

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DB - 21
Spaniels and St. Bernards:
Refugees, Part II.

Plockstrasse 8
Giessen, Germany
January 18, 1958

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

One of the many German anecdotes about refugees goes like this:

A fugitive spaniel from East Germany is trotting down the street in a West German town. Suddenly, he finds himself face to face with a local St. Bernard. "Hey, watch where you're going, you little mutt," says the big dog, "now move out of my way!" Unintimidated, the spaniel glances up and barks his reply: "Don't talk so big, buster. I was a St. Bernard once myself."

The story is a commentary on the fact that many refugees have tended to boast about their former importance after landing here in the Bundesrepublik; as if to say, "I may be small stuff here, but I was a big-shot at home."

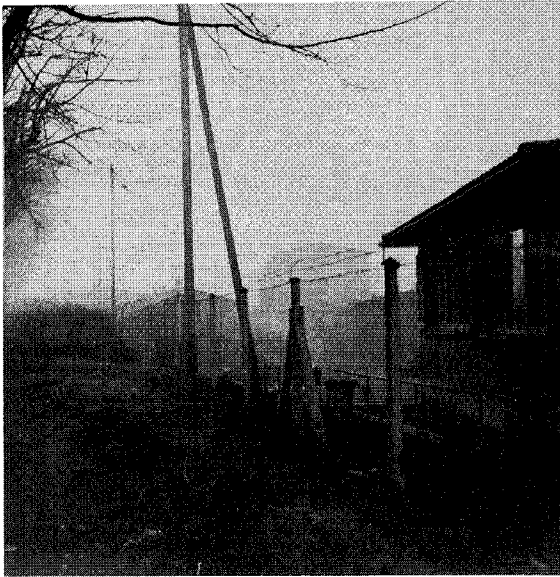
Here in Giessen, the Bundesrepublik maintains a refugee reception center which is designed to separate the spaniels from the St. Bernards, and the wolves from the sheep. This establishment is called an Emergency Admission Camp. A second such camp is located at Uelzen in Lower Saxony, and a third in West Berlin. Together, they process every single incoming refugee.

The local camp is situated on the alluvial fen which borders the Lahn River by the Giessen railroad yards. It consists of three large permanent buildings - two for administration and one a dormitory - and four barracks dating from wartime. Barbed wire fence surrounds the camp, more to keep undesirables out than the refugees in. However, it gives the camp a morose air.

The Hesse State Government is responsible for the technical administration of Giessen's camp. That means the state takes care of feeding, bedding, medical examinations, and social services within the camp.

The local facilities can accommodate a maximum of 700 refugees at one time. However, it has been years since that number was reached. At present, about 230 are housed in the large permanent dormitory during their 3 - 4 - day - average stays. Single girls are put up in a separate building run by a charity organization, and young boys are housed in a new dormitory at Krofdorf, a village 2 miles northwest of Giessen.

The director of the state operation is Richard Lehm, also a refugee in a way. He is a native of the Sudetenland. As an anti-Nazi, he fled to England following Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia. He served with the British and Canadian armies after D-Day.



A Morose Air

Lehm supervises 95 employees. It is a many-sided job - including the management of a dining hall, a laundry, a bedding supply, a medical center, a library, a community hall, a kindergarten, and an office which gives each refugee 12 cents a day pocket money. He also acts as liason man between the state and federal refugee agencies, the various intelligence services which have their offices in the camp, the church charity organizations, the Y.M.C.A., and the Giessen City refugee office.

Lehm has arranged it so that the incoming refugees take care of some of their own needs - cleaning the dormitories, doing some of their own laundry, and self-service in the dining hall. "My main hope now," he says, "is to get rid of these unsightly barracks we have left from the war. Fortunately, we don't have to press them into service as dormitories right now."

The Admission Camps are really screening centers. Each refugee must be cleared through one of them in order to have his flight legitimized. It is here that the refugees are given the first of a series of interrogations.

The inquiries determine: 1--The reason for fleeing East Germany; 2--Whether the refugee has a criminal record; 3--Whether the refugee has debts; 4--Where the refugee's relatives are living; 5--Whether the refugee has connections with either Soviet Zone military organizations or security agencies.

Each refugee fills out a questionnaire involving these subjects and his biography. The questionnaires are then assayed by an "admission committee" consisting of three examiners - most of whom are qualified judges. If there is something fishy or unclear about the written answers, the committee calls in the refugee for a hearing. On the basis of these questionnaires and hearings, the committees then decide what sort of admission the refugee is entitled to.

