

'The refugee problem' from the Deutsche Volkszeitung (24 July 1945)

Caption: On 24 July 1945, the Deutsche Volkszeitung, periodical of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany, focuses on the difficult issue of the fate of German refugees.

Source: Deutsche Volkszeitung. Zentralorgan der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands. 24.07.1945, Nr. 36; 1. Jg. Berlin: Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands. "Das Flüchtlingsproblem", p. 1.

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The refugee problem

Columns of refugees move along the country roads: old men, women and large numbers of children, stumbling along from place to place, generally without any definite destination. These are German people, who are now suffering the consequences of Hitler's demented policies which led millions of Germans to abandon their livelihoods and go off to conquer foreign lands that belonged to other peoples. The misfortune of these refugees is just part of the disaster wrought on Germany by an imperialist policy of conquest. It is important to recognise this fact, because it should guide us as we now seek ways and means to provide the refugees with stable homes, jobs and livelihoods. In this process, the principle should also hold good that the main offenders — together with their assets — be enlisted, if necessary, to alleviate the misery of the refugees and to supply their greatest needs.

The main offenders have been — together with the Nazi leaders — those reactionary big landowners, supporters of a militarism hostile to ordinary people, whose aristocratic arrogance and greed for land was one of the strongest motivating forces behind the Nazi system and the centuries-old watchword of the 'Drive towards the East', pursued with such insatiable rapacity. These forces have led Germany time and time again into military confrontations with Russia and Poland.

It is well known that the action programme of the Communist Party of Germany calls for the liquidation of the large estates and their division amongst the farmers ruined and made destitute by the war. Amongst these are the refugees who, as convinced democratic workers, want to play their part in reconstruction, but we must constantly keep sight of the fact that there are in these columns of refugees many who allowed themselves to be lured to the East by Hitler and settled on plundered farms, the rightful owners of which were either expelled or exterminated. These people have no one to blame but themselves. On the other hand, new homes should and will be given to honest farm-workers and farmers.

A start has already been made. Thousands upon thousands of refugees are to be settled in Mecklenburg and Pomerania, where there is room on the estates of the big landowners. It is a welcome sign that local councils in the Mark Brandenburg have taken the first steps towards settling refugees on the manorial estates in the Mark. Measures are being introduced here that will lead to a lasting solution to the refugee problem.

It is in the nature of things that we cannot solve the refugee problem overnight in the minutest detail, but all the basic essential steps can now be taken. First and foremost, the futile wanderings of the refugees must stop immediately. Only in cases where columns of refugees are heading towards definite destinations should they continue their journeys. All those refugees who are wandering pointlessly and aimlessly from place to place — frequently going round and round in circles — must be made to settle. The longer the present situation continues, the more susceptible they will be to falling into bad ways and causing damage to agricultural land. It is short-sighted in the extreme for certain local authorities to force those refugees passing through simply to move on, without these people knowing where they are going. If this were done everywhere, the problem would never be solved.

At the conference attended by the provincial authority, *Land* councils and mayors of the Mark Brandenburg, it was pleasing to discover that many local authorities are trying hard to find a real solution. There are parts of the country where tens of thousands of refugees have already found secure accommodation. They are employed to bring in the harvest. It is a fact that, in many places, saving the harvest would have been significantly more difficult, if not impossible, without the help of the refugees, who are, to a large extent, experienced agricultural workers and farmers. *Land* councils that were initially reluctant to receive refugees do not now want them to leave.

We all know that, hard on the heels of the cereal harvest, comes the even more labour-intensive lifting of root vegetables and autumn crops. So there is work for those refugees accommodated in the countryside for weeks and months ahead. With understanding, good will and a willingness to make sacrifices, all refugees can be accommodated, including also those less able to work. We have learned of cases where local authorities have retained the most productive workers from the passing columns of refugees on the spot and have simply sent the rest — among them women and children — on their way into the unknown. These

practices are in no way consistent with the new spirit that is supposed to prevail these days in our welfare departments. We want to help everyone who has been forced into destitution by the demented policies of the Nazis. On the other hand, responsible local authorities that make every effort to solve the refugee problem, working hard and often experiencing great difficulties, have every right to demand honest labour from all those refugees who are fit for work. However, those who do not wish to work should not be allowed to share the scarce resources remaining. By working hard and strictly obeying official instructions, refugees can earn the right to food and lodgings and can contribute towards reconstruction.

Hitler has left our people a dreadful legacy. Only by taking gradual steps to tackle the problems and by harnessing all our energies shall we overcome the mountain of difficulties that towers before us. Yet even such a complicated question as settling the great river of refugees can be solved if it is tackled correctly. We must succeed in giving these uprooted, homeless people a new home in a democratic Germany. It is also a touchstone of the actual will to rebuild this country of all those anti-Fascist forces that want to lead our people towards a peaceful and better future.