

The Right of Complaint (1980)

Abstract

In the 1950s, East German citizens were given the legal right to file complaints with state or social institutions—an option that citizens increasingly used as the last means for voicing their dissatisfaction. Until the GDR's demise, the majority of complaints related to housing conditions and shortages.

Source

Report by the SED District Leadership

[...]

In 1980, the SED district leadership in Leipzig received 1,154 new written and verbal petitions and 199 second and multiple petitions. In the first quarter of 1981, 297 petitioners filed for the first time and 41 filed second or multiple petitions with the district leadership.

Compared with 1979, when 1,107 first and 152 second or multiple petitions were filed, the figures for 1980 saw a 4% increase in first petitions and a 24% increase for multiple petitions. [...]

The most common problems for first-time petitioners related to housing (31%). Of these, 80% were concentrated in the area within the city limits of Leipzig. The main reasons for petitions relating to housing are:

- poor or crowded living conditions of the petitioners,
- housing problems of young married couples living separately,
- housing problems resulting from divorce,
- growing demand for very high-quality living space.

Furthermore, a significant number of the petitions relating to housing problems resulted from the unrealized allocation plans of state bodies.

Another main area, although the figures remained almost constant, were petitions filed on account of problems relating to building repairs. Of these, too, about 80% concern the city of Leipzig. This category of petition consists of those in which citizens request urgent repairs to older residences, and those in which requests were made for the elimination of defects, sometimes considerable, in newly built apartments (water damage, heating, etc.), but to which the responsible parties have not responded promptly.

The petitions regarding travel matters increased from 117 in 1979 to 184 in 1980, representing an increase of 36%.

No additional focal points could be identified at the present time.

It is obvious from most of the petitions that the comrades and other citizens show total confidence in the party when they turn to the party organs with their problems, concerns, remarks, and criticism. They thereby express their recognition of the consistent work of the party organs, especially that of the General Secretary, the Central Committee, and the district leadership and its First Secretary. In many of the petitions, recognition is expressed for the successful implementation of policies by the party and the

government in their unity of economic and social policy. Almost 80% of petitioners express their willingness to help in the resolution of the problems they have mentioned, for example by renovating or expanding living space, by their intention to cooperate in improving the conditions of roads and streets, and in other ways.

Source: "Bericht der SED-Bezirksleitung", PDS-Archiv, Leipzig; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990*. Munich, 1993, pp. 521–22.

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