

Justice, Governance, and Reconstruction: Luxembourg City in the Aftermath of Liberation

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Trauma, Hope, and Illusion: Cities at the End of World War II and in Post-War Transformation, Prague City Museum (05/05-07/05/2025), Prague
Panel II: Post-War Reconstruction of the Metropolis
Background Image: Touristic map of Luxembourg (1942, based on an older map), Archives de la Ville de Luxembourg, LU_P_NS_B6



I Context: Luxembourg City May 1940-September 1944 (Part 1)

May 1940

Invasion and occupation of Luxembourg and the capital. Government flees, local officials stay. Aldermen council issues a protest note in newspapers.

Stadtkreis Luxemburg

German Civilian Administration, city district created, *de facto* annexation of Luxembourg.

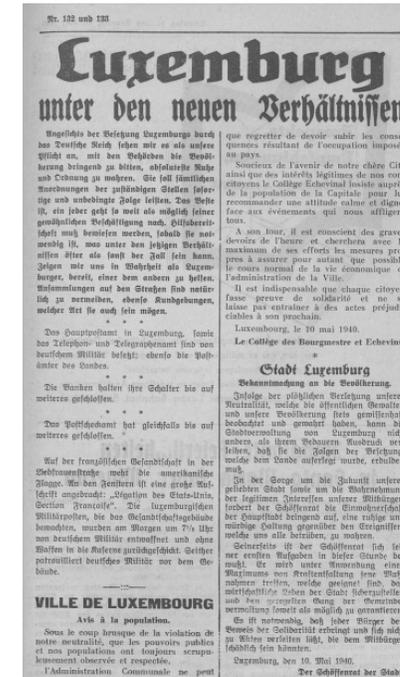
Richard Hengst appointed shortly after (13.08.1940), elected mayor Diderich removed

Profile of the Oberbürgermeister

Reputed legal expert, nominated by the Reich Ministry of the Interior as opposed to other administrators in German-administered Luxembourg -> removed in 1943

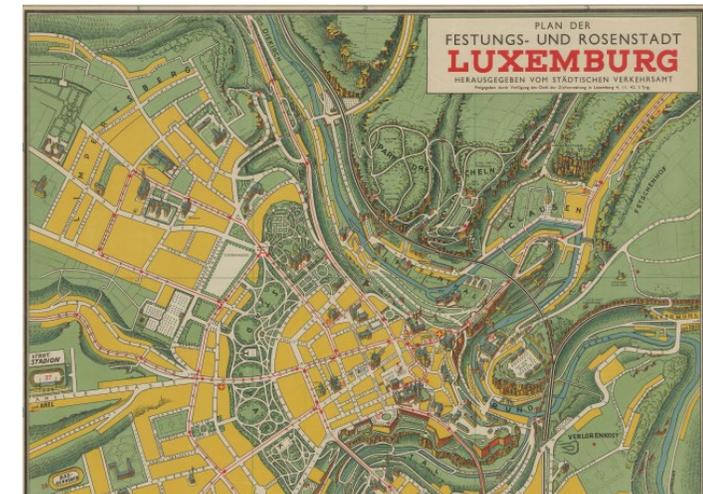
Key Priorities

Expansion of municipal staff from 1100 to 1400, key priorities: propaganda, cultural, touristic and linguistic policy. Establishment of a building authority, tax office, ration and nutrition office, and other public institutions, incorporation of surrounding municipalities.

