

OMGUS Survey: How do the Germans View the *Lastenausgleich*? (November 1948)

Abstract

The equalization of financial burdens [*Lastenausgleich*] was enacted by the German Bundestag in 1952. Intended to balance out differences in the burdens imposed by the war on different population groups through a redistribution of wealth, it was among the most important socio-political measures of the young Federal Republic. The concept of equalizing burdens was introduced as early as 1948 in connection with the currency reform as a means to ameliorate social hardships and to increase public acceptance of the social market economy. This poll, conducted in the American occupation zone in November 1948, revealed that while those surveyed had imprecise ideas about how the equalization of burdens would be implemented, the majority approved of the concept.

Source

German Appraisal of “*Lastenausgleich*”

Sample: about 1,500 residents of the American Zone, 250 West Berliners, and 150 people from Bremen.

Interviewing dates: November 1948. (12 pp.)

About three-quarters of the population in AMZON (73%) and Bremen (76%) knew the meaning of the term *Lastenausgleich*, a term used to refer to policies aimed at equalizing war losses among the people. In Berlin, however, only 30 per cent of the respondents could give a satisfactory definition of the term. In Berlin and Bremen an overwhelming majority (91 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively) was in favor of the programs; in AMZON the people were slightly less enthusiastic (74%).

More than half of the respondents felt that the program should be carried out immediately and more than eight in ten thought it would indeed be carried out eventually. A large minority in AMZON and Berlin (43 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively) and 50 per cent in Bremen, however, thought it could not possibly be carried out fairly.

Refugees and bombed-out persons were most frequently mentioned as the ones who ought to benefit from the program. Almost a fourth (24%) of the AMZON respondents expected to benefit themselves; almost a third (32%) expected that they would have to pay for a *Lastenausgleich*.

In AMZON only 40 per cent of the respondents knew that German authorities would develop the plans for the equalization program. Among those who knew about the program, 40 per cent wished that the Americans would carry it out as contrasted to only 26 per cent who wanted German authorities to implement the plan. Reasons given by the former group were almost without exception variants of the theme that the Military Government would be more just and more objective than German officials. This was particularly the case among those expecting to receive something from, rather than pay something to, the program.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL,

1970, pp. 287–88.

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