

# The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany: Report by the Commission on Questions Concerning *Republikflucht* (June 25, 1956)

## Abstract

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On the one hand, this detailed report by the SED Commission on *Republikflucht* articulated the official line of the state and the party – that West Germany was deliberately wooing away East Germany’s skilled workers to weaken the GDR. On the other hand, however, it also conceded that the GDR’s unsatisfying political and economic conditions played a role in the problem. The report recommended a number of improvements, but they were mostly cosmetic in nature (e.g., offering better leisure-time activities and a larger selection of magazines). The data collected by the GDR confirmed that it was above all young and well-trained individuals who were leaving for the West.

## Source

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### The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany: Report by the Commission on Questions Concerning *Republikflucht*

Berlin, June 25, 1956

#### The Causes of *Republikflucht*

According to the records of the HVDVP [Main Administration of the German People’s Police], a total of 270,115 persons fled the republic in 1955.

*Republikflucht* is being systematically organized by Bonn agencies, which regard it as an essential means for continuing the “Cold War.” It must be assumed that the Kaiser Ministry<sup>[1]</sup>, in conjunction with the various agencies in charge of Eastern affairs and espionage, is working according to a uniform plan to organize *Republikflucht* and is currently carrying out its work on German integration chiefly from the perspective of weakening the German Democratic Republic through the systematic extraction of certain occupational groups from the GDR. The current economic conditions in West Germany are being exploited as the chief instrument in this process.

The immediate goal of the organizers of the *Republikflucht* is as follows:

1. Impeding and delaying the planned economic reconstruction [of the GDR] and weakening the GDR’s ability to defend itself;
2. Strengthening the economic and military potential of West Germany, whereby those who fled the republic are simultaneously being exploited to hinder the struggle of West German workers against monopolies;
3. Exploiting *Republikflucht* for propagandistic purposes to intensify the agitation against the GDR and to heighten international discrimination against it.
  - a) In carrying out these plans, various means and methods are being used to woo workers away from the GDR on a widespread basis. The Western press and inflammatory [radio] stations repeatedly highlight the need for workers and the allegedly better working and living conditions. In particular, skilled workers

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in various occupational sectors are being urged – partly surreptitiously, partly openly – to flee the republic. Here, certain enterprises and bureaucracies are promising pension, retirement, and other benefits to the targeted GDR citizens. The financial compensation for war losses [*Lastenausgleich*] promised by the Bonn agencies is playing crucial role in the luring away of citizens.

The economic attraction of West Germany, under the current the economic conditions, is aiding the efforts of West German recruiting agencies.

The sending of inflammatory pamphlets and job offers to citizens of the GDR – materials that contain, alongside the usual defamation of the GDR, the call to flee the republic – is being organized on a large scale by West German agencies.

It is also significant that those who have fled the republic are sending letters to acquaintances and family members in the GDR and urging them to come to West Germany.

b) In a number of cases, especially in organizing the *Republikflucht* of particularly important skilled workers, who are simultaneously being used for espionage, *Republikflucht* is being directly organized by agents of the most diverse headquarters and branches in West Germany and West Berlin.

c) This hostile activity is abetted by a number of factors that make it easier for the enemy to realize his plan.

These include above all:

1. The inadequate attention and certain indifference exhibited by the state apparatus, but also by GDR political organizations, toward *Republikflucht*.

There is no atmosphere of a fight against *Republikflucht* and there is no uniform plan for countermeasures, a plan that involves all democratic parties and organizations in this struggle.

2. The inadequate explanation and incorrect application – the often merely administrative implementation – of decrees and directives from the party and the government, which often produces confusion and disgruntlement among the population.

3. The hitherto inadequate measures to involve the population in debating, making, and carrying out ordinances and laws, which has led some segments of the population to feel as though they hardly have any influence on the democratic shaping of life.

4. So far, the decisions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Conference as they relate to diverse segments of the GDR population have been presented and explained to those concerned in a completely inadequate way. (This concerns the general future of the GDR, as well as the future of various strata of the population.)

