

SD Report about Consumer Goods Shortages (March 18, 1940)

Abstract

The regime's dramatic and complete shift towards a war economy under the Four-Year Plan meant the redistribution of resources, raw materials, and labor power towards arms and ammunition manufacturing, as well as technological research and development. For German civilians, this shift meant the diminishing of consumer goods production, leading to material scarcity of everyday necessities. Rationing policies helped to mitigate these issues to some degree, but as this document shows, non-rationed goods became scarce almost as soon as the war began.

Responsibility for monitoring social issues such as commodity shortages fell in part to the Security Service of the Reichsführer SS [*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD], the state intelligence agency of the SS and Nazi Party. The SD monitored public reaction to government policy, and through its reports, kept the regime appraised of the public's general mood. Thus, the SD reports served as a crucial barometer of popular support for the regime, allowing policy makers to anticipate public reaction to their initiatives. This SD report from March 18, 1940, warns of public dissatisfaction regarding consumer shortages, in particular of non-rationed foodstuffs, stimulants, fruits, and produce very early in the war.

Source

March 18, 1940

Complaints from members of the public about the distribution of scarce goods

There are reports from all over the Reich stating that there is great discontent among the public about the difficulties encountered while shopping for goods that do not require ration cards. These are mainly foodstuffs and luxury foods – vegetables, fruit and tropical fruit – which are as important for daily nutrition as those groceries subject to rationing.

Almost all reports point out that especially working women, who usually are only able to do their shopping in the evening hours, complain that they are unable to obtain any goods except those foodstuffs that require ration cards. A wide circle of housewives, who do not have enough time to queue up for sparse goods, sometimes for hours, were apparently also affected by this. The reports further state that although retailers in many cases had started to give preference to regular customers over occasional customers in order to ensure a fair distribution of scarce goods, conflicts repeatedly arose not just with customers, but very often also with the regulating authorities. While in many cases the authorities agreed with the view to give regular customers priority when distributing scarce goods in order to counter the bad habit of hoarding, some administrative offices on the other hand were of the opinion that shop owners had to sell each customer the goods they demanded. This opinion was based on the assumption that shop owners very often equated the term “regular customer” with the so-called “better or good customer,” who is judged based on the volume of their shopping. The same phenomenon exists – according to reports from Cologne, Duisburg, Mülheim, Krefeld, and Gelsenkirchen – at the wholesalers. For example, a report from Cologne states that according to comments made by greengrocers, it currently was very difficult to obtain vegetables at Cologne's wholesale market without paying bribes. For fruit and tropical fruit (oranges) they had to pay inflated prices based on the volume of the lot. Moreover, it was demanded of the retailers that they offer scarce or rationed foodstuffs such as butter, eggs, etc. to the wholesalers as an additional payment for their delivery. The same occurrences have

been observed at the wholesale market in Duisburg, where big city wholesalers make their deliveries dependent upon whether shop owners bring poultry, butter, and soap with them. In some cases goods never reached the wholesale market but instead were black-marketed in underhand dealings (individual cases were dealt with by the local authorities in charge).

Because of this effect consumers, but especially those circles who are limited to certain shopping hours due to their employment, demand that vegetables, fruit and other scarce goods be included in the rationed foodstuffs, at least in the same manner that the distribution of venison, poultry, and fish is handled, namely that retailers either keep customer lists or stamp certain ration cards. With this regulation, which is suggested by both consumers and retailers, a fair distribution could be implemented on the one hand, and on the other hand the unnecessary queueing – as it has recently again been seen frequently for the sale of confectionary – could be prevented. According to a report from Dortmund, so-called regular customer cards have already been handed out there at the beginning of the new acquisition period.

Source of original German text: Meldungen aus dem Reich (no. 67) March 18, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938–1945. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS*. Edited by and introduction by Heinz Boberach. Band 4: Meldungen aus dem Reich Nr. 66 vom 15. März 1940 – Nr. 101 vom 1. Juli 1940. Herrsching: Pawlak Verlag, 1984, pp. 897–907.

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