**THE ASSIMILATION OF GERMAN EXPELLEES INTO THE
WEST GERMAN POLITY AND SOCIETY SINCE 1945**

STUDIES IN SOCIAL LIFE XVIII

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THE ASSIMILATION
OF GERMAN EXPELLEES
INTO
THE WEST GERMAN POLITY
AND SOCIETY SINCE 1945

A CASE STUDY OF EUTIN, SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

by

BERTRAM GRESH LATTIMORE, JR.

MARTINUS NIJHOFF / THE HAGUE / 1974

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ISBN 978-90-247-1650-0

ISBN 978-94-011-7642-2 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-94-011-7642-2

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PREFACE

The expulsions of German nationals from former Reich territories east of the Oder-Neisse Rivers and of German minority communities from various Eastern European nations following the collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945 constitute one of the least appreciated consequences of the Second World War. Numbering some ten million people, this group formed nearly a fifth of the total population of the new West German state which emerged in 1949 and presented a grave threat to its early stability. The state (*Land*) which received the greatest number of these largely destitute expellees in proportion to its indigenous population was Schleswig-Holstein: in the years between 1945 and 1948 its population doubled. This predominately agrarian area underwent severe strains in accommodating these newcomers, and its handling of the expellee problem provided a bench mark for the evaluation of the assimilation process throughout the Federal Republic.

While the tracing of the assimilation of the expellees into the West German polity and society has been voluminously documented at the national level,¹ much less research into the process has been conducted at the state and local levels. The principal reason for this seems to lie in the belief that the process has been successfully completed at these lower levels and may be considered a

¹ The classic treatment of the first decade and a half of the assimilation process from the national level is Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding, eds., *Die Vertriebenen in West-Deutschland: Ihre Eingliederung und Ihr Einfluss auf Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Politik und Geistesleben* (3 vols., Kiel: Ferdinand Hirt, 1959). (Hereafter cited as *Vertriebenen*.)

fait accompli.² Nonetheless, there appear to be few studies which have placed the research microscope over a particular community and followed its postwar development with an emphasis on the assimilation of the expellees.³ Studies which have dealt exclusively with the assimilation process in Schleswig-Holstein are either outdated, neglect the political side of the process, or treat expellee assimilation as a peripheral matter.⁴ The purpose of this study will be to help fill this academic gap in assimilation research by focusing upon a particular town in Schleswig-Holstein to gain a deeper insight into the assimilation process from 1945 to 1970. By emphasizing the political aspect of the process, an attempt will be made to appraise the depth of the expellee commitment to West German values and goals.

The town of Eutin was judged to be particularly well suited for an investigation into the assimilation process in Schleswig-Holstein. Eutin possessed a proud history stretching back to the twelfth century and a famous cultural heritage dating from the late eighteenth century. Lying geographically in the heart of the gently

² The most recent treatment of the assimilation process in English typifies this view:

Internal policy goals relating to economic and social integration into West Germany . . . need not be analyzed in detail. That integration has progressed so well makes it evident that expellee efforts in this direction have brought favorable, effective government response. Moreover, since the late 1950's these claims have yielded in frequency and importance to those relating to foreign policy.

See Hans W. Schoenberg, *Germans from the East: A Study of Their Migration, Resettlement, and Subsequent Group History Since 1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 161. (Hereafter cited as *Germans from the East*.)

³ As recently as 1967 one author noted that "es sind keine Untersuchungen bekannt, die bestimmte Gruppen der Vertriebenen oder Flüchtlinge oder auch nur einzelne Dorfgemeinschaften oder Familien auf ihrem Weg von 1945 bis heute verfolgten". Ludwig Landsberg, "Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge in der westdeutschen Gesellschaft", *Leistung und Schicksal: Abhandlungen und Berichte über die Deutschen im Osten*, Eberhard G. Schulz, ed. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1967), p. 392.

⁴ The only in-depth treatment of a Schleswig-Holstein town's development from 1945 to 1955 completely neglected the political side of the process. See Ernst W. Buchholz and Elizabeth Pfeil, *Von der Kleinstadt zur Mittelstadt: Städtewachstum durch Vertriebenenwanderung* (Bad Godesberg: Selbstverlag der Bundesanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumforschung, 1957). A comprehensive research into the state's political development between 1945 and 1958 treated the expellees and their political party simply as one interest group among many. See Heinz Josef Verain, *Parteien und Verbände: Eine Studie*

rolling terrain of East Holstein, it was far enough removed from the metropolitan centers of Kiel and Lübeck to acquire a life of its own, and as the countyseat of Eutin County the town was also an important political and administrative center before and after the influx of the expellees. Both the town and county of Eutin have remained areas of expellee concentration significantly higher than the Schleswig-Holstein state average, and the expellee political party played a prominent role in their postwar development.

The documentation of Eutin's close association with the expellee phenomenon⁵ was facilitated by the existence of a well organized town archive and a regularly published local newspaper. Most important, however, were the minutes of the town's Expellee Committee, a body originally independent of the town council but later incorporated into its committee system. By analyzing the lengthy transcripts of Expellee Committee sessions between 1948 and 1970 and comparing the topics discussed with the movement of the times as reflected in local elections and in the local press, a profile of the course of the assimilation process at the local level emerged.

