61 Participation in sport was thus a counterpart to what Peter Fritzsche has dubbed “anti-system politics,” the bourgeoisie’s turn away from parliamentary politics and toward more populist forms of mobilization. The youth of this class, among whom Thiess counted so many readers, was acutely dissatisfied with Weimar’s political status quo, and as Peukert has shown, many of them expressed this dissatisfaction through participation in the bündisch youth movement and an increasing openness to radical, anti-democratic ideas. Bourgeois youths’ fascination with sport, even absent an explicit political inflection, may be read (in tandem with the bündisch orientation) as an oblique gesture of refusal. As such, it is as telling a sign of the Weimar constitutional system’s demise as was the antipathy that extraparliamentary mass movements represented: sport and populism offered a sense of Gemeinschaft that Weimar Gesellschaft (real or ideal) could not. See Fritzsche, Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Peukert, The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

Abstract: We know that Germans moved very quickly from the Endsieg propaganda of the Nazis to a victimization rhetoric in early post-World War II years. Yet even before the extent of the mass murder of Jews had penetrated average German’s consciousness, expelled ethnic Germans in 1948—1949 used Holocaust metaphors to present their desperate case. In the context of a hunger strike staged by expellees, and the subsequent trial of the strike’s leader, expellees living at a refugee camp at Dachau consciously used the proximity of their camp to the former concentration camp to strengthen political agency.

“Hunger Strike Begun in Camps in Germany,” the headlines in The New York Times read.¹ “Protest in Dachau,” proclaimed the Süddeutsche Zeitung, southeastern Germany’s largest paper.² While a hunger strike at Dachau evokes nigh incredulous attention, the fact that it took place in September 1948, two and a half years after the liberation of the notorious concentration camp, seems particularly remarkable. The story of what happened to the hundreds of Nazi concentration camps in the immediate postwar period is often eclipsed by the stories of their liberation. The logistical situation in occupied Germany with millions of uprooted people, vast infrastructural devastation, and a population politically suspect to the occupying powers, prompted the use of many of the concentration camps as conveniently available housing for refugee populations. In the case of Dachau, the erstwhile concentration camp barracks, renamed the internment camp, housed SS guards awaiting their 1946 trial, while a temporary camp was built adjacent first for displaced persons, then from 1947 for German expellees. By the summer of 1948, conditions in the camp had deteriorated to the extent that residents of the camp inaugurated a series of protests, culminating in a weeklong hunger strike in early September.

The transcript³ of the 1949 trial of strike leader Egon Herrmann, who was tried on one set of charges related to inciting a riot months after the hunger strike had ended, and a slander charge brought against him by Wolfgang Jaenicke, head of the Bavarian Refugee Bureau, proves a rich resource detailing the history of the protest movement at Dachau between April and December 1948, and the rhetoric constitutive to a “camp narrative.” Harold Marcuse has aptly described an “aura of the Nazi camps” that “permeated” the strategy adopted by Refugee Bureau officials in handling the Dachau protest.⁴ Drawing principally on the trial transcript, this article relates the little-known strike episode and argues that camp residents

Expellees on Strike: Competing Victimization Discourses and the Dachau Refugee Camp Protest Movement, 1948—1949

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themselves exploited the nature of the place they dwelled in, using victimization rhetoric to strengthen a political agenda.

Expellee political activity in 1948 was still very restricted. The occupation authorities maintained an absolute ban on political coalitions until 1947. Expellee interest groups first formed as mutual assistance societies (e.g., Kirchliche Hilfesstellen München); political and cultural groups evolved only after 1947. Physically cut off from the political rebirth occurring outside the camps, options for political expression for the Dachau expellees were therefore very limited in 1948; victimization discourse would prove to be a potent tool of empowerment for the Dachau hunger strikers. The rhetoric consciously employed by these protesters, housed at the earliest and most renowned of the concentration camps, was especially remarkable for its early use of Holocaust metaphors. Not only did the Holocaust victim trope strengthen Dachau expellees' victim status, but the strikers also asserted this status in direct competition with similar assertions on the part of camp administrators, creating battling victimization claims.

The discourse advanced as part of the Dachau protest movement was just one such assertion to disproportionate sacrifice on the German national altar in the postwar era. The foundation of this discourse was laid with the War-Damages Registration Decree issued on 8 September 1939. While its focus was property damage, the decree implanted the idea and language for a class of "war-damaged" persons that fell outside the category of war refugees or war decedents and their survivors. At war's end, those clamoring the loudest for national recognition of their sacrifice included the expellees as a group, who pronounced in the 1950 Charter of the German Expellees their victim status, and who, in drawing analogies between Christ's Passion and the "Passion" of the expulsion, implied their sacrifice of their homelands as expiation of the sins of all the German people. Veteran groups likewise employed rhetoric of national sacrifice and victimization. Heeding Goebbels' call to total war, soldiers were prepared to carry "even the heaviest burdens and . . . make any sacrifice." But as veterans, soldiers suffered heavily in the postwar period when soldiers' pensions were initially eliminated. Former officers asserted that while they had "made a high sacrifice in blood," they were forced "to bear the entire burden of the defeat," even going so far as to compare their sufferings to those of Jews in Nazi Germany. Returned prisoners of war echoed expellee redemptive rhetoric when they claimed their POW labor as a form of wartime reparations on behalf of all of Germany.

Actual victims of Nazi persecution were largely overlooked in this competition for victim status. The appropriation by the postwar German state of these and other victim discourses (of women raped by Soviet soldiers, or of civilians bombed by Allied planes) further informed historical memory and created a less threatening and more palatable postwar German identity. The Dachau protest movement launched organized political activity among this seemingly disempowered group of expellees and served as a model of growing political consciousness among all expellees in West Germany.