5. Various illegal measures and inadequate attention to democratic legal norms make it easier for the enemy to agitate about “alleged legal insecurity” among various segments of the population and thus to disturb their general trust in the workers’ and peasants’ power.

6. The economic difficulties and shortages that still persist here seem “insurmountable” to segments of the population, because we are still doing an inadequate job of explaining the general process of our economic development and the grand perspectives to the population, and because we also shy away from talking about the relationships and contexts that are causing these difficulties.

7. Inadequate attention to the developmental difficulties of members of some vocational groups, especially the problems of young people who have just completed their apprenticeship.

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8. The inadequate incorporation of social organizations in clarifying the causes behind the occasional supply problems and the failure to mobilize them quickly in order to overcome such difficulties.
  9. The absence of a proper price differential between certain goods, as well as wage and salary rates that are occasionally too low for some groups.
  10. The difficulties arising from the housing shortage and mistakes in the allocation of housing, as well as complications arising from the long-term separation of family members.
  11. The incorrect, that is, contradictory handling of the granting of travel permits to West Germany, the inadequate education regarding certain measures that we have been forced to take to protect the GDR (controls and the like), as well as the excesses that sometimes occur in the process.
  12. The bureaucratic and soulless behavior that is frequently found among the functionaries of the state and social organizations; the often exaggerated regulations in the granting of certificates or permits, regulations that interfere with people's personal circumstances.
  13. The inadequate vigilance of various state agencies and social organizations vis-à-vis the enticement methods associated with West German student delegations, pan-German conferences of scientists, and the establishment of business relationships.
  14. The often excessive reliance on members of the intelligentsia – especially teachers – in the fulfillment of socio-political tasks, which they consequently regard as coercive.
  15. The inadequate utilization of conscious, working people from the GDR who travel to West Germany, as well as the inadequate exertion of influence by the National Front, the unions, and other mass organizations on citizens of the Federal Republic who are in the GDR as visitors.
  16. The completely inadequate utilization of returnees and new arrivals from West Germany in the fight against *Republikflucht*.

#### Conclusions regarding political measures

It is important to expound, in connection with a broad explanation of the results of the XXth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Conference, the great reality of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Five Year Plan, and, in the process, to show the prospects of growing prosperity for ever broader strata of the population, and to convince them that everyone has the opportunity to live here in security and without fear.

In the process, the population must be made to understand the different development of civic life in West Germany and the GDR, [and] why the building of Socialism in the GDR goes hand in hand with an ever broader unfolding of democracy through the active participation of all strata of the population in the entirety of the state's political life and – with it – the necessary broadening of the democratic rights of the citizens.

The expanded participation of the population in securing adherence to democratic lawfulness simultaneously demands the utmost vigilance and the greatest public involvement in the struggle against those who break the laws of the republic.

The Office of the Presidium of the National Council shall cultivate a broad discussion among the entire population in connection with the new election of the committees of the National Front. The discussion must reverberate throughout the press and on the radio. In cultivating the popular debate on further democratization, the Office of the Presidium of the National Council shall publish varied materials in

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keeping with the situation and the attitudes of various strata of the population.

The following measures are necessary:

1. Since the organization of *Republikflucht* is “a means to maintain and continue the Cold War,” it is imperative that the entire state apparatus and all social organizations be incorporated into the struggle against *Republikflucht* in accordance with a uniform plan. It is necessary for internal deliberations on this question to be carried out both within the Block and within the Presidium of the National Council;
2. It is imperative to ensure – while stipulating personal responsibility – that when decrees and directives are issued by agencies, the political repercussions of every measure are weighed, and that every measure is thoroughly and comprehensibly explained to the relevant occupational groups. Here, those affected by the intended measures should be consulted beforehand, to the greatest extent possible;
3. In all areas in which the state and economic apparatus is active, as well as in social organizations, a vigorous battle must be waged against bureaucratism, soulless behavior, and commandant-style methods. It would be useful, for educational purposes, to hold regular seminars to debate the question of how state and economic functionaries behave toward the population;
4. In debates with the population, overcoming impatience toward unclear or even false views, provided they do not spring from hostile attitudes, must be the guiding principle of all functionaries of the state apparatus and all social organizations.

