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**Resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone/German Democratic  
Republic 1945-1955.**

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## Abstract

The following study traces the history of fundamental political resistance to Communism in the Soviet Occupied Zone/German Democratic Republic from 1945 to 1955. The two most tangible manifestations of this form of resistance are dealt with: actions of members of the non-Marxist parties before being co-opted into the Communist system, and the popular uprising on 17 June 1953. In both manifestations, the state's abuse of basic rights of its citizens - such as freedom of speech and personal legal security - played a dominant role in motivation to resist.

This study argues that the 17 June uprising was an act of fundamental resistance which aimed to remove the existing political structures in the German Democratic Republic. By examining the Soviet Occupied Zone and German Democratic Republic from 1945 to 1955, it becomes clear that there existed in the population a basic rejection of the Communist system which was entwined with the regime's disregard for basic rights. Protestors on 17 June 1953 demonstrated for the release of political prisoners, and voiced political demands similar to those which had been raised by oppositional members of the non-Marxist parties in the German Democratic Republic prior to their being forced into line. The organized political resistance in the non-Marxist parties represented "Resistance with the People" (*Widerstand mit Volk*).

## Abrégé

L'étude qui suit retrace l'histoire de la résistance politique contre le communisme dans la zone d'occupation soviétique/République Démocratique d'Allemagne entre 1945 et 1955. Elle porte sur les deux formes les plus tangibles de cette résistance: les activités des membres des partis non-marxistes avant l'époque de collaboration et le soulèvement populaire du 17 juin 1953. Dans les deux cas, le non-respect de l'État des droits fondamentaux - surtout le droit de parole et la sécurité de la personne - a joué un rôle prédominant dans la motivation à résister.

Cette étude postule que le soulèvement populaire du 17 juin 1953 était une expression de résistance fondamentale qui avait comme but le renversement du régime politique de la République Démocratique d'Allemagne. L'histoire de la zone d'occupation soviétique et de la République Démocratique d'Allemagne entre 1945 et 1955 nous enseigne qu'il existait dans la population un rejet profond du régime communiste qui était lié à l'abus des droits fondamentaux. Les protestataires du 17 juin ont manifesté pour la libération des prisonniers politiques, et ont exprimé une volonté politique semblable à celle des partis politiques non-marxistes. La résistance de ces partis représentait certainement la "Résistance avec le peuple" (*Widerstand mit Volk*).

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### List of Abbreviations

- ACDP- *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik*,  
Archive for Christian Democratic Politics.
- AdsD- *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie*, Archive of  
Social Democracy.
- ADL - *Archiv des Deutschen Liberalismus*, Archive of  
German Liberalism.
- BA-P- *Bundesarchiv - Abteilungen Potsdam*, Federal  
Archive - Potsdam branches.
- BLHA- *Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv*, Main  
provincial archive for Brandenburg.
- BstU- *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des  
Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen  
Demokratischen Republik*, Federal Agency for the Files  
of the State Security Service of the Former German  
Democratic Republic.
- CDU - *Christlich-Demokratische Union*, the Christian  
Democratic Union.
- DVdI - *Deutsche Verwaltung des Innern*, German  
Administration of the Interior.
- FDJ - *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, Free German Youth.
- FNA - *Franz Neumann Archiv*, Franz Neumann Archive
- GDR - German Democratic Republic
- IM - *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, Unofficial coworkers of  
the Ministry for State Security.
- KGB - abbreviation for the Soviet Committee for State  
Security.
- KgU - *Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit*, Fighting  
Group Against Inhumanity.
- K-5 - 5th department of the criminal police; early  
political police.

- KPD - *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, Communist Party of Germany.
- KVP - *Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, People's Police in Barracks.
- LDPD- *Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*, Liberal Democratic Party of Germany.
- MfS - *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, Ministry for State Security.
- MLHA- *Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv*, Main provincial archive for Mecklenburg.
- NKWD- abbreviation for the Soviet People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs.
- RIAS- Radio in the American Sector (of Berlin).
- SAPMO-*Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv*, Foudation Archive of the parties and mass organizations of the GDR in the federal archive.
- SED - *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, Socialist Unity Party of Germany.
- SMAD- Soviet Military Administration in Germany.
- SPD - *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, Social Democratic Party of Germany.
- TLHA- *Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar*, Main state archive for Thuringia, Weimar
- UfJ - *Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen*, Investigative Committee of Free Jurists.
- ZA - *Zentralausschuss*, Central Committee

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## Introduction

November 9 has witnessed significant events in 20th century German history with uncanny frequency. At 2 pm on 9 November 1918, Philipp Scheidemann, a Social Democratic Party member of the Reichstag, mounted a balcony of the Reichstag and proclaimed Germany a republic. At 4 pm across town on the same day, Karl Liebknecht proclaimed Germany a free socialist republic. On 9 November 1923, Adolf Hitler undertook his failed Beer Hall *Putsch* in Munich. On 9 November 1938, the infamous *Reichskristallnacht*, or Night of the Broken Glass, took place during which Jewish businesses and synagogues were vandalized and burned throughout Germany. At 7 pm on 9 November 1989, a weary Günter Schabowski, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany's (SED) secretary for information, read a statement on East German television announcing a lifting of travelling restrictions. Thousands of citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) immediately began lining up to pass through the concrete wall that symbolized the Cold War. Bewildered East German border guards yielded to the pressure from the mounting crowds and opened the crossings to West Berlin.<sup>1</sup> By midnight, the line of spluttering Trabants containing East Germans eager to reach the long-forbidden western half of the former German capital extended for miles. On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall crumbled.

The events of 1989 in East Germany, and all Eastern Europe, have caused a flood of literature dealing with the collapse of Communism. This attention is appropriate, as the collapse of one of the 20th century's dominant ideologies

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 3-4.

deserves our consideration. Due to our proximity to the events of 1989, it is perhaps understandable that there has been less emphasis placed on the historical roots of that year. It is now possible for historians, with the aid of archival material made accessible by the fall of the Berlin Wall, to offer analyses on the historical background to 1989, a background that reaches to that last great watershed event, the Second World War.

The following is a study of fundamental political resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone and the German Democratic Republic from 1945 to 1955. This study deals with the two most tangible manifestations of this resistance: the actions of members of the non-Marxist parties in the GDR - the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD), and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) (banned in eastern Germany except eastern Berlin from 1946) - and the popular uprising of 17 June 1953. In both manifestations, the state's abuse of basic rights of its citizens - such as freedom of speech, the right to own property, and personal legal security - played a dominant role in the motivation to resist. The symbiotic relationship between resistance and repression, therefore, is of central importance in this study.

There were other manifestations of fundamental political resistance in this time period. Individuals or groups who worked for anti-Communist groups based in West Berlin, such as the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity (*Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit- KgU*) and the Investigative Committee of Free Jurists (*Untersuchungsausschuss freiheitlicher Juristen - UfJ*) merit consideration in this regard. However, these groups are addressed only tangentially in this study because of the

difficulty in determining the motives of East Germans who worked for these groups. Indeed, the close relationship between the CIA and the KgU means that major sources on the KgU are inaccessible. The conduct of the Christian churches in the GDR also merits consideration in the topic of resistance. This resistance, however, must be conceptualized in terms of a resistance stemming from an institutionalized world view fundamentally different from the Communist world view. Moreover, the ultimate political aims of this resistance are not as tangible as the aims of the subjects under examination in this study. Church resistance therefore merits consideration on its own terms, for above all it should be interpreted in terms of a long-established institution attempting to defend its independence.<sup>2</sup> Church resistance represented a different phenomenon to the individual and group resistance discussed in this study. Nevertheless, the fundamental resistance of the churches and the anti-Communist groups like the KgU merit a place in the historiography of resistance in the GDR.

Major European thinkers have contemplated the role of repression in the motivation to resist. In the 15th century, Nicholas of Cusa, whom Ernst Cassirer has characterized as "the first great modern thinker,"<sup>3</sup> wrestled with the topic

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<sup>2</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, "Von der Freiheit, Ich zu sagen," in Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk (eds.), *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995), p.98.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1927), p. 10. Louis Dubré's treatment of Cusa has also been flattering. Dubré refers to him as "the most original mind of the 15th century"; Louis Dubré, "Introduction and major works of Nicholas of Cusa," *The American Catholic*

of whether revolution was ever justified given that kings were entrusted by God to stand vigil over society. He concluded that a revolt was justified if the monarch violated the trust of his subjects.<sup>4</sup> Establishing trust between rulers and ruled, in particular where basic rights were concerned, was central to the English Bill of Rights of 1689. The Bill of Rights outlined Parliament's right to participate in the governing process, and affirmed basic freedoms for the English people, including the right to trial by jury and the right to be released from prison if the jailor could not show cause for imprisonment (*Habeas Corpus*).<sup>5</sup> During the Enlightenment, political philosophers came to view the role of the state as guarantor and protector of the natural rights with which all individuals are endowed: the right to liberty, to security of the person, and to property. John Locke, the first philosopher to deal comprehensively with the political consequences of Enlightenment thought, believed that a revolt was justified when the king failed to protect the natural rights of his subjects. Locke believed that if the king failed in this task, his monarchy would be a form of war rather than government.<sup>6</sup> Locke's justification for revolt was closely

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*Philosophical Quarterly* LXIV, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the Bill of Rights is reprinted in Stephen Englehart, John Moore Jr. (eds.), *Three Beginnings: Revolution, Rights, and the Liberal State* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 191-193.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hobbes opposed Locke on this point, arguing that citizens did not possess the right to resistance against the state because it would lead to anarchy, chaos, and war, which, he felt, was far worse than

tied to the intellectual climate of 17th and 18th century Europe which conceived of political legitimacy resting in individuals and their natural rights. The American Declaration of Independence of 4 July 1776 reflected these aspects of Enlightenment thought. The Declaration proclaimed unalienable rights to be "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>7</sup> The Declaration acknowledged political legitimacy as resting in individuals, by claiming that if a government did not secure the above mentioned rights, the people had the right to alter or abolish that government.<sup>8</sup> The classic document of the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, arguably the most important document in shaping the course of 19th century European history, echoed the emphasis on basic rights which had characterized the American Declaration of Independence, by declaring basic rights to be liberty, property, personal security, and the right to resist oppression.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Declaration proclaimed that laws would be enacted which would protect citizens against arbitrary arrest, and which would protect the citizen's right to freedom of expression. In the 19th century, almost all European nations experienced popular challenges to the state in support of the basic rights

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any tyranny.

<sup>7</sup> Engelhart/Moore(eds.), p. 195. The text of the American Declaration of Independence is reprinted in this work, pp. 195-198.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen is reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 201-204.

brought to the fore by the French Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

Resistance in East Germany in the decade following World War II, like the German resistance to Hitler,<sup>11</sup> follows in this tradition of justified resistance against a regime which failed to serve and protect its subjects and their natural rights. The development of the East German state from 1945 eroded both organized political opponents' and the broader population's belief that the state exercised its authority in the name of the people.<sup>12</sup> The demonstrators of 17 June 1953, like organized political opponents, did not simply demand replacement of the government, but sought a new political system characterized by a government which safeguarded individual freedom and equality before the law, and allowed participation in the political process, both pillars of modern western democracies.<sup>13</sup> The existence of such a political system in neighbouring West Germany naturally influenced the resisters' desire for a western democratic system to replace the Communist one.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. x.

<sup>11</sup> On the historical place of the German resistance to Hitler, see *ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>12</sup> On the "people" (*das Volk*) as the basis of political legitimacy Hermann Heller has written: "Trotz mannigfaltiger Unterströmungen und Gegenwirkungen anderer Art ist spätestens seit dem 18. Jahrhundert als oberster, alle politischen Normen und Formen legitimierender Wert von der allgemeinen öffentlichen Meinung das "Volk" anerkannt." Quoted in Kurt Lenk, "Probleme der Demokratie," in Hans-Joachim Lieber (ed.), *Politische Theorien von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1993), p. 938.

<sup>13</sup> Lenk, p. 939.

Historians who deal with resistance in the German Democratic Republic must inevitably turn to the rich historiography on resistance in the Third Reich,<sup>14</sup> but they must be cautious to consider these works as a starting point rather than a reference point. The two dictatorships and their historical circumstances were fundamentally different. That the GDR was not involved in an all-encompassing war or mass murder, and that the GDR formed part of a divided German nation, are a few of the more obvious differences. Nevertheless, the historiography on resistance in Nazi Germany has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of "resistance," and leaves an important legacy for historians of GDR resistance. A review of the literature on resistance in the Nazi era is therefore in order.<sup>15</sup>

The following is a select review of the most important literature on German resistance to Hitler, with a particular regard for works which affected the concept of resistance.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Fulbrook points out in her recent history of the GDR that it will likely be a number of years before the historiography on opposition in East Germany reaches the same level of sophistication as has been achieved in the literature on resistance in Nazi Germany; Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 153. On the value of the historiography of Nazi Germany for GDR history in general, see Christoph Klessmann, "Zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland - was kann die künftige DDR-Forschung aus der Geschichtsschreibung zum Nationalsozialismus lernen," *Deutschland Archiv* (hereafter DA) 25 (1992): 601-606.

<sup>15</sup> The most important work for an evaluation of the historiography on resistance in the Third Reich for GDR history is Poppe/Eckert/Kowalczyk (eds.).

<sup>16</sup> For a general survey of the various manifestations of resistance, see Peter Steinbach, Johannes Tuchel (eds.), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*

Among the first works by German historians after the Second World War were studies on German resistance to Hitler, likely in order to counteract western Allied historiography which portrayed Hitler's vision of Germany as a reflection of the desires of all Germans. Western Allied historiography tended to portray Nazism as rooted in the historical development of the German people. William McGovern's *From Luther to Hitler* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941) captured the essence of this view. Following the war, John Wheeler-Bennett and Lewis Namier argued that those involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 were pseudo-Nazis, and in the end likely would not have been much of an improvement on the Nazis.<sup>17</sup> In opposition to this school of thought, Hans Rothfels wrote the first scholarly work on German resistance to Hitler, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (Hinsdale: Henry Regenery Co., 1948), originally published in English, and in German the following year.<sup>18</sup>

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(Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 1994) and Jürgen Schmädke, Peter Steinbach (eds.), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1994.) For a list of the most important works on resistance, see the bibliography in Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press University, 1996). For a superb synopsis of the trends in historiography on German resistance during the Third Reich, see Ian Kershaw *The Nazi Dictatorship* (New York: E. Arnold, 1993). Briefer, but still adequate, is Klaus Hildebrand, *The Third Reich* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1945); Lewis Namier *In the Nazi Era* (London: Macmillan, 1952).

<sup>18</sup> Although Rothfels' work was the first scholarly treatment of the subject, memoir literature had appeared earlier. See Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler: nach einem Erlebnisbericht von Fabian von*

Rothfels' motive behind his work is revealed by his comment: "If [this study] results in a "vindication," it is, in the author's opinion, not only one of considerable sections of the German people, but also and more basically one of the human spirit *in extremis*."<sup>19</sup> Rothfels concentrated on conservative resistance to Hitler, believing it had to be understood not in sociological or class terms, but in terms of individual motivation based on moral standards. Although he did not concern himself with opposition in the broader population, he did introduce the concept of "silent opposition" or "potential resistance." Rothfels defined this concept as broad sections of society which repudiated the regime, although not actively, but who might have provided a "reservoir of forces upon which active resistance might count, once power was wrested from an oppressive regime."<sup>20</sup> Rothfels' assertion of opposition in "daily life" has often been missed by social historians from the 1960s onwards. Rothfels' work was a reliable survey of German opposition to Hitler.

Gerhard Ritter's *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH, 1954), which appeared in English as *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), followed in the tradition of Rothfels by exploring the motivation of the

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (Hinsdale: Henry Regnery Co., 1948), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

German resistance to Hitler. He believed that the moral motivation of the resistance was captured in the persona of Carl Goerdeler, the former Lord Mayor of Leipzig and prominent figure in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944.<sup>21</sup> Ritter emphasized the importance for the resisters of replacing the chaotic, murdering tyranny with a state based on the rule of law. Ritter's study was representative of the dominant historical school preoccupied with conservative resistance, and overshadowed works on leftist resistance to Hitler such as Hermann Brill's *Gegen den Strom* (Offenbach: Bollwerk Verlag, 1946) or Günter Weisenborn's *Der lautlose Aufstand* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1953).<sup>22</sup>

The 1960s political climate in West Germany fostered a reevaluation of the German resistance to Hitler. An economic recession, combined with government scandals such as the *Spiegel* Affair of 1962, contributed to a waning of support for the conservative politics of the first West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU). In 1966, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) participated in government for the first time in post-war Germany as part of the Grand Coalition, and by 1969 it was able to wrest power away from the CDU by forming a coalition government with the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The legacy of the Third Reich also came to prominence in the

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<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* (Munich: DTV Verlag GmbH, 1964), p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Hildebrand, p. 154. Other early works which adopted an approach similar to Ritter and Rothfels included Eberhard Zelle, *Geist der Freiheit: Der zwanzigste Juli* (Munich: Hermann Rinn, 1954) and Annedore Leber, *Das Gewissen steht auf* (Berlin: Mosaik Verlag, 1954).

1960s. The horror of the Holocaust was brought back into the public eye during the Auschwitz trials of 1961-1963, and the continuing presence of former active Nazis in the universities and administration became a focal point of student unrest in the latter half of the decade. Focus on the Third Reich was spurred by the publication of Fritz Fischer's controversial *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1962)<sup>23</sup> which argued that Germany had been responsible for the First World War, thus suggesting that the Nazi era represented a continuation, rather than an aberration, in German history. Fischer's work consequently rekindled the *Sonderweg* debate. Thus, renewed interest in the Nazi era and a changing political climate in West Germany led to a questioning of whether the German resisters to Hitler were in fact noble representatives of the liberal ideology on which the new Federal Republic of Germany was based.

As early as 1961, Ralf Dahrendorf criticized the political views of the conservative resistance to Hitler as part of his broader criticism of the "Prussian upper class."<sup>24</sup> In 1966, essays by Hans Mommsen, "Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstandes," and Hermann Graml, "Die aussenpolitischen Vorstellungen des deutschen Widerstandes," in W. Schmitthenner and H. Buchheim's *Der deutsche Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Cologne: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1966), published in English in 1970 as *The German Resistance to Hitler*,

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<sup>23</sup> Fischer's work appeared in English as *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, "Demokratie und Sozialstruktur in Deutschland," in Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Freiheit* (Munich: R. Piper, 1961).

brought into question the motives of the resisters by examining their constitutional and foreign policy positions. These authors suggested that the resisters were influenced more by absolutist rule such as that of the Kaiser's Germany, than by ideas of liberal democracy. Furthermore, Mommsen suggested that historians' preoccupation with elite opponents, and their concerns about the loyalty of the population, led to a distorted view of *Widerstand ohne Volk* (resistance without the people).<sup>25</sup> Scholars also began to probe the extent to which those involved in maintaining and building the Nazi system could be categorized as resisters. These scholars argued that the men of 20 July had been, after all, an integral part of the Nazi system. By 1974, the question of whether or not the resisters of 20 July 1944 were a respectable alternative to Hitler was being openly debated.<sup>26</sup> Historical scholarship had returned to the premises of the initial studies of John Wheeler-Bennett and Lewis Namier. This new scholarship was based on faulty reasoning, however. Certainly, peace and the rule of law represented respectable alternatives to Hitler's rule.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, because of the scepticism towards the conservative resistance, works on illegal Socialist and

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<sup>25</sup> Mommsen first introduced this concept in "Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstandes," in W. Schmitthenner and Hans Buchheim, *Der deutsche Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Cologne: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1966), p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> See H.J. Schultz, *Der zwanzigste Juli. Alternative zu Hitler?* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> On the importance of peace and the rule of law for the German resistance to Hitler, see Peter Hoffmann, *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat* (Munich: R. Piper, 1969).

Communist resistance received increased attention.

Weisenborn's *Der lautlose Aufstand*, largely ignored in the 1950's, was republished in 1962 and 1974. Similarly, Klaus Mammach's *Die deutsche antifaschistische Widerstandsbewegung 1933-1939* (East Berlin: Dietz, 1974) was received warmly.<sup>28</sup>

A new standard for scholarship on the German resistance to Hitler was set with the publication of Peter Hoffmann's *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat* (Munich: R. Piper, 1969).<sup>29</sup> The extensive use of sources eclipsed the empirical evidence of previous literature. Hoffmann's work asserted the factual and ethical motivation of the resistance, and brought evidence against sweeping social theories based on a few examples or less. Hoffmann therefore provided a

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<sup>28</sup> Resistance from Communist circles had, as an integral component of the legitimation process, dominated GDR historiography on German resistance to Hitler. Indeed, not until 1964 did a work appear in the GDR on the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944 (Daniel Melnikow, *Der 20. Juli 1944: Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1964). The account was less than flattering to the resisters. For East German historiography on the German resistance to Hitler, see Jens Reich, Kurt Finker, "Reaktionäre oder Patrioten? Zur Historiographie und Widerstandsforschung in der DDR bis 1990," in Gerd Ueberschär, *Der 20. Juli 1944* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1994), and Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective. The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> This work has been revised and expanded several times. It appeared in translation in English in 1977 as *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977) and as *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977). In 1985, the fourth German edition was published as *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat* (Munich: R. Piper, 1985). The latest edition appeared in 1996 as *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

convincing counter position to Mommsen's suspicions about the liberal democratic motives of the resisters. Hoffmann's work on the German resistance stood out in a historical literature which had increasingly come to de-heroize the conservative resistance.

The emphasis in the historiography on resistance in Nazi Germany shifted within the move towards social history in the 1960s. As a result of this trend in historical research, the actual concept of "resistance" came to be reevaluated, leading to a broadening of the types of activities which could be categorized as resistance.<sup>30</sup> Researchers involved with the Institute for Contemporary History's project "Resistance and Persecution in Bavaria 1933-1945," known simply as the Bavaria Project, carried out the most important work on this topic. The results of this project were published between 1977 and 1983 in a six volume set entitled *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*. Ian Kershaw has summed up the nucleus of this project: "The emphasis was placed upon the impact of the Nazi regime on all areas of everyday life, allowing a multi-faceted picture of spheres of conflict between rulers and ruled to emerge."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The most important summary works on the definition of resistance are: Klaus-Jürgen Müller (ed.), *Der deutsche Widerstand 1933-1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1986); Jürgen Schmädke and Peter Steinbach (eds.), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: R. Piper, 1985); Peter Steinbach (ed.), *Widerstand: Ein Problem zwischen Theorie und Geschichte* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987); Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (eds.), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994); Gerd Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20. Juli 1944: Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Kershaw, p. 157.

Concentrating on "spheres of conflict" inevitably led to an evaluation of resistance. The Bavaria Project initially adopted the following definition of resistance: "Resistance is understood as every form of active or passive behaviour which allows recognition of the rejection of the National Socialist regime or a partial area of National Socialist ideology and was bound up with certain risks."<sup>32</sup> Peter Hüttenberger, a member of the Bavaria Project involved in conceptualizing its approach, was largely responsible for this definition which expanded the traditional view of resistance to include actions not specifically designed to overthrow the government. He brought to the fore the importance of "resistance" as a reaction, and therefore a concept of room for manoeuvre: "Research on resistance must therefore grasp the social relationships, and include the reciprocal mechanisms of power and societal reaction."<sup>33</sup> Volumes II - IV of *Bayern in der NS-Zeit* are thus subtitled "Herrschaft und Gesellschaft im Konflikt." Hüttenberger's highly theoretical essay further made two key points:

1) Widerstand soll jede Form der Auflehnung im Rahmen asymmetrischer Herrschaftsbeziehungen gegen eine zumindest tendenzielle Gesamtherrschaft heissen, wobei die Differenzierung der Formen des Widerstandes sich aus den verschiedenartigen Möglichkeiten der asymmetrischen Beziehungen ergibt, die ihrerseits von der sozialen Struktur

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Hüttenberger, "Vorüberlegungen zum "Widerstandsbegriff," in Jürgen Kocka (ed.) *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), p. 122. Because of the importance of language in this debate, all quotations will also be provided in the original German. "Die Erforschung des Widerstandes muss also die sozialen Beziehungen umgreifen und die wechselseitigen Mechanismen von Herrschaft und gesellschaftlicher Reaktion miteinbeziehen."

der implizierten Einheiten abhängen.<sup>34</sup>

2) Widerstand heissen sämtliche auflehrenden Handlungen, die einem Herrschaftsträger die Möglichkeit nehmen, an soziale Einheiten Leistungsforderungen zu stellen, sowie sämtliche Handlungen, die Leistungsverweigerungen sind oder zu Leistungsverweigerungen hinführen können.<sup>35</sup>

The Bavaria project therefore set the criterion for resistance as effect, not motive, and subsequently examined the daily life of Germans in Bavaria during the Nazi era with particular attention to those activities which actually forced the regime to compromise; actions that limited the regime's agenda in some way, no matter how small. In 1981, Martin Broszat, one of the editors of *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, made a plea for a new concept to describe this type of resistance, believing the term "resistance" was too closely linked to elite resistance and the assassination attempts. In Volume IV of *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, Broszat fully defined the concept of *Resistenz*, borrowed from the medical vocabulary for a body fighting a foreign presence, which he had cursorily introduced in Volume I of the series. Broszat defined *Resistenz* as "effective defense, limitation, stemming of National Socialist power or claims to power, regardless of motive, interests, or driving forces."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hüttenberger, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 130. For a discussion of Hüttenberger's concepts, see Peter Steinbach, "Widerstand - aus sozialphilosophischer und historisch-politologischer Perspektive," in Poppe/Eckert/Kowalczyk (eds.), p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Broszat, "Resistenz und Widerstand: Eine Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsprojekts," in *Bayern in der NS-Zeit* (Munich: R.Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981) vol. 4, p. 697.

*Resistenz* covered a wide range of activity, from factory strikes, to disregarding the ban on being in the company of Jews, to refusing the Hitler greeting. Broszat's approach represented the polar opposite to traditional resistance historiography, as *motive* for actions receded into the background. Broszat defended his position by stating: "In every socio-political system, even more so under a political domination like that of National Socialism, what counts most is that which was *done and accomplished*, less that which was *desired or intended*."<sup>37</sup> Ian Kershaw perhaps stated it best when he said that in Broszat's approach, resistance was portrayed in shades of grey, rather than black and white.<sup>38</sup>

Broszat's concept has received a mixed review in the academic world. The primary difficulties in grappling with Broszat's approach are demonstrated by two statements by

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*Resistenz* was defined as "wirksame Abwehr, Begrenzung, Eindämmung der NS-Herrschaft oder ihres Anspruchs, gleichgültig von welchen Motiven, Interessen und Kräften dies bedingt war." For a summary of the main points of the Bavaria Project, see Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich (eds.), *Alltag und Widerstand - Bayern im Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Piper, 1987)

<sup>37</sup> Broszat, "Resistenz," p. 698. "In jedem politisch-gesellschaftlichen System, noch mehr unter einer politischen Herrschaft wie der des Nationalsozialismus, zählt politisch und historisch vor allem was getan und was bewirkt, weniger das, was nur gewollt oder beabsichtigt war."

<sup>38</sup> Kershaw, p. 158. Broszat and Fröhlich identified three main types of resistance by period, although the borders between them were fluid:

1) Communist and Socialist resistance in the working classes 1933/34.

2) Partial *Resistenz*/ *Volksopposition* especially in the churches 1935-1940/1.

3) Fundamental opposition and plans for a coup by conservative elite 1938-1944;  
Broszat and Fröhlich, p. 55.

Peter Hoffmann: "It makes no sense today to demand that every opponent of the regime and of National Socialism had to have been a fanatical potential assassin in order that his opposition be believed."<sup>39</sup> And: "On the whole, at all times from 1933 to 1945 the majority of German voters, indeed of the entire population, supported the government, albeit with varying degrees of willingness."<sup>40</sup> In light of Hoffmann's observations, the lack of analysis of motive in the *Resistenz* concept is glaring. Did *Resistenz* activities imply support of, or opposition to, the Nazi regime? At an international conference of historians in Berlin in July 1984, the Swiss historian Walter Hofer in particular lashed out at the *Resistenz* concept for blurring the distinction between fundamental resistance against the Nazi system, and superficial opposition. He argued that motive was of central importance in the discussion on resistance.<sup>41</sup> Klaus Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul came to a similar conclusion, stating that Broszat's definition clouded the issue of resistance as, ultimately, *Resistenz* could be interpreted as basic support for the regime, rather than basic hostility to

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<sup>39</sup> Hoffmann, *Widerstand* (Munich: R. Piper, 1985), p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> See the discussion comments of Walter Hofer in Jürgen Schmädke, Peter Steinbach (eds.), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 1119-1158. Marlis Steinert and Klaus-Jürgen Müller shared Hofer's sentiments. Motive has come to occupy an important place in the literature again with Peter Steinbach, Johannes Tuchel (eds.), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1994).

it.<sup>42</sup> The proximity of the terms *Resistenz* and the English "resistance" are therefore misleading. Peter Steinbach has criticized the *Resistenz* approach, arguing that "resistance appears as daily behaviour, not as an escalation of a wide spectrum of resistance behaviour to a decisive and life-threatening act."<sup>43</sup> Timothy Mason has also taken issue with the *Resistenz* concept, arguing that working class strikes were political resistance, not *Resistenz*, as they were politically motivated actions designed to weaken or even overthrow the regime.<sup>44</sup>

Although Detlev Peukert's criticism of Mason's conclusion that the working class as a whole fundamentally rejected National Socialism may be accurate,<sup>45</sup> Mason's concept of daily actions having political motivations is noteworthy. Furthermore, criticisms of Mason's work have by

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<sup>42</sup> Klaus Michael Mallmann, Gerhard Paul, "Resistenz oder loyale Widerwilligkeit? Anmerkungen zu einem umstrittenen Begriff." *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 41 (1993): 99-116. Mallmann and Paul also point out that a weakness in Broszat's approach was the assumption that the all-encompassing totalitarian model of Nazi Germany was accurate. As they stated, the totalitarianism theory came back into the debate through the "back door" of *Resistenz* research.

<sup>43</sup> Steinbach, "Widerstand," p. 55. "Widerstand erscheint als Verhaltensform des Alltags, nicht aber als Steigerung eines breiten Spektrums von widerständigen Verhaltensweisen zur entscheidenden und lebensgefährlichen Tat."

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Mason, "Arbeiteropposition im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland," in Detlev Peukert, Jürgen Reulecke (eds.), *Die Reihen fast geschlossen* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1981), p. 293.

<sup>45</sup> Detlev Peukert, "Der deutsche Arbeiterwiderstand 1933-1945," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B28-29/79: 22-36.

extension supported the term "resistance" as the appropriate designation for the 17 June 1953 uprising in East Germany. In criticizing Mason, Peukert argues for a narrow definition of resistance to describe only those actions which were geared to bring about the fall of the regime. Similarly, Günther Morsch argues against Mason stating that worker protests in the Third Reich were not politically motivated, and therefore not resistance, but were simply reactions to unacceptable working conditions.<sup>46</sup> It follows then that the political component of the strikes in the summer of 1953 in East Germany make the term "resistance" an appropriate designation.

Ian Kershaw downplays the criticism of the *Resistenz* approach, stating that Broszat introduced the term as a conceptual device to investigate the effect of National Socialist penetration of society on the "little people" and the extent to which they defended against it, in no way suggesting that *Resistenz* derailed the Nazis from their ultimate objectives. *Resistenz* was thus a manner of conceptualizing Nazi Germany in terms of conflict spheres; as a dynamic relationship between the power structure and the broader society. As Broszat himself stated: "The expansion of the topic of resistance was not meant to open the door to an increasing devaluation of the term resistance [...] The goal was rather to demonstrate the broad scale of resistance as well as its types of expression - from the occasional or persistent non-conformity to illegal underground work. Above all, it was to demonstrate the abundance of opportunities and circumstances for

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<sup>46</sup> Günter Morsch, "Streik im Dritten Reich," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (hereafter *VfZ*) 36 (1988): 649-689.

oppositional behaviour."<sup>47</sup> In other words, the "resistance" which had occupied a prominent place in historiography up to that point was almost detached from Broszat's topic of investigation. To further clarify Broszat's position, Kershaw distinguishes between the *fundamentalist* approach to resistance, which deals with "organized attempts to combat Nazism and [...] high-risk political action [which challenged] the regime as a whole,"<sup>48</sup> and the *societal* approach, which explores "a multiplicity of points of conflict with ordinary citizens."<sup>49</sup> Although Kershaw is correct to point out the distinction between the two approaches, his flattery towards Broszat's *Resistenz* as a conceptual framework is too extreme. The criticisms of historians like Mallmann, Paul and Hofer must be taken seriously, for Broszat's concept has clouded the issue of resistance, which, Broszat's justifications noted above notwithstanding, was part of his intention. Witness the following assertion by Broszat: "If through the investigations of the Bavaria project it becomes clear that active, fundamental resistance against the NS-Regime was fruitless on almost all occasions, but on the other hand

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<sup>47</sup> Broszat, "Resistenz," p. 693. "Die Ausweitung des Widerstandsthemas sollte nicht...einer inflationären Entwertung des Widerstandsbegriffs [...] Tür und Tor öffnen. Ihr Ziel war es vielmehr, die breite Skala der Ausdrucksformen des Widerstandes - von der zeitweilig oder beharrlich resistenten Nonkonformität bis hin zur illegalen Untergrundarbeit aufzuzeigen, vor allem auch die Fülle der Anlässe und Rahmenbedingungen für oppositionelles Verhalten darzulegen." Ian Kershaw provides an excellent summary of the debates surrounding Broszat's *Resistenz* concept; Kershaw, pp. 162-179.

<sup>48</sup> Kershaw, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

effective *Resistenz* can be detected in many different ways in various social sections, then this alone is a result that should cause reflection on the premises of the term "resistance."<sup>50</sup> "Fruitless," however, is not a criterion of determining whether or not something happened.

In 1982, Richard Löwenthal added to the definition of resistance by differentiating between political opposition, refusal to participate in society (*gesellschaftliche Verweigerung*), and ideological dissidence (*weltanschauliche Dissidenz*), although pointing out that the boundaries between the three types of opposition were porous.<sup>51</sup> He felt that these three types of resistance were the most important because they were directed against the pillars of the ruling power: political power, organization of society, and its control of information.<sup>52</sup> Löwenthal described refusal to take part in society as a wider, and often more effective type of resistance, which was not politically motivated and which "was directed practically and relatively openly against the incursions of National Socialism in societal life and its organizations."<sup>53</sup> Löwenthal's *gesellschaftliche Verweigerung* is thus identical in substance with Broszat's *Resistenz*, although Löwenthal supports his choice of terms

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<sup>50</sup> Broszat, "Resistenz," p. 698.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Löwenthal, "Widerstand im totalen Staat," in Richard Löwenthal, Patrik von zur Mühlen (eds.), *Widerstand und Verweigerung in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945* (Berlin, Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz GmbH, 1982), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Eckert, "Die Vergleichbarkeit des Unvergleichbaren," in Poppe/Eckert/Kowalczyk (eds.), p. 73.

<sup>53</sup> Löwenthal, p. 14. "[...] praktisch und relativ offen gegen die Eingriffe des Nationalsozialismus in das gesellschaftliche Leben und seine Organisationen richtete."

largely because *Resistenz* does not translate well and cannot contribute to debates in an international setting. The absence of motive, and emphasis on effect, is made clear by Löwenthal's assertion that "the objective political effect of this type of resistance [*gesellschaftliche Verweigerung* - GB] is independent from its primarily apolitical motivations."<sup>54</sup> According to Löwenthal, one must be cautious not to interpret the political effect of farmers' or workers' protests against Nazi policies as politically motivated actions.<sup>55</sup> Löwenthal defined a second category of resistance, ideological dissidence, as resistance stemming from the political and cultural milieu, which was relatively ineffective in hindering the progress of the regime, but was nonetheless an important symbol of rejection of the regime's philosophy in art, literature, and science and which helped to preserve the German cultural tradition "*über die Jahre des Schreckens*."<sup>56</sup>

For the purposes of this study, Löwenthal's concept of political resistance is the most important of the three. Löwenthal defined this resistance as synonymous with opposition, and as "activities which were consciously directed against the dictatorship of the Party, which strove to undermine and ultimately overthrow it and which were therefore necessarily illegal from the beginning and had to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 19. "Die objektive politische Wirkung solcher Widerstandes [*gesellschaftliche Verweigerung* - GB] ist dabei unabhängig von seinen primär unpolitischen Motiven."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

be carried out conspiratorially."<sup>57</sup> Löwenthal's emphasis on conspiracy greatly limited which actions could be considered resistance, and if applied to East Germany in the 40's and 50's would mean resistance was limited to a few underground groups who worked for anti-Communist organizations in western Germany. Indeed, because the conspiratorial element was lacking, the June 1953 uprising would not necessarily fall under Löwenthal's definition, although a mass demonstration against the regime certainly must be conceptualized in terms of resistance. For this reason, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen's differentiation between passive resistance (the self assertion of certain groups and institutions, ideological dissent, inner emigration, and refusal to participate in society) and active resistance (groups or individuals which protested publicly against National Socialism, and tried conspiratorially or indirectly to fight the regime, warn of its dangers, or shake it in its credibility) finds greater resonance for the study of East German resistance.<sup>58</sup> Yet this definition is lacking as well for it confuses passive opposition and latent fundamental resistance. Passive resistance, like Broszat's *Resistenz*, blurs motivation for resistance, indeed implying a certain complicity with the regime. Although there is much overlap between passive opposition and latent fundamental

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. "Aktivitäten die bewusst gegen die nationalsozialistische Parteidiktatur gerichtet waren, ihre Untergrabung und ihren schliesslichen Sturz anstrebten und daher notwendig von vornherein illegal waren und dazu konspirativ betrieben werden mussten."

<sup>58</sup> Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *"Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung": Opposition gegen Hitler und der Staatsstreich vom 20. Juli 1944 in der SD-Berichterstattung* Vol. 1. (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1984), p. 20.

resistance, it is important to distinguish between the two by applying the litmus test of motive.

Robert Gellately's works on the Gestapo, although not directly concerned with the issue of resistance, provide a balance to *Resistenz* historiography, and point to an important criterion in determining the level of acceptance of the regime. In *The Gestapo and German Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Gellately addressed the high level of cooperation that the Gestapo experienced from the wider society. Gellately concluded that individuals became unofficial enforcers of the regime not only out of fear for their own safety, but due to underlying support for the regime.<sup>59</sup> As Gellately has written: "Instead of (implicitly or otherwise) regarding the German population as largely passive, it might be more useful to portray them as more active participants who, even as unorganized individuals, from time to time played a role in the terror system."<sup>60</sup> Active participation with the secret police is an important barometer of the regime's support, and is applicable to East Germany. Klessmann has tangentially referred to this point: "The enormous number of [Stasi informants] was actually a substitute for badly functioning spontaneous denunciation."<sup>61</sup> Klessmann's generalization does not apply to the earlier period of GDR history when the informant

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Gellately, "Rethinking the Nazi Terror System: A historiographical analysis," *German Studies Review* vol. XIV (1991), p. 30.

<sup>61</sup> Klessmann, p. 457. "Die riesige Zahl von IM war insofern der Ersatz für die schlecht funktionierende spontane Denunziation."

system was still in its infancy, but the low level of cooperation with the Ministry for State Security even in those days points to a general rejection of this arm of the regime, and by extension the regime itself. Gellately's conceptualization of terror in terms of "an expression of power rather than of simple compulsion [...]"<sup>62</sup> is also useful, and is more sophisticated than the stark "iron band" portrayal of Hannah Arendt.<sup>63</sup> A study of East Germany's MfS in the early years reveals that the MfS had considerable difficulties in gaining popular acceptance.<sup>64</sup>

Historians are presently grappling with the application of resistance research on the Third Reich to the GDR. In a recent publication, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk has made an initial attempt at categorizing GDR resistance. Like Löwenthal, Kowalczyk believes that the terms opposition and resistance are synonymous: "In principle, resistance and opposition are understood as a type of behaviour which brought into question, limited, or stemmed the all encompassing claims to political domination. This type of behaviour should be called resistance, which can be organized or not organized, and which can be carried out by

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<sup>62</sup> Gellately, "Rethinking," p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951).

<sup>64</sup> Gellately has suggested that historians of the Third Reich have concentrated either on history from above or from below with little overlap. As a result, recent works on "daily" resistance do not deal adequately with the Nazi security apparatus. He points to Kershaw's analysis of the "Hitler Myth" as an appropriate direction for future historians, as it investigates "both the *Führer* image-building and image reception"; Gellately, "Rethinking," p. 27. His comments are also an appropriate reminder for historians of the GDR.

groups, individuals or institutions."<sup>65</sup> Kowalczyk described four basic types of resistance: 1. *gesellschaftliche Verweigerung*, 2. social protest, 3. political dissent, and 4. mass protest. The first was the most common type of resistance in the GDR, a passive protest which could include referring to the Wall as "the Wall" rather than an "antifascist protective barrier," or refusing to participate in the parties or mass organizations.<sup>66</sup> The most common type of societal protest was watching or listening to western television and radio. As in Broszat's approach, the motive for this type of resistance recedes into the distance. The second category, social protest, was tied to various social groups and their reaction to developments in society. The most drastic examples of this type of protest were strikes.<sup>67</sup> Kowalczyk points out that this type of protest flowed easily into political protest. The third category encompassed reform socialists, "bourgeois" (*bürgerlich*) opposition, and societal or cultural opposition. The latter manifested itself in rock music or hair styles, while the reform socialists played a negligible role in the 50s, taking on a more prominent role in the 70s and 80s. Bourgeois opposition was critical in the 1950s, however, led by small groups but enjoying the widespread support of the population. It was characterized by the rejection of

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<sup>65</sup> Kowalczyk, "Von der Freiheit," p. 90. "Prinzipiell wird unter Widerstand und Opposition eine Verhaltensform verstanden, die den allumfassenden Herrschaftsanspruch in Frage stellt, begrenzt oder eindämmt. Ein solches Verhalten soll widerständiges heissen. Dabei kann dieses organisiert wie nicht organisiert, in Gruppen, individuell oder institutionell geschehen."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

Marxist-Leninist ideology and strove for a free democratic Germany as practiced in West Germany.<sup>68</sup> The last category is self-explanatory, witnessed only on two occasions in the GDR: 17 June 1953 and in the fall of 1989. Kowalczyk's assertion that bourgeois opposition in the 1950s was widespread merits attention. His choice of term to categorize this opposition, political dissent, is inappropriate, however, for it is associated with the reform movements of the latter years of the GDR and detracts from the basic rejection of the Communist regime. It is more useful to conceive of the bourgeois opposition of the later 1940s and early 1950s in terms of fundamental political resistance.

More recently, Rainer Eckert has published "17 Theses" on resistance and opposition in the GDR.<sup>69</sup> The 17 theses cover a wide spectrum of oppositional activity, but are weighted towards opposition in the latter years of the regime. Eckert does not deal specifically with a definition of resistance, although he is careful to stress the need to differentiate between the fundamental resistance of social democrats, Christians, and underground groups like the Fighting Groups Against Inhumanity and the Investigative Committee of Free Jurists, and the opposition of reform-oriented groups of the 1970s and 80s.<sup>70</sup> Eckert addressed several central issues regarding resistance in East Germany. First, he pointed out that attempts "to approach dictatorial power from the angles of resistance or opposition" are

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>69</sup> Rainer Eckert, "Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR: Siebzehn Thesen," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* vol.44 (1996): 49-67.

<sup>70</sup> Eckert, "Widerstand," p. 53.

rare,<sup>71</sup> adding that "this approach only makes sense when resistance is accepted as a phenomenon of dictatorship."<sup>72</sup> The leading authority on German resistance to Hitler has already come to this conclusion: "The relation between National Socialism and the Resistance is a key to comprehending the Nazi System."<sup>73</sup> It is important, therefore, to explore East German resistance in conjunction with the development of the dictatorship. Eckert also raised the issues of whether East Germans who worked for foreign spy services, or those who fled the GDR, should be considered resisters. He concluded that those who fled the GDR cannot be considered true resisters because they essentially abandoned hope of changing the regime.<sup>74</sup> The issue of agents is more complicated and will have to await further research, and ultimately greater access to documents. It does seem on first analysis that East Germans who conducted subversive work against the GDR out of political conviction should be considered resisters.