A Dachau Refugee Camp

The 12 million ethnic Germans resident in eastern Europe, ordered "humanely transferred" to Germany by the 1945 Potsdam Agreement, posed a logistical nightmare for the war-devastated and truncated state. Although in popular terminology referred to as "Flüchtlinge," or refugees, by allied military and UN definition the expelled ethnic Germans were not refugees at all—that term (and the international aid that came with it) was reserved for non-Germans displaced by the German war effort. The expellee flood was designated a German problem to be handled by German agencies. It was left to German authorities, such as they were in the chaotic months following the war, to hastily construct an administrative system to handle the myriad problems concerning expellees and other German refugees.

In the case of Bavaria, that meant the creation of the Staatssekretariat für Flüchtlingswesen (State Secretariat for Refugee Affairs; hereafter Refugee Bureau), with Wolfgang Jaenicke appointed its head in 1945; the position was elevated to a cabinet position on 31 January 1947. Jaenicke, born in Breslau in 1881 as the son of the Silesian city's mayor, spent his entire career in public service, either in elected or appointed office. He left national political service with the Nazi seizure of power, but accepted an assignment in 1933 from the League of Nations to advise Chiang Kai-shek on state administration, working most successfully in Shantung province. In 1936 he returned from China to Germany, where he withdrew to private life in Upper Bavaria. Jaenicke's expertise in public administration qualified him for similar work in postwar Germany. Only reluctantly did Jaenicke come out of retirement in 1945 to assume the tremendous task of managing expellee affairs; indeed, sometimes he was overwhelmed by it. Still, his were heroic efforts. When Jaenicke took office on 15 December 1945, half a million German war refugees crowded the state, augmented by 200,000 Sudeten German expellees and 600,000 war evacuees (Germans who had been evacuated from Germany's industrial and urban centers to the relative safety of bucolic Bavaria). On top of this, Bavaria was under orders to take in another one and a quarter million expellees from Hungary and Czechoslovakia beginning in January 1946: this to a region with no established industry, few jobs, and, in the wake of Allied bombing raids near the end of the war, with limited shelter resources.

To tackle the pressing housing shortage, Jaenicke first enlisted Bavarian construction firms in building barracks. They built the first big refugee camps in Bavaria at Hof, Fürth im Wald, Wiesau, Mellrichstadt, Schalding, and Piding. By the end of January 1946 the first trains from eastern Europe began to arrive; Bavaria received 4,800 to 9,600 refugees per day. Logistics became even more complex in 1947: 75,000 Germans fled the Soviet Zone and moved to Bavaria, the numbers compounded by 128,000 Germans moving from Denmark and Austria. Altogether, between 1945 and 1948, Jaenicke supervised the building of 1,153
camps and spent 23 million marks provisioning them. In an effort to integrate the expellees into the western German economy Jaenicke and his administration helped create 800 industrial factories and established the expulsion allowance (Ausweisungsgeld) of originally 12 million marks, rising to 62 million. Providing expellees permanent housing was another crucial aspect of integration, and under Jaenicke's leadership, the Bureau began construction on 18 housing settlements, contributing to a decrease in the number of refugee camps from 1,153 in 1945 to 426 in 1949. Indeed, already at the close of 1947, only one percent of refugees remained in camps, and the Refugee Bureau anticipated doing away with the camps completely in 1948.

These plans were upset by a combination of factors in 1948, namely the communist revolution in Prague, worsening conditions in eastern Germany due to forced labor in uranium mining, and the negative effects of the currency reform that June. This turn of events would force the designation of the former Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, including some of its sub-camps, to help meet the expellee housing demand.

The communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948 triggered a greater outflow of ethnic Germans to western Germany. More importantly, though, it signaled to expellees in western Germany, who had been clinging to the hope that their tenure there was only temporary, that indeed there was to be no going back. Sudeten German expellees, comprising the majority of the Bavarian refugee camp populations, were newly motivated to find ways to make western Germany their new permanent home, including increased local political activity.

Uranium mining in eastern Germany's Erzgebirge was, in the new nuclear age, a priority for the Soviet occupying power. They conscripted tens of thousands of Germans to excavate the radioactive ore, mostly by hand. By early 1948 conscription through the regular labor exchanges proved inadequate, and the mines drafted anyone without proper identification papers, or those caught illegally crossing the border into the western zone. Both of these policies left expellees particularly vulnerable to conscription. Fear of working these emerging death traps increased emigration from the Soviet zone and bred panic among illegal border crossers living as refugees throughout Germany, especially in Bavaria.

The currency reform had particularly dire effects. Individual expellees, as well as those with Refugee Bureau assistance, had created new industries from scratch. They now needed cash, the new currency, to keep afloat, but could not get loans from banks since they had no collateral, having come virtually empty-handed to western Germany. The cash shortage also affected the Refugee Bureau, which could not purchase needed materials to make repairs at the camps. It forced the Refugee Bureau to reduce its personnel from 264 to 78 employees, and, while there were finally materials available for repairs, the severe shortage of cash made it difficult to pay for such repairs. The camps in western Germany, hastily built as a temporary expedient in 1945, were by 1948 falling apart. The demeaning camp conditions added insult to the devastating experience of expulsion itself.