über ihren Aufbau, ihre Verflechtung und ihr Wirken in Schleswig-Holstein, 1945-1958 (Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1964). (Hereafter cited as *Parteien*.) Three other studies are too dated to provide more than a background today. For a statistical treatment of the economic situation in the Duchy of Lauenburg County, see Marthe Krautzpaul, "Die soziale und berufliche Umschichtung der Vertriebenen, Flüchtlinge und Evakuierten des Kreises Herzogtum Lauenburg in den Jahren 1945/49" (unpublished dissertation, Wirtschaftlichen Staatswissenschaften der Hohen Rechts- und Staatswissenschaften Fakultät, University of Kiel, 1952). The results of a questionnaire responded to by expellees living just to the east of Kiel (1945 to 1950) are analyzed in Lenchen Rehders, *Probsteierhagen, Fiefbergen, und Gut Salzau: Wandlungen dreier ländlichen Siedlungen in Schleswig-Holstein durch den Flüchtlingszustrom* (Kiel: Selbstverlag des Geographischen Instituts der Universität Kiel, 1953). The conclusions of a more general sample are found in Else Bohnsack, *Flüchtlinge und Einheimische in Schleswig-Holstein: Ergebnisse einer Stichprobenerhebung, 1953* (Kiel: Universität Kiel, 1956).

⁵ Eutin's postwar history has not been extensively documented. Upon the occasion of the town's 700th anniversary in 1957, a new history was published. Its modest 207 pages, however, included only 4 devoted to the period after 1937. See Gustav Peters, *Geschichte von Eutin* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholz Verlag, 1958), pp. 203-207. The only subsequent elaborations to appear have been in connection with articles written either for the local newspaper (*Ostholsteiner Anzeiger*) or for the Society for the Care and Promotion of Homeland Knowledge in Eutin County (*Verband zur Pflege und Förderung der Heimatkunde im Eutin*).

This study, however, does not pretend to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the expellee phenomenon since 1945. This task has already been very adequately done by Hans W. Schoenberg's *Germans from the East*. The parochial focus of this thesis is a deliberate attempt to break away from the economic and foreign policy emphasis which has thus far characterized most studies of the expellees. For this reason the author highly recommends that the reader supplement his following of this text with Schoenberg's book and perhaps a brief history of postwar West German political development. Only in this manner will the tracing of Eutin's postwar history be brought into proper focus.

The only other town of comparable size in Eutin County is Bad Schwartau, but its propinquity to the city of Lübeck gave it unfair advantages over the town of Eutin in the pace and scope of its assimilation program. The minutes of Bad Schwartau's Expellee Committee reflect these advantages when compared with those of Eutin by the fewer total number of sessions held and the more restricted agenda of items considered. Occasional reference to these meetings, however, will confirm the general trend of events in Eutin.

While the primary focus of this study was the town of Eutin, it was also necessary to consult with state officials of the Schleswig-Holstein Chancellery and the Department of Expellee Affairs within the Ministry for Labor, Social Affairs and Expellees. Their personal experience with the assimilation process and their helpful suggestions regarding the research for this thesis rendered these contacts invaluable for the ultimate success of the effort. Thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of officials at both Kiel and Eutin, the bulk of the research for this thesis was completed between March and June 1971 in Schleswig-Holstein. During the following two months of travel throughout West Germany, it was possible to observe the current environment and to interview a group of officials and politicians connected with expellee matters at the national level in Bonn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would have been impossible to research and write had it not been for the generous cooperation of many people. First and foremost, I am indebted to my adviser Professor Uri Ra'anani for his enthusiasm and helpful guidance; were it not for his initial suggestion of the expellee topic to me as a possible thesis subject, this study might never have been undertaken. Once in West Germany, I was given prompt and valuable assistance by Herr Carl Raben of the Schleswig-Holstein Ministry for Labor, Social Affairs and Expellees. His constant readiness to help me in personal as well as academic matters can never be adequately recompensed. Herr Raben introduced me to Dr. Heinz Walsdorff of the Schleswig-Holstein Chancellery who furnished me with useful information and arranged for me to meet the friendly and active Agent for Expellee Affairs of Nordfriesland County, Herr Ernst Schmidt. Herr Raben was also a native Eutiner, and he arranged my initial introductions to officials of the town administration. Wherever I turned for information in Eutin, I encountered a friendly readiness to assist me. Among the many town civil servants, I am especially grateful to Chief Administrator Alwin Schmidt, former Agent for Expellee Affairs Kurt Obieray, both Herr Fien and Fräulein Neumann of the *Anmeldungsamt*, and Archivist Herbert Hoiss for their continual patience in answering my ceaseless questions. Herr Dieter Nooke, an SPD town councilman, first turned my attention to the Expellee Committee minutes; later he and his family became treasured friends. In Bonn a former Fletcher graduate, Hans-Joachim Vergau, introduced me to Dr. Herwig Effenberg in the Foreign Ministry. He in turn arranged numerous interviews which helped me to gain a national perspective of expellee affairs. Among those interviewees I am especially indebted to the generous hospitality of Herr and Frau von Loesch of the federal League of Expellees. Finally, my wife Nancy deserves special thanks and praise for her unflagging encouragement of this endeavor, her patience during my absence in Germany, and her teaching position which enabled the research to be financed.