The most recent attempt to clarify the term "resistance" has come from Christoph Klessmann in a 1996 article in *Historische Zeitschrift* entitled "Opposition und Resistenz in zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland." Klessmann prefers the term "opposition" for GDR history because "resistance" is associated with the active political fighting of the Nazi regime. To further his choice of word, Klessmann stated: "The examples from the GDR show at least

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffmann, *German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Eckert, "Widerstand," pp. 57-58.

that we are dealing with partial opposition rather than resistance with the goal of toppling the system."<sup>75</sup> This definition may be appropriate for the latter years of the GDR, but is not applicable to the founding years of the regime when there was clear resistance with the aim of overthrowing the Communist system. Neither has Klessmann's analysis contributed to an understanding of the 17 June uprising. The uprising, the most visible example of resistance to the regime prior to 1989 received only one sentence in Klessmann's discussion.<sup>76</sup> Klessmann is correct, however, but saying nothing new in pointing out the importance of motive for differentiating between Resistenz and Opposition, although both involved personal risk: "It should be attempted [...] to draw the line between Resistenz as (often unintentional) limiting of political power, and opposition as conscious [...] hostility."<sup>77</sup>

Historical works on resistance in the GDR are far fewer than those on resistance in the Nazi era, in part because the East German archives were opened only recently. Because of the vast quantity of sources now accessible, it seems premature for some historians to question the usefulness of the new material. Lutz Niethammer, speaking for a group of

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<sup>75</sup> Christoph Klessmann, "Opposition und Resistenz in zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland." *Historische Zeitschrift* 262 (1996), p. 455.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 479.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 460. For a detailed examination of the weaknesses in Klessmann's article, see the review by Peter Hoffmann at <http://www.msu.edu/~german/articles/hoffmann1.html> (6 Sept. 1996)

historians at a conference of the *Forschungsschwerpunkt Zeithistorische Studien* in Potsdam in June 1993, stated that "studies on the 17 June uprising based on new material can complement, and occasionally, correct the best western studies (such as Baring's), but on the whole show the previous western works to be classics rather than rubbish."<sup>78</sup> Niethammer later committed another disservice to the historical profession, stating that historical analysis on the GDR, especially on the major events, will now depend on evaluation and analysis of what is already known, rather than on new information emerging from the archives.<sup>79</sup> Happily, this attitude was not shared by all historians in attendance. Armin Mitter in particular spoke out against this position.<sup>80</sup>

The lack of historical works on GDR resistance was due in part to the dearth of sources, and in part to the "political incorrectness" of the topic in the era of *Ostpolitik*. Beginning with the *Generalvertrag* in 1972, West German historians in general became reluctant to investigate topics which might be disparaging to East Germany, and

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<sup>78</sup> Lutz Niethammer's contribution to the discussion in Jürgen Kocka and Martin Sabrow, *Die DDR als Geschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), p. 65. "Kaum widersprochen wurde schliesslich auch der Einschätzung, dass solche Forschungen die besten zeitnahen westlichen Untersuchungen - wie in diesem Fall Barings - zwar ergänzen, im einzelnen auch korrigieren, sie im Ganzen aber eher zu Klassikern als zur Makulatur machen."

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> See Armin Mitter, "Der "Tag X" und die "Innere Staatsgründung" der DDR," in Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle (eds.), *Der Tag X: Die "Innere Staatsgründung" der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/1954* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995), pp. 15-16.

jeopardize the precarious friendship which had been established. As a result, the standard western histories of the GDR have only fragmentary information on resistance, usually limited to a crude interpretation of the 17 June uprising and the visible resistance of intellectuals such as Wolfgang Harich and Robert Havemann.<sup>81</sup> This absence becomes noticeable when these works are contrasted with more recent studies of the GDR such as Mary Fulbrook's *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) in which societal reaction to the regime occupies a prominent position. However, Fulbrook concerned herself to a greater extent with the latter years of the regime and acts of opposition which would fall under Broszat's *Resistenz* category. Her intent was to "open up some of the more inchoate, but not less important, forms of popular dissent or "resistance" in the broader sense of the regime's demands. It is clear that much nonconforming behaviour was not explicitly regarded or consciously intended as such [...] It was on the whole primarily self-protective, with

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<sup>81</sup> The basic texts prior to 1989 were David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow's German Ally* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Martin McCauley, *The German Democratic Republic since 1945* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983); Hermann Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1986* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988); Dietrich Staritz, *Geschichte der DDR 1945-85* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985); M. Dennis, *The German Democratic Republic* (London: Pinter, 1988); Henry Kirsch, *The German Democratic Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); Henry Ashby Turner, *The Two Germanies since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1982). It should be noted, however, that David Childs' treatment of the uprising was more advanced than the other analyses. Childs pointed to the important facts that economic demands were just one of the demands voiced by demonstrators on 17 June 1953, and that the demonstrators comprised various societal groups apart from workers; Childs, pp. 31-33.

respect to the defence of an individual's own personal values or interests, rather than actively oppositional in intent."<sup>82</sup> In this approach, motive for opposition occupies a secondary role, yet Fulbrook herself provided an important clue to underlying motive for opposition when she stated: "It was not so much because the GDR lacked national legitimacy, as that it failed to produce a new, intrinsic, legitimacy of its own, that its stability was undermined."<sup>83</sup> As will be demonstrated in this study, abuse of basic rights significantly contributed to the regime's inability to establish legitimacy in the 1940s and 1950s.

Prior to 1989, the only sound work dedicated to opposition and resistance in the GDR was Karl Wilhelm Fricke's *Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984). This work outlined some basic organizational structures of the concepts of opposition and resistance, and traced the development of both from the immediate post-war period to 1984. Fricke defined opposition as hostility to the political situation which expressed itself relatively legally and relatively openly, whereas resistance was political opposition which did not have open and legal means to express itself. Thus, from the beginning of the SED regime, resistance in the GDR was illegal. Fricke pointed out that both forms of opposition overlapped, partly because opposition could, at the will of the Party, be deemed illegal at any point.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy*, p. 153.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>84</sup> Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984), p. 13.

Fricke also believed that the roots of opposition were to be found in the dramatic changes in the societal and governmental systems which were being imposed on the population of the GDR.<sup>85</sup> Fricke does not analyze in detail, however, the equally important topic of the *manner* in which those changes were implemented. Fricke's work was also not primarily concerned with the development of resistance in association with the development of the repression apparatus, nor with the 17 June 1953 uprising. Although the source base was limited, Fricke's work remains a significant contribution to the literature, and an important introduction to the field of GDR opposition.

Within the period under investigation, 1945 to 1955, the most evident demonstration of popular resistance was the uprising on 17 June 1953. The literature on this topic has enjoyed a renaissance in the aftermath of the opening of the archives, yet the conclusions that have been reached have been far from uniform. The debate centres around the nature of the uprising. Was it a popular anti-communist revolutionary upheaval? Or was it simply a workers' uprising, the result of poor working conditions and therefore more representative of a "normal" conflict present in any modern society? With regard to the nature of the uprising, Armin Mitter's conclusion is noteworthy:

"Schlüssiger dürfte jedoch der Hinweis darauf sein, dass es eben am 17. Juni nicht um einen Arbeiteraufstand oder eine Arbeiterbewegung ging, sondern dass das *Widerstandspotential* innerhalb der gesamten Gesellschaft gegen den kommunistischen Herrschaft aktiviert wurde, von dem die Arbeiter nur ein Teil, wenn auch vielleicht der wichtigste

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<sup>85</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 14.

waren."<sup>86</sup> This "resistance potential," and the role of abuse of basic rights within the formation of this potential, is investigated in the present work. A full discussion of the literature on the 17 June uprising is found in Chapter Four of this study.

Works on the GDR police and judicial systems, both pillars of the SED dictatorship, are valuable for the study of East German resistance. There are several works that deal with the development of the judicial system. Karl Wilhelm Fricke's *Politik und Justiz in der DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979) provided a detailed description of the use of the judicial system for political ends.<sup>87</sup> More recently, Falco Werkentin has provided a well documented study of GDR justice in practice in *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht*. (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995). This work is helpful in periodizing the harshness of GDR justice. The MfS in the 1950s has received surprisingly little attention in the literature that has appeared since 1990. The most important work remains Karl Wilhelm Fricke's *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989). His conclusion that the MfS was not a state within a state remains valid, but he did not have the source base necessary to provide a thorough treatment of the subject. Norman Naimark's *The Russians in Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1995) has provided a thorough treatment of the development of the Soviet Occupied

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<sup>86</sup> Mitter, "Der "Tag X," p. 22. Italics added. Mitter also emphasizes the *geistige* issue of democracy for the demonstrators; Mitter, "Der Tag X," p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Wolfgang Schuller's *Geschichte und Struktur des politischen Strafrechts der DDR bis 1968*. (Ebelsbach: Gremer, 1980) also investigates the use of GDR justice for political ends.

Zone, and particularly the origins of the East German state and security apparatus. Naimark's work has illustrated the important role of the Soviet Union in the development of East German institutions.

Works on resistance in East German political parties have been scarce. Michael Richter's exhaustive *Die Ost-CDU: Zwischen Widerstand und Gleichschaltung* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1990) described the process of *Gleichschaltung* (forcing into line) of the eastern CDU, and offered the most comprehensive study of resistance in the CDU. For this study, his emphasis that the CDU was representative of wider society merits attention. Although one must be wary of counterfactual history, his conclusion that the CDU would have won free elections in eastern Germany in the fall of 1949 is noteworthy. A solid work on the LDPD in the early years of the GDR has yet to be written. This study seeks to partially fill this gap by employing recently accessible LDPD documents. Student resistance, which was often tied to the political parties, has received perhaps the most attention in the literature on GDR resistance. These works are important for probing the motivation of student resisters.<sup>88</sup>

There have been several works published on SPD resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone and GDR. Two of these works, Helmut Bärwald's *Das Ostbüro der SPD 1946-1971* (Krefeld: SINUS 1991) and Wolfgang Buschfort's *Das Ostbüro der SPD* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991) cover SPD resistance in the SBZ/GDR in the process of recounting the

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Ammer, *Universität zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1969); Klaus-Dieter Müller, Waldemar Krönig (eds.), *Anpassung, Widerstand, Verfolgung: Hochschule und Studenten in der SBZ und DDR 1945-1961* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1994).

history of the western SPD's *Ostbüro* (Eastern Office). Bärwald's work is a loose journalistic account which does not fill the requirements of historical scholarship. Buschfort's work has advanced knowledge on SPD resistance by providing factual information on resistance activities. He does not address motive of the resisters as such, however, nor does he develop the role of repression in the history of SPD resistance. An important work for assessing motivation behind resistance is Horst-Peter Schulz and Beatrix Bouvier's "...die SPD aber aufgehört hat zu existieren" (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Verlag, 1991). This work offers a series of interviews with participants in SPD activity in the Soviet Occupied Zone/German Democratic Republic. Although valuable, the interviews are based on recollections from years afterwards and must therefore be treated with caution.

Based on this historiographical analysis of resistance in Nazi Germany and of literature on the GDR, this study sets out several goals. First, it seeks to return motive to a prominent place in the consideration of resistance. The primary difficulty with a *Resistenz* approach is that it removes motive as a consideration in reaction to the development of the regime.<sup>89</sup> This study therefore does not adopt a *Resistenz* approach to study GDR resistance in East Germany between 1945 and 1955. To be sure, because of the political aspect of the popular uprising in East Germany in 1953, a *Resistenz* approach to the GDR in the 1940s and 1950s is not suitable as it would not address the primary issue of

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<sup>89</sup> Both Peter Steinbach in "Widerstand," p. 55, and Christoph Klessmann in "Gegner des Nationalsozialismus. Zum Widerstand im Dritten Reich" in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 46/1979 emphasize the importance of political motivation in the concept of resistance.

politically motivated resistance in broad sections of the population. There is perhaps more of an argument for using the *Resistenz* approach to study the *Nischengesellschaft* of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s in the GDR. This study therefore falls broadly under the fundamentalist approach outlined by Kershaw, and the specific definition provided by Löwenthal.<sup>90</sup> Kershaw's fundamentalist approach emphasizes the importance of organization to the term "resistance." There should not be excessive focus on organizational aspects, however, as doing so would not address the spontaneous uprising of 1953. This study, therefore, considers resistance to be acts, organized or not, which arose from a conscious, political motive, aimed to undermine the political system in some way, and bound with a certain degree of risk. Individuals who carried out these acts ultimately aspired to the overthrow of the Communist system. Organized leaflet distribution by members of the non-Marxist parties, and in particular the underground activity of members of the SPD, and the 17 June 1953 uprising, will therefore be treated as similar phenomena.

Second, this study will detail the history of resistance in the political parties by integrating records from the parties and those of the east German security apparatus. This integrated approach is not available in the present literature. Such an approach reveals the prominent place of repression in motivation to resist, and the presence of resistance in the lower levels of the LDPD in particular. This resistance has not previously been documented.

Third, this study will argue that there was a basic commonality between aims and motives of resisters in the

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<sup>90</sup> See pp. 22-23 above.

non-Marxist political parties and those in the broader population. This thesis has been proposed in the literature, but has not been proven conclusively.<sup>91</sup> To prove this hypothesis, one must address the only instance of concerted resistance to remove the Communist system in East Germany during the period under investigation: The revolutionary uprising of 17 June 1953. This study will provide previously unavailable information on the uprising and its aftermath to demonstrate the political nature of the uprising, and thus challenge existing studies which emphasize the economic component of the disturbances. If one sets aside the organizational aspects, the 17 June 1953 uprising was an act of resistance fundamentally similar to the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt. By examining the Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR from 1945 to 1955, it becomes clear that there existed in the East German population a basic rejection of the Communist system which was intertwined with the regime's disregard for basic rights. Protestors on 17 June 1953 demonstrated for the release of political prisoners, and voiced political demands similar to those which had been raised by oppositional members of the non-Marxist parties in the GDR prior to their being forced into line. The organized political resistance in the non-Marxist parties represented *Widerstand mit Volk*.

Fourth, this study seeks to incorporate an examination of the repression apparatus into an analysis of resistance, thereby illustrating the symbiotic relationship between resistance and repression. The new material on the Communist repression apparatus which will be introduced will provide a

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<sup>91</sup> Kowalczyk claims that the democratic resistance in these parties had "massive support in wide sections of the population," but does not support this hypothesis; Kowalczyk, "Von der Freiheit," p. 111.

balance to studies which emphasize the role of economic considerations as a source of the uprising. There is at present no detailed description of the development of the GDR's repression apparatus in the founding years of the GDR.

Because of the collapse of Communism in East Germany, there are now accessible rich sources on the topic of resistance. On resistance in the CDU, documents of the *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik* in the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Sankt-Augustin are imperative. Records of the CDU *Kreis* and *Bezirk* levels provide a view into the situation in the lower levels of the party, not always reflected in the records of the leadership. These lower level reports also contain situation reports on the East German population after 1953. When used in conjunction with state records and records of the other non-Marxist parties, these records provide valuable insights into the population. The records of the CDU *Ostbüro* contain only fragmentary evidence on CDU resistance activity in the Soviet zone/GDR. The holdings of the *Archiv des Deutschen Liberalismus* in the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Gummersbach contain documentation on the LDPD. Records of the *Kreis* and *Bezirk* level provide information on resistance in the lower levels of the party. Situation reports from the LDPD following the uprising also provide insight into the population. There exists more documentation on the lower level LDPD than on those levels of the CDU. Documentation from the *Ostbüro* of the FDP is, like that of the CDU, fragmentary. The *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie* in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bonn contains documentation on SPD underground activity in eastern Germany. The statements of those involved in resistance activity and the reports of

SPD couriers on activity in eastern Germany are particularly useful. Documentation from the higher levels of the western SPD is not useful, as it does not provide information on SPD activity in the East. The western SPD ran the *Ostbüro* furtively.

The most important holdings on resistance activity in the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* in Berlin are found in the record groups *Befreundete Parteien*, *Amt für Information, Justiz*, the papers of leading functionaries, and *Leitende Organe der Parteien und Massenorganisationen*. The latter group has been used extensively in a recent study.<sup>92</sup> The records of the Free German Trade Union (FDGB) should be explored in future research for insights into popular developments.

Documentation generated by the GDR's repression apparatus offers excellent evidence on the development of resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone and GDR. Records of the Ministry of the Interior (previously held in Potsdam, and now transferred to Berlin-Lichterfelde) offer the most comprehensive documentation on the uprising of 1953. These records have not been used scientifically before. Records of the Ministry for State Security in Berlin are also valuable in assessing resistance. The holdings of the *Dokumentenstelle* provide information on MfS operations, while the *Sekretariat des Ministers* record group contains the records of leadership meetings. The situation reports collected by the MfS following the uprising are contained in a general record group called the *Allgemeine Sachablage*. These reports are presented for the first time in this study.

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<sup>92</sup> See Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle.

In analyzing resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone and GDR from 1945 to 1955, it becomes clear that resistance was intimately tied to concepts of law, democracy, and the moral basis of power. Emmi Bonhoeffer, at the 37th anniversary of the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt, reflected on the nature of German resistance in the Third Reich:

Resistance to Hitler was always both: moral protest and political calculation.

The moral protest was directed at the cynicism of Hitler and his government, against his attacks on neighbouring peoples, his persecution of the Jews and its infernal result.

The political considerations revolved around the destruction of the concept of law, around an analysis of the development of dictatorship, and around the reorganization of the state after Hitler [...] to guarantee a parliamentary form of government.<sup>93</sup>

Thus GDR resistance in the 1940s and 1950s had more in common with the resisters of July 20 than it did with *Resistenz* activities in the Third Reich. In this regard, to answer a question posed by Rainer Eckert on similarities between resistance in the GDR and in Nazi Germany, a common link between both resistance in the Third Reich and in the GDR was a desire for a state based on the rule of law, a concern for human rights and freedoms, and the protection of the individual from the "totalitarian" state.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Steinbach, "Widerstand," p. 61.

<sup>94</sup> Eckert, "Die Vergleichbarkeit," p. 80.

## Chapter One: Resistance and Repression between the End of the War and the First Elections of the Soviet Occupied Zone

### 1. - The beginning of political life in eastern Germany.

#### 1.1 - The administration of occupied Germany

On 7 May 1945 in a technical college in the French town of Reims which was serving as the headquarters of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme western Allied Commander for Europe, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, the Chief of Wehrmacht Leadership Staff in the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), signed the unconditional surrender of the German armed forces. With the repetition of this act in the Soviet army headquarters in Berlin-Karlshorst on the next day, the war in Europe effectively came to an end.<sup>1</sup> The Allies arrested Germany's government, now headed by Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz who had attained the position through Hitler's political testament, on 23 May.<sup>2</sup> The main troops of occupation were those of the Allied Powers: the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States.<sup>3</sup> The Red Army

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<sup>1</sup> At this ceremony, Admiral Hans Georg von Friedeburg, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, and General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff signed on behalf of the German Wehrmacht. The full text of the document is in *Das Potsdamer Abkommen: Dokumentensammlung* (Berlin (East): Staatsverlag der DDR, 1980), p.31.

<sup>2</sup> Hitler named Dönitz his successor as president of the Reich, war minister, and supreme commander of the armed forces; Jackson Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1988), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Due to an administrative error, the only area of Germany that was not occupied was the area around the town

occupied Berlin, and the territory east of the Elbe, while western Allied forces had reached a line stretching from Schwerin in the North, and along the Elbe and the Mulde rivers to the south. The western Allies had met up with the Soviets for the famous handshake on the bridge spanning the Elbe near Torgau on 25 April.

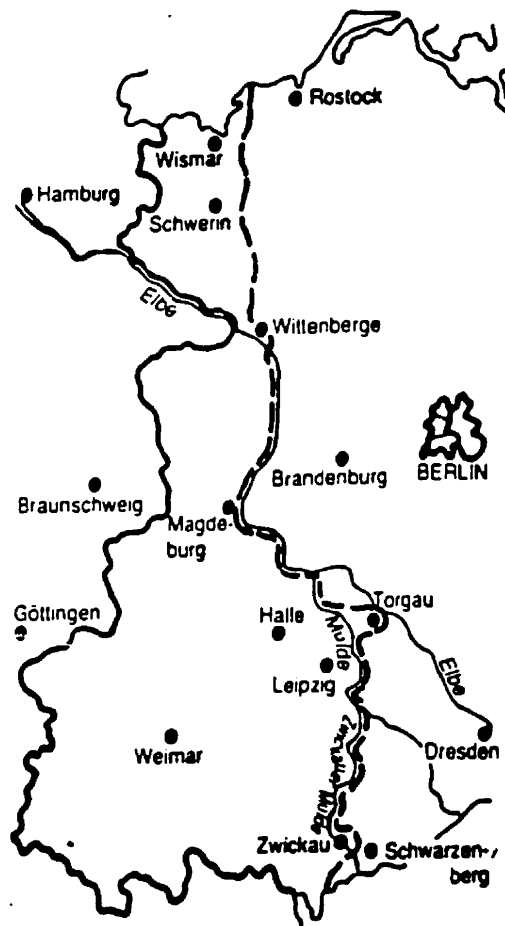
The leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union had met twice during the war to plan for the post-war world after their presumed victory. They met in Tehran from 28 November to 1 December 1943, and in the vacation residences of the Czars in the small Crimean town of Yalta from 4 to 11 February 1945, with the Yalta conference having more bearing on German developments.<sup>4</sup> The leaders agreed that France should participate in the occupation of Germany - the Soviet, American, and British occupation zones had already been decided upon by the London agreements of 12 September and 14 November 1944 -<sup>5</sup> and on the Allied Control Council, and that the Allies were to possess supreme authority in Germany. They could not agree, however, on whether or not Germany should be dismembered,

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of Schwarzenberg in the mountainous area of southern Saxony. The local authorities there set up an independent republic which lasted until the end of June, when Soviet forces moved in to replace the western Allied troops who had occupied the surrounding area.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill is reputed to have said that if the Allies had looked for ten years they could not have found a worse meeting place than Yalta, and only an adequate supply of whiskey made a stay there bearable; Russell Buhite, *Decisions at Yalta: An Appraisal of Summit Diplomacy* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1986), pp. 4-6.

<sup>5</sup> David Childs, *The GDR: Moscow's German Ally* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 2.



- Furthest penetration of western Allied troops ( 7 May 1945 )  
 — Border between western and eastern zones of Germany ( July 1945 )

(Source: Ilse Spittmann, Gisela Herwig, DDR Lesebuch (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1980) p.39.)

and could only agree in principle to reparations.<sup>6</sup> Although the Yalta conference seemed to prepare the way for joint administration of Germany, Stalin's remark that in this war, the victor would impose his system as far as his armies reached<sup>7</sup> was a more accurate portrayal of how post-war Germany would be dealt with.

On 5 June 1945 in the same building in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst where the signing of the unconditional surrender had been repeated, the Allies signed another important agreement regarding Germany's future. The "Declaration in Consideration of the Defeat of Germany" stated that there was no central government in Germany able to comply with the demands of the victorious powers. The governments of France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain effectively took over the highest government power in Germany, as had been foreseen at the Yalta conference.<sup>8</sup> While each power was to rule its own zone, the commanders-in-chief, General Dwight Eisenhower, General Bernard Montgomery, Marshal Georgi Zhukov, and General Pierre Koenig, concluded an agreement forming the Allied Control Council to deal with questions concerning all Germany, as well as an Allied Kommandatura to deal specifically with Berlin. There was, however, one significant drawback to the Allied Control Council: it did not possess the right to intervene in the affairs of the

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<sup>6</sup> For the protocols of the proceedings and other related documents, see *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta* (Washington: US government printing office, 1955), pp. 562-996.

<sup>7</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979), p. 18.

occupation zones.<sup>9</sup> On 30 July, the Allied Control Council was constituted in a former courthouse in Schöneberg in the American sector of Berlin, and started its functions on 30 August.<sup>10</sup> It met until 20 March 1948, when the Soviet representative stormed out. The Council did not meet after that date.

### 1.2 - The beginning of political parties in the Soviet zone.

On 9 June, one month after the end of hostilities, Marshal Georgi Zhukov, commander-in-chief of the Soviet occupation troops, issued Order Number 1 creating a body to administer the Soviet occupied zone called the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD).<sup>11</sup> Zhukov himself headed SMAD until 10 April 1946.<sup>12</sup> One day after SMAD's founding, Zhukov issued Order Number 2 which allowed the founding of anti-fascist political parties and unions in the eastern zone.<sup>13</sup> Order Number 2 meant that political activity in post-war Germany occurred first in the Soviet zone, and

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<sup>9</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 18. As we shall see, this drawback became important when eastern politicians appealed to the western Allies for assistance in their zone.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Broszat and Hermann Weber (eds.), *SBZ-Handbuch* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> SMAD had four main departments: demilitarization, civil administration, economics and politics.

<sup>12</sup> Colonel General V.D. Sokolovski followed Zhukov until 29 March 1949; Sokolovski was succeeded by General V.I. Chuikov to 10 October 1949 and the disbanding of SMAD.

<sup>13</sup> Orders were usually made known through the SMAD organ *Tägliche Rundschau*; Fricke, *Politik*, p. 28.

much earlier than in the western zones which permitted the formation of political parties only as of 7 August 1945. For Wolfgang Leonhard, a German Communist who lived in exile in the Soviet Union during the war and who has provided historians with rare insights into the Soviet zone in his memoirs, Order Number 2 came as a surprise because the Soviet teachers of the German emigres had indicated that Germans would be allowed to become politically active again only in the distant future.<sup>14</sup> Order Number 2 was also unexpected because there had been no warning of the announcement in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, the organ of the Soviets in their zone which had been appearing since 15 May.<sup>15</sup>

#### 1.2.1 - The Communist Party of Germany

Following Order Number 2 which permitted the foundation of political parties and trade unions, official political life began again in eastern Germany. The first party to be granted official status was the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). The swift entry of the KPD can be explained by the KPD's preparedness ahead of time for its appearance in the Soviet zone. German Communists living in exile in the Soviet Union during the war had been preparing to set up the KPD in the Soviet zone once the war came to an end. Leading German Communists were organized into 3 groups, the so called

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<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1981), pp. 345-347.

<sup>15</sup> The *Tägliche Rundschau* appeared daily except Monday until 30 June 1955; Siegfried Suckut, *Blockpolitik in der SBZ/DDR: die Sitzungsprotokolle des zentralen Einheitsfrontausschusses* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1986), p. 13; Broszat/Weber, p. 36.

*Initiativgruppen*, which were responsible for establishing the party in eastern Germany. Walter Ulbricht, a KPD member of the Reichstag who had fled Germany to France in 1933, and after France's fall in 1940 had fled to the Soviet Union, led the Berlin group. Anton Ackermann led the group responsible for Saxony, and Gustav Sobottka led the group responsible for Mecklenburg. Ulbricht's group was the first to appear in Germany, arriving early in the morning of 30 April, even before the surrender of Berlin on 2 May, on a flight from Moscow.<sup>16</sup>

One of the first tasks of these groups once the war had ended was to disband the Antifa (or antifascist) committees that German citizens had founded at the end of the war to restore public works. The Soviet authorities often appointed these committee to exercise public power.<sup>17</sup> The problem with these committees, in the eyes of the KPD, was their political unreliability, as the Antifas often contained members from a mixture of political backgrounds. Most committees were formed by Communists, Socialists, or a combination of the two, but there were also committees with a liberal, bourgeois leaning.<sup>18</sup> By June 1945, Antifa committees throughout Germany had been dissolved.<sup>19</sup> The KPD dealings with the Antifa committees are one sign that its agenda in eastern Germany reached beyond merely establishing

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<sup>16</sup> Leonhard, p. 341.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht: the Communist reconstruction of East Germany 1945-46* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 27; Dieter Mark Schneider, "Renaissance und Zerstörung der kommunalen Verwaltung in der SBZ", *VfZ* 37 (1989), p. 460.

<sup>18</sup> Sandford, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Schneider, p.467.

the administration and cleaning up the rubble; the KPD intended to remove political opponents.<sup>20</sup>

The KPD's proclamation of 11 June 1945, however, demonstrated an apparent change in its political philosophy since the Weimar Republic. Instead of Marxist language like "class struggle," and "the social democratic enemy" permeating the decree, the KPD presented itself as a reformed, broadly based workers' party.<sup>21</sup> In the preamble, the decree even went so far as to claim: "We are of the opinion that it would be wrong to force the Soviet system on Germany, as the present developmental conditions in Germany are not suitable for it."<sup>22</sup> In retrospect, the ten points of the KPD programme contained signs that the party had not entirely abandoned its dictatorial tendencies. Among calls for the resurrection of democratic rights and freedoms so that all citizens would be equal without regard to race, there was no mention of guarantees for freedom of speech or

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<sup>20</sup> According to Dieter Mark Schneider, the initiative groups of the KPD in eastern Germany dissolved these committees largely because they were supporters of western-style democracy. Schneider, p. 266. Wolfgang Leonhard also indicated that he became skeptical of KPD motives for dismantling these committees, as they functioned smoothly and provided a needed service; Ilse Spittmann, *Die SED in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Cologne: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1987), p. 146. To be fair, it should be mentioned that the western Allies also disbanded the Antifas in the western zones because they believed that the committees represented a potential political opponent. See Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), pp. 121-126.

<sup>21</sup> *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv* (hereafter SAPMO-BA), *Zentrales Parteiarchiv* (hereafter ZPA), RY1/ I 2/3/28, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1/I 2/3, pp. 1-2.

religion. There was a call for parcelling out the land of individuals with large land holdings, without mention of compensation. There was a call for justice reform, but on the nebulous grounds of "restructuring the judicial system according to the new democratic way of life of the people." Finally, the call for an anti-fascist, parliamentary, democratic republic lacked detail.<sup>23</sup> The KPD had, however, toned down its rhetoric from the Weimar era, especially with its call for co-operation in a United Front to deal with the tremendous problems facing Germany.

### 1.2.2 - The Social Democratic Party of Germany

The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was the second party to be founded. It issued its proclamation on 15 June, 4 days after the KPD. The establishment of the SPD began in earnest in May 1945, when various groups of social democrats met in Berlin. The first group was formed by Otto Grotewohl, Eric Gniffke, and Engelbert Graf. Karl Germer, Hermann Schlimme, Bernhard Goering, and Richard Weimann formed a second group, while Max Fechner led a third.<sup>24</sup> On 7 June the various SPD groups in Berlin met for the first time and elected a Central Committee (Zentralausschuss - ZA) with Fechner, Gniffke and Grotewohl as speakers.<sup>25</sup> There were difficulties within the ZA immediately, however, as some members such as Gustav Dahrendorf supported a close

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<sup>23</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1/I 2/3, pp.1-2

<sup>24</sup> Broszat/Weber, p. 464.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Moraw, *Die Parole der "Einheit" und die Sozialdemokratie* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft GmbH., 1973), p. 85.

relationship with the Soviet Union and a rejection of Weimar-style democracy, while other members under the leadership of Grotewohl preferred an adherence to a social democratic programme. Individuals also founded SPD groups early in 1945 in other areas of the eastern zone, mainly in centres where the SPD had been strong before the war. In Chemnitz, a group of friends formerly in the SPD formed an SPD group and began meetings in March 1945.<sup>26</sup> In Thuringia and those areas of Saxony which had been occupied by American troops, where political activity was forbidden, SPD groups met secretly to re-establish contact and form a base for the party. This was the case in Freital where the mayor, SPD member Arno Hennig, was involved in the establishment of an SPD group.<sup>27</sup> Within a few weeks of the withdrawal of American troops from Thuringia in early July 1945, the SPD had amassed 800 members in Saalfeld alone, and 1800 in Kreis Saalfeld, which indicates previous SPD contact.<sup>28</sup> The predominant pattern of SPD foundings outside of Berlin was one of individual groups growing up parallel with little co-ordination either between the groups, or between the outlying areas and the founding members in Berlin.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Beatrix Bouvier and Horst-Peter Schulz, "...die SPD aber aufgehört hat zu existieren" (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1991), p. 235.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Walter, Tobias Dürr, and Klaus Schmidtke, *Die SPD in Sachsen zwischen Hoffnung und Diaspora* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1993), p. 121. Hennig later participated in an illegal SPD group.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with C.E. (Curt Eckhardt); Bouvier/Schulz, p. 277.

<sup>29</sup> A detailed account of the origins of the SPD in the Soviet occupied zone can be found in Beatrix Bouvier,

There are several important points to note about the founding of the SPD. First, there was a feeling that close co-operation with the KPD was desirable as both parties were working-class based, and many members of both parties felt that Hitler's rise to power had been facilitated by the division within the working class movement. In fact, Max Fechner, one of the founders of the SPD in Berlin, sent a letter to Ulbricht after Ulbricht's arrival in the city which proposed co-operation with the Communists in the rebuilding of communal administration, and which hinted at a union of the two parties.<sup>30</sup> On 16 June, the SPD followed up Fechner's letter and made a formal offer of unity to the KPD, which the KPD rejected. The SPD position was representative of a view in Europe as a whole, as parties of the left in Britain, France, and Italy were also co-operating more closely.<sup>31</sup> The second, and most important, aspect of the founding of the SPD is that it was a re-founding, which meant that the party ideology of the Weimar era was transferred to post-war Germany. That the SPD was re-founded is repeatedly emphasized by those involved in the early days of the creation of the SPD in the Soviet zone.<sup>32</sup>

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"Antifaschistische Zusammenarbeit, Selbständigkeitsanspruch, und Vereinigungstendenz", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 16 (1976): 417-468.

<sup>30</sup> Moraw, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> For more on European developments, see Dietrich Staritz, *Einheitsfront, Einheitspartei: Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in Ost- und Westeuropa 1944-1948* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982), p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> See Bouvier and Schulz for their series of interviews on the subject. Helga Grebing, Christoph Klessmann, Klaus Schonhoven, and Hermann Weber, *Zur Situation der Sozialdemokratie in der SBZ/DDR zwischen 1945*

The SPD rejected dictatorship, rejected the idea of class struggle, rejected the imposition of the Soviet system on Germany, and supported parliamentary democracy - all of which were visible in its founding proclamation.

The SPD proclamation called for an anti-fascist democratic republic and a guarantee of democratic freedoms, including the freedoms of expression and religion which the KPD proclamation did not mention. The SPD proclamation emphasized socializing various industries like banks, insurance companies, and industries that dealt with energy and raw materials. Suspicions that the SPD's aim was socialism at the expense of democracy can be alleviated by examining the history of the proclamation itself. Of the various proposals for the proclamation, Grotewohl's draft was issued because of its emphasis on democracy. Grotewohl feared that Dahrendorf's draft proclamation did not stress the democratic nature of the SPD sufficiently because it stated that the goal of the SPD was the "building of a socialist state." Grotewohl's draft claimed instead that the main goal of the SPD was: "Democracy in state and township, socialism in the economy and society."<sup>33</sup>

### 1.2.3 - The Christian Democratic Union of Germany.

It is perhaps surprising that the founding of political parties did not end with the SPD and the KPD, as the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD) were two middle class parties that in many ways represented the antithesis of

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*und dem Beginn der 50er Jahre* (Schüren: Presseverlag, 1992) also emphasizes the re-founding of the party.

<sup>33</sup> Bouvier, "Antifaschistische," p. 425.

Communism. The LDPD even advocated Capitalism, which, according to Soviet ideology, ultimately led to Fascism. Historians still debate the Soviet decision to allow these other parties. One explanation is that the Soviet Union felt the parties would be kept under control by forming a United Front.<sup>34</sup> Other historians argue that the Soviets believed allowing two clearly oppositional parties might endear themselves to the population.<sup>35</sup> The true reasons will likely remain unclear until historians gain full access to Russian archives. For the purposes of this study, it is important that both middle class parties were constituted legally in the Soviet zone.

On 26 June 1945, the CDU issued its founding proclamation, but, as had been the case with the SPD and KPD, the preparations for the founding of the party had been underway for a few months. One of the primary influences in the embryonic CDU was Dr. Andreas Hermes, a former Reichsminister for Agriculture and member of the Centre party. For his participation in the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944, Hermes was arrested and sentenced to death, but the execution was continually delayed due to the efforts of his wife.<sup>36</sup> At the beginning of May 1945, the Soviets released Hermes from a Nazi prison in Berlin-Moabit and a few days later the Soviet commander of Berlin, Colonel-General Bersarin, appointed him to head the Food

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<sup>34</sup> Hermann Weber (ed.), *Parteiensystem zwischen Demokratie und Volksdemokratie* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982), p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> J.B. Gradl, *Anfang unter dem Sowjetstern: Die CDU in der SBZ 1945-1948* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1981), p. 13.

Office.<sup>37</sup> The first CDU political talks of the post-war period took place in this office at Fehrbelliner Platz in Berlin. This office served as the first meeting point between Hermes and Jakob Kaiser after the war.<sup>38</sup> Jakob Kaiser had also been involved in the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler and escaped execution by hiding in a friend's house in Babelsberg. On 25 May, Soviet authorities assigned Kaiser as liaison between the Food Office and the municipal council.<sup>39</sup> By the end of May, Kaiser, Hermes, and various members of the former Centre party, as well as a few members of the former German Democratic Party (DDP), unofficially formed the CDU.<sup>40</sup> The founders were initially preoccupied with a name for the new party. Many wanted the word "Christian" in the party's name for two reasons: to acknowledge and incorporate the heritage of resistance from the Christian Churches during the Third Reich, and, perhaps more important, to avoid disappointing many Christian voters if the word were left out. Hermes pushed for inclusion of the word "Union" to stress the bridging of differences

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Werner Conze, *Jakob Kaiser: Politiker zwischen Ost und West 1945-1949* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Notable members from the DDP (by the end of the Weimar period, the name had been changed to *Staatspartei*) included Ferdinand Friedenburg, Ernst Lemmer, Walter Schreiber, and Otto Nuschke. Members from the former Centre party were Andreas Hermes, Jakob Kaiser, Lukaschek, Emil Dovifat, Heinrich Krone and Hermann Vockel; Manfred Agethen, "Die CDU in der SBZ/DDR 1945-53" in Jürgen Fröhlich (ed.), *"Bürgerliche" Parteien in der SBZ/DDR: Zur Geschichte von CDU, LDPD, DBD, und NDPD 1945 bis 1953* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1994), p. 49.

between classes and generations.<sup>41</sup> "Deutschland" at the end was also chosen strategically, portraying the party as German-wide.<sup>42</sup>

There were similarities between the CDU proclamation and that of the SPD and KPD, but the differences between the proclamations are of greater significance. The CDU agreed in principle to the redistribution of land, mainly to accommodate the influx into the eastern zone of nearly 4 million Germans expelled from East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, and Czechoslovakia,<sup>43</sup> and also felt that industries essential to communal living, such as those dealing with raw materials, should be put under state ownership. Like the KPD, the CDU announced its support for private ownership.<sup>44</sup> Two important points that the other proclamations did not address were the call for the independence of the judicial system, and for law to once again become the basis of public life. The CDU proclamation demonstrated unambiguous support for democracy and the rule of law.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Osmond, "Kontinuität und Konflikt in der Landwirtschaft der SBZ/DDR zur Zeit der Bodenreform und Vergenossenschaftlichung 1945-1961," in Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1996), p. 147.

<sup>44</sup> The CDU proclamation is reprinted in Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 129.

#### 1.2.4 - The Liberal Democratic Party of Germany

The last of the parties to be founded in 1945 was the LDPD. The first meeting of the founders took place on 16 June 1945 in Berlin at the invitation of Eugen Schiffer, a former Weimar justice minister, and Dr. Waldemar Koch, later chairman of the LDPD in the Soviet zone.<sup>45</sup> This group merged with other liberal groups in the city like the liberal group in the district of Steglitz under Dr. Hamel, who had also been involved in the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt.<sup>46</sup> Outside of Berlin, a number of political groups with a liberal ideology similar to that of the groups in Berlin were formed, including the *Deutsch-Demokratische Partei* which was founded in Weimar and Görlitz. On 6 July in Dresden Professor Kastner and Ernst Schneidung helped form the *Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*. In Halle, a group led by the former Reichstag member Carl Delius created the *Demokratische Volkspartei* and in Netzschkau on 10 July, the *Deutsche Demokratische Einheitspartei* was founded.<sup>47</sup>

The LDPD proclamation demonstrated the liberal middle class basis of the party. This proclamation provided the

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<sup>45</sup> Ekkehart Krippendorf, "Die Gründung der LDP in der SBZ 1945", *VfZ* 8 (1960), p. 290; Broszat/ Weber, p. 545. Four others who took part in the founding of the LDPD were Albert-Willy Meyer, salesman and journalist, Dr. Wilhelm Külz, former Reichsminister of the Interior and mayor of Dresden until 1933, Franz Xaver Kappus, a writer, and Dr. Wilhelm Eich, a professor from Berlin. The founders originally decided to name the party after the former Weimar party *Deutsch-Demokratische Partei*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; Hermann Weber, *Von der SBZ zur DDR* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1968), p. 20.

clearest contrast to the others, emphasizing the right to private property and voicing only limited support for state-run industries. Like the other parties, the LDPD called for the recognition of human rights without regard to race, class, or age; and the reforming of German community life on a true democratic basis. Point 15 of the LDPD proclamation explained that these values were to be upheld through an independent judicial system: "An independent judiciary is to be responsible for safeguarding justice." The LDPD proclamation also emphasized the importance of a free economy. The proclamation was guarded concerning the socialization of industry, stating it would be appropriate only for certain industries, and only when there was an overwhelming interest of the population as a whole.<sup>48</sup> The LDPD proclamation reflected not only the views of the Berlin LDPD groups, but of LDPD groups throughout the Soviet zone. The proclamations of the Leipzig and Netzschkau groups expressed similar sentiments, insisting on democracy and the rule of law.<sup>49</sup>

Further evidence of the nature of the LDPD comes from secret instructions sent by the LDPD leadership in Berlin to LDPD leaders in charge of forming groups at the grass roots

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<sup>48</sup> The proclamation is reprinted in Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 186. Point 8 on the issue of socialization stated: "Die Unterstellung von Unternehmungen unter die öffentliche Kontrolle ist nur gerechtfertigt, wenn die betreffenden Betriebe hierfür geeignet und reif sind und wenn ein überwiegendes Interesse des Gesamtwohls dies gebietet."

<sup>49</sup> Other main points of the Leipzig proclamation were the support of political freedom and basic human freedoms like speech and assembly. The Netzschkau proclamation also emphasized that dictatorship must be eradicated. These proclamations are reprinted in Krippendorf, "Die Gründung," p. 305.

level. In these instructions, the leaders were advised to look for new members for the party in the circles of the following former Weimar parties: *Deutsch-Demokratische Partei*, *Deutsche Volkspartei*, *Deutschnationale Partei* and *Wirtschaftspartei*. All of these parties had been based on middle class values similar to those adopted by the LDPD. The LDPD did not consider it likely to find support among former Centre party members or in areas with a large proportion of Catholics.<sup>50</sup>

In sum, all parties proclaimed their support for basic human rights and democracy, and at the same time made clear their rejection of dictatorship, although the LDPD and CDU proclamations provided more detail on the manner in which these aspects were to be safeguarded, by emphasizing the importance of the rule of law and an independent judiciary. The interest in increased socialization of the economy was also prevalent in all proclamations, although the LDPD proclamation was the least enthusiastic. This interest in socialization reflected a broader sentiment in the wake of the Second World War that a new era was upon Europe which would be characterized by the ascendancy of Socialism and the decline of bourgeois Capitalism. Jakob Kaiser summed up this belief in his famous statement: "The era of the bourgeois order is over."<sup>51</sup> Widespread interest in Socialism

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<sup>50</sup> Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 186. This document reflects the underlying hostility between the CDU and the LDPD. The CDU had even tried to prevent the founding of the LDPD. The leading LDPD members Külz and Koch often referred to the CDU condescendingly as a "getarntes Zentrum mit demokratischem Anhängsel"; Krippendorf, p. 300; Conze, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Tilman Mayer, *Jakob Kaiser - Gewerkschafter und Patriot. Eine Werkauswahl* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1988), pp. 214-229.

should not, however, be interpreted as a rejection of democracy. Soviet style Socialism, despite an attitude favourable to Socialism, would have found little support in the initial years after the war in eastern Germany.<sup>52</sup>

### 1.3 - The formation of the *Einheitsfront*

The SPD, KPD, CDU and LDPD demonstrated their willingness to co-operate by forming the *Einheitsfront der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Parteien* in Berlin on 14 July, known as the Antifa-Block.<sup>53</sup> The Central Block was located in Berlin, and was led by a Central Committee comprised of 5 rotating members from each party. Antifa-Blocks were also formed at the *Ort*, *Kreis*, and *Land* levels. These were formed over a period of months following the establishment of the Central Block.<sup>54</sup> The provincial Block for Brandenburg, for example, was not established until 18 November 1945.<sup>55</sup> One of the primary features of the Antifa-

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<sup>52</sup> Sigfrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), p. 38. Meuschel suggests that even Soviet Socialism would not have been thought of as badly as it was later.

<sup>53</sup> The formation of the Antifa-Block did not prevent the parties from campaigning vigorously to increase membership in their own parties, however. In the first year of occupation, it appears that the KPD and SPD were much more active in trying to engage the population in their politics than the other parties. In March 1946 in Dresden, for example, the KPD held 745 public meetings, the SPD 722, but the CDU only 118 and the LDPD 100. *Bundesarchiv - Abteilungen Potsdam* (hereafter BA-P), DO 1 7/22, p.49. Dresden police report for 1945-1946.

<sup>54</sup> Hermann Weber, *DDR: Grundriss der Geschichte 1945-1990* (Hannover: Fackelträger-Verlag, 1991), p. 26.

<sup>55</sup> Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 21

Block was that all its resolutions had to be issued unanimously. There could therefore not be political opposition in the traditional sense. The KPD thus was able to ensure that no party could adopt policies which went against KPD interests, as the KPD could simply refuse to support a resolution, forcing it to be either abandoned or amended. The Block, therefore, presented a major obstacle to parliamentary opposition.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the Block's limitations on political opposition, it may be questioned why the parties, especially the CDU and LDPD, joined the Block. Andreas Hermes and Walther Schreiber, the first chairmen of the CDU, based their decision to join on the experience of the Weimar republic which showed, they believed, that petty political interests could make a parliamentary system unworkable. A CDU statement in the summer of 1946 revealed this outlook: "If once again petty individual profit, if again egoistic private interests are made the basis for forming a party, then the new democracy will end in misery as well."<sup>57</sup> Külz, co-founder of the LDPD, also felt that working in the Block was necessary to rebuild Germany, describing participation in it as a "democratic necessity of the state."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, all parties agreed that co-operation was necessary to overcome the monumental cleaning up duties. Ironically, another reason the middle class parties participated in the Block was that it accorded them undue political weight. These parties were aware that they were smaller than the workers' parties, but work in the Block would give them in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Agethen, p. 49; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Broszat/ Weber, p. 553.

essence a veto, as all resolutions had to be unanimous. The first members of the Central Committee of the Block were Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht, Franz Dählem, Anton Ackermann, and Otto Winzer from the KPD; Andreas Hermes, Walther Schreiber, Jakob Kaiser, Theodor Stelzer, and Ernst Lemmer from the CDU; Waldemar Koch, Eugen Schiffer, Wilhelm Külz, and Artur Lieutenant from the LDPD; and Otto Grotewohl, Gustav Dährendorf, Helmuth Lehmann, Otto Meier, and Eric Gniffke from the SPD.<sup>59</sup>

#### **1.4 - The administrative framework of the Soviet Occupied Zone.**

Shortly after the formation of the Central Block, Stalin, Churchill, and Truman met in Cecilienhof Castle near Potsdam, in the lush Sanssouci garden and palace complex which had been the summer residence of Prussian kings and German emperors. The Potsdam conference was convened to further plan the post-war world, and set out three objectives regarding Germany in particular: to demilitarize and denazify Germany, to create the foundation for a democratic and peaceful Germany, and to treat Germany as a whole.<sup>60</sup> The Potsdam accord issued at the end of the conference supported basic human freedoms, such as freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and called for a return in Germany to the Weimar state of law. A central government with more power allotted to the provinces was foreseen, but

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<sup>59</sup> Eric Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>60</sup> For the protocols of the conference and related documents, see *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam)* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1960), vol. I and II.

only after the signing of a peace treaty. Until that time, local and regional administrations were to run German affairs.

