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The Right of Complaint (1980)

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 pertained primarily to housing conditions and shortages.

Report of the SED District Leadership

[. . .]

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

In comparison with 1979, when 1,107 first and 152 second or multiple petitions were filed, the figures for 1980 represented an increase of 4 percent for first petitions and 24 percent for multiple petitions. [. . .]

The most common problems for first-time petitioners had to do with housing (31 percent). Of these, 80 percent were focused on the area within the city limits of Leipzig. The main reasons for the petitions pertaining to housing problems are:

- poor or crowded present living conditions of the petitioner,
- housing problems of young married couples living separately,
- housing problems arising from divorces,
- growing expectations for very high-quality living space.

Furthermore, a significant number of the petitions pertaining to housing problems were due to allocation plans of the state organs that could not be implemented.

Another main area, although the figures remained almost constant, were petitions filed on account of problems relating to building repairs. Here as well, about 80 percent pertain to the city of Leipzig. This category of petition is constituted by those sorts [of petitions] in which citizens requested urgent repairs to older residences, and by those in which requests were made for the elimination of defects, some of them major, in newly built apartments (water

damage, heating, etc.), but to which the responsible parties did not respond promptly.

The petitions regarding travel matters increased from 117 in 1979 to 184 in 1980, representing a 36 percent rise.

Additional areas of concentration cannot 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, the successful implementation of policies by the party and the government in their unity of economic and social policy is being expressed. Almost 80 percent of petitioners announce their willingness to help in the resolution of the problems they have mentioned, for example by renovating or expanding living space, by their intended assistance in improving road and pathway conditions, and in other ways.

Source: "Bericht der SED-Bezirksleitung" ["Report of the SED District Leadership"], PDS-Archiv, Leipzig; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds., *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945-1990* [*The Divided Country. Life in Germany 1945-1990*]. Munich, 1993, pp. 521-22.

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