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Germany at *Stunde Null* (1945)

Refugees, DPs, Victims

> “In 1951, at a time when talks had begun with Israel on reparations, 68% [of Germans surveyed] believed that Jews who had suffered should be helped. However, Jews were placed last on a list of victims of war and persecution - after war widows and orphans, bombing victims, refugees and the families of the members of the resistance movement of the 20th of July 1944”
>
> (Bergmann and Erb 1990: 254).

War creates a sense of victimization that is not unique to any particular group. It is also a necessary reminder that those liberated and moving about at war’s end in Europe were not only those imprisoned in camps or working under duress for the Reich and German industries, but also liberated POWs, children and others evacuated from areas threatened by bombing, members of the Nazi Party and formerly exiled or imprisoned political opponents of the Nazis. Soon to be added to this mix were ethnic German expellees and those fleeing from the Soviet into the Western Zones.

It is estimated, for example, that 2-3 million German soldiers died in the course of the war, 1-2 million more were missing (many disappearing into Russian camps they did not return from), and half a million civilians perished as a direct result of bombing and combat. At least 4.5 million soldiers were wounded, and on VE-Day, 3 million German soldiers were in American custody (Sorge 1986: 61-71; Davis 1967: 45). Such losses help explain why in the 1946 German census there were 10 women for every 8 men, and why one of the enduring postwar images was of women clearing rubble (*Trümmerfrauen*) in bombed-out cities.

The scope of the movement is difficult to imagine. It has been estimated that in May, 1945, 40% of the population was on the move in Germany, that by August perhaps 25-30,000 refugees from Eastern Europe were reaching Berlin daily, and that by the end of the year, nearly one-third of the residents of Bavaria, Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein were refugees (Pötzsch 1997: 22). As many as 11-13 million fled from Eastern Europe, as much for ethnic as political reasons, by British estimates there were already more than 7 million refugees and expellees in the Western zones (16% of the population) by October 1946, and the 1950 census indicated that in the Federal Republic at that time, 9.6 million (around 20%) had arrived during or after the war (Moeller 1997: 54). Where people were migrating depended upon their nationality and physical location at the end of the war, so that French or Dutch forced laborers were heading west out of the US or British Zones at the same time that Poles, Balts or those in the Soviet Occupied Zone were heading west into the US or British Zones.

Reich statistics indicated a total of about 7.5 million foreign workers and POWs in the Reich as of October 1944 (Wagenführ 1954: 139; Eichholtz 1996: 243), and according to General Clay, “Allied armies advancing in Germany had uncovered almost 6.5 million displaced persons, the great majority of whom had been brought into Germany for forced labor” (Clay 1970: 231). Employing “the kind of hurry-up humanitarianism in which Americans excel” (Friedrich 1948: 180), more than 4 million of these DPs had been rapidly repatriated by the end of July, including a least 1 million Russians and more than 500,000 Frenchmen (Zink 1947: 107). The remaining 2 million DPs were collected in "assembly centers," cared for by UNRRA (late 1944 to June 1947), and continued repatriation efforts reduced their number to about 500-600,000 by November - a number that began to climb again as expellees from Poland and the Balkans began arriving (Ziemke 1975: 355; Clay 1970: 232).

Those who did not want to return home included Poles, Yugoslavs and Balts who were unwilling to live in territories now under Soviet or Communist Party control or who feared continued persecution (Davis 1967: 184). Some of these wanted to (and did) wreak vengeance on Germans or engaged in the black market while they lived in the camps, and many remained in limbo because they were "stateless" and the traditional countries of immigration, like the US, were slow to make immigration possible (Peterson 1977: 117). Among the DPs were Soviets trying to claim they were Ukrainians as well as former Nazi collaborators trying to avoid detection - and non-German Jews (Ziemke 1975: 356). It meant that even with the war over, some Jewish survivors found themselves still in camps for months and even years living in close proximity with potential (or former) victimizers, and frightened to reveal just who they were (Hilliard 1997: 69-74).

Before the death marches out of the concentration camps, 500,000 or so of the imprisoned Jews may still have been alive. But the deprivations, epidemics and starvation of the last weeks may have taken up to 60% of them. We do not know what the total number of survivors is, perhaps only 200,000 or so, and can only base our numerical estimates on grim facts such as that of the 60,000 prisoners who were freed at

Bergen-Belsen, 9,000 died within two weeks of liberation (Königseder and Wetzel 1994: 14).

