

Residents of the Kabel Neighborhood of Hagen to the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia: Request for the Vacation of Residences Confiscated for Displaced Persons (January 2, 1947)

Abstract

At the beginning of 1947, the residents of the Kabel neighborhood of Hagen approached the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia and demanded the return of the residences and gardens that had been confiscated to accommodate foreign refugees. In harsh words, they denounced their lack of rights, and described themselves as defenselessly exposed to criminality, plundering, and destruction. They demanded that the existing camps be dissolved and their occupants returned to their homelands or integrated into the German labor force.

Source

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Hagen, January 2, 1947

The forcibly evacuated residents of the neighborhood of Kabel, who have signed the appendix below, urgently request that the [local] government approach the military government and advocate the speedy evacuation of the confiscated residences and the return of their gardens.

On May 3, 1945, the residents of the neighborhood of Kabel (with the exception of a small area on the periphery) had to evacuate their homes to make way for foreign workers on orders from the city administration of Hagen. The evacuation order was made known through a public announcement on the evening of May 2, 1945, supposedly on orders of the occupying power. At the time, it was said that the evacuation would be only short term. Nearly two years have now passed. In the meantime, no one gave any thought to where the German population should find shelter in the bombed-out city. Trusting that the evacuation would be only short-lived, many of the evacuated families made do with the most primitive lodgings. These unfortunate beings are still living today in factory spaces, barracks, or attic rooms, often under conditions unfit for humans. They have long since given up on the furnishings and other possessions they left behind.

The experiences we have had with the quartered foreigners in the meantime leave us with no hope of retrieving any significant portion of the property left behind. We shall not go into detail about the hold-ups, gang robberies, the plundering of entire fields, and other harassments that began with the establishment of the camp. There is many a bitter word one could say about this, but these things are probably unimportant in the opinion of the powers that make decisions in Germany, since it is only Germans who are suffering from things being left as they are. It would seem that they are acting on the principle that some use for spoiled children: "You can do anything you want but don't get caught, or I'll have to punish you."

Today, nearly two years after the weapons were laid to rest, Poles are still living in the residences of

evacuated Germans. The Poles pay no rent; restrictions on the use of electricity and gas do not apply to them. Moreover, Kabel has long since been rid of every fence, stable, and shed. Every bit of wood has long since gone into the furnace. The property left behind has been dragged off or sold on the black market. [...]

If the Western democracies are truly serious about fulfilling their promises to give the German people a chance to recover economically, and if there is a willingness to give the Germans the very stuff of life that makes it worth living again, then one cannot ignore the legal dimension.

Along with sufficient food and clothing, the Germans, too, must once again be granted the most basic right of personal property. And if that is the case, then one cannot avoid the dissolution of the camps for foreign workers. For the camps are, and remain, a factor of uncertainty and lawlessness for the Germans. They are a cancerous tumor that will be dangerous to any legal, moral, or economic planning in the future as well. If the Poles do not want to return to their homeland, and if the Allies are not willing to take in these foreigners, the only thing left to do is to integrate them into the German labor force with the same rights, but also the same obligations. Then, there would be no further justification for their privileged status vis-à-vis German workers. The employer should be obligated, out of self-interest, to house these stateless people.

On behalf of all the residents of Kabel, and also on behalf of the Kabel environs, the undersigned request that the government of North Rhine-Westphalia use all legal means [in consultations] with the appropriate authorities to bring about the dissolution of the Polish camp in Kabel by the beginning of the spring planting. In addition, all efforts must be aimed at liquidating the camps for foreign workers as soon as possible, and returning their occupants to their homelands to whatever extent possible. In spite of aid from the UNRRA, the camps weigh heavily on German economic life, and they are a serious burden on the German people's trust in the democratic powers.

Source: BArch, Z 40/468, copy (excerpts); reprinted in Udo Wengst and Hans Günther Hockerts, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland*, Bd. 2/2: 1945–1949: *Die Zeit der Besatzungszonen. Sozialpolitik zwischen Kriegsende und der Gründung zweier deutscher Staaten. Dokumente*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, pp. 248–49.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Residents of the Kabel Neighborhood of Hagen to the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia: Request for the Vacation of Residences Confiscated for Displaced Persons (January 2, 1947), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4120>> [April 30, 2025].