

DOCUMENT No. 87: Conclusions from Reports of the SED District Leaderships, 8 August 1953

Numerous reports in the SED archives reveal how profoundly the food program undermined the regime's efforts to stabilize the situation in the GDR. The Eisenhower food scheme received an "overwhelming response" from the East German population. By the end of the program's first phase (15 August), 865,000 people had traveled from the East to the distribution centers to receive packages. A second phase, lasting from 28 August to 3 October, elicited a similar reaction. In total, more than 5.5 million food packages were distributed.

Berlin, 8 August 1953

Dept. Leading Organs of the Party
And Mass Organizations
Sector Party Information

Conclusion
from Reports of the District Leaderships from 7.8.53

[...]

II. The Mood and the Position of the Population towards the New Course of the Party and Government.

The mood of the population is determined to a large extent on economic questions. In the foreground stands the discussion on the aid packages campaign [*Bettelpaketaktion*]. Despite considerable educational party work, the majority of the population is largely uninterested in the decisions of the 15th Central Committee meeting, in the *Volkskammer* session, and the immense help provided by the Soviets. The political and provocative background of this relief operation are for the most part unknown among the population. The position of the majority of the population and the symptomatic arguments have changed little from the days before. Typically the following arguments remain: "You've got to take what you can get from the Americans," "It was given to us," "What we're given, we take," etc.

In those districts, where the cost of going to pick up the packages is higher than that of the actual package, the argument essentially stands that they are not worth picking up. (e.g. Suhl, Rostock, Karl-Marx-Stadt).

As was stated before in the last reports, there is strong discontent regarding the coal and energy supply. Frequently the New Course is slandered in connection with the difficulties in the coal and electricity supply. They say that one should rather build power plants than monuments and houses of culture. Demands persist furthermore for changes in the classifications of living areas, payments made to Groups 5 to 8, HO price reduction, the introduction of private industry wages in the VEB's [People's Owned Industries], etc.

[...]

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30. Obtained by the editor. Translated by Christiaan Hetzner.