The primary method for educating workers in the various administrations and in political work among all strata of the population must be to patiently win people over to the basic ideas of our standpoint.

5. In the assignment of socio-political tasks, anything perceived as coercive must be eliminated. The goal must be to have social tasks completed with conviction and on a voluntary basis, and, in the process, for every individual’s milieu, way of thinking, and opportunities to be taken into account;
6. It is useful and necessary to lend greater public weight to deliberations by elected bodies (district assemblies, county assemblies, community assemblies) by inviting certain occupational groups when particular issues are dealt with, through greater publicity in the press and on the radio, and by soliciting and answering questions from the public and individual delegates in order to ensure more vigorous debate during deliberations. It is imperative that, in addition to holding fixed office hours, delegates must simultaneously engage in deliberations relating to various questions from individual strata of the population, chiefly questions connected to the fulfillment of the plan in various areas;
7. The chairmen of the district councils and the county councils must be given the power to ensure that individuals who fled the republic and subsequently returned are given proper work;
8. Entries into the GDR – for purposes of visiting – by West German delegations and individuals whose hostile activities are unmistakable from the outset must be prevented. That applies especially to all official West German student organizations that are consolidated in “East-West Working Groups” and directed by the Kaiser Ministry. In the future, all universities, colleges, and secondary schools can only receive delegations for whom appropriate arrangements have been made on the basis of the most exacting screening process. Individual faculties are to be stripped of the right to invite student organizations.
9. Review of the method of interrogating individuals by the police and security agencies and the keeping of these interrogations to a minimum;
10. Improved expansion of leisure activities, especially through a stronger utilization of stadiums and

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sports fields for large-scale arts events, for dancing, open-air movie screenings and the like;

11. Changes to the press by creating a larger selection of illustrated press organs, e.g., a special women's illustrated magazine, and limiting the publication of smaller specialized journals for a narrow circle of individuals. Providing larger amounts of paper to enhance the diversity of the press;

12. Comrade Minister President is requested to change the work of the surveillance organs (surveillance agencies) so that the surveillance by these bodies in enterprises, institutions, etc., is carried out in a way that does not unsettle the workers and members of the intelligentsia during the investigation. The results of the surveillance are to be made public in the enterprise, and the workers themselves are to be more strongly involved in the activities of the surveillance organs.

#### Additional measures

1. The government of the German Democratic Republic will issue, in the form of a response to questions posed by those who have fled the republic, a statement about immunity from prosecution and the legal status of those who wish to return from West Germany after realizing that leaving the republic was the wrong decision, and after becoming disillusioned by their life prospects in West Germany;

2. The Committee for German Unity will set up a working group that will deal continuously with the enemy's methods for wooing away individuals and that will create and publish materials that are useful in the struggle against *Republikflucht* (letters from disappointed individuals, the situation in refugee camps, methods of exploitation, recruitment for the Foreign Legion, etc.);

3. The Presidium of the National Council will engage in a discussion with returnees and new arrivals from the most diverse occupational groups. The results of this discussion will be assessed in a mass brochure;

4. The educational sites of the National Front shall be reorganized and turned into genuine centers for new methods of agitation (meeting places for discussions with various strata of the population, diverse discussion topics – which are above all closely related to special concerns in the respective areas of work, invitations to scientists, scholars, artists, writers, dealing with questions of technology, the question of vocational training, etc.);

5. The National Front is to organize returnee conferences at the district and county levels and to widely publicize the results of these conferences;

