



What was life like ...

... IN THE GDR?



Stiftung Haus der Geschichte
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Museum in der Kulturbrauerei



Aufgang

**A very warm
welcome!**

This is where you can explore what everyday life looked like for people in the GDR. How did they work? How did they live? What desires and wishes did they have and what limits did the regime impose?

Discover for yourself!

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1 **Everyday life in the GDR**



After the Second World War, two power blocs emerged in Europe: the western nations closely linked to the USA and the "eastern bloc" under the leadership of the Soviet Union. The border ran through Germany. Two States were created there in 1949: the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the GDR (German Democratic Republic) in the east. Power in the GDR was in the hands of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany).

- a** Which European cities belonged to which bloc in those days? Take a look at the map on the wall and place the cities in the appropriate bloc.

Prague

Berlin

Athens

Vienna

Moscow

London

Warsaw

Copenhagen

Paris

Amsterdam

Berlin

Budapest

Ost

West

- b** Where do you come from?
To which bloc would your home town have belonged? Enter it in the table.

- c Part of the GDR national emblem is hanging on the wall. Which of the symbols pictured below can you recognise? Draw a circle around them! Then allocate the symbols to the groups they stand for.



FARMERS/
PEASANTS

INTELLIGENTSIA/
ACADEMICS

WORKERS

- d Next to the emblem you can see various scenes depicting people in their everyday lives in the GDR. If you were an exhibition curator, what topics would you definitely include in the exhibition? Write down a list

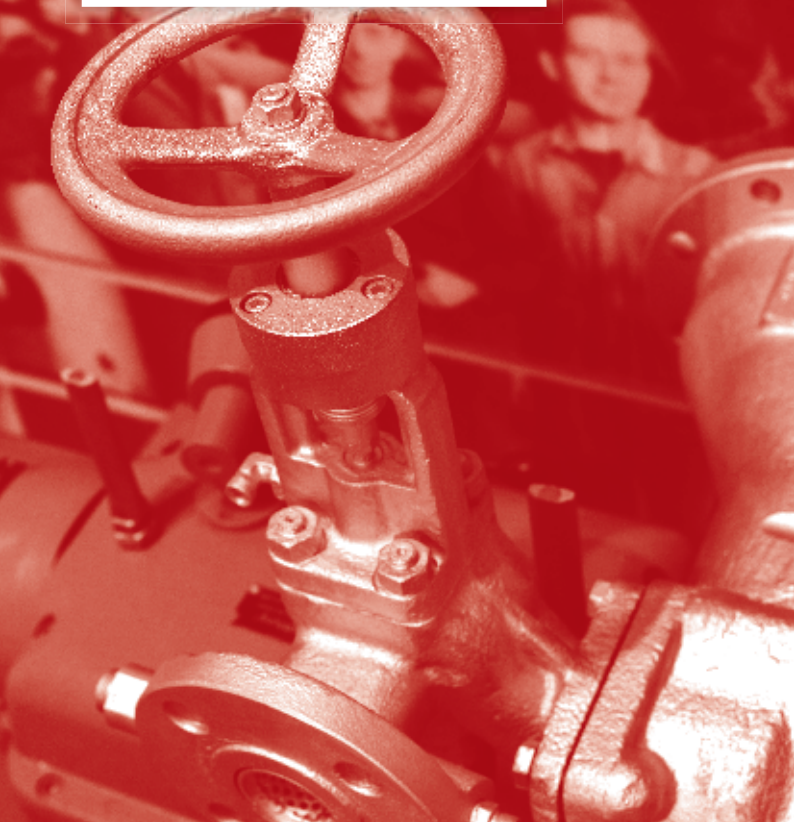
• family

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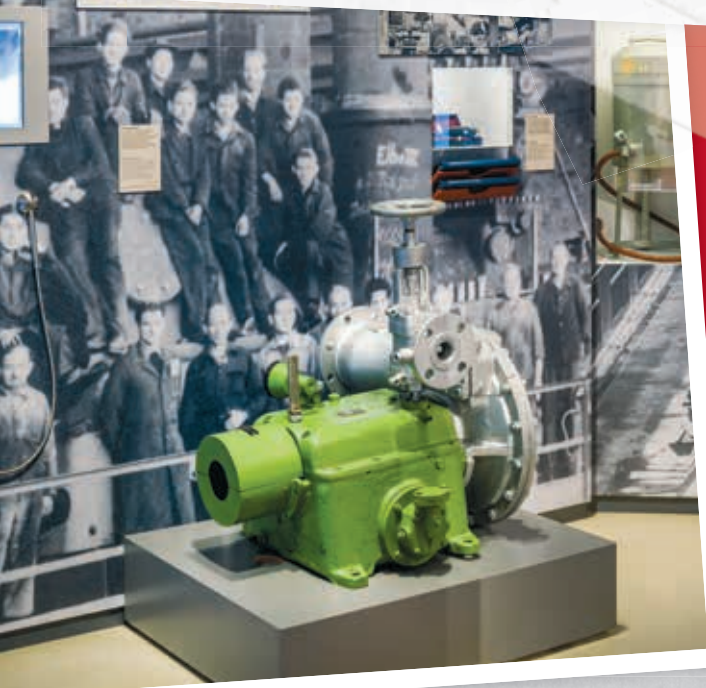
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2 Working to Plan



Nearly all factories in the GDR belonged to the State. The SED set out in a plan what and how much was to be produced. The factory workers were divided into teams. These teams were called "brigades" in the GDR. The brigades had to meet the planning goals of the SED. But the so-called economy of scarcity and other problems often made it difficult for these goals to be reached.



a Watch a video about production conditions.
What do the workers complain about?

b In the locker farther back in the exhibition hall, you'll find photos and personal items belonging to the worker Werner Adam. Look more closely at the candlestick and fill out an inventory card.