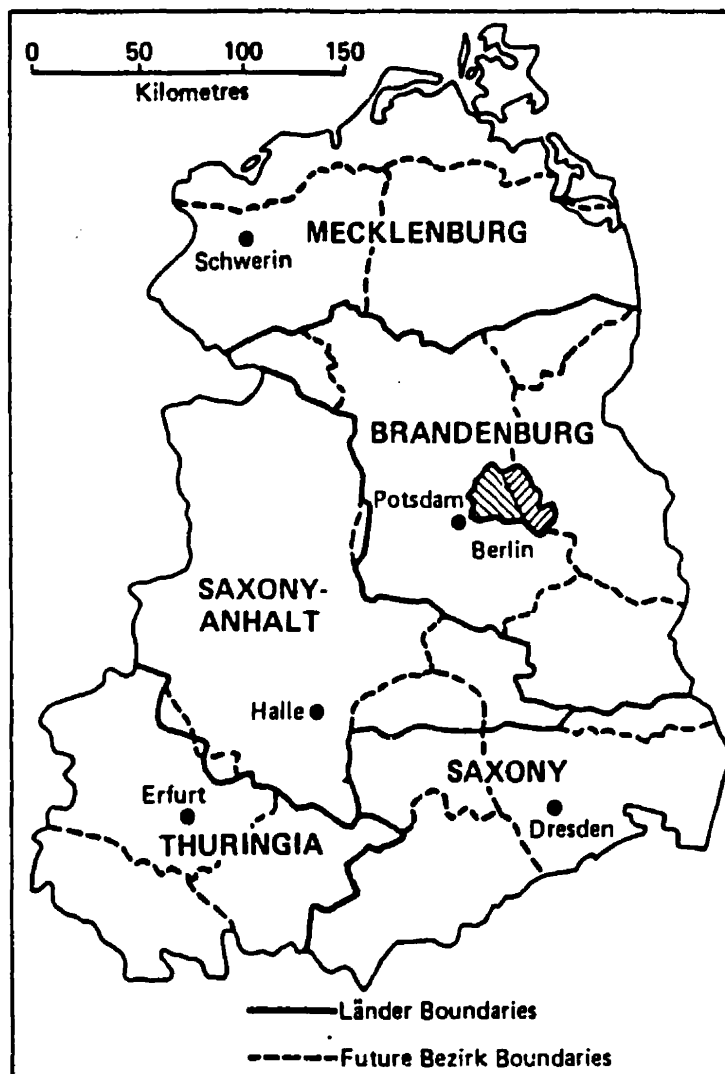
SMAD had begun administrative restructuring of its zone of Germany immediately prior to the Potsdam conference, and continued this restructuring while the conference took place. Order Number 5 of 9 July 1945 divided the zone into 4 *Länder* and one *Provinz*<sup>61</sup>: *Land* Mecklenburg-Pomerania (after 1946 simply Mecklenburg) with its seat of government in Schwerin, *Land* Brandenburg (Potsdam), *Provinz* Saxony (Saxony-Anhalt) (Halle), *Land* Thuringia (Weimar), and *Land* Saxony (Dresden). The five provinces were divided into *Bezirke* (districts), and each *Bezirk* divided into city and country *Kreise*. Between 4 and 16 July, SMAD created provincial administrations for the newly formed *Länder* headed by a president and between 3 and 5 vice presidents. The president was usually a member of the SPD (except in Saxony-Anhalt where the president was Dr. Erhard Hübener of the LDPD), but the first vice president, who was responsible for internal affairs such as the police and therefore held considerable power, was invariably a member of the KPD.

Through Order Number 17 of 27 July 1945, SMAD created another level of government by establishing 11 German central administrations.<sup>62</sup> Nine of the 11 German central

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<sup>61</sup> For the sake of simplicity, these will be referred to collectively as "provinces" in this study.

<sup>62</sup> The 11 administrations were transport, information, fuel industries, trade and utilities, industry, agriculture, finances, work and social security, health, education and justice. Five more administrations were added by 1947, the most important being the German Administration of the Interior which was created in August 1946; Broszat/Weber, p. 201.



The Länder of the SBZ/GDR (May 1945–July 1952)  
 with their capital cities

(Source: Martin McCauley, The German Democratic Republic Since 1945  
 (MacMillan Press, 1983) p.xiii.)

administrations were located in the Soviet zone of Berlin, gradually coming under one roof in the former headquarters of Goering's Air Ministry on Leipziger street. SMAD, after receiving recommendations from the political parties in the zone, appointed the heads of the administrations as follows: 6 presidents and 11 vice presidents from the KPD; 4 presidents and 11 vice presidents from the SPD; 1 president and 3 vice presidents from the CDU; and 1 president and 1 vice president from the LDPD.

Due to the confusion caused by the various levels of government, SMAD held a meeting on 13 November 1945 with the provincial and central administrations at which it delineated responsibility.<sup>63</sup> The provincial administrations remained the highest German authority in the first year of occupation taking orders only from SMAD. The central administrations acted solely in an advisory capacity.<sup>64</sup> Initially, Zhukov believed that the central administrations should not intervene in the provincial administrations but rather advise SMAD on issues common to the entire Soviet zone and coordinate three areas of operation in particular: railways, postal service, and supply.<sup>65</sup> One western report characterized the central administrations as having "only fragmentary information about economic events in the

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<sup>63</sup> Broszat/Weber, pp. 202-204.

<sup>64</sup> The decrees of the provincial administrations were given the force of law by Order Number 110 of SMAD of 22 October 1945; Ingetraut Melzer, *Staats-und Rechtsgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin (East): Staatsverlag der DDR, 1983), pp. 36-37.

<sup>65</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.49.

provinces, let alone any power to influence them."<sup>66</sup> Zhukov's support for the provincial administrations over the central administrations was likely a result of the Potsdam accords which forbade central administration in Germany before a peace treaty.<sup>67</sup>

## **2 - Opposition and Resistance by the non-Marxist parties to the implementation of the Communist programme in the Soviet Occupied Zone.**

### **2.1 - The CDU and the land reform**

The Central Block functioned smoothly in the summer of 1945, encountering its first problems in August when the KPD proposed a land reform which would dispossess of their land all war criminals and members of Nazi organizations considered criminal by the Soviet authorities such as the SS (usually referred to as "Nazi criminals" in the documents), and land holders with over 100 hectares. This land was then redistributed in parcels of 5 hectares.<sup>68</sup> The land reform, although also being carried out in other zones, held particular importance for the eastern zone because of the high percentage of large properties. Private estates of 100 hectares or more made up one third of the total land area.<sup>69</sup>

There can be little doubt that the ultimate goal behind

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> Siegfried Suckut, "Der Konflikt um die Bodenreform-Politik in der Ost-CDU 1945", *Deutschland Archiv* (hereafter DA) 15 (1982), p. 1083.

<sup>69</sup> Sandford, p. 82.

the KPD's land reform proposal was the economic transformation of the eastern zone in order to create a basis for socializing the economy. At a KPD meeting in January 1946 on the party's economic programme, SED member Smolka stated: "What type of societal form do we actually have? Do we have Capitalism or Socialism? I think we must honestly say that we have, of course, Capitalism. I believe it is imperative to fill the higher and middle level posts in the economy with our people in order to create a new order in the means of production."<sup>70</sup>

The process leading to the tabelling of the KPD land reform proposal began outside Berlin, where the KPD in the provincial Block in Saxony brought forward a proposal for a land reform on 29 August. The LDPD and CDU rejected immediately what they saw as an economically weak and politically motivated land reform, but after two days of discussions were willing to accept the proposal on condition that land owners with over 100 ha. who were not tainted by a Nazi past would receive compensation.<sup>71</sup> Various CDU groups in other provinces of the Soviet zone also voiced the need for compensation when the land reform was discussed in the provincial blocks. The Chemnitz CDU group in Saxony as well

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<sup>70</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, I 2/12/22, p. 66. Minutes of a KPD meeting of 7 January 1946 regarding the economic programme.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Hermes, *Die CDU und die Bodenreform in der SBZ im Jahre 1945* (Saarbrücken: Verlag der Saarbrücker Zeitung, 1963), p. 115. A reprinted document of 4 September 1945 from the CDU organization in *Provinz Saxony* to the central leadership of the CDU mentions that a Soviet representative attended the land reform discussions and rushed the proceedings along. The CDU would have preferred more time to consider the issue. Also, it would have made more sense to introduce the land reform proposal in highly agricultural Mecklenburg or Brandenburg, but not all parties had been founded in those provinces by August 1945.

as representatives of the CDU and LDPD in Thuringia stressed the importance of compensating those with a clean past. W. Zeller, a prominent member of the youth wing of the CDU, reflected overall sentiment in the CDU when he agreed in principle to the land reform in order to meet the needs of the population, but at the same time expressed concern about the lack of compensation. He believed that the land reform must not be carried out as a *Klassenkampf*.<sup>72</sup> Only in Mecklenburg did the CDU accept the KPD proposal as it stood.

When the KPD put forward a land reform proposal on 30 August in the Central Block in Berlin,<sup>73</sup> the CDU immediately protested stating that land owners with a clean past must receive compensation for the loss of land. The CDU did agree, however, to a resolution stating that, in principle, a land reform was desirable.<sup>74</sup> By issuing this resolution the CDU gave the impression of endorsing the KPD land reform proposal in its entirety.

Andreas Hermes, co-chair of the CDU, then attempted to distance himself from the joint statement by publishing an article which emphasized the differences between the CDU and KPD on the issue of the land reform. After Soviet authorities prohibited the publication of his article in *Tägliche Rundschau*, Hermes turned to the American licensed *Allgemeine Zeitung* which published the article on 19 September. Hermes' main concerns were the lack of

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<sup>72</sup> *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung* (hereafter ACDP), I-255-001/7, NL W. Zeller. Notes from a 1946 speech.

<sup>73</sup> Protocol from the Central Block sitting of 30 August 1945; Broszat/Weber, p. 201.

<sup>74</sup> Reprinted as "Erklärung der "Einheitsfront" in Berlin vom 13. September 1945"; Hermes, p. 123.

compensation and the effect that the reforms would have on German unity, believing that a reform of this magnitude could not be carried out in one zone of Germany without an adverse effect on eventual unity.<sup>75</sup> Hermes' vision of democracy also played a role in his concerns about the manner of the land reform. On 26 October, the *Tägliche Rundschau* asked Hermes six questions regarding the land reform and related issues. Responding to a question about Block work, Hermes provided a thinly veiled criticism of the KPD: "Joint work of several parties on one task requires a great deal of mutual loyalty and unlimited respect for the different fundamental beliefs of the co-operating parties. It would be a misunderstanding of democracy if this co-operation limited the representation of differing opinions of the individual partners or made such opinions impossible. In that case, the *Einheitsfront* would simply be a disguise to secure hegemony for a specific course."<sup>76</sup>

The CDU's fears about the land reform seemed to be confirmed on 15 November, when Heinrich von der Gablentz, leader of the CDU political-economic committee, presented to the CDU leadership a variety of letters and documents stating that property owners were being unlawfully thrown off their land. Based on these letters, Gablentz stated:

"Thousands of completely untainted families, themselves fierce opponents of the Nazi system and recognized victims of fascism, are, through the use of fascist methods, being expelled from their homes and unjustly ordered out of their

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<sup>75</sup> Suckut, "Der Konflikt," p. 1086. Hermes stated: "Eine reichseinheitliche Regelung scheint uns gerade in dieser Frage eine unerlässliche Notwendigkeit." Hermes also made his views known in three speeches in Berlin and Dresden at the end of October 1945; Winfried Becker, *CDU und CSU 1945-1950* (Mainz: V. Hase und Koehler Verlag, 1987), p. 188.

<sup>76</sup> Conze, p. 47.

towns. They are not only being robbed of their land, but of all their personal belongings." And: "These transgressions can no longer be quietly accepted by the Union [i.e. the CDU]."<sup>77</sup>

Hilde Benjamin, Minister of Justice in the GDR from 1953 to 1967, hinted that there had been excesses in the land reform when, as a professor at the Walter Ulbricht German Academy for Political Science and the Law,<sup>78</sup> she wrote: "The punishment of Nazi and war criminals was closely linked to the dispossession of those criminals and the carrying out of the land reform. During this process it was not uncommon to find other criminals who were against the new democratic order."<sup>79</sup> The suggestion here is that "other criminals" were dispossessed because they did not agree with the new way of life in the Soviet Occupied Zone, and not because of their activities during the war.

On 22 November 1945 the CDU formally protested against the manner of the land reform. During the Central Block sitting of that day, the KPD and the SPD presented a proposal entitled "help for the new farmers" which was to support the new farming economy that had been created by the land reform. The LDPD agreed immediately to the proposal, but the CDU wanted to tie the proposal to a statement by the Central Block against the excesses of the land reform. As the other parties refused to accept the CDU position, the

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<sup>77</sup> An extract from the protocol is printed in Suckut, "Der Konflikt," p. 1087; See also Agethen, p. 50.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), p. 439.

<sup>79</sup> Hilde Benjamin, Max Becker, Kurt Goerner, and Wolfgang Schriewer, "Der Entwicklungsprozess zum sozialistischen Strafrecht in der DDR, " *Staat und Recht* 18 (1969), p. 1117.

resolution was issued without the CDU signature.<sup>80</sup>

This position of the Berlin CDU on the land reform resulted in negative reactions by some CDU leaders outside Berlin. In *Provinz Saxony*, the CDU provincial executive committee requested the resignation of Dr. Schreiber, the second CDU chairman. The *Land* executive committee in Mecklenburg also distanced itself from the leadership in Berlin, but in Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia there was only a muted response.<sup>81</sup> The reason for the negative reaction is twofold. First, it was logistically difficult for the central CDU to convey its message to the outlying areas, as the telephone and infrastructure systems were still in chaos.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet authorities censored the CDU newspaper. SMAD added articles to the CDU newspaper from the Communist press in favour of the land reform without reference to the source. Thus, as CDU members outside Berlin were not aware of Gablentz's evidence of injustice in the reform, they were puzzled by the CDU refusal to sign the "help for the new farmers" resolution.<sup>83</sup> Second, SMAD increasingly prodded lower levels of the CDU to challenge the central position. In Halle, for example, the Soviets issued the local CDU group a licence for its newspaper in return for taking a stance against the CDU

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<sup>80</sup> Hermes, p. 133.

<sup>81</sup> Suckut, "Der Konflikt," p. 1089.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 1086-1089.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Bloch, *Zwischen Hoffnung und Resignation. Als CDU-Politiker in Brandenburg 1945-1950* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1986), p. 62. Bloch acknowledged that the declaration of 13 September was confusing, and that articles in the CDU newspaper did not seem consistent with the party line.

leadership.<sup>84</sup> Still, SMAD was unable to convince the provincial chairmen to issue a vote of no-confidence against the central leadership at a meeting organized by SMAD on 18 December in Karlshorst,<sup>85</sup> forcing SMAD to do something it hoped to avoid. Zhukov had hoped that an inner revolt would take place, and the CDU itself would remove Hermes and Schreiber due to their stance on the land reform. As this did not happen, SMAD removed them from their positions, demonstrating publicly that SMAD did not tolerate political opponents.

The issue of the land reform is revealing in a number of ways. First, the executive committees of the CDU in all provinces except Mecklenburg rejected the original KPD proposal without being aware of the Berlin CDU stance, based on its disregard for property rights. This demonstrates a basic commonality throughout the CDU. Second, apart from disregard for property rights, the undemocratic conduct of the KPD, and the desire for German unity were also motives of opposition for the CDU.<sup>86</sup> Third, it must be remembered that Soviet authorities constrained CDU conduct. These points suggest that Andreas Hermes was correct to declare after his dismissal that the overwhelming majority of the party outside Berlin agreed with the leadership of the party on the land reform issue.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hermes, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> Only Herwegen of the CDU Saxony, and Lobedanz of the CDU in Mecklenburg spoke out against the central CDU leadership; Suckut, "Der Konflikt," p. 1089.

<sup>86</sup> Bloch, pp. 63-68.

<sup>87</sup> Hermes, p. 91.

### 2.1.1 - The new CDU leadership.

After the removal of Hermes and Schreiber from their positions due to their stance on the land reform, the CDU was forced to look for new leadership. Jakob Kaiser, a CDU member with a background in the union movement, somewhat reluctantly took over as chairman of the CDU.<sup>88</sup> Kaiser immediately began to mold the CDU into a party with more socialist elements in its platform. In an article in *Neue Zeit* from 28 September 1945, Kaiser stated that his aims for the party arose in part from his experiences in the resistance circle of Carl Goerdeler: "We were all convinced that the future of the German people would be largely determined by socialist ideas."<sup>89</sup> Kaiser's interest in "socializing" the party led to his dubbing of the term "Christian socialism" at the Berlin delegates' conference in the first week of February 1946. He made his position clear again, in dramatic fashion, at the executive committee sitting of 13 February 1946 when he said that the party had to move away from dogmatic Christianity and the middle class. He proclaimed that "the Union is not a middle class party" and "the era of the bourgeois order is over." It was here as well that Kaiser introduced his concept of Germany being a bridge between West and East,<sup>90</sup> rather than firmly entrenched in either camp.

Apart from the socialist elements, there were two other elements which were important in Kaiser's agenda for the

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<sup>88</sup> Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 120.

<sup>89</sup> Mayer, p. 186.

<sup>90</sup> Kaiser's famous phrase was: "Wir haben Brücke zu sein zwischen Ost und West"; Ibid., pp. 214-229

CDU. First, he believed in basic human freedoms. In a *Neue Zeit* article of 30 December 1945 entitled "Zum Weg der Union", he wrote: "In the centre of life is the dignity and freedom of the individual," explaining further that freedom was the basis for all democratic politics.<sup>91</sup> At the February 1946 executive committee sitting he again stressed the importance of the free individual: "We are convinced that the core of true socialism must be the awareness of dignity and the importance of free and responsible individuals."<sup>92</sup> With these words, Kaiser demonstrated that the CDU may have had socialist elements in its platform, but that it was not a Marxist party. The second aspect of Kaiser's platform was his emphasis on German unity, which he stressed in a series of speeches at the beginning of 1946. At one speech in February 1946, he stated: "I can only say that for me, the question of the form of the Reich lies on my heart like no other."<sup>93</sup> His concern for German unity, and a united CDU, led him to travel to the western zones of Germany where he met with various leaders of the western CDU. By this time, however, Konrad Adenauer, leader of the western CDU, was hostile to Kaiser's socialist position and his notion of Germany being a bridge between East and West. Adenauer preferred that Germany be solidly entrenched in the western camp. At a 6 April 1946 meeting in Stuttgart between Adenauer and Kaiser, Adenauer stated his opposition to the "bridge" concept for Germany and also rejected Kaiser's claim that the Berlin CDU should be the central leadership for all Germany. Adenauer's stance against the Berlin CDU

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<sup>91</sup> Mayer, p. 199.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

derived in part from his belief that Berlin must never again be the capital of a united Germany.<sup>94</sup>

### **2.1.2 - Reaction of the other parties to the land reform**

The position of the LDPD on the land reform, in contrast to that of the CDU, is less well known. In Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, and Thuringia, the LDPD initially rejected the KPD proposal. In Saxony-Anhalt, the 2 LDPD members who had refused to sign the land reform law agreed to sign only after pressure from the KPD to maintain the unity of the Block became too great.<sup>95</sup> In Thuringia, the non-Marxist parties forced a vote on the issue of the land reform for anti-fascist property owners, whereby the KPD conceded a passage in the legislation that stated that anti-fascist property owners would not be stripped of their property.<sup>96</sup> Dr. Koch was the most outspoken LDPD member against the KPD land reform because of its effects on human rights and property ownership. He emphasized that he would not support a land reform that did not compensate the land owner: "The principle of private property is valid for all classes. With [the land reform], the first step off the path is made. Any

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<sup>94</sup> Conze, p. 80.

<sup>95</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 2/5/50, p. 18. 21 September 1945 report of the SED *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

<sup>96</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 2/5/50, p. 22. 21 September 1945 report of the SED *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

other form of dispossession could then easily follow."<sup>97</sup> Koch was reprimanded by Zhukov at a meeting on 5 September 1945 for his position on the land reform.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, Koch agreed to the land reform, largely in the interest of preserving the Block, but also because of pressure from inside his party, spearheaded by Külz, to co-operate with the occupying power out of political tact. Koch did try to temper the land reform later with proposals for committees to ensure that the reform was free of injustices.<sup>99</sup>

Although in all of the provinces except Saxony-Anhalt, the SPD initially agreed to the KPD proposal for the land reform, the response by lower levels of the party was not always enthusiastic.<sup>100</sup> The SPD and KPD in Thuringia, Mecklenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Saxony, agreed to hold joint events in support of the land reform, but this cooperation did not always come about. In Kreis Güstrow in Mecklenburg, only 5 out of 178 public gatherings were joint functions.<sup>101</sup> In a report on the state of the land reform, Hermann Matern, the leading KPD functionary in Saxony, stated: "The Social Democratic Party was with us from the beginning on the land

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<sup>97</sup> Armin Behrendt, *Wilhelm Külz: Aus dem Leben eines Suchenden* (Berlin (Ost): Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1968), p. 56.

<sup>98</sup> At the meeting between Koch and Zhukov on 5 September 1945, Zhukov stated that he was "satisfied" with the role of the KPD and the SPD in the *Einheitsfront*, suggesting that opposition by the SPD leadership was limited; Krippendorf, p. 303

<sup>99</sup> Behrendt, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> Krippendorf, p. 303.

<sup>101</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 1 2/5/50, p. 13. 21 September 1945 report of the SED *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

reform [...] The Social Democratic Party is, however, passive in carrying out the land reform. It neither conducts farmer assemblies, nor participates officially at farmer conferences."<sup>102</sup> Matern clearly lied at the December Conference of 1945 between the SPD and KPD when he spoke of good co-operation with the SPD in carrying out the land reform: "We carried out the land reform together; we mobilized the workforce together."<sup>103</sup> The discrepancy between the immediate acceptance of the land reform by the leaders, and the unwillingness at a local level to carry it out, may be explained by an underlying opposition to working with the Communists. This trend, as will be seen, was common to the SPD at this time.

### 2.1.3 - Popular reaction to the land reform

The land reform had a major impact on agricultural society, yet did not immediately bring the expected loyalty to the KPD. Overall, 6,330 property owners with over 100 ha., and 8,332 smaller land holders were stripped of their land. The reform affected on average 34% of the available agricultural land in the Soviet zone, but this percentage was higher in some areas such as Brandenburg where 38% of available agricultural land was affected, and Mecklenburg where 52% of available agricultural land was affected.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 2/5/50, p. 14. 21 September 1945 report of the SED *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

<sup>103</sup> Gert Gruner and Manfred Wilke, *Sozialdemokraten im Kampf um die Freiheit* (Munich: Piper, 1981), p. 115.

<sup>104</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper, "Die Neubauern in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1952: Bodenreform und politisch induzierter Wandel der

About 559,000 people, mostly landless farmers, refugees, and non-agricultural workers, each received on average 5 ha. of land from the land reform, and formed a new societal group known as *Neubauern*.<sup>105</sup>

Contrary to the widespread spontaneous jubilation throughout the Soviet zone portrayed in the KPD version of the reform, the land reform was not received uniformly in the villages of the eastern zone.<sup>106</sup> Some villages rejoiced in the announcement and decorated the town, while others expressed little interest. Overall, the KPD was disappointed with the political result of the reform. In Mecklenburg, Sobottka complained that the land reform had not caused the expected "flood" of farmers into the KPD.<sup>107</sup> In Saxony, Hermann Matern complained that farmers were distrustful of the land reform fearing it to be Communist propaganda, and as a result entries into the KPD were disappointing.<sup>108</sup> Matern dwelt on this issue of trust stating that the farmers did not possess a fear of Communists (*Kommunisten-Schreck*) as they used to, but brought doubts to his own observation stating that they still maintained a "watchful distance."<sup>109</sup> The KPD representative in Saxony-Anhalt reported more success in recruiting farmers for the party, but concluded that overall farmers were not concerned with politics at the

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ländlichen Gesellschaft," in Bessel/Jessen (eds.), p. 109.

<sup>105</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 81.

<sup>106</sup> Osmond, pp. 143-144.

<sup>107</sup> SAPMO-BA, RY1/I2/5/50, p. 13. 21 September 1945 report of SED *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

moment.<sup>110</sup> A KPD member from Thuringia reported that the KPD was having some success recruiting farmers, but that they were sceptical regarding whether the KPD would really carry out the reform.<sup>111</sup> In Radeburg in Saxony, the KPD representative complained that no farmers would stand for the KPD in the upcoming election, preferring to join the LDPD. As a result, the SED had only one farmer on its list in this rural region.<sup>112</sup> It seems likely, however, that the KPD eventually made political gains from the land reform. KPD membership in Mecklenburg increased from 3,200 in June 1945 to 19,500 in October, and 32,000 in December. In local elections in the Fall of 1946, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) (the fused KPD and SPD - see section 3 below) secured 75.2% of the vote in Mecklenburg, and obtained 72% of the *Gemeinde* mayorships in *Land Brandenburg*,<sup>113</sup> although this success was also a result of SMAD restrictions on CDU and LDPD activity.<sup>114</sup> Further research will be required to address the extent to which those who benefitted from the land reform supported the SED at the 1946 election.

## 2.2 - The reform of the education system

Simultaneously with the land reform, a school reform was carried out in the eastern zone in preparation for the 1

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/908, p.88. 31 August 1946 excerpts and summary of reports from the SED *Bezirk* groups in Saxony in preparation for the elections.

<sup>113</sup> Bauerkämper, pp. 119-120.

<sup>114</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 329.

October reopening date for schools. The KPD, SPD, and LDPD held similar views on the school reform, with the KPD and SPD actively co-operating to bring the reform about.<sup>115</sup> On 18 October 1945, the SPD and KPD issued a joint proclamation for a new school system which was to "bring up the next generation in a new spirit of militant democracy and friendship among peace-loving peoples," and would foster "independent, progressive, free, and upright thought and action."<sup>116</sup> The reforms aimed to rid the perceived teaching of militarism in schools by removing content in the curricula which "praised wars of conquest" and which "deified reactionary kings."<sup>117</sup> The reforms were also meant to guarantee equal access to education by establishing schools as *Einheitsschulen*, with 8 grades of *Grundschule* followed by 4 levels of *Oberschule* or 3 levels of *Berufsschule*.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, financial assistance was guaranteed to assist needy families in sending their children to school.<sup>119</sup> On the controversial issue of religion in schools, the KPD, SPD, and LDPD agreed that religion

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<sup>115</sup> Andreas Malycha, "Der Zentrallausschuss der SPD und der gesellschaftspolitische Neubeginn im Nachkriegsdeutschland", *ZfG* 38 (1990), p. 593.

<sup>116</sup> Gerd Dietrich, *Politik und Kultur in der SBZ 1945-1949* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 40. The joint proclamation is reprinted in Dietrich, pp. 234-236. For the LDPD position, see the "Richtlinien des Parteivorstandes der LDPD für die Orts- und Bezirksgruppen November 1945" in Dietrich, p. 237.

<sup>117</sup> "Gesetz zur Demokratisierung der deutschen Schule für die Provinz Sachsen"; reprinted in Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 392.

<sup>118</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 96.

should not be taught in schools, although Anton Ackermann made a point of stating that the KPD still supported freedom of religion, oddly explaining that: "We, the followers of Marxism-Leninism [...] are the true sources of Christianity."<sup>120</sup>

The CDU agreed with much of the school reform, including the dismissal of all teachers who had been members of the Nazi party (which amounted to over 2/3 of the teachers), and the new organization of the schools.<sup>121</sup> It felt, however, that the separation of church and school was inappropriate, and insisted that Christianity be taught in schools.<sup>122</sup> Despite the CDU protests, the school reform was enstated through the "law for the democratization of the German school" in 1946. The law did not immediately bring Communist influence to the educational process, however. Until 1947/1948 the curricula in eastern German schools were fairly independent of Soviet or KPD influence.<sup>123</sup> The KPD was not pleased with this lack of politicization of the curricula. In November 1945, the Central Committee of the KPD sent a message to all KPD *Bezirk* heads complaining of the low number of Communists among new teachers.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, Bestand KPD ZK, I 2/2/18. Report on the joint conference of the KPD and SPD on 4 November 1945. (The LDPD was also in attendance.)

<sup>121</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 37.

<sup>122</sup> See the Resolution of the political committee of the CDU of 27 February 1946 in Dietrich, pp. 245-247.

<sup>123</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p.37.

<sup>124</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, I 2/5/42. 24 November 1945 memorandum from the Central Committee of the KPD to all *Bezirksleitungen*.

### 2.3 - The sequestering of factories

In the summer of 1946, the Soviets and the Socialist Unity Party (SED) took another step in the economic transformation of the eastern zone. Both SMAD and the SED pressed for a referendum on the sequestering of factories belonging to war criminals, which caused misgivings in the CDU and the LDPD about the manner in which the sequestering would be carried out after the example of the land reform. The referendum was set for 16 July 1946 in Saxony, and the results were to be taken as representative for the entire Soviet zone. Initially, Kaiser protested the referendum on sequestering because he felt that such a public consultation would have to involve all zones of Germany.<sup>125</sup> As a result of SMAD pressure on Kaiser to temper his oppositional stance,<sup>126</sup> the CDU stated in a resolution issued in the Central Block that it welcomed the referendum, but warned that the dispossession should not be a precedent for changing the social and economic structures of society. The CDU leadership expected the sequestering to be carried out in a lawful manner.<sup>127</sup> Many factory owners were also apprehensive that the sequestering was part of a Communist plan for rapid socialization.<sup>128</sup> The CDU repeated in a statement of 5 June 1946 its insistence that the action only apply to Nazi and

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<sup>125</sup> Kaiser made his position clear at the first CDU conference on 16 June 1946 in eastern Berlin; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 50.

<sup>126</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 184.

<sup>127</sup> The resolution is reprinted in Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 149; see also Gradl, p. 72; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 50.

<sup>128</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, I 2/2/22, p.88. 7 January 1946 minutes of the KPD meeting on the economic programme.

war criminals, voicing displeasure at the number of factories which had already been unlawfully confiscated. The CDU was adamant that each confiscation had to be carefully investigated.<sup>129</sup> At the 9 July 1946 sitting of the Central Block, the CDU complained of the initial SED-incited sequestering taking place in Saxony even before the referendum, stating that factory owners had no opportunity to prove their innocence, and that some properties were confiscated from people who had never been involved with the Nazi party nor any war crimes.<sup>130</sup> The CDU produced an 11 point programme for improving the situation regarding sequestering in Saxony, which emphasized providing those individuals in question with a fair hearing.<sup>131</sup> CDU concerns about the sequestering process did not prevent the party from supporting the sequestering in principle. With all parties campaigning in favour of the sequestering referendum, albeit the CDU and LDPD did so reluctantly, the 16 July 1946 referendum passed by a comfortable margin: the handing over of "the factories of war criminals and Nazi criminals into the hands of the people" was approved by 77.7% of the voters. Only 16.5% of cast ballots rejected the proposal, and 5.8% of the ballots were invalid.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> ACDP, VII-012-1001. 5 June 1946 CDU statement; 17 May 1946 memorandum on the question of dispossession in industry.

<sup>130</sup>. Minutes from the 9 July 46 Central Block sitting; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 157

<sup>131</sup> Proposal reprinted in Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>132</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 185.

### 3 - The creation of the Socialist Unity Party and SPD resistance

#### 3.1 - The path towards fusion

From the fall of 1945 the SPD was engaged in a political fight with the KPD over the issue of fusion of the two parties.<sup>133</sup> Certain sections of the SPD, however, had been in favour of fusion of the parties since the war. The leader of the SPD in Thuringia, Hermann Brill, personified the desire for fusion of the two parties. On 3 July 1945, Brill founded a party localized in Thuringia called the "League of Democratic Socialists" which was a fusion of the KPD and SPD.<sup>134</sup> Cooperation between the workers' parties had also been evident in Berlin, Dresden and Görlitz. In Dresden and Görlitz especially, a clear majority of members had supported fusion.<sup>135</sup> The SPD in Freital demonstrated its support for close cooperation with the KPD by hanging a

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<sup>133</sup> For a summary of the debates regarding whether or not the fusion was forced, see the exchange of letters in DA 24 (1991): 410-416.

<sup>134</sup> Andreas Malycha, *Auf dem Weg zur SED; die Sozialdemokratie und die Bildung einer Einheitspartei in den Ländern der SBZ: ein Quellenedition* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1995), p. LV. For more on Brill, see Manfred Overesch, *Hermann Brill: Ein Kämpfer gegen Hitler und Ulbricht* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1992).

<sup>135</sup> Werner Müller, "SED Gründung unter Zwang - Ein Streit ohne Ende?" DA 24 (1991), p. 53. Hermann Matern, the KPD leader in Dresden, had to insist on the SPD being founded as leading SPD members wanted a united party immediately; Harold Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge des Widerstands* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), vol. 4, Part 1, p. 300.

picture of Stalin on the wall during its founding meeting.<sup>136</sup> These examples of SPD support for fusion with the KPD were isolated, however. A clear majority of the SPD in the eastern zone opposed immediate union with the KPD,<sup>137</sup> although many members desired close co-operation between the two parties. The Leipzig SPD was an exception in this regard as it refused any co-operation with the KPD. Two members of the SPD leadership in Berlin, Eric Gniffke and Ralf Dahrendorf, made a special trip to Leipzig to attempt to convince the SPD leadership there to work more closely with the KPD.<sup>138</sup>

Throughout the summer and fall of 1945, likely invigorated by the party's steadily increasing membership, the SPD leadership continued to assert its independence and oppose fusion with the KPD.<sup>139</sup> On 26 August 1945, at the first party conference of the SPD in *Bezirk Leipzig*, Grotewohl stated that the SPD had a political right to lead Germany, and that there would not be a united list of SPD and KPD candidates in upcoming elections.<sup>140</sup> He could be buoyed by the fact that the SPD had crushed the KPD at a council election in the enormous *Leunawerk* factory complex, electing 26 members to the KPD's 1.<sup>141</sup> On 14 September, Grotewohl gave another speech to thousands of members and

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<sup>136</sup> Walter et al., p. 122.

<sup>137</sup> Malycha, p. XXVIII.

<sup>138</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 1, pp. 311-315.

<sup>139</sup> By November 1945, the SPD had 380,000 members while the KPD had 305,000; Grebing, *Zur Situation der Sozialdemokratie*, p. 22.

<sup>140</sup> Moraw, p. 107.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

functionaries of the SPD in the house of the *Neue Welt* newspaper in the American sector of Berlin, in which he stressed SPD strength and independence.<sup>142</sup> The situation became more delicate from 19 September, when Wilhelm Pieck, the chairman of the Central Committee of the KPD, suggested fusion of the parties. The SPD, however, maintained its desire for independence.

On 5 and 6 October 1945, the first conference took place between the leader of the western SPD, Kurt Schumacher, and Otto Grotewohl. The conference took place in the British zone of occupation, at Wennigsen near Hannover. At the conference, Grotewohl made clear his opposition to fusion with the KPD.<sup>143</sup> On 22 October 1945, the Central Committee supported Grotewohl's position by rejecting the KPD offer of fusion, stating that a majority of SPD members would not accept it. British observers at this meeting stated that they expected that in the future the SPD would follow "a very much stronger line" against the KPD.<sup>144</sup> As a demonstration of this "stronger line," the SPD rejected a KPD proposal to hold a joint function on the anniversary of the November revolution.<sup>145</sup>

SPD resistance to fusion was also evident outside Berlin. In Thuringia, Hermann Brill, who had come to oppose cooperation with the KPD because of SMAD interference and

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<sup>142</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 1, p. 347.

<sup>143</sup> Schumacher made it clear that he did not want a close relationship with the eastern SPD as he felt it was being too influenced by SMAD; Lucio Caracciolo, "Der Untergang der Sozialdemokratie in der SBZ", *VfZ* 36 (1988), p. 298.

<sup>144</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 1, p. 479.

<sup>145</sup> Malycha, p. LXXI.

general conduct in the Soviet zone<sup>146</sup>, verbally attacked Heinrich Hoffmann, a member of the SPD *Land* organization in Thuringia, at a sitting of 26 November. Brill accused Hoffmann of treachery in supporting fusion.<sup>147</sup> In Schwerin and Rostock, SPD members Hermann Lüdemann and Albert Schulz gathered members together who were against the pro-fusion stance of the SPD chair for Mecklenburg, Carl Moltmann. They failed to convince the *Land* organization of the dangers of fusion, however, likely because of the relative popularity that the KPD enjoyed in Mecklenburg due to the land reform.<sup>148</sup> In Saxony-Anhalt, Werner Bruschke, the secretary of the Saxony-Anhalt SPD executive committee, voiced his opposition to fusion.<sup>149</sup> In Saxony, Arno Hennig and Arno Wend, under secretaries for *Bezirk* Dresden travelled to Berlin in an attempt to convince the ZA to remove Otto Buchwitz, chairman of the SPD organization for *Land* Saxony, from his position because of his support for fusion.<sup>150</sup> The most common reason given by SPD members for opposition to fusion with the KPD at this time was the disregard that the KPD had shown toward other parties in the administration.

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<sup>146</sup> Brill is reported to have said at an SPD meeting in Weimar on 11 November 1945: "If you want to know what Soviet culture is, you just have to look outside your window and see the Ivans in their filthy uniforms. And they want to teach us how to build socialism in Germany!" Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 263

<sup>147</sup> Moraw, p. 135.

<sup>148</sup> Klaus Schwabe, *Die Zwangsvereinigung von KPD und SPD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* (Schwerin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1994), p. 16; Hurwitz, Vol. 4, Part 1, p. 497.

<sup>149</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 1, p. 497.

<sup>150</sup> Walter, p. 134.

For SPD members, this behaviour raised the spectre of renewed dictatorship.<sup>151</sup>

On 4 November, an event in Austria altered political developments in Germany. The Austrian elections were a resounding and shocking defeat for the Communists as the SPD won 76 of 165 seats in the Austrian national assembly, compared to the KPD's 4.<sup>152</sup> The message for the KPD in the Soviet zone was clear: It would not win an open and free election against the SPD, therefore fusion of the two parties had to be brought about. Accordingly, the KPD increased its pressure for fusion, but made little progress against the stubborn resistance of the SPD. On 4 December 1945, the first meeting of the SPD Central Committee with the leaders of the provincial and *Bezirk* organizations of the Soviet zone SPD took place. The meeting was a clear victory for opponents of fusion. Only two present supported fusion: Otto Buchwitz of Saxony and the Central Committee member Karl Litke.<sup>153</sup>

As the pressure from the KPD mounted for at least talks on the possibility of fusion, the SPD agreed to a joint meeting of 30 leading functionaries from each party for 20 and 21 December in Berlin, the so-called *60er Konferenz*. At this conference, Grotewohl made known his displeasure with the KPD by giving a speech listing ten points that suggested why the KPD was, at present, an unsuitable partner. He

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<sup>151</sup> "Bericht Friedrich Eberts über die Neubesetzung des Oberbürgermeisteramtes in Brandenburg vom 27. September 1945"; Malycha, p. 37. In this report, Ebert complains of KPD occupation of the post of mayor arbitrarily. See also "Protokoll über die Sitzung des SPD-Vorstandes der Provinz Sachsen am 17. Dezember 1945"; *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>152</sup> Caracciolo, p. 303.

<sup>153</sup> Moraw, pp. 136-137.

stressed the fact that the KPD was not acting according to its proclaimed adherence to democracy, and suggested that the SPD would pull out of local administrations if the KPD continued to exert pressure and unwanted influence on the SPD. He phrased it rather bluntly: "In our membership, a deep distrust of the Communist brother party has materialized."<sup>154</sup> He also pointed to the protection by the Soviet authorities that the KPD enjoyed, in contrast to the harassment and arrests experienced by SPD members. Gustav Kligelhöfer, a secretary of the ZA of the SPD, echoed Grotewohl's concerns about SMAD favouritism saying: "Many of our comrades do not speak that which they have in their hearts, as they want to restrain themselves, need to restrain themselves, out of fears based on previous experiences."<sup>155</sup> Grotewohl did not rule out fusion outright, however, but insisted that the ten points be a basis for it. In these points, he also mentioned the need for a German-wide meeting of the SPD to agree on fusion,<sup>156</sup> as he believed that fusion in one zone would be a disaster for German unity. Grotewohl's stance at this conference deserves close attention, as he did not agree to the KPD's fusion proposal. By attaching the conditions that fusion could not occur on a zonal basis, and that there must be separate lists for the upcoming elections, Grotewohl effectively postponed fusion

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<sup>154</sup> Gruner/Wilke, p. 71.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>156</sup> The speech with these ten points is reprinted in Hermann Weber (ed.), *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), p. 55.

indefinitely.<sup>157</sup> His expression of a desire for unity was crafty manoeuvring within the limitations of Soviet occupation, as he simply could not suggest otherwise. Participants at the conference have stated that they saw Grotewohl's speech as a way of avoiding fusion.<sup>158</sup>

The SPD was a divided party after the December Conference, although the majority of members opposed fusion because of the KPD's dictatorial behaviour up to that point.<sup>159</sup> One strain within the party, a clear minority, desired immediate fusion. The most vocal proponents in this group were Otto Buchwitz of Saxony and Heinrich Hoffmann of Thuringia, but there were grassroots movements as well, as in the SPD in Görlitz and Güstrow.<sup>160</sup> Another group felt that, due to the circumstances, fusion was inevitable, but that the SPD would be able to continue its policies within the new united party. For this group, the undemocratic conduct of the KPD was the biggest concern but it felt that this would be tempered by a strong SPD presence.<sup>161</sup> The hope of influencing the future party was evident when the chair of SPD *Bezirk* Leipzig, Trabalski, suggested dissolving the SPD rather than join the new united party, but was opposed

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<sup>157</sup> The Central Committee reiterated its anti-fusion stance at a meeting of 15 January 1946; Spittmann, p. 156.

<sup>158</sup> Staritz, *Einheitsfront*, p. 206.

<sup>159</sup> The division was partly a result of the misinterpretation of the conference due to communications problems and Soviet censorship. Gustav Kligelhöfer reported on 3 January 1946 that some SPD members were confused because the conference was portrayed in the media as the beginning of the fusion process; Malycha, p. LXXXV.

<sup>160</sup> Malycha, p. 88.

<sup>161</sup> "Schreiben der Ortsgruppe SPD Oranienburg an Otto Grotewohl 20 Februar 1946"; Malycha, p. 409.

by a majority of this SPD group despite the clear anti-Communism of the members.<sup>162</sup> Friedrich Ebert in Brandenburg and Albert Schulz in Rostock also felt that the SPD would be able to exert enormous influence on the development of the new party.<sup>163</sup> Even Otto Grotewohl felt that the new party could be manipulated: "Should it come to close contact between both parties, then I know that we Social Democrats will be the stronger section."<sup>164</sup> Although these suggestions may seem naive, it should be remembered that there was a feeling that the KPD protector SMAD would not be in Germany much longer, as the division of Germany was considered temporary.<sup>165</sup> Without SMAD interference, the SPD might well have been able to influence the new party. A third strand within the party felt that fusion with the KPD was a distinctly bad idea because of the KPD's totalitarian tendencies. Some SPD groups, like those in Wismar, Rostock, and Dresden expressed this view by calling for a party-wide referendum on the issue of fusion.<sup>166</sup> Hermann Brill made his aversion to fusion clear in an article for the SPD newspaper *Tribüne* after the December Conference, writing that he was pleased to work alongside the KPD, but that he was equally

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<sup>162</sup> Werner Müller, "Sozialdemokraten und Einheitspartei," in Dietrich Staritz, *Einheitsfront*, p. 155. For the hostility of the Leipzig SPD group to fusion, see Malycha, p. 315: "Aus dem Protokoll über die gemeinsame Sitzung des Landes - und Bezirksleitung Sachsens der KPD und SPD am 28. Januar 1946."

<sup>163</sup> Malycha, p. XXXVI; p. 90.

<sup>164</sup> Ernst Lemmer, *Manches war doch anders* (Frankfurt am Main: H. Scheffler, 1968), p. 268.

