

**WELFARE - THE EXAMPLE GDR
STATEMENT "LABOUR ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL
WELFARE"**

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The term 'Social Welfare' meant the "government measures for the support, counselling and nursing/fostering of citizens, who are in need of economic or medical aid".¹ It included financial support for rent, medical aid (with financial help for the blind and people with special needs), hospitals, seniors' homes and nursing homes and insurance, furthermore temporary support (coal and wood, renovation of homes etc.). The aim of the Social Welfare was human dignity.

A study about Social Welfare in the Soviet Occupied Zone after 1945 and in the German Democratic Republic since 1949 made clear: The Welfare politics lay in the responsibility of the 'Central Administration for Work and Social Welfare', established in 1945. 1948 the renamed 'Main Administration for Work and Social Welfare' was integrated in the 'German Economic Committee'.

The main problem in the early years was the enormous poverty, which should be reduced mainly through a "closed cooperation of the administrations for work and social cases".² This point of view was typical for the Soviet Occupation Forces, who considered welfare politics as part of labour market politics. Because of this the 'Main Administration for Work and Social Welfare' had to take care of people with special needs. The Vice President of this administration, Jenny Matern, summed up this relationship: "We represent as one of the basic rights the right to work, which obviously includes the duty to work."³

The social security recipients were ordered to work, which had the "character of disciplinary measure and correction".⁴ In agriculture and forestry for example the welfare recipients were sent off to enforce pest control against colorado beetles. They were also sent to gather mushrooms, but the payment was taken of from the social security benefit.

The realisation of these ideas of welfare politics were rather difficult, because the socialised enterprises (Volkseigene Betriebe = 'peoples own enterprises') refused to employ handicapped people.

The initial expectation, that social welfare would become unnecessary in the

socialist German state failed to be realistic: The social security recipients in the ‘real existing Socialism’ were discriminated as non-productive people who were reducing the surplus value of the society.

The public social welfare was considered as a specific female activity. In this respect a resolution in 1946 read: “It corresponds to womens’ nature to unfold all her love and charity in this organisation.”⁵

Statement “Welfare organisation and Socialism”

The government tried to engage women for the practical work of the welfare organisation “Volkssolidarität” (= Peoples’ Solidarity), but they preferred the engagement in clerical groups.

The “Volkssolidarität” resulted out of the campaign “Volkssolidarität gegen Wintersnot” (= Peoples Solidarity against distress of winter). Step by step it turned out to be a socialist welfare organisation. The unification of the Communist and Social Democratic Party into the Socialist United Party (SED) in the Soviet Occupied Zone was the main reason for this politics. Former members of the Nazi Party and the National socialist Welfare Organisation were persuaded to do practical Social Work, while the revival of the social democratic “Arbeiterwohlfahrt” (Workers Welfare) was hindered.

In 1951 the “Volkssolidarität” was forced to hand over many childrens’ homes, maternity wards and houses for disabled to the state and unions. In 1956 they had to give up the travellers’ aid (at railway stations) in favour of the Red Cross. Only women and old people and at least merely the old peoples’ welfare were target groups of the marginal “Volkssolidarität”. The organisation for the care for old and deprived people belonged to the mass organisation of the German Democratic Republic, but remained “relatively unimportant”⁶ in spite of the great number of members.

Besides the “Volkssolidarität” existed furthermore the catholic “Caritas” and the protestant “Diakonische Werk” (= Diaconical Welfare Work), the ‘Relief Organisation of the Protestant Church’ as well as the German Red Cross of the GDR. This Red Cross organisation for socialist health protection, first aid and the protection against catastrophes was considered part of the civil defence and was put under the control of the Ministry of Interior. Since 1953 existed a central training school. The leading functionaries had to be acknowledged by the Socialist United Party. The main tasks were: first aid in health and social services as well as in political and sport events, home service, care for old people, pint of blood service, epidemic control, ambulance service and ‘Fast First Aid’. Furthermore existed a sea rescue service and a mountain rescue service as well as travellers’ aid and mining aid. The central organisation for search of missing people should be mentioned too.

The financial support came mainly out of the national budget. The basic organisation relied mostly on volunteer work. ‘Young First Aid Attendants’ and the ‘Red Cross Youth’ were trained.

The GDR was the only state in former Eastern Bloc that allowed "clerical welfare work in considerable amount."⁷ The urgent need after World War II as well as the originally liberal clerical politics of the Soviet Occupation Forces made it possible for the 'Innere Mission' (= Home Mission) and the 'Relief Organisation of the Protestant Church' to carry out their welfare work. An important reason for this was the fact that the people in need in Eastern Germany got donations from foreign clerical organisations. Especially in the care for permanently disabled people the churches found a field of activities, because the government showed little understanding for these people. Significant for the consideration of disabled people is the statement of a psychiatrist: „The idiots for the church, the still capable for us.“⁸

¹ Cf. **Gunnar Winkler** (ed.): *Lexikon der Sozialpolitik*. Berlin 1987, p. 339. This and the following quotations are sense-orientated translated from German into English.

² **Marcel Boldorf**: *Sozialfürsorge in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953. Ursachen, Ausmaß und Bewältigung der Nachkriegsarmut*. (= Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 138): Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, p. 43

³ **Marcel Boldorf**: *Sozialfürsorge in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953. Ursachen, Ausmaß und Bewältigung der Nachkriegsarmut*. (= Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 138): Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, p. 38

⁴ **Marcel Boldorf**: *Sozialfürsorge in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953. Ursachen, Ausmaß und Bewältigung der Nachkriegsarmut*. (= Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 138): Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, p. 60

⁵ Cf. **Marcel Boldorf**: *Sozialfürsorge in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953. Ursachen, Ausmaß und Bewältigung der Nachkriegsarmut*. (= Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beiheft 138): Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1998, p. 173

⁶ **Philipp Springer**: „Da kommt ich mich dann son bißchen entfalten“. *Die Volkssolidarität in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1969*: Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 25

⁷ **Ingolf Hübner**: Diakonie im real existierenden Sozialismus. In: Ursula Ruper/Carola Jyllig (Hg.): *Die Macht der Nächstenliebe. Einhundertfünfzig Jahre Innere Mission und Diakonie 1848-1998*. Ausstellungskatalog im Auftrag des Deutschen Historischen Museums und des Diakonischen Werkes der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. Berlin 1998, p. 260

⁸ Dieses Zitat stammt aus dem Jahr 1967 und wird wiedergegeben nach **Jochen-Christoph Kaiser**: *Diakonie in der Diktatur. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte der Inneren Mission zwischen 1933 und 1989*. In: Ingolf Hübner/Jochen-Christoph Kaiser (Hg.): *Diakonie im geteilten Deutschland. Zur diakonischen Arbeit unter den Bedingungen der DDR und der Teilung Deutschlands*: Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1999, p. 70