

“Strength through Joy”: Cruise to Madeira (1938)

Abstract

One of the most popular Nazi organizations was “Strength through Joy” [*Kraft durch Freude* or KdF], which was founded in November 1933. This office organized National Socialist leisure and vacation activities for members of the German Labor Front and their families. Up until 1939, it employed about 7,000 full-time workers and 135,000 volunteers, and was financed by the German Labor Front to the tune of about 29 million Reichsmarks per year. Its goal was to overcome the usual separation between work and private life as well as class differences. The new national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] was to be characterized by solidarity, and it followed that workers should now enjoy all the opportunities for rest and relaxation that had previously been reserved for the middle class. These opportunities included a multitude of cultural and sports events—such as subsidized theater, opera, and concert tickets, as well as cheap instruction in tennis and sailing—and thousands of members took advantage of them annually. The most popular offerings were KdF-financed tourism programs, both inside and outside Germany. These programs enabled many workers to take their very first vacation trips. Up until 1939, about 43,000 KdF excursions were sold, many of them daytrips.

As we can see in this photograph, KdF also organized cruises on its own or on rented ships. These voyages were supposed to introduce the National Socialist national community to other countries. Participants were therefore expected to wear modest clothing and behave in a dignified way. Political training was part of the obligatory program, and spies from the Gestapo and the SD were among the travelers. In the end, the ideal of harmonious integration was not really achieved. Many participants in KdF trips complained about the regimented daily routine, the poor quality of the lodging and service, and the preferential treatment given to party officials. For example, cruises to Madeira remained out of reach for most workers, who would have associated them with their popular moniker, “big-shot trips” [*Bonzenfahrten*]. Despite many shortcomings and extensive internal corruption, the KdF remained one of the Third Reich’s most successful mass organizations. Photo by Heinrich Hoffmann.

Source



Source: “Strength through Joy” cruise to Madeira—the sun deck of the ship is fully occupied. Photo: Heinrich Hoffmann.

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