<sup>165</sup> Malycha, p. L.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

pleased that fusion was not to take place on a zonal level.<sup>167</sup> Brill was fearful of the KPD's version of democracy, and was not alone in his suspicions that the KPD would establish a dictatorship.<sup>168</sup> In Borna, in response to a query by a Soviet officer as to why the SPD and KPD were not working together, the local SPD leader said: "We SPD want true democracy for all."<sup>169</sup> A resolution from the SPD in Zehdenick was more subtle: "We Social Democrats of Zehdenick have unfortunately determined that, up to this point, the KPD has not acted in a way conducive to union."<sup>170</sup> In Waltersdorf, SPD suspicions were raised by the fact that the KPD had historically proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat, and suddenly supported democracy.<sup>171</sup> Lastly, the SPD group in Chemnitz fiercely opposed fusion with the KPD because it believed the KPD would establish a dictatorship. Hans Hermsdorf, a member of the SPD in Chemnitz, said that he refused to negotiate with the KPD where the concept of democracy was concerned, and that he would fight every dictatorship, "however it may name or disguise itself."<sup>172</sup> At

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>168</sup> "Rundschreiben Nr.18 des Landesvorstandes der SPD Thüringen vom 6. November 1945"; Malycha, p. 187.

<sup>169</sup> "Protokoll über die Unterredung der Bornaer Ortskommandatur mit dem Unterbezirksvorstand der SPD Borna vom 16. Januar 1946"; Malycha, p. 302

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 104. From a Waltersdorf Meeting on 8 February 1946.

<sup>172</sup> "Schreiben von Hans Hermsdorf an dem Bezirksvorstand der SPD Chemnitz August Friedel vom 31. März 1946"; Malycha, p. 447. The SPD in Magdeburg was also against fusion, as demonstrated by insisting on a German-wide party conference; ibid., p. LXI. See also

one *Bezirk* party meeting, he exclaimed: "Back to democracy, forward to socialism!"<sup>173</sup>

SPD concern about fusion with the KPD was strong enough to force some members to turn abroad for support. The earliest contact came in October 1945, when Grotewohl approached the British in Berlin asking them for insurance that there would be free elections in the eastern half of Germany. One SPD Central Committee (ZA) member even went so far as to ask the British occupation authorities to ban joint election lists through a Control Council directive. The request did not receive much attention, however, because the British intelligence officer who received the request did not think the issue of much importance, and was suspicious of the SPD in any case.<sup>174</sup> On 11 November, in the wake of the intensification of the KPD campaign, Grotewohl became more urgent with his plea for outside help. He informed the British authorities that "there was a danger of people in Eastern Germany considering that they had merely exchanged one party dictatorship for another."<sup>175</sup> By the beginning of the new year, there was evidence that the British had misjudged the earlier threat, as one British representative stated: "It seems probable that Grotewohl [...] will give way to the Communist demands, as he sees no hope of outside help until the zonal frontiers have been abolished, and is unwilling to sacrifice his career and that

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Bouvier/Schulz, pp. 251-262.

<sup>173</sup> Bouvier and Schulz, p. 255. Excerpts of an interview conducted with Hermsdorf are reprinted in this work.

<sup>174</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 1, p. 479.

<sup>175</sup> Caracciolo, p. 302.

of other good socialists in pointless resistance."<sup>176</sup> It seems, however, that the British occupation authorities also felt that resistance was pointless as they did not offer assistance to the Social Democrats in the Soviet zone.

SPD resistance to fusion was eventually broken by a vigorous, multi-faceted campaign conducted by SMAD. During the first months of 1946, in order to break the resistance of the Central Committee of the SPD to fusion, SMAD increased pressure on local SPD groups to co-operate with the KPD in the search for fusion.<sup>177</sup> The Soviets hoped that internal pressure would force the SPD to abandon its opposition to fusion. SMAD activities included denunciations of those against fusion as saboteurs and fascists, and arrests of outspoken opponents of fusion.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, the Soviets banned meetings of SPD groups who were against fusion and offered material and moral support to local SPD groups that supported fusion.<sup>179</sup> Through these tactics, the

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<sup>176</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 2, p. 799.

<sup>177</sup> Andreas Malycha suggests that the Soviets hoped to present the western powers with a *fait accompli* which would have increased their bargaining position at the Paris foreign ministers' meeting in April 1946; Malycha, p. XV

<sup>178</sup> Works on political prisoners in the first year of occupation are now beginning to emerge in large volume, but a sound scholarly work has yet to appear. See Lutz Niethammer, *Der "Gesäuberte" Antifaschismus: Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994); Bodo Ritscher, *Speziallager Nr.2 Buchenwald* (Weimar-Buchenwald: Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 1995); Gunter Agde, *Sachsenhausen bei Berlin: Speziallager Nr. 7 1945-1950* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994). For an earlier account, see Gerhard Finn, *Die politischen Häftlinge der Sowjetzone 1945-1958* (Berlin: Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit, 1958).

<sup>179</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 139.

Soviets were able to create the necessary conditions for fusion at the local level. In the first months of 1946 local SPD and KPD groups began to join together in a united party. These groups in turn applied pressure on their *Land* representatives to seek agreement on fusion.<sup>180</sup> Ultimately, the Soviet tactic of inducing fusion from below proved effective. During a meeting on 11 February 1946 between the ZA and the SPD *Land* committees, the *Land* committees appealed to the ZA to support fusion based on the "spontaneous" fusion which was taking place at the local level throughout the Soviet zone. Faced with the position of the *Land* committees, and aware of the increasingly severe Soviet measures against opponents of fusion, Grotewohl abandoned his opposition to fusion. Eric Gniffke has labelled this meeting the "rebellion of the *Land* committees."<sup>181</sup>

In the days prior to the meeting of 11 February 1946, Grotewohl had, in fact, been considering the possibility of fusion with the KPD given the situation in the Soviet zone. During a dinner meeting on 4 February in West Berlin of Grotewohl, Dahrendorf, and Sir Christopher Steel, the head of the political department in the British military government in Germany, Grotewohl lamented that he could not prevent fusion under the circumstances. Steel reported: "Not only was the strongest pressure brought to bear on them [Grotewohl and Dahrendorf] personally, ([Grotewohl] spoke of being tickled with Russian bayonets), but their organisation in the provinces had been completely undermined. Men who four days before had assured him [i.e. Grotewohl] of their

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<sup>180</sup> Hermann Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>181</sup> Moraw, p. 149.

determination to resist were now begging him to get the business [i.e. fusion] over and have done with it."<sup>182</sup> Earlier in Frankfurt am Main, Grotewohl had forewarned SPD members in West Germany: "If any decision should be taken in Berlin, that doesn't please you, you can be certain that this decision has only been taken under pressure from the Soviet occupying power."<sup>183</sup> Given these conditions, Grotewohl came to accept fusion in the hope that the SPD would remain alive within the new party. He made this calculation on the assumption that German unity would soon occur, following which both he and the SPD could again become prominent figures in politics.<sup>184</sup> The alternative, he felt, was to abandon SPD policies in their entirety in the Soviet zone. Grotewohl later regretted his decision to support fusion once he realized that it was a manoeuvre to remove the SPD in the Soviet zone. Grotewohl attempted to escape the GDR at least once.<sup>185</sup>

Three days after the 11 February meeting, a group of between 8 and 12 Kreis chairmen of Berlin met at the invitation of Curt Swolinzky to organize Berlin SPD members who opposed fusion.<sup>186</sup> The group decided to conduct an SPD party vote in Berlin on the question of fusion. The 31 March 1946 vote, which was permitted to take place only in western Berlin, was a victory for those against immediate fusion, as 82.6% of SPD members who voted rejected immediate fusion

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<sup>182</sup> Caracciolo, p. 312.

<sup>183</sup> Alexander Haritonow, "Freiwilliger Zwang", DA 29 (1996), p. 410.

<sup>184</sup> Caracciolo, pp. 316-318.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>186</sup> Hurwitz, *Die Anfänge*, Part 2, p. 1082.

with the KPD.<sup>187</sup> The keen interest in cooperating with the KPD was, however, also apparent. 62% of those who voted answered yes to the question of whether they desired co-operation with the KPD.<sup>188</sup>

After the vote, the SPD constituted itself as an independent party in the western zones of Berlin, and watched as the eastern SPD went forward to unity. On 21 April in the Admiralspalast theatre in Berlin, shortly after the opening of the joint SPD/KPD gathering at 10:00 a.m., Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl crossed the stage, met in the middle, and shook hands to seal the fusion of the two parties. The handshake remained the symbol of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) until 1990.

### **3.2 - Underground SPD resistance**

#### **3.2.1 - The SPD Ostbüro**

The most extensive anti-Communist resistance in the Soviet zone was conducted by members of the SPD who remained in the East after the fusion of the two parties, either within the SED in the hopes of reforming the Communist system from within, or outside the party carrying on SPD work illegally.<sup>189</sup> Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the western SPD, contributed significantly to supporting SPD resistance in the Soviet zone based on his concern for the erosion of democracy there. On the developing situation in the eastern

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<sup>187</sup> 71.8% of Berlin SPD members took part in the vote; Grebing, p. 37

<sup>188</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 141.

<sup>189</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 36.

zone, Schumacher stated: "One cannot declare the principles of democracy, of socialism, of freedom, of the right of self-determination, and then adopt policies which are the opposite."<sup>190</sup> Again in 1947, he stated: "The fact that social democracy in the eastern zone is forbidden, suppressed, and persecuted is not primarily an SPD issue. It is a question of equal rights in accordance with the equality of all German citizens. It is a question of world democracy."<sup>191</sup> Schumacher therefore established the SPD *Ostbüro* (Eastern Office), an organization based in Hannover in the British zone to aid both the eastern members of the party who sought refuge in the West, and those who stayed to fight Communism. Schumacher described the *Ostbüro* as "the institution of organized Social Democrats against the Communist claims to power in Germany."<sup>192</sup> The *Ostbüro*, founded virtually simultaneously with the fusion of the KPD and SPD in April 1946, grew out of a section of the party which had been established in February 1946 in Hannover to provide support for SPD refugees from the Soviet Occupied Zone (*Sowjetische Besatzungszone - SBZ*).<sup>193</sup> Schumacher envisaged five initial

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<sup>190</sup> Helmut Bärwald, *Das Ostbüro der SPD* (Krefeld: SINUS, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>191</sup> Dieter Rieke, *Sozialdemokraten als Opfer gegen die Rote Diktatur* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1994), p. 24. For more on Schumacher himself, see Gunther Scholz, *Kurt Schumacher-Biographie* (Dusseldorf: ELON Verlag, 1988); Willy Albrecht, *Kurt Schumacher. Ein Leben für den demokratischen Sozialismus* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1985); Dietrich Orlow "Delayed Reaction: Democracy, Nationalism, and the SPD 1933-1960", *GSR XVI* (1993), p. 80.

<sup>192</sup> Rieke, p. 25.

<sup>193</sup> The leader of the refugee support branch in Hannover was Rudi Dux; Buschfort, p. 17

tasks for the *Ostbüro*: 1) to be a contact post for SPD members in the SBZ and a coordination post for resistance groups there, 2) to gather information on the SBZ in order to trace the development of the Communist system, 4) to make public this information gathered on the eastern zone, 5) to mount a defence against spies from Soviet and East German secret services in the Federal Republic of Germany, and 6) to assist political refugees from the Soviet occupied zone.<sup>194</sup> Underlying these tasks was the desire to maintain links to the eastern SPD in order to build up the party again quickly in the event that the zonal boundaries fell.<sup>195</sup> As far as can be determined by the documents, the *Ostbüro* smuggled neither groups of SPD resisters nor weapons into the Soviet zone, but rather supplied groups already in place with information and materials (especially pamphlets) of the western SPD. It should be mentioned, however, that it is not possible to come to a definitive conclusion on this topic as the documentary source base is fragmentary. The Central Committee of the western SPD ran the *Ostbüro* furtively, leaving virtually no documentation on *Ostbüro* operations in official minutes. The following account relies on the reports of individuals involved in SPD resistance which are housed in the Archive of Social Democracy in Bonn.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Bärwald, p. 29.

<sup>195</sup> Buschfort, p. 20.

<sup>196</sup> Documents on SPD activity are also available in the holdings of the first eastern German political police, K-5. This special branch of the police force was not founded until 1947, however. Documents from K-5 on SPD activity are presented in the following chapter.

### 3.2.2 - The formation and motives of the first underground SPD groups in the SBZ

The creation of the SED provoked certain SPD members to engage immediately in underground anti-Communist resistance. These early SPD groups, which were composed of anti-fusion SPD members who had been in contact prior to the founding of the SED, distributed oppositional material obtained from the SPD building located on Ziethenstrasse in Berlin, and reported to the western SPD on developments in the Soviet Occupied Zone. Because the SPD was still legal in Berlin due to the city's four-power status, and because of the relative accessibility of Berlin, SPD groups in the SBZ initially contacted Berlin rather than the *Ostbüro* in Hannover. In Halle, Fritz Gebuehr, Georg Otten, Günther Eckstein, Klara Laue, Arthur Kuntzmann, and Karl Behle met at the first mention of fusion to plan strategy in the case that fusion would pass. Once the SED had been created, Behle contacted Ziethenstrasse to obtain brochures and newspapers for illegal distribution in the eastern zone. Only at the end of 1946 did a courier from the *Ostbüro* in Hannover contact Behle directly. The activities of this group were brought to an end in April 1947 when Soviet forces arrested Behle. Behle was tried by a Soviet Military Tribunal and sentenced to 10 years in a labour camp, some of which he served in the "Special Camp" Sachsenhausen, administered by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKWD).<sup>197</sup> Behle

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<sup>197</sup> *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie* (hereafter AdsD), SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421 8 March 1954 report of Karl Behle Bonn. See also ADSD SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394. Behle was amnestied in 1954.

may have considered his sentence fortunate. In May 1946 in Rostock, the NKWD arrested five former secretaries of the SPD in Mecklenburg. Erich Krüger was executed out-of-hand, while Heini Besse, Erich Becker, and Willi Jesse (the former contact person for Mecklenburg for the 20 July 1944 resisters) were each sentenced to 25 years in jail. Only Hermann Witteborn was able to flee to the West.<sup>198</sup>

The dangers of contacting Hannover directly were revealed by the SPD group headed by Dieter Rieke. The group was based in the town of Döhren in Kreis Gardelegen which lay on the border between the eastern and western zones of Germany. Like the group in Halle, this group consisted of SPD members who had been in contact prior to the fusion of the parties. Through Rieke, the group contacted SPD members in the towns of Stendal, Magdeburg, and Salzwedel. One of the members of the group was the mayor of Döhren, who facilitated both members leaving the eastern zone and materials coming from the western zones. The mayor himself sent reports on the eastern zone to the Ostbüro via a courier named Ernst Knippel. In February 1948, Soviet authorities arrested Knippel and shortly thereafter other members of the Döhren group.<sup>199</sup> Knippel's arrest also led to the arrest of another group that had contacts to Knippel in

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<sup>198</sup> *Franz Neumann Archiv* (hereafter FNA), VII/8. Unsigned, Undated report to Franz Neumann. Confirmed in ADSD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394. 16 December 1954 summary of the fates of certain SPD members in the eastern zone. Jesse was amnestied in 1954. Whether the others were released before finishing their sentences remains undetermined.

<sup>199</sup> ADsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421, 25 July 1956 report on the history of the arrest of the Rieke Group, Gardelegen, p. 1.

Haldensleben.<sup>200</sup> The *Ostbüro* criticized Knippel for acting irresponsibly in crossing the border.

Knippel's inexperience was symptomatic of the early days of the *Ostbüro* when the SPD was attempting to conduct underground work against a seasoned opponent in the Soviet NKWD. Indeed, it appears from the following account that the NKWD penetrated the *Ostbüro* in Hannover at an early stage. Beginning in 1946, Arthur Leibknecht worked illegally for the SPD in Haldensleben spreading pamphlets denouncing Communism. He carried out his work uninterrupted until 4 January 1948 when he met an old acquaintance, Arthur Reich, son of a social democratic editor in Thuringia. Reich's social democratic background, and his proof that he had been in the *Ostbüro* in Hannover, sufficed to gain Leibknecht's confidence as he provided Reich with oppositional pamphlets for distribution. In March, Soviet authorities arrested Leibknecht and sentenced him to 25 years labour and confiscated his possessions. Reich was later revealed to have worked for the NKWD. Leibknecht was amnestied in 1956.<sup>201</sup>

The initial signs of an emerging Communist dictatorship in the east and the brutality of the Soviet occupation were primary factors behind these first SPD underground resistance groups. Helmut Wenke, Benno von Heinitz and Peter Krämer were members of an SPD group in Saxony which contacted the Berlin SPD for the purposes of spreading pamphlets. The group, which consisted in large part of students, protested the excesses of the Soviet occupiers and

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421, 1 August 1956 report on Arthur Leibknecht's arrest by Soviet security organs.

their German helpers by spreading pamphlets entitled "Ivan the Terrible" and defacing buildings of the German criminal police in Bautzen. Heinitz and Wenke were arrested on the night of 19 to 20 August 1947 and Krämer shortly thereafter. Heinitz and Krämer each received 25 years labour, and Wenke received ten.<sup>202</sup>

Hermann Kreutzer's group was also motivated to resist by Communist infringements on personal freedoms. Hermann Kreutzer, his father Paul, and his fiancée Dorothee Fischer, led an SPD group of about 100 centred in Saalstadt/Rudolstadt, Thuringia. The centre for the coordination of the activity was the Thuringian chamber of trade where Baumeister, a member of the group, had telephones at his disposal. Members of the group were also in the *Kommunalpolitik* branches of the *Kreis* and *Land* administrations. The communications abilities of these departments assisted the group in maintaining contact with other SPD members in the eastern zone.<sup>203</sup> Roughly six months after fusion, and after having considered the possibility of infiltrating the SED from within, the group contacted the SPD in Berlin and met with an *Ostbüro* representative. The group's activities consisted of distributing *Ostbüro* pamphlets and providing information on developments in the SBZ to the western SPD. Kreutzer was motivated to act by the restrictions on basic freedoms in the eastern zone, including the right to fair trial and the freedom of expression. After 12 years of Nazism, he was dismayed by the

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<sup>202</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0420 B/I, 15 August 1951 report by Helmut Wenke.

<sup>203</sup> Author's interview with Hermann Kreutzer, Berlin, 24 April 1995.

lack of democracy in the eastern zone.<sup>204</sup> He also believed that German unity would take place in the near future and wanted to maintain SPD contacts in the Soviet zone because of the difficulties in starting the party anew. Kreutzer's group maintained contact with the *Ostbüro* through a neighbouring resistance group in Rudolstadt from January 1947 to the spring of 1949<sup>205</sup> when the three leaders of Kreutzer's group were arrested and sentenced to 25 years by a Soviet Military Tribunal. Kreutzer was amnestied in 1956.<sup>206</sup>

### 3.2.3 - Resistance within the SED

Other SPD members chose not to participate in underground work outside the SED, but within the new party. Siegfried Weisse, who was fundamentally opposed to fusion of the two parties, gathered a group of like minded Social Democrats to form the resistance group "igel," and turned to Ziethenstrasse for further instructions. There, he received instructions to remain within the SED in order to obtain documents on the administration and the economy. Weisse was ideally placed for such information as he headed the Saxony finance administration in Dresden from 1946. Weisse also had contacts to the secretary of the *Kreistag* office and the president of the *Kreistag*, Elfriede Matschke. Weisse was unaware, however, that a member of the Dresden *Kreis* council

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<sup>204</sup> Bärwald, p. 38. When I asked him his primary motivation, Kreutzer replied with a resounding "Freiheit!"

<sup>205</sup> Bärwald, p. 38.

<sup>206</sup> Author's interview with Hermann Kreutzer, Berlin, 24 April 1995.

for education, Werner Uhlig, also worked for the *Ostbüro*. Weisse proceeded to inform the *Ostbüro* about activities in the Saxon administration based on his various sources. He also procured important materials for couriers, such as stamped service identification so they could move more easily through the zone. The negligence of a courier led to Weisse's arrested by the NKWD on 16 February 1949.<sup>207</sup>

The most prominent SPD resisters who remained in the SED were Fritz Drescher, ministerial director of the *Land* government for Saxony,<sup>208</sup> Arno Haufe, and Arno Wend, both members of the *Landessekretariat* for the Saxony SED. Wend was arrested during a series of SPD arrests on 7 July 1948 and sentenced to 25 years labour which he was to carry out in the Siberian work camp in Workuta, but was amnestied after serving 7 years. Fritz Drescher, and the 14 members in his illegal group, were sentenced on 17 June 1949 to 25 years for espionage and anti-Soviet propaganda.<sup>209</sup> Drescher and Wend had already been arrested several times in the

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<sup>207</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421, 4/5 February 1954 report by Siegfried Weisse. Other members of Weisse's group were Fritz Bauer, Gerth Hoppe, Herbert Schäfer, Günter Flach, Herbert Unger, Jochen Müller, and Gerhard Ungerade. See also AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394, 26 November 1956 report; undated report by Source 47670 on illegal group "igel" of the SPD from 1946 to March 1949.

<sup>208</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 39.

<sup>209</sup> The 14 members of Drescher's groups were Helmut Hoffmann, Halle; Willi Korn, Halle; Erich Bunk; Merseburg; Günter Meier, Halle; Emil Fuchs, Schkopau; Kreist, Merseburg (no first name given); Albert Lebbin, Bitterfeld; Alfred Fritze, Sangerhausen; Hans Donner, Bitterfeld; Willy Thorwandt, Weissenfels; Erich Schmidt, Pouch bei Bitterfeld; Hermann Polenz, Hettstedt; Artur Wagner, Schkeuditz; and Fritz Drescher, Weissenfels. Two received 20 years labour, all the others 25 years; Fricke, *Politik*, p. 118.

Third Reich for SPD-related activities.<sup>210</sup> Haufe, Wend and Drescher were amnestied in 1954. Indeed, as has become evident in the cases cited here, the majority of those sentenced in the mid-1940s for SPD-related activity were released between 1954 and 1956.<sup>211</sup>

It appears that a small portion of the SPD members in the eastern zone joined either the CDU or the LDPD to avoid persecution and to resist the SED from within these parties. One *Ostbüro* report stated: "A small number of our comrades have fled into the bourgeois parties in order to disguise themselves."<sup>212</sup> One member of the SPD reported that he joined the LDPD in Ronneburg, Thuringia in 1946 and urged people there to vote for the LDPD as a protest against the SED.<sup>213</sup>

The SPD presence in the SED meant that the new party was far from united. In reports to the SED from various Saxony *Kreise*, the difficulties between former SPD and KPD members were evident. In Pirna, an SED member reported that "political differences still exist in some local SED groups because there are functionaries that have not bridged the antagonisms that existed between SPD and KPD prior to

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<sup>210</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 39.

<sup>211</sup> Wolfgang Buschfort, "Gefoltert und geschlagen," in Rieke, p. 30.

<sup>212</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/2. 11 November 1955 report on arrests and releases of comrades in the Soviet zone.

<sup>213</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394, 9 March 1948 personal report; AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/2, 10 November 1955 report on arrests and releases of comrades in the Soviet zone. Hans Lehmann and Dr. Shade of Görlitz were also SPD members who joined the LDPD.

1933."<sup>214</sup> In Auerbach, the SED complained: "The cohesion of the party is deficient."<sup>215</sup> In Kreis Löbau, a meeting of the SED turned to a discussion on the unity of the party during which somebody in attendance stated: "In 1918, the masses were united and the leadership wasn't, today the leaders of the parties are united but there is resistance in the lower levels of membership."<sup>216</sup> Kreis Zwickau and Kreis Hoyerswerda also complained of poor cooperation between KPD and SPD members.<sup>217</sup>

#### **4 - The origins of the Communist repression apparatus in eastern Germany.**

Because of the important role that basic rights played in the motivation behind political anti-Communist resistance in eastern Germany, both broadly in the population and specifically in the non-Marxist parties, an understanding of the repression apparatus in eastern Germany is imperative. Indeed, a history of resistance in eastern Germany would be incomplete without mention of the governmental power structures, for the relationship between resistance and authority was intertwined. The most important pillars of the repression apparatus in eastern Germany were the police and judicial systems.

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<sup>214</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/908, p. 81. 10 August 1946 report from SED Pirna to the SED *Landesvorstand* Saxony.

<sup>215</sup> SAPMO-BA, NL 182/908, p. 82. 31 August 1946 excerpts and summary of SED *Bezirk* reports on the state of preparations for the upcoming elections in *Land* Saxony.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

#### 4.1 - The roots of the Volkspolizei

SMAD established a police force in eastern Germany almost immediately after occupation, although the Soviet commander of the field army exercised ultimate public authority.<sup>218</sup> Local Soviet army commanders created the new police force by appointing police chiefs, usually based on the recommendations of the mayor, to recruit "anti-fascists" for police work. These initial cadres came disproportionately from the working classes. (See chart below)

POLICE FORCE IN THE SBZ, DECEMBER 1946.

	Brandenburg	Sax.- Anhalt	Saxony	Thuringia
workers/farmers	85%	-----	90.3%	87.6%
SED	88%	88%	92.8%	93.4%

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In the initial days after the war, police tasks entailed registering inhabitants, carrying out SMAD orders, and enforcing those German laws still valid for the

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<sup>218</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 13.

<sup>219</sup> Chart taken from Rüdiger Wenzke, "Auf dem Wege zur Kaderarmee. Aspekte der Rekrutierung, Sozialstruktur und personellen Entwicklung des entstehenden Militärs in der SBZ/DDR bis 1952/1953," in Bruno Thoss (ed.), *Volksarmee schaffen - ohne Geschrei: Studien zu den Anfängen einer "verdeckten Aufrüstung" in der SBZ/DDR 1947-1952* (Munich: R.Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994), p. 209.

upholding of public security.<sup>220</sup> The police force was fairly ineffective, however, in carrying out the third duty. There was little coordination among police posts, and even the names of the police forces varied according to region, named either *Ordnungsdienst*, *Ordnungspolizei*, or *Schutzpolizei*.<sup>221</sup> The vast majority of the police force, which by January 1946 numbered a mere 21,973 including clerks, had no policing experience and were often undisciplined or corrupt,<sup>222</sup> which hampered the police's ability to bring the widespread crime of the initial post-war years under control.<sup>223</sup>

By 1946, the police force was beginning to undergo significant changes. First, as a result of a declaration of the Allied Control Council of 1 January 1946, the police were permitted to carry weapons, although the shortage of available arms meant that most police continued to use billyclubs.<sup>224</sup> The most important change, however, came as a result of SMAD Order Number 0212 of August 1946 which secretly created a new central administration in the Soviet zone, the German Administration of the Interior (*Deutsche*

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<sup>220</sup> Wolfgang Eisert, "Zu den Anfängen der Sicherheits- und Militärpolitik der SED-Führung 1948 bis 1952," in Thoss (ed.), p. 147.

<sup>221</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/270, p.37. 21 October 1947 annual report for the year 1946-47.

<sup>222</sup> Richard Bessel, "Die Grenzen des Polizeistaates," in Bessel/Jessen (eds.), pp. 226-227; Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 356. On average, 5% of the police force had pre-war police experience; Wenzke, p. 209.

<sup>223</sup> In Berlin, the number of registered thefts in 1946 was 885% higher than in 1937. Similarly, Saxony reported crime 4 to 5 times higher than before the war; Bessel, p.225.

<sup>224</sup> Bessel, p. 227.

Verwaltung des Innern - DVdI). The founding of the DVdI was largely due to the lack of organization in the police force and the related low success rate in fighting crime.<sup>225</sup> But Erich Mielke, a vice president of the DVdI, was right to see far greater possibilities, calling the DVdI a "sharp weapon for the democratic rebuilding."<sup>226</sup> The leadership of the DVdI consisted of one president, Erich Reschke, and three vice presidents, Erich Mielke, Willy Seifert, and Paul Wagner.<sup>227</sup> Although the DVdI remained small initially, employing only 70 workers by the end of 1946,<sup>228</sup> the SED took an important step in transforming the DVdI in December 1946 into the "sharp weapon" foreseen by Mielke. Ulbricht and Fechner met with the presidents of the provincial interior ministries to transfer supreme authority in police matters from the provinces to the DVdI.<sup>229</sup> The DVdI took over central authority of all agencies that dealt with internal administration, public order, and security, which included the criminal police, the traffic police, the railway police, the water police, and the fire department.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 358; Kurt Arlt, "Das Wirken der Sowjetischen Militäradministration in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld zwischen den Beschlüssen von Potsdam und der sicherheitspolitischen Interessen Moskaus 1945-1949," in Bruno Thoss, p. 130.

<sup>226</sup> Eisert, p. 150.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. Seifert was in charge of the administration police, and Wagner the Schutzpolizei; BA-P, DO 1 7/550, p. 3. Report on the initial division of powers of the DVdI in the SBZ.

<sup>228</sup> Eisert, p. 150.

<sup>229</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p.358.

<sup>230</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/253. Schematic breakdown of the DVdI in 1946.

#### 4.2 - The judicial system

Control of the judicial system was a primary goal of the KPD in eastern Germany after the war. A KPD proposal for reform of the judicial system revealed the party's desire to control the Central Administration of Justice. It envisaged a president, two vice presidents, and 6 departments, 2 of which had to be occupied by KPD members: Department II responsible for personnel matters, and Department V responsible for criminal law. The other departments - new jurists, civil matters, and the penal system - could be given up to other parties, although the last had to be occupied by somebody who saw "eye to eye" with the KPD.<sup>231</sup> Filling the personnel post with a reliable Communist was critical to the KPD, because a Communist in this post would permit the KPD to staff the Central Administration for Justice with people sympathetic to Communism. The KPD barely disguised this intention in an internal proposal for justice reform: "The democratic renewal of the justice apparatus and the justice administration requires increased recruitment of suitable elements from the broader population. For these purposes, those with no training in law should be taken in if they possess the necessary character and educational qualities to exercise a post in the justice system."<sup>232</sup> With the assistance of SMAD, the KPD was indeed able to obtain the important posts in the Central Administration for Justice. Although the Central Administration for Justice was

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<sup>231</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/1118, pp. 50-51. Undated proposal by KPD member Melsheimer for the structure of the Central Administration of Justice.

<sup>232</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/1118, p. 64. 5 October 1945 proposal of the Central Committee of the KPD for a reform of the judicial system.

headed by the LDPD member Eugen Schiffer, true power lay with his first vice-president, SED member Ernst Melsheimer, and the head of the personnel department, the reliable Communist Hilde Benjamin.

Starting in 1946, the Central Administration for Justice implemented a six month course to train these new recruits to become "people's judges" and "people's public prosecutors."<sup>233</sup> The four parties were allowed to nominate candidates for the school, but only "reliable democrats" were permitted to attend.<sup>234</sup> The "people's jurists" ushered in the beginning of the Communist takeover of the judicial system, although the impact of the "people's justices" was not immediate. By the end of 1947, only 25% of all judges and public prosecutors carried SED membership books.<sup>235</sup> Even GDR historians did not disguise the importance of the "people's justices" for the transformation of the justice system: "The class structure of the judicial system was able to be drastically changed only by relatively quickly producing judges and prosecutors from the working classes [...] After a brief introduction, they handled those trials which were vital for the protection of the new order: trials against Nazi and war criminals, saboteurs, and

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<sup>233</sup> The empowerment of judges and lawyers was prescribed in a SMAD order from 17 December 1945. There were initially 5 schools set up for the training of "people's jurists." These schools were centralized into one centre in Potsdam-Babelsberg with the founding of the GDR in 1949; Melzer, p. 51.

<sup>234</sup> Josef Streit, "Zur Geschichte der Staatsanwaltschaft der DDR", *Staat und Recht* 8, August 1969, p. 1264.

<sup>235</sup> Falco Werkentin, *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995), p. 21.

speculators."<sup>236</sup> Hilde Benjamin, the later GDR justice minister, put it sharply: "The institution of the "people's judges" was the truly revolutionary element in the restructuring of the judicial system, and became its symbol."<sup>237</sup> The true element to the training however, was a deprofessionalizing and politicizing of the judicial system.<sup>238</sup>

## **5 - Characteristics of life in the immediate post-war period**

### **5.1 - Disease, food, shelter.**

The concerns of the broader population in the first year of occupation did not revolve around political developments or the behind-the-scenes Communist takeover of power. Daily life was characterized to a much greater degree by eking out an existence amid the rubble, and contending with the brutality of the Soviet occupation. In the eastern zone, nearly 65% of housing in the larger centres was destroyed, and 40% of the population lost all their possessions.<sup>239</sup> The majority of the population had to

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<sup>236</sup> Melzer, p. 51.

<sup>237</sup> Benjamin, p. 1119.

<sup>238</sup> Gerhard Dilcher, "Politische Ideologie und Rechtstheorie, Rechtspolitik und Rechtswissenschaft," in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1994), p. 475.

<sup>239</sup> Kirsten Poutros, "Von den Massenvergewaltigungen zum Mutterschutzgesetz. Abtreibungspolitik und Abtreibungspraxis in Ostdeutschland, 1945-1950," in Bessel and Jessen, p. 174.

struggle to find temporary housing, often crowding those places still livable or simply living in the streets. The search for food occupied a good portion of the day, but ended more often than not in disappointment. No zone of Germany was able to provide the inhabitants with the 2000 calories per day necessary for an average person to function properly. The American zone had the highest average at 1330 calories per person per day, followed by the Soviet zone at 1083, the British at 1050, and the French at 900.<sup>240</sup> These conditions forced the German population to turn to the black market to survive, where cigarettes and sexual favours fetched many of the necessities of life. Malnutrition was nevertheless common, leading to an increase in the incidence of diphtheria, tuberculosis, and typhus, and a horrendous infant mortality rate. In 1945 in Berlin, the infant mortality rate stood at approximately 60 per 1,000, compared to the norm in industrial countries of 9-12 per 1,000.<sup>241</sup> The rampant crime, noted above, also contributed to the chaos and hardship of everyday life immediately after the war.

## 5.2 - Red Army abuses.

Attempting to eke out a living was a primary issue for the majority of the population, but was overshadowed by concerns for personal safety. The 5 Soviet armies that occupied the eastern zone brought with them primitive feelings of revenge for the brutality of the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union, feelings that could be unleashed in

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<sup>240</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 45.

<sup>241</sup> Dennis Bark, David Gress, *From Shadow to Substance 1945-63* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 131.

their role as unchallenged conqueror. Isaac Deutscher, a post-war journalist and later Stalin biographer, wrote in October 1945 about the Soviet zone: "Even now questions of high politics are of little concern to the German civilian compared to the pressing daily problems of personal security for himself and especially for his wife or daughter."<sup>242</sup>

Deutscher hinted at who bore the brunt of the revenge: the women of the eastern zone. The rape of German women by Red Army soldiers, which began well before the war ended during the advance on East Prussia, is now beginning to take its place in the historiography of East Germany as a major historical occurrence.<sup>243</sup> The sheer extent of rape has suggested to Norman Naimark that it was a "systematic expression of revenge and power over the enemy [...] deeply rooted in socio-psychology."<sup>244</sup> Although there were numerous instances of Soviet brutality against German women, one example in particular demonstrates the baseness of Soviet conduct. A Soviet army hospital for patients with syphilis granted permission for the patients to have an evening out in the nearby Brandenburg town. The outing turned grotesque when the patients proceeded to attack and rape local townspeople. For a long period thereafter, nobody in the district left their house at night.<sup>245</sup> Red Army abuses were

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<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p.55.

<sup>243</sup> See the excellent chapter "Soviet Soldiers, German Women, and the Problem of Rape," in Naimark, *The Russians*, pp.69-140.

<sup>244</sup> Norman Naimark, "Die Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland und die Frage des Stalinismus", *ZfG* 43 (1995), p. 294.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

also prevalent in other regions of the Soviet zone. Robert Murphy, the American political advisor for Germany with the rank of Ambassador, commenting on the situation in Berlin stated that according to reliable reports, the "majority of the eligible female population" had been violated.<sup>246</sup> In Thuringia, the LDPD reported that the population lived in fear because of attacks by Red Army soldiers.<sup>247</sup> The incidence of rape was drastically reduced after 1947 due to a SMAD order curtailing contact between the Red Army and the German population,<sup>248</sup> but the experience left a scarring legacy. As Naimark has concluded: "It is important to establish the fact that women in the Eastern zone [...] shared an experience for the most part unknown in the West, the ubiquitous threat and the reality of rape, over a prolonged period of time."<sup>249</sup> As the female population in the zone outnumbered the male population by about 3 million, this was an issue that affected a clear majority of the population.

The incidence of rape caused a loathing of the occupying force and had serious consequences for the Soviet partner, the SED. Soviet reports indicated that even some SED members despised the Russians because of their attacks on German women.<sup>250</sup> The SED was aware of the effect the

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<sup>246</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 80. Estimates on the number of German women raped varies widely, from about 30,000 to 2 million. Naimark, "Die Sowjetische," p. 296.

<sup>247</sup> *Archiv des Deutschen Liberalismus* (hereafter ADL), LDPD #14802. April 1946 report from LDP Kreisverband Langensalza.

<sup>248</sup> Naimark, "Die Sowjetische," p. 294.

<sup>249</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 107.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

occupation was having on their political fortune. Fred Oelssner, the head of the Agitprop department in the Central Committee of the KPD, stated: "People have already talked about the attacks of the Russians, they happen and they hurt us."<sup>251</sup> Max Fechner echoed his thoughts: "It [the issue of rape] hurts us [i.e. the SED]."<sup>252</sup> One member of the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKWD), Berut von K ugelgen, also suggested that the Red Army was not helping the Communist cause in Germany, stating that it would have been better for the KPD "if the war had ended before Red Army troops had entered Germany."<sup>253</sup> Hermann Matern indirectly pointed to the tie between the SED's unpopularity and the problem of rape when he commented on the abysmal result for the SED in the 1946 Berlin elections: "We could not, despite all our efforts in this direction, win over the women."<sup>254</sup> Outside of Berlin, local SED groups also complained of their inability to win over women to the KPD. The SED in Kreis Freiberg reported on 13 August 1946 that it was having "tremendous difficulties" getting women to stand for election for the SED.<sup>255</sup> A report from the town of Gohlis offered an explanation for the difficulties, stating that not one woman would stand for the SED in Gohlis because of the present "insecurity."<sup>256</sup> The SED in Radeburg even went

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/908, p.88. 31 August 1946 summary of reports from the SED in 18 *Gemeinden* in Saxony.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 88

so far as to put on their election list one female farmer, who was not a member of the SED, as bait for other women.<sup>257</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is important to emphasize that the brutality of the Soviet occupation caused large sections of the population to view with hostility both the Soviets and their allies in Germany, the SED.

### 5.3 - The NKWD

The widespread incidence of rape was not the only reason that the Soviet occupation was harsh. The conduct of the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKWD) also contributed to a hardening of the population's attitude towards the Soviets and their German helpers. The NKWD arrived in Germany with the Soviet troops and established offices throughout eastern Germany by the end of 1945. NKWD tasks in the Soviet zone were similar to those in the Soviet Union: to secure the Soviet state against real and potential threats. The NKWD was thus to be informed of, and to control all, branches of life in the SBZ, a task made easier by its control of the SMAD branch for civilian affairs.<sup>258</sup> Lieutenant-General Ivan Serov led the NKWD troops in eastern Germany on an intense campaign to remove resistance, real or suspected, to Soviet policies for eastern Germany. Initially, the main targets were SPD members who fought against fusion with the KPD, and underground *Werwolf* groups which were suspected of planning a terrorist campaign

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>258</sup> The Russian archives have yet to release the documents of the civilian affairs branch of SMAD.

against the occupying forces.<sup>259</sup> These targets soon gave way to widespread, fairly random arrests.

The extent of the arrests was visible in the NKWD "Special Camps" system. At first, Nazi and war criminals made up the majority of prisoners in the eleven camps of the Soviet zone. Indeed, all Allies had agreed that camps on German soil were to be set up as prisons for Nazi and war criminals.<sup>260</sup> By 1946 a number of political opponents and other innocent individuals found themselves in the camps of the eastern zone, especially youths suspected of *Werwolf* activities.<sup>261</sup> Present estimates suggest that the camp system contained about 120,000 prisoners between 1945 and 1949, of which approximately 42,000 died<sup>262</sup> although some estimates range as high as 240,000 inmates of which 95,000 died. The deaths were caused primarily by the dreadful living conditions.<sup>263</sup> Although the estimates vary, they are consistent in that they reveal a death rate among inmates of between 35 and 40%.

The arbitrary arrests and camp system caused much

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<sup>259</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 382.

<sup>260</sup> See "Berichte über sowjetische Internierungslager in der SBZ", DA 22 (1990): 1804-1810; Achim Kilian "Die "Mühlberg-Akten" im Zusammenhang mit dem System der Speziallager des NKWD der UdSSR", DA 26 (1993): 1138-1159.

<sup>261</sup> Barbara Kühle, Wolfgang Titz, *Speziallager Nr. 7 Sachsenhausen 1945-1950* (Berlin: Brandenburgisches Verlagshaus, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>262</sup> The 11 camps were located in Bautzen, Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, Buchenwald, Frankfurt/Oder, Fünfeichen bei Neubrandenburg, Jamlitz bei Lieberose, Ketschendorf bei Fürstenwalde, Mühlberg bei Riesa, Sachsenhausen, Torgau, and Weesow bei Werneuchen; Kühle/Titz, p. 7.

<sup>263</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 378.



(Source: Barbara Kuhle, Wolfgang Titz, Speziallager Nr. 7 Sachsenhausen 1945-50 (Berlin: Brandenburgisches Verlagshaus, 1990), inside front co

duress in the population. When marching prisoners between camps, NKWD officers would often arrest people off the street to make up for prisoners who escaped along the way, which caused general panic in the population at the sight of these marching columns.<sup>264</sup> In October 1946, several groups in Eisfeld wrote directly to the Soviet authorities requesting the release of youths who had been arrested in the region.<sup>265</sup> Similarly, parents flooded Otto Buchwitz, the leading SED member in Saxony, with letters regarding the whereabouts of their missing children after he successfully petitioned SMAD for the release of 500 other detained youths.<sup>266</sup> The deep fear of the occupying power was also revealed by farmers who were worried they would not be able to fill the quotas set by SMAD. One KPD member reporting on the situation in Saxony with regard to agricultural quotas stated: "The orders are central ones [i.e. from SMAD in Karlshorst]. In other words the local Soviet commander himself is enormously fearful lest they not be carried out. This fear has caused clashes in the villages, which always become unpleasant affairs."<sup>267</sup> The hostility in the population to the NKWD was not lost on the Soviet authorities in Germany. In November 1947, General Major I.S. Kolesnichenko, head of SMAD in Thuringia, stated in a letter to General-Lieutenant Makarov that the activities of the NKWD were a main reason behind the hostile

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<sup>264</sup> Kühle/Titz, p. 13.

<sup>265</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/4. October 1946 letter from the mayor of Eisfeld, the Antifa women's committee, and the Free German Youth to the Soviet authorities in Eisfeld.

<sup>266</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 390.

<sup>267</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 I 2/5/50, p. 20. 21 September 1945 report of KPD *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

attitude toward the Soviet occupiers, hastily adding that the NKWD was of course investigating properly and arrested only guilty individuals, but that the Germans were used to "another system of justice."<sup>268</sup>

The actions of the NKWD negatively affected popular support for the KPD/SED. The KPD in the town of Reichnau reported that the population was concerned because a woman had disappeared after threatening suicide out of fear of imminent arrest. The report concluded that "the rigorous measures of the GPU [this Soviet military intelligence branch was often confused with the NKWD] negatively affect the work of the [KPD] for the upcoming referendum. Perhaps we could determine if these actions are a result of orders from the central authority, or if we are dealing here with overzealous local GPU offices."<sup>269</sup> The SED could sense the waning of their political fortunes due to Soviet conduct. In April 1948, Grotewohl veiled the problem by blaming the West: "Western propaganda about the supposed wave of arrests and lack of freedom seriously undermine the SED's authority in the zone and in Germany as a whole."<sup>270</sup> The disregard for basic rights which characterized the Soviet occupation clearly undermined the legitimacy of the SED.

## 6 - The first elections in the Soviet Occupied Zone

The elections of 1946 provided an opportunity, albeit limited, for the population to pronounce judgement on developments in the eastern zone. In the elections to the

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<sup>268</sup> Naimark, "Die Sowjetische," p. 298.

<sup>269</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, RY1 I 2/5/50, p. 20. 21 September 1945 report of KPD *Bezirk* secretaries on the progress of the land reform.

<sup>270</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p.391.

*Gemeinde* councils between 1 and 15 September, the SED obtained 57.1% of the overall vote, compared to 21.1% for the LDPD and 18.7% for the CDU.<sup>271</sup> The reasons for the SED success at the *Gemeinde* level are varied. One of the reasons for the SED success was, as noted in the land reform discussion above, its ability to gain some support from the land reform. A more important factor, however, was the difficulty the other parties encountered in standing candidates for election.<sup>272</sup> In Kreis Döbeln, only 3 out of 39 Orte were able to get their CDU candidate approved by SMAD, meaning that it was not possible to vote for the CDU in 36 localities in Döbeln. CDU Land committees complained of similar occurrences in Thuringia and Mecklenburg.<sup>273</sup> In the Central Block sitting of 22 August 1946, Kaiser formally complained of the difficulties the CDU encountered in registering their local groups.<sup>274</sup> In many regions where the CDU and LDPD could not stand candidates, the population expressed its displeasure with the SED by spoiling their ballots. The number of spoiled ballots was often equal to or higher than the number of SED votes.<sup>275</sup> Further barriers to

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<sup>271</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 51. The SED received 5,093,144 votes overall, the CDU and LDPD 3,553,939.

<sup>272</sup> The right to active vote applied to everyone over 18, while the right to passive vote applied to everyone over 21 who had not been a member of the SS or SD and was not a war criminal; SAPMO-BA, ZPA, I 1/2/90, p. 7. Minutes from the first Reichskonferenz of the KPD, 2 and 3 March 1946.

<sup>273</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 51; Gradl, p. 73; Conze, p. 107; Mattedi, pp. 88-89.

