



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961
From the City of Aachen's Social Report on Family Housing (1947)

Concrete examples from the West German city of Aachen attest to the catastrophic living conditions that still prevailed even two years after the end of the war. Apartment buildings were dilapidated, poorly heated, and had inadequate sanitary facilities and furniture.

Family Josef G., 11 persons, inhabits a Nissen hut along Triererstraße. In addition to the mother and the head of the family, there are 9 minor children, among them a baby of several months. Shortly before the cold snap last winter, the hut was still being finished. A much-too-small stove was supposed to provide the necessary heat. Although the family for the most part camped around the small stove, this failed to prevent the children from getting frostbite on their hands and feet and having to be admitted to hospital. On that occasion, 12 centners [hundredweight] of potatoes also froze. The 11 persons have 6 beds, each with one blanket. If they get too cold, three of them lie in one bed at a time. Bedding is almost nonexistent. The furnishings of the room consist of a stove, table, refrigerator, and a small cupboard; there is no wardrobe. Clothes that are not needed for wearing hang on the wall. At the moment, one child is sick with pneumonia.

Family G., which includes several children, inhabits the first floor of the wood barracks in Schönforsterstr. The ground floor has no wood paneling, so the room above is nearly floating in mid-air. There is the danger of collapse. The viable rooms do not yet have window frames, let alone windows. Boys and girls sleep together. The so-called beds consist solely of torn, irreparable stuffing. There is no wardrobe. The lavatory room is connected to the living spaces in the most primitive way. The door is missing; there is hardly any linen and clothing. The children go barefoot. The adults are dressed in tattered clothes.

The house at Küttenstraße 56 is home to 6 families, most of them welfare recipients. There is no roof, no protection against the rigors of the weather. The stairs are propped up by poles. The storms, which are always considerable at this elevation, blow mightily through all the rooms. In bad weather, the people must seek other shelter with their meager belongings. When it is raining, all available buckets and containers are brought out to catch the cascading water. Sanitary facilities do not exist. The residents do their business in a bucket, which is then emptied onto a trash heap. Water must be fetched from a neighboring house.

The house at Wespenstr. 2, half of which was torn away by bombs and the rest of which is seriously damaged, is inhabited. It is hard to believe that people can live in it at all. One gets the feeling that this part of the house will also collapse at any moment. The walls and ceiling plaster

have peeled away, the windows and window frames are missing, incoming rain has hollowed out the masonry. The cold has unimpeded entry. In the winter, the stairs and hallways are a surface of ice. Under these conditions, every attempt to heat the house must fail. There is no water in this house. It has to be fetched from 100 meters away. The state of the sanitary facilities is indescribable. An effort is now being made to set up some kind of lavatory. Until now, the residents relived themselves in the surrounding rubble. The room furnishings are exceedingly sparse. There is a lack of everything. Family E., which is living there, consists of 4 persons and uses two rooms. A wooden box serves as a kitchen cupboard, a small stove is supposed to heat the rooms. In the bedroom there is one cot and one child's bed. No bed pads. A woolen blanket serves as a pad. Needless to say, there is no wardrobe. Rain has entry into all rooms. Another family of 3 persons lives in the same house in one room. Here, too, the meagerest furnishings are hardly available.

Source: Die sozialen und gesundheitlichen Verhältnisse der Bevölkerung der Stadt Aachen [The Social and Health Conditions of the Population of the City of Aachen]. HSTA/Bestand NW 43/457, p. 32 ff., reprinted in Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, ed., *Frauen in der Nachkriegszeit 1945-63* [*Women in the Postwar Era 1945-1963*]. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988, pp. 14-16.

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