

Information on the Public Mood with Regard to Provisioning in Berlin and the District of Potsdam (May 19, 1961)

Abstract

A few months before the closure of the inner-German border and the building of the Berlin Wall, the supply situation in East Berlin and Potsdam came in for serious criticism, once again, from the population. The situation had temporarily improved at the end of the 1950s, but by 1961, the public was finding it difficult to obtain even some basic staples, because the forced collectivization of agriculture in 1960 had led to serious supply bottlenecks. The situation was made worse by the fact that, in Berlin, East German farmers took advantage of the relatively open border and sold their goods for higher prices in the western sector of the city.

Source

The Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Sect. Party Organs

Berlin, May 19, 1961

I. From many industrial enterprises and residential areas of Berlin, there is growing public criticism regarding the shortcomings in the provisioning of food and industrial goods.

In many HO [*Handelsorganisation*], *Konsum*, and private stores, no bread and sometimes no rolls are available by the late afternoon, especially on Fridays and Saturday evenings.

This shortage occurs not only before holidays. In some residential areas in Lichtenberg,

Treptow, Köpenick, Friedrichshain, Pankow, and Weißensee, this situation has been going on for weeks in some cases.

The offices of a few KL have dealt with this issue. The office of the KL Prenzlauer Berg has noted that “the capacity of the VEB *Aktivist* is fully utilized and that workers in the enterprise are putting in a large workload for the bread supply. But the shortages have occurred because the private bakers have increasingly scaled back or stopped baking bread and are now producing above all fine pastries, cakes, rolls and so forth.”

In a circular dated April 24, 1961, the Purchasing and Delivery Cooperative of Bakers and Confectioners asked that a sufficient amount of bread be baked ahead for the holidays from May 1 to Pentecost. At the same time, it announced that the VEB *Aktivist* and the *Konsum* wholesale bakery are in a position to deliver bread to the bakers in an emergency. However, this measure was supposedly not agreed upon with the two enterprises. A large number of bakers have taken advantage of this hint.

The 1st District Secretary in Prenzlauer Berg, Gen. Kropius, and the chairman of the council of the city district, Gen. Hilbert, explained that they had personally observed in the expansion enterprise that tons of ribs, shins, and pig heads (with and without cheeks) were lying around and were not being sold, because some retail stores are not taking the cheaper meats.

The provisioning with butter is being disrupted by two phenomena. First, in many stores the butter is

rancid, and second, some of the stores in which shoppers are signed up already close at around 3:00–4:00 pm, so that many get no butter.

At the same time, comrades of the municipal administration point out that according to a preliminary survey, about 100,000 more people are entered on the customer lists than there are inhabitants.

At times, there is no beer, no non-alcoholic drinks, no white wine, and no liquor in many stores and taverns. Salespeople in Lichtenberg told comrades: “You should really know that only the larger taverns are still being supplied with white wine.”

In the Hotel Albrechtshof, where, among others, West German and foreign guests stay, neither beer nor soda was available for six days. So far, people point merely to a labor shortage in regard to this matter. Great shortcomings exist in the trade of industrial goods in many areas (e.g. textiles, ready-to-wear clothes, shoes, glasses, and so forth).

The shortage of detergent has caused great displeasure among some members of the population. In a soap store in Karlshorst, one female customer said: the Second World War also started with this.

Discontent is growing in tandem as these provisioning problems have increased. In many stores, open and critical discussions are taking place, some of which are exploited by hostile forces for provocative statements. Many party members are saying that they do not know how to take control of these discussions. The sales personnel are dragged into such discussions every day and are speaking out about their situation with a lot of discontent and sullenness.

In the Lichtenberg locations of state-run and co-operative retails, the sales personnel referred customers to a recent retail conference, according to which there will be even less meat, bread, and butter in the coming weeks. In Treptow, Gretastraße, only ½ stick of butter will be given out per capita this week.

In the great industrial enterprises in democratic Berlin, intense discussions are being carried on about the provisioning situation, especially by colleagues living on the outskirts. In the VEB Bergmann-Borsig, questions about the provisioning with meat, bread, and potatoes are at the forefront. Some of the comrades in the enterprises are saying that when it comes to these shortages they do not have adequate arguments to pacify their colleagues. They maintain that it is high time for the government to finally issue an official response to this difficult provisioning situation.

Increasingly there are views (also among comrades) that the transformation of agriculture occurred too early and too fast, and that we are now experiencing the payback.

At the shovel milling works, 18 women demanded time off on Saturdays after 9:00 am to go shopping, since they can't get anything in the outskirts in the afternoon.

In this context, a number of young workers maintained that with such difficulties, “we” cannot solve the West Berlin questions, especially since the RIAS [Radio station in the American sector] supposedly said: “The West remains firm. What now?”

In Köpenick, housewives explained while shopping that they were of course in favor of a peace treaty and did not want a war. But it was obvious that we are not able to provide people with all the basic necessities.

People in the stores are increasingly explaining that until now they have been reluctant to shop in West Berlin. However, at times, they are now forced to do so because of the growing shortages in supplies.

In general, the following mood is spreading in these conversations:

Contrary to the declarations of the press, things are not moving forward. At the moment, there are deficiencies that should not exist sixteen years after the end of the war.

In the process, the following statements are made to party members: “Talk is silver, silence is golden” – “Not only are things not moving forward, they are constantly moving backward” – “It is time for food ration cards to be introduced – conditions like 1945” – “In the war under Hitler there was at least meat and bread on a regular basis.”

“If the thing with West Berlin is not changed soon, we’ll all go broke” – “How long are people going to talk about West Berlin without taking action” – “Last year it was said: when the lilac returns to bloom . . .” – “Tell Mr. Ulbricht he should finally seal off the borders” – “Why is everything available at Wendenschloß for the functionaries. Vegetables, asparagus, strawberries, and other goods in short supply are offered there in abundance.”

A few days ago, comrade Erna Hedrich, an expert with the municipal administration, overheard the following conversation between two women on a train:

“Bring me some apples from the city again some time.”

“Impossible, ever since the ‘bigshots’ all left there isn’t anything special anymore. They’ve had large villas and roads built at the Wandlitzsee. They’d be better off taking the train again and seeing what the situation is like.”

The fellow passengers responded with laughter.

II. Notes about the provisioning situation in the Potsdam district:

1. Last weekend there was an inadequate supply of meat and sausage in the districts of Potsdam-Stadt and Potsdam-Land and in the industrial centers of the district. In some places, there were also problems with bread. In the city of Potsdam, no meat was available after 10:00 am on the last three Saturdays.

2. In Potsdam-Stadt, there is an inadequate supply of dishes in restaurants and likewise of drinks, especially non-alcoholic ones.

At the moment, the Park Festival is taking place in Potsdam, and many visitors from the GDR, the democratic sector of Berlin, West Berlin, and West Germany are present.

3. It should be noted that the allocation from the central authority in Berlin for the per capita consumption of food in the peripheral areas of the district is already below the district average in Potsdam. A part of the provisioning contingent for the population was used up by the robust travel and vacation traffic and by the vacation homes and vacation camps.

4. Comrades point out that a lot of Eastern farmers are currently traveling on the “Sputnik” (connecting train Potsdam-Berlin) to the democratic sector in order to sell asparagus illegally in West Berlin. The train is not being patrolled.

Source: SAPMO-BArchiv, DY 30/IV 2/6.10/29, 1–4; reprinted in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*. Bd. 8: 1949–1961: *Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004, no. 8/220.

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