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Emigration Causes Uneasiness in the Party (March 14, 1984)

This report by the Information Department of the district headquarters [*Sektor Parteiinformation*] of the SED in Leipzig shows how party members viewed the growing number of people leaving for West Germany. Their responses, which range from condemnation to incomprehension, suggest an ignorance of the actual situation.

At the moment, emigration to the FRG is the subject of more and more discussion in party and work collectives. At membership meetings, comrades draw attention to the fact that, although they are attempting to deal with these questions in keeping with the party's position, they do not seem convincing because they lack relevant information.

This has to do with the following questions:

- Is it true that 100 citizens are leaving the GDR each day?
- Why are so many people applying for exit visas?
- Why are we authorizing such a high number of exit visas?
- Have corresponding agreements been made with the FRG?
- Why don't we receive information through party channels in this regard?

Examples of the reactions of comrades to these questions:

- In social studies instruction at the company vocational school for electrical engineering [*Starkstrom Anlagenbau*] in Leipzig-Halle, an apprentice asked if the figures announced on West German television were accurate. The comrade social studies teacher responded that she is aware that 100 citizens have been leaving the GDR each day since January 1984, and that it is good if we can get rid of these lousy citizens.

At the next APO [Department Party Organization] meeting at this school, a candidate posed the same question and expressed doubt about the teacher's information. The APO secretary confirmed the figure mentioned and argued that our state was getting a good deal out of it because everyone who leaves the country has to reimburse the GDR for the costs of training.

- At a meeting of our residential party task force [*Wohnparteiaktiv*] in Grünau, someone asked how he should answer if citizens were to ask such questions at the house gatherings in the lead-up to the election.

First, all comrades confirmed that this was a topic of discussion in their party and work collectives.

The following arguments were then developed: A comrade from the main post office in Leipzig said, "We respond by saying that the FRG pays back the training costs for each one, so we are

making out pretty well.” A comrade from KMU [Karl Marx University] said: “I think there are other reasons for it and it has to do with the elections on May 6. Basically the applicants are the non-voters from the previous election. In any case, I am glad that some from my residential area are gone. [. . .]”

This led one comrade from the Council of the West City District not to ask for so many agitators on election day since there would now be fewer problems. A comrade from the *Deutsche Spedition* shipping company said, “Why are we suddenly in such a hurry; no one here can explain that and there is a lot of discussion. Since those leaving are required to leave the GDR on such short notice, we are receiving hauling orders that we cannot even complete due to fuel problems. To me it seems very rushed and not thought through.”

The director of the party task force argued that we have to maintain trust, even if it is difficult to understand some measures at first. But hopefully such people would never be allowed to step foot in the GDR ever again. If what we all hear is true, that people who have left are allowed to visit the GDR three times a year, then the comrades would no longer show any understanding.

One comrade argued, and was supported in her statement by two others, that she did not know what was true about it and what was not, since the facts mentioned obviously came from Western broadcasts, but she understood it to mean that this was due to the GDR’s willingness to compromise in the sense of creating good relations with the FRG and to maintain and secure policies for peace and détente. But the other comrades remained silent on this and it gave the impression that they did not support this explanation.

Source: StAL SED-BL Leipzig, IV/E-2/5/301, sheet 24 f.; reprinted in Henrik Eberle and Denise Wesenberg, eds., *Einverstanden, E.H.: Parteiinterne Hausmitteilungen, Briefe, Akten und Intrigen aus der Honecker-Zeit* [Agreed, E.H.: Internal Party Memos, Letters, Files, and Conspiracies from the Honecker Era]. Berlin, 1999, pp. 286-88.

Translation: Allison Brown