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OMGUS Survey on Attitudes toward the Food Situation (1946-47)

In the first two years after the end of the war, the food shortage was the main problem for most Germans. The Allies helped to ease the situation with substantial food shipments, which supplemented German production. Nonetheless, there was growing skepticism about the extent of the aid in the American zone, especially in the larger cities, where hunger was the worst. Still, the Germans in the American occupation zone assumed that they were being treated better than Germans in others zones.

Trends in Attitudes toward the Food Situation

Sample: a cross-section of the adult population in the American Zone and in the American and British Sectors of Berlin.

Interviewing dates: from several surveys made between February 1946 and June 1947. (7 pp.)

In the course of the year, the German public became increasingly skeptical about the amount of food that the United States sent to Germany. Whereas in July 1946, 73 per cent believed the American claim that they were providing a fifth of the total food supply, by June 1947 only 49 per cent believed this claim. Relatively more Bavarians were skeptical of the claim than residents of either Hesse or Wuerttemberg-Baden. Support for the claim tended to come more from among men, the better educated, the self-styled upper class, and former Nazi Party members.

In June 1947, regular newspaper readers were more likely (52%) than occasional readers and nonreaders (45 per cent each) to believe that America's imports amounted to a fifth of the Zone's food. Fewer nonreaders, however, than readers denied the claim. Proportionately as many urban as rural people reportedly believed the American claim although the number of denials increased with city size: 45 per cent of the residents of large cities in contrast to 33 per cent in small villages rejected the claim. Some of these opinions evidently resulted from the fact that urban residents had a harder time getting food than did rural residents. In fact, in June 1947, when 64 per cent of the people in rural areas said that they had enough food to get along, only 22 per cent of the urban dwellers could make this claim. And when the question was refined still further to whether or not they had enough food to do their work well, the figures for the two groups went down even further, to 50 per cent for rural residents and nine per cent for urban dwellers.

Despite dissatisfaction with the food supply, AMZON residents felt that they were the best fed in the four zones. In June 1947, 41 per cent of AMZON Germans thought that the rations were smallest in the Soviet Zone, 28 per cent mentioned the French Zone, 18 per cent said the British Zone. Interestingly enough, West Berliners placed the French Zone at the top of the list with 40 per cent and the Soviet Zone second with 31 per cent.

Source: A. J. and R. L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys*. Urbana, IL, 1970, pp. 167-68.