costs for “Displaced Persons” are not part of the occupation costs, “because the Germans brought these people to Germany” and “have to care for them now.” In purely historical terms alone, his thesis should be somewhat open to challenge. We don’t know whether there is a reliable statistic that could tell us how many DPs who are living with us today were “brought to Germany” by Hitler. We do know, however, that the number of those to whom that does not apply is substantial. Insofar as these people came here under coercion, that coercion was not at the hands of the previous German rulers, but of today’s Communist governments in their respective homelands. Moreover, in contrast to the situation of German refugees from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the exclusive goal of this coercion was to force them to leave their homeland, not to make them go to Germany, of all places. Their reasons for choosing this migration destination, in particular, are obviously beyond our control.

The people who were actually brought here by Hitler against their will are a different matter. We do in fact feel responsible for them, since the barbaric deportation system [that brought them here] operated in our name. On the other hand, it is hardly our fault that these DPs do not want to or are unable to return to their homelands. We do not dismiss the profound tragedy of their situation, but one cannot hold us responsible for the fact that the political systems in their homelands make a return seem inadvisable to them – Clay’s explanation, however, incorporates this very notion of our responsibility. If one wants to examine the question of guilt, the next cause would undoubtedly be the agreement at the Yalta conference, where the Germans did not participate. To be sure, one could argue that Yalta, too, and thus its consequences, as well, were the products of the war instigated by Hitler. But if one were to insist on a historical regression, one would also have to consider the causes that brought about Hitler and for which we are by no means exclusively accountable. And since history as such can only be understood as a “chain reaction,” one would have to see the Fall in Paradise as the real, overall cause of humankind’s misery. Such a perspective may make theological sense, but one must admit that it brings us no closer to practical solutions of the kind called for by the DP problem.

Source: “Hier irrt Clay,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 5, 1948.

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Recommended Citation: Newspaper Commentary, “Where Clay is Wrong” (October 5, 1948), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4122>> [April 29, 2024].