6. The various West German delegations that visit the GDR are called upon to raise the question of *Republikflucht* from the perspective of the democratic, peace-loving population of West Germany. (Unmasking how those who fled have been exploited by Adenauer's policy of failing to reach an agreement in the fight against West German workers' organizations, [how they have been exploited] as wage-depressers and instigators, and to provide soldiers for the NATO army etc.);

7. The Commission for Agitation is tasked with working out a special agitation plan for the fight against *Republikflucht*, while taking the following considerations into account:

Dealing with the issue in the press and on the radio;

Dealing with the issue in DEFA weekly newsreels and dealing with the issue in a feature film or documentary;

Dealing with the issue through individuals or a writer's collective in the form of a realistic novel and in the form of an effective, realistic radio play. The political argumentation against *Republikflucht* must be continuously expanded upon on the basis of the general development and the state of affairs.

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8. Collections and public appeals must be curtailed considerably and kept to a minimum.

Comrade Maron is tasked with taking the appropriate measures on the basis of the Collections Law;

9. It is suggested that the county councils form civil commissions. These commissions shall address the concerns of the citizens when it comes to questions of travel to and resettlement in West Germany, replacing the previous procedure at the People's Police County Offices (VPKA).

On the basis of personal discussions with citizens, the commissions will examine the circumstances prevailing in each individual case and help citizens with the return of family members who fled the GDR.

The commissions will be made up of experienced, active citizens or delegates of the popular assemblies who are known to the population. They shall work closely with the agencies of the VPKA. If necessary, the commission will pass the concerns of the citizens onto the VPKA.

### **Attachment to the materials on Republikflucht**

During 1954, the total number of cases of *Republikflucht* rose each quarter. The year 1955 saw another considerable increase.

	<b>1954</b>	<b>1955</b>	<b>1956</b>
Quarter 1	37,345	42,366	75,181
Quarter 2	38,131	52,862	
Quarter 3	43,515	76,670	
Quarter 4	54,288	98,217	
Total	173,279	270,115	= increase of 56%

Although the findings to date show a decline in the number of cases of *Republikflucht* in the first quarter of 1956, as compared to the fourth quarter of 1955 (from 98,217 to 75,181), this should not yet be taken as evidence of a downward trend. For one thing, a comparison of the first quarter of 1955 with the first quarter of 1956 shows an increase of nearly 80%.

For another, there was also a decline in the first quarter of 1955, as compared to the fourth quarter of 1954. One can therefore speak of a certain seasonal effect, whereby the cold spell in February-March of this year is likely to have had an inhibitory effect.

The social breakdown according to the records of the HVDVP yields the following picture:

	<b>1954:</b>	<b>1955:</b>
Workers	47,953	88,463
Specialized workers	5,235	12,384
Miners	1,243	2,048
White-collar workers	24,164	40,779
LPG farmers	241	929
Small farmers	720	1,081
Mid-sized farmers	533	693
Large farmers	274	260
Teachers	1,498	2,223
Engineers	805	2,028

Technicians	258	523	
Chemists	92	148	
Scientists	50	69	
Artists	129	121	
Doctors	201	290	
Lawyers	84	71	
Students	969	1,811	
Artisans	1,594	1,828	
Tradesmen	1,597	2,112	
Owners of private enterprises	455	467	
Breakdown by age:	1954	1955	First quarter 1956
15 – 18	15,709	26,857	6,608
18 – 25	40,452	80,280	18,840
25 – 35	29,905	45,855	13,111
35 – 40	10,164	13,832	4,427
40 – 50	21,062	30,594	9,280
By party membership	1954	1955	First quarter 1956
Members of the SED	5,178	8,421	2,037
Members of the CDU	847	1,108	292
Members of the LDP	757	909	270
Members of the NDP	549	853	217
Members of the DBP	293	499	117
Members of the FDJ	11,910	25,237	5,042

Since 1954, a steady rise in cases of *Republikflucht* is to be noted; the highest level was recorded in October 1955 with 37,091 cases.

Worthy of note are the changes in the ratios of the various age groups and occupations. The number of 18- to 25-year-olds who fled the republic rose from 40,452 in 1954 to 80,280 in 1955, that is, by about 100%, while the total number of those who fled the republic increased by 56%.