For instance, if the refugee can prove that he fled for political reasons - persecution or fear of reprisals - then he is eligible for a sizeable monetary compensation from the Federal Government.

Similarly, youths are given extra benefits - especially those who wish to continue their studies in high school or at a university. Refugees who have fled in order to join members of their families who are already in the West are also entitled to extra compensation.

Surprising as it may seem, only a few of the refugees in recent years have been able to claim "political" reasons for their flights. Last year their number ranged from 6 to 8 per cent of the total.

Another 18 per cent fled to join their families; 17 per cent were given compensation as youths, and 40 per cent were listed as "hardship" cases.

In 1957, the Giessen camp's four admission committees scrutinized 72,000 refugees. The decisions they reached were by no means binding. They are more a kind of recommendation. A refugee who is unsatisfied with the committee decision may appeal it to a review board and then through the ordinary courts. What the committee decision determines is how much and what type of Federal aid the refugee should receive.

Following the preliminary screening here at Giessen, the refugee moves on to the state where he expects to settle (excepting those, of course, who remain in Hesse). If he has no place to live, representatives of the state see to it that he gets room in a transit camp.

The refugee then reports to the local refugee office such as the one run by Herr Fernhomberg (DB - 20) here in Giessen. There he is again interviewed by an examining commission similar to the Giessen camp committees. Only this time, the committees are run by the state, not the Federal government. Their decisions are binding. Furthermore, they are empowered to reverse the decisions made by the Federal committees at the admission camps. And they often do, much to the disgust of the Federal authorities.

A couple of weeks ago, I sat in on two dozen Federal admission committee hearings. They ranged in duration from 10 minutes to an hour. The variety of cases was enormous, and I came away feeling that I had seen a fairly representative spread of the refugees currently entering West Germany.

The three-man committee sits at a long table which is piled with case folders, source books about the Soviet Zone, pencils, pens, and ashtrays. The refugees wait outside on benches until they are called for individual hearings. Each case is delegated to a single examiner, who familiarizes himself thoroughly with the refugee's questionnaire. He tells his colleagues about the salient aspects of the case and directs the hearing. The examiners take turns running the questioning.

Although it is not required, all of the committee examiners at the Giessen camp were themselves refugees. Most of them spent some years living under Communist rule in East Germany and they are well-versed in what is going on there today. Several of them remarked to me that they are on blacklists in the Soviet Zone because of their current work. It was suggested to me that I not take their pictures or write their names.

Following are some of the cases examined recently by Giessen admission committees:

Ernst Rademacher is a 54-year-old machinist. He is totally bald, and his drooping features would give him an expression of complete dejection if it were not for his soup ladle ears. For the past 5½ years he has worked in a small East Berlin factory. "Why did you flee?" asked the examiner. Rademacher blinked slowly and replied: "The F.D.G.B. (Communist union) told me I'd have to take a wage cut and a different job classification."

Yes, he had complained to the union directorate. But they told him his claim would be considered only if he were to agree to spy on his co-workers. Rademacher refused. The examiner asked if he had ever done any work for the S.E.D. (Socialist Unity Party of Germany - the Communist party). Rademacher said he was sent once to West Berlin to make propaganda among the workers, but a West German cop turned him back. He twisted his cap in his lap. The examiner told him to step into the hall. "He's just a victim of the labor policy of the system," the examiner told his colleagues. They agreed and decided to grant Rademacher admission as a hardship case. That means the machinist immediately received a \$500 compensation from the Government.

Rudolf Rose has a sharp face, shifty hazel eyes, and a mop of unruly black hair. He is 22. It took a half an hour to get him to the committee room, and then only after repeated calls over the camp's loudspeakers. The examiner, a woman, confessed to the others that she was somewhat prejudiced against Rudolf. Pointing to his identity card, she remarked that he had forged something on it. It appeared that Rudolf is married and has three children. He had falsified his pass to read that he was divorced.

"Well, what about it, Herr Rose?" asked the examiner, "what's your reason for coming here." The reluctant Rudolf stammered a bit and then mumbled something about having "arguments" with his boss. He was a transport worker in a private business and he said he wasn't getting paid regularly. After failing once, he finally slipped across the border into Bavaria.

"Come now," said the examiner, "you mean to say that your wife had trouble with you, so you ran out on her. Then you falsified your papers and went west. Isn't that so?" The youth murmured an affirmative. After sending him out, the examiners grudgingly agreed to grant him admission - on the lowest scale. "We'll have to take care of his wife eventually anyway," said the woman.

