

In German town Allies helped, new war refugees face wrath of "neo-Nazis"

By McClatchy Foreign Staff, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.19.15

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Lothar Czossek, 86, in Remsdorf just outside of Troeglitz, Germany, said that being home to a branch of the Buchenwald concentration camp should have taught area residents the importance of the needs of others. Here he is standing near the old camp barracks on April 29, 2015. Photo: Claudia Himmelreich/McClatchy DC/TNS

TROEGLITZ, Germany — In the town of Troeglitz, Germany, "neo-Nazis" chased the mayor from office this year. They also burned down a shelter for people fleeing from wars in other countries, or refugees. The events happened 70 years after Allied bombers reduced much of the thousand-year-old village to rubble.

Local historians and refugee supporters think this is a strange twist because the people who crawled from the rubble 70 years ago received an enormous amount of help to put their lives back together. That help came from the Allies, including the United States and Russia, who won the war. People in those countries had every right to see the population of Nazi Germany as representing the worst humanity had to offer.

But the aid came, and it helped locals rebuild their lives.

The Politics Of Hostility

Now Troeglitz has become a symbol of another problem in Europe. Thousands of refugees, fleeing wars in the Middle East and Africa, are boarding boats in desperate efforts to reach Europe. But Europeans aren't embracing their arrival even as hundreds die in the effort to get here.

Like many smaller German communities, Troeglitz was under instructions to prepare to host a few dozen war refugees. But as has been the case in several other places, the National Democratic Party of Germany, or the NPD, who are seen as the new Nazis, began organizing anti-refugee marches. The crowds grew.

In March, the mayor, Markus Nierth, citing the rising anti-immigrant tide, resigned. He said he'd been receiving threats that made continuing in the job impossible.

Then on April 4, the building being fixed up to house the refugees was destroyed by fire. Police quickly determined that the fire was set on purpose, or arson. They blamed supporters of the NPD.

Pro-Refugee Groups Under Threat

Matthias Keilholz is a local Lutheran pastor and founder of a pro-refugee support group. He found the developments disheartening.

At the end of that World War II, one in five people who lived in Troeglitz were considered to be refugees, he said. "And yet now, when others need this same help, many here not only turn their backs, but threaten others who offer help."

Of course, it's not just in Troeglitz where there's opposition to incoming refugees. Germany took in more refugees than any other European nation in 2014, about 173,000. Now, an opinion poll showed that almost half of Germans opposes taking in more.

In 2014, other countries in Europe, took in far fewer refugees than Germany. Still, political parties in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom are gaining supporters by opposing refugees.

"We have a pro-refugee community here," Keilholz said. "But the truth is right now the NPD has more supporters."

The anger comes in spite of the fact that local businesses have been very positive about the benefits from a group of new workers coming to the area. One local leader made the point that Germany's low birth rate, and the area's high rate of young people who've fled for Berlin and Munich, have left the region

needing workers. At meetings, a few locals note the risks and costs of the journey to Europe. They say this shows that the refugees are both courageous and come from families that had money, and therefore education.

The High Cost Of Ignoring History

Area historian Lothar Czossek fears that the arson attack and the threats that frightened the mayor from office show a dangerous problem.

“Too many Germans are saying enough is enough, and they want to forget our shared history,” he said. “The ignorance of this history is alarming” given that the area had a labor camp where people were killed by Nazis during World War II.

Czossek remembers how in January 1944 Allied bombs flattened much of his village. After the bombing, 15 slave laborers in striped pajamas were assigned from the nearby labor camp to help his family dig out. He was 14 when the laborers dug his grandparents out from the wreckage of his home.

Years later, when he took over a small museum dedicated to collecting the records on the labor camp, a former prisoner reminded him they’d once had lunch together. The former prisoner had helped to clear the rubble of his family home. Czossek had shared his potato and bacon.

“There was no real de-Nazification,” he said. “The top officials were pursued, the others returned to normal lives. The problem with that is now, when things get a little tight, too many people think it’s acceptable to blame others for their problems. They don’t remember the cost of such thinking.”

Quiz

- 1 Which answer choice BEST summarizes the article?
- (A) Some people in Troeglitz, Germany, are studying the history of World War II and gathering new information about the bombings and killings that happened in their town.
 - (B) Some people in a German town are taking violent action against refugees from the Middle East and Africa, even though the people of Troeglitz once required aid themselves.
 - (C) Many refugees are fleeing wars in the Middle East and Africa and are searching for new homes in European towns such as Troeglitz.
 - (D) Many refugees are not able to escape from wars in the Middle East and Africa and are requesting assistance from Germans in leaving their countries.
- 2 Select the sentence from the section "Pro-Refugee Groups Under Threat" that BEST captures the central idea of the article.
- (A) Matthias Keilholz is a local Lutheran pastor and founder of a pro-refugee support group. He found the developments disheartening.
 - (B) "And yet now, when others need this same help, many here not only turn their backs, but threaten others who offer help."
 - (C) Still, political parties in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom are gaining supporters by opposing refugees.
 - (D) The anger comes in spite of the fact that local businesses have been very positive about the benefits from a group of new workers coming to the area.
- 3 Which answer choice BEST describes the structure of the section "The Politics Of Hostility"?
- (A) The section describes a series of related events.
 - (B) The section compares refugees with German citizens.
 - (C) The section provides several expert perspectives.
 - (D) The section explains a problem and suggests a solution.

- 4 Why does the author include the section "The High Cost Of Ignoring History" in the article?
- (A) to highlight historian Lothar Czossek's fear regarding the arson attack
 - (B) to explain how much of Troeglitz was destroyed during the 1944 bombing
 - (C) to show that many Germans no longer worry about Nazi actions during World War II
 - (D) to illustrate how treacherous it can be to ignore tragic historical events

Answer Key

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