Conditions in the barracks at the Dachau refugee camp (Regierungs­durchgangslager Dachau, or State Transit Camp) were appalling. Camp occupants had petitioned the Refugee Bureau in April 1948, but had never received a reply, even when they resubmitted their petition directly to Georg Nentwig, the deputy director of the state immigration bureau. Some of the Dachau camp inmates’ complaints of demoralizing living conditions were common to all Bavarian refugee camps. Residents had little cash, had few employment possibilities, and lacked personal identity documentation that would permit free movement outside the camps. The specific complaints against Dachau director Karl Wagner foreshadowed a concentration camp narrative to be employed at the time of the hunger strike. The food was inedible and insufficient. There was a serious shortage of wood; the walls of bathroom stalls had long since disappeared to be used as firewood, and the wall dividing the men’s side from the women’s was perforated with holes. Similarly, families living together in barracks had no privacy. When families tried to establish limited privacy by hanging blankets as dividers, the camp administration ordered them removed. The barracks held little furniture other than the beds themselves, and even these were insufficient, often lacking mattresses or even straw sacks. Only two water faucets served the entire camp population of 400. Residents increasingly felt they were carrying an inequitable share of the hardships of the German postwar era.

The Dachau Hunger Strike
The seething discontent of expellees in the Munich area camps began to boil over in August 1948. The first outburst of this latest round of protests began at a Dachau sub-camp named Allach II. A group of local students had visited the camp, accompanied by a reporter from Radio Munich who had taped an interview with camp director Kaun. The residents of Allach II were incensed at the tone of that interview, feeling that Kaun gave too rosy a picture of camp life. They mounted a demonstration in the camp, protesting the poor conditions and what camp residents perceived as a lack of ministerial response to alleged abuses. They felt particularly frustrated over the apparent gap between their living conditions and those of the camp administrators. Allach residents reported that camp administrators had new wooden furniture made for their own living spaces while not enough wood was available to divide the barracks into family spaces; four pigs allegedly were being fattened for administration consumption while expellees complained about the meager quality of their own food. Residents also suspected the camp director of appropriating for his own use CARE packages meant for them.

The protest movement at Dachau, built on a months-old foundation of complaints and petitions to the camp administration and the Refugee Bureau, was encouraged by the press attention given to the Allach demonstration and was stimulated by the presence of a charismatic leader: Egon Herrmann. Herrmann, born in Brünn (Brno)
joined the Nazi Party in 1941, remaining a member until war's end. In 1942, he
himself as a writer of articles on psychology, and after 1923, through employment
in Moravia in 1899, had a university education in psychology and had supported
himself as a writer of articles on psychology, and after 1923, through employment
at a Berlin psychology institute. In 1933 he returned to Prague, in his homeland,
where he continued to work as a writer and where he married in 1935. Herrmann
joined the Nazi Party in 1941, remaining a member until war’s end. In 1942, he
was drafted. As Herrmann told it, even though he had risen to the rank of ensign
during World War I, in the Second World War he shunned the responsibility of
commanding men, serving only as an enlisted man. Herrmann was discharged just
before the capitulation in 1945 due to heart disease.

For Herrmann, as for millions of ethnic Germans in central and eastern Europe,
the postwar peace was short-lived. In early May 1945, Herrmann was pulled from
his Prague apartment by angry Czechs and interned at a Czech gymnastics club
(Sokol). There, he later testified, he witnessed the beating deaths of about 5,000
people, including two SS companies and a police company. Together with other
Sudeten Germans, Herrmann was assigned to the burial detail, burying not only
German military personnel, but also, according to Herrmann, eight or nine truck-
loads of the corpses of young children and elderly women, ostensibly murdered
in a wave of violence directed against Sudeten Germans. Herrmann was expelled
in early June to the Soviet zone of Germany, but he escaped and returned to his
apartment in Prague. In May 1947, Herrmann was evicted on a half-hour's notice,
leaving behind an 8,000-volume personal library, paintings, and carpets, and forced
into communal housing with other Sudeten Germans in Prague until their expulsion
about one year later.\(^{20}\) Herrmann's postwar odyssey, like that of many Sudeten
German expellees, included ample instances of real suffering and victimization
that would serve as a springboard for a persuasive victimization rhetoric.

Herrmann was sent first to the Bavarian refugee camp at Fürth im Walde, which
in 1948 housed double the 1,200 refugees it was designed to hold. He secured a
transfer to the Dachau transit camp, where he arrived about 20 June 1948.\(^{21}\) The
remembered date is significant; coincident with the currency reform, which arguably
launched the hunger strike two months later, Herrmann only experienced the
Dachau camp under the abysmal post-currency reform conditions. Bavarian refu-
gee camp populations elected their own Central Committees (Hauptausschuss),
a body of limited self-representation under the jurisdiction of the Refugee Bureau;
Herrmann, who had been sending telegrams of complaint to the Refugee Bureau
since he first arrived in Prague, became the head of Dachau's six-member Camp
Central Committee.

Under Herrmann's leadership, Dachau residents cataloged what was wrong
at their camp. The barracks leaked when it rained. Shorts in the electrical wiring
were common and sparked fires in the barracks. Some residents had lived in these
"temporary" barracks for as long as 14 months. Rations were inadequate. Breakfast
and supper consisted of half a liter of black coffee and one piece of bread with one
tablespoon of fat. The midday meal was often little more than a thin soup. Those
expellees without cash reserves were unable to buy needed extra provisions and
were often forced to resort to stealing fruit or vegetables from private gardens in
the outlying areas.\(^{22}\)

Camp residents held a meeting Wednesday evening, 18 August 1948, to once
again take up the problems facing them in the camp. Representatives of the Refu-
gee Bureau attended the meeting, but found themselves the target of attacks when
they tried to address or calm the camp denizens. The assembled residents adopted
12 resolutions to be forwarded to the head of the Refugee Bureau as well as to the
military authorities. The resolutions, named the Resolutions of 23 August 1948
in the trial transcript, called for remedies like an increase in the allowances,
improvements in the food, immediate issuing of identity cards, and enactment of an
equalization of burdens law.\(^{23}\) The Dachau Central Committee issued an ultimatum
to State Secretary Jaenicke: respond to our demands within 14 days, or we'll begin
a hunger strike.

