



German History in Documents and Images

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

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

Deutschmark, Deutschmark über alles ...

Or: How ugly are we Germans really? Bonn wants to turn tourists into goodwill ambassadors

BONN, August 2. The German Federal Press Office wants to turn fifteen million German tourists vacationing abroad into ambassadors for the Federal Republic. A five-part advertisement series created with the help of caricaturist Pit Flick deals with prejudices against Germans, as well as prejudices held by them (after all, next year will see the first direct election 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 recreational-vehicle convoys, descending upon their hosts from above. The welcome sign is written in vacation-colony-German, as can actually be found in some "Southern German Zones." For instance: "Reel Geman koffie" or "Fig-knuckles with sauerkraut." Then comes the government's suggestion to German vacationers: seek out contact with local residents instead of huddling together in beachfront high-rises and resorts. The London *Times* has already responded in a friendly fashion. After this initial, tone-setting 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."

The first prejudice that is caricatured and challenged: "Germans really only enjoy one thing: working."

You see industrious construction workers building a giant D, that is, a blueprint for Deutschland (an ironic allusion to the campaign slogans of the chancellor's party). First, each ad acknowledges the truth in each 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 annual vacation; 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 tenant 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 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 the 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 in front of a class of schoolchildren from various nations; he looks like a grandchild of [chancellor] Helmut Schmidt. 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 among neighbors is certainly necessary, but Germans should also learn from others, and some restraint can’t hurt, even among good friends.

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

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 adorned with pebbles: Peace in the castle. A few strangers watch in amazement. Regarding this prejudice, the caption confesses the following: “Admittedly, we Germans sure do love order and it’s not always easy to garner sympathy for that from our neighbors.” Here, vacationers are being prepared for the possibility of controversial political discussions, especially with Frenchmen and Italians on the subject of “occupational bans.” Our vacation diplomats are supposed to know: “There are no occupational bans in our country. 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, however, if some people in our country might not be overdoing the review of candidates for public service. 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 the 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 quite a few people might 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.

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