

Finding Substitutes for West German Imports: Report from a Central Committee Brigade (March 16, 1961)

Abstract

Constant shortages and supply bottlenecks in East Germany's planned economy were one important reason for the mass exodus out of the GDR. On September 30, 1960, the government of the Federal Republic canceled the interzonal trade agreement with the GDR. Afterwards, GDR leaders needed to make their country less dependent on supplies from the West. This meant developing their own alternatives to Western imports and using them in production and relying on supplies from Eastern Bloc states.

Source

I. The chief challenges in becoming immune to West German attempts to interfere with the nationally-owned paint factory in Wolfen and the nationally-owned Agfa film factory in Wolfen

The two enterprises are among the chemical enterprises of our Republic whose production depends particularly strongly on the supply of West German chemical raw materials and intermediate products.

The most important task of the paint factory lies in developing new production possibilities for the 77 products hitherto obtained from West Germany. These 77 products are essential prerequisites for the production of a large number of organic paints, auxiliary agents for textiles, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. They affect about 15% of the factory's total production.

In the film factory, however, it is not possible to arrange for the in-house production of those pre-products for film manufacturing that have hitherto been procured from West Germany. The task consists of creating, in cooperation with other GDR enterprises, the preconditions for uninterrupted production in the film factory. [...] *One especially crucial task involves making all of the necessary preparations to enter the capitalist market effectively, and on short notice, with the new brand "ORWO," in the event that the Agfa brand agreement is cancelled by the West Germany company Bayer-Leverkusen.*

II. Results to date in implementing the decrees of the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee

[...] In the struggle to fulfill the programs, the following results have been achieved so far at the paint factory in Wolfen:

7 products will still be produced in sufficient quantities in the paint factory itself in 1961,

6 other products will be produced starting in 1962,

4 additional products will be procured from other GDR enterprises in 1961,

2 products will be sent immediately from the USSR,

sample shipments for 16 products have arrived from the USSR; 8 of them have already been analyzed with positive results,

the lab development of 9 products has been completed in the paint factory and production could be started,

11 products are included in the paint factory's research plan; their development will presumably be completed in 1961,

the development path for 10 products is still unclear.

The remaining products are being developed by supra-factory research teams with academic institutes and universities and will presumably be completed in 1961. [...]

In the film factory, work is underway to create, by the end of the first half of 1961, all of the preconditions needed for production to be converted to the new brand name "ORWO" within a few days' notice. Joint efforts with the Association of Nationally-Owned Chemical Fiber and Photochemical Enterprises [VVB Chemiefaser und Fotochemie] and the Chemistry Section of the State Planning Commission ensured that projects in the film program would not be affected by cuts in investment funding. One can already gauge that a sudden halt in shipments from West Germany will no longer cause a significant production decline in the film industry. However, this requires that the Chemistry Section of the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Trade consistently implement the Politburo's decree on the film program, and, in particular, guarantee sensible inventory in keeping with the product range. [...]

Source: SAPMO-BArch ZPA, IV 2/5/13, ff. 64–67; reprinted in Dierk Hoffman, Karl-Heinz Schmidt, and Peter Skyba, eds., *Die DDR vor dem Mauerbau: Dokumente zur Geschichte des anderen deutschen Staates, 1949–1961* [*The GDR before the Building of the Wall: Documents on the History of the Other German State, 1949–1961*]. Munich: Piper, 1993, pp. 380–82.

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Recommended Citation: Finding Substitutes for West German Imports: Report from a Central Committee Brigade (March 16, 1961), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4081>> [February 07, 2025].