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Explanations from the Ministry of the Interior of the GDR on the Situation of the Former Resettlers (October 20, 1953)

After 1945, the majority of refugees and expellees from Eastern Europe settled in the Western occupation zones and in West Germany. Even though fewer refugees settled in East Germany, the government still had a hard time integrating them into society and providing them with housing and jobs. In October 1953, in an effort to improve the social situation of resettlers, the GDR government forgave a portion of the government loans that had been granted to resettlers to help them set up new households. In many instances, these loans could not be repaid, and they were putting resettlers at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other East German citizens who had suffered fewer material losses during the war.

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### **The Ministry of the Interior, Section Population Policy**

The resettlement of the German population from the People's Republic of Poland, the CSR, Hungary, Romania, and other countries essentially occurred in 2 stages. [ . . . ] The first stage encompassed the so-called unorganized resettlement in the period from 1944 to the end of 1945. The extent of it could be ascertained only through a general census in 1946.

This unorganized resettlement came to an end with the creation of the Central Administration for German Resettlers at the end of 1945. The resettlement of the German population in 1946 and thereafter from the territories east of the Oder-Neiße border, the CSR, Romania, and Hungary proceeded on the basis of a resettlement plan. The resettlement basically came to an end in 1948. [ . . . ] Only smaller groups of resettlers continued to arrive from the People's Republic of Poland. Assigning them to jobs poses no special difficulties. [ . . . ] The improvement of housing conditions [ . . . ] and the furnishing of living space could no longer be regarded as a "pure resettlement program" at this point in time. For that reason, the previous, special registration of resettlers was terminated. Realizing that singling out the resettlers would make assimilation more difficult, the resettler committees in communities and districts were dissolved later on, because it became apparent that they often hindered resettlers in settling down and deepened the sometimes still existing conflicts between resettlers and the old-established population.

Although the resettlers were no longer registered separately in statistical terms, great attention continued to be paid to solidifying their economic livelihood, through such things as handicraft enterprises and farms, and providing them with housing. Despite the fact that the resettlers were treated as equal citizens, it became clear that they were not fully participating in the general upward development of the population. The government therefore submitted to the

*Volkskammer* [People's Parliament] the Law on the Further Improvement of the Situation of the Former Resettlers in the German Democratic Republic, which was passed by the *Volkskammer* on September 9 [8], 1950. (GBL. P. 971).

The law gave special importance to Party V, according to which needy resettlers were given interest-free credits of up to DM 1,000 per household to furnish their apartments and purchase furniture and household objects. By May 30, 1953, 695,875 resettler families had taken advantage of this loan allowance, totaling DM 400,427,000. The outstanding loans amount to DM 18,111,907. [ . . . ]

The loans were taken out by nearly 700,000 families, which means that about 2 million of the 4.3 million resettlers living in the German Democratic Republic participated in this loan program.

The legislature's goal of solidifying the resettlers economically and helping them settle down has been achieved to a very large extent, in that the loans have been used mostly to purchase furniture.

Since these loans were granted only to families with a modest overall family income, the borrowers included a large number of pensioners, welfare recipients, and individuals who were well below the target levels of DM 250 or 300. To make the repayments, which are between DM 15 and 30 per month, the borrowers in many cases had to significantly scale back their standard of living.

Letters from the resettlers, directed to the State Secretariat for Internal Affairs, have repeatedly asked us to examine whether a lowering of the loan debt is possible. They point out that the old-established population does not need to make use of these loans, because they did not suffer any material losses. In particular, this request is justified by the fact that in the years 1950-1951 those articles that the resettlers especially lacked – for example, bed linens – carried considerable household surcharges, with the prices significantly lower today. [ . . . ]

Through the purchase of goods by means of the resettlement loans [in the time] before the two large price reductions in 1951, a not inconsiderable part of the credit extended by the state flowed into the budget through household surcharges. For that reason, it seems sensible to us to grant the following relief to improve the economic situation of the former resettlers:

I. All borrowers will be given a debt reduction of 20% on the loans they took out.

For borrowers who have already paid their loans above the reduced amount or entirely through early or on-time repayments, a corresponding credit shall be made to their savings account.

The time at which the borrower can use it shall be determined in accordance with the availability of goods and the financial situation.

II. Borrowers whose income in the first half of 1952 was no more than DM 900 will receive a total debt forgiveness of 50% on the loans they took out. For each additional family member, the income level rises by DM 180 per half year. If the repayment already exceeds 50% of the loan amount taken out, the procedure shall be as described above.

III. If the borrower dies and the heirs have an annual income of no more than DM 1,800, the remaining amount shall be forgiven.

IV. For borrowers who did not take possession of objects they purchased because of fraudulent schemes by sellers (craftsmen, tradesmen), the loan is to be forgiven if 20% of the purchase price was paid to the Savings and Loan.

In addition, consideration should be given as to whether those borrowers whose income is below DM 900 per half year should be given a 75% reduction of their loan debt or complete forgiveness.

Further, additional help in the form of loans to furnish apartments or build single-family homes requires careful examination, for when the Resettler Law was passed, a part of the population, which had also suffered considerable losses (those damaged by bombing), expressed its unhappiness that it was not receiving this aid.

Source: BAArch, DO 2/49, folios 140-143; 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. 8/118.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap