

Newspaper Article on Jewish Immigration to the United States (November 1937)

Abstract

As the Nazi regime ramped up its persecutory policies on Jews, emigration became, though rather slowly, an appealing option for many families. This article, published in the *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt*, a Jewish newspaper in Berlin, is one of many that depicted the United States as the “Land of Unlimited Possibilities.” A skilled Jewish worker could make upwards to \$35 per week in the U.S., and a Jewish woman finding work in a department store might earn as much as \$20 dollars per week. These figures were often very enticing to families who thought of leaving central Europe, but, as the article outlines, the process of obtaining a visa was both complicated and frustrating. Potential immigrants needed to line up two sponsors, preferably people with a direct familial relation to them, and the paperwork was often overwhelmingly complex. The United States’ government turned away countless applicants before 1939. Further, a successful application did not guarantee future economic security or peaceful integration into a new community. The U.S. was struggling through its own economic depression, which made finding a job difficult for citizens and permanent residents already in the country.

Source

Jewish Immigration to the USA.

Report for the *Gemeindeblatt* by Dr. Günther Plaut (Cincinnati)

Today, more than ever, the North American Union is coming under consideration as a country of Jewish immigration from Germany. There is still a surprising lack of clarity about the conditions and prospects of such a migration, which can be seen again and again in the case of new arrivals.

It is well known that legal permanent immigration to the States is possible only on the basis of an affidavit by which the issuer guarantees that the immigrant will not be a burden on public welfare. Such an affidavit is best issued by a blood relative who either has assets or is in a secure position. A non-relative will be able to successfully vouch for an immigrant only if he is very wealthy or possesses extraordinary influence. No one can immigrate to America because he already has been offered a position he wants to take. And no one can work who has entered the country on a tourist visa.

Now, there is indeed the possibility of changing one’s status and turning one’s tourist visa into a permanent immigrant visa. To do this, however, one must first leave the country and then immigrate again via one of the neighboring countries, such as Canada, Cuba or Mexico. But even for that, you need an affidavit; and you also need money: because the trip and the stay in one of these countries need to be paid for. So it is not at all correct to assume that you only need to be here in America and that it will then be easy to get your immigrant visa. Those who can afford to travel here to prepare everything necessary should certainly do so; but to make the long journey merely on the chance of changing one’s status here is a gamble that may well fail.

America today, despite its great unemployment, presents the picture of economic advancement. The immigrant will generally find a job opportunity – as general as that sounds, it has statistical truth. Of course, occupational differentiation plays a large role. But the majority of Jewish immigrants from Germany belong to commercial professions, and in most cases a position as an employee of some kind can be found – if the demands are not great. Women have it easier than men in this respect. A girl who

works as a salesgirl in a store will usually earn from 12 to 20 dollars a week, which currently is equivalent to 40 to 60 marks. Male salaries for minor clerks are somewhat higher. A skilled laborer, on the other hand, such as a mechanic, may earn 35 dollars a week if he has a lucky hand; and an engineer or chemist who comes to a more elevated and independent position may often expect considerably more.

Of considerable importance, and unfortunately usually unrecognized in Germany, is the dependence of the opportunity for work upon the place of emigration. In New York there is a chance of getting a very good position; but this chance is small. Much greater, on the other hand, is the chance in New York of finding no job opportunity at all. The situation is similar in Chicago and, to a lesser extent, in all very large cities. The unemployment rate among Jewish immigrants from Germany is by far the highest in New York. Here in Cincinnati, on the other hand, not a single case of unemployment has been known among the 200 or so newcomers. This is mainly due to the fact that the smaller the city, the greater the help of the Jewish community for the immigrants can be, and it is. In the big city, the immigrant is almost always a social zero who, for a long time at least, remains dependent on his relatives and on friends from Germany who are in the same situation. In a small Jewish community, however, the arrival is often – though not always! – granted entry into the best Jewish families of the town; and that this considerably increases the chances of advancement goes without saying. One can almost say that in this respect the possibilities of advancement are in reciprocal proportion to the size of the city. Although it must be clear that this is not a recipe of general validity.

Doctors generally make a living; dentists have a more difficult time, because the equipment available and in use in America is extremely modern and expensive, so that in their case self-employment is associated with financial difficulties.

The importance of mastering the language cannot be overestimated. It is the key to an important and desirable assimilation, namely in the sense of being able to stand one's ground in the orderly affairs of the day without making a fuss. Mostly, by the way, good will is recognized; and nothing impresses the average American more than the quick and successful learning of the English language.

Source of original German text: *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt*, Nr. 47, 21 November 1937, S. 1. Leo Baeck Institute. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/LeoBaeckInstitute>

Translation: Insa Kummer

Recommended Citation: Newspaper Article on Jewish Immigration to the United States (November 1937), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5174>> [May 03, 2024].