

German Historical Institute London
Bulletin VolumeXXII, No. 1 May 2000 S. 23-27
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Volker Ackermann's *Der 'echte' Flüchtling* focuses on the large number of refugees and expellees who fled from the GDR into the Bundesrepublik in the period 1945-61. This is an important and interesting topic on which surprisingly little has so far been written. Siegfried Bethlehem's study entitled *Heimatvertreibung, DDR-Flucht, Gastarbeiterzuwanderung*, published in 1982, analysed the policy of the West German government towards the refugees from the GDR, but the author was unable to gain access to the archival material necessary to evaluate the motives behind their flight to the West. Helge Heidemeyer's book, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945/1949-1961* (1994), concluded that the federal government in Bonn did not have a clear, consistent, or coherent policy towards refugees from the GDR, noting that it accepted them more readily in the early 1950s when they represented an economic burden than at the end of the decade when they constituted an important asset for the expanding West German economy. While Volker Ackermann's work covers some of the same ground, he concentrates in particular on young refugees from the GDR and, unlike Heidemeyer, assesses not only the attitude of the West German authorities to the refugee problem but also looks at it from an East German perspective. Although there is no indication in the title, Ackermann's study is regionally based, dealing with North Rhine-Westphalia, the Bundesland which bore the brunt of the influx of refugees from the GDR in the 1950s.

Der 'echte' Flüchtling has been impressively researched and Ackermann has evaluated material from no fewer than twenty-six archives. While the book is based predominantly on West German sources, he has also analysed East German documents held in the Bundesarchiv in Potsdam and the Jugendarchiv beim Institut für Zeitgeschichte, based in Berlin. This enables the author to see the issues from contrasting perspectives. Curiously, however, Ackermann did not carry out research in the Public Record Office in London, even though a significant amount of material on this topic is held there. The title of the book - *Der 'echte' Flüchtling* - is entirely appropriate because it does indeed represent the 'red thread' running through the work. All the refugees or expellees who fled or were expelled from the Eastern territories in the early postwar years were automatically classified as 'genuine' refugees but, after the establishment of the Bundesrepublik in 1949, a distinction was made between different groups of refugees from the GDR depending on their motives for fleeing to the West. Ackermann's study focuses on who qualified as a 'genuine' refugee and was therefore entitled to preferential treatment. This issue is looked at from the perspective of the federal government in Bonn and the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia. Particular attention is paid to the treatment of young East German refugees in the 18-25 age group, members of the police force, and soldiers from the National People's Army. Ackermann illustrates how the concept of the 'genuine' refugee was incorporated into federal legislation introduced in the early 1950s. Those deemed to be 'genuine' refugees had suffered 'a direct threat to life and limb or their personal freedom' (p. 13). On the basis of surveys, questionnaires, and reports, Ackermann shows that very few GDR refugees were able to meet this criterion for recognition as an 'echter Flüchtling'.

The response of the Adenauer government to the influx of refugees from the GDR was heavily influenced by political pragmatism. While recognizing that few of them conformed to its definition of a 'genuine' refugee, it continued to accept the vast majority, maintaining in public that they had suffered political persecution in the GDR. This decision can be attributed to foreign policy considerations. As part of its strategy to bring about the unification of Germany, the federal government was anxious to demonstrate to international public opinion what it saw as the inhumanity of the political system in the GDR. It therefore attached great importance to portraying the refugees as victims of the 'overall political situation' (p. 35) in East Germany and was reluctant to concede that they may have fled to the West for economic, personal, or, other reasons. In fact, there is even evidence that the government sought to suppress the publication of public opinion polls which refuted its argument that the exodus from the GDR was politically motivated. For example, in April 1957 it exerted pressure on journalists not to publish the findings of a survey by Infratest revealing that 29 per cent of GDR refugees had come to the West in order to improve their economic position.

Ackermann illustrates how the desire of the Bonn government to depict the East German refugees as victims of political persecution influenced the implementation of both the *Notaufnahmegesetz* of 22 August 1950 and the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* of 15 May 1953. The majority of GDR refugees were accepted under the *Notaufnahmegesetz* throughout the 1950s even though no more than a tiny proportion of them could prove 'a direct threat to life or limb or their personal freedom'. Thus, pragmatic political considerations rather than consistent, objective criteria determined who was to be regarded as a 'genuine' refugee, and it is hard to disagree with Ackermann's conclusion that the process bordered on a 'farce' (p.113). While the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* also laid down that recognition as a 'genuine' refugee should be dependent on evidence of political persecution, this stipulation was gradually relaxed during the 1950s in response to pressure from political and church leaders. On 27 July 1957, an amendment was introduced widening the criteria for recognition as a 'genuine' refugee to include a 'serious conflict of conscience'. More important still, economic reasons were finally recognized in an amendment passed on 29 June 1961, less

than two months before the construction of the Berlin Wall. However, according to the Bonn government, such refugees were none the less victims of the political system in the GDR since economic and political factors were inextricably linked. As Ackermann noted: 'From this time onwards even the wish to improve one's standard of living was regarded as a political motive for fleeing [to the West]; the "fight for freedom" was officially interpreted as "the fight of the working population for a fair share in the gross national product" '(p. 283).