<sup>274</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 22 August 1946; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 163

<sup>275</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 51.

the non-Marxist parties were the uneven distribution of the limited paper supply in favour of the SED,<sup>276</sup> and SMAD arrests of some of the more popular non-Marxist candidates.<sup>277</sup>

At the *Land* and *Kreis* elections of 20 October 1946, the CDU and LDPD improved their count because registration of candidates by SMAD was not necessary.<sup>278</sup> As a result, the SED was not able to win over 50% of the vote in any province. Between the elections, the SED lost 430,000 votes and the CDU/LDPD gained 750,000, although the CDU and LDPD still did not have candidates in all ridings.<sup>279</sup> At the *Kreis* level, the SED received 50.1% of the vote, the CDU 25.2%, and the LDPD 18.6%. At the *Land* level, the SED received 47.6%, the LDPD 24.6% and the CDU 24.5%. In the provincial assemblies of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt, the bourgeois parties received a majority over the SED and its coalition partner the Association for Farmer Mutual Assistance (VdgB). The elections of the fall of 1946 returned the following mandates to the provincial assemblies:

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<sup>276</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 51; Conze, p. 106; Bloch, pp. 74-75.

<sup>277</sup> See the statement of Aloys Schaefer in Brigitte Kaff (ed.), "Gefährliche politische Gegner": *Widerstand und Verfolgung in der sowjetischen Zone/DDR* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1995), p. 197.

<sup>278</sup> Agethen, "Der Widerstand," p. 25.

<sup>279</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 52.

	Seats obtained in Provincial Assembly			
	SED	CDU	LDPD	VdgB*
Brandenburg	44	31	20	5
Mecklenburg	45	31	11	3
Saxony	59	28	30	2
Saxony-Anhalt	51	24	33	2
Thuringia	50	19	28	3

\* *Vereinigung der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe* (Association for Farmer Mutual Assistance.)<sup>280</sup>

(Source: McCauley, p. 31.)

Due to the difficulty in getting accurate numbers on the election,<sup>281</sup> it may not be possible to know the true results of the vote, but there are clear indications that the vote count was adjusted in favour of the SED prior to the release of the results. An internal report of the party control commission of the SED in Mecklenburg discussing the October 1946 vote stated that the bourgeois parties had outpolled the SED in *Kreis Güstrow*, *Hagenow*, *Ludwigslust*,

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<sup>280</sup> The VdgB was founded in November 1945 as an agricultural cooperative. By 1946, it had become an SED-dominated organization in the countryside throughout the Soviet zone, and was permitted to stand candidates for the fall election. See Naimark, *The Russians*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>281</sup> Peter Lapp's study on East German election practices (Peter Lapp, *Wahlen in der DDR* (Berlin: Holzapfel, 1982)) was published before access to archival material, and thus had to rely on official SED statistics. Since 1989, more information on the extent to which the elections were manipulated has been trickling out of the archives, but information on the early elections remains scarce.

Neubrandenburg, and Greifswald.<sup>282</sup> The official statistics, however, showed a very close race with the SED ahead in all of these *Kreise*, except Ludwigslust.

That the SED was able to obtain only approximately 50% of the vote under extremely favourable conditions suggests that the party did not enjoy overwhelming support in the population. The vote in Berlin and the subsequent reaction of the SED and the Soviets to the first elections in the Soviet zone provide further evidence of the SED's unpopularity, despite the seemingly desirable results of the election. Due to the four power status of Berlin, the SED was forced to run against the SPD and the bourgeois parties without enjoying any advantages. The results were a shock even to opponents of the SED. The SED finished in third place behind the SPD and the CDU, obtaining 19.8% of the vote, compared to the SPD at 48.7%, the CDU at 22.2% and the LDPD at 9.3%. The SED performed best in the Soviet sector of the city, but still only managed 29.9% compared to the SPD's 43.6% of the vote.<sup>283</sup> The Berlin vote clearly demonstrated that the SED could not win an open and fair election in the Soviet zone of Germany. Ulbricht showed his displeasure at the results of the elections and signalled that the non-Marxist parties had been too successful by stating: "The growth of reactionary tendencies in the CDU and LDP requires a strengthening of the SED and close cooperation with these parties, in order to beat back the reactionary influences in

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<sup>282</sup> *Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv* (hereafter MLHA), IV L 2/4/1214, Landesleitung der SED Mecklenburg LPKK.

<sup>283</sup> Broszat/Weber, pp. 422-423.

the bourgeois-democratic circles."<sup>284</sup>

The Soviets were already so concerned by the results of the *Gemeinde* elections that, without waiting for the *Land* and *Kreis* election results, they formed a Central Committee Commission to investigate the poor results. During a conference between the Commission and Colonel Sergei Tiul'panov's propaganda administration in SMAD, several members of SMAD put forward explanations for the SED's poor showing at the *Gemeinde* elections, not, as the numbers might suggest, its relative success. Like Ulbricht, Tiul'panov targetted his anger at the CDU and LDPD,<sup>285</sup> revealing that those parties had indeed gained much influence in the population. Both SMAD and the SED must have been especially displeased with the results of cities with a high percentage of working class voters such as Leipzig, Dresden, Zwickau, Plauen, Halle, Jena, Erfurt and Bautzen where the CDU and the LDPD received more votes.<sup>286</sup> The Commission's report to the Central Committee on 11 October further demonstrated Soviet disappointment in the first election results by pointing out "serious deficiencies" in SMAD's propaganda administration, and concluding that virtually all of its leaders should be replaced.<sup>287</sup> Clearly, the results of the elections were deeply troubling to the Soviet authorities in Germany.

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<sup>284</sup> Fritz Reinert, *Blockpolitik im Land Brandenburg 1945 bis 1950* (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für Politische Bildung Rosa Luxemburg, 1992), p. XXIX; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 52.

<sup>285</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p.332.

<sup>286</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 329; Fricke, *Opposition*, p.51.

<sup>287</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 335.

Political anti-Communist resistance in the first year of occupation was a response to transgressions against basic rights. This motivation for resistance was visible in the conduct of the CDU during the implementation of the land reform and the conduct of the SPD both during the fusion debates and in its underground resistance SPD groups in the Soviet Occupied Zone. LDPD resistance in this early phase of the Soviet Occupied Zone was noticeably absent, although the party did voice concerns about excesses in the land reform and excesses in the sequestering of factories. Participation in resistance activities by the broader population was negligible during the first year of occupation, primarily because the population was concerned with surviving the dreadful post-war conditions. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the SED did not have a solid basis of support in the population. The results of the fall 1946 elections and subsequent reaction by SMAD and the SED attest to this point. To explain popular reluctance to strongly endorse the SED, the nature of the Soviet occupation must be addressed. The widespread incidence of rape and the wanton conduct of the NKWD severely undermined the legitimacy of the SED in the Soviet zone. The infringements on basic rights by the Soviet authorities in Germany provoked a hostile climate of opinion toward the Soviet partner in Germany, the SED.

Chapter Two: The implementation of the Communist dictatorship and the development of resistance from the fall of 1946 to the founding of the GDR in October 1949.

## 1. The implementation of the Communist dictatorship 1946-1947

### 1.1 - The provincial constitutions.

On first consideration, the presence of articles in the provincial constitutions dealing with basic rights might suggest that the SED supported these rights. However, the process leading to the tabulation of the constitutions reveals the extent to which the SED merely paid lip service to guaranteeing basic rights for eastern Germans, and to the importance of the non-Marxist parties in securing mention of basic rights in the constitutions. Furthermore, the constitutional debates demonstrate that the SED was preparing for the establishment of a dictatorship in eastern Germany by insisting that a separation of powers not be included in the provincial constitutions.

The drafting of a constitution for each province was one of the first tasks of the newly elected representatives. This task was made possible by SMAD Order Number 332 of 27 November 1946 which granted provincial assemblies the power to enact laws.<sup>1</sup> The name of the provincial committee responsible for drafting a constitutional proposal to submit before the plenum differed from province to province. In Thuringia, the "justice committee" was responsible for the draft, whereas in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt, the

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Braas, *Die Entstehung der Länderverfassungen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1946-1947* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987), p. 90.

committee responsible for the constitution was named the "justice and constitutional committee." In Saxony and Mecklenburg, the "constitutional committee" received the task of drafting a constitution.<sup>2</sup> The committees were staffed according to the relative strengths of the parties in the assemblies. The SED headed the committees responsible for the constitution in Thuringia (Karl Hermann), Saxony-Anhalt (Erich Besser), and Saxony (Wilhelm Koenen), while the CDU provided the leadership in Mecklenburg (Werner Jöhren) and Brandenburg (Frank Schleusener).<sup>3</sup>

Between December 1946 and February 1947, the deliberations of the committees were brought to an end and constitutions for each province were issued. Of particular interest for this study of resistance are the sections of the constitutions which dealt with basic rights and the judicial system. The articles dealing with basic rights varied considerably between constitutions. The constitutions of Saxony-Anhalt, Mecklenburg, and Saxony attached separate sections with lengthy discussions on basic rights, while the constitutions of Brandenburg and Thuringia included only cursory mention of basic rights under the broader section: "The Democratic Construction of the Province."<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> The constitutional committee was one of a number of committees formed by the provincial assemblies. The Saxony-Anhalt assembly formed 11 committees, Thuringia and Brandenburg had 12 each, Mecklenburg 14, and Saxony 15. The most important of these committees, common to all provinces, were the budget, procedural, finance, culture, education, youth, economy, trade, and supply committees; *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>4</sup> The constitutions for each province are reprinted in Braas, pp. 480-537. In the Thuringian constitution, basic rights were dealt with in one line in Article 3 of Section A "Demokratischer Aufbau des Landes." The line read: "The

discrepancy was a result of the different workings of the individual constitutional committees. The Thuringian and Brandenburg committees began work immediately after the elections of the fall of 1946 and as a result, discussions in those committees revolved around the initial draft proposal for a constitution which had been issued by the SED leadership in Berlin, and which did not contain a catalogue of basic rights. Neither the CDU nor the LDPD in those provinces had received a constitutional proposal from the party leadership. Before the issuance of the constitutions, the CDU leadership did manage to get basic rights acknowledged in both constitutions, but due to its late appeals the CDU had to content itself with basic rights as a sub-category, rather than as a complete and separate catalogue of basic rights.<sup>5</sup>

Because the constitutional committees in Saxony-Anhalt, Mecklenburg, and Saxony took up their work later, the CDU leadership in Berlin was able to provide to the CDU in those 3 provinces a counter-proposal to the SED's initial draft.

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limits of the state's authority lie in the recognition of freedom of the individual, freedom of belief and conscience, freedom of expression and freedom of science. These freedoms can be limited only within the framework of the law." Brandenburg's constitution had a more extensive list of basic rights, but these were also included under Section A entitled "Demokratischer Aufbau." Article 6 of Section A read: "The state's power is limited within the legal framework by basic rights. These rights are: freedom of the individual, freedom of expression, freedom of belief and conscience, freedom of science and its teachers, freedom of election, freedom of assembly, freedom to strike, freedom to vote, freedom of place of residence, freedom of movement, guarantee of mail privacy. A right to resistance exists against laws which run counter to morality and humanity." In Article 4 of the same section, the equality of citizens before the law was also guaranteed.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-112; p. 134; p. 147.

The main difference between the proposals was the CDU's inclusion of a catalogue of basic rights. Equipped with the CDU draft as comparison, the non-Marxist parties strongly objected to the SED draft because of its disregard for basic rights, an objection that found resonance even among some SED members. As a result of the objections, the SED leadership in Berlin withdrew the initial draft it had issued, and issued a second draft which contained a separate catalogue of basic rights.<sup>6</sup>

The primary goal of the CDU in its push for basic rights was to ensure that the state's power could not be used in a manner which would infringe on the basic rights of the citizen. In so far, the CDU was seemingly successful in protecting the citizen against a government that abused its authority, as every constitution contained at least mention of basic rights and a clause which "limited the state's authority to where it infringed" on these basic rights.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 134. At the Central Block sitting of 5 January 1947, the CDU suggested 22 further improvements to the SED's second constitutional proposal, including the expansion of the catalogue of basic rights to include right to assembly, postal security, and to choose one's place of residence, and an economic plan which would treat Germany as a whole. The SED accepted the expanded catalogue of rights - some of these rights were included in the Brandenburg constitution despite the fact that the constitutional committee had essentially finished its work by then - and the economic plan, but rejected other CDU demands such as the call for private schools to be permitted, for a constitutional ruling on the dispossessions in the eastern zone, and for religion in schools; Braas, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> See the provincial constitutions in Braas, pp. 480-537. The Brandenburg and Thuringian constitutions have been discussed above. All other constitutions contained a separate section entitled: "Basic Rights and Basic Obligations of the Citizen." In Saxony-Anhalt's constitution, this was Section B, in Mecklenburg's, Section II, and in Saxony's, Section B.

Only in Brandenburg did the constitution go further and proclaim the right to resistance against laws which "contravened morality and humanity."<sup>8</sup> The CDU soon learned that simply mentioning basic rights in a constitution did not guarantee the citizen against a state abusing its authority.

The articles in the constitutions dealing with the judiciary were uniform throughout the Soviet zone. All constitutions proclaimed the independence of the judiciary by outlining that the judiciary was not subordinate to any one party, but solely to the constitution. However, because the SED rejected the CDU's desire for a constitutionally outlined separation of powers, there was no mention of a supreme court in any constitution. There were, however, other bodies prescribed to ensure the legal conduct of the government. All 5 constitutions stipulated bodies to monitor the administration called *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeiten*. In Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt, the task of these bodies was to protect the citizen against "excessive regulations and decrees of the provincial administration." In Mecklenburg and Saxony, it was limited to "verifying the lawfulness of the administration's decrees."<sup>9</sup>

There is cursory mention of a rudimentary supreme court in the constitutions of Saxony (Article 60), Saxony-Anhalt

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<sup>8</sup> In Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, the SED and LDPD rejected the right to resistance believing that this issue should be dealt with in a federal constitution. In Mecklenburg, no party broached the topic of resistance. In Saxony, the SED and LDPD preferred that the right of resistance not be included in the constitution. The CDU did not pursue the matter as it contented itself with the catalogue of basic rights; Braas, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

(Article 60), and Thuringia (Article 43).<sup>10</sup> In Thuringia, if at least one third of the provincial assembly doubted the constitutionality of certain laws, they would be examined by a special committee known as the *Verfassungsprüfungsausschuss* (Committee for Constitutional Review). The Committee for Constitutional Review consisted of the president of the provincial assembly as the head, the three vice presidents of the provincial assembly, and one member from the *Oberlandesgericht*, the *Oberverwaltungsgericht*, and from the Law Faculty at the University of Jena. The decisions of this committee were final.<sup>11</sup> In Saxony-Anhalt, if a judge doubted the constitutionality of a law, the law would be brought before the "justice and constitutional committee" for review. This committee was comprised of the president of the *Oberlandesgericht*, the president of the *Oberverwaltungsgericht*, and the dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Halle.<sup>12</sup> Saxony's constitution contained only brief mention of a mechanism to judge the constitutionality of laws. It stated that if judges questioned the legality of certain laws, the constitutional committee would review the law and make a suggestion to the provincial assembly, which would then hold a vote. There was no mention of who would comprise the constitutional

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Friedrich, "Aspekte der Verfassungsentwicklung und der individuellen (Grund)-Rechtsposition in der DDR," in Kaelble et al. (ed.), p. 485.

<sup>11</sup> Article 43 of the Thuringian constitution; Braas, p. 486.

<sup>12</sup> Article 60 of the Saxony-Anhalt constitution; *ibid.*, p. 498

committee.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 - The roots of the SED repression apparatus

### 1.2.1 - The development of the police

As the SED consolidated power, the force behind the guarantees for the basic rights in the constitution lessened. The emerging police state in the eastern zone progressed considerably in 1947 as the police came under the influence of the SED, and correspondingly began to take on tasks related to political crime. One police report characterized the new direction as follows: "In the anti-fascist democratic republic, it is necessary to develop a new order on the basis, and in the form, of complete democracy. The goals of this new order are the protection of the individual and his material assets, and the prevention of future evils against the state, community, and the individual."<sup>14</sup> However, no definition was given for "evil" in this context. An internal classified report on the situation in the police was more specific:

In our young republic [i.e. the Soviet zone - GB], the police are the first and only bearers of arms. They solve not only criminal and traffic matters, but rather I see one of their most important tasks as constantly protecting [...] against attacks on our young democratic state. The imperative precondition for this is the absolute political reliability of all of those in the service of the police.

There are clear signals in the police which are frighteningly similar to those in the developing stages of

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<sup>13</sup> Article 60 of the Saxony constitution; *ibid.*, p. 532.

<sup>14</sup> Eisert, p. 154.

the police in the Weimar Republic. If this development continues, there is a great danger that if a sudden political situation occurred, we [the SED-GB] would not have enough control of the police (uniformed as well as the criminal police), to use them as a protective instrument.<sup>15</sup>

The political transformation of the police resulted in regular crimes, and even non-crimes, becoming politicized, especially where the economy was concerned. A police report from 1947 suggested that the politicization of certain crimes was one reason for the unpopularity of the police: "The police are very often forced to take action against "hoarders" [*Klein-Hamsterei*] who sell their surplus to improve their food situation. Members of the police force are required to confiscate even the smallest amount. As the population does not understand the need for this, these police measures are seen as unjust treatment. It has even happened that "hoarders" and those who steal from fields etc. attack the police and their assistants."<sup>16</sup> In one case, police attempts to confiscate 3 horses led to much protest and a "threatening" crowd being formed, forcing the police to abandon their attempt at confiscation.<sup>17</sup>

The historian Richard Bessel has pointed to the reason for the unpopularity of the police, so candidly admitted in the above report. As Bessel has written: "The *Volkspolizei* during the later 40s and early 50s was increasingly occupied with problems to which the solutions gave the impression

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<sup>15</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/205, p.34. 10 August 1947 report: "Zur Lage in der Polizei" from Otto Hanschke, member of the executive of the Cottbus SED *Kreis*, department of police and justice, to the SED *Instrukteur* for Brandenburg, Pfeiffer.

<sup>16</sup> Bessel, p. 235.

<sup>17</sup> ACDP, II-204-055/4, KV Worbis. 10 May 1948 report from *Kreis* police leadership Mühlhausen to *Kreis* police office.

that they served a foreign political elite and a foreign occupation authority."<sup>18</sup> Bessel concluded that the *Volkspolizei* had to contend with legitimacy problems from the beginning.<sup>19</sup> This transformation of the police into a party weapon was not only unpopular in the population, but also within the police. An internal SED report complained:

Even purely from the attitude, one sees that the majority of police employees in the Cottbus police administration lack clear political direction. I also have reason to believe that this ill is present in other district administrations. In general, there is a negative attitude towards the Russian occupying power, which often takes on a dangerous look. It is mainly these members who also never see their tasks from a political perspective, and who reject or disapprove of any political activity by the police. In many cases they even sabotage such activity.

It is not uncommon to find cases of even high ranking police officers who, when we receive requests from the Russian occupying power, say: "Why should we work for the Russians? They steal from us too." Or they say: "The police has nothing to do with politics, the police must remain apolitical."<sup>20</sup>

The author of the report cited one example of such conduct. A member of the Berlin police force found an SPD *Ostbüro* pamphlet that made fun of Pieck, Grotewohl, and the Russians. Instead of destroying the pamphlet, the police officer passed it first around the office and then to another police station, before somebody reported the incident. The author complained how widely spread the pamphlet had been before someone reported the incident:

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<sup>18</sup> Bessel, p. 235.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>20</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/205, p.34. 10 August 1947 report from Otto Hanschke, member of the executive of the Cottbus SED Kreis, department police and justice, to Pfeiffer, SED Instrukteur for Brandenburg.

"What use is our work of informing the public, and what use are our threats against people who spread these types of pamphlets, when, with the acquiescence of high ranking police officers, these types of things are possible in the police?"<sup>21</sup> Thus, by the late 1940s, both popular reaction to the *Volkspolizei*, and developments within the police itself, demonstrated a distrust of the power it served.

As the police became increasingly politicized throughout 1947, it also became more coordinated and centralized. This process was visible in the development of the border police (*Grenzpolizei*). In November 1946, each provincial police force formed a separate department for the border police, which took over the task of patrolling the borders of the eastern zone originally held by the Soviet occupation troops. Initially, the border police units of the provinces were poorly clothed, armed, and housed, and the organization of the units differed between provinces. To unify the work of the border police, SMAD issued orders in September 1947 to coordinate the various provincial border police.<sup>22</sup> The Central Administration of the Interior (DVdI) assumed overall authority for the border police the following year. The coordination of the police was aided significantly by the creation of an internal telex network (*Fernschreibernetz*) for the entire zone by August 1947.<sup>23</sup>

Despite greater coordination and centralization, material difficulties still plagued the police. In Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg, only 10-15% of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/270, p.421. 21 October 1947 annual report for head of the *Schutzpolizei* on the *Schutzpolizei*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

police force had the solid blue *Schutzpolizei* uniforms which became standard attire with the founding of the DVdI in 1946. Police vehicles were characterized as an "urgent necessity,"<sup>24</sup> and socks and shoes were also in high demand.<sup>25</sup>

The most important step in the creation of the SED's political police was the expansion of the fifth department of the criminal police (K-5) in 1947. K-5, originally led by Ernst Lange until August 1948 when it was taken over by Erich Jamin, was formed immediately after the war to monitor the police force and judicial system for unreliable elements.<sup>26</sup> Following the announcement of SMAD Order Number 201 on denazification in August 1947, K-5's importance grew as it became responsible for removing former active Nazis still in leading positions in state, societal, and economic administrations. K-5's duties went beyond denazification though, as demonstrated by the vice president of the DVdI Erich Mielke's definition of its task as the defence of "the democratic institutions [...] and economic rebuilding of the Soviet occupied zone from attempts to undermine them."<sup>27</sup> K-5's internal divisions also indicate the extent of its duties: 1) political crimes, including violation of SMAD orders, 2) violations of Allied Control Council directives, 3) sabotage of the rebuilding, 4) antidemocratic activity, and 5) general technical matters.<sup>28</sup> K-5's duties were such

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0005. 9 September 1948 report on DVdI by "reliable source."

<sup>27</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 360.

<sup>28</sup> Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR (hereafter

that its leaders made clear that no one who had been employed in the Gestapo or SD would be permitted to work in K-5. This did not apply in other branches of the criminal police.<sup>29</sup>

SPD activity in the Soviet zone preoccupied K-5. Indeed, when K-5 was founded, Erich Mielke claimed that the greatest danger to the democratic rebuilding would come from "Schumacher agents."<sup>30</sup> In its yearly report for 1947, K-5 in Saxony reported that beginning in the summer of 1947, a "massive distribution" of SPD pamphlets was taking place in the Soviet zone.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the previous year, K-5 reported that the SPD was conducting "systematic work" against the SED, which reached its zenith with the distribution of the SPD newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung* during the SED provincial party conference in Dresden.<sup>32</sup> In comparison to 1946, K-5 in Saxony reported that the number of incidents of SPD pamphlets or graffiti had risen from 160 to 536.<sup>33</sup> K-5 was pleased to report, however, that Order Number 201 had reduced the incidence of SPD activity. This admission suggests that Order Number 201 served a dual purpose: To bring to an end the denazification process in

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BStU), Zentralarchiv (hereafter ZA), *Allgemeine Sachablage* (hereafter AS) 229/66, pp. 372-373. 8 January 1948 overview of K-5 duties in K-5 yearly report for 1947 signed by Nindl, head of K-5 for Saxony.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 365. 13 January 1948 yearly report for 1947 for K-5 Saxony.

<sup>30</sup> Fricke, *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p. 374. 13 January 1948 yearly report for 1947 for K-5 Saxony.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

the Soviet zone, and eliminate political opponents.

There is some evidence to suggest that K-5 was also excessive in carrying out the denazification aspects of Order Number 201.<sup>34</sup> The Mecklenburg police leadership admitted that the police often charged alleged Nazi criminals with crimes much more severe than they had actually committed. The police leadership explained this behaviour by the fact that the investigative units were mostly comprised of those who had suffered severely at the hands of the Nazis, and who were therefore sometimes "excessive."<sup>35</sup> The excesses also likely undermined the fortunes of the SED. As the police chief of Schwerin stated: "It might reach a point where the methods of the investigative units could burden us as a party."<sup>36</sup>

K-5 reported directly to the Soviet security forces in Germany, but was housed in the DVdI in Berlin. DVdI's responsibility for K-5 was part of the general centralization of the criminal police branches under the German administration of the interior, which had taken place by March 1947. After this point, the provincial ministers of the interior exerted little control over the direction of the police, responsible instead for simply carrying out DVdI orders.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/441, pp.34, 36. Protocol of 3 February 1948 meeting of the Mecklenburg provincial Volkspolizei.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 361.

### 1.2.2 - The Intelligence and Information Department.

In October 1947, in order to be better informed about the general situation in the eastern zone, Ulbricht suggested to SMAD that an information and intelligence service be established within the DVdI. Upon SMAD's acceptance of the idea, the Intelligence and Information Department (*Abteilung Nachrichten und Information*) was established under Mielke in the DVdI on 11 November 1947. Mielke felt that the new department should inform the population of government measures, but that it should also be able to inform the government on the general attitude in the zone.<sup>38</sup> The SED explanation for the creation of the Intelligence and Information Department suggests that oppositional behaviour within the SPD and the non-Marxist parties was on the rise in 1947. The SED stated that "certain elements" were trying to destroy co-operation within the united party, and that "reactionary groups" within the non-Marxist parties were suppressing the "progressive" members of the parties.<sup>39</sup> The SED then suggested that the Soviet zone had to be equipped with the necessary tools to fight these tendencies: "All efforts to tear apart these forces [i.e. - those who supported close work between the KPD, SPD, and the non-Marxist parties] will be fought by Democracy [through] the further expansion of agencies into institutions which [...] will defend against

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<sup>38</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, pp. 364-365.

<sup>39</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p.267. 11 November 1947 report: "Aufbau einer Abteilung Nachrichten und Information in der DVdI."

all attacks by reactionaries."<sup>40</sup> Both K-5 and the Intelligence and Information Department had as a primary goal the removal of political opponents, particularly in underground SPD groups and among oppositional members of the non-Marxist parties.

The Intelligence and Information Department was under the control of the information offices in the individual provinces (*Landesnachrichtenämter*).<sup>41</sup> These offices had previously focused on gleaning information from newspapers and transmitting government resolutions to the press, rather than monitoring occurrences in the population.<sup>42</sup> Following the addition of the Intelligence and Information Department, the information offices influenced public opinion by planting articles and photos in newspapers, and monitored the population through a network of informants. The *Landesnachrichtenämter* were to "take the pulse of all internal developments, come up with a diagnosis and when necessary, prescribe the most effective 'medicine.'" <sup>43</sup> By 1947, the German Central Administration of the Interior had become a powerful instrument of the SED to further its agenda in eastern Germany.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., AS 238/66, pp. 343-344. An undated report on K-5 duties lists the main targets as underground SPD groups, "enemies in licensed political parties," religious sects and fascist organizations.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>42</sup> BStU, ZA, Sekretariat des Ministers (Hereafter SdM) 324, p. 23. 29 July 1947 letter from Dünow of the press office to Mielke.

<sup>43</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p. 280. 11 November 1947 report: "Aufbau einer Abteilung Nachrichten und Information in der DVdI."

### 1.3 - The SED takeover of the judicial system.

The SED accompanied its takeover of the police apparatus in the Soviet zone with manoeuvring to gain control of the judicial apparatus. Of those students who attended the college to become "people's jurists" in 1946 and 1947, 79.6% were SED members, 9.7% LDPD members, 6.2% CDU and 4.4% had no political affiliation.<sup>44</sup> The effect of SED dominance among students was not immediately obvious. By 1947, only 20% of judges and 28.2% of public prosecutors were SED members. By 1950, those percentages had risen to 54% and 87% respectively.<sup>45</sup> These new jurists dealt primarily with the sentencing of Nazi and war criminals, a task with which most courts in the Soviet zone were concerned after SMAD Order Number 201 quickened the denazification process. In 1947, 873 people had been tried as Nazi or war criminals in the Soviet zone, whereas in 1948 that number had risen to 4,549.<sup>46</sup> The SED presence at the trials was not only visible in the judges and lawyers, but in the jurors as well. The SED held classes to instruct jurors to see things "from the Party's viewpoint."<sup>47</sup>

Initially, the extent to which the SED used the

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<sup>44</sup> Andrea Feth, "Die Volksrichter," in Hubert Rottleuthner (ed.), *Steuerung der Justiz in der DDR* (Cologne: Bundesanzeiger Verlag, 1994), p. 358.

<sup>45</sup> The CDU and LDPD did agree to the SED's system of "people's justices" because of the necessity to rebuild the justice system in the wake of its infiltration by the Nazi party, but both parties felt that it must be a temporary measure; Feth, p. 369.

<sup>46</sup> Werkentin, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/441, p. 32. Protocol of 3 February 1948 meeting of the Mecklenburg provincial Volkspolizei.

judicial system in the Soviet zone for political purposes was limited. To a much larger degree, SMAD used the Soviet judicial system and occupation statutes to remove opponents of the SED in eastern Germany. The denazification process in eastern Germany provided an opportunity for SMAD to remove political opponents, based on an article in the Allied Control Council Directive 38 which permitted punishment of post-war crimes. Article III of Section II stated that individuals could be punished, who "after May 8 endangered the peace of the German people or of the world [...] by spreading National Socialist or militaristic propaganda, or by inventing and spreading tendentious rumours."<sup>48</sup> During the era of Soviet occupation, Soviet Military Tribunals (SMT), rather than German courts, were involved in the removal of political opponents. Soviet Military Tribunals in theory tried only crimes against the Soviet occupying power, but in practice crimes against the Soviet programme in Germany were also considered crimes against the occupying power. These cases were tried under Russian law, specifically Article 58 of the 1927 criminal code of the Russian Federated Socialist Republic which dealt with "counter-revolutionary activity."<sup>49</sup> The definitions of counter-revolutionary activity were vague enough to be applied broadly for Soviet political ends. For example, counter-revolutionary activities were considered "propaganda or agitation which incites the overthrow, undermining or weakening of Soviet political authority [...] as well as the spreading, production, or storing of materials with similar

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<sup>48</sup> Werkentin, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 106.

contents."<sup>50</sup> The maximum penalty for such crimes was execution, although the death penalty was banned under Soviet law from 26 May 1947 to 12 January 1950, during which time the maximum penalty was 25 years internment.<sup>51</sup> Until the founding of the GDR, the SED did not have to get its own hands dirty removing political opponents.<sup>52</sup>

#### **1.4 - The administrative framework of the Soviet occupied zone.**

There were several important administrative changes in 1947 which affected the emerging system of government in the eastern zone. First, there was a resolution of the spheres of competence between the provincial governments and the central administrations. In 1946, Zhukov had clearly stated that the central administrations did not possess the power to interfere in provincial jurisdiction. By the second half of 1947, as a result of the deepening tensions between the Soviet Union and the western Allies which suggested that the Soviet version of a united Germany would not materialize, SMAD reversed its position and raised the central administrations above the provincial governments as the highest German administrations in the zone.<sup>53</sup> Second, as part of the centralization process, SMAD also set up the German Economic Commission (*Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission - DWK*) to coordinate the economic development of the Soviet

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<sup>50</sup> Excerpts of Article 58 are reprinted in Fricke, *Politik*, pp.106-109.

<sup>51</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> Werkentin, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 50.

zone. The DWK was comprised of the presidents of the German central administrations for industry, transportation, fuel and energy, agriculture, and trade and supply, as well as the head of the Free German Federation of Unions and the Association for Mutual Farmer Assistance. Bruno Leuschner was appointed the temporary leader of the DWK, but was soon replaced by Heinrich Rau.<sup>54</sup> As the ultimate German authority on economic development in the zone, the DWK was an embryonic central government for the Soviet zone.<sup>55</sup>

## **2 - Resistance to Repression in the Soviet occupied zone.**

### **2.1 - The repressive nature of the Soviet occupation, 1947.**

While SMAD and the SED maneuvered to secure the SED's prominent place in the emerging Soviet zone government, the brutality and lawlessness of the Soviet occupation continued, turning the population against the Soviet occupiers and their German assistants. The wide occurrence of rape, outlined in the previous chapter, continued unabated in 1947, as did its accompanying negative effect in the population, until the winter of 1947-48 when the Soviets

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<sup>54</sup> Broszat/Weber, p. 282.

<sup>55</sup> There existed in the western zones a parallel to the DWK. In May 1947, the British and American occupation authorities established the "Bizonal economic council" in the unified American and British zones (Bizonia). The Bizonal economic council represented a quasi-government in Bizonia. It comprised 52 members from the provincial assemblies who were voted to the positions according to the relative strengths of the parties in the provincial assemblies; Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p.186.

restricted Red Army contact with the civilian population.<sup>56</sup> K-5's work also contributed to insecurity in the population, drawing comparisons between it and the Gestapo.<sup>57</sup>

Continuing NKWD excesses also caused underlying resentment of the occupying power. Reports from local CDU groups reflect the general insecurity surrounding Soviet arrests. In April 1947, CDU, LDPD, and SED members wrote to the Soviet authorities in Köppelsdorf saying that 11 youths had been arrested, forced to confess, and then sentenced. The party members requested their immediate release.<sup>58</sup> In May, a local Leipzig CDU group appealed to the party leadership for assistance in releasing a CDU member and four youths who had been wrongly arrested.<sup>59</sup> In Thuringia, the CDU complained to the central CDU leadership in Berlin that there had recently been a series of wrongful arrests and requested that the party leadership talk to SMAD in Karlshorst about the issue.<sup>60</sup> By December 1947, the Soviets themselves had become concerned about the effect of the arrests. General I.S. Kolesnichenko, head of SMAD in Thuringia, wrote to SMAD in Karlshorst saying that CDU and

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<sup>56</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> One SED member complained that the brutal methods of the criminal police caused the population to fear it as much as it had feared the Gestapo; Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 360

<sup>58</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/4, NL W. Seibert. 9 April 1947 letter from the CDU, LDPD, and SED to Soviet authorities in Köppelsdorf.

<sup>59</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/4, NL W. Seibert. 23 May 1947 letter from the CDU local group Libertwollkwitz-Saxony to the CDU Kreis leadership in Leipzig.

<sup>60</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/4, NL W. Seibert. 12 May 1947 letter from the CDU provincial association in Thuringia to the CDU in Berlin (Seibert.)

LDPD politicians sympathetic to the Soviet Union reported that the main reason for the hostility in the population toward the Soviets was the "activities of the NKWD."<sup>61</sup> Kolesnichenko suggested that the NKWD should make their arrests known publicly, as the secrecy surrounding arrests and internment was causing "great fear" in the German population.<sup>62</sup>

Letters from Germans in the eastern zone to Franz Neumann, the chair of the Berlin SPD, offer further insight into the insecurity in the population. The letters repeatedly complained about the use of force stating that it was urgent that the NKWD "special camps" be dissolved. One letter complained that the situation in the Soviet zone made the Nazi era look like "child's play." Another letter, after describing the attempts of one SPD member to fight the SED's "policy of force" which ended in his disappearance, pleaded: "How much longer must these conditions continue? Criminals control the situation here and the hypocrisy of democracy increases daily."<sup>63</sup> Neumann was already well informed about the injustices in the eastern zone and had often spoken out publicly against them. Throughout 1947, he gave speeches critical of the Soviet zone. At one speech in December, he indirectly compared the SED to the Nazis: "Where the SED rules, there is no political freedom. Where the SED rules, dictatorship rules. Where the SED rules, the concentration

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<sup>61</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 393.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> FNA, VII/3. May 1949 anonymous letter to Neumann; 4 June 1948 anonymous letter to Neumann; 20 April 1948 letter to Neumann from "the Comrades of the illegal SPD;" 19 March 1948 anonymous letter to Neumann.

camp rules."<sup>64</sup>

## 2.2 - SPD resistance.

The desire for democratic conditions in the Soviet zone was the primary motivation behind SPD resistance groups in 1947. These conditions included the guarantee of basic rights, such as freedom of opinion, assembly, and equality before the law. In 1947 an increased number of SPD resistance groups came into existence. The increased number of groups led to a vigorous campaign against the SPD under the guise of Order Number 201, as outlined above. The K-5 reports which indicated that SPD resistance increased in 1947 are supported by records in the Archive of Social Democracy in Bonn. The following discussion encompasses all SPD resistance groups or individuals which could be identified through archival sources.

For Heini Fritsche, the manner of the SED seizure of power was a primary motivation to resist. Fritsche, a rare contact for the SPD *Ostbüro* in the *Volkspolizei*, contacted the SPD at Ziethenstrasse in Berlin because he was disturbed by the arbitrary takeover of power which raised parallels in his mind to the Nazi seizure of power.<sup>65</sup> In Freital, Richard Netsch began a resistance group of roughly 20 former SPD members because of the lack of freedom and the "Nazi-like"

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<sup>64</sup> FNA, IX b 1, "Reden." Notes from speeches of 20 October 1947 and 12 December 1947.

<sup>65</sup> Fritsche was arrested on 15 August 1951 and sentenced to 25 years labour by an SMT. He spent 4 years of his sentence at the Siberian labour camp in Workuta before obtaining early release; Bärwald, p. 44.

conditions in the Soviet zone.<sup>66</sup> The inexperience of SPD members that took part in underground activity was again evident in Netsch's group. The SPD *Ostbüro*, which had as one of its main tasks the assistance of SPD resisters in the Soviet zone, continually sent couriers to Netsch to remind him to act furtively. The *Ostbüro* was especially alarmed that Netsch had sent it a list through the regular mail of all those involved in his group.<sup>67</sup>

Unjustified incarcerations by the Soviets was also a powerful reason behind SPD resistance. In Münchenbernsdorf, Thuringia, an SPD member organized illegal SPD work after witnessing the conduct of the NKWD.<sup>68</sup> Another SPD member listed the "25,000" in the NKWD's "special camp" at Buchenwald as his motivation to resist.<sup>69</sup> In Cottbus, an SPD group spread pamphlets demanding the release of the political prisoners in the eastern zone.<sup>70</sup> Other SPD members began working for the SPD *Ostbüro* not solely because of NKWD conduct, but because of the terror of the occupying power and "its SED assistants."<sup>71</sup> The deep insecurity in the zone

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<sup>66</sup> Walter et al. (ed.), p. 149.

<sup>67</sup> Netsch was arrested in 1951 and sentenced to prison. Other members of the group managed fled to the West; *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>68</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361. 26 May 1947 letter from an SPD member in Münchenbernsdorf.

<sup>69</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0046 a-g. 30 May 1949 report from a student.

<sup>70</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 27 July 1956 report on Gruppe Behnisch I and Gruppe Behnisch II; 15 July 1947 refugee report.

<sup>71</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 2 February 1954 report by Julius Brendenbeck.

was visible in an SPD group which provided the *Ostbüro* with information on which Germans were informants for the NKWD, in order that this information be broadcast into the Soviet zone as a warning for other Germans.<sup>72</sup> SPD members complained that these NKWD informants were "dirtier" than in the Nazi era.<sup>73</sup> SPD reports of 1947 repeatedly point out that this insecurity resulted in a deep distrust in the population towards the SED. According to one report, the population was especially bitter because instead of the promised socialism, "Russian fascism" was the order of the day.<sup>74</sup>

At the University of Jena, Wilhelm Wehner, Konrad Abel, and Günther Höfer took up contact with the *Ostbüro* of the SPD in August 1947 under the guise of the Kurt Henschke group.<sup>75</sup> Others who came to be involved with the group were Dr. Josef Witsch, a publisher, and Ricarda Huch, an author. Wehner was driven to resist by his belief in freedom of the individual,<sup>76</sup> and his concern for the Sovietization of Germany. Wehner was arrested in March 1948 and was sentenced

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<sup>72</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 19 July 1956 report on the Keil, Rost, Weck group.

<sup>73</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394. 3 April 1947 anonymous letter to Schumacher.

<sup>74</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. 24 July 1947 report. See also reports of 23 July 1948 and 4 June 1948.

<sup>75</sup> Waldemar Krönig, Klaus-Dieter Müller (eds.), *Anpassung, Widerstand, Verfolgung: Hochschule und Studenten in der SBZ und DDR 1945-1961* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1994), p. 259.

<sup>76</sup> Helmut Bärwald, "Terror als System," in Günter Scholz (ed.), *Verfolgt - verhaftet - verurteilt: Demokratie im Widerstand gegen die Rote Diktatur - Fakten und Beispiele* (Berlin: Westkreuz Verlag, 1990), p. 29.

by an SMT to 25 years labour after two years awaiting trial. Wehner was amnestied in June 1956.<sup>77</sup>

For some Social Democrats, the blatant example of the brutality of the occupation in the Wismut mining operation was a motive for resistance. Due to the importance for its development of an atomic bomb, the Soviet Union was pleased to discover that the Erzgebirge region of southern Saxony contained significant uranium deposits. By 1947, the Soviets had secured the area and had begun extensive mining operations. The Soviets realized that Germans would not readily volunteer for this work and thus conscripted roughly 100,000 Germans for the harsh work. Most workers were conscripted from the nearby large cities in Saxony, but the Soviets also conscripted labourers from as far away as Mecklenburg.<sup>78</sup> After learning of the forced labour in the uranium mines in southern Saxony and the miserable living standards, an SPD member of the SED attempted to address the issue within the party but was warned not to broach the subject.<sup>79</sup> He then travelled to Ziethenstrasse in Berlin, where he received various pamphlets, brochures, and copies of Schumacher's speeches for distribution in the Soviet zone. In return, he provided the *Ostbüro* with reports on the eastern zone and the situation within the SED.<sup>80</sup> The SPD member continued to spread pamphlets in the Soviet zone, including a brave distribution during the Leipzig fair in

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<sup>77</sup> Bärwald, *Das Ostbüro*, p. 40.

<sup>78</sup> For more on the Wismut mining operation, see Naimark, *The Russians*, pp. 238-250.

<sup>79</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 26 July 1956 report from "Source" on his arrest.

<sup>80</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 26 July 1956 report from "Source" on his arrest.

1947, until his arrest by the NKWD on 12 March 1948. During his trial, he gave an emotional speech in which he revealed his ultimate motive, stating: "Germany must finally be free!" The speech found little resonance with the judge who sentenced him. The SPD member spent 8 years in Bautzen prison before obtaining early release in 1956. While in Bautzen, he did not want for social democratic company, as numerous other SPD resisters were there at the same time, including Dieter Rieke, Albert Lebbin, Paul Schubert, Heinz Brennecke, Fritz Ohlman, and Paul Trautner. The social democrats in the prison were so numerous that other prisoners referred to them as the prison's own "SPD-Fraction."<sup>81</sup> The unjust imprisonments led to a small prisoners' revolt in Bautzen a few years later. In March 1951, prisoners waved towels out of windows and shouted: "We are not criminals!" to which people on the street shouted back their support.<sup>82</sup>

For Herbert Braun, a political commentator on Radio Leipzig from February 1947 to May 1948, the lack of freedom of expression was the impetus to engage in resistance. Braun joined the SPD in 1945 and the SED in 1946 in order to provide a "counterweight" to the Communists in the party. His manuscripts for the radio were continually subject to excessive censorship by the Soviet authorities. The ongoing censorship of his views, and the fact that from the end of 1947 the SED was becoming more dependent on the Soviets, caused Braun to request leave from his job as commentator in December 1947. In February 1948 he gave his last commentary on the radio, and in May left the station. Because he was

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> FNA, VII/3, "SBZ/DDR." Undated report from Georg Friedrich on his time in Bautzen.

"politically suspect," he was arrested by K-5 and brought to trial under accusations of spying for the western powers. As there was little evidence to support this accusation, the charge was changed to co-operation with the Nazis, but the jury found him innocent. In June, he and his family fled the Soviet zone and settled in Frankfurt.<sup>83</sup>

The infringement on freedom of expression was evident during the trial of an SPD member of the "Lukas Cranach" group in Weimar, to which Curt Eckhardt and Herbert Wehner also belonged. The SPD member on trial stated that he was innocent because the Soviet Occupied Zone was a democracy and therefore a variety of political persuasions were supposed to be allowed: "In every democracy of the West, this type of expression of opinion would not be punishable."<sup>84</sup> These pleas had little effect on the Soviet Military Tribunals. One SPD member even refused to have a lawyer at his trial stating that it would be "pointless in this system."<sup>85</sup>

SPD members were also driven to resist by the initial transformation of the SED into a Marxist-Leninist cadre party. The transformation of the SED into a Soviet style Communist Party, a "Party of a New Type," began in the summer of 1947 at the Second Party Congress (*Parteitag*) when the SED announced that parity in the party and government administrations was not necessary because there was no

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<sup>83</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0330I. 28 August 1948 personal account of Herbert Braun.

<sup>84</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 25 July 1946 report on the Soviet military tribunal arrest and sentencing.

<sup>85</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 24 July 1956 report by Hermann Fabian; 25 July 1956 report on SMT arrest and sentencing.

longer a difference between KPD and SPD members of the party.<sup>86</sup> SPD members in the party naturally showed little enthusiasm for this resolution. The SPD-dominated SED group in Gaschwitz stated that the resolution of the Second Party Congress did not aid the party in tackling the tasks ahead, as it undermined the unity of the working class.<sup>87</sup> On a trip through Thuringia in late 1947, Kurt Fischer, the president of the Central Administration of the Interior, noted that at a local gathering of the SED in Glauchau-Rothenback, a member of the party suggested that the leadership of the SED was wrong to embark on this course, and that it should follow Kurt Schumacher's vision of socialism. There was a similar occurrence in Kreis Rudolstadt where members of the SED stated: "We want to remain Marxists, but not become Leninists. We don't want to become Communists."<sup>88</sup> Evidently, the SPD presence in the SED was still strong in 1947.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Excerpts from SED report on the Second Party Congress; Hermann Weber, *Parteiensystem zwischen Demokratie und Volksdemokratie* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982), p. 84. At the fusion of the SPD and KPD, parity between the parties in the leading functions of the SED from Kreis up was guaranteed.

