



German History in Documents and Images

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Report by the American Secret Service about the Attitudes of the German Population in the American Occupation Zone (August 12, 1945)

A few weeks after the end of the war, an opinion poll in the American occupation zone revealed the aftereffects of the politics and propaganda of the Nazi regime. The Germans were weary of politics and did not believe in a positive new beginning. They despised the Russians but also rejected the Americans, whom they blamed for their “voluntary” entry into the war, and from whom they expected the forced introduction of a “foreign” form of government – i.e., democracy. The statements about National Socialism were themselves contradictory, though they already pointed to an exculpatory approach that was often used later on, namely to place responsibility for the crimes entirely on the person of Adolf Hitler. Anti-Semitic prejudices were still widespread.

Stance toward the Allies. – The Russians are without a doubt the least popular. Even today, 92% of those surveyed said that they consider the Russians an “inferior” people. The Germans cannot and do not want to grasp that they were defeated “even” by the Russians. Strong feelings of revenge are noticeable here. Most Germans were evidently hoping that the Russians would be forced to rebuild the destroyed Germany. To our question: “Did you assume that the Western Allies together with the Germans would wage war against the Soviets?,” 72% responded in the affirmative. [. . .]

We (the Americans) are in second place. It is astonishing that people are generally more hostile toward us than toward the French and the English. A psychological assessment of the opinion survey shows that there are two reasons for this. First: it is generally said that the English and the French were “forced” to go to war, while the Americans entered voluntarily into war against the Reich. It is assumed that the French and the English will behave “in a manner that is customary after a war,” while the Americans are “suspected” of wanting to impose their own way of life (democracy) onto the German people. Second; the idea that we waged a “Jewish war” remains predominant. [. . .] The English are credited with a certain “correctness.” What also contributes to their popularity is that they are not as “rich” as we are: the element of envy is absent. Most popular are the French “archenemies,” probably because people assume that they can deal most readily with the French.

NATIONAL SOCIALISM. – There is a tendency to hold individuals, especially Hitler, responsible for the regime’s atrocities. Strong contradictions are evident here. A review of the attitudes (cross-checking) shows that 84% of those who can still be regarded as National Socialists

distance themselves from the person of Hitler. At the same time, 53% of those surveyed declared that Hitler “knew nothing” about the atrocities in the concentration camps.

ANTI-SEMITISM. – Latent anti-Semitism manifests itself in all those surveyed. It seems to be a motivating sentiment even when the survey participant deems himself free of all National Socialist sympathies. The answers to the question: “Do you believe Germany would have also lost the war if the Jews had not been persecuted?” is particularly relevant. With varying degrees of qualification, 64% of those surveyed declared that the persecution of the Jews had been “decisive” in Germany’s defeat. Moreover, many of those surveyed expressed strong opposition to the Reich’s anti-Jewish measures. And yet, they still hold anti-Semitic ideas insofar as they are convinced of the “power” of “world Jewry.”

POLITICS. – Weariness with politics was evident in more than 90% of those surveyed. It is probably primarily due to the fact that the vast majority of Germans believe that politics in the future will be carried out over the heads of the German people. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed did not believe that German self-determination was foreseeable within the next fifteen years. To the question: “Why do you want to have nothing to do with politics?,” 67% responded: “Because politics leads to war.” One frequently expressed view is that the new economic beginning “is pointless anyhow.”

PRESS. – The “American newspapers for the German population” are more popular than one might think. A Berlin survey showed that 91% of readers consider the *Allgemeine Zeitung* a “decent paper.” In contrast to this, 66% responded negatively to the question of whether the “American papers” publish “the whole truth.” Apparently the popularity of our papers can be attributed to the comparison with the National Socialist press. Eighty-four percent of those surveyed declared that the National Socialist press had “always lied,” 15% felt it had “not always” written the truth, and only one percent believed that the Hitler press had for the most part stuck to the truth. The question about the format of American newspapers drew different responses, which varied by region. On average, it emerged that 59% of readers approve of the format, 36% have various objections – “too sensationalistic,” “too little substance,” “a moralizing tone,” “not enough local news” – while 6% reject the journalistic format without any further explanation.

Source: Hans Habe, *Im Jahre Null. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Presse [In Year Zero. A Contribution to the History of the German Press]* (1966). Munich, 1977, p. 82 ff.; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955 [The Founding of Two States. German History 1945-1955]*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, pp. 372-73.

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