

Paul Merker to the Chairman of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Wilhelm Pieck, on the Compensation Law in the Soviet Occupation Zone (1948)

Abstract

Since the GDR, unlike the Federal Republic, refused to see itself as the legal successor to the “Third Reich,” it did not regard itself as similarly responsible for compensating for Nazi crimes. In the Soviet occupation zone (and later in the GDR), compensation to Nazi victims was made chiefly in the form of special social benefits and honorary pensions. With the exception of Jews, these victims were not granted material allowances. In addition, the nationalization of “Aryanized” industrial enterprises, banks, or department stores was not reversed in favor of the former owners. Within the various groups of victims, preferential treatment was given to those who had actively fought against National Socialism, that is, above all to Communists.

Source

Berlin, May 4, 1948

The following thoughts require consideration:

1. The state has certain obligations to the anti-Fascist fighters and political victims who are also at the center of the battle for the democratization of the country today. These obligations include restoring their health, providing them with the most basic furnishings, clothing, etc., ensuring the education of the children of these victims in order to close gaps that were created by Nazi oppression, and providing a certain amount of support in old age.

In my view, this must be regarded as an obligation of honor of the democratic state. But the calculation of income lost through incarceration, as proposed in the West, or compensation for damages actually caused by lengthy incarceration, by the destruction or robbery of property, is out of the question.

2. As far as the so-called racially persecuted are concerned, the national questions play a role here. The Jewish population was plundered and almost annihilated, for reasons of so-called racial policy. Therefore, this constituted the destruction of a national or religious minority, a destruction that the German people allowed to happen. In this instance, our zone, too, cannot avoid instituting certain measures for the partial restitution of the damage that occurred. However, this cannot be a question of merely returning to the Jewish big capitalists their former wealth, enterprises, or banks. What must be returned is this: the property of Jewish communities, the movable and immovable property of private Jewish persons, insofar as they live in the zone, with the exception of those things that have passed into the hands of the state [through nationalization]. In addition, it is necessary to register Jewish assets that are still in the unlawful possession of Nazis or other reactionary elements and to place them under trusteeship. However, all these questions are spelled out in the draft bill.

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/2.027/31; reprinted in Udo Wengst, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland*, Bd. 2/2: 1945–1949: *Die Zeit der Besatzungszonen. Sozialpolitik zwischen Kriegsende und*

der Gründung zweier deutscher Staaten. Dokumente. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, no. 207, p. 469.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Paul Merker to the Chairman of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, Wilhelm Pieck, on the Compensation Law in the Soviet Occupation Zone (1948), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4478>> [July 09, 2025].