



Volume 9. Two Germanies, 1961-1989
A Shortage of Everyday Commodities (May 15, 1979)

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.

Party Information from May 15, 1979

[. . .]

Our path to social protection and the ambitious implementation of the social policy program are being met with great approval and support. Numerous discussions in the collectives clearly show that our successful thirty-year path is viewed as the work of many generations and as the result of the industriousness and creative strength of the workers, only under the leadership of our party and in close alliance with the Soviet Union.

[. . .]

On the basis of the information passed on by the county [SED] leaderships on the mood of the people, the following arguments and opinions continue to be discussed:

- The present supply situation in no way corresponds to the notion of a consistently improving 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 cleansers. [. . .] The Böhlen county leadership [of the SED] estimates that during such discussions even some communists allow themselves to be put on the defensive and do not assume a party position. In evaluating the 10th [party] meeting, increased discussion with such comrades should take place in the party collectives.
- Within the range of goods, the supply level for some consumer items in the lower price groups has gotten worse.

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

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

All the first-class items our republic produces are either exported or sold in special stores

[*Exquisitläden*]¹ that ordinary people cannot afford.

There is no good public discussion on 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 too many consultations are being carried out all the way up to the Central Committee, but no changes ever come of them.

[. . .]

The [SED] county leadership in Torgau made the following verbatim statement in its report: “On this and other questions of local policy, the representatives, election assistants, and comrades will patiently reply in the coming days and will elucidate the generally positive results in the GDR and the county.”

The [SED] county leadership in Borna estimates that rumor-mongering is still very widespread on questions of supply, and that temporary gaps in certain assortments of goods give rise to speculation, nasty comments to sales personnel, and cheap propaganda. In this context, the county leadership reports on the firm actions of many comrades in Ferro Lippendorf and in the Borna consumer collective, where it was clearly documented that a number of workers were spreading untrue rumors to the staff about the supply of everyday goods in order to stir up public opinion. Comrades there categorically countered the rumors that are still in circulation. The BPO [*Betriebsparteiorganisation* or Company Party Organization] leadership of the “Bella” shoe factory in Groitzsch and the GO [*Gründungsorganisation* or Founding Organization] of IC Böhlen assess, however, that they are not progressing in the discussion on 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.

[. . .]

Source: “Parteiinformation vom 15.5.1979” [“Party Information from May 15, 1979”], PDS-Archive, Leipzig; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, ed., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945-1990* [*The Divided Country. Life in Germany 1945-1990*]. Munich, 1993, pp. 378-80.

Translation: Allison Brown

¹ These stores carried high-quality items produced in the West or under western license, or hard-to-obtain local products – ed.

² Car produced in the GDR – ed.