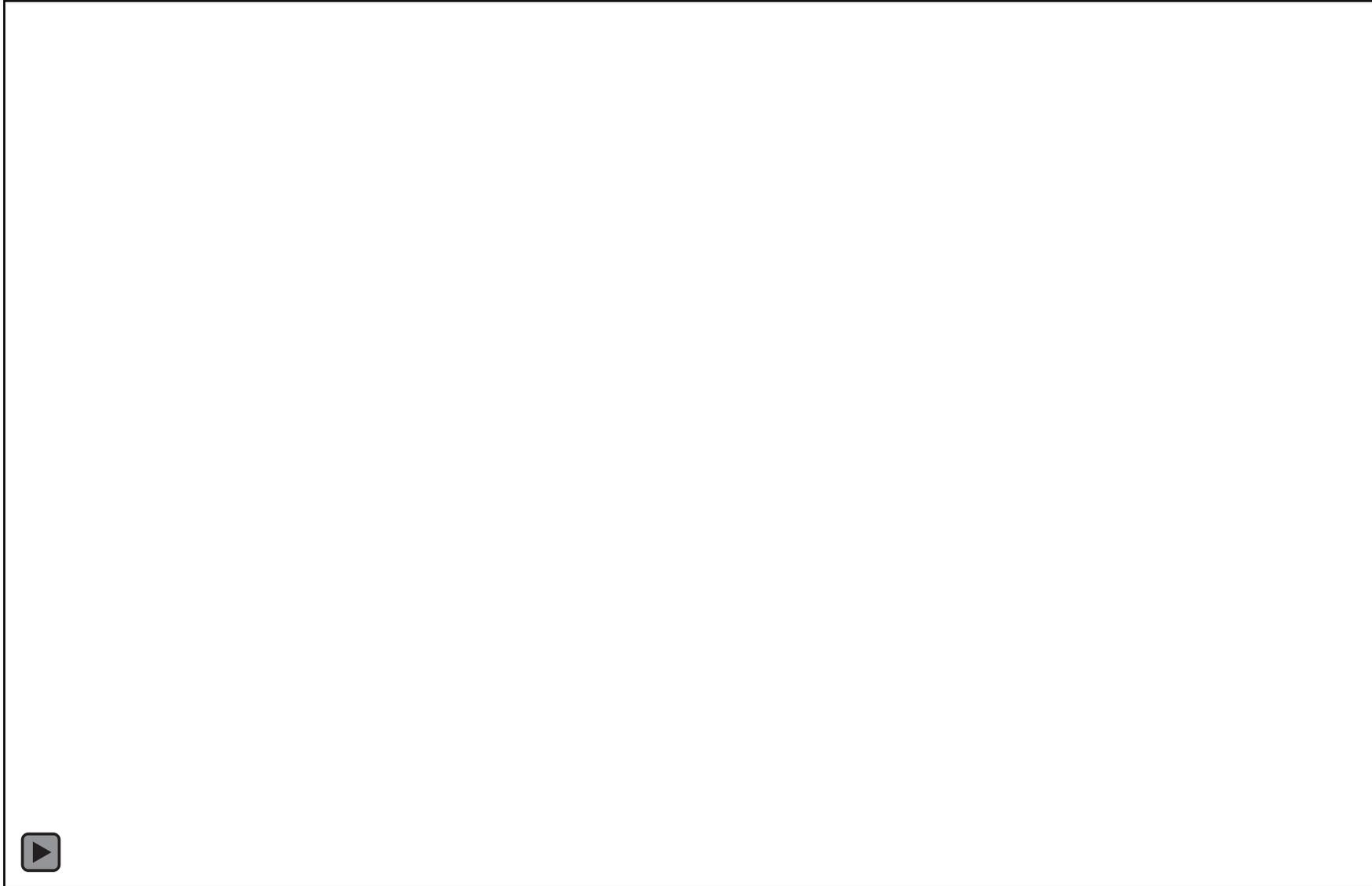


Oberbürgermeister Richard Hengst, kommissarischer Leiter der Stadtverwaltung in Luxemburg.

Photograph taken from *Luxemburger Wort*, 14/08/1940, published in the *Luxemburger Wort* on the introduction of Oberbürgermeister Hengst into his new office, *Luxemburger Wort* (14.08.1940), p. 1. [Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/g8xnk3/pages/1>]



I Context: Luxembourg City May 1940-September 1944 (Part 2)



Lëtzebuerg ass fräi... (1), Centre national de l'audiovisuel, Collection Pierre Bertogne, film no.49 (movie showing scenes throughout the country in September 1944).