Jaenicke's initial response to the resolutions was half-hearted. In fact, he evaded
direct responsibility for the Dachau camp, pointing out to the refugees, and to the
general public in interviews with newspaper reporters, that his portfolio was so
encompassing that the details of camp management must devolve to the regional
directors. Jaenicke insisted he had to concern himself with much larger matters
than the problems of individual expellees:

It is obvious, given the extent of my responsibilities, which in addition to refu-
gee affairs include the entire immigration affairs and housing affairs of all of
Bavaria, and considering the extent of the administrative organization, that I am
not in the position to personally check on the condition of 668 camps currently
housing 110,000 people.\(^{24}\)

While administratively practical, Jaenicke's position did not endear him to the
Dachau expellees. Jaenicke further distanced himself from the real concerns of the
expellees (inadequate rations being a central one) by sarcastically noting that the
kitchen could not be expected to fulfill individual tastes, and blaming the camp's
frequent electrical outages on the overuse of heating plates by expellees themselves.\(^{25}\)
Jaenicke responded to the ultimatum by delegating the problems to his deputies
and leaving for Hamburg on business. He first learned of the hunger strike when a
newspaper reporter there asked him about it.\(^{26}\) Dachau expellees deeply resented
the fact that Jaenicke had ignored their resolutions and had not even bothered to
visit the camp during the 14-day ultimatum to try to prevent the hunger strike.
This resentment emerges clearly in testimony given at Herrmann's trial. Herrmann
called it "dereliction of duty," while Dr. Sierig, a Refugee Bureau employee who
Jaenicke put on administrative leave in the wake of the strike, accused Jaenicke of
only coming to Dachau because Dr. Phillip Auerbach (State Commissioner for the
racially, religiously, and politically persecuted) had publicly said that Jaenicke never
came to Dachau. "On your own initiative, you would have let us starve out there."\(^{27}\)
The ultimatum going unanswered, the strike began at midnight, 4 September 1948. Initially, 1300 residents of the Dachau camp participated, along with 500 residents of the Allach II camp. Their primary goal, as reported in the press, was quickly made plans to join or support the strike. Sunday, 5 September, residents of the camp at Winkl bei Berchtesgaden held a mass meeting expressing their support, and the camp director there announced similar meetings to be held that week in all of the Bavarian camps still housing expellees. Residents of the Holzhof camp near Rosenheim planned to join the strike on Tuesday, asserting that their concerns paralleled those of the Dachau residents. Refugees in camps in Augsburg planned a hunger march through downtown Augsburg to illustrate their plight. Another thousand former refugee camp residents now living in Odelhausen held a demonstration to announce their support of the hunger strikers. Some 2800 residents of the border camp Hof-Moschendorf also joined the list of camps expressing solidarity with the cause of the strikers. The Dachau hunger strike had clearly struck a responsive chord among the refugees and expellees; in all, 72,000 joined the hunger strike. Efforts by the expellee community to appropriate the mantle of victimization occasioned the emphatic denial of Bavarian authority. In contemporary discourse, expellees could not be permitted to claim exclusive victim status since there were other categories of victims (victims of Nazi persecution, bombing victims, war widows and orphans, e.g.). Dr. Adam, ministerial director of the Refugee Bureau, scoffed at the notion of expellees on a hunger strike. “The expellees aren’t Gandhis,” he said. “They won’t starve.” Indeed, the witness Berger, a Dachau camp resident, reported that heating plates were going full blast throughout the strike, that Herrmann was even distributing potatoes among the hunger strikers. Herrmann justified any lapses in a strict fasting regimen by saying that the main thing was not to eat any food provided by the camp kitchen. He further explained that children, infants, nursing mothers, and the elderly were exempted from participation. Herrmann’s actions paradoxically kept residents from becoming victims of a hunger strike while strengthening their claim to victim status through prolonging the strike. By its fourth day, Wednesday, 8 September, the expellees received statewide political attention in the form of recognition by the Bavarian political parties and the mass support of expellees in camps and in some expellee organizations. The Bavarian opposition parties each demanded that the state government undertake immediate and effective measures. The Social Democrats’ state expellee committee, recognizing the tremendous political potential of the dissatisfied expellees, even threatened to take the case directly to the mass of expellees in Bavaria if the government proved unable to achieve satisfactory results.

Egon Herrmann had begun meetings on Tuesday, 7 September, with State Secretary Jaenicke and State Commissioner Dr. Philipp Auerbach. Auerbach and Jaenicke publicly affirmed that they would do all in their power to improve conditions for expellees still in camps. In direct response to the expellee resolutions of 23 August, they announced plans to house 500 Dachau expellees at the neighboring ex-internment camp. The renovated internment camp, with its newly built workshops, was being readied by Auerbach’s office for victims of Nazi persecution; Auerbach agreed to share the facilities with the Dachau expellees. Jaenicke promised new, temporary identity cards for the Dachau expellees, thus permitting them free movement throughout the state of Bavaria. Still, Herrmann refused to call off the strike until negotiations with Jaenicke were concluded.

