

The City Director of Haltern on the Housing of Displaced Persons (December 16, 1946)

Abstract

Under Allied policy, foreign refugees and expellees were housed in camps on German soil but were not subject to the German authorities. This led to tensions. At the end of 1946, the city director of Haltern in the state of Westphalia, which was part of the British occupation zone, complained that a large portion of the city's undamaged and inhabitable houses had been confiscated to accommodate foreign refugees. He noted that these houses were being plundered by their new inhabitants and were falling into disrepair as a result. Moreover, he explained that crime in the city had risen dramatically since the camp began operations.

Source

The City Director of Haltern to the Main Office for Work Administration for the British Zone, Forced Evictions in order to House Displaced Persons

Haltern, December 16, 1946

In April of last year, after the entry of Allied troops, the new district of Haltern (the so-called New Quarter) was forcibly evacuated within a very short time (sometimes 15 minutes). Local residents had to leave all their possessions behind, and the district was declared a prohibited area (DP camp).

From that time on, the camp housed, alternately, Russians, Italians, Yugoslavs, and most recently Poles exclusively. With this, a time of dire need and utmost hardship began [to descend upon] the inhabitants of this city, half of which was destroyed in the air raids. Unrest and threats, abuses, predatory thefts, and ongoing assaults and plundering all began with this camp. On top of this, the scum of the large cities of the industrial region teamed up with these criminals, and together they have thrown the local population into a panic-like fear of the Poles. The energetic men of the city of Haltern came together on the basis of neighborly aid, and, night after night, without regard for the demands of their jobs or the food crisis, they carry out patrols involving more than 500 volunteers in total. These measures, guided by the administration, have already had a positive effect.

What follows is my response to items 1–6:

- 1.) About 5,000 Poles are currently housed in the DP camp. This number changes constantly through departures and new arrivals.
- 2.) The DP camp consists of the “New City Quarter” and the settlement at the edge of the city. This section, in particular, was considered an adornment in Haltern’s design and was spared by the aerial bombing. It is made up almost entirely of new houses and single-family homes, all of which should be seen as the life work of industrial workers.

All told, there are 414 houses = 869 apartments in that area, where approximately = 3,800 of the evacuated local persons had their residence. If one looks at the extent of the damage in Haltern,

undamaged houses	29%	=	473 houses
slightly damaged houses	52%	=	842 houses

heavily “ “	10%	=	162 houses
completely destroyed “	9%	=	146 houses

the ‘camp’ accounts for about 80% of the undamaged houses and about 30% of the inhabitable houses.

3.) The formerly well cared-for houses and streets are now completely filthy, the gardens and squares resemble the overgrown grounds of old ruins. Even wardrobes are being used in the gardens as toilets. Nothing official is known about the condition of the houses. It is telling, however, that extensive repairs had to be done to the floors, windows, doors, and above all the roofs, of the 15 houses along the right side of Reich Road in Haltern-Wesel that were recently returned to evacuated local residents. The furnishings of these houses are missing.

4.) Many of these evacuated residents, such as miners, railway workers, and other workers are forced to watch as the floors, doorframes, and window frames they acquired through hard work are torn from their property and burned, and as their small houses are completely given over to decay. Most recently, camp inmates have begun to remove the roofs of the houses and to burn the roof beams and roof laths. This has rendered the empty houses and nearly all the barns completely unusable. The furnishings have been mostly sold at black-market prices or have been taken by Poles who were moved to other camps. Only a few pieces could be returned to their owners with the help of the police.

5.) Because of the destruction caused by earlier camp inmates and the congregation of many people in individual houses, living space in the prohibited area is not being fully used. As a result, additional structures are falling victim to the destructive rage of certain elements.

6.) Whereas a general survey conducted at the outset provided a picture of the untenable situation in Haltern, these statements should now be corroborated with facts:

The following, more serious crimes have been committed in the city and the district of Haltern since the camp for foreigners began operations:

	1945	1946 1.1.46 – 3.31.46	1946 4.1.46 – 6.30.46	1946 7.1.46 – 9.30.46	1946 10.1.46 – 12.16.46
Murder and manslaughter	12	1	-	1	-
Robberies on farms	about 420	33	5	7	13
Other robberies and break-ins	about 550	65	38	22	12
Large animals stolen	about 720	32	5	26	-
Small animals stolen	more	85	28	27	5
Bicycles stolen	about	27	37	42	18
Clothes	about	660	36	14	54
Watches	about	10	2	8	8

The countless smaller thefts are not included in these statistics.

The long held hope of the final dissolution of the DP camp (to which end several offices have taken hitherto unsuccessful steps) is the only thing that is helping the population of Haltern to endure the chaotic conditions that exist at the moment.

Source: BArch, Z 40/468, copy; 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. 229–31.

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