Inge Knutsen is a 47-year-old native of Schleswig in West Germany. She has a plain face, rimless glasses, and her dull blonde hair is bound back in a severe bun. Half her life she has worked as a parish assistant for the Lutheran Church. A few years ago, she went to East Berlin to accept a post with a church group there. Why? "I felt the people in the East needed us," she told the committee. So, for 160 marks a month (about \$40), she worked as long as she could. "Finally," she said, "I just couldn't manage all the work. I got sick. The S.E.D. said they would declare me Republikfluchtig if I quit. My pastor told me to get out as soon as I could." The examining committee was impressed by this simple woman's altruism and granted her hardship aid.

Wolfgang Köhler's gaunt face was deeply tanned, although it was the middle of winter. He had just escaped from East Germany via Egypt. A sandy-haired 35-year-old, Köhler is a construction engineer. Early last year, the D.D.R. sent him and two other East Germans to Alexandria to build a power station. He had signed a contract to work in Egypt for two years. His family was scheduled to join him last summer.

Meanwhile, his two German colleagues returned to the D.D.R. in August, leaving Köhler alone in charge of an Egyptian construction crew.

He was getting along all right on his \$5 per diem until one day he was informed his family couldn't join him. The reason given was that there was no satisfactory school for his child. There is, in fact, a German school in Alexandria, but it is run by the Bundesrepublik. That was unacceptable to the D.D.R.

Köhler began to feel isolated and lonely. So he made friends with some West Germans who were working in Alexandria. Representatives from the D.D.R.'s Alexandria trade delegation warned him to keep away from West Germans. He persisted. About Christmas, Köhler was set to go home to East Berlin on leave. He bought a plane ticket which was routed through Switzerland. The D.D.R. trade people took the ticket away and got him another routed through Czechoslovakia. This made Köhler suspicious that he might be arrested on his return to Communist territory. So he got a ticket to West Germany and took off.

The examining board heard this story and looked at the corroborating evidence. They granted Köhler admission to the Bundesrepublik as a political refugee.

The next three cases involve Vopos (people's police). They were Erich Graber, a 27-year-old expellee from East Prussia, slender, with thinning blond hair; Karl Hübner, 33, a powerfully-built former S.S. man, well-dressed, a long nordic head, and unnordic black hair; Horst Buchwald, 32, who hails from Goethe's Weimar, a stocky fellow with florid cheeks and a resonant bass voice.

Graber enlisted in the Volkspolizei in 1950. He was trained in the tank corps and later became a cadre officer. In order to attain officer grade, he joined the S.E.D. in 1953. Graber told the examiners that his way towards flight began in the fall of 1956. A brother officer asked him to procure some penicillin to cure a case of syphilis. Graber sent his wife to West Berlin for the medicine. Someone revealed this to the security police. He was arrested to quarters for 10 days and forced to withdraw from the S.E.D. This was his excuse for fleeing.

Hübner was a machinist for a time after the war. "I was pressured into the Volkspolizei in 1955," he said. This didn't sound so convincing after one of the examiners pointed out that Hübner had voluntarily joined the S.E.D. back in 1947. He must have been politically reliable, the examiners concluded, because he was immediately assigned to security work in the Volkspolizei - first with the "internal troops" of the "ministry of Interior, and later with the S.S.D. (state security service) as a sergeant major.

"I had to spy on my comrades," he admitted, "write reports on their mood, and check their weapons for faultiness." An examiner asked him if he denounced many comrades. "Several," said Hübner, remorsefully. How many of the Vopos are politically reliable, he was asked. "Forty per cent," Hübner replied. Last August, Hübner's enlistment was up. However, he continued to work for the S.S.D. after being mustered out. "I got a noseful," he said sadly, "they caused me mental suffering."

Buchwald joined the so-called Kasernierte Volkspolizei (garrisoned people's police) in 1949. By last November he had attained the rank of first lieutenant. During a leave, he and his wife decided to skedaddle.

His wife went first to West Berlin, after slipping past the D.D.R. guards on the interurban line. This caused the army to discharge Buchwald. He followed his wife by hiding in the back of a truck. His reason for quitting the D.D.R.: "After Stalin's death and Hungary, I wasn't in agreement with the policies there. It was a hard decision, and I sort of slid into it."

