

Excerpt from a Police and Administrative Regulation on the Question of “Whether Apprentice Travel is Necessary and Useful Today” (1796)

Abstract

This excerpt from a police and administrative regulation reveals how eighteenth-century mercantilist thinking, in combination with the increasing mechanization of production processes (and against the backdrop of authoritarian regimentation), called into question the tradition of apprentice travel. An economically prospering state, so the argument went, could not afford to let its technically skilled, industrious young citizens leave the country for extended periods.

Source

[...]

The travel of apprentices to enhance their skills has been considered necessary from time immemorial. To that end, certain travel years have been established for all trades except the closed ones. And to ensure that the traveling apprentices were able to progress all the better, “craft gifts” and craft work given as gifts were introduced. In the old days, the craft system was in bad straits when it came to improving skill levels, but there were always more skilled craftsmen in some countries than in others, so it must be conceded that apprentice travel was at that time both necessary and useful. However, times have changed. In answer to the question of whether apprentice travel is still necessary and useful today, so many various circumstances arise that it is impossible to give either a general yes or no answer to the question. It depends on what the state’s circumstances are and whether travel is to occur within the borders of the state or outside the country as well, and also on how the travel itself is done. If the manufacturers, factories, and workshops are flourishing in large or mid-sized cities, it would be a big mistake to allow apprentice travel outside the country. And if it had to be allowed for one craft or another, or otherwise for shifting circumstances, no young citizen should be permitted to travel outside the country without prior notice and permission, and the permission would have to be limited in an orderly manner to a certain portion, for example, to one-third, of the usual apprentice travel years so that the individuals would have to spend the other two-thirds of the travel years in their homeland itself; there would then have to be important motivation for extending that permission to the entire apprentice travel period.

Source: Johann Heinrich Ludwig Berg, ed., *Policey- und Cameral-Magazin in welchem nach alphabetischer Ordnung die vornehmsten und wichtigsten bey dem Policey- und Cameralwesen vorkommenden Materien nach richtigen und vernünftigen Grundsätzen practisch abgehandelt und durch landesherrliche Gesetze und hin und wieder wirklich gemachte Einrichtungen erläutert werden*, Vol. IV. Vienna, 1796, p. 295f.

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