<sup>87</sup> "SED Ortsgruppe Gaschwitz an die Delegiertenkonferenz des Arbeitsgebietes Markkleeberg. 15.8.47"; Weber, *Parteiensystem*, pp.79-80.

<sup>88</sup> Frank Thomas Stössel, *Positionen und Strömungen in der KPD/SED 1945-1954* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1985), p. 339.

<sup>89</sup> FNA, VII/3 "SBZ/DDR." 25 April 1947 letter from Dresden. "We Social Democrats of Saxony are prevented from taking part as guests at your party conference from 25 to 27 April 1947 in Berlin due to the political conditions within the SBZ. In spite of this, we feel tied to you, although we presently work in the SED, and offer you our warmest

At the University of Jena, an active centre for resistance throughout the history of the GDR, Gustav Tzschach, an SPD member in the SED, founded an SPD resistance group in 1947 due to the changes in the SED, believing that the SED's path of "bolshevizing" Germany was harmful for the country. He believed in Social Democracy, but not Communism, which he stated clearly during the founding of the National Democratic Party of Germany's (NDPD) branch at the University of Jena. During the public founding at the university cafeteria, Tzschach stood up and declared: "What we need is not a national democratic party, but a social democratic party."<sup>90</sup> Another member of the group, Heinz Gunzler, left the SED after its proclamation of a "Party of a New Type" and joined the LDPD. For Tzschach and the others in the group, the transformation of the SED was part of the general trend in the eastern zone towards dictatorship and abuse of basic rights. The main topics that the group discussed at their secret meetings reflected their concerns: the transformation of the SED into a "Party of a New Type," the transferring of the Russian system onto Germany, the use of force to solve all problems, the increasing suppression of opinions, and the division of Germany.<sup>91</sup> The group contacted the SPD *Ostbüro* in order to receive instructions, and provide the *Ostbüro* with information on developments in the Soviet zone for

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greetings as socialists."

<sup>90</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0421. 16 May 1956 report on the activities that led to the arrest of the nine person SPD resistance group from Jena and Sonneberg in 1949.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

distribution.<sup>92</sup> It hoped that the western press would then bring international pressure to bear on the Soviet zone. Within the Soviet zone, the group spread information by word of mouth within the student body, believing this to be a more effective way than pamphlets of resisting the regime. In early 1949, the group was denounced and arrested, and subsequently tried by a Soviet Military Tribunal.<sup>93</sup>

The trend towards dictatorship in the SED even caused some ardent supporters of SPD-KPD fusion to engage in resistance. In Halle, a strong proponent of fusion became disillusioned with the SED and turned to Ziethenstrasse in order to establish an SPD resistance group in Saxony-Anhalt.<sup>94</sup> Paul Szillat, the SED mayor of Rathenow, also became disillusioned with the SED and began working for the western SPD until 1951 when he, his son, and five others were sentenced on counts of sabotage and "social democracy."<sup>95</sup> Ironically, Szillat served his sentence in the notorious prison in Brandenburg which had been built under

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Jena was not the only university that witnessed SPD resistance. The University of Halle also saw SPD activity during the latter half of the 1940s. An SPD group under Karl Frankenberger, a member of the student council, was formed after the war and remained active until 16 April 1947 when Frankenberger fled because of imminent arrest. Another group in Halle had been actively distributing pamphlets on behalf of the SPD from 1948 to 1950; AdSD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0368a-c Report on illegal work in Halle; *ibid.*, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394 17 April 1947 report of student Karl Frankenberger Haale/Saale.

<sup>94</sup> FNA, VII/3, "SBZ/DDR." 19 August 1946 report from the courier Kasperek to Franz Neumann.

<sup>95</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p.42.

his administration.<sup>96</sup> In Magdeburg, the pro-fusion Max Fank, a member of the SED Kreis executive in Stralsund and member of the Mecklenburg provincial assembly, was arrested on 9 March 1949 for his social democratic activity and sentenced to 25 years in a labour camp.<sup>97</sup>

The Soviets adopted strong methods to remove social democratic opponents in the party. During the Easter week of 1947, Halle, Gera, Leipzig and Dresden witnessed arrests of 130 social democrats in the SED. Additionally, prisons in Zwickau, Dresden, and Buchenwald noted high numbers of SPD inmates.<sup>98</sup> Among the more prominent SPD members arrested were Dr. Konitzer, former president of the Central Administration for Health, and Dr. Rudolf Friedrichs, minister president of Saxony.<sup>99</sup>

The majority of SPD members who contacted the SPD Ostbüro in 1947 were engaged in underground resistance. A small number, however, contacted the Ostbüro because of a rumour circulating in the Soviet zone that the SPD would be reinstated. These members simply desired that the western SPD know of their reliability in order to build up the party again should the ban on the party be lifted, rather than to engage in underground resistance. Wilhelm Pieck, vice chair of the SED, helped to fuel the rumour of SPD reinstatement

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<sup>96</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0420 B1. 6 June 1955 report on SPD prisoners in Brandenburg from former inmate; Hermann Kreutzer confirmed that Szillat served his sentence in Brandenburg prison. Author's interview with Hermann Kreutzer, 24 April 1995.

<sup>97</sup> Fank was amnestied on 24 January, 1954; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 39.

<sup>98</sup> Stössel, p. 194.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

in the Soviet zone by publishing an article in *Neues Deutschland* at the beginning of 1947 in which he questioned why Schumacher had not yet asked SMAD for permission to reestablish the SPD in the eastern zones of Germany.<sup>100</sup> The "Lukas Cranach group," for one, took up contact with the SPD *Ostbüro* in Berlin in June 1947 after considering the article. The members of the group desired information on the direction of the western SPD, and instructions for reestablishment of the party in the eastern zone.<sup>101</sup> In Cottbus, the notion that the SPD might be permitted again in the eastern zone caused an SPD member of the SED to contact Ziethenstrasse in Berlin in September 1947 to obtain instructions on a course of action. The *Ostbüro* instructed him to gather names of reliable Social Democrats in his district. He then contacted SPD members in the region in order to have them at the party's disposal in the event the party was re-licensed. He was eventually arrested in May 1948, along with four others with whom he had contact.<sup>102</sup>

Repermitting the SPD in the eastern zone had, in fact,

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<sup>100</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0421. 25 July 1956 report from "Source" on his arrest and sentencing by a Soviet Military Tribunal.

<sup>101</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0421. 25 July 1956 report from "Source" on arrest and sentencing by a Soviet Military Tribunal, p. 3. This group, which had contact to Curt Eckhardt's group in Erfurt, was arrested on the night of 11 March 1948. On 19 January 1950, Willi Wehner, Curt Eckhardt, and the leader of the Lukas Cranach group were sentenced to 25 years labour.

<sup>102</sup> *Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv*, (hereafter BLHA), Ld.Br. Rep. 332, L IV 2/4/187, SED Landesvorstand Brandenburg. 10 May 1948 police minutes on interrogations of SPD members, signature blacked out.

been considered at a high political level. In January and February 1947, Pieck, Ulbricht, Grotewohl and Fechner had travelled to Moscow to discuss with Stalin the situation within the SED. As has been noted, the SED was subject to internal strife, emanating largely from the former SPD members, but also from the far left elements among KPD members.<sup>103</sup> At this meeting, Stalin suggested legalizing the SPD in the eastern zone in exchange for the SED obtaining a licence in western Germany. Stalin believed that the SED might be able to split Schumacher's SPD by attracting left-wing elements of the western SPD to the SED.<sup>104</sup> Ulbricht and his colleagues immediately rejected the proposal for an SPD in eastern Germany.<sup>105</sup> The reaction of Ulbricht and the other SED leaders was an admission of their own unpopularity, and the strength of the SPD one year after its ban.

SPD resistance in the eastern zone was dealt a severe blow by the capture of Waldemar Kasperek, one the *Ostbüro's* main couriers, on 8 April 1947. Kasperek revealed the names of various SPD individuals and groups in the zone who worked for the *Ostbüro*, including Paul Peters, director of government publications in Halle and head of the SPD for Saxony-Anhalt, Fritz Drescher, a ministerial director of the provincial government for Saxony, Kurt Weiss, leader of municipal department in the SED provincial association in Halle, and the main SPD figure in Magdeburg, government

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<sup>103</sup> The topic of Communist elements in the SED which were unhappy with the fusion of the parties has received little attention in the scholarly literature. For an introduction, see Stössel.

<sup>104</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 298.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

counsel Brendenbeck.<sup>106</sup> He also exposed Professor Brundert, Willi Hesse, Willi Bernhard, Willi Rössner, and Otto Runge as belonging to an SPD organization in Saxony-Anhalt.<sup>107</sup>

In order to deal with the increased SPD resistance activity in 1947, and the correspondingly increased fight by the NKWD, the SPD *Ostbüro* hired more staff and was outfitted with more modern equipment. Günther Weber, a former Leipzig police president who joined the *Ostbüro* on 27 April 1947, also helped to run the *Ostbüro* more like an intelligence organization.<sup>108</sup> The organization went through another change in July 1947 when Sigi Neumann and Stephan Thomas (alias Grzeskowiak) replaced Rudi Dux as head of the *Ostbüro*, although the transition was not entirely smooth. Many SPD members were suspicious of Neumann due to his membership in the KPD during the Weimar era.<sup>109</sup> Thomas' and Neumann's first task was to rebuild the courier network which had been compromised by Kasperek's capture.

### 2.3 - Resistance within the LDPD.

Opposition within the non-Marxist parties to the emerging dictatorship in the Soviet zone centred around a desire to protect basic rights. The SED's disregard for basic rights especially in the industry reform continued to provoke a hostile response by the LDPD in 1947. Due to the

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<sup>106</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/383, p.236. 25 August 1948 report by the Central Party Control Commission.

<sup>107</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA IV 2/4/383, p. 244. 10 September 1948 report by the Central Party Control Commission.

<sup>108</sup> Buschfort, p. 21.

<sup>109</sup> Buschfort suggests that Neumann was selected because his background in the KPD might be helpful in penetrating the SED; Buschfort, p. 22.

repeated unjust confiscations of property from those with an untainted past, the LDPD insisted that wherever the past was debatable, the case had to be brought before the provincial commission on sequestering.<sup>110</sup> Leading LDPD members, including Elster and Külz, officially complained about the manner of sequestering properties,<sup>111</sup> for they felt that it was a basic requirement of humanity that individuals be given a chance to defend themselves.<sup>112</sup> From the beginning, the LDPD had insisted that legal procedures be followed in carrying out the reforms. At the founding sitting of the Central Block on 13 and 14 July 1945, Dr. Eugen Schiffer (LDPD) insisted that a guarantee of rights (*Rechtssicherheit*) must accompany confiscation: "The claim to *Rechtssicherheit* is not merely a legal issue, but rather a requirement of life in a modern parliamentary democracy. Life, freedom, honour, property and all other rights must be protected through guarantees."<sup>113</sup>

Lower levels of the party supported the position of the party's leadership. At a public meeting of the LDPD in November 1947 in Beelitz, the speaker attacked the SED due to its disregard for the rights of the middle class, and complained that the Soviet authorities still determined policy for the eastern zone. He added that capitalism allowed people a more comfortable life, whereas socialism

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<sup>110</sup> Itzerott, pp. 191-193.

<sup>111</sup> ADL, LDPD #2780. Protocol of Thuringian LDPD executive sitting of 28 November 1947.

<sup>112</sup> Itzerott, pp. 191-193.

<sup>113</sup> "Verlauf der Gründungssitzung am 13. und 14.7.45. Gedächtnisprotokoll von Erich Gniffke"; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 63.

only brought poverty and misery.<sup>114</sup> The right to property was at the centre of the complaints of Dr. Hans Müller-Bernhardt, LDPD member of the Saxony provincial assembly, when he stated that the "people's factories" should be returned to private hands.<sup>115</sup> In the Thuringian provincial assembly, the LDPD/CDU and a few SED members were in fact able to return some factories to their previous owners. In Brandenburg and Berlin, the opposition parties prevented the SED from socializing cinemas.<sup>116</sup> These protests were not without risk, however. After speaking out against the dispossession of theatre owners in Mecklenburg, Dr. Scheffler, the chair of the LDPD fraction in the Mecklenburg provincial assembly, was visited by the deputy minister of the interior, Dr. Spreche. Spreche tried to persuade Scheffler to change his stance, suggesting that for doing so he would receive additional rations.<sup>117</sup> Refusal of Spreche's bribe led to Scheffler's arrest and trial as a Nazi.

The situation in Thuringia regarding the injustices in the industry reform was particularly tense. LDPD members in *all Kreise* were so appalled by the injustices that they refused to participate in the sequestering commissions, causing the LDPD in Thuringia to approach the Thuringian Minister of the Interior Gebhardt for review of the

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<sup>114</sup> BLHA, Ld.Br. Rep. 203, MdI Nr. 25, p. 343. 8 November 1947 interior ministry report from Beelitz.

<sup>115</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 53.

<sup>116</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 53.

<sup>117</sup> MLHA, IV L 2/12/530, Justiz, p. 45 18 March 1949 memorandum from Dr. Scheffler to the High Division for Criminal matters of the provincial court in Schwerin.

sequestering procedures.<sup>118</sup> Referring to the sequesterings, Dr. Karl Hamann, an LDPD member of the Thuringian provincial assembly, stated: "Every day, new injustices discredit democracy."<sup>119</sup>

#### 2.4 - Resistance within the CDU.

The CDU was also concerned with injustices in the sequestering of factories. The CDU newspaper *Neue Zeit* was a vocal critic of the SED's conduct during sequestering.<sup>120</sup> At the Central Block sitting of 31 October 1947, the CDU proposed regulating the sequestering actions through a "Zonal Commission for Sequestering Disputes."<sup>121</sup>

SMAD and SED repression of opponents, and unjust incarcerations in the population at large, provoked resistance by several leading CDU members. The severity of the injustices had a deep effect on Wolfgang Seibert, a leading member of the CDU's youth group *Junge Union*, and head of the *Junge Union* in Thuringia. Seibert had been a strong proponent of liberal democracy since the end of the war. In 1946, he gave speeches throughout the Soviet zone which stressed the importance of basic freedoms for a democracy, such as the freedoms of speech, opinion, and press. In July, he delivered a speech on the nature of

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<sup>118</sup> ADL, LDPD #2780. Protocol of Thuringian LDPD executive sitting of 28 November 1947.

<sup>119</sup> ADL, LDPD #2780. Protocol of Thuringian LDPD executive sitting of 28 November 1947.

<sup>120</sup> Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 221; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 53.

<sup>121</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 31 October 1947; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 233-237.

dictatorship and democracy, stressing that one of the key differences was the fact that all citizens in a democracy were equal before the law. In March 1947, Seibert stated that developments in the eastern zone had damaged the population's belief that justice and humanity would be reinstalled in Germany.<sup>122</sup> In a letter to Georg Dertinger, the general secretary of the CDU in the eastern zone, Seibert was critical of the CDU's role in contributing to this insecurity. He stated his displeasure with the CDU's work and its apparent blindness to the injustices in the zone: "Things have happened which will always remain a blemish, and unfortunately from which the CDU is not free of guilt." He further lamented that two years after the founding of the CDU, nothing had been done to remove "a Gestapo and its terror." Because Seibert was preoccupied with the policing methods of the zone, he distributed the CDU pamphlet: "We did not fight against terror in order to watch new despotism emerge," at over 120 public gatherings.<sup>123</sup> By June, Seibert could no longer tolerate the injustices in the zone. He wrote to Jakob Kaiser explaining that he would be leaving the party because of its silence, and therefore complicity, in the injustices in the Soviet zone. Seibert wrote: "I do not wish for my name to be associated any longer with a party leadership which over and over publicly bows to an occupying power, whose measures could in no way find the approval of a Christian." He clarified that he was not against the Soviet Union, but

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<sup>122</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/2, NL W. Seibert. Notes from a speech of March 1947.

<sup>123</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/3, NL W. Seibert. 18 February 1947 letter from Seibert to Dertinger.

rather the Sovietizing of eastern Germany.<sup>124</sup>

At the University of Berlin, a group of students headed by Georg Wrazidlo, chair of the CDU university group and medical student, published a student journal critical of Communism. Their protests began on 1 May 1946 when Wradzilo, at that time leader of the student's working committee, adopted a resolution against decorating the university with Communist emblems.<sup>125</sup> Wrazidlo believed that the university served "scholarship and education" and was not a "party institution."<sup>126</sup> The group, which also included the Catholic students Gerhard Rösch, Schipke, Wolf, and Klein (who was also a member of the central council of the FDJ)<sup>127</sup> were sentenced for conducting underground fascist activity and for possession of weapons. These charges were most likely manufactured by the SED, considering that Wradzilo was a member of a resistance group against Hitler and a recognized "Victim of Fascism." He was, of course, arrested for opposing the SED.<sup>128</sup> The CDU faction in the Berlin city parliament was disturbed by the arrests and insisted that the Allied Kommandatura be contacted to find out more about the arrests.<sup>129</sup> At the same sitting Annedore Leber (SPD)

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<sup>124</sup> ACDP, I-298-001/3, NL W. Seibert. 12 June 1947 letter from Seibert to Kaiser.

<sup>125</sup> AdsD, ZASS t/c 16. 31 March 1947 newspaper report: "Aufklärung über Studentenverhaftungen."

<sup>126</sup> Connelly, p. 273.

<sup>127</sup> AdsD, ZASS t/c 16. *Telegraf* 23 March 1947 newspaper report: "Verhaftung von CDU-Studenten."

<sup>128</sup> AdsD, ZASS t/c 16. 31 March 1947 newspaper report: "Aufklärung über Studentenverhaftungen."

<sup>129</sup> AdsD, t/c 16 1947. Internal report

stressed that the "rechtliche Unsicherheit" must come to an end, and demanded that arrests and verdicts be made public.<sup>130</sup> Wrazidlo, Klein, and 19 others served 9 years each in eastern prisons.

CDU resistance in 1947 to the increasing Communist dictatorship was spearheaded by Jakob Kaiser. He demonstrated resistance to one-party rule by opposing the entry of the mass organizations into the Central Block, accusing the SED of undermining the independence of the other parties in an attempt to assume the leading role.<sup>131</sup> At a speech on 12 July 1947 to the CDU leadership in the Soviet zone, which came to be characterized as "the opposition speech," he further demonstrated resistance to one-party rule. He called for the CDU to follow an independent path "especially now," and rejecting the SED campaign to intensify Block work.<sup>132</sup> At the same speech, he provided insight into the situation in the Soviet zone, and his own motivation to resist the SED, when he stated that the population lived in fear because of the "incarcerations and the lack of personal security."<sup>133</sup> In a clear rejection of Communism, Kaiser refused to take part in the celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of the October revolution. SED and SMAD abuse of basic rights was at the centre of Kaiser's

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<sup>130</sup> AdsD, ZASS, t/c 16 1947. *Kurier* 28 March 1947 newspaper report: "Diskussionen über Studentenverhaftungen."

<sup>131</sup> In the Brandenburg provincial assembly, Zborowski (CDU) rejected the FDGB in the Block because he believed that extra-parliamentary organizations should not be involved too closely in party work; Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 53.

<sup>132</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 53; Gradl, pp. 106-107.

<sup>133</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 53; Conze, p. 156.

resistance.

Kaiser hoped that the deteriorating situation in the Soviet zone could be arrested by the unification of the zones of Germany. On 5 and 6 February in Königstein, CDU representatives from all zones of Germany met. At this point, relations between eastern and western CDU were still amiable. At Kaiser's prompting, an executive working committee of the CDU and CSU of Germany was elected at Königstein and met in Berlin from 13 to 15 March to work out a political representation for all zones of Germany. The committee sent out letters to the other parties in Germany to help create this representative body. When Schumacher rejected this "National Representation" on 28 May, Kaiser's hope to achieve German unity in this manner died.<sup>134</sup> The division of Germany was solidified when the Moscow conference of Allied foreign ministers failed to produce a plan to run Germany as a whole, and the Munich conference of provincial leaders also proved fruitless.<sup>135</sup>

By the fall of 1947, the eastern CDU's opposition to the emerging Communist dictatorship was becoming unpleasant for the Soviet authorities. At the CDU's party conference of

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<sup>134</sup> Conze, p. 144. Schumacher refused the "National Representation" because he believed that responsibility for representing the German people lay with the parties, not with delegates to the proposed "National Representation." Furthermore, as long as the SPD was forbidden in the Soviet zone, Schumacher would not participate in functions that involved SED representation; Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p.187.

<sup>135</sup> Martin McCauley, *The German Democratic Republic since 1945* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), p. 34. In May 1947, the minister presidents of all provinces met in Munich in an effort to maintain the unity of Germany, but the eastern representatives left after a few hours because the delegates could not decide on an agenda.

4 to 8 September in Berlin's Admiralspalast, a conference that Gradl has named "der Parteitag des Widerstands,"<sup>136</sup> Kaiser made his famous statement on the CDU's position towards dictatorship: "We must be, and we want to be, a breakwater against dogmatic Marxism and its totalitarian tendencies."<sup>137</sup> Other speeches by leading CDU members at the conference echoed Kaiser's view. Karl Arnold, a CDU representative from the British zone, spoke out for the importance of the individual in a society. Robert Tillmanns, a CDU member of the Saxony provincial assembly, gave a clearly anti-Marxist and anti-SED speech.<sup>138</sup> Considering that Tiul'panov was in attendance, these were courageous statements.

The elections of the CDU leadership demonstrated the popularity of Kaiser's course with the membership. Kaiser received 248 of 249 votes for party chair. Equally important, Dr. Reinhold Lobedanz was not elected as the third vice chairman because, according to Ernst Lemmer, a member of the CDU executive, he was more willing to compromise with the SED than Dr. Erich Fascher, the choice of the delegates.<sup>139</sup>

This clear support in the party must have given Kaiser added impetus to firmly resist the SED during the *Volkskongress*. After the failure of the Moscow conference of Allied foreign ministers, and due to the lack of progress at the London foreign ministers' conference of November 1947, the SED and SMAD came to the conclusion that a united

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<sup>136</sup> Gradl, p. 109.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 117.

<sup>138</sup> Gradl, p. 120; Conze, p. 172.

<sup>139</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 54; Conze, p. 172.

Germany under Communist domination was a distant wish. The SED therefore called for parties, organizations, and large factories from all Germany to send delegates to Berlin for 6 and 7 December to form a *Volkskongress*, a popular representation, which would discuss German reunification and elect a delegation to bring their views to London, where the foreign ministers' conference was still underway.<sup>140</sup> At the Central Block sitting on 24 November, Kaiser spoke out against the SED's plan for a German representative body on the grounds that it would not be representative of all zones of Germany.<sup>141</sup> His grave fear, however, was that this body would not be apolitical but rather a pretense for the SED to put forth its political agenda in all zones of Germany, an agenda which Kaiser opposed on the grounds that it did not fulfil the requirements of parliamentary democracy.<sup>142</sup> Kaiser made his motivations for opposition to the *Volkskongress* clear in a speech to the CDU on 21 September 1947 in the Weimarhalle: "Ich kann nur für eine Partei Verantwortung tragen, die ihren politischen Weg aus der Freiheit aus dem Gesetz ihres Wesens heraus zu klären in der Lage ist." He also emphasized the importance of freedom of the individual: "Dieses Gesetz, meine Freunde, verpflichtet uns auf die Forderungen der Menschlichkeit, auf die Forderungen der Freiheit, und des unabdingbaren Rechtes der Persönlichkeit, es verpflichtet uns auf die Forderungen der freien Meinungsäusserungen und der freien Meinungsbildung, die

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<sup>140</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 24 November 1947; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 242; See also Gradl, p. 128.

<sup>142</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 54.

Grundlagen einer wahren Demokratie sind [...]"<sup>143</sup> On 2 December, for these reasons, Kaiser rejected official CDU participation at the *Volkskongress*, although he permitted CDU members to attend if they desired.<sup>144</sup>

The *Volkskongress* divided the CDU. Kaiser had elected to resist the Soviets once and for all, whereas a minority of members believed that not to take part in the *Volkskongress* would mean the end of CDU work in the Soviet zone. Otto Nuschke was representative of this group which had come to put its faith in a path of compromise with the Soviets in the hope that free elections would take place, and that the CDU would subsequently be a major political force. Nuschke was not entirely naive in his expectation of free elections, stating that the western Allies would be the ones to bring about free elections.<sup>145</sup> Most CDU provincial chairmen supported Nuschke, and agreed to attend the *Volkskongress* due to pragmatic reasons.<sup>146</sup> As a result, 219 CDU members attended the *Volkskongress*, including leading functionaries such as Lobedanz, Nuschke, Wolf, Herwegen and Trommsdorf.<sup>147</sup> The *Volkskongress* was attended by over 2,200 delegates, including 600 representatives from the West.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> ADL, #2928. Report on speech by Kaiser 21 September 1947.

<sup>144</sup> Conze, p. 190.

<sup>145</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 34.

<sup>146</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 32; At the *Volkskongress* Luitpold Steidle of the CDU openly criticized the CDU leadership for not participating; Mattedi, p. 109.

<sup>147</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 54.

<sup>148</sup> Conze, p. 192. The Committee elected to represent Germany at the London conference never did attend; Gradl, p.

Wilhelm Külz, the leader of the LDPD, also agreed to support the *Volkskongress* movement because he felt that compromise with the Soviets and the SED was the only way to keep alive hope of exercising liberal politics in the Soviet zone. He realized the error of his ways, however, as shortly before his death on 10 April 1948, he pleaded for a state ruled by law, and against the arbitrary confiscation of property.<sup>149</sup> The support of the higher levels of the party for the *Volkskongress* did not translate into automatic support by the lower levels. In the Brandenburg provincial assembly, Dr. Walter Kunze spoke out against the *Volkskongress*. His anti-Communist stance carried over into the dedication of the Hennigsdorf steel works, where he protested against socialist mottos and slogans adorning the plant. For his actions, he was removed from his position as finance minister in the provincial government, and was accused by the Brandenburg Minister of the Interior Bechler of being a western agent.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 57. At the Central Block sitting of 24 November 1947, the LDPD supported the SED proposal, while the CDU rejected it; minutes of the Central Block sitting of 24 November 1947; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 32.

<sup>150</sup> Fritz Reinert, *Protokolle der Landesblockausschusses der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Parteien Brandenburgs 1945-50* (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1994), p. 196. See also Gerhard Papke, "Die Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und DDR 1945-52," in Manfred Agethen/ Jürgen Fröhlich (eds.), *"Bürgerliche" Parteien in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995). The reaction of the lower levels of the LDPD to the *Volkskongress* has not been addressed in the literature, and requires further research. It is likely, however, that the LDPD did not enthusiastically support the *Volkskongress*. An SED

Citing their "anti-democratic" stance regarding the *Volkskongress*, SMAD removed the CDU chairs Lemmer and Kaiser on 19 December 1947.<sup>151</sup> Kaiser and nine of the 14 members of the CDU executive then moved to West Berlin, where Kaiser continued to attack the developing Communist dictatorship in the eastern zone by establishing the *Büro Kaiser* to maintain contact with the *Kreis* groups of the CDU in the zone, the majority of which still stood behind him.<sup>152</sup>

Following the removal of Kaiser, SMAD instructed Dertinger to form a *Koordinierungsausschuss* (Coordinating Committee) to run the CDU on an interim basis under the leadership of Nuschke, Dertinger, Wolf, Hickmann and Lobedanz.<sup>153</sup> The *Büro Kaiser* thus offered an alternate leadership for the CDU in the Soviet zone to the one under Dertinger and Nuschke.<sup>154</sup> By December 1947, the provincial level leaders clearly distanced themselves from Kaiser<sup>155</sup> because of the belief that, ultimately, one had to compromise with the occupying power.<sup>156</sup> Peter Bloch, a CDU

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declaration of 14 August 1947 complained of insufficient Block work at the lower levels, and that joint cooperation was often limited to higher levels of the parties. The declaration is reprinted in Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p.230.

<sup>151</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 32.

<sup>152</sup> See Gradl, p. 149 for a list of the members who joined Kaiser in West Berlin; Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 59.

<sup>153</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 35.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Conze, p. 203.

<sup>156</sup> The Berlin CDU was an exception among the provincial leaderships. The Berlin CDU, under its chair Walter Schreiber, broke with the CDU in the Soviet zone and put its full support behind Kaiser in April 1948; Gradl, p. 140.

member of the provincial assembly in Brandenburg, explained that he stayed in the CDU after Kaiser was removed because he felt that compromise was necessary in order for the CDU to maintain a presence in the Soviet zone. He later admitted that this belief was naive: "We simply did not comprehend, despite our experience in the Third Reich, the [...] inevitability of a dictatorship, be it Nazi or Communist."<sup>157</sup>

The evidence suggests that the majority of the CDU membership had already come to the conclusion that Bloch only came to later. The executive of the CDU received letters from all over the SBZ in support of Kaiser.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, all 5 provinces witnessed a polarization between the provincial leadership, which distanced itself from Kaiser, and the *Kreis* level which supported him, especially in Saxony where a majority of CDU members firmly stood behind Kaiser on the grounds that there could be no further compromise with the SED and the Soviets.<sup>159</sup>

The CDU youth group *Junge Union* also stood firmly behind Kaiser. This group had been formed in the summer of 1945 in Berlin and Thuringia by young members of the CDU, and eventually spread to all areas of the Soviet Occupied Zone. By the time of the Kaiser crisis of 1947/8, the *Junge Union* had roughly 42,000 members.<sup>160</sup> On 18 December 1947, the

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<sup>157</sup> Bloch, p. 99.

<sup>158</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 42.

<sup>159</sup> The head of the Saxony CDU, Hugo Hickmann, is a complex figure. He supported Kaiser and Lemmer, but also felt that compromise with the Soviets was necessary, a belief he later regretted; Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 49.

<sup>160</sup> ACDP, III-013-870 "Die Arbeit der Jungen Union in der SBZ ruht" by Fred Sagner, p. 3.

*Junge Union* expressed its allegiance to Jakob Kaiser. Five days later, it refused to take part in the *Koordinierungsausschuss* and the *Volkskongress*. Because of these actions, SMAD banned the *Junge Union* in the Soviet zone. On 1 February 1948, the *Junge Union* leaders Fred Sagner and Dr. Josef Bock wrote to all *Junge Union* members instructing them to lay down their work until democratic conditions emerged in the eastern zone.<sup>161</sup> Previous to this announcement, the youth groups *Junge Liberaldemokraten*, *Jungsozialisten*, and *Junge Union* joined together in Berlin in a demonstration against Communism, carrying banners which read "Anti-Communism is a democratic duty."<sup>162</sup>

Although the *Junge Union* work which had been permitted by the authorities had come to an end, the *Junge Union* conducted underground work. Sagner built up *Junge Union* groups throughout the SBZ in conjunction with the *Büro Kaiser*<sup>163</sup>, which formed important "spiritual and political resistance centres in the academic arena."<sup>164</sup> These

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<sup>161</sup> ACDP III-013-870 "Die Arbeit der Jungen Union," by Fred Sagner, p.5.

<sup>162</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 77.

<sup>163</sup> Agethen, "Der Widerstand," in Agethen/Fischer, p. 38.

<sup>164</sup> Agethen, "Der Widerstand," in Agethen/Fischer, p. 38. Overall in universities across the Soviet zone, the non-Marxist parties proved to be more popular than the SED. The SED was unable to obtain a majority at any university during the first student council elections in the winter of 1946/47; Ammer, pp. 13-14.

The failure of the SED to win a majority of students to its cause was troubling for the party, and convinced it that the influence of the other parties was too prevalent at universities. The influence of these "bourgeois" elements in the universities

underground groups sometimes cooperated with SPD groups in the Soviet zone. SMAD and SED arrests of a large number of these resisters brought the majority of the underground *Junge Union* work in the Soviet zone to an end.<sup>165</sup> Commenting on his resistance work in the Soviet zone during these years, one young CDU resister stated: "The fear of Siberia was colossal."<sup>166</sup>

Kaiser's removal also prompted limited underground resistance by other CDU members. In Niesky and Freital, the local CDU groups contacted the *Büro Kaiser* and began distribution of western CDU pamphlets.<sup>167</sup> The fragmentary archival holdings of the CDU *Ostbüro* unfortunately do not permit the identification of other CDU groups who began to engage in underground resistance as a result of Kaiser's dismissal.

In sum, by the end of 1947, there was clear resistance in the non-Marxist parties, both in the general membership and in the majority of the leadership, and the underground SPD groups to SED and SMAD abuse of basic rights. These motives for resistance were summarized in a letter from the CDU in *Kreis Kyritz* to the CDU in *Kreis Ostprignitz*. The CDU in Kyritz attributed the number of new CDU local groups to

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was a main reason the SED formed a *Hochschulausschuss* (University Committee) on 16 May 1947. The *Hochschulausschuss* increased pressure for universities to develop a Marxist world view, which in turn caused a large number of professors to leave to the West; Ammer, p. 34.

<sup>165</sup> Agethen, "Der Widerstand," p. 38; Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 80.

<sup>166</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 5 February 1948 report on the visit of a female student from the eastern zone.

<sup>167</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 52.

the increasing number of people who were dissatisfied with one-sided politics which reminded them of the Nazi dictatorship. One CDU member was clear on his opposition to the anti-democratic nature of the SED: "There are efforts underway to transfer these methods [i.e. as in the Third Reich] into the present and to prevent the emergence of a true democracy. In countless localities, only one party determines policy, a party that has set out a goal of not tolerating those who have different ideas [...] Impatient elements are presently trying, often with dubious and dangerous methods, to revive the spirit of dictatorship."<sup>168</sup> The increased resistance in the non-Marxist parties fueled the repression cycle. As the above discussion of the security apparatus in the Soviet zone has demonstrated, K-5 began an intense campaign to remove this resistance after the announcement of Order Number 201 in August 1947. In fact, it appears that SMAD issued Order Number 201 in order to deal with this increased resistance, as well as to bring to an end the denazification process.

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<sup>168</sup> BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203, MdI Nr. 25, p.299. 25 October 1947 letter from CDU Beeskow to CDU Kreis association Ostprignitz.

### 3 - Dictatorship and Resistance between the first Volkskongress of December 1947 and the third Volkskongress of May 1949.

#### 3.1 - The international climate and its effect on the Soviet zone.

By 1948, the deepening Cold War was having a major effect on the development of the eastern zone. After the London foreign ministers' conference of December 1947 failed to resolve the division of Germany, the western Allies believed a negotiated solution to the German problem no longer to be feasible. As a result, the United States and Britain invited the Benelux countries and France to London in the first half of 1948 for a conference on the future of Germany. The conference was held in two sessions, from February to March, and from April to June. It was at this second session that the countries involved decided to lay the foundation for a German government in the western zones of Germany.

Because the Reichsmark was devalued and unstable, one of the most important prerequisites for the formation of this government was a currency reform.<sup>169</sup> As the Soviet Union showed little interest in this currency reform, the western Allies introduced the new currency, the D-Mark, into their zones of Germany, but not Berlin, in June 1948. The Soviet Union responded quickly to the introduction of the new currency, claiming that it had to take necessary measures to

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<sup>169</sup> Henry Ashby Turner, *Germany from Partition to Unification* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 23-24.

ensure that the currency did not enter Berlin.<sup>170</sup> On 18 June 1948, the Soviet security forces in Germany, with substantial help from east German police units, stopped all land access to West Berlin from the western zones. The Berlin Blockade then commenced.

Although these measures were harsh, the Soviets were within their rights to prevent ground transportation into Berlin. The western Allies had no written agreements with the Soviet Union guaranteeing land access to Berlin from their zones of Germany. They did, however, have a written agreement guaranteeing three air corridors.<sup>171</sup> The western Allies used these corridors to mount Operation "Vittles," the largest air lift in history. In order to deliver the millions of pounds of supplies per day necessary to sustain the Berlin population, a plane landed in Berlin roughly every 30 seconds.<sup>172</sup> The airlift continued through the inclement winter of 1948 and was finally lifted in May 1948, when Stalin realized that there was no further point to the blockade as the Berlin population would be able to easily survive the upcoming summer and subsequent winters. Furthermore, the western counter blockade was starting to negatively affect the Soviet zone's economy.<sup>173</sup>

### **3.2 - Communist control of the police.**

The most important result of the growing antipathy between East and West was the SED's expansion of its

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 192.

security apparatus to defend its position in eastern Germany. The police force was strengthened considerably in the aftermath of the failed Moscow foreign ministers' conference in March 1947, doubling its manpower from the previous year,<sup>174</sup> although still plagued by low morale and desertions.<sup>175</sup> At a conference of the *Landespolitik* department of the Central Secretariat of the SED in Werder in July 1948, the SED decided that the police must not only be expanded, but strictly subordinated to the SED.<sup>176</sup> As a result, the transformation process which had begun the previous year was noticeably advanced, especially as the leadership of the police was now required to swear an oath of loyalty to the SED and its policies.<sup>177</sup> The provincial ministries of the interior were also transformed into instruments of political control. In a telling statement, Gebhardt, the Thuringian Minister of the Interior, reported on a conference of the interior ministers saying: "The Ministry of the Interior will be in the future rather a political ministry. For this reason, various jurisdictions are being removed from the interior ministry [i.e. the construction department] [...] The interior ministry will control central and political power [...] The new situation

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<sup>174</sup> The numbers on the police force vary. Richard Bessel claims the police force comprised 68,148 workers by September 1948, (Bessel, p. 229), whereas Norman Naimark puts the number at 80,971 (Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 374).

<sup>175</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 375.

<sup>176</sup> Wolfgang Eisert, "Zu den Anfängen der Sicherheits- und Militärpolitik der SED-Führung 1948 bis 1952," in Thoss, p. 173.

<sup>177</sup> Eisert, p. 173.

in the *Klassenkampf* requires new methods."<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, the SED was aware that police alone could not solidify SED dominance in the eastern zone, and as early as the spring of 1948 began preparations for 40 "barracked" units of police, the future cadres of the National People's Army.<sup>179</sup> Due to the deepening Cold War, the border police were also expanded and brought under the control of the Central Administration of the Interior, rather than the provincial ministries of the interior.<sup>180</sup> The development of departments within the police to monitor the political reliability of police officers, *Politkultur* departments, also ensured SED loyalty in the police force.<sup>181</sup> The centralization of the police force for political ends was made clear by one SED member at a meeting of the SED leadership in September 1948: "Use of force does not just mean that a small group of armed revolutionaries captures power, but rather that we carry out a determined *Klassenkampf* with the power of a new people's democracy, with the brutal use of the police etc."<sup>182</sup>

SED efforts to consolidate the instruments of control under its authority had proved successful. By the summer of 1949, the SED, with the help of SMAD, had occupied the

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<sup>178</sup> *Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv*, (hereafter THSA) IV L 2/3-032, BPA Erfurt Landesleitung Thur-Sekretariat. Protocol of the SED secretariat sitting of 8 May 1948.

<sup>179</sup> Rüdiger Wenzke, "Auf dem Wege zur Kaderarmee. Aspekte der Rekrutierung, Sozialstruktur und personellen Entwicklung des entstehenden Militärs in der SBZ/DDR bis 1952/53," in Thoss, p. 214.

<sup>180</sup> Eisert, p. 177.

<sup>181</sup> See Naimark, *The Russians*, pp. 366-368.

<sup>182</sup> Eisert, p. 174.

leading posts in the Central Administration for Justice and the Central Administration of the Interior.<sup>183</sup> The SED had also succeeded in centralizing power in the central administrations and thus subordinating the provincial authorities to the administrations. By the spring of 1949, the political police branch of the criminal police, K-5, had been fully removed from the authority of the provincial administrations and worked exclusively for the DVdI and SMAD.<sup>184</sup> The SED's leading position in the Soviet zone was secure by 1949, and placed it in a favourable position to dominate the new German Democratic Republic which was founded in the fall.

### 3.3 - The takeover of the judicial apparatus.

The changes in the judicial system in the eastern zone in 1948 meant that there would be little recourse against the "power of the new people's democracy," as Eugen Schiffer discovered. Schiffer, the LDPD head of the German Central Administration for Justice, attempted to reform the justice system along liberal democratic lines. Schiffer realized the importance of an objective judiciary for the German population, writing in 1946 that after the experience of the Nazi era, "there could be no doubt that the German population demanded an objective, just, and nonpartisan

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<sup>183</sup> For the new structure of the Central Administration of Justice from January 1949, see Thomas Lorenz, "Die Deutsche Zentralverwaltung der Justiz (DJV) und die SMAD in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945-49," in Hubert Rottleuthner (ed.), *Steuerung der Justiz in der DDR* (Cologne: Bundesanzeiger Verlag, 1994), p. 146.

<sup>184</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 363.

judicial system."<sup>185</sup> In early 1948, Schiffer wrote to the Soviet authorities arguing for a simplification of the judicial process, including the elimination of the *Amtsgerichte*, and for a ban on the election of public prosecutors for provincial courts by the provincial assemblies. In itself, the election of these public prosecutors by the provincial assemblies did not mean that the independence of the judiciary was compromised, but Schiffer recognized the general trend in the Soviet zone and realized that these elections would be the first step in the complete elimination of separation of powers.<sup>186</sup> On 29 April 1948, SMAD rejected Schiffer's requests for reform of the justice administration, which at the same time signalled the coming end to Schiffer's political career. By August 1948, through manoeuvring by the SED, Schiffer was forced to retire. In September, SMAD removed a further 8 leading functionaries of the Central Administration for Justice, all previously SPD members. By the end of 1948, the SED occupied all leading positions in the justice administration and had thus removed all opponents to the political transformation taking place.

The SED also worked to secure loyalty in the new generation of jurists by politicizing their training. At a January 1948 sitting of the SED executive, Max Fechner, deputy chair of the SED, insisted on a political education of the "people's judges."<sup>187</sup> The delegates at the second

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<sup>185</sup> Lorenz, p. 165.

<sup>186</sup> Lorenz, p.139.

<sup>187</sup> Andreas Gängel, "Die Volksrichterausbildung," in author collective for an "Ausstellung des Bundesministeriums der Justiz," *Im Namen des Volkes? Über die Justiz im Staat der SED* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1994), p. 53.

jurists' conference of the SED in November supported Fechner by calling for a widening of the "sociological" content in the training of jurists.<sup>188</sup> On 2 October 1948, Max Fechner became president of the Central Administration for Justice.<sup>189</sup>

### 3.4 - Changes within the SED.

The increasing SED exertion and centralization of power was also reflected in major changes to the party itself. The transformation of the party, which began in 1947, received a powerful impetus at the 11th session of the SED on 29 July 1948, at which the SED leadership issued measures for "cleansing the party from enemy and degenerate elements." The SED was to become a Communist party like that of the Soviet Union, a "vanguard of the working class" instead of the "people's party" as it had proclaimed itself previously.<sup>190</sup> In accordance with becoming a party similar to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Anton Ackermann proclaimed that his view of a "German way to socialism" had been entirely wrong.<sup>191</sup> To carry out the transformation of the party, and afterwards ensure its "purity," the SED created a Central Party Control Commission (ZPKK),

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Lorenz, p. 140; see also Werkentin, pp. 21-22. By 1949, the only nominal non-SED member in the administration was Dr. Helmut Brandt, the vice president of the German central administration for justice.

<sup>190</sup> Stössel, p. 169.

<sup>191</sup> Reprint of Ackermann's personal admission, 24 September 1948; Hermann Weber, *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der DDR* (Munich: DTV, 1986), p. 129.

Provincial Party Control Commissions (LPKK), and Kreis Party Control Commissions (KPKK).<sup>192</sup> These commissions removed "unreliable" members from the SED, the vast majority of which belonged previously to the SPD. Between 1948 and 1950, approximately 200,000 members were purged from the party.<sup>193</sup> By January 1949, at the first SED party conference (Parteikonferenz), the SED officially proclaimed its desire to become a "Party of a New Type."

#### **4 - Resistance in the Soviet zone, 1948.**

##### **4.1 - SPD resistance.**

The increased attack on SPD members in the SED as a result of the transformation of the party drove some SPD members to resist the Communist dictatorship in the Soviet zone. In Kreis Dresden, an SPD member expelled from the SED, sought out other SPD members to form a resistance group.<sup>194</sup> In Grimma, an expelled SED member joined with other expelled SED members to form an oppositional group.<sup>195</sup> Other SPD members expelled from the SED opted to join the non-Marxist parties to carry out their oppositional politics. One SPD member writing to the Ostbüro stated that in Kreis Niederbarnim in Brandenburg, the local CDU group was

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<sup>192</sup> Reprinted Neues Deutschland article from 21 September 1948; Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 105.

<sup>193</sup> Turner, p. 63.

<sup>194</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/385, p. 126. 5 January 1950 report by the Provincial Party Control Commission for Saxony. He was arrested in January 1950.

<sup>195</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/385 ZPKK, p. 409. 28 October 1948 report by the SED Kreis executive for Grimma.

comprised mainly of former SPD members.<sup>196</sup> The transformation of the SED also caused many SPD members to leave the party voluntarily, as it became clear to them that their hopes for socialism would not be fulfilled. One member felt that the "Communist" road to socialism, by which the decisions were taken away from the people and put in the hands of the party, was inappropriate. He felt, as had Rosa Luxemburg, that the road to socialism was one of a slow and difficult convincing of the masses.<sup>197</sup> One worker who wrote in to the *Tribüne* also rejected the SED's approach to socialism and stated: "The SPD will rise again."<sup>198</sup> The idea that the SED had hijacked socialism was a common theme of opponents of the SED.

