

Press Review: “Where to Put the Baby?” Critical Voices on the Subject of Daycare Centers (1953)

Abstract

In the 1950s, the GDR government vigorously promoted female employment, and it celebrated the rising ratio of women in the workforce as a breakthrough toward gender equality. One indispensable precondition for women’s employment was the dramatic expansion of the state childcare system, even for the very youngest children. But letters to the editor in East German magazines in 1953–54 made clear that there were still serious deficiencies in the number and quality of childcare centers.

Source

Compilation of Letters to the Editor from Various Papers in the German Democratic Republic, 1953–54

“Where to put the infants? Stefanie Tomicki, a spinner at the VEB [state-owned company] Feintuch Finsterwalde has a ten week-old son that she can’t put anywhere. Although there is a crèche for infants in the company, it is by no means sufficient for the many infants. After the nursing period she took her vacation. She was unable to work for another week, because she did not know where to put the child. Now she alternates childcare with her mother, who also works – that is, Stefanie Tomicki has the day shift and then her mother goes to the night shift. “No diapers at all could be had!” she told us, “I didn’t get anything, even with point cards.”

From *Die Frau von heute*, organ of the Democratic Women’s League of Germany, no. 29, July 17, 1953

“At a parents’ meeting called by the head of the children’s village Halle-North, Fischer- von Erlach Street, one could see the condition of the kindergarten for oneself. [...] The responsible offices of the city administration will have to answer for the state of warm meals for our children. And this is the crux of the problem. Not that the food is over-salted, no, they wouldn’t do that to our children. However, the organizer of the meeting reported to the parents that the food is very badly prepared, and there is not enough for our children. It has also happened that no food at all could be served.

The head of the kindergarten now stands helpless before the children and their parents. It is astonishing: it has come to the point where the educators have to collect signatures from the children in order to remedy the problems with their help.

I now ask the responsible offices of the city administration whether this is in the spirit of our government, which is championing the well-being of our children? After all, our working women rarely have the chance to cook a warm meal in the evening. Moreover, by then, the children have ignored their hunger and are tired.”

From *Freiheit* (SED), Halle, no. 5, January 7, 1954.

“Until now, many working women believed that their small children were well taken care of in childcare during the day. But the mothers were forced to discover that their children in the day nursery on Adolf Damaschke Street were still noticeably hungry in the evening and also partly grumpy.

The fault lies with the irresponsible work of the head of the nursery. She had not drawn up a work plan

that the childcare workers could follow. Moreover, not only did the bookkeeping show substantial deficiencies, but even the settlement of the food ration-cards showed untenable discrepancies.”

From *Märkische Union* (CDU), Potsdam, no. 208, October 24, 1953.

Source: Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, ed., *Sopade Informationsdienst. Der Arbeitseinsatz von Frauen in der Wirtschaft der Sowjetzone*. Bonn, 1956, p. 18f; 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. 8/121.

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