DPs were housed in dozens of camps, and Jews were not initially separated out as a group. As of April 30, 1947, there were still about 650,000 DPs in such camps: 189,000 Poles, 165,000 Balts, 105,000 Ukrainians and 138,000 Jews in all of west Germany (Clay 1970: 232). In the American sector, 36,000 Jewish DPs were registered in January 1946, but by October the number had climbed to 141,000, and according to a different count, by November more than 111,000 Jews had found refuge in the American Zone. (Königseder and Wetzel 1994: 47). Those Jews who remained in camps were mostly Eastern European, and composed of two groups: a small group of camp and ghetto survivors (including those who had fled death transports and joined partisan bands) nearly all aged 18-45, and a much larger group of Polish and Russian Jews who could see no future for themselves and were hoping to emigrate to Palestine and were using Germany as a waystation. An UNRRA study of November 1946 carried out among the 127,000 Jews living in the American Zone found that 71% were Poles, 6% Hungarians, 4% Czechs, 2.5% German, 2.5% Rumanian, 2% Austrian and more than 10% stateless or from other countries (Königseder and Wetzel 1994: 56-57).

Destruction, Dislocation, Infrastructure

Transportation

The Allies arrived to find a Germany in which much of the transportation infrastructure was damaged. 65% of the locomotives and 75% of the freight cars available in 1936 had survived, but only 40% of these locomotives and 70% of the freight cars were actually serviceable. In the Bizone, most of the track was still usable, but 4,500 signals and 13,000 switches as well as the largest urban train stations and yards had been destroyed, and across the country about a third of all railway stations were gone. Nearly two-thirds of the missing 2,472 railroad bridges had been blown up by the Wehrmacht (Benz 1989: 251).

Things were not much better on the roads: 40% of them were unusable, and car production capacity was down 40% as well (Moeller 1997:55; Benz 1989: 250). The few who had cars when Germany capitulated could not run them for lack of fuel: even by early 1945, Allied bombing had so destroyed gasoline production plants that horses and oxen were used to drag armored cars and artillery to the front (Eichholtz 1996: 150). But as it was, the Occupation authorities initially didn't want civilians moving about in the first place, and issued curfew and movement limitation orders (no more than 6 km from home). Though local public transportation could be used, it was decreed that "railways, private cars, bicycles and private motorbikes must not be used without special permission" (Malzahn 1991:148-49). Railroads initially only transported troops, military supplies and displaced persons; food and firewood were transported by truck, but here too, only about 25,000 trucks in the Bizone were either operable or available to civilians (Ziemke 1975: 351).

Housing

According to the estimate of the US Strategic Bombing Survey, the half-million tons of bombs released over the 61 largest German cities (population > 100,000) during the war resulted in the destruction of about 3.6 million residential units, or around 20% of the housing in Germany (Sorge 1986: 110). The destruction was quite uneven, however, in the areas Americans came to control. Bavaria, a largely rural region with some larger cities, only saw 13% of its housing destroyed, while in heavily urban Bremen the figure was 42% (Schraut 1995: 229).

The housing needs thus varied locally, and in the largest cities in the American Zone, the situations were acute: more than half of all the residential buildings in Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich (inner city) were either seriously damaged or completely destroyed, leaving behind an estimated 27 million cubic meters of rubble (Boehling 1996: 81, 90, 106). A US Group Control Council Survey of Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Nürnberg and Kassel in September of 1945 found "that three-quarters of the inhabited houses needed repairs. More than half had no windows; a third had damaged roofs, and a quarter unsound walls" (Ziemke 1975: 351). In Frankfurt, whose 1945 population was about 270,000, most of the population (173,000) was living in ruins and basements, and the housing situation was not eased by the fact that 8% of the residences were requisitioned by Occupation troops (affecting 33,000 residents). From mid-May to mid-August, in addition, 92,000 expellees arrived, and at least a thousand soldiers and air raid evacuees returned to Frankfurt each week for the next year (Boehling 1996: 80-81).

Industry

Despite the hopes Allies had about crippling German industry during the course of the war, overall production was temporarily slowed rather than stopped. At the end of the war, in May, 1945, the country had greater industrial potential than at the beginning, and it was estimated that the capital stock and the net investment wealth had actually increased by about 20% compared to 1936 (Eichholtz 1996: 677-78). But the collapse of supply networks and the lack of raw material and energy sources meant in the US Zone that while factory owners had enough funds "to clean up and put their plants in order, afterwards all they could do was wait for coal, electricity and materials" (Ziemke 1975: 350).

