



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

The Federal Executive Board of the Democratic Women's League of Germany: Working Directive on the Law for the Protection of Mothers and the Rights of Women (November 6, 1950)

The equality of men and women was enshrined in the GDR constitution, and the SED made every effort to further increase the number of women in the workforce. In 1950, the Democratic Women's League of Germany [*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* or DFD], the most important East German women's organization, outlined the state's extensive catalogue of aid and support measures for women and mothers. In many enterprises, however, there was still considerable opposition to the equal employment of women and to their appointment to leadership positions.

Women Ask – The DFD Responds

“Without getting women to participate autonomously not only in political life as such, but also in the ongoing public service to be performed by all, it is impossible to speak not only of Socialism, but also of a complete and solid democracy.”

– Lenin

Question: Was there ever a time when women in Germany had equality?

Answer: The constitution of 1919 stated: “Men and women are fundamentally equal.” However, this declared equality was limited to civic rights, and the word “fundamentally” was exploited to the disadvantage of the [supposedly] equal woman. Equality existed only on paper, since not all laws that restricted women in their rights were abolished. The so-called Bonn Basic Law speaks of the equality of men and women, but states at the end of its provisions that laws contradicting equality will remain in force until March 31, 1953.

The discrimination against women, which existed for centuries, was already abolished in our German Democratic Republic through Article 7 of our constitution, which says: “Men and women are equal.” This article goes on to say: “All laws and regulations that contradict the equality of women are repealed.” With the Law for Women, which guarantees the practical implementation of Article 7 of our constitution, the equality of women has become a reality for the first time in German history. The precondition for this was the new path after 1945: the creation of an anti-Fascist-democratic order.

The first breakthrough for the equality of women was achieved in August 1946 with Order 253 of the then Soviet Military Administration. The order guaranteed our women equal pay for equal work. Thus, the glorious Soviet army not only liberated Germany from Hitler Fascism, but also opened a path for German women to a freer and happier life. In the Soviet Union, the equality of women has long since been reality.

Question: Wherein lies the great value of the Law for Women?

Answer: The great value of this law lies not only in the financial support for working women and women with many children, but above all in the practical equality in all areas of life. Through this law, women have the possibility of becoming qualified for all positions and of participating in the democratic build-up of our land as conscious citizens equal to men.

Question: Does the law force women to work?

Answer: Neither the Law on Work nor the Law for Women contains provisions that amount to a compulsion to work. The right to work is granted to every citizen, and thus women, too, have been given full freedom to shape their lives and activity on their own. To that end, they receive the greatest possible support from the government of our German Democratic Republic. It eliminates all obstacles for them and helps them make use of their right to work.

The great majority of women used to have to work out of social need; their children were left to themselves and exposed to the influences of the street. Today, mothers can pursue their work feeling reassured. Children receive the best care and education in the Children's Homes, and this takes the burden off the working mother. The goal is to support the working mother in all areas as best as possible, in order to give her real free time with her child after her work ends.

Question: The subsidies for mothers with many children envisioned in the Law for Women are the cause of much rejoicing, but there is [also] a certain mistrust: "Will everything actually be carried out?"

Answer: Mistrust was appropriate in all capitalistic countries and also under Hitler Fascism, in which much is promised, but nothing is delivered. The government of our German Democratic Republic has proven that laws, decrees, and plans exist not only on paper, and that their implementation is guaranteed by the will and participation of all democratic forces. Our guided and planned economy creates the preconditions for the realization of the laws. Just as our motto "first produce, then live better" was correct and led to an improvement in our living standard, the enhanced participation of women is the precondition for the fulfillment of our Five-Year Plan and thus a precondition for the continuous improvement of our lives. Thus, by their participation, women themselves will contribute to realizing the Law for Women in all its aspects.

Question: Do the demands for more children not serve the same goals we already knew under Hitler?

Answer: Our minister president, Otto Grotewohl, said the following in his justification of the Law concerning the Protection of Mother and Child and the Right of Women: "There is no comparison between the population policy of Hitler and that of the German Democratic Republic. The Fascist population policy served war and the downfall, our population policy serves peace and prosperity."

Question: How can we convince men that the work performed by women is of equal value?

