

A Shortage of Everyday Commodities (May 15, 1979)

Abstract

These reports from local functionaries in the SED start off by dutifully emphasizing the populace's broad approval of the party's social policy; yet they also convey the harsh criticisms voiced by many GDR citizens on account of shortages in everyday commodities.

Source

Party Information from May 15, 1979

[...]

Our path toward social protection and the determined implementation of the social policy program has met with great approval and support. Numerous discussions in the collectives made clear that our successful thirty-year path is regarded as the work of many generations and as the result of the diligence and creative power of the working people under the sole leadership of our party and in close alliance with the Soviet Union.

[...]

Based on information provided by the district [SED] leaderships on the mood among the population, the following arguments and opinions continue to be discussed:

– The present supply situation in no way corresponds to the notion of consistently improving the satisfaction of material and psychological needs.

Many high-quality articles and goods are exported, creating great shortages in supply.

There is a creeping price increase in the GDR, especially for shoes and textile goods.

More and more articles are being sold under the table, especially household cleaning products. [...]

The Böhlen district leadership [of the SED] estimates that during such discussions even some communists allow themselves to be put on the defensive and do not take a party position. In evaluating the 10th [party] meeting, [it is clear that] more discussion with such comrades should take place in the party collectives.

– Within the range of goods, the supply level of some consumer items in the lower price groups has gotten worse.

What is the cause of the reduction in car imports from the Soviet Union?

What are the causes of certain supply difficulties for bed linens, cars, and vegetables?

All the first-class goods produced by our republic are either exported or sold in special stores [Exquisitläden][1] that ordinary people cannot afford.

Among the public there is no good discussion of supply issues; often you can hear people say: how will it be next year when there are no elections and no thirtieth anniversary?

With respect to spare parts, especially for the Trabant,[2] there are too many consultations all the way up to the Central Committee, but they do not result in any changes.

[...]

The [SED] district leadership in Torgau made the following verbatim statement in its report: “In the coming days, the representatives, election workers, and comrades will continue to patiently answer these and other questions of local policy and will elucidate the overall positive results in the GDR and the district.”

The [SED] district leadership in Borna estimates that rumor-mongering about supply issues is still very widespread and that temporary gaps in certain assortments of goods give rise to speculation, to nasty remarks towards retail workers, and to cheap propaganda. In this context, the district leadership reports on the offensive behavior of many comrades in Ferro Lippendorf and in the Borna consumer cooperative, where it was clearly documented that a number of workers were spreading false rumors to the workforce about the supply of everyday goods in order to get people riled up. Comrades there categorically countered the rumors that were still circulating. The BPO [*Betriebsparteiorganisation* or Company Party Organization] management of the “Bella” shoe factory in Groitzsch and the GO [*Gründungsorganisation* or Founding Organization] of IC Böhlen estimate, however, that they are not making progress in the discussions of supply issues because the comrades often do not remain objective, and they express their own lack of understanding that things such as bed linens, chocolates, terry cloth towels, underwear, etc., are sold in the special stores at higher prices.

[...]

NOTES

[1] These stores carried high-quality items produced in the West or under Western license, or hard-to-obtain local products—eds.

[2] A brand of car produced in the GDR—eds.

Source: “Parteiinformation vom 15.5.1979,” PDS-Archive, Leipzig; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990*. Munich, 1993, pp. 378–80.

Translation: Allison Brown

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