The reviving of Germany industry was complicated in the immediate postwar years by what can only be described as mixed motivations on the part of the Allies. On the one hand, the Allies wanted to destroy Germany's economic potential to wage war (Potsdam and London Agreements in 1946 and 1949) by prohibiting production of war material, aircraft and atomic material. This was expanded to include prohibitions on producing synthetic rubber and oil, primary magnesium and beryllium, limiting the maximum size of certain machine tools, the total output of aluminum, steel, synthetic ammonia, chlorine and styrene, as well as the speed and tonnage of ships (Clay 1970: 324). In addition, Americans were convinced, as heirs to "trust-busting" attitudes about industry, that the German war machine had been made possible by economic monopolies, and therefore planned to decartelize, demonopolize, and decentralize industry (cf. "Prohibition of Excessive Concentration of German Economic Power," US Military Government Law No. 56 of February 12, 1947 in State Department 1950: 344). These desires implied not only seizing and closing plants but also reorganizing entire basic industries such as coal, steel, or iron and thus being deeply involved in the management of industrial enterprises.

On the other hand, at Yalta and again at Potsdam, while it was agreed that Germany should pay reparations for the damage it had caused, Germany should also retain enough to allow for a rebuilding of a viable peacetime economy. Reparations in the form of dismantled industrial plants that could be moved were compatible with the desired restrictions on, say, war material production, and in 1946 from 1,500-2,000 industrial plants were being appraised by the Allied Control Authority. But by December, 1947, only 682 plants were still under discussion as “surplus and available for reparations” (186 in the US Zone, 496 in the British Zone), of which 40 had by that time been dismantled and removed from US and British Zones, most of them previously used “exclusively for the manufacture of war materials” (State Department 1950: 413-14; Benz 1989: 73-74; Latour and Vogelsang 1973: 159-161). An unknown amount of “capital equipment was being taken from the Soviet Zone and shipped to the East,” and by March of 1948, the Soviet Union had withdrawn from the Allied Control Council for both political and economic reasons; by this time only 140 industrial plants (43 in the US Zone, 62 in the British) were still under consideration for dismantling as reparations payments (State Department 1950: 422).

The wish to limit or break up German industrial production, and use war plants for reparations, was incompatible with the rebuilding of the German economy. A joint statement by State and War Departments on August 29, 1947, was blunt about this: “The old plan provided for very sharp cuts in production capacities…from which the bulk of reparations were to be obtained. It is impossible to provide a self-sustaining economy in the bizonal area without materially increasing the levels in these industries" ("Revised Plan for Level of Industry in the Combined U.S.-U.K. Zones of Germany" in State Department 1950: 358). Reparations themselves, particularly when they involved moving industrial plants from West to East, also ran afoul of the growing tensions with the Russians and their refusal to treat Germany as a single economic unit.

Food

"For three years the problem of food was to color every administrative action," General Clay wrote, and there were many reasons for it (Clay 1950: 263). Germany was not self-sufficient in food, and the loss of territory in the east meant also the loss of the agricultural land that had provided food surpluses (in grain, vegetables, and meat) (Moeller 1997: 55). Even if food surpluses were available, the trains to transport food were unavailable. "Normally," Ziemke noted, "the half of the Rhineland south of the Mosel imported a half million tons of food every day," the equivalent of one fifty-car trainload, but there were not enough vehicles available to ensure that even local produce could be moved (1975: 194).

The greater problem was the lack of food production itself, for no one was at work in the fields by mid-1945. Horses and young men had been drafted into the Wehrmacht, thousands of acres were mined, and "the foreign workers and POWs who had made up the bulk of the agricultural labor force quit and took to the roads as soon as the front passed" (Ziemke 1975: 195). American efforts to help were stymied by depleted global food reserves owing to the war, distribution difficulties, disagreements with the British, an exceptionally hard winter in 1946, and a drought in 1947. Rations were so low that "60% of Germans were living on a diet that would inevitably lead to diseases caused by malnutrition," according to nutrition survey teams (Ziemke 1975: 352). Even with what could be provided from hoarded food or from relatives in the countryside, it was not enough (Malzahn 1991: 114-18).

There was, however, a flourishing black market for food, at least part of which was driven by currency questions (would Reichsmark be supplanted by Allied military Marks? By dollars? Or in practice by cigarettes or other commodities?), that would be resolved seemingly overnight with the sudden reappearance of food on store shelves after the currency reform of 1948. Initially, however, "we could not hope to develop democracy on a starvation diet" (Clay 1970: 266), so in mid-1945 US troops were pressed into service to distribute seeds and fertilizer, the 12th Army Group released at least 400,000 POWs for farm labor, and in June SHAEF started to import 650,000 tons of wheat (Ziemke 1975: 274-75). Perhaps most psychologically (as well as nutritionally) nourishing, however, were the contracts made in 1946 between the US Military Government, American welfare agencies and the Red Cross to provide food (and later other items) in the form of CRALOG and CARE packages. The acronyms stood for the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed to Operate in Germany and the Cooperative of American Remittances to Europe, and by 1948 the two had provided 29 million dollars worth of assistance to the US Zone alone (Clay 1970: 276-77).

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