The age group 25–35 showed an increase of 60% (from 29,905 to 45,855).

The shifts between the various occupational groups yield the following picture:

In 1955, in terms of those who fled, there was a much greater preponderance of skilled and specialized workers, technicians and engineers, teachers and scientists, than in 1954. The number of skilled workers who left grew by 88% over 1954, the number of intellectuals by over 100%, while the number of farmers and agricultural workers increased by only 18%.

The status of *Republikflucht* in 1956:

in January 1956 a total of 24,682 persons fled, and

in February 26,696.

In January 1956, there were 10,569 more recorded escapees from the republic than in January of the previous year.

The February number [for 1956] is 12,684 higher than the February number for 1955.

	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>First quarter total</b>
	24,682	26,696	23,803	75,181
of which	9,511	10,519	9,384	male
	10,701	11,441	10,200	female
	4,470	4,736	4,219	children

The social breakdown for the first quarter of 1956 is as follows:

	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>Total</b>
Workers	6,522	7,438	6,572	20,532
Specialized workers	1,127	1,297	1,013	3,437
Miners	119	132	132	383
White-collar workers	3,817	4,010	3,302	11,129
Teachers	228	221	135	584
Engineers	185	170	146	501
Technicians	60	49	31	140
Chemists	14	9	5	28
Scientists	3	9	9	21
Doctors	57	38	40	135
Students	121	173	133	427

Breakdown by party membership:

	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>Total</b>
SED	751	728	558	2,037
CDU	107	108	77	292
LDP	95	101	74	270
NDP	74	75	68	217
DBP	28	51	38	117
FDJ	1,660	1,975	1,407	5,042

Geographic focal points

According to the available documents, *Republikflucht* is most prevalent in the following districts:

Schwerin

Rostock

Magdeburg

Erfurt

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## Potsdam

The percentage of those who fled the republic, relative to the population of each district as a whole, is as follows:

	<b>Population as of January 1, 1955</b>	<b>Republikflucht 1954/55</b>	<b>%</b>
Schwerin	643,629	22,746	3.53
Rostock	857,870	28,290	3.29
Magdeburg	1,454,482	45,428	3.12
Erfurt	1,330,976	37,946	2.85
Potsdam	1,215,530	32,641	2.69
Leipzig	1,600,523	42,985	2.69

Legal (authorized) moves to West Germany and West Berlin:

	<b>1954</b>	<b>1955</b>	<b>1956</b>
Quarter 1	4,494	10,151	6,849
Quarter 2	6,764	10,426	(minus Dresden and Cottbus, with Dresden and Cottbus ca. 7,000)
Quarter 3	9,249	9,169	
Quarter 4	10,350	11,439	
Total	30,857	41,185	

Returnees

<b>1954</b>	<b>1955</b>	<b>1956 – quarter 1</b>
43,277	41,937	9,932

Arrivals from West Germany and West Berlin

<b>1954</b>	<b>1955</b>	<b>1956 – quarter 1</b>
33,962	30,991	4,866

Interzonal travel GDR – West Germany (PM 12 a)

	<b>Authorized</b>	<b>denied</b>
1954	2,252,555	1,880
1955	2,015,868	48,298
quarter 1 1956	247,315	64,161

Interzonal travel West Germany-GDR (residence permit)

	<b>Issued</b>	<b>applied for</b>
1954	1,499,957	1,042,622
1955	1,341,590	926,433
quarter 1 1956	215,561	129,038

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## NOTES

[1] Refers to Jakob Kaiser, Federal Minister for All-German Affairs from 1949-1957 – trans.

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/483, Bl. 15–24 and 42–47, Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der SED, Nr. 29/56, vom 19. Juni 1956 (Abschrift). Re.: Darstellungsband 8, II (Sozialpolitische Denk- und Handlungsfelder), note 45; 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. 8/149.

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