

Welcome Message from the Program for Oktoberfest (1932)

Abstract

This welcome message to visitors of the 1932 Oktoberfest in Munich—printed on the inside page of the official guide to the world-famous festival—appeared at the height of the economic depression and political polarization in Germany. Written in rhyming couplets, the message presented the occurrence of the festival that year as a victory over naysayers. People needed diversions now more than ever, the Oktoberfest’s organizers argued, especially in cities such as Munich, where the suffering was particularly great. Moreover, they clearly saw this as a matter of civic pride, pointing out that eight smaller towns and cities in Bavaria had gone ahead with their festivals. The Oktoberfest was still struggling to come back from its series of cancellations during the First World War and again during the period of hyperinflation, and organizers undoubtedly wished to avoid having to call it off yet again.

The message also made an explicit appeal to anyone who still had money to spend some of it at Oktoberfest. It framed such spending as a part of the social contract, even going so far as to label anyone who did not do so “a scoundrel” [*ein Schuft*]. Such appeals had become commonplace in the early 1930s, as businesses struggled to stay afloat in a time of plummeting consumer spending. German unemployment peaked in 1932, with over 6 million people looking for jobs, or around 30% of the workforce, and the city of Munich’s unemployment rate surpassed the national average.

The welcome message ended with a reference to the frustrating results of that year’s many elections, which had only seemed to compound public uncertainty about Germany’s future direction. Although Germans did not actually vote in four Reichstag elections in 1932—the message’s writer likely took poetic license here to maintain the meter—they did vote in two rounds of national presidential elections in the spring, as well as for a new Reichstag in late July and then again in early November. On top of that, Bavarians went to the polls to elect their state parliament just two weeks after the last round of the presidential elections in April. Campaigns and elections, in other words, definitely saturated the year. Until further notice, though, the message playfully concluded, just vote for the Oktoberfest.

Source

[...]

The festival’s foes nearly won the day
Once again taking Oktoberfest away;
Reluctantly, we heard many explain:
“Why should we celebrate in times of pain?
Oktoberfest is nothing but an opportunity
To spend our hard-earned money!” —
Of course! That’s the whole point of the thing:
Some shell out, while others rake in.
Got money in your wallet? Fork it out,
Got no money, you’ll have to do without.
Only a scoundrel hoards with greed,
The funds that others so sorely need!
Thousands wait with longing looks

For the well-heeled to open their pocketbooks.
Most can only enjoy in modest measure
The usual Octoberfest pleasures.
Though times may be hard, we'll always protest
Efforts to cancel Octoberfest!
The greater the misery, hardship and gloom
The more urgent diversions become.
Augsburg, Weilheim, Moos and Grafing
Mühldorf, Freising, Rosenheim and Pasing
Have held their annual fairs;
Why should Munich refrain from theirs?

The big city, for all intents and purposes
must follow the logic of "Bread and Circuses."
In the desert of misery few can graze,
But festivals exist as oases.

Thus has it ever been:
Only good cheer will cure us again!
And Octoberfest is suited through and through,
A fair "like no other," fine and true. —

Spruce and tidy, our city of stalls, —
Arose again, its magic enthralls.

And in the evening's bright gleaming light
No one forgets this marvelous sight!
Therefore let us all stress
We will not abandon our Octoberfest,
Never shall we leave the slightest doubt
Though naysayers shake their heads and shout. —
Four times have we been sent

to elect the parliament.
And each time, however much they tried
no agreement could they find;
Who can say the fate of the rest,
So follow me — it will be best —
And vote in each future contest

For our dear Octoberfest!

Source of original German text: Münchner Oktoberfest 1932, Programmheft, p. 5, digitized by
Münchener Digitalisierungszentrum (Digitale Bibliothek). Available online:
<https://www.bavariikon.de/object/bav:BSB-MDZ-00000BSB00048887?lang=de>

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