Young people were heavily overrepresented among those who left the GDR and, according to one study, almost half of them were under the age of twenty-five. They were accommodated in camps and, on the basis of confidential reports drawn up by the camp authorities, Ackermann explores their motives for fleeing from East Germany. He outlines the difficulties in interpreting the reports since the refugees would not necessarily cite their real reasons for leaving the GDR but those they considered strong enough for them to be allowed to stay in the Bundesrepublik. Several camp administrators observed that an unusually large number of young refugees had an unstable family background and, according to a report from the Haus Elisabeth camp near Gießen in 1954, no less than 61.5 per cent of the occupants came from broken homes. It was noticeable that all the reports from camp officials interpreted 'political motives' in a very broad way. For example, the annual report in 1957 for the Sandbostel and Westertimke camps near Bremen concluded that 71 per cent of their inmates had fled to the Federal Republic for 'political' as opposed to 'personal' reasons. Later in the report it transpired that among those attributed 'political' motivation was a young East German woman who had come to the West to marry her fiancé because 'the fulfilment of the most elementary human aspirations was made so difficult by the GDR' (p. 183). The same official noted in 1953 that pregnancy was a common cause of young women choosing to flee to the West. A representative survey commissioned by the Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen in 1956 concluded that political motives were of primary importance among only 29 per cent of refugees, while the majority were influenced by personal or economic factors. According to Ackermann, East German students came closest to the Bonn Government's vision of 'genuine' refugees who had suffered political discrimination and rejected the SED regime.

An important aspect of Ackermann's study deals with the efforts, both at federal and state level, to integrate the GDR refugees into West German society. In North Rhine-Westphalia, special homes were set up for young people, jointly financed by public and private money. They were initially concerned exclusively with the economic and social needs of the refugees but later assumed greater political significance due to the gradual recognition that the decision to flee to the Federal Republic did not necessarily imply acceptance of its political system. One study carried out by the Evangelische Heimstatthilfe in 1958 concluded that, while the refugees rejected the SED regime, they did not necessarily identify with the 'parlamentarisch-demokratische Grundordnung; preferring instead 'an ideal form of Communism' (p. 255). This view was borne out by the reaction of young East German refugees to the industrial unrest in Baden-Württemberg in the spring of 1963 when they supported the striking metal workers using 'radical Marxist arguments' (p. 249).

One of the most interesting sections of the book concerns the response of the SED to the flight of its citizens to the West. Initially, the regime adopted a relaxed attitude but the decision to close the border with the Federal Republic in May 1952 indicated its disquiet. This deepened in the mid-1950s as the East German economy began to experience the negative consequences of a dwindling work-force. Ackermann shows that SED officials admitted privately that not enough was being done to counter the exodus of East German citizens to the West, but there was a reluctance to debate the issue openly. In so far as it was discussed, the SED attributed the problem to a conspiracy on the part of the West. It argued that the Federal Republic was consciously attempting to attract economically valuable groups as a means of slowing down the GDR's post-war recovery and weakening its military position. On the other hand, the SED did not consider even privately that the refugees were influenced by political motives. While the Bonn government viewed them as 'freedom fighters' and 'genuine political refugees' (p.139) who left East Germany not because of the attractiveness of the Federal Republic but due to their dissatisfaction with the GDR, the SED saw the refugees as victims of the Adenauer government's propaganda campaign to lure them to the West to supplement the West German work-force.

Volker Ackermann has chosen an excellent topic and produced a very fine book. It is extensively based on primary sources and the author succeeds in presenting the results of empirical research within a clear conceptual framework. While the focal point of the book is the attitude of the Federal Government to the refugees from the GDR, it is by no means simply a political study, but also views the refugee problem in an economic and social context. Ackermann succeeds in placing the events he is describing in a wider historical perspective and draws parallels with the issue of asylum seekers in Germany in the early 1990s. He also illustrates the extreme political sensitivity of the refugee problem during the 1950s, showing how the Bonn government sought to suppress evidence of young East German refugees choosing to return to the GDR. Ackermann's central argument is both original and convincing. He builds up a fascinating picture of the Bonn government's vision of a 'genuine' refugee who, after due reflection on the contrasting political systems in East and West Germany, decides to flee to the West. Ackermann's analysis of the refugees' motives for fleeing to the Federal Republic is the most interesting but also the most problematic section of the book. Although the author undoubtedly succeeds in showing that very few were able to meet the government's stringent definition of a 'genuine' refugee, he acknowledges the difficulties in interpreting the refugees' own statements about their motives for leaving the GDR since they had to convince the West German authorities that they had compelling reasons to remain in the Federal Republic. In fact, this is an area where oral history might have been employed to good effect since the refugees would have had no

reason to withhold their true motives many years later.

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