An intermediate conclusion was reached on Thursday, 9 September, when the Dachau residents gave up their demand that Jaenicke be removed in return for his promises that he would improve housing, employment, and rations. When the Dachau Central Committee received these promises in writing, Herrmann agreed that they would call off the hunger strike. Jaenicke held a press conference to announce the terms. He put a number of officials of the Refugee Bureau on administrative leave, including Dr. Gernbeck and Foreign Commissioner Sierig, pending an investigation of the charges brought against them. Jaenicke generously planned to move about 2,400 expellees into the better barracks of the internment camp (increased from the 500 figure projected earlier in the negotiations) and to provide improved employment opportunities at the workshops there and through the establishment of a sausage factory and a goose farm. He assured that children would be supplied with whole milk. He promised to issue a directive that would encourage camp committees to bring their complaints to their camp administrations.

While the press conference addressed the demands of the expellees point by point, Jaenicke also used the occasion of the publicity generated by the hunger strike to air an alternative victimization discourse: Bavaria and its Refugee Bureau were victims of international and national policies. The expellee problem should not be and was not a problem solely for the German authorities, he held forth, it was an international problem, generated by the Potsdam Agreement, and exacerbated by the actual conditions of the expulsion of the Germans. Virtually penniless expellees from Czechoslovakia and refugees from eastern Germany arrived in Bavaria, a borderland, leading to an overflow of refugees in Bavaria with shrinking means to handle the problem. Jaenicke also directed some of the blame for the imbalance toward the other western German states; for instance, while 110,000 refugees populated Bavarian camps, neighboring Württemberg-Baden housed only 1,000 refugees in camps. Jaenicke demanded an equalization of this unfair situation. The press conference provided a glimpse into Jaenicke’s character and into the position he would later take in the trial: since he was not responsible for these hardships, someone else must be. Instead of personally responding to expellee complaints about camp conditions, Jaenicke sacked the deputies he had left in charge when he went to Hamburg. Jaenicke skirted the issue of any personal responsibility entirely when he insisted that the root of the problem was the international community’s
failure to help care for the expellees they had helped to create with the Potsdam Agreement. Indeed, in his entire testimony at the trial, Jaenicke continually emphasized his personal sacrifices and great successes in running the Refugee Bureau, claiming for himself victim status while refuting the expellee claim. According to Jaenicke, expellees were not victims; they were beneficiaries. This telling response to the expellees’ first use of victimization rhetoric vividly illustrated the power of dueling victimization claims and foreshadowed its continual use in the early postwar period. Jaenicke had a hard time recognizing the real cause of the difficulties, aptly summarized by Mr. Haugg, a Refugee Bureau employee, at the 1949 trial: “We keep forgetting that only three and a half years have passed since the end of the war and that we lost the war. From there spring problems that are not easily solved.”

The strike ended Friday, 10 September, once the camp committee had received a letter from Jaenicke confirming his proposed improvements. He implemented some immediate changes, including an increase in the daily calorie allotment to 2150, arrangements for identity cards, and an easing of permits for relocating out of the camp. He planned immediate negotiations with the Ministry of the Interior for an increase in allowances and for securing clothing for the camp inmates.

The hunger strike was a success on a number of fronts. Although Refugee Bureau representatives insisted conditions had not been as bad as the expellees had portrayed them, and that the needed improvements were already underway as the benefits of the currency reform began to be felt that fall, the hunger strike ensured that Dachau and similar expellee camps would receive priority. Testimony at Herrmann’s trial indicated that the Dachau camp most likely received improvements much earlier than it otherwise would have. Secondly, the strike was successful in bringing the plight of the expellees to the attention of the Bavarian state government. Indeed, the state parliament granted immediate funding of DM 500,000 for aid for expellees in Bavaria, and they directed the Bavarian forest service to supply good quality lumber free of charge to the camp for use in improving the barracks. Finally, the strike was a success in terms of helping Bavarian expellees find a common voice. It certainly quickened the political pulse of many expellees still housed at the camps.

The indignities of latrines with no privacy, the inadequacy of water for washing, the need even to steal food to supplement entirely insufficient rations, all echoed core experiences of inmates of Nazi-run camps. Herrmann essentially hijacked an emerging Holocaust narrative and portrayed the Dachau expellees instead as victims. Herrmann repeatedly employed language explicitly connecting the expellees’ plight to that of victims of Nazi persecution. Within a few weeks of Herrmann’s first residence in Germany in the camp at Fürth im Walde, he had sent a telegram to Jaenicke complaining that the prevailing camp conditions were “worse than in a concentration camp.” He described “rats and mice jumping over the tables, . . . bedbugs [that] could be scratched off the wall at random,” in addition to inadequate sanitary facilities. Such references evoke concentration camp survivor testimony about the pervasiveness of lice and other vermin. Expellees in this early postwar period found themselves relegated to the lowest levels of work, if they could find work at all. This prompted Herrmann to complain that to Bavarian policy makers, expellees were nothing more than a substitute for wartime “Ostarbeiter” (workers from Poland and other occupied countries forced to work in Germany). Again, this reinforced an image of victims of Nazi persecution. Later, as head of the Dachau Central Committee, Herrmann engineered a resolution through the committee on 14 November 1948 that judged Jaenicke guilty of ignoring the needs of the Dachau expellees. He insisted that the State Secretary therefore act accordingly and “instead of the planned, slow rotting of the refugees of State Transit Camp Dachau, choose the quicker and painless path of extermination in the form of gasping or other known means of liquidation.” Having laid this foundation, a week later Herrmann could name Jaenicke the “state secretary of extermination.” The assumption of Holocaust victim rhetoric could not be clearer. Parallels between expellees at Dachau and Nazi-era concentration camp inmates expanded further when expellees received permission to move into the renovated internment camp, thus geographically assuming the place of victims of Nazi persecution.