Liberation

10-11th of September 1944: entry of American troops along with prince-consort, welcomed by mayor and members of council

Reestablishing Authority on the local level

- Mayor Diderich picks up post again, SHAEF subsidiary established in Lux-City
- Throughout September: First council sessions, distribution of duties to chiefs of service
 - Three dead council members replaced
 - Policing duties by members of militia and American MPs, soon replaced by extended municipal police
 - Rationing continues, confiscations
 - Purge and examination of political behaviour during German annexation announced as key priority
 - City retakes possession of energy infrastructure
 - Subsidies paid to parents of forced conscripts



E shake-hand töschent dem General Patton an dem Prönz Felix. An der Mött de Burgermëschter **Diderich**. Photo Rouster

US Third Army General Patton exchanging a 'shake-hand' with Prince-Consort Felix, mayor Diderich between them In: *Escher Tageblatt* (16.09.1944), p. 1.
[Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg,
<https://persist.lu/ark:70795/h5s0sn/pages/1/articles/DTL65>]

Infrastructure And Housing

Influx of evacuated populations ever-increasing,
Requisitioning of housing by Allied Authorities and the return of national government alike

Battle of the Bulge (12/44-02/45)

Northern half of Luxembourg evacuated and utterly destroyed, few dozen municipalities relocated to Luxembourg City to the *Cercle Cité*,
Population rises to an estimated 70 000 for a time

Municipal level

Creation of an enlarged unity aldermen council (social democrats included)
Commission for purge of staff and evaluation of behaviour delivering first reports,
Commission for war damages, reconstruction (limited)
German measures in relation to taxes, aerial defense and rationing remain in-
place on the local level.

National level

March 1945: Creation of provisional consultative assembly, ministries retain
emergency powers, government expanded.
Creation of new Offices to manage prices, coordinate supplies and relief, submit
claims for war damages and first steps towards a commission of reconstruction,
with local commissions implemented throughout Luxembourg

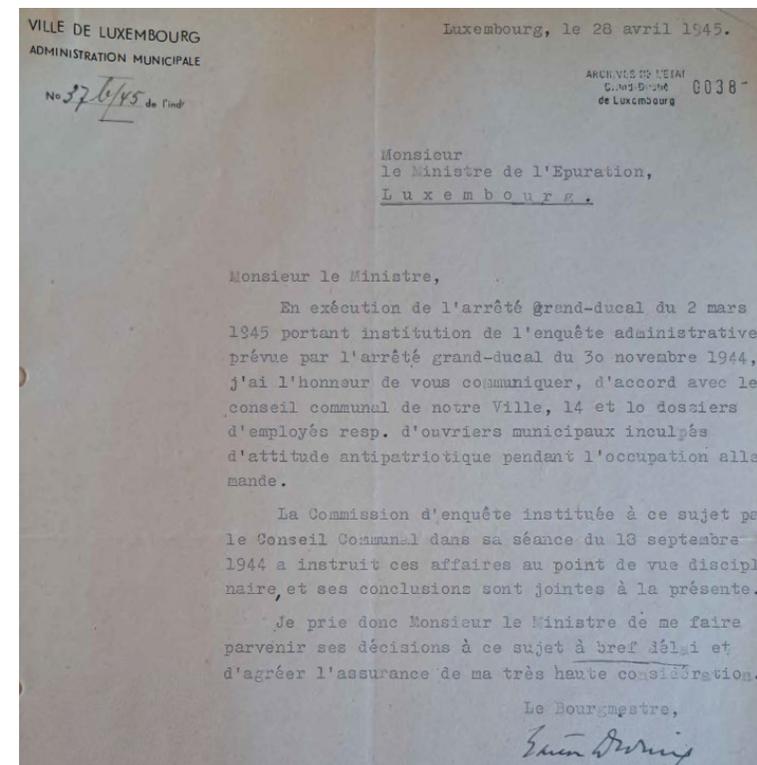
III Purge as a local affair?