The incidence of SPD resistance dropped dramatically in 1948, however, because of the intense campaign that the Soviets and K-5 had launched in the fall of 1947 under the guise of carrying out Order Number 201. Whereas at least 14 new SPD resistance groups were founded in 1947, only three could be identified by archival evidence as being founded in 1948.<sup>199</sup> The SPD and its *Ostbüro* were the main targets for Soviet security organs, who believed that Schumacher was the chief figure in a capitalist conspiracy to undermine the Soviet Occupied Zone.<sup>200</sup> In May, a large number of SPD

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<sup>196</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0394. 9 March 1948 anonymous letter.

<sup>197</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394. 6 May 1949 report entitled: "Mein Austritt aus der SED" Signed Lamp'l.

<sup>198</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/383 ZPKK, p. 11. 12 August 1948 letter to *Tribüne*, the newspaper of the FDGB.

<sup>199</sup> See the documents in AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0394.

<sup>200</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 387.

members with *Ostbüro* contacts were arrested in Gardelegen, Haldensleben, Stendal, Burg, and Jena. In the fall and winter, sweeping arrests of SPD members took place in Magdeburg, Eisleben, Halle, Frankfurt on the Oder, Dresden, and Zwickau. The arrests led to further arrests based on confessions. Hermann Kreutzer has estimated that 70% of eastern SPD members were caught through other members confessing their contacts, although he could not verify if these were forced confessions.<sup>201</sup> In the winter of 1948/49, SPD members in the Soviet zone were dealt a further blow when K-5 kidnapped from West Berlin the secretary of the *Ostbüro* of the SPD, Heinz Kühn. During his interrogation by the NKWD, he exposed a number of SPD members engaged in resistance in the Soviet zone, which led to a massive wave of arrests including the Kreutzer group in April 1949.<sup>202</sup> The intense campaign against SPD resistance curtailed the distribution of pamphlets. K-5 in Saxony reported that many of the leading SPD resisters had been arrested in 1948 and that "the illegal propaganda activity of the SPD was negligible during the year."<sup>203</sup>

Couriers continued to be a weak link in SPD work. In January 1948, Richard Lehnert, an *Ostbüro* courier, mistakenly told Soviet authorities a name different from that on his identification while on a trip to Dresden, after which he was secretly followed. In March 1948, he returned to the Soviet Occupied Zone and stayed with a number of SPD

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with Hermann Kreutzer, Berlin, 24 April 1995.

<sup>202</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 119.

<sup>203</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p.628. Yearly report for K-5 in Saxony for 1948.

resisters, including Curt Eckhardt who was arrested on the day after his visit. It is also likely that Lehnert's bungle led to Arno Wend's arrest in July.<sup>204</sup>

Due to the NKWD campaign against the SPD, illegal SPD resistance in 1949 was negligible. The *Ostbüro* acknowledged the reality of what was already taking place and officially discouraged resistance groups as building blocks of a future party, and concentrated on individual exchange of information.<sup>205</sup> The concern for the safety of its members in the Soviet zone led to greater use of RIAS to spread its message, and in 1952 to the use of balloons as a manner of infiltrating material into the East.<sup>206</sup> There is no archival evidence for the creation of illegal SPD groups in 1949. In fact, the NKWD felt that SPD resistance in the Soviet zone had been eliminated so thoroughly by 1949, that it and the SED abandoned the fight against the SPD *Ostbüro* between 1950 and 1953.<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.2 - Resistance within the CDU.

The increasing Stalinization of the eastern zone, combined with the removal of Kaiser and Lemmer from their positions as leaders of the eastern CDU in December 1947, caused widespread discontent in the lower levels of the CDU in the Soviet zone in 1948. In Mecklenburg, SMAD forced the

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<sup>204</sup> Buschfort, pp. 39-40.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

CDU member Werner Jöhren to step down because of his continuing support of Kaiser. He eventually fled to the West and became leader of the *Ostbüro* of the CDU.<sup>208</sup> One CDU member, alarmed by the meaning of the removal of Kaiser for democracy in the eastern zone, proclaimed publicly: "I say this openly: the majority of our Union friends [i.e. CDU members] still stand behind our democratically elected Jakob Kaiser. We demand from the provincial CDU committees that participation in the Block be brought to an end. We do not want to be guilty of the great tragedy which the SED is bringing upon us. We demand *Gemeinde* elections. Should these not occur, we will take the initiative ourselves."<sup>209</sup> The speaker also wished to withdraw the CDU representative for the district from the *Volkskongress*.

The SED use of force to put through its agenda was at the centre of CDU opposition. At a public meeting of the CDU in August 1948 in Zerrenthin, Brandenburg, one CDU member lashed out at the SED for not treating the other parties as legitimate, and even accused the SED of terrorist activities.<sup>210</sup> At a CDU meeting in Bentwisch on 5 June 1948, the CDU leader of the ministry for education in Potsdam attacked the SED for its lack of respect for democracy stating: "As we were against Hitler's dictatorship, so are we fundamentally against every other dictatorship, be it from whichever direction, including the dictatorship of the

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<sup>208</sup> Richter, p. 57.

<sup>209</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. Report on CDU gathering in Tivoli 24 August 1948.

<sup>210</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 19 August 1948 report by Siegfried Tscheschner.

proletariat."<sup>211</sup>

This oppositional attitude was representative of the general membership. At provincial party congresses of the CDU throughout 1948, the membership consistently elected pro-democracy leaders - and therefore more often than not pro-Kaiser candidates. In Brandenburg, Dr. Wilhelm Wolf, chair of the CDU provincial association for Brandenburg, who spoke out for ties to the western CDU and personal freedoms, was elected but died under mysterious circumstances in a car accident in Berlin 5 days later.<sup>212</sup> In Thuringia, the pro-Kaiser Georg Grosse received the most votes, but SMAD disallowed his candidacy. In Saxony, delegates elected Hugo Hickmann as they believed he was working with the Soviets merely out of political necessity, but they elected the Kaiser-supporter Rudolf Schmidt as deputy provincial chair. SMAD also forbade Schmidt from taking office. Similarly in Mecklenburg, Lobedanz was elected chair, but the second and third chairs elected, Karl Heinz Kaltenborn and Hans Krukenmayer respectively, were Kaiser-supporters and thus forbidden by SMAD from taking office.<sup>213</sup>

The CDU also resisted the SED's attempts to control the economy. At the 11th and 12th sessions (*Tagungen*) of the SED in June and July 1948, the SED laid claim to the leading role in the economy, meaning that its economic plans were to be implemented in the Soviet zone regardless of the other parties' positions. The other parties realized that a leading role in the economy could not be separated from a

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<sup>211</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY30 IV 2/15/1. Report on the CDU meeting in Bentwisch on 6 September 1948.

<sup>212</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 82.

<sup>213</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, pp. 83-86.

leading role in society.<sup>214</sup> At the Central Block sitting of 7 September 1948, the CDU stated that the German Economic Commission (DWK) must come under parliamentary control, as at the moment it was governing "dictatorially."<sup>215</sup> In Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt, the CDU criticized the DWK's favouring of the SED's Two Year Plan<sup>216</sup>, and therefore the SED's leading role. In a rare example of bowing to opposition, the SED did propose a way in which all parties could participate in the DWK decision-making process, to which the CDU agreed.<sup>217</sup> Hickmann also felt that the SED had gone too far with its claim to the leading role, and hoped the CDU would give an "offenes Stopp" against renewed dictatorship.<sup>218</sup> CDU concerns surfaced at a meeting of the extended CDU executive, at which the CDU demanded the securing of parliamentary democracy, a ban on one party claims to the leading role, issuing a date for elections, and the formation of an all German government in the near future.<sup>219</sup> By the Third Party Congress of the CDU in Erfurt in September 1948, the CDU had still to be fully co-opted into the Communist system. Otto Nuschke put forward a CDU programme which insisted on parliamentary democracy, free elections, private property, and which rejected the SED's "people's democracy," although continuing to favour a close

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<sup>214</sup> Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>215</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 7 September 1948; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 291.

<sup>216</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 96-99

<sup>217</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 8 October 1948; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 315.

<sup>218</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 108.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

relationship between Germany and the East.<sup>220</sup>

Due to opposition to the SED within the CDU, which had been made clear at the provincial party congresses, the Soviets began a wave of arrests against middle and lower level CDU members, especially in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt.<sup>221</sup> During one of these waves in the spring of 1948, Soviet security organs shot outright the CDU chair of *Kreis Delitzsch*, Hans Georg Löser, in his apartment.<sup>222</sup> On 28 December, the CDU mayor of Falkensee, Hermann Neumann, was arrested and died in prison. On 31 December, the entire executive of the CDU in Woltersdorf (*Kreis Niederbarnim*) was arrested.<sup>223</sup> After a trip to Saxony-Anhalt, one correspondent reported that the NKWD was playing a decisive role in forcing the CDU into line.<sup>224</sup> Because of the repression of its members, the CDU refused to participate in the Block until August.<sup>225</sup>

The actions of the Soviet security apparatus produced mixed results. They were successful in removing some opposition, but convinced other members to engage in underground resistance. In Borna, a member of the CDU *Kreis* leadership reported that the "attitude in the population was growing more hostile to Russia day by day [...] Active

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<sup>220</sup> Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 163.

<sup>221</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 48.

<sup>222</sup> Richter, "Vom Widerstand," p. 50.

<sup>223</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 237.

<sup>224</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 31 March 1948 report from a correspondent entitled: "Das politische Gesicht Sachsen-Anhalts"

<sup>225</sup> Agethen, "Der Widerstand," p. 31.

members of the Union [i.e.CDU] are already trying to contact illegal SPD circles."<sup>226</sup> The CDU provincial association in Saxony-Anhalt even encouraged underground work by reporting an increase in the work of the SPD, and saying that "true" CDU members should contact them.<sup>227</sup> There is only limited archival evidence of underground CDU groups, however, due to the secrecy with which these groups were guarded by the western CDU. It is likely that the following cases were not isolated. In Apolda, one CDU member was able to build up a substantial illegal CDU group throughout 1948. He was so successful in keeping alive contacts to the old CDU that he managed to get elected in the first elections of the GDR in October 1950 in *Kreis* Weimar. He also aided others, through his own financing, in escaping to the West.<sup>228</sup> There was also a CDU group with contacts throughout the zone, which tried to build a resistance group against the Communist dictatorship, but was arrested before it achieved its goal.<sup>229</sup>

A speech by Hugo Hickmann in which he criticized the conduct of the SED provides further insights into motives behind CDU resistance, and also into the developing Communist dictatorship. At a CDU meeting in Luchau, at which approximately 100 people attended, Hickmann outlined his displeasure with SED tactics. He regretted the continuing

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<sup>226</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 30 January 1948 report on the personal visit of *Kreis* executive member from Borna.

<sup>227</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 26 February 1948 report from personal conversation with members of the provincial association for Saxony-Anhalt.

<sup>228</sup> ACDP, III-013-630/3. Undated report regarding (name blacked out), industrialist.

<sup>229</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 108.

division of the country, and attributed it to the war-time Allies' inability to come to an agreement, but blaming the United States in particular. He was more conciliatory to the people of West Germany, who, he suggested, desired German unity. This statement received a chorus of "bravos."<sup>230</sup>

Hickmann further complained of the SED methods of filling administration posts, such as inserting Dr. Kurt Fischer from Saxony as head of the Soviet zone police to replace Erich Reschke.<sup>231</sup> His complaints pointed to the increasing control of the instruments of power by the SED: "We demand a police apparatus that will remove the dictatorial regulating of police matters, as has just occurred in Berlin [i.e. appointing Fischer without consultation - GB], and places the Berlin central police leadership under parliamentary control." He was especially critical of the SED's control of the DWK, stating that the CDU was not allowed to be involved in any decision-making, referring to it as "absolute economic dictatorship" and stating: "It cannot continue this way!"<sup>232</sup> He forcefully argued against the increasing one-party state, saying it was becoming like the Nazi era when one encountered obstacles if one did not belong to a certain party, and cited the recent increase in CDU membership as a result of popular discontent with the SED. The discussion after Hickmann's speech showed concern by those in attendance that the SED was squeezing the CDU out of

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<sup>230</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/38, p. 33b. Secretariat report on CDU meeting in Luchau on 3 September 1948.

<sup>231</sup> Fischer, having spent his war years in Moscow, was a more reliable Communist than Reschke who had been in a concentration camp during the war; Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 366.

<sup>232</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/38, p. 34. Secretariat report on CDU meeting at Luchau on 3 September 1948.

effective participation in government.<sup>233</sup>

#### 4.3 - Resistance within the LDPD.

There were elements within the LDPD who continued to resist the SED installation of a dictatorship. After Külz' death in April 1948, Arthur Lieutenant, the finance minister for Brandenburg, assumed the leadership of the LDPD and guided the party on a more confrontational stance, criticizing the DWK as being merely a power tool of the SED, criticizing the Two Year Plan as disrupting the economy unnecessarily as German unity would be achieved soon, and criticizing the confiscation of property from those with an untainted past.<sup>234</sup> In July 1948, the LDPD responded to attacks on its policies by the *Tägliche Rundschau* with a declaration of the party leadership on 28 July 1948.<sup>235</sup> In this statement, the party outlined 8 points that the SMAD brought up including the newly introduced Two Year Plan, Block cooperation, sequestering of property, and the eastern borders of Germany. In all points, the LDPD was careful to say that it was not fundamentally opposed to the issues as presented by the SED, but that it felt they should be modified. In short, these protests were opposition to the leading-role claim of the SED. Under pressure from SMAD, Lieutenant resigned on 9 October 1948 and was replaced by Karl Hamann, who immediately abandoned Lieutenant's

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>234</sup> Rüdiger Henkel, *Im Dienste der Staatspartei* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994), pp. 153-154.

<sup>235</sup> The LDPD declaration is reprinted in Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 255-256.

confrontational stance.<sup>236</sup>

The LDPD nevertheless continued to show concern about an SED dictatorship. At the 5 August 1948 sitting of the Central Block, Dr. Kastner worried that the population felt one party rule had returned to Germany. He felt that this impression was created by pictures of Marx, Engels, Thälmann, and Bebel adorning the Block plenum, and by the public statements of certain SED members. At a recent gathering of all political parties, for example, the SED member Jendretzky proposed a toast to the victory of socialism.<sup>237</sup> Shortly after that sitting, the LDPD issued guiding principles on 26 August 1948, which emphasized the democratic aspects of the party. Two of the main principles were LDPD support for a parliamentary democratic republic, and LDPD insistence that the German republic should be a state based on the rule of law.<sup>238</sup> Many of these elements were echoed in the Eisenacher Program of the LDPD of 28 February 1949, in which the LDPD outlined its main platforms as a guarantee of basic rights, and the establishment of a parliamentary, democratic Germany based on a private economy.<sup>239</sup>

The LDPD was most concerned with the unjust dispossessions taking place in the Soviet Occupied Zone. Dr. Hamann realized the political implications of the injustices stating: "It is [...] frightening to see how large the

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<sup>236</sup> Mattedi, p. 142.

<sup>237</sup> Minutes from the Central Block sitting of 5 August 1948; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 276-277.

<sup>238</sup> Izerott, pp. 199-200.

<sup>239</sup> "Das Eisenacher Programm"; Weber, *Parteiensystem*, pp. 202-205.

insecurity in the country is with regard to sequestering and the land reform [...] We will only make progress in political and economic developments when absolute order and absolute legal security are introduced." Hamann's pronouncements were met with cries of: "Exactly Right!" and: "We reject force!"<sup>240</sup> In February 1948, the LDPD in Thuringia unanimously resolved to withdraw its representatives in the local and provincial commissions responsible for carrying out SMAD's sequestering orders 124 and 126,<sup>241</sup> stating: "The conduct of the sequestering commissions at the moment goes against all requirements for the guarantee of rights [...] and runs into pure despotism. Apparently orders 124/126 are to be misused to bring about the socializing of the entire economy." Another LDPD member added: "One must also say that in the local commissions, personal revenge often plays a role. On top of that are attacks by the police. In general, the intrusions and attacks of the investigation units hinder the work considerably. We have no influence on these units."<sup>242</sup> These comments reveal that the police were engaged in excesses in carrying out the reform, and confirm that already by 1948, the police answered only to the SED.

Wolfgang Natonek, the chair of the Leipzig University

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<sup>240</sup> ADL, LDPD #2782. Speech by Dr. Hamann in Erfurt on 31 October 1948 entitled: "Political and Economic Questions of the Day."

<sup>241</sup> For details on SMAD orders, see Jan Foitzik, *Inventar der Befehle des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD) 1945-1949* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1995).

<sup>242</sup> ADL, LDPD #2780. Protocol from the meeting of the LDPD provincial association for Thuringia on 8 February 1948.

LDPD group and from February 1947 the chair of the student council, actively resisted the SED dictatorship in eastern Germany. At the Second Party Congress of the LDPD in July 1947, he said that he had had no intention of entering politics, but political developments forced him to reconsider: "We see, however, that it is necessary to engage in party politics in order that we are not dominated by another party. We know what is at stake."<sup>243</sup> Natonek also protested admissions to the university based on class rather than ability, feeling a new injustice was replacing the old.<sup>244</sup> Natonek's primary motivation to resist, however, was his belief that the new system in eastern Germany was built on force and coercion. After the following experience which took place after a lecture at the university, Natonek decided to enter politics:

A young man came up to me whom I did not know. Clearly he had confused me with someone else. He asked me: is it your turn or mine to deliver our notes to the tower today? Back then, the SED-headquarters was in the Kroch tower on Augustusplatz. I thought to myself, it cannot be possible that something is happening once more that we all thought was behind us for good: namely a state in which one person spies on the next, in which everyone is afraid to say what he thinks.<sup>245</sup>

On 11 November 1948, Natonek and a large group of students were arrested. Natonek received 25 years labour for "conspiracy with the capitalist west," and the LDPD group at the university was banned.<sup>246</sup> Natonek was amnestied in

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<sup>243</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 61.

<sup>244</sup> Hans-Uwe Feige, "Die Leipziger Studentenopposition (1945-48)", *DA* 26 (1993), p. 1061.

<sup>245</sup> Quoted in Connelly, p. 274.

<sup>246</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 61; AdsD, ZASS T/C 15 1948-49. Article from Volk F. newspaper of 5 February 1949:

1956.<sup>247</sup> His arrest led to a new resistance group at the university being founded which compared the terror of the Soviet Occupied Zone to that of the Hitler era.<sup>248</sup> At the University of Jena, the chair of the LDPD group, Wolfgang Möhring, was satisfied with developments at the university until 1948, when the suppression of opinion, as evidenced by the attempt to remove the philosophy professor Leisegang, and the continuing incarcerations, convinced him to join a resistance group. Möhring's proclamation at a student rally that Marxism was the "devil's math" led to his arrest by Soviet security organs.<sup>249</sup> The student council at Rostock also witnessed fairly vocal opposition in 1948 and 1949, especially by the LDPD member Dieter Riessner who protested against the silencing of oppositional voices and SED control of the university, and was subsequently forced to flee to the West.<sup>250</sup>

The stifling of the non-Marxist parties in Berlin had the opposite effect from the one intended by the Soviets and the SED. The harassment at the University of Berlin, especially of the students Otto Stolz, Joachim Schwarz, and Otto Hess, led to a show of solidarity among the students and outside the university as well. As Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk

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"Studenten kämpfen in der Sowjetzone."

<sup>247</sup> Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 61.

<sup>248</sup> Connelly, p. 296.

<sup>249</sup> Wolfgang Möhring, "Von der Legalität zum Widerstand," in Rektor der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität (ed.), *Vergangenheitserklärung an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1994), p. 45. On Leisegang, see Robert Gramsch, "Der Studentenrat im Umbruchsjahr 1948" in above, pp. 59-63.

<sup>250</sup> Ammer, p. 42.

has written: "Suddenly, the struggle at the university became a struggle for democracy in Berlin."<sup>251</sup> Due to the constrictions, 26 of 30 elected student representatives resigned.<sup>252</sup> Overall, it appears that young people who did not support the SED turned to the LDPD to express their views. Members under 25 years of age made up 24.3% of the membership in the LDPD, while members under 20 made up only 2.6% of CDU, and 6.1% of SED.<sup>253</sup>

Opposing the SED, the Sovietization of the eastern zone, or the Soviet Union was at no point in the history of the Soviet zone or the GDR a safe undertaking. This fact was demonstrated clearly in the case of Arno Esch. Esch joined the LDPD in 1946 and helped establish the local Rostock LDPD group. In the fall of that year, he began the study of law at the University of Rostock and founded an LDPD group at the university. By March 1948, his importance had been noticed and he was permitted to give a speech at the LDPD provincial congress for Mecklenburg which was held in Stralsund. By October 1948, he had spoken out against the Block as a method for the SED to remove democratic forces. His political abilities earned him growing allegiance, and in February 1949 he helped draft the party's programme for the Eisenacher party congress. Esch wanted the LDPD to become a broadly-based left liberal party, believing that this would put the party in a good position at all-German elections which he expected would take place soon. For Esch, the founding principle of liberalism was individual freedom.

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<sup>251</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, "Die studentische Selbstverwaltung an der Berliner Universität nach 1945", DA 26 (1993), p. 919.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 920.

<sup>253</sup>, p.158.

He felt that the world encountered a series of severe problems, principally the atom bomb, and that the key to overcoming them was liberalism and its belief in the basic goodness of humanity. He also believed that one's world view, rather than nationality, should be the deciding factor in politics, which led to his famous phrase: "A liberal Chinese is closer to me than a German Communist." Esch believed that the last great work of liberalism was the Weimar constitution.<sup>254</sup>

Because of his anti-Communism, he refused to take part in the third *Volkskongress*, and left the sitting of the LDPD central executive which accepted the founding of the GDR. On the night of 19 October 1949, he was arrested by Soviet security officers while leaving an LDPD meeting. The SMT in Berlin sentenced Esch and 7 others to death by shooting for "preparing an armed revolt." The other 10 in the group were sentenced to 25 years labour. The verdicts were based on Article 58, Paragraph 2, of the Russian civil code which prescribed the death penalty for "preparation of an armed revolt." On 24 July 1951, Esch was executed in the Soviet Union. Although the other executions have not been confirmed, the others sentenced to death were not heard from again.<sup>255</sup> Clearly, Esch's theories of liberalism conflicted with the aims of the SED to Sovietize the eastern zone.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> ADL, #2509. 16 May 1949 speech by Esch to the Rostock LDPD group.

<sup>255</sup> Ammer, pp. 48-53.

<sup>256</sup> 9 December 1955 letter from Trautmann to Naase regarding the matter of Arno Esch. Other members of the LDPD connected to Esch who were arrested were: Wiese, Posnanski, Kiebusch, Mehl, Behrens, Kuhrmann, Neitmann, Groth, Krumm and Albrecht, all of whom were sentenced to 25 years labour. All were eventually released between 1953 and 1955; ADL,

The evidence suggests that these examples of LDPD resistance reflected an oppositional stance which was prevalent in the majority of the LDPD membership. Reporting on the LDPD membership, K-5 wrote: "It has been determined that certain LDPD members have a progressive attitude and cooperate in the democratic rebuilding. Larger sections of the party, especially younger members, exhibit reactionary tendencies. This is most prevalent at universities."<sup>257</sup>

SMAD actions reveal that there was not only opposition within the membership of the non-Marxist parties, but that there was significant opposition in the population toward the SED which was expressed through support of the non-Marxist parties. SMAD revealed the widespread support for the CDU and LDPD in the eastern zone by creating two other parties in an attempt to draw supporters away from the parties. In April 1948, the Democratic Farmer's Party (DBD) was formed, followed by the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) in May. The CDU and the LDPD did not welcome the competition. One prominent CDU member, Dr. Leo Herwegen, even suggested uniting the CDU and the LDPD to combat the new parties.<sup>258</sup> SMAD's decision to delay the *Gemeinde* elections to the Fall of 1949 to coincide with the provincial elections was also an admission of CDU and LDPD popularity. LDPD reports suggest that the Soviets were correct to fear an open election, revealing that the decision to delay the *Gemeinde* elections was rejected by the

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<sup>257</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p. 629. Yearly report for the K-5 for Saxony for 1948.

<sup>258</sup> ACDP, III-013-800. 14 May 1948 report from Saxony-Anhalt on a 9 May 1948 CDU meeting of the *Kreis* association of Sangerhausen.

widest majority of the population because they wanted to give expression to their opinions. One question people repeatedly asked was: "Why do we even have a constitution?"<sup>259</sup>

The delay provided an opportunity for the Soviets to proceed against oppositional LDPD and CDU members. In Thuringia, the LDPD fraction chairman Hermann Becker was arrested on 23 July and sentenced to 25 years labour.<sup>260</sup> On 31 December 1948, the LDPD Kreis chairman for Niesky, Konrad Brettschneider, was arrested for anticommunist activities and sentenced to 25 years labour by an SMT. The arrests of CDU members increased by over 40% between 1947 and 1948.<sup>261</sup>

By the end of 1948, both the CDU and LDPD remained independent parties that supported a democratic system characterized by basic freedoms, especially legal security, and political plurality. The general membership showed more opposition to compromise with the SED and the Soviets than the leadership, and paid for this opposition with punishments ranging from harassment to arrest. In sum, a majority of the general membership of the non-Marxist

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<sup>259</sup> ADL, LDPD # 24914. 20 August 1948 report by LDPD Ortsgruppe Hohenstein-Ernstthal.

<sup>260</sup> He was eventually released from the Soviet Union on 16 October 1956; Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 59.

<sup>261</sup> Statistics compiled by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 29. May 1996. Number 94RK01. In 1947, 93 CDU members were arrested. In 1948, 133 CDU members were arrested. These numbers reflect only those cases which could be identified with the use of CDU documents. The true numbers were certainly higher. Karl Wilhelm Fricke suggests that 1948 marked the beginning of a "new era" in the removal of political opponents in the Soviet occupied zone; Karl Wilhelm Fricke, "Opposition, Widerstand und Verfolgung in der SBZ/DDR," in Kaff, p. 10.

parties opposed the SED out of democratic conviction. Some of these members then turned to underground resistance because of the accompanying repression.

Furthermore, SMAD and SED actions against these parties suggest that the non-Marxist parties enjoyed support in the broader population and that therefore there was, at least, resistance sentiment in the general population. In an anonymous letter to the organ of the Free German Trade Union (FDGB), the *Tribüne*, one worker claimed that "90% of workers were against the SED."<sup>262</sup> Although this number was certainly exaggerated, a majority of the population rejected the SED. Even the SED member Fritz Wolf admitted: "Our policies in the eastern zone, land reform, industry reform, school and justice reform are a considerable success, thanks to the support of the SMA. What we haven't achieved is actually winning over the masses."<sup>263</sup> In a captured report of the SED factory group in Mückenbergr, SED members candidly admitted that the population stood behind the SED in 1945 and 1946, but that this was no longer the case.<sup>264</sup> The lack of support for the SED combined with the support for the CDU and LDPD suggests that the population was prepared to jettison the Communist system in the eastern zone for a democratic system as early as 1948.

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<sup>262</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/383 ZPKK, p. 11. 12 August 1948 letter to *Tribüne*.

<sup>263</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/383, p. 415. 11 October 1947 resolution by Comrade Fritz Wolf at the party congress of the SED. Wolf was investigated by a party commission for his comments.

<sup>264</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro. 15 September 1947 report; 11 June 1948 report of the SED Betriebsgruppe Werk Mückenbergr to the Kreis leadership of the SED in Bad Liebenwerda.

## 5 - Motives behind popular resistance to the SED dictatorship.

Historians face a difficult task in determining with certainty motives behind popular resistance in the Soviet occupied zone. In the absence of modern polling techniques, historians must rely on archival sources to tap into popular beliefs. By analyzing the records of the non-Marxist parties, the SPD, the police and the SED, it becomes apparent that SED and SMAD abuse of basic rights occupied a prominent position in motivating popular resistance to the Communist dictatorship. Repression by SMAD and SED may have succeeded in removing certain opponents in the population, but it contributed to insecurity within the population at large, and ultimately to a latent fundamental resistance to the regime. The *Volkskongress* elections of 1949 attest to this point.

The following episodes help to illustrate popular insecurity. During a black market trial in Ilmenau, the accused, in a statement that had little to do with the trial, explained that his son had left for West Germany because he was afraid of being arrested by the Russians. The accused added casually: "There have, after all, already been a few arrested." The public prosecutor claimed that this statement was an attack on the occupying power and would not be permitted in the court. The director of the provincial court, Dr. Otto, was so appalled by the prosecutor's comments that he resigned from the case immediately, drawing loud applause from the public in attendance. The case was adjourned for a few days, during which time the SED declared that the tickets issued up to that point to attend the trial were no longer valid, and new ones were issued which could

only be obtained at the SED office.<sup>265</sup>

Popular insecurity was also made evident during an SED rally in Magdeburg in September 1948, with 4-5,000 in attendance. The initial address was followed by some questions concerning the food situation. One person in attendance then stood up and said that Germany had suffered through 12 years of terror only to experience a new terror, with people disappearing from the eastern zone everyday. The SED representative responded that the arrests were carried out in accordance with the law. An ensuing tumult caused the session to be terminated immediately.<sup>266</sup>

Although the insecurity continually contributed to popular resistance to the SED, some SED members seemed to have little regard for the result. The SED mayor of a small town threatened villagers with the "Red Army" or with being "locked up in a basement" in order to push the party platform through. These threats naturally turned the villagers away from the SED, and in this case to the CDU. One member of the CDU stated: "Believe me, we have the SED mayor Böhm to thank for the fact that there is a local CDU group here."<sup>267</sup>

Situation reports of the non-Marxist parties and the SPD offer important evidence that the above examples were a reflection of deep resentment in the broader population to the SED, based on the abuse of basic rights in the Soviet zone. In January 1949, after Max Fechner's reassurances about the judicial system, the LDPD reported that "the

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<sup>265</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0046 c. 18 June 1949 report from Ilmenau.

<sup>266</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. 4 September 1948 report.

<sup>267</sup> Quoted in Osmond, p. 143.

declaration by Max Fechner will contribute to the strengthening of *Rechtsicherheit* and order, and therefore the *trust of the population in the zone*." <sup>268</sup> The Kreis Borna LDPD reflected that the population did not accept the injustices, no matter how they were couched. The representative from Pagau reported: "A further question is law and justice. One often hears the words these days 'new societal order.' With these words, our German feelings are stricken stone-dead", to which he received thunderous applause.<sup>269</sup> Further examples of the concern for justice come from the LDPD *Ortsgruppe* Lubbenau which stated that in August 1948 the chair of their group had been arrested by the Soviets without reason, and thus they were not filling his position until they heard an explanation from the Soviets.<sup>270</sup> The Jena LDPD representative Dr. Schomerus reported: "Especially now, we should emphasize liberal thought concerning the individual, in order that personal rights be respected and guaranteed. It is inhumane, when a certain pressure and terror is exercised on people [...] We should not forget the individual. People also expect rights from the state. The SED is striving for the totalitarian state." He later added: "I no longer see any sign of the principles of the constitution." Dr. Schomerus' criticism of the SED pressure on the LDPD is intriguing, for it reveals the restrictions in the eastern zone: "We are not

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<sup>268</sup> ADL, LDPD #10383. 31 January 1949 report from the LDPD provincial association Mecklenburg to the party leadership. Italics added.

<sup>269</sup> ADL, LDPD #13822. Protocol of the meeting of the LDPD of the Kreis association for Borna on 26 October 1949.

<sup>270</sup> ADL, LDPD #12887. 3 February 1949 letter from the LDPD Lubbenau to Kreis association of Calau.

Communists. We do not want our nation to become Communist. We are no different from the people in the West. Over there, where people are free, there are only 6-8% Communists. From that, one could probably conclude that there aren't too many more here."<sup>271</sup> The LDPD member in Altenburg spoke out against the injustices of the sequestering saying that the LDPD must fight these injustices: "We as liberal democrats must step in where basic rights are affected." The Altenburg member also echoed Schomerus' comments on the hostility in the population to the SED: "The SED is rejected by the entire population. If an election were held, the liberal philosophy would be much more at the fore than the totalitarian philosophy of the SED."<sup>272</sup> In Mecklenburg, one LDPD member admitted what was apparent: "It is probably clear to everyone that the majority of the population do not have Marxist leanings."<sup>273</sup> During a speech in Chemnitz, Hugo Hickmann, a CDU member for Saxony, also hinted at the injustices in the eastern zone: "Without parliamentary control of those who govern, there is no democracy. We place no value on an East German state [Oststaat]. A new democratic order must be created, so that our zone can

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<sup>271</sup> ADL, LDPD # 2782. Protocol of the sitting of the extended executive for the provincial association of Thuringia on 26 November 1949.

<sup>272</sup> ADL, LDPD #2782. Protocol of the sitting of the extended executive for the provincial association of Thuringia on 26 November 1949. These insights into the population are rare. In the protocols of the LDPD provincial associations of Thuringia, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg, there is very little sense of the view of the population. This absence is likely due to the Soviet representative's presence at these meetings.

<sup>273</sup> ADL, LDPD #2782. Protocol of the extended executive of the LDPD provincial association of Thuringia on 15 October 1949.

present itself before the world as a zone that guarantees democracy." His speech was met with loud applause.<sup>274</sup>

Situation reports from SPD *Ostbüro* informants from 1948 and 1949 repeatedly mention that the population was fed up with the SED's policy of "Gewalt geht vor Recht," especially in matters of dispossession.<sup>275</sup> The most common reasons given in the reports for popular rejection of the SED were the constant feeling of insecurity due to the "terror methods" of the NKWD and SED, and a food situation that was abysmal.<sup>276</sup> Of particular interest is the analysis in the reports that the SED, because of the initial support for socialism after the war, had had a basis of support, but had lost this support because of the *Rechtsunsicherheit* of the Soviet occupation, not personal economic difficulties.<sup>277</sup> The reports often cite the presence of the NKWD as the only reason an uprising had not taken place already.<sup>278</sup>

The terror of the eastern zone even caused a West German self-proclaimed Communist, who had left Hamburg to go to the Soviet zone and join the SED, to leave the party. In

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<sup>274</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/15/1, Abteilung Massenagitation. Protocol of speech by Professor Hickmann in Chemnitz on 27 September 1949.

<sup>275</sup> See the reports in AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0361/1.

<sup>276</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0360/1. There is an entire series of reports in this signature that repeat these themes. In particular, report from Mecklenburg 28 May 1949, Leipzig (undated), Report of 12 May 1949, Report of 28 May 1949, of 23 November 1948, and of 28 July 1949.

<sup>277</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0360/1 *ibid.* Especially report on travel impressions from the Russian zone 26 June 1949.

<sup>278</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0360/1. An 8 July 1949 report on Aue noted that the Soviets had stepped up security in the region because of fear of worker unrest.

commenting on his experience in the SED, he stated: "A belief that the use of force can eliminate doubts in the population leads to a population that lives either in fear or is passive." He added that force can remove some obstacles, but that it would be the "death sentence of socialism."<sup>279</sup>

In another report, the personal assistant of the president of the industry and trade chamber for Brandenburg, a source identified as very reliable by the SPD *Ostbüro*, described the effect of the *Rechtsunsicherheit* in industry. He stated that the *Volkskontrollen*, organizations led by the central control commission of the DWK, examined factories for weaknesses in production. If weaknesses were found, the owner of the factory usually ended up in prison. The report went on to say that the judicial system had been "socialized" providing therefore no recourse to these measures.<sup>280</sup>

The assertion that injustices in the Soviet zone were widespread is supported by the fact that several non-affiliated anti-Communist groups were founded in West Berlin by individuals who had lived in the Soviet Occupied Zone. One of the most prominent, and later most violent, was the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity (*Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit-KgU*) founded by Rainer Hildebrandt. In its founding proclamation of 25 April 1949, Hildebrandt appealed to voters in the eastern zone to oppose the upcoming *Volkskongress* election, claiming that whoever voted for it

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<sup>279</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0330I. 6 May 1949 report entitled: "Mein Austritt aus der SED."

<sup>280</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0360/1. 26 January 1949 report by the personal assistant of the president of the industry and trade chamber for Land Brandenburg.

would be voting for a "system of inhumanity."<sup>281</sup> At a press conference two days later, Hildebrandt stated that one of the ultimate goals of the KgU was to free those wrongly imprisoned in the Soviet zone.<sup>282</sup> The KgU also aimed to record all "crimes against humanity" which were taking place in the Soviet zone. Within a few years, the CIA would come to use the anti-Communist potential of the KgU, by having the organization conduct an underground terrorist campaign in the GDR.<sup>283</sup>

Another of the major anti-Communist groups was the Investigative Committee of Free Jurists (*Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen-UfJ*), founded in the fall of 1949 by Horst Erdmann (alias Dr. Theo Friedenau.)<sup>284</sup> In September and October 1948, Erdmann had already written articles in western journals critical of the judicial system in the zone and the practices of the NKWD.<sup>285</sup> In one article, he suggested how severe the terror system was by issuing instructions on how to avoid NKWD spies, thereby saving oneself from "considerable damage." Erdmann

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<sup>281</sup> Kai-Uwe Merz, *Kalter Krieg als antikommunistischer Widerstand: Die KgU 1948-1959* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1987), p. 60.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. Hildebrandt also expressed to me that the many unjust imprisonments in the Soviet zone motivated him to found the KgU. Interview with Rainer Hildebrandt, Berlin, 2 March 1995.

<sup>283</sup> See Merz, pp. 53-57.

<sup>284</sup> Erdmann's background remains unclear. It appears, however, that he was involved in law practice in the eastern zone; Frank Hagemann, *Der Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen 1949-1969* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), pp.20-21

<sup>285</sup> Hagemann, p. 21.

believed that the Communist system could be fought with justice itself, and that enough external pressure on the GDR might force it to follow its 1949 constitution, which would result in the end of the regime because the constitution called for free elections.<sup>286</sup> The UfJ also documented the injustices taking place in the eastern zone with the aim of conducting a "new and better Nürnberg."<sup>287</sup> Thus, the injustices were at the core of both the KGU and the UfJ. In fact, there had even been brief mention of joining the two organizations.<sup>288</sup>

Popular rejection of the *Volkspolizei*, which was visible in the earlier period under investigation in this study, appears to have continued in 1948 and 1949 and thus suggests popular rejection of the SED's main instrument of repression. In Mecklenburg, the SED complained of the strained relationship between the *Volkspolizei* and the broader population,<sup>289</sup> and added that there was still distrust and opposition to the party in the population. The LDPD in Zittau also commented on the relationship with the police, stating that the singing of: "Wir sind die junge Garde des Proletariats" by the *Volkspolizei* when they showed up in public was not suitable for making the organization popular.<sup>290</sup> In East Berlin, an expelled SED member led an

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with Siegfried Mampel, 4 April 1995, Berlin.

<sup>287</sup> Hagemann, p. 22.

<sup>288</sup> Interview with Siegfried Mampel, 4 April 1995, Berlin.

<sup>289</sup> MLHA, IV L2/4/1179. Position of the LPKK on the questions of the ZPKK from 10 August 1949.

<sup>290</sup> ADL, LDPD #9139. Protocol of business committee of the LDPD provincial association for Saxony with the chairs

oppositional group specifically against the *Volkspolizei*. The member in question felt the organization was a continuation of "fascist militarism."<sup>291</sup>

There were signs in 1948 that the Soviets themselves were becoming concerned about the lack of legal security in the eastern zone. The military government in the Soviet zone declared an amnesty on 18 March 1948 for Nazi criminals who were serving less than one year, as well as those accused of minor crimes who had not yet been sentenced. In the summer of 1948, 28,000 prisoners were released from the camps in the eastern zone, causing the closure of 8 of the 11 camps.<sup>292</sup>

### 5.1 - The *Volkskongress*

The election of candidates to the third *Volkskongress* on 15 and 16 May provides an opportunity, although limited, to gauge popular opposition to the SED. The third *Volkskongress* was the last step in the formation of an East German state. A major step toward establishing an East German state had been taken with the second *Volkskongress* in 1948. For this second *Volkskongress*, the leadership of the parties and mass organizations appointed, rather than elected, delegates to attend the gathering in Berlin on 17 and 18 March. The delegates to this *Volkskongress* elected a *Volksrat* (People's Council) which formed a constitutional committee under the CDU member Reinhold Lobedanz to draft a

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of the *Kreis* associations on 15 December 1949.

<sup>291</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/384. 25 November 1949 report on oppositional groups in the Berlin *Kreis* Treptow.

<sup>292</sup> Naimark, *The Russians*, p. 395.

constitution. The CDU attempted to obtain a constitutionally outlined separation of powers by insisting on a supreme court, but was unsuccessful due to SED resistance. Apart from this aspect, the constitutional proposal was similar to that of a liberal parliamentary democracy.<sup>293</sup> On 3 August 1948, the constitutional proposal was officially revealed.<sup>294</sup>

The final step in the creation of East Germany came in 1949. In May, a second *Volksrat* was elected from the delegates to the third *Volkskongress*. On 7 and 8 October 1949, the second *Volksrat* constituted itself as the provisional *Volkskammer* (People's Assembly) of the GDR.

For the purposes of this study, the election to the third *Volkskammer* is of greater importance than the role of those delegates in creating the GDR. The statement put forward for the election to the third *Volkskongress* was: "I support the unity of Germany and a just peace treaty. I therefore vote for the following list of candidates for the Third German *Volkskongress*."<sup>295</sup> All citizens who had reached the provincial voting age were entitled to vote, except those who had been sentenced under Order Number 201 or the Allied Control Council Directive 38, and the mentally ill. There was, however, another category of citizens excluded from voting, which may have affected the result. All those who were sentenced for "sabotaging" the new anti-fascist democratic order, or for adopting a "confrontational

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<sup>293</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 72.

<sup>294</sup> See the following chapter for a discussion of this proposal, which became the first constitution of the GDR on 7 October 1949.

<sup>295</sup> Dietrich Staritz, *Geschichte der DDR 1949-1985* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), p. 23.

attitude" towards the occupying power, were not permitted to vote, even if they had been released by a Soviet "act of mercy."<sup>296</sup> Eligible voters were registered by the local election committees. The provincial, *Kreis*, and *Gemeinde* administrations were responsible for providing the local election committees with the necessary materials to conduct the election, including election boxes and booths.<sup>297</sup>

Despite the skewed question, the SED could not win an overwhelming majority to its cause. The official results reported 66% "yes" votes, but the manner in which the vote was conducted leads to doubts about the accuracy of the tally. It is most probable that the "no" vote was higher, and that the Soviet authorities and the SED adjusted the vote, as the following events illustrate. Hermann Hieke, CDU *Kreis* chair of Wolmirstedt, Saxony-Anhalt, stated that reports from the voting locales which entered the *Kreis* election committee once the locales had closed indicated a majority "no" vote, even reaching as high as 70% in Kolbnitz, Samswegen, and Rogätz. For the *Kreis* overall, the numbers stood at 55% "no", 38-40% "yes," and the rest were spoiled. The next day, the Ministry of the Interior ordered the election committee to count all empty and invalid ballots as "yes" votes. Hieke protested this action by resigning from the committee. On Monday, *Kreis* Wolmirstedt announced a result of 55% "yes" and 45% "no." Hieke also reported that the chair of the election committee in *Gemeinde* Greater Ammensleben refused to falsify the vote

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<sup>296</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/72, p. 16. 21 April 1949 orders by Dr. Fischer: "Bestimmungen für die Beihilfe bei den Delegierten-Wahlen zum Deutschen Volkskongress."

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

count and was arrested by K-5.<sup>298</sup> SPD reports on the *Volkskongress* also indicate that a high "no" vote prompted the SED to order recounts. In Magdeburg, the "no" vote was said to have reached 70%.<sup>299</sup>

Police reports also suggest that the population opposed the *Volkskongress*. In Saxony-Anhalt, the police reported that in nearly all *Kreise*, posters dealing with the upcoming election had been torn down "in numbers not seen since before 1945."<sup>300</sup> The police blamed "reactionaries in the Church and CDU/LDPD" for spreading negative propaganda about the vote, and feared that the CDU may have fallen completely into the hands of "reactionaries," stating: "It appears that the reactionary wing is in command. These signs are most evident in the CDU."<sup>301</sup> Much of the pamphlet propaganda was attributed to Schumacher groups which were said to be "actively at work."<sup>302</sup>

The *Volkskongress* elections reveal significant regional differences in support for the movement, and by extension,

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<sup>298</sup> ACDP, III-013-630/3. 5 March 1952 report by Hermann Hieke, pp. 1-2. See also AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. Report on *Volkskongress* of 15 -16 May 1949 states that recounts were ordered by the SED.

<sup>299</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. Report on *Volkskongress* of 15 and 16 May 1949; Ibid., 0357/1 report. The historian Dietrich Staritz also claims that on the night of 15 May, the Central Administration of the Interior ordered the provincial ministers of the interior to recount the disqualified ballots as "yes," but Staritz does not have archival evidence to support the claim; Staritz, pp. 23-24.

<sup>300</sup> BA-P, DO 1 7/72, p. 28. 17 May 1949 letter from Saxony-Anhalt police department to Kurt Fischer, signed Hegen.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

the SED. From the results on the following page, it is apparent that Mecklenburg was the only province that did not witness a significant rejection of the *Volkskongress*. The city of Berlin, and the provinces of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia recorded a significant number of *Kreise* which did not reach the average "yes" vote, and which had a higher than average number of spoiled ballots. The urban *Kreise* of Saxony-Anhalt also witnessed opposition to the *Volkskongress*, although the rural *Kreise*, on the whole, supported the movement. In Mecklenburg, the weakest support for the *Volkskongress* came from the industrial centres along the Baltic.

By 1949, a trend in north-south division of the Soviet zone in terms of popular opposition had become evident. In the elections of 1946, popular support for the non-Marxist parties had been strongest in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, and Brandenburg, despite the obstacles placed by SMAD. In the provincial assemblies of Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg, it should be remembered, the CDU and LDPD formed a majority. In Saxony, the cities in which the CDU and LDPD had received more votes than the SED in 1946 - Leipzig, Dresden, Zwickau, Plauen, and Bautzen - witnessed, with the exception of Bautzen, higher than average rejection of the *Volkskongress* election.

