

***Republikflucht* by Young People, Young Returnees, and New Arrivals in the Period from January to September 1960 (November 10, 1960)**

Abstract

Growing numbers of young people were among those who left the GDR for West Germany at the beginning of the 1960s. This report by the Working Group for Youth Questions within the Central Committee of the SED confirms that young, skilled workers and teachers – including many members of the Free German Youth (FDJ), a Communist youth organization – were fleeing the GDR in droves. The report stated critically that this escapee wave was not being taken seriously enough and that the party was neglecting political-ideological work among youth. Furthermore, according to the report, too little use was being made of young people who had returned to the GDR after becoming disillusioned with political and social conditions in the Federal Republic.

Source

Working Group for Youth Questions within the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany: *Republikflucht* by Young People, Young Returnees, and New Arrivals in the Period from January to September 1960

Berlin, November 10, 1960

After the Secretariat of the Central Committee decided to deploy the Working Group Youth to the Karl-Marx-Stadt district [to investigate] matters pertaining to mass political work among youth, we determined that *Republikflucht* among young people between the ages of 15 and 25 increased significantly in the period from January to September 1960.

In response, the Working Group Youth arranged for us to be given a complete overview of the flight, return, and new arrival of young people by the relevant department in the Central Committee and the state apparatus.

The following facts emerge from an examination of these materials:

1.) *Republikflucht* by young people between the ages of 15 and 25 has increased significantly during this period.

All told, 43,658 young people left the republic, 24,577 males and 19,081 females.

The number of young people who fled was lowest in February at 2,815. It then rose to 5,804 by May, dropped to 4,669 in July, and reached 6,153 in August and 7,331 in September.

A comparison with the years 1958 and 1959 shows a significant rise in *Republikflucht* among young people.

In 1958, the number was 60,727 for the period from January to December. In 1959, 42,647 young people left the republic from January to December, with 31,635 leaving in the period from January to September 1959.

The following districts had the highest number of young people who fled the republic during the whole of 1960; the figures in parentheses refer to the months of August and September.

Magdeburg (490 – 499)

Leipzig (558 – 545)

Erfurt (541 – 583)

Karl-Marx-Stadt (525 – 618)

Dresden (535 – 669)

Potsdam (645 – 785)

Berlin (639 – 806)

A not insignificant portion of these young people were members of the FDJ. This is evident from the following overview:

In the months of July, August, and September 1959, 12,151 young people left the republic; of those 1,750 were FDJ members.

During that same period in 1960, 18,153 young people left the republic; of those 2,920 were members of the youth organization.

Although the materials at hand only provide a very incomplete picture of the social situation of these young people, the following overview emerges:

a) Young people employed in industry and agriculture make up the majority of those who fled the republic; a not inconsiderable portion are young skilled workers. It is a grave problem that these young people come from core areas in these districts, areas that are important for the national economy.

In the district of Halle, for example, these core areas are the city of Halle itself, the county of Merseburg (here, the large chemical enterprises, in particular), and counties like Wittenberg, Dessau, Weißenfels, and others.

b) A not insignificant portion of young people who fled the republic are young teachers at general education schools, university students, students at vocational colleges, secondary school students, and *Gymnasium* graduates.

Of these young people, 2,006 left the republic in the period from July to September 1960. Here, the number of young teachers rose from 39 in July to 292 in September, the number of university students rose from 52 in July to 107 in September, and the number of secondary school students and graduates rose from 176 in July to 345 in September.

It is very characteristic for these secondary school students and *Gymnasium* graduates to have left the GDR with their parents. For example, in the city of Rostock, 31 out of 42 young people left the republic with their parents.

In assessing the flight of the young intelligentsia, it is very important to consider that there are points of concentration in the various districts. For example, sixteen young intellectuals from the Office for Weights and Measures in Berlin fled the republic; all of them had studied in Jena and Halle.

Furthermore, the Institute for Postal and Telecommunications in Berlin is another point of concentration, for example.

An examination of the causes of *Republikflucht* mainly points to an underestimation of the [need for] continuous, persistent, political-ideological work among young people.

Many of the leading party organs and the basic party organizations, but especially the leadership of the youth organization, continue to rely solely on the vanguard of the youth, neglect the activation of the entire youth organization, and thereby disregard the most important precondition for getting at young people as a whole.

A manifestation of this neglect can be found in the fact that, for example, the content of the Council of State's programmatic statement to the *Volkskammer* is unknown to many young people.