Herrmann rhetorically reinforced the image of Dachau expellees as concentration camp victims by casting employees of the Bavarian Refugee Bureau as Nazis. Georg Nentwig, deputy director of the state immigration office, and Fritz Hiltmann, department chief for transportation, received particular attention from Herrmann in connection with their visit to the camp on 27 November 1948. Herrmann criticized Nentwig for the “fresh, arrogant and brutal” manner in which he behaved in the camp, appearing as an “SS-Gruppenführer.” Herrmann used similar wording to disdainfully characterize Hiltmann: “every inch a high-ranking member of the NSDAP.” Herrmann continued the metaphor when he compared Hiltmann to the Nuremberg criminals. In Herrmann’s view, expellees sent by Hiltmann to the Moschendorf camp would likely be sent on to work camps in the Russian zone. “Have you never thought about it, that in such cases of forced deportations the Nuremberg [criminals] were condemned to death?” Indeed, Refugee Bureau employees unwittingly recalled Nuremberg defendant testimony whenever they
responded, as Hiltmann did to the above accusation, “That is not my responsibility.”50 Jaenicke, in response to suggestions that he could have undertaken more to ameliorate poor conditions in Dachau, also echoed Nuremberg: “That wasn’t part of my job description (Es gehörte nicht in meinen Aufgabenkreis).”51 Moreover, Herrmann repeatedly punctuated the trial testimony of Refugee Bureau employees by heckling them with comments like “Just like Himmler!” and “So spoke Himmler too!”52 If the Dachau expellees were the victims of Nazi persecution, then in this scenario the employees of the Refugee Bureau, responsible in Herrmann’s view for continued suffering of the expellees, must be the Nazis.

Moschendorf, the “Bavarian Siberia”
The expellees also used anticommunist discourse to support victimization rhetoric. Appeals to the inhumanity of the Soviets clearly emerge in connection with expellees’ fears of the Moschendorf camp, located on the border between the eastern and western zones of Germany. The popular image of the camp in expellee discourse was borrowed from the Holocaust narrative because Moschendorf was a place to which people were sent against their will to meet horrific ends (deportation to the uranium mines), but was compounded by the substitution of Russian communists as the dangerous other. The depth of the Dachau expellees’ fears of possible deportation to Moschendorf was illustrated by the spontaneous reaction to the visit from Refugee Bureau representatives in late November 1948, a reaction which ultimately led to Herrmann’s arrest.

That Saturday afternoon, 27 November, three representatives of the Refugee Bureau visited the camp to check on the progress of the conversion of the internment camp into living space for the refugees; Georg Nentwig and Fritz Hiltmann were joined by Wolfgang Langkau, department chief in the state immigration office. Their one-hour tour of the construction site concluded with an unscheduled sampling of the builders’ inadequate food rations. Recognizing that the construction workers in the internment camp could not be expected to perform their tasks on such meager rations as watery cabbage soup, Nentwig decided to make an impromptu visit to the kitchens located in the transit camp. That brought them into Herrmann’s territory.

As the men were returning to their car in preparation to leave, Herrmann, hastily notified of the officials’ presence in the camp, buttonholed Hiltmann and began to harangue him regarding a recent article in the newspaper Münchner Allgemeine about conditions at the refugee camp Hof-Moschendorf. Dachau camp residents were directly affected because some of them had relatives at Moschendorf who faced deportation to the Soviet occupation zone as illegal refugees (they had crossed from the Soviet into the American zone without permission). Such deportees faced a very good chance of being sent as forced labor to the brutal uranium mines in eastern Germany. Hiltmann’s duties as department chief for transportation included the transport of refugees in and out of Moschendorf. Herrmann’s goal, that Saturday, was to get Hiltmann to respond to the threatened deportation of Dachau inmates’ loved ones, and to get his assurance that these deportations would stop. To do so, Herrmann and other expellees present would not only resort to threats of physical violence, but would accuse Hiltmann of working for Stalin.

Herrmann interrupted his tirade against Hiltmann only to verbally assault another of the officials, Nentwig, calling over to him, “Hey you, you little man, what are you doing in my camp?” Herrmann continued, shaking his finger in Nentwig’s face, “You with your lying State Secretary (Jaenicke), your lying minister, who lies, lies, lies.”53 While this attack challenged the authority of the Refugee Bureau employees, it also indicated the deep unease provoked by the presence of these men in the camp that day.

The continuing altercation attracted a crowd, and by the time the three officials were ready to get into the car and leave, about 80 to 150 people had surrounded the vehicle. Herrmann took advantage of this new audience to taunt the representatives of the Refugee Bureau, “There they go, the cowards, but we won’t let them out.”54 The driver attempted to move forward, but the crowd pressed in so closely around them that it was impossible. Fritz Hiltmann now became the target of the Dachau expellees’ fears and anger about Moschendorf. Calling him “the criminal of Moschendorf,” the crowd exhorted Hiltmann to respond to their concerns.55 In fact, the weight they placed on Hiltmann’s response is evinced by their choice of words, namely “verantworten” for Moschendorf, or “take responsibility for,” rather than the simple “antworten,” or “answer.”

