

# Government Advice on German Behavior Abroad (August 3, 1978)

## Abstract

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A journalist pokes fun at a campaign by the Federal Press Office. The campaign urged West German tourists to behave well during foreign vacations, so as not to bolster anti-German prejudices in neighboring European countries.

## Source

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### **Deutschmark, Deutschmark über Alles . . .**

### **Or: How Ugly are We Germans Really? Bonn Wants to Turn Tourists into Goodwill Ambassadors**

Bonn, August 2. The Federal Press Office wants to turn fifteen million German vacationers abroad into ambassadors for the Federal Republic. A five-part series of advertisements, co-designed by cartoonist Pit Flick, deals with prejudices against Germans and thus also with prejudices of the Germans (after all, next year will also see the first direct elections to the European Parliament). The project was prompted by demographic research on the image of Germans abroad. Conclusion: we really aren't that ugly after all.

The first product of this research recently appeared in magazines: camera-wielding, snorkel-wearing Teutons in convoys of recreational vehicles, descending upon their hosts from above. The welcome sign is written in vacation-colony German, as can actually be found in many a "Southern German Zone." For instance: "Reel Geman koffie" or "Fig-knuckles with sauerkraut." Then comes the government's suggestion to German vacationers: seek out contact with locals instead of huddling together in beachfront high-rises and resorts. The London *Times* has already responded in a friendly fashion. After this initial introductory ad come the next four, which deal with common prejudices held by our neighbors; each appears under the heading "European vacation in 1978: Germany is worth talking about."

Prejudice number one is caricatured and challenged: "Germans really only enjoy one thing: working."

One sees industrious construction workers building a giant D, that is, a model Deutschland (an ironic allusion to the campaign slogans of the chancellor's party). First each acknowledges what might be true about the prejudice: in the past few decades, people in Germany have indeed worked long and hard because Germans have had to rebuild a livable country from rubble and ruins. Then statistics challenging German "workaholism" are introduced: 92 percent of the labor force works a 40-hour, five-day week; 88 percent of the labor force has four weeks of vacation annually; 750,000 citizens are in voluntary early retirement thanks to the flexible retirement age. As for the catchphrase "dog-eat-dog society," the government wants our ambassadors in swimming trunks to know that the German federal government spends one-third of its 200 billion DM annual budget on social services, and that there are effective laws against unbridled competition. For example, there is the antitrust law, the right of codetermination, the Works Constitution Act, the tenancy law (not all of these laws are popular with the CDU/CSU opposition).

Prejudice number two: "Deutschmark, Deutschmark, über Alles . . ."

The wheels of the cars and campers are deutschmark coins. A Southern European waiting for the convoy

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sits on a donkey. Here, pride in the strength of the DM and the fact that Germany is “one of the leading industrial economies” becomes a useful opener for the desired conversation: Germany’s neighbors profit from the DM, too, for example, through the vacationers, but also because of remittances from guest workers [in the Federal Republic]. The caption reads: “And when it comes to the strong position of our economy, this is not due to a miracle. Rather, it is the product of everyone’s efforts and of the social solidarity we have achieved together.”

Prejudice number three: “Germans are know-it-alls.”

A model student in a typical German Michel cap stands in front of a class of schoolchildren from various nations; he looks like one of Helmut Schmidt’s grandsons. This sort of boastfulness abroad is supposed to be prevented. There really are those kinds of Germans, the ones that know everything better: “How to play soccer right, how to build cars right, how real coffee is supposed to taste and all that . . .” As a conversation-starter: frankness is necessary among neighbors, but Germans should also learn from others, and some restraint can’t hurt, even among good friends.

Prejudice number four: “Germans certainly impose order on everything.”

There is your typical narrow-minded German from back in the day, standing in his bathing trunks in his sandcastle, issuing commands to his wife, children, and dog, all under the banner “my home, my castle.” And the sandcastle is decorated with pebbles: there is peace in the castle. A few strangers look on in amazement. Regarding this prejudice, the caption confesses: “We admit, we Germans do love order and it’s not always easy to get our neighbors to understand that.” Here, vacationers are being prepared for the possibility of controversial political discussions, especially with French and Italians, on the subject of “occupational bans.” Our vacation diplomats are supposed to know: “There is no occupational ban with us. Not even if someone voices extremist opinions. But our civil service laws prevent enemies of the democratic state from being employed in public service.” The caption also addresses foreign and domestic criticism of background checks for candidates for civil service positions (this sentence also won’t please the opposition): “Meanwhile, we should ask ourselves whether the review of candidates for public service is being taken too far. Administrative overreactions do deserve criticism.” [...]

The educational vacation guide from the Federal Press and Information Office costs about two million DM. It will run for five weeks in magazines with a total circulation of six million copies. But the question remains how the majority of tourists are going to make themselves understood in the language of their preferred vacation country. Because here in this country, Spanish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian are—unlike English and French—still foreign languages in the true sense of the word. Thus, while many may read Bonn’s vacation message, they will lack the language skills necessary to become ambassadors.

Source: Helmut Herles, “Deutschmark, Deutschmark über alles . . .” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 3, 1978. © All rights reserved. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung GmbH, Frankfurt.

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