

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff: “Homeland in the East” (1950)

Abstract

The West German government strove to integrate resettlers into society to the greatest extent possible. At the same time, however, it did not try to prevent them from banding together in the Organization of Expellees [*Organisation der Heimatvertriebenen*] or from cultivating their own traditions. In May 1950, *Die Zeit* journalist Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, who had herself fled from East Prussia in 1945, reported in emotional tones on a meeting of 60,000 expellees in Hamburg. It was clear that many of them clung to the hope of returning to their old homeland.

Source

In May 1950, 60,000 expellees from the formerly German territories in the East gathered in Hamburg. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, herself from East Prussia, reported with much pathos.

Seven hundred years ago, the first Germans gathered in the Hanseatic cities of Bremen and Lübeck to head for the German East and colonize the territories east of the Vistula. Back then, they set out with courage and hope, and they created a new homeland for themselves through centuries of tireless labor.

They returned disinherited, expelled, persecuted, the last descendants of those pioneers. In recent days, they gathered in Hamburg for a large meeting, in which 60,000 refugees from the East participated. Probably never before was the prayer that opened the joint service, “Give us back our homeland” [*Gib uns unsere Heimat wieder*], recited with more fervor, never before did the thoughts of so many homesick, uprooted people drift more longingly across the Iron Curtain than during these days, when so many memories were brought back to life.

But this fate has not broken these people: with one voice they declared that they were not seeking refuge in foreign countries and overseas lands, and that they would rather hold out in their cramped, miserable hovels until their right to their homeland was restored to them. It is not through arms that they want to regain their homeland, but, as mayor Brauer put it, through the power of the idea that freedom and justice are stronger than terror and violence.

Source: Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, “Heimat im Osten”, *Die Zeit*, May 18, 1950.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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