Municipal Commission created in September '44, first results delivered by March '45

Initial refusal to submit all personnel files to ministry, only 24 evaluated files out of 1400 staff transmitted

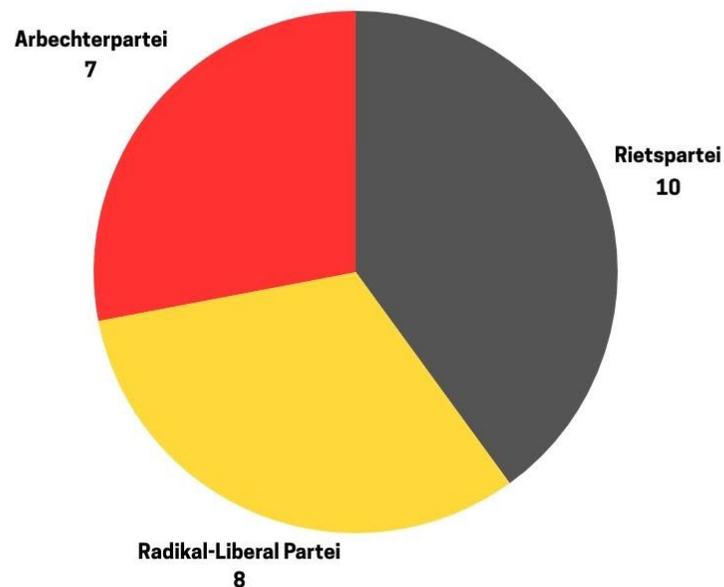
- **Key Priorities:** Enabling promotions, honorable awards, and confirming dismissals and demotions
- **Approach:** Pragmatic, swift and sweeping, mostly aimed at allowing resumption of all municipal services, mild penalties

Rather contrary to contemporary justice-demanding pre-election narratives, and precedes national-level purge proceedings by several months