The assembled crowd surrounded and jostled the car, even lifting the car by the back bumper, and ripping open and bending the passenger-side door. Herrmann repeatedly reached in to Hiltmann, calling him the representative of Moschendorf and demanding that he address the crowd, and making as if he would drag him out of the car. Herrmann let go of Hiltmann when the crowd cried out, “No, no violence!” but continued his insults: “There they sit, the spies of the pitiful state secretary”; and “What’s the Moschendorf account? How much does Stalin pay per head? One or two Marks?”56

A riot was averted when the police arrived. They convinced Hiltmann that he should address the crowd; only this, they felt, would pacify the crowd. Hiltmann’s speech, dealing largely in generalizations, disappointed the eager crowd. They interrupted with catcalls and whistles, and echoing Herrmann cried, “How much is Stalin paying you?” and “Let’s hang them from the lamppost, heads down!”57 At this, the police finally moved in and broke up the meeting; the officials climbed in their car and left.

Moschendorf symbolized for expellees the potential fate that awaited them all: forcible relocation to a totalitarian regime under Soviet control. Expellees in the camp understood the limits of their power, and they clearly perceived their treatment as that of “prisoners and internees,” even worse than that of prisoners of POW camps.58 Implicit in the anticommunist discourse was fear, and expellees in Dachau hesitated to register complaints too loudly lest they be sent to Moschendorf.59 Moschendorf,
by any measure, constituted a real threat for residents in the Dachau camp, where raids had been conducted, and where those without proper papers for residence in the American zone were rounded up, collected in the dance hall, and subsequently transported by train to Moschendorf, “the Bavarian Siberia.” Expellee descriptions of such actions bore an unfortunate resemblance to reports of roundups of Jews in small towns in Eastern Europe by German personnel during World War II, complete with references to women and children huddling in unheated rooms, exposed to the elements, before being loaded onto trains for transport northeastward. Certainly transport to Moschendorf was seen as only the first step in a “forced deportation to Russia,” as Herrmann expressed it.61

Victimization Rhetoric and Political Empowerment
Expellees could harness fears of Moschendorf and deportation eastward, whether to uranium mines in Saxony or to Siberia itself, to serve victimization rhetoric. The rhetoric worked in tandem with a real sense of victimhood, dating from the expulsion experience itself. The expellee sense of victimization was further enlarged with the recognition that even Bavarian officeholders worked against the integration and assimilation of expellees in their state. An American military study of native-expellee relations supported such beliefs; the report determined that Bavarian political and religious leaders opposed assimilation of expellees and instead viewed emigration as the best solution for the “expellee problem.”62 In fact, this report gave rise to a flyer written by Dachau’s Central Committee, which claimed that the “Refugee Bureau in the person of the Minister President Dr. Ehard and the State Secretary for Refugee Affairs Wolfgang Jaenicke” were hostile to refugees and expellees, and worked against their assimilation. The flyer stated, “They don’t want to have us, and they are not thinking of really helping us... [they want to] drive a wedge between natives and refugees.”63 With this flyer, Dachau residents converted their status as victims at the hands of Czech expellers to victims at the hands of Bavarian politicians.

At his trial, Herrmann asserted that the hostility of Bavarians towards expellees was merely a continuation of Czech hostility toward Sudeten Germans. As evidence he compared Czech and Bavarian anti-expellee slogans. The first two recalled popular memories of vitriolic statements by Czech politicians against the expellees: “Leave the Germans nothing but a single handkerchief that they can cry into!” (attributed to Herrmann to Eduard Benes); and “Only a dead German is a good German!” (attributed to Herrmann to Prague mayor Dr. Zenkl).64 The second two continued in the same vein, but were attributed to Bavarian politicians: “Chase these scoundrels out of our land with a beer mallet (Bierschlegel)” (attributed to Dr. Fischbach); and “Keep these people from infiltrating our towns, our cities; they could change the face of our state!” (attributed to an unnamed Bavarian state representative).65 On the face of it, little differentiated these four appeals to exclusion. In each case, expellees were victimized, whether through deprivation of property, life, residence, or home. The political potential of the victimization rhetoric emerged when Bavarian political speeches paralleled Czech speeches. The important difference was that the Czech slogans applied to Germans, while the Bavarian ones targeted expellees. Herrmann thus subtly reminded the Bavarians that expellees were German too.

Incessant extreme rhetoric on the part of the expellees prompted retribution in kind. Nentwig, verbally assaulted by Herrmann and other expellees in November 1948, characterized Herrmann and his crowd as fanatics. Going further, he condemned the 27 November altercation as an “act of terror.” Contrary to testimony of other witnesses, he believed that the event was orchestrated by Herrmann, the depth of his conviction revealed by the use of terms like “Schlussakt,” as if the confrontation was carefully divided into acts, and set scenes, like a theater piece.66 Jaenicke, pushed beyond the limits of his patience (Herrmann even called Jaenicke a sloth and a stinking fish in public speeches),67 rebuked the expellees for abusing their guest privileges (Gastrecht) in Bavaria through criticizing Minister President Ehard and the Refugee Bureau.68

This last critique on the part of Jaenicke encapsulated the central sense of victimhood felt by expellees, including those at Dachau, and Herrmann pounced upon it at the trial. The expellees were not in Bavaria as guests, he pointed out, nor was an expellee “a gypsy, Arab, or Turk, who you can evict tomorrow.” Instead, expellees were “forced to come here in the hope for a home (Heimat).”69 How could expellees be criticized for impolite guest behavior when, given a choice, they would not have chosen to be there in the first place? In this light, the Dachau expellees’ choice not to eat at the table of their “host,” the Refugee Bureau, acquires new nuances. The hunger strike not only rejected the Refugee Bureau as a proper host, it amounted to a rejection of the Potsdam Agreement itself, “a crime against humanity,” as Herrmann characterized it.70 Further, Herrmann underlined the Sudeten German claim to full German nationality when he advanced a Sudeten German monetary claim on Germany in the amount of $20 billion. Herrmann drew a distinction between the true victims of the war, the expellees who lost everything, and other Germans who retained their property in the form of “paintings on the wall, porcelain,” and carpets. Expellees had already paid the Czechs $20 billion in tribute in the form of lost property, Herrmann argued, in essence a loan from Sudeten Germans to western Germans; now it was time for western Germans to help share the costs of the war in the form of an equalization of burdens law benefiting the victimized expellees.71 As the victimized Dachau expellees saw it, they had already lost everything, and they only stood to lose more through the unfair machinations of the Refugee Bureau, including exclusion from decent jobs, confinement to mass refugee camps, and potential deportation to the Soviet zone or even Czechoslovakia. Risking arrest and imprisonment through camp protests seemed the final, and appropriate, conclusion to this litany of victimization.