The reason for this, among other things, is that when many functionaries appear before young people, they talk about this programmatic statement without explaining it to young people.

This neglect of political-ideological work among youth, as a whole, has resulted in many unclear ideas and negative arguments by young people themselves.

Such arguments are:

“Building up Socialism means deepening the rift,

My fatherland is Germany,

As far as the development of Germany is concerned, the Russians and Americans will work that out between themselves,

The capitalists must be better after all; otherwise we wouldn't want to catch up with them,

Given the difficulties that exist, we'll never make it,

The development of West Germany really isn't as bad as you make it out to be,

The establishment of the Council of State means that now Walter Ulbricht has seized all the power for himself,

What's the point of proposals for disarmament, a peace treaty etc., the Americans will do whatever they want anyway,

Freedom and democracy really do reign in West Germany; at least you can do whatever you want there.”

(this is linked, in particular, with listening to the Luxemburg station, to jazz music, etc.)

The aforementioned examination of the causes of *Republikflucht* has also made it perfectly clear that the gravity of this situation is being underestimated by parents, older workers in the workplace, but also by the party and the youth leadership.

For example, numerous economic functionaries but also workers in the machine factory in Halle expressed the view that *Republikflucht* among young people is a passing fad, or that one should let young people sow their wild oats since they would eventually return home one day.

In the assembly plant in Halle, the head of the work division stated: “What can you really do about it? My boy no longer listens to me, and here, too, they already come of age at eighteen, and then parents don't

have a say anymore.”

That an underestimation [of the situation] really does exist can also be seen in the assessment of 33 cases of *Republikflucht* by young people in the county of Fürstenwalde, where the following was identified as the cause of *Republikflucht*:

Nine joined relatives [in the West], 7 went because investigative proceedings had been launched against them, 6 out of fear of punishment, 3 joined their parents, 3 joined their spouses, 3 because of plans to get married, and 2 because of family quarrels.

From this, however, it is not apparent that a not insignificant portion of youth is fleeing the republic because they see no prospects for themselves in our republic, and because they believe that the West will offer them all the freedom and opportunity they need to develop in an unimpeded way.

Moreover, some young people evidently leave the republic because they do not regard our accounts of the Fascist, militaristic development of West Germany as credible, and not a few young people say that all we do here is work, and that nothing is being offered otherwise and that nothing is going on.

In addition, it is obvious that not enough attention is being paid to the deliberate, planned wooing away of young people.

An examination of youth crime and hooliganism, particularly in the district of Halle, has shown that a number of the leaders and the most active members of the identified groups, clubs, and gangs were young people who had fled the republic and returned, or young people who had arrived recently.

In addition, it appears that the amount of direct contact that occurs between illegal clubs here in the republic and their counterparts in West Germany through the help of postcard exchanges, contest participation, etc., has been underestimated.

2) The number of young people who returned to the republic and the number of young people who moved here increased in the period from January to September 1960.

There were 10,546 returnees in this period, 6,990 males and 3,556 females. During this time, 3,766 young people moved here, 2,475 males and 1,291 females.

As for returnees, we are looking at 900 to 1,000 every month, with the highest numbers having been reached in April with 1,119, in July with 1,025, and in September with 1,068. As for those moving here, we are looking at 350 to 480 young people per month, with the highest numbers having been reached in April with 476 newly arrived youths, in June with 406, and in August with 424.

In most cases, these young returnees state that their eyes were opened up to the realities in West Germany and that their social situation prompted them to take this necessary step.

Very characteristic among young people who move here is the desire to avoid military service. They are coming to the GDR for this reason, or because social conditions, especially in certain industrial sectors like mining, prompted them to leave West Germany.

A not inconsiderable portion of youth also state unequivocally that their conscience prevented them from remaining in West Germany, since it became obvious to them that the same [old] Fascists and militarists are determining policy in West Germany once again and are preparing a war against the Socialist countries, especially against the GDR.

One grave shortcoming is found above all in the fact that these young people are only attended to at the beginning, when they arrive in the GDR, and that they are left to their own devices again after a short

time.

It is also evident from this that their experiences are not being utilized to educate youth in the republic about political and social conditions in West Germany. This means that these returnees and new arrivals are not being prompted to take a political stand before the youth of the republic and to appear before them, and [it also means] that, on the other hand, too little political work is being done with these young people.

With Socialist greetings,

Working Group for Youth Questions

within the Central Committee of the SED

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