

OMGUS Survey on Attitudes toward Expellees (September 13, 1946)

Abstract

In the first months and years after the war, the need to provide for millions of refugees and expellees and to permanently integrate them into West German society represented a central political and socioeconomic problem. This poll, taken in September 1946 in Baden-Württemberg (southwestern Germany), revealed that, in addition to suffering from immediate material hardships, many refugees also felt rejected by the local German population. A large majority wanted to return to their homeland. The Germans, particularly members of the middle- and upper-classes, perceived the refugees as foreigners. In their eyes, the newcomers were a burden that other nations needed to shoulder as well.

Source

An Investigation to Determine Any Changes in Attitudes of Native Germans toward the Expellees in Wuerttemberg-Baden

Sample: 624 persons (8.5 per cent of whom had lived in Wuerttemberg-Baden for less than one year, 9.5 per cent for a period not exceeding four years, 82 per cent for more than five years).

Interviewing dates: 13 September 1946. (10 pp.)

From the point of view of the expellees, there was a decrease from 75 per cent in March 1946 to 60 per cent in September in the number expressing satisfaction with their reception in Wuerttemberg-Baden (Cf. Report No. 14A of 8 July 1946). Two-fifths of those who were dissatisfied with their reception stated that, instead of regarding them as Germans, the natives considered them to be human beings of inferior value, foreigners, or even beggars. As many as seven in ten expressed a desire to return to their original homes. Asked about the greatest problem that they had faced since coming to the American Zone, 35 per cent mentioned housing, 20 per cent the lack of work, and another 20 per cent clothing. Asked what problems they anticipated in view of the fact that winter was approaching, nearly half (43%) mentioned housing, 39 per cent clothing and shoes, 31 per cent work, and 24 per cent food. (Native residents shared this ranking of problems, with 61 per cent pointing to housing, 50 per cent to food and clothing, and a smaller percentage to the lack of work.)

From the point of view of the native residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden, opinions on the expellees were divided. The population was generally convinced that Czechoslovakia and Hungary were not justified in expelling these people (75 per cent in March, 84 per cent in September). Indeed, in September, 28 per cent of the sample considered the expellees to be foreigners, as opposed to 49 per cent willing to recognize them as German citizens. (Among those with more than eight years of education, the share viewing the expellees as foreigners rose to 42 per cent; and 38 per cent of the middle-class respondents held the same view.) Majorities (83 per cent in March, 74 per cent in September) were nonetheless willing to grant the expellees full participation in politics, although the more highly educated and better off citizens were somewhat more inclined to limit these rights. Two-fifths (40%) of the 17 per cent of the total sample who, in September, expressed a desire for limitations of the expellees' political rights also indicated that the expellees were not Germans and did not think as Germans.

The residents of Wuerttemberg-Baden were increasingly unwilling to assume responsibility for the care

of the expellees: The number stating that Germans alone should care for them dropped from 39 per cent in March to 27 per cent in September; those giving responsibility to the countries which expelled them rose from seven to 36 per cent; the number mentioning international organizations remained roughly constant (15 per cent in March, 16 per cent in September); and the share mentioning the Americans or the Western Allies, with or without a German contribution, dropped from 23 to six per cent. Those with the highest level of education were least likely to assign responsibility to Germany. Three-quarters of the native residents (73%) and five-sixths of the expellees (83%) felt that the American authorities were doing all they could to assist German officials who were trying to solve the expellee problem. Again, the highly educated and those of middle class status or above were most inclined to disagree. Almost four in five of the natives (78%) felt that the expellees were a burden on the financial and economic status of the American Zone – an attitude stronger among the well educated and the middle and upper classes – as opposed to only 13 per cent who saw the expellees exerting a favorable influence on the AMZON economy.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 112–14.

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