Answer: Here, one must bear in mind that in every individual instance in which a woman is integrated into the work process, an ideological wall that protects old, inherited views must be torn down first. Partly among the women themselves, and also – to an even stronger degree – among the leadership of enterprise unions and the employment offices. It is clear that the will to work, and also the will to qualify for certain specialized work, is strongly present among women.

Our women in high positions, in leadership positions, our activists in the countryside and in enterprises have achieved things that cannot be valued highly enough. With this, we have proven that they are clearly able to assume positions of leadership and great responsibility. They grow along with the magnitude of the tasks assigned to them. It was through their work, as well, that our Two-Year Plan could be fulfilled ahead of schedule.

Oftentimes there is a lack of willingness in enterprises to hire women or train or retrain them.

The management of enterprises, the leadership of enterprise unions, and the employment office are obliged to help women in enterprises in which backward attitudes still exist, and to ensure that they become qualified and are developed.

Questions and answers that pertain specifically to individual paragraphs of the law.

[. . .]

Question: Paragraph 6 and Paragraph 7. What improvement is made by the law, especially for pregnant women?

Answer: 190 counseling offices for mothers and children will be created in addition to the existing ones, so that each district will have at least three. In these counseling offices, pregnant women will receive ongoing medical care and general counseling, as well as help with social and legal questions.

Moreover, all pregnant women, from the sixth month of pregnancy, and nursing mothers, for the entire period of lactation (though for a maximum of one year), will receive double rations.

And the labor contract for private agricultural enterprises stipulates the following in Article 5 on Provisioning, Housing, and Payments in kind: "Expectant and nursing mothers will receive, from the fourth month of pregnancy and for fourth months after giving birth, half a liter of whole milk per day. They are also entitled to additional food provisions at the same level as is granted to the population supplied with ration cards." The labor contract of the state-owned farms states: "Likewise, the enterprises are obligated, in cases in which the population supplied with ration cards is given additional provisions or allocations outside the ration cards, to make these available to their employees in the appropriate amount under the above-mentioned conditions."

On the basis of these labor contracts, the incorporation of pregnant women who fall under the self-provisioning regulations into the improved food provisioning is stipulated.

(See also the next two questions and answers)

Question: Paragraph 7, Section. 1 How will the recuperation of pregnant women in weak health be carried out?

Answer: Working pregnant women in weak health can recuperate at the expense of social security. Until the construction of special recuperation homes [*Erholungsheime*], social insurance will make a total of 2,000 places available in the existing recuperation homes for this purpose. [. . .]

Question: Paragraph 10, Section 4. Who receives the one-time subsidy of DM 50 to buy a set of clothes for each newborn?

Answer: Every mother with full insurance receives these DM 50, namely for each newborn, even with multiple births. This one-time subsidy can already be paid two weeks before the birth. Mothers with family insurance continue to be subject to Paragraph 38 of social insurance. It says there: the wife of the insured, or the life partner living with him, and any daughters, foster daughters, and stepdaughters entitled to maintenance who are living with him in a household, are granted the following in the case of pregnancy and the birth of a child:

- a) medical care
- b) midwife help
- c) a one-time subsidy at the birth of a child of DM 50
- d) a supply of medicines and remedies for home care
- e) care in a hospital or a maternity home in accordance with the regulations of Paragraph 33

Question: Paragraph 11, Section 2 The commission that decides on the termination of a pregnancy also includes members of the DFD: are DFD women in a position to make a decision about a medical indication?

Answer: Only doctors can make a decision about the medical indication. However, in our new social order, all laws and decrees are deliberated jointly with the populace; the decisions are made jointly with it, and these decisions are also implemented together with the populace, in this case with the DFD.

In this, it will be necessary that constant supervision by the DFD take place. If the objection is voiced that the DFD women are not medically trained, one can respond that there are also lay judges [*Schöffen*] in the courts who have no prior legal training, and yet the panel of judges retires with the laypeople before rendering a judgment, and the laypeople are educated. In the same way, the medical education of the DFD women is very important, so that they can present these decisions to the population. [. . .]

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 31/295; 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* [*History of Social Policy in Germany since 1945*, Vol. 8: 1949-1961: *German Democratic Republic. Under the Sign of the Build Up of Socialism*]. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004, no. 8/46.

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