Herrmann was arrested the day following the 27 November altercation. The
charges against him were disturbing the peace, intimidation of officials, and fe­lonious detention of a public official.72 State Secretary Jaenicke, fed up with the personal insults, also filed civil charges of slander and defamation. The eight-day trial, where more than 70 witnesses were heard, began 24 February 1949 in the Munich regional court. The press labeled it “the first expellee trial,”73 implying that Herrmann was on trial for the crime of being an expellee. The label further implied that this was but the first of many such trials. Herrmann’s attorney, Dr. Horn, embraced this label; together with Herrmann he portrayed the trial as a contest of whether expellees would be permitted full political participation in western German society.74 Herrmann and his supporters used the trial proceedings not only to air specific grievances about treatment at Dachau, but to deploy the fullest expression of their victimization rhetoric to the treatment of refugees and expellees in general in Bavaria. Herrmann, his attorney Horn, and other witnesses highlighted expellee victimization at the trial in terms of what Herrmann named a “Lagerpsychose” (camp psychosis): the refugee camps were “incubators of demoralization and total resignation... men fully broken, without work, without any right to create a new existence,... without future, hopeless....”75 This degraded population was treated by the Refugee Bureau as “underlings” and mere “chess pieces,” kept in the mass refugee camps in a political game between German states as Bavaria sought to force Hesse and Württemberg-Baden to accept more refugees.76

Using the hunger strike as a springboard, the expellees defined a specific camp narrative that provided both a communal identity and a legitimate political voice in German society. Expellees used the occasion of the strike to call international attention to their segregated status, down to the lack of identity cards carried by “every German.”77 In camp meetings, Herrmann asserted expellee political belonging in western Germany, proclaiming “We two million people want to enforce our rights,” and he made repeated calls for expellees to be included in the democratic process. Expellees in Dachau, frustrated at the denial of full enfranchisement, resorted to extreme comparisons: accused of disorderly conduct at the time of the spontaneous gathering on 27 November, expellees responded, “even the inmates of the concentration camps [had the right] to gather in the camp.”78 Herrmann went so far in trial testimony as to offer himself as a martyr to the cause of expellee political expression: “When [the democratic] means are exhausted, there remains only one means, to arrest me. That is the last means still available to us refugees.”79 For expellees in Dachau, the “passion play” Herrmann described that commenced with the expulsion appeared to culminate in exclusion from integration in Bavaria.80

The refugee camp narrative, which emphasized overt mistreatment of refugees at the hands of the Refugee Bureau, empowered the expellees at Dachau.

Conclusions

Although Herrmann was convicted on all counts and received a one-year suspended sentence, his trial gave public voice to the expellees. He and the witnesses at his trial, testifying about camp conditions and seeming bureaucratic indifference, cast themselves as victims of fate, of circumstances far beyond their control. Their lament echoed that of all expellees, who believed they were unfairly the only Germans punished for World War II. But out of the trial testimony also emerged anger and frustration that, four years after the conclusion of the war, refugees still suffered. The promise of the June 1948 currency reform was that conditions would rapidly improve, but by August 1948 residents in the Bavarian camps had seen no evidence. Frustrated rising expectations are a classic recipe for revolution; the Resolutions of 23 August 1948 could be interpreted as the expellees’ cahiers de doléances. What is informative about the events at Dachau, though, is that the potentially revolutionary situation was defused by the adoption of a victimization discourse that in turn gave expellees political voice.

Herrmann’s trial reflected the jockeying for political position between different groups in Bavaria employing competing claims to victimhood as their primary weapon; expellees based their victim claims on an assertion of full national equality with every German native to western Germany. Simultaneously, the emerging West German state claimed victim status for itself as victimized by Hitler and the Nazis, victimized by horrors of war, victimized by occupation forces. There was no room in that view for the alternative victim status as claimed by the expellees. Expellees were forced to use extreme rhetoric, including Holocaust metaphors. The 1948 Dachau protest movement laid the foundation for the expellees’ self-conception of the “other Holocaust.”

3 The transcript is housed at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.
6 Hughes, 9.
8 Diehl, 101.
Rust, a Dachau camp resident, felt that Jaenicke was probably a good civil servant, but that he shied away from taking extraordinary measures demanded by the extraordinary times. (Protokoll über die Verhandlung gegen Egon Herrmann am 24 Februar 1949, [hereafter Protokoll] 5 March 1949, 29). Jaenicke’s one-time 2nd Deputy, Dr. Ziegler, testified that Jaenicke was too bureaucratic, not strong enough for the job, and ought to be replaced. (Protokoll, 7 March 1949, 2). Most of the witnesses, however, testified that Jaenicke was doing the best that could be expected, given the circumstances. (See testimonies of Zetsche, Glaser, Neumann and Werner).