These three Vopos had been grabbed up by American intelligence agents as soon as they arrived in the West. They were thoroughly interrogated, as is the practice with most Vopo deserters. Later, they were questioned by German intelligence agents. The Americans had taken away their identity papers; a common practice. Because the Vopos have no Ausweise, the Federal refugee authorities are compelled to accept them as legitimate fugitives, whether they like it or not.

The Giessen admission committee didn't care for this situation and said so to me. They cited the example of Vopo Graber. During the inquiry, it came out that he had recently divorced his wife, left her with two children, conceived a third child by another woman, married her, and then skipped to the West. "He has no intentions of supporting either wives or children," said one examiner, "and his 'excuse' sounds flimsy. But we have to take him."

Indeed, the current admission regulations are so loose that only a fraction of one per cent of the refugees are now being rejected for Federal aid. One case I saw was that of a 28-year-old mineworker with a long criminal record as a thief, black marketeer, and smuggler. He was rejected. But that does not mean he will be returned to the Soviet Zone. On the contrary, he remains in the West. Any applications he might make for aid would go through federal or state social service channels.

Other admission hearings concerned:

- 1--A farm wife who had been a member of the Nazi Party and later of the S.E.D. She couldn't fulfil her production norm and was recently moved off her farm. She and her son became tenant farmers. One day, the government ordered them to pay her deceased husband's debts, amounting to \$10,000. So she and her son fled.
- 2--A 54-year-old woman accountant and her daughter who came into conflict with the police after she criticized the regime. One night she saw a policeman come to her door. She and her daughter escaped by the back way and over a garden wall.
- 3--A 45-year-old S.E.D. party functionary who got into trouble after someone denounced him as a former Nazi Party member - "I simply couldn't work under that constant pressure; they made me go to party school."
- 4--A woman doctor and her teen-aged son. She was anxious to get away from her Communist big-shot husband, and to have her son study in the West.

After these hearings, the examiners made it a point to tell me that roughly half of these refugees had been in serious danger at the time they fled - in danger of arrest if not imprisonment. The other half, they added, ranged from mildly undesirable to seriously associal types. These examiners made an extremely good impression: hard-working, thoroughly acquainted with the material, and skilled in questioning.

Their boss at Giessen is a kindly Silesian with a rugged face, Herr Georg Pluschke. Himself a refugee in 1951, he came here after working in Giessen's sister camp at Ueisen for five years. Pluschke is 52. He was a lawyer and later a judge during his stay in the Zone. "I set a lot of political prisoners free while I was judge," he said. "Everything went well until I became uncomfortable for them and fog'." Pluschke stuffed a few belongings in a rucksack and hiked across the Zone border near Hof, Bavaria.

Here are some of the things Georg Pluschke says about refugees and his work with them:

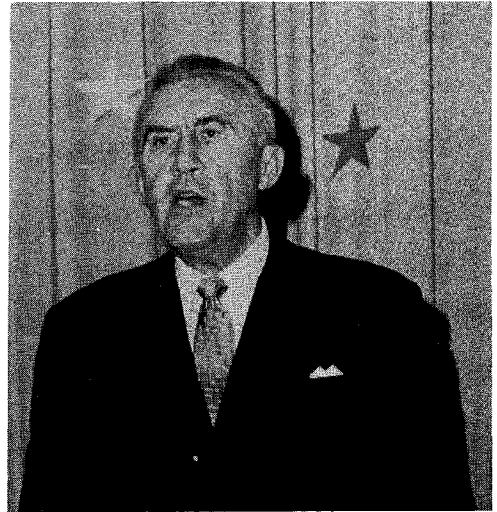
"Right now we're handling about 6,000 cases per month in Giessen. A thousand of these are oral hearings. For that I've got about 100 employees - including those who run our file (a whole floor full of records containing information on every refugee who passes through Giessen).

"Our attitude towards fleeing the Zone is: stay as long as you can; then come, we'll do something for you."

(Asked about unpleasant types among the refugees) "These people have lived under nothing but dictatorship - a dozen years of swastika and another dozen of hammer and sickle."

"I'd say 80 per cent of the people in the Zone are carrying on passive resistance to the regime. Another 10 per cent are carrying on active resistance, but their number is smaller and smaller. The rest are party functionaries and fanatics. But we get them too, as refugees.

"If reunification came today, I think many refugees would go back. But every day that passes the number will be that much less. I would go back, yes, as a 'pioneer' - knowing that it would be an unpleasant job."



An Unpleasant Job...

David Binder
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