

Report by the SED Factory Party Organization at the VEB Bergmann-Borsig (1955)

Abstract

The poor supply situation in the 1950s was a constant topic of conversation among East Germans, who often evoked West Germany as a direct point of comparison. This report by the SED party organization at the nationally-owned enterprise Bergmann-Borsig mentions various criticisms raised by workers – high prices, low quality, and the shortage of food and consumer products.

Source

SED Factory Party Organization

VEB Bergmann – Borsig

Bln.-Wilhelmsruh, December 1, 1955

Report on the General Mood

On Monday, November 28, 1955, early in the morning, the full-time secretaries and members of the secretariat, as well as the party leadership, were instructed by comrade C. The argumentation for this week includes the following points:

1. Secret letter from Dulles to Adenauer in connection with the coalition crisis and the social struggles in West Germany.
2. Questions about provisions. Has the standard of living in the GDR improved?
3. Sale of profiteering goods in the workplace (chocolate, cigarettes).
4. Christmas bonuses.

Through the secretaries of the basic party organizations [*Grundorganisationen*], a total of 104 agitators were instructed during the breakfast break by the above-mentioned comrades.

Through the work of our party agitators, we have received the following information:

In boilermaking, the *Republikflucht* [flight from the republic] of some of our colleagues from the enterprise was discussed. Here, one colleague from the Heese brigade spoke about the *Republikflucht* of colleague NNNN. He said that Fahr earned good money here. His wife was also working. Something must not be quite right. They had a good living in our GDR.

But there are also a number of false views, as for example in scaffold-making. A colleague there said that there would be no reunification of Germany for the time being, and that it would be better if I went to the West.

In Hall 12, another colleague stated that if the situation in this hall with regards to work does not change, he'll head for the West. Today an entire brigade from this section bought margarine from our factory HO because there is supposedly none to be had in Bergfelde. In general, the workers of Section 165,

boilermaking, are trying earnestly to fulfill the plan quotas by the end of the year. But they were very angry about the production snags in their section. They declare: we want to work. But they have to create the conditions for us to do so.

In the Section General Enterprises, a colleague stated that the Geneva Conference did not produce what we were expecting. We can change the situation only if Adenauer is forced to step down. In the Section Energy, General Secretary Beer had an intense discussion with a colleague, who said the following:

Don't talk to me about your German unity. The GDR and the SU rejected everything. But a large segment of our colleagues in this section also recognize the political tasks we are facing and reject the inclusion of all of Germany in the NATO pact. They are ready to defend the achievements of the GDR. This is expressed by the fact that we recruited the most candidates for our party in General Enterprises and that some of them signed up for the honorary service of the VP [*Volkspolizei* or People's Police]. One colleague cannot understand why the administrative apparatus at Bergmann-Borsig is so bloated. This state of affairs should be changed. An intense discussion developed over the sale of profiteering goods. They criticized that the price for chocolate (4.50 DM) and cigarettes (6–24 Pfennigs) is too high. This should be sold in the currency 1:1. The goods are no longer of good quality because the storage times are too long. Or one should not smuggle them into the enterprise in the first place, but give them to the orphanages right away.

In Generator Construction, 11 comrades were present to evaluate the agitation work. Four comrades did not engage in discussions this week because they said that they were swamped with work and therefore did not have the time.

Primarily the supply situation was discussed there.

The colleagues are essentially in agreement with the argumentation we supplied. But they refer little to the situation of the workers in West Germany. The letter from Dulles to Adenauer is unknown to these colleagues. They believe that the FDP and the CDU frequently quarrel and then get along again.

In this section, there is also talk that the wages of skilled workers are too low relative to those of semi-skilled workers.

In Technical Management, as well, criticism was expressed about the quality and price of the profiteering goods.

The fourteen-day sale of reduced-price goods was too sudden, which meant that the colleagues were not financially prepared for it. Moreover, certain goods sold out too quickly.

Comrades Schöpp, Biehan, and colleague Wehe were not able to answer the question of why various food ration-cards still exist in the GDR and Berlin after ten years, since they themselves are not convinced of their necessity.

Another point of discussion in Technical Management was that things were better in 1951 and 1952. Back then, there were wage and salary increases or HO price reductions, which have been sorely missed of late.

Through agitators, it was shown that price reductions are possible only if work productivity is further increased.

Some of our colleagues stated that they will not say anything in the future if their names appear alongside their observations and critiques.

In Turbine Construction, the planers discussed that they wanted to work and contribute to fulfilling our plan. But work is scarce for them at the moment.

There were intense discussions about the Christmas bonus. For example, the Christmas money should amount to at least a weekly wage. Why do the fitters earn so much and we transport workers so little?

We are all working, after all, and Borsig in Tegel is placing notices every day, we could start right away.

In Toolmaking there is generally not much discussion about Adenauer's policy. Colleagues say they are not interested. The colleagues there say that the cost of living is still too high, and that potato prices are too low because the digging up by voluntary harvest deployments did not cost any money. The promised prosperity of the working class has not materialized. The announcement that the card system would be abolished was not kept. In the future, they should not promise so much. The availability of goods is very poor in the Pankow district; the districts Mitte and Weißensee are provisioned much better. There is great outrage about standing in line to shop outside of the enterprise. The negative discussions begin with the heavy rush hour traffic, the bus lines A 45 and A 55. Most colleagues there are annoyed because they can't get on the bus. The chocolate (profiteering item) is too expensive; it costs only 4 Dm [!] in West Berlin and is still fresher.

There are colleagues who believe that these goods should be distributed free of charge to old-age homes and kindergartens. In Toolmaking, the issuing of the Christmas bonus was welcomed. There is unhappiness about the fact that a limit has been set since the Christmas bonus is a matter of tradition. In the basic organization Plant Management, in the section Work Standardization, there is talk that the supply of textiles and food in the GDR is inadequate. In the section Workforce Guidance the colleagues likewise maintain that the confiscated goods are too expensive. They think that the range of goods in the GDR is too small. In particular, there is a lack of finished woollens. There are also not enough onions. In the other sections, as well, colleagues are saying: our 'East Mark' has greater purchasing power than the West Mark, and now we are charging 4.50 Dm [!] for a confiscated chocolate bar.

Brief assessment:

Our agitators report that our colleagues have been more open to our arguments recently. Apart from the unclear and negative statements recorded here, the larger [part] of our colleagues are open-minded; they criticize the ongoing workflow inadequacies in production, and express their opinions openly. One shortcoming in our agitation work is that our agitators are not constantly discussing political and economic questions with their colleagues. A grave lack of clarity, which must be eliminated by our agitation work, can be seen in our colleagues' failure to understand the role of the power of our workers and farmers and, especially, the character of our nationally-owned enterprises. Discussions persistently reveal ignorance when it comes to the power of the class of workers. Some of the misapprehensions identified here were cleared up through the effort of the qualified agitators. Discussions about free elections are now few in number in our enterprise. The sort of conditions under which free elections will be held has been made clear to the colleagues.

[Signature C.]

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