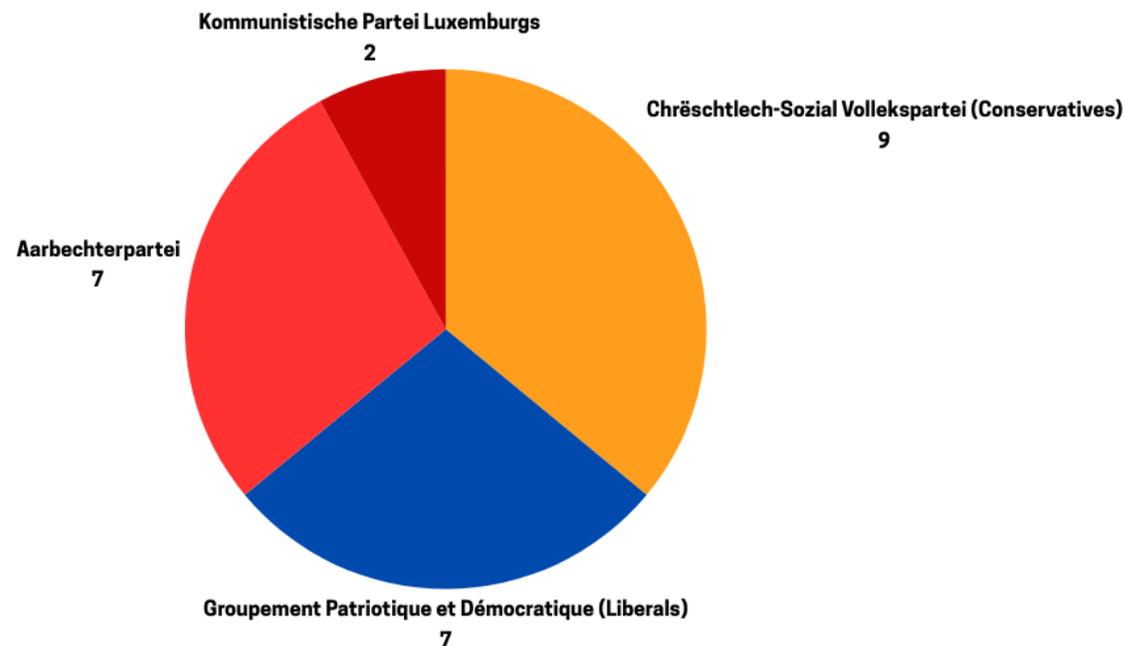


Request from Diderich for swift decisions on select personnel files by the Purge Ministry, Archives Nationales du Luxembourg, EPU-02-309 Administration communale de la ville de Luxembourg - enquêtes à l'encontre du personnel

IV 1946: A government of (local) national union? (Part 1)



**Pre-war composition
(until January '46)**



Election Results of 1945

Sources:

Offizielles Wahlresultat, Luxemburger Wort (16.10.1934): [Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/csg59d/pages/4>].

Offizielles Wahlresultat, Luxemburger Wort (17.10.1934),

[Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/djbj04/pages/6>].

Die Gemeinderatswahlen, Escher Tageblatt, 1945. Jg., n° 230 (09.10.1945)

[Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/k7vtn5/pages/1>].

IV 1946: A government of (local) national union? (Part 2)

- Enlargement of aldermen council from 5 to 7 made permanent
 - Convention between all parties signed with the Ministry of the Interior in January '46
 - Self-titled '*Schöffenrat der Nationalen Union*' (aldermen council of National Union)
 - Key issues: purge, restitution of property, order in the city, housing, political refugees, and infrastructure
- **More of the same? 6 out of 7 had previously been members of the aldermen council**

"The Aldermen Council that appears before you is composed of representatives from all factions and all groups of the Municipal Council and has taken on the mission of safeguarding and promoting the administration and interests of the Capital in a spirit of national unity."

- Mayor Diderich in his initial address of the new municipal council in its first session on February 15, 1946, from: Archives de la Ville du Luxembourg, Compte rendu analytique 1946, N.1 (15.02.1946), p.1.



Herr Bürgermeister **Diderich** (zweiter von links) und die Schöffen Schneider (erster v. links), Schaus und Hamilius (dritter u. vierter v. links) erwarten auf „Kaltgesbrück“ die mit der Trikolore gezeichneten Wagen . .

Diderich and three members of the aldermen council waiting for the transport of killed political prisoners from the concentration camp of Hinzert, where many Luxembourgers were interned.
Source: Luxembourgish illustrated magazine *Revue* (15.03.1959), [Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/jsfv1q27nq/pages/4/articles/DIVL83>]

Diderich dies ...and crisis ensues

- Death of Diderich (29.04.46) triggers discussions
- Workers' Party declaring convention void, requesting seat of first alderman, met with refusal
- Official exit of Workers' Party in August 1946, referring to the decision of their central committee
- Conservative-liberal-communist coalition formed under the leadership of Émile Hamilius, newcomers on the council

The Aldermen Council of National Union crumbles after a mere three months

But: Key issues remain, e.g. housing, political purges, standardization of employment, reconstruction -> unique clash with the government when dealing with released prisoners



Stirmesch gemengerotssetzong zu Letzeburg. D' sozialisten an der oppositio'n, In: D'Unio'n (02.08.1946), [Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, <https://persist.lu/ark:70795/v8bn5j/pages/4/articles/DTL71>].

Commonalities

Urgency of restoring order within days/weeks

Symbolic pre-war figures seeking to reestablish themselves

Use of Unity Governments and narratives

Tensions between purge, adoption of pragmatic approaches

Resumption of political status quo, Fragility remains

Differences

Reclaiming Legitimacy vs. Ensuring Daily governance

Purge as a local rather than centralized affair

Resistance activities as cause for promotion

Reconstruction as a national affair, rarely tackled in the capital

Swift reactions on city level, partial continuation of German policies