Object:

Material:

Estimated year of construction:

Use:



- c** Read below about how Werner Adam remembers his daily work:

"The team spirit in the brigades was very good. Every year, we had a major event for the brigades. We had some great evenings celebrating with the brigades — it was a wonderful time. Of course, we also had quite different problems. For instance, we have to finish such and such a part, and have it ready by then and then... but then there were no materials."

Why did he have time to make the candlestick and other things while working in the factory?

- d** What did Werner Adam like about his work in the factory and what bothered him? Underline the positive things he saw and explain what did not function well.





3

**Being
young**



The SED wanted to politically educate children and young people through the Young Pioneers and the Free German Youth (FDJ). They were supposed to become enthusiastic about Socialism. But not all young people wanted to join in.

- a** In the showcases opposite, you can see photos and objects belonging to young people who lived in the GDR. They had different opinions to the SED regime and expressed them through their choice of clothing.

Look at the showcases and match the clothing to the attitude:

THEY REJECTED WHAT THE
REGIME PRESCRIBED

Shirt and badge
of the Free
German Youth

THEY WERE ENTHUSIASTIC
ABOUT SOCIALISM

Longer hair and
Free German
Youth shirt

THEY JOINED IN BUT
WERE NOT CONVINCED

Punk badge and
studded bracelet

- b** Why did some young people not want to be members of the Free German Youth or even rebelled against the State? To answer the question, also use the headphones to the right below the showcases.

.....

.....

.....

- c** Most children were organised in the Young Pioneers from the age of 6. On special occasions, the pioneers had to wear a kind of uniform consisting of a white shirt, blue trousers or skirt and a blue or red scarf. Consider the pros and cons of such a uniform.

Advantages

Disadvantages





4

Do-it-herself!

Fashion was also produced according to a central plan. State-run shops sold the clothing. One of the few exceptions was the private fashion boutique "Josefine" in East Berlin. But most East Germans were dependent on what the State offered.



a “Fashion is awful” a young woman complains in the film clip. What bothers her particularly? Match the following elements:

too short

too long

badly made

boring

shapeless

unfashionable

too tight

TROUSERS

COLOURS

too bright

dark

ugly

conspicuous

too pale

- b** Choose one item of clothing from the boutique “Josefine” and one from the showcase “Präsent 20” and compare them.

	JOSEFINE	PRÄSENT 20
Item of clothing		
Material		
Production type	<input type="radio"/> unique item <input type="radio"/> industrial mass production	<input type="radio"/> unique item <input type="radio"/> industrial mass production
I like / do not like this item of clothing because...		

- c** What would you do if you could not buy any clothes you like? Write down your comments.



5

In their
sights





Painters, musicians and writers met regularly in the flat of Ekkehard and Wilfriede Maaß here in the East Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg. They held readings and concerts. The SED regime was suspicious of the couple.

- a** This room is similarly furnished to the living room of Ekkehard and Wilfriede Maaß 30 years ago. Sit down on the red sofa and take a look around! What can you spot in the room which might indicate that people living here had different ideas to the regime?



- b** The Ministry for State Security (MfS), the GDR's secret police, gathered information about the couple and their guests. Special devices were used to eavesdrop on their conversation. Look for such a listening device in the living room and draw a sketch of it.



- c** A lot of books were banned in the GDR, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago". Nevertheless, you can find it on the bookcase in the Maaß's living room. But it is in several parts and has no cover. Can you guess why? Tick the right answer!

- ☐ the book was a serialised novel that was published chapter by chapter
- ☐ the book was smuggled into the GDR pages at a time
- ☐ the book was cut up so that many people could read it at the same time





6

Dreams and reality



Dreams, yearnings and rejection of the SED regime were expressed in different ways. In 1985, 8th-grade pupils describe their ideas of the future in school essays.

- a Listen to Peggy's essay ("PG")
Peggy had dreams for her future in the year 2010.
Circle what she wished for:



a car

a happy marriage

a dog

peace

money

Socialism

a trip to Brazil

children

a house with a garden

a Free German
Youth blouse

happiness

- b** How likely was it that Peggy would be able to fulfil her dreams? Consider that East Germans were not allowed to travel wherever they wanted in 1985. Mark her wishes with **+** or **-**.

Peggy's dreams

**Can she fulfil
the dream?**

- c** What is your dream for the future?
How likely is it that you will be able to achieve it?
Mark each one with **+** or **-**.

My dream

Can I achieve it?

Exit

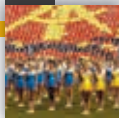


stations:
Colors and photos
for orientation



Path markers.
You will pass them on
your right or left.

1st floor



3



2



1



1 2 3 4 5 6

Ground floor

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TRACING HISTORY