The Central Block sittings in the aftermath of the *Volkskongress* vote demonstrate that the SED had understood the meaning of the election: popular rejection of its programme in eastern Germany. Furthermore, these sittings demonstrate that, in the opinion of several leading politicians, *Rechtsunsicherheit* was the overriding component of this popular opposition. The Central Block sittings in the wake of the *Volkskongress* vote were tumultuous affairs

## Auswertung der Volkskongreß-Wahlergebnisse

Den Durchschnitt der gültigen -Ja-Stimmen = 66.1% haben nicht erreicht und den Durchschnitt der ungültigen Stimmen 33.9% haben überschritten: (In Klammer beigelegt)

		%	
<b>in Mecklenburg</b>			
die Stadtkreise	Wismar	65.7	
	Rostock	64.0	
die Landkreise	Schönberg	57.7	(42.3)
	Hagenow	59.5	(40.5)
	Ludwigslust	61.5	(38.5)
	Usedom	64.1	(35.9)
<b>in Sachsen-Anhalt</b>			
die Stadtkreise	Salzwedel	60.1	(39.9)
	Halle	60.9	(39.1)
	Magdeburg	62.4	(37.6)
	Weissenfels	62.8	(37.2)
	Zeitz	64.7	(35.3)
	Naumburg	65.4	(34.6)
die Landkreise	Jericho II	62.5	(37.5)
	Liebenwerda	63.8	(36.2)
	Osterburg	65.4	(34.6)
<b>in Sachsen</b>			
die Stadtkreise	Plauen	59.8	(60.2) X
	Zwickau	53.2	(46.8) X
	Görlitz	54.8	(45.2) X
	Leipzig	55.4	(44.6) X
	Chemnitz	64.3	(35.7)
	Dresden	62.0	(38.0)
die Landkreise	Plauen	41.2	(58.8) X
	Auerbach	47.5	(52.5) X
	Glauchau	52.7	(47.3) X
	Ölanitz	54.6	(45.4) X
	Zwickau	55.5	(44.5) X
	Zittau	56.7	(43.1) X
	Leipzig	61.1	(38.9)
	Kamenz	61.9	(38.1)
	Rochlitz	62.0	(38.0)
	Chemnitz	63.1	(36.9)
	Bautzen	64.2	(35.8)
	Löbau	64.3	(35.7)
	Dresden	65.5	(34.8)
<b>in Brandenburg</b>			
die Stadtkreise	Potsdam	53.2	(46.8)
	Forst	58.5	(41.5)
	Guben	59.0	(41.0)
	Cottbus	61.1	(38.9)
	Wittenberge	63.4	(36.6)
die Landkreise	Lübben	54.5	(45.5)
	Teltow	54.7	(45.3)
	Luokau	57.2	(42.8)
	Cottbus	62.2	(37.8)
	Guben	62.3	(37.7)
	Luckenwalde	62.3	(37.5)
	Angermünde	63.2	(36.8)
	Westpreenitz	64.1	(35.9)

in Thüringen

die Stadtkreise Apolda

Greiz

Gera

Eisenach

Jena

Weimar

Mühlhaus.

Gotha

Altenburg

Arnstadt

Erfurt

die Landkreise

Worbis

Greiz

Gera

Schleiz

Stadtroda

Saalfeld

Langensalza

Mühlhausen

Sonneberg

Nordhausen

Weimar

Eisenach

Altenburg

in Berlin

Stimmenkreis I

"

"

II

III

In ganz Thüringen haben im Gegensatz zu den anderen Ländern auch die Jugendlichen so schlecht wie die Erwachsenen gewählt!

Kopie des Archivs der Partei und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv  
Wichtigste dieser Aufzeichnungen sind die gesammelten Reproduktionen der Schrift  
Mengen in der Sitzung Archiv der Partei und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv

at which the SED sought to place blame for the "poor" results, indicating the SED was not pleased with its apparent victory. Grotewohl lashed out at a number of groups including the SPD Ostbüro, the Schwennicke branch of the LDPD, and the Kaiser CDU. Even the Jehovahs Witnesses did not escape his keen eye.<sup>303</sup> Grotewohl insisted that the LDPD and the CDU remove the reactionary elements in their parties who had campaigned actively against the SED in the Volkskongress vote.<sup>304</sup> Hamann did not dispute Grotewohl, stating that Schwennicke and Kaiser elements within the respective parties had to be dealt with and shown the "correct way,"<sup>305</sup> but he carefully pointed out what he believed to be the true reasons for the result: *Rechtsunsicherheit*, disunity of the

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<sup>303</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 8 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 408. Carl-Hubert Schwennicke was chair of the West Berlin LDPD provincial association which from 1947 opposed the LDPD leadership in the rest of the zone. In 1948 the two organizations formally split. Schwennicke's group, which included Hans Reif, Anton Schöpke, William Borm, and Waldemar Koch believed that the path of compromise with the Soviets that Külz had adopted was a disaster because the Cold War was deepening, and the Soviet Union would not be willing to bend; Henkel, p. 153.

<sup>304</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 8 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 411. At the same sitting, Goldenbaum of the DBD stated that CDU members of the election committee in Leipzig said during the counting of votes: "Another vote for us, a no vote."

<sup>305</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 8 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 415, 440, 467 Kastner also admitted that the LDPD had many disgruntled members: "Large sections, decisive sections of the LDPD are consciously cultivating a damaging bureaucracy, in order to sabotage our economic construction and our economic plan; ADL, LDPD # 2509. Letter of June 1949 from Trautmann, Berlin branch of LDPD Ostbüro to RIAS stated that many LDPD members were arrested in June 1949.

parties, and "certain social complexes."<sup>306</sup> At the same sitting, Wilhelm Pieck also sought to place the blame for the results. He attacked the Bishop of Berlin and Brandenburg, Otto Dibelius, for his public call for resistance against the regime, and his comparisons of the K-5 to the Gestapo, the *Volkskongress* vote to manipulation reminiscent of Hitler, and the "people's justices" to Hitler's system of justice. Pieck also directed his criticism against Pfarrer Kirsch of Chemnitz.<sup>307</sup> Pieck further complained of opposition within the CDU and LDPD, stating: "We have nothing against the leadership of the other parties. On the contrary, we want to help the leaders to overcome resistance in their parties."<sup>308</sup> The CDU leader Nuschke agreed: "During the elections, we noted resistance in the individual parties to the *Volkskongress* movement."<sup>309</sup>

Like the LDPD, the CDU leadership bowed to the SED and said it would "clean up" the party, but the CDU also pointed out the true reason behind the "poor" results. Dertinger and Nuschke complained specifically of popular insecurity, saying that the number of arrests likely had something to do with the high "no" vote. Dertinger complained of the lack of fair trials according to standard rules (i.e. plaintiff, defendant, etc.) and provided an important insight when he said: "The question of so called legal security

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<sup>306</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 430.

<sup>307</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 433-435.

<sup>308</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 436.

<sup>309</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 440.

(*Rechtsicherheit*) and its practical implementation is in my opinion more important than all the other aggravating circumstances such as economic difficulties, social difficulties and so on. These are actually a result of the legacy that Hitler has left behind. The laws of the constitution and criminal proceedings must be, and in my opinion could be, guaranteed."<sup>310</sup> Both Nuschke and Dertinger urged a meeting with the Minister of the Interior, Dr. Kurt Fischer, to discuss arresting procedures.<sup>311</sup>

This emphasis on *Rechtssicherheit*, combined with the election results, suggests that Soviet and SMAD repression was more evident in Thuringia, Brandenburg, Saxony, and the cities of Saxony-Anhalt, than in Mecklenburg. This hypothesis is difficult to prove in the absence of accurate statistics on the numbers of eastern Germans sentenced by SMTs because of their opposition to Communism, not their activities during the Third Reich, and in the absence of statistics on NKWD incarcerations.<sup>312</sup> K-5 statistics are slightly more useful because they separate Order Number 201 arrests from other arrests, but it is still not possible to determine if anti-Communist opponents were sentenced under manufactured charges such as sabotage, possession of

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<sup>310</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 441-445.

<sup>311</sup> Minutes of the Central Block sitting of 17 June 1949; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, pp. 441-445.

<sup>312</sup> It is likely that SMT statistics, once compiled, will not prove definitive because the SMTs couched the sentencing of non-Nazi anti-Communists under the generic heading of "fascist." See above discussion. The inaccessibility of NKWD documents and the documents of the civilian affairs branch of SMAD hinders any attempt at obtaining arrest statistics.

weapons, or being a western agent. Furthermore, these statistics have only been located for the Saxony K-5.<sup>313</sup> In 1947 in Saxony, K-5 opened 23,017 cases, of which 5,760 dealt with Order Number 201. In 1948, K-5 in Saxony opened 51,236 cases, of which 12,674 dealt with Order Number 201.<sup>314</sup> Clearly, there were many investigations which did not deal with denazification, but with other opponents of the SED.

There is other evidence, however, which suggests that repression was more prevalent in those areas which showed a greater than average rejection of the *Volkskongress*. Repression of the non-Marxist parties was clearly greater in these provinces. Arrests of oppositional CDU members were most numerous in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Brandenburg.<sup>315</sup> There are at present no statistics available for the distribution of LDPD arrests prior to 1949. The LDPD in Thuringia, however, was the most vocal of all the provincial LDPD executives in complaining of intimidation of its members.<sup>316</sup>

Furthermore, unjust incarcerations of individuals not involved in the non-Marxist parties appears to have been greater in the south. It should be remembered that the head of SMAD in Thuringia, General Kolesnichenko, suggested to

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<sup>313</sup> The BStU continues to undertake the enormous task of locating and ordering material of the MfS archives. It is likely that once this process is complete, K-5 statistics on the other provinces will be available.

<sup>314</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 229/66, p. 596. Yearly report for K-5 Saxony for 1948.

<sup>315</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 48.

<sup>316</sup> See the protocols of the LDPD provincial executives for Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, and Thuringia in ADL, LDPD #23921, 10320, 10399, 9138, 2782, 2780 and 7516.

the SMAD leadership in Karlshorst that NKWD excesses were causing great fear in the population. It was these injustices that had led the head of the CDU's youth group, *Junge Gemeinde*, to emigrate to the western zone of Germany. Police excesses during the sequestering of factories had been the impetus behind the Thuringian LDPD's withdrawal from the sequestering commissions. Additionally, LDPD reports on the population mention popular insecurity more often in the reports from Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg and Thuringia than in those from Mecklenburg.<sup>317</sup>

## 6 - The founding of the German Democratic Republic.

By 1949, the division of Germany was becoming permanent. In August, based on the agreements of the London Conference of 1948, the West German state, the Federal Republic of Germany, came into existence. The founding of East Germany followed shortly after. On 16 September, Pieck, Grotewohl, Ulbricht and Oelssner travelled to Moscow to begin the preparations for the founding of the GDR.<sup>318</sup> There

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<sup>317</sup> LDPD reports from the Mecklenburg Kreise of Rostock and Schwerin do not contain mention of popular insecurity, whereas popular insecurity is mentioned in reports of local groups in Saxony and Thuringia, as well as in the reports of the provincial leadership in Thuringia. See the LDPD reports for the Kreise Bad Langensalza, Dessau, Borna, Erfurt, Gera, Rostock and Schwerin in the ADL. The CDU archive in the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has yet to catalogue the Kreis level CDU documents which it received after the fall of the GDR. Thus the LDPD reports offer better evidence at present to regional differentiation in repression. CDU complaints about insecurity presented to this point in this study, however, have been predominantly from Thuringia and Saxony.

<sup>318</sup> Suckut, "Die Entscheidung zur Gründung der DDR", VfZ 39 (1991), p. 126.

was then much discussion in eastern German political parties in the first week of October regarding elections to the *Volkskammer*, and not about the actual decision to found the GDR or the composition of the government, because the election process would determine whether the GDR would be a parliamentary republic with competitive parties as laid out in the constitution, or if it would be founded as a *Volksdemokratie*, a people's democracy with one party rule as had been instituted in the other countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans.<sup>319</sup> The documents revealed by Siegfried Suckut in 1991 of the SED executive sittings of 4 and 9 October demonstrate that the SED never intended to hold competitive elections, and that the GDR was "from the beginning, seen by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the SED as a "people's democracy."<sup>320</sup> These documents explain SED insistence on delaying both the first elections to the *Volkskammer*, and to the provincial assemblies, to coincide with the *Kreis* and *Gemeinde* elections set for October 1950.

At the joint sitting of the *Volksrat* and Central Block on 5 October, there was little protest by the non-Marxist parties for the delay of the elections, although both Kastner and Hamann had previously absolutely rejected delaying the provincial elections.<sup>321</sup> The communiqué calling for the *Volksrat* to be transformed into a provisional *Volkskammer* therefore passed without objection.<sup>322</sup> It is

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<sup>319</sup> Suckut, "Die Entscheidung," p. 129.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

difficult to ascertain precisely the reason the non-Marxist parties offered such little protest to the delay of the elections. Part of the reason was certainly SMAD pressure to conform. Nuschke, for example, came to support the GDR's founding after Vladimir Semenov, the head of the Office of the Political Advisor to the Soviet Commander-in-Chief, informed him on 5 October that SMAD would not accept CDU opposition to the founding of the GDR.<sup>323</sup> It is also possible that the party leadership believed that free elections would take place, because these were, after all, guaranteed in the constitution.<sup>324</sup> Kastner of the LDPD, for example, insisted that the *Volkskammer* was provisional and that elections were a necessity.<sup>325</sup> On 7 October, the *Volksrat* became the provisional *Volkskammer* of the newly proclaimed German Democratic Republic, and on the following day ordered the five provinces to delay provincial elections for a year.<sup>326</sup>

#### **6.1 - Response of the non-Marxist parties to the founding of the GDR.**

The founding of the GDR met with reserved CDU support. All provincial executives made their support contingent on the holding of free elections. However, lower levels of the CDU were often unwilling to voice this limited support. In Brandenburg, Peter Bloch called the GDR founding a "coup

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<sup>323</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 193.

<sup>324</sup> Suckut, "Die Entscheidung," p. 133.

<sup>325</sup> Mattedi, p. 153.

<sup>326</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, pp. 199-203.

d'état" as it took place without an election.<sup>327</sup> On 9 October at a CDU conference of Kreis functionaries, lower level CDU members protested the founding of the GDR on democratic principles. Some local CDU groups left the party on the announcement of the vote delay.<sup>328</sup> The CDU in Luckau complained that the founding of the GDR was anti-constitutional because "according to the constitution, the *Volkskammer* is elected by the people. In the meantime, the constitution has already been promulgated. By whom? From the outset, the founding of the GDR demonstrates several breaches of the constitution." He also complained that while the DWK no longer existed, the government still had the same people: "It is the same SED dictatorship."<sup>329</sup> The delay of the vote also met with criticism from the Saxony-Anhalt CDU groups in Schönberg, Bernburg, and Waren.<sup>330</sup> In Chemnitz, the local CDU group issued a resolution on 2 November 1949 which stated that a people expresses its will through free, equal, secret, general, direct elections, not demonstrations (i.e. *Volkskongress*) and therefore rejected the postponement of the elections.<sup>331</sup> A leading SED functionary, Otto

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<sup>327</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 202. Bloch, p. 143.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.; Bloch, p. 145.

<sup>329</sup> Protocol from 9 October 1949 Kreis conference; Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 526. The head of the CDU in Luckau even put forward a proposal for a vote of no-confidence against Nuschke. The proposal was defeated; Reinert, p. 304.

<sup>330</sup> Protocol reprinted in Suckut, *Blockpolitik*, p. 526.

<sup>331</sup> Resolution printed in Suckut in Weber, *Parteiensystem*, pp. 165-166. Reprinted *Union Teilt mit* 1949, Vol. 1 admits that there was much discontent within the CDU for agreeing to delay the vote and accepting the transformation of the *Volksrat* into the provisional *Volkskammer*.

Buchwitz, stated that he had received a series of letters from CDU fractions in the Soviet zone insisting that the provincial constitutions obliged them to hold elections.<sup>332</sup>

In Saxony, the founding of the GDR ran up against considerable opposition in the provincial assembly. Here, a majority of members, mostly CDU, refused to issue a resolution supporting the new government. The Saxony CDU even wrote to Kaiser saying that the party members opposed Nuschke's treasonous policies.<sup>333</sup> The SED then proceeded violently against these CDU members in public. Members of the SED and FDGB even visited their homes to curse at the politicians and pressure the members to either reverse their stance or stop their political activities altogether. In most cases the CDU members stopped their political activity quickly; only two CDU members refused to give into the mob pressure.<sup>334</sup> Nuschke had tried unsuccessfully to convince those oppositional members in Saxony to support the government until an election, which he expected to take place in March 1950.<sup>335</sup>

At the 4 October 1949 sitting of the SED executive, Pieck confirmed general resistance at the lower levels of the non-Marxist parties to delaying the elections. He claimed that there were many "reactionaries" in the CDU and LDPD who did not agree with the present policies (i.e. the decision to postpone elections). Five days later, Grotewohl

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<sup>332</sup> Minutes of the 4 October 1949 meeting of the SED party executive, reprinted in Suckut, "Die Entscheidung," p. 161.

<sup>333</sup> Mattedi, p. 154.

<sup>334</sup> ACDP, III-013-793 6 March 1952 Report by Wilhelm Rost.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

said that on mention of delaying elections to October 1950, a "revolution" in the CDU and LDPD nearly broke out.<sup>336</sup>

CDU resistance to the election postponement was still evident at the Fourth Party Conference of the CDU on 12 November 1949. A leading CDU functionary from Brandenburg, Peter Bloch, stated that the breaching of law and the constitution must finally come to an end. He specifically called for an end to SED attempts at a one-party dictatorship, a statement which met with loud applause.<sup>337</sup> Siegfried Witte, Pfarrer Kirsch, and Saxony's economic minister Gerhard Rohner were also critical of the SED.<sup>338</sup> Kirsch defiantly proclaimed that there would never be a unified Germany under Communist domination.<sup>339</sup> The resistance demonstrated at this conference was noticeably less than at previous CDU conferences, however. The Fourth Party Conference marked the emergence of pro-Communist elements within the CDU, and the nearing end of its existence as an independent party.<sup>340</sup>

Protest against the delay of the elections is less visible in the LDPD. In Saxony, the *Kreis* leaders supported

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<sup>336</sup> Minutes of 9 October 1949 meeting of SED party executive, reprinted in Suckut, "Die Entscheidung," p. 170. The non-Marxist parties must have been anxious to hold elections. The parties were well aware of the widespread discontent, and internal polls suggested the parties would win 70% of the vote if elections were held in 1949; Siegfried Suckut, "Innenpolitische Aspekte der DDR-Gründung", DA 25 (1992), p. 371.

<sup>337</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 211.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 58.

<sup>340</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 211. Agethen, "Der Widerstand," p. 35.

the leadership's approval of the delay of the elections, but indicated that their membership did not generally support their position.<sup>341</sup> Protests by the LDPD membership are not documented in the minutes of the provincial leadership meetings for the other provinces. However, Grotewohl's comment that "a revolution" almost broke out in the CDU and LDPD on announcement of the delay of the elections, combined with the history of opposition by the LDPD membership to the SED, suggests that the LDPD membership rejected the delay of the election.

It is likely that the population rejected the delay as well. LDPD situation reports for 1949 from the party association in Mecklenburg to the party leadership generally paint a favourable picture of the situation in the GDR and work within the LDPD. Lapses in this pattern are therefore striking. In November 1949, the LDPD provincial association in Mecklenburg reported that in spite of a "thorough informing," the population did not understand the postponement of the election.<sup>342</sup> In Saxony, the LDPD reported similar sentiments in the population. One LDPD member reported the following on the situation in his *Kreis* : "The one thing that I have not been able to do is convince people that it was right that the elections did not take place."<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> ADL, LDPD #9139. Protocol of the meeting of the LDPD executive of the provincial association of Saxony on 3 November 1949 with the *Kreis* chairs.

<sup>342</sup> ADL, LDPD #10386. 1 November 1949 situation report of 1 November 1949 from the LDPD provincial association Mecklenburg to the party leadership.

<sup>343</sup> ADL, LDPD #9139. Protocol of the meeting of the LDPD executive of the provincial association for Saxony on 3 November 1949 with the *Kreis* chairs. Member from Plauen speaking.

Popular protests in his *Kreis* appealed to the rule of law, stating that elections had to be held because they were proscribed by the constitution.<sup>344</sup> SPD reports also emphasized the population's displeasure at the founding of the GDR and the delay of the elections to the following year.<sup>345</sup>

By the time the GDR was founded, there was clear resistance in the membership of the non-Marxist parties to the SED dictatorship in the Soviet zone. The SMAD and SED campaign against these members produced a differentiated response. On the one hand, it eliminated opponents in these parties. On the other hand, it drove some members into active underground resistance and contributed to insecurity in the broader population. The most successful anti-resistance campaign came against the SPD. The NKWD had eliminated virtually all SPD groups in the Soviet zone by 1949, and through this intimidation prevented the establishment of new groups. Opposition to the SED was visible in the population, as witnessed by the results of the *Volkskongress*, although the opposition was more evident in the provinces of Thuringia, Saxony, Brandenburg, and the cities of Saxony-Anhalt, than in the northern province of Mecklenburg. Support for the non-Marxist parties in the Soviet zone, combined with the opposition demonstrated at the *Volkskongress* illustrates that popular opposition was of a political nature: the population opposed the Communist system in eastern Germany. The evidence presented in this

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<sup>344</sup> ADL, LDPD #10386. 1 November 1949 situation report from the LDPD provincial association Mecklenburg to the party leadership.

<sup>345</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. November 1949 report from Doberlug.

chapter suggests that a primary reason behind the political opposition was the abuse of basic rights by SMAD and the SED. Karl Schirdewan, the last surviving member of the SED *Politbüro* from the 1950's has said that the "repression was the SED's greatest error."<sup>346</sup> Schirdewan accurately pointed to a major reason the SED encountered difficulties in garnering popular support.

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<sup>346</sup> Interview with Karl Schirdewan, Potsdam, 18 March 1995.

### Chapter 3: Dictatorship and Resistance in the new State: From the founding of the GDR to the declaration of the "building of socialism" in the summer of 1952.

#### 1. The development of the instruments of the SED Dictatorship.

##### 1.1 - The constitutional basis of the German Democratic Republic

Although the GDR was to be a one-party state from the beginning, as Siegfried Suckut has proven with the minutes of the SED executive sittings in the fall of 1949,<sup>1</sup> the GDR's constitution resembled that of a liberal parliamentary democracy. The constitution contained no mention of the leading role of the SED, nor measures to secure the vanguard of the proletariat.<sup>2</sup> The GDR constitution was drafted by the constitutional committee of the 400 person second *Volksrat*, which had been elected from the delegates of the second *Volkskongress* of March 1948.<sup>3</sup> During the deliberations on the constitution, both the CDU and LDPD insisted on the

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> In 1968, the *Volkskammer* issued a new constitution which enshrined the leading role of the SED. The constitution proclaimed the GDR to be a "socialist state of the German nation" which strove for Socialism under the "leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist Party." The constitution of 1968, unlike the constitution of 1949, resembled the Soviet constitution of 1936 which entrenched the leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the development of the Soviet Union; Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 72. On the composition of the *Volkskongress* see section 5.1 in Chapter 2 of the present study.

recognition of basic rights in the constitution, and that these rights be independent of class or political affiliation.<sup>4</sup> The CDU stressed the importance of universal basic rights in its newspaper *Neue Zeit*: "Basic rights cannot, and must not, be dependent on a political line [...]. Basic rights and freedoms are eternal and inalienable. A democracy which appropriates rights based on a person's economic situation would no longer be a democracy; it would undermine itself."<sup>5</sup> The SED compromised on the issue of rights by submitting a constitutional proposal with a catalogue of basic rights to the constitutional committee of the *Volksrat*. Basic rights were thus enshrined in the constitution without opposition. In other aspects of the constitutional deliberations, the SED proved more insistent. The SED rejected CDU demands for a constitutionally guaranteed separation of powers, a parliamentary form of government, and the establishment of a supreme court. The SED conceded smaller points to the CDU, however, including a guarantee of freedom of religious practice (Article 40), a guarantee of state funding to the churches (Article 44), and, in place of a supreme court, a constitutional committee in the *Volkskammer* (Article 65).<sup>6</sup>

When the second *Volksrat* constituted itself as the provisional *Volkskammer* of the German Democratic Republic on 7 October 1949, the constitutional proposal became the first constitution of the new state. The GDR constitution outlined

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich, p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p.73. The full text of the GDR constitution is reprinted in Horst Hildebrandt, *Die deutschen Verfassungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1971), pp. 195-232.

extensive rights for GDR citizens, including equality before the law (Article 6), equality of gender (Article 7), freedom of movement, the right to emigrate (Article 8), freedom of expression and the right to postal security (Article 8), freedom of the press (Article 10), freedom of assembly (Article 12), freedom to strike (Article 14), and the right to work (Article 15).<sup>7</sup> As was the case in the Brandenburg constitution of 1946, the GDR constitution guaranteed the right, and even obligation, for citizens to resist government measures which "ran counter to the resolutions of the people's assemblies."<sup>8</sup> Article 6, which guaranteed equality before the law, also contained the clause by which the SED removed oppositional elements in the population. The important second paragraph of this article read:

Boykotthetze gegen demokratische Einrichtungen und Organisationen, Mordhetze gegen demokratische Politiker, Bekundung von Glaubens-, Rassen-, Völkerhass, militaristische Propaganda sowie Kriegshetze und alle sonstigen Handlungen, die sich gegen die Gleichberechtigung richten, sind Verbrechen im Sinne des Strafgesetzbuches. Ausübung demokratischer Rechte im Sinne der Verfassung ist keine Boykotthetze.<sup>9</sup>

The main difference between the constitution of the GDR and that of a liberal parliamentary democracy was the lack of separation of powers. The *Volkskammer* was the highest authority in the GDR,<sup>10</sup> composed of 400 deputies to be

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<sup>7</sup> Articles 5-16 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, pp. 196-198.

<sup>8</sup> Article 4 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Article 6 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 197.

<sup>10</sup> Article 50 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 207.

elected in free, equal, and secret elections.<sup>11</sup> Candidates for the *Volkskammer* could only be forwarded by associations which "according to their statutes, strove for the democratic shaping of state and community life, and whose organization encompassed the entire territory of the state."<sup>12</sup> Individuals could therefore not stand for election if they were not associated with a party or organization with a presence in the entire territory of the state. The strongest faction in the *Volkskammer* named the president of the state, who then formed a government which consisted of ministers chosen from the elected deputies. All factions with more than 40 members in the *Volkskammer* were represented in the government, either through ministerial positions or *Staatssekretäre* positions. Individuals who held these latter positions were permitted to attend cabinet meetings but were not permitted to take part in the formulation of government resolutions.<sup>13</sup>

To ensure the constitutional conduct of the government, the constitution required that the *Volkskammer* form a constitutional committee (*Verfassungsausschuss*), on which all factions were proportionately represented. The *Verfassungsausschuss* further consisted of three members of the *Oberster Gerichtshof* and three professors of law who

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<sup>11</sup> Article 51 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949. Active voting age was 18; Hildebrandt, p. 208. The passive voting age was 21. Article 52 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> Article 13, Paragraph 2 of the GDR constitution from 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 198

<sup>13</sup> Articles 91 and 92 of the GDR constitution of 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 216.

were not members of the *Volkskammer*.<sup>14</sup> The constitution outlined the task of this committee as the "review of the constitutionality of the laws of the Republic."<sup>15</sup> A law was forwarded to the *Verfassungsausschuss* for review only if at least one third of the *Volkskammer* questioned the constitutionality of the law, or if the law was questioned by the *Präsidium*, the president of the GDR, the government, or the provincial assemblies.<sup>16</sup> The final report of the *Verfassungsausschuss* was then voted upon by the *Volkskammer*.<sup>17</sup> Because the majority of the committee were SED members, and because the final report of the *Verfassungsausschuss* was not binding, the constitutional committee of the *Volkskammer* was not independent and could not ensure the constitutionality of laws.

A second mechanism in the constitution for the protection of the citizen from the state was also ineffective. Article 138 outlined that the provincial *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeiten* were to protect the citizen against "unlawful" government measures. These bodies, as outlined in the discussion on the provincial constitutions in chapter 2, were ineffective in the early years because of

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<sup>14</sup> Article 66 of the GDR constitution of 7 October 1949. Article 131 outlined that the *Oberster Gerichtshof* was made up of judges nominated by the government, and elected by the *Volkskammer*; Hildebrandt, p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> Article 66 of the GDR constitution of 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Article 66 of the GDR constitution of 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 211. The *Präsidium* was comprised of the president, his deputies, and their committee members. (Article 57).

<sup>17</sup> Article 66 of the GDR constitution of 7 October 1949; Hildebrandt, p. 211.

SED dominance in them. In 1952, the remaining *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeiten* were dissolved when the SED replaced the 5 provinces with 14 regional districts (*Bezirke*). The SED had wanted to remove the *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeiten* earlier. In Thuringia, the CDU member Karl Magen rejected the SED proposal for the abolition of the *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeit*, believing that the SED wanted to remove the "central tenet of a state based on the rule of law." Magen fled to the West out of fear of reprisal for his comments.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the administrative bodies outlined in the constitution to ensure the legal conduct of the government were not a reliable check on the government.

## 1.2 - The Ministry for State Security

The present literature on the MfS is dominated by memoirs and journalistic accounts of the latter years of the organization. Very little scholarly material on the earlier years of the MfS based on new sources has been written.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p.94.

<sup>19</sup> For memoir literature, see Josef Schwarz, *Bis zum bitteren Ende* (Schkeuditz: GNN-Verlag, 1994); Reinhardt Hahn, *Ausgedient: Ein Stasi Major erzählt* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990). The most important journalistic accounts include: David Gill, *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991); Anett Schwarz, Arianne Riecker, Dirk Schneider, *Stasi intim: Gespräche mit ehemaligen MfS-Angehörigen* (Leipzig: Forum, 1991); Liehard Wawrzyn, *Der Blaue* (Berlin: K. Wagenbach, 1990); Peter Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1993). More scholarly works include Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *MfS intern* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989) and the documentary edition Armin Mitter, Stefan Wölle, *Ich liebe euch doch alle!* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1990). The most useful work on the early years of the MfS remains Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit*

For a proper understanding of resistance in the early years of the GDR, however, both MfS reports on the population, and a knowledge of MfS operation is important. The dynamic relationship between resistance and repression was amplified by the creation of the Ministry for State Security.

### 1.2.1 - The structure and function of the MfS

In December 1948, K-5 of the German Central Administration of the Interior was replaced by the Main Directorate for the Defence of the Economy and the Democratic Order. The Main Directorate for the Defence of the Economy and the Democratic Order became part of the Ministry of the Interior with the founding of the GDR on 7 October 1949. On 8 February 1950, the *Volkskammer* of the new German Democratic Republic removed the Main Directorate for the Defence of the Economy and the Democratic Order from the Ministry of the Interior and, with little fanfare, instated it as the Ministry for State Security. A few weeks later, the *Volkskammer* appointed two veterans of the Spanish civil war to head the Ministry, Wilhelm Zaisser was named Minister of State Security, and Erich Mielke State Secretary.<sup>20</sup>

Although the *Volkskammer* resolution of 8 February did

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(Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989), which appeared before the fall of the Wall and thus does not contain new archival material. For an introduction to East Germany's state security in English, see David Childs and Richard Popplewell, *The Stasi: the East German Intelligence and Security Service* (Houndmills: MacMillan, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Fricke, *Die DDR Staatssicherheit*, pp. 24-25. Clemens Vollnhalls, "Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit," in Jürgen Weber (ed.), *Der SED-Staat: Neues über eine vergangene Diktatur* (Munich: Olzog Verlag, 1994), p. 54.

not outline the duties of the MfS, the MfS was clearly founded to secure the position of the SED in the GDR, as its motto "Shield and Sword of the Party" made clear. Initially, however, the SED's position was to be guaranteed by a hunt against specific oppositional elements, rather than blanket surveillance of the population.<sup>21</sup> These targets were primarily the non-Marxist parties and the anti-Communist resistance groups in West Berlin. There was some truth behind Mielke's rhetoric that the MfS was founded to secure the societal system of the GDR against the "increased activity of spies, saboteurs and agents."<sup>22</sup> This concentration was, of course, directly related to the increasing hostility between the Cold War adversaries. By 1950, the United States and its "satellite" West Germany were viewed by the SED as the GDR's principal enemy.

It is important to stress the humble beginnings of the MfS. Initially, the MfS was a small organization that was little more than an arm of the Soviet security apparatus in Germany. In 1952, it comprised only 4,000 workers, compared

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<sup>21</sup> In November 1951, Mielke ordered the MfS to gather information and pictures on the members of the provincial executives of the LDPD, the CDU, the NDPD, the FDJ, and the VdgB; BStU, ZA, # 100828. 15 November 1951 Directive 1/51 from Mielke to the Minister of State Security in Brandenburg. The department charged with monitoring the broader population, Department VIa, was initially small. The BStU's internal researcher on this topic, Herr Wiedmann, defines Department VIa as an "extremely small apparatus"; Interview with Herr Wiedmann, 28 April 1997, Berlin. Following the uprising of 1953, the MfS greatly expanded its internal monitoring duties by creating "information groups" within the MfS. See the following chapter.

<sup>22</sup> *Neues Deutschland* 28 January 1950.

with 9,000 by 1955, 17,500 by 1957, and 96,000 by 1989.<sup>23</sup> During a 1955 speech by Ernst Wollweber, head of state security from 1953 to 1957, to a closed session of the MfS leadership, Wollweber stated that the original organization was so small that "everybody knew everybody."<sup>24</sup> His statement that the number of informants from the broader population had increased dramatically to total "several divisions" by 1955 suggests that the number of informants in the initial years of the organization was also small.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that KGB officers were in leading positions in the MfS is well documented. In 1955, Wollweber revealed the extent of KGB influence in the organization: "Eight or 5 years ago, the apparatus of the Friends did the majority of the actual operative work of the Secretariat for State Security."<sup>26</sup> "The Friends" was SED vocabulary for the Soviets. KGB officers were intimately involved in the establishment and running of the MfS until the mid-1950s, when, partly as a result of the Soviet Union's recognition of GDR sovereignty, it withdrew many of its KGB advisors, although still retaining close links.<sup>27</sup> The role of the KGB

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<sup>23</sup> Clemens Vollnhalls, "Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit," in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), p. 502; Jens Gieseke, "Die Hauptamtlichen 1962," *DA* 27 (1994), p. 940.

<sup>24</sup> BstU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 74. "Referat des Genossen Staatssekretär auf der Dienstbesprechung am 5.8.1955."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> Fricke, *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit*, pp. 39-42. Leo Bauer and Günter Stempel are two of many who mention the presence of Soviets in their arrest proceedings. Wolfgang

in the early history of the MfS was not hidden by the MfS. Indeed, the MfS often proudly pointed to the close co-operation between the two intelligence organizations.<sup>28</sup>

There is presently no overview of the structure of the MfS during its early years. Although the research branch of the former MfS archive in Berlin hopes to publish one by the end of 1997, the overview is slated to be released only to the internal research branch of the archive.<sup>29</sup> There are at present only unreliable overviews of the organization in Bernhard Sagolla, *Die Rote Gestapo* (Berlin: Hansa Druck, 1952) produced by the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity, and *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1962). Sagolla's overview of the MfS cites Department II as responsible for the financial affairs of the MfS,<sup>30</sup> although Department II was actually responsible for spying in West Germany.<sup>31</sup> As *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst* was published before widespread

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Schwanitz, one of Mielke's four deputies in 1989, confirms that Soviet advisors were in all levels of the MfS and took part in virtually all operations until the mid 1950's; Schwanitz, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Erich Mielke acknowledged the help that the Soviets had accorded in the creation of the MfS; Erich Mielke, "Mit hoher Verantwortung für den zuverlässigen Schutz des Sozialismus," *Einheit* 1 (1975), p. 45. The internal MfS history also states that the Russian "Chekists" helped in the founding years; BStU, ZA, VVS JH3 001-133/80. *Studienmaterial zur Geschichte des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit* (hereafter Studienmaterial), pp. 16-17.

<sup>29</sup> Telephone interview with Herr Wiedmann of the BStU, 26 February 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Sagolla, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 447/51, #100016. 11 December 1951 Order Nr. 67/51 from Zaisser.

access to documents, it too is unreliable. The following is based on documentation from the central MfS archive, and reliable secondary works.

The MfS was founded with a central headquarters on Normannenstrasse in East Berlin and branches at all the *Land* (provincial) and *Kreis* (local district) levels. Following the dissolution of the provinces in 1952, the MfS was correspondingly divided into *Bezirk* (regional district) levels. Important sites such as the sprawling Leuna factory complex, or the sensitive uranium mining operation in the Wismut region, also had their own branches.<sup>32</sup> The MfS was originally divided into departments (*Abteilungen*), which over time, and not uniformly, became Main Departments (*Hauptabteilungen*).<sup>33</sup> Key departments in the MfS at this time were Department V, headed by the former member of the National Committee Free Germany Fritz Schröder, and his first deputy Erich Jamin<sup>34</sup>, which was responsible for monitoring and fighting underground opponents such as the anti-Communist organizations based in West Berlin; Department VI, responsible for more visible opponents like the non-Marxist parties in the GDR, the churches, and sects;

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<sup>32</sup> As of 3 November 1951, Department W dealing with the Wismut mining operation became an independent administration with the rights of a provincial MfS administration; BStU, ZA, #100012. 3 November 1951 Order Nr. 56/51 from Zaisser.

<sup>33</sup> There were originally 16 *Abteilungen*; BStU, ZA, GVS 1233/52, # 100041. 1 October 1952 directive on *Aktion Sonne* from Mielke to the *Bezirke* leadership. Sagolla states that there were 18, whereas *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1962) claims there were 17. See Sagolla, pp. 5-6 and *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Dr. R. Turber, former MfS Officer in Department V and later Department XX, Berlin, 31 May 95.

Department III, which was responsible for protecting economic installations; and Department II which was responsible for intelligence operations in West Germany.<sup>35</sup> Although Department II conducted operations in West Germany, the MfS did not have a department for foreign espionage in general. A small GDR foreign espionage service was founded in 1951 but this unit was housed in the Foreign Ministry rather than the MfS.<sup>36</sup>

Department V conducted all observations and penetrations of oppositional groups and forwarded the information to the department responsible for carrying out arrests, Department VIII.<sup>37</sup> Although Department V was not responsible for arrests, these had to be approved by

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<sup>35</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1233/52, #100041. 1 October 1952 directive on *Aktion Sonne* from Mielke to the *Bezirke* leadership. Department III had four sections 1) planning, development, and finance 2) industry 3) light industry and trade and supply, 4) agriculture; BStU, ZA, GVS 3530/53. 16 November 1953 Directive 37/53 Generalmajor Last to leader of Department XIII. Until the further release of documents, the operations of Department II must remain somewhat of a mystery.

<sup>36</sup> The prototype organization for the GDR's foreign espionage was the Institute for Economic Research. Its work was brought to a standstill by West Germany's Federal Ministry for the Protection of the Constitution in the "Vulkan affair" of 1953. See David Dallin, *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 343; Peter Siebenmorgen, "Staatssicherheit" der DDR, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 525/52, Tgb.Nr. 952/52, #101166. 21 April 1952 letter from Mielke to Gutsche, Minister for State Security in Saxony. Memoir literature also points to Department VIII as responsible for internal arrests; Günter Fritzsche, *Gesicht zur Wand* (Leipzig: Benno Verlag, 1993), p. 44. For details on the actual arresting procedure, see Fricke, *Politik und Justiz*, pp. 218-235.

Department V first.<sup>38</sup> It remains unclear which department was in charge of penetrating organizations in West Germany and West Berlin. Most likely, these were combined operations between Department V's Section 5 responsible for "western operations" (*Westarbeit*), and Department VIII which, apart from arrests, planned and executed measures against individual persons, groups and sites in the "operations theatre" of West Germany and West Berlin.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, Department VIII was responsible for contacts with the *Volkspolizei*.

Although the *Volkspolizei* and the MfS cooperated closely, the MfS was the most important SED instrument for fighting opposition in the GDR. The *Volkspolizei* deferred all cases that had even slightly political overtones to the MfS for further investigation. The *Volkspolizei* would often refer to the MfS cases relating to workers who had been negligent on the job, for example, because of their attempts

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<sup>38</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 542/52, #100030. 24 April 1952 Order Nr. 60/52.

<sup>39</sup> Siegfried Mampel, *Der Untergrundkampf des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit gegen den Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen in Berlin (West)* (Berlin: Der Berliner Landesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 1994), p. 24; *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1962), p. 46 also indicates that kidnappings in the West were carried out by Departments V and VIII; *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Berlin: UfJ, 1956), p. 91, contains a reprint of a report from the Berlin Police *Präsidium* from 13 November 1952 on the kidnapping of Dr. Linse from West Berlin which states that Department VIII of the MfS, headed by Morgenthal, carried out the kidnapping. In the above cited interview of 31 May 1995, Dr. Turber confirmed that section 5 of Department V was responsible for "Western operations."

to "sabotage" the GDR's economy.<sup>40</sup> The Volkspolizei played an important role, however, in carrying out MfS orders dealing with opponents of the regime, including arrests and house searches.<sup>41</sup>

One of the early tasks of the MfS was to compile a card catalogue of elements in the GDR that were "undermining" socialism and of former active Nazis. A directive from September 1950 called for the systematic registration of these "enemies." The enemies were listed as: agents of foreign spy services, terrorists, saboteurs, participants in "illegal Schumacher work," Trotskyists, former members of illegal fascist organizations, former members of the Gestapo, the SD, and the Abwehr, leading figures in the administration of National Socialist concentration camps and prisons, former members of the SS and SA, leading functionaries in the NSDAP and the government, members of religious sects and "other people." Although the "other people" category was all-encompassing, and given that any resistance could be termed "terrorism" by the SED, the focus of attention was nonetheless on former active Nazis and western agents.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the campaign against western

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<sup>40</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 462/51, #100843. 18 December 1951 Instructions for 20 and 21 December 20 1951; *ibid.*, GVS 525/52, #101166. 21 April 1952 Instructions for 1 and 8 May 1952; BA-P, DO 1 11/752, p. 27. 28 September 1950 report from Danisch, deputy leader of Volkspolizei in Saxony, to the Ministry of the Interior, Berlin; *ibid.*, DO 1 11/1150, pp. 3-5. Volkspolizei reports from 15 September to 9 October 1950 from Saxony-Anhalt; *ibid.*, DO 1 11/24, pp. 40-41. 31 January 1953 report from the head of the Volkspolizei Maron to the Soviet Control Commission, Chrenow.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 8/50, #101091. 20 September 1950 "Richtlinien über die Erfassung von Personen, die eine feindliche Tätigkeit durchführen und die von den Organen des

agents even took precedence over registering former active Nazis, as discussed below. If information from informants or official sources such as police investigations revealed that one of those registered was engaged in "enemy activity," a file would be started on that person. Files were divided into *Einzelvorgänge* for individuals, and *Gruppenvorgänge* if a group of individuals was involved in subversive activity. Initiating a file required the consent of the Minister of State Security himself, or one of his designated representatives such as the leaders of the MfS in the provinces.<sup>43</sup>

Among the initial orders which provided guidelines for the new organization were orders on the registration of individuals arrested by the MfS. People engaged in "anti-democratic" activity could be arrested with the approval only of the Minister for State Security, the State Secretary, the leaders of the Departments, the leaders of the MfS in the provinces or their deputies.<sup>44</sup> Mielke paid at least lip service to legal procedure, noting that an arresting order had to be issued before the arrest, and that a judge or public prosecutor had to be informed of the upcoming arrest. This document offers further evidence of the concern with western-based enemy organizations. The guidelines directed MfS workers to register criminals by the

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Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit festgestellt wurden," issued by the head of the Department of Registration and Statistics, confirmed by Mielke.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 10/50, #101091. 20 September 1950 "Richtlinien zur Erfassung der durch die Organe des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR verhafteten Personen," issued by the head of the Department of Registration and Statistics, confirmed by Mielke.

"severity" of the crime. The example in this directive dealt with a person who was charged with both being an active member of the Gestapo, and an American spy. In this case, he was registered under the "more important" crime of being an "Agent of the USA."<sup>45</sup>

### 1.2.2 - The development and implementation of the system of secret coworkers.

On 9 September 1950, Mielke issued an order for the registration of informants from the general population. Informants were separated into the categories of "secret coworkers" (*Geheime Mitarbeiter*), individuals who did not publicly work for the MfS but because of their direct contacts with enemy elements could provide information on "espionage and other illegal, anti-democratic" activities, and a second category called "informants" (*Informatoren*), individuals who were able to provide information not because of their contacts but rather their position, such as hotel owners, waiters, and insurance agents. A third category encompassed those who provided their homes as meeting places for the MfS. The orders warned to thoroughly examine individuals who provided these meeting places to avoid "treasonous" acts.<sup>46</sup> The instructions for recruiting these

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 9/50, #101091. 20 September 1950 "Richtlinien über die Erfassung der geheimen Mitarbeiter, der Informatoren und der Personen, die konspirative Wohnungen unterhalten," issue by the Head of the Department of Statistics and Registration, confirmed by Mielke.

The terms *Geheime Mitarbeiter* and *Informanten* were replaced by the mid-1960s with the terms unofficial coworker (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*) and societal coworker for state security (*Gesellschaftlicher Mitarbeiter Sicherheit*);

unofficial members of the MfS were vague, stating only that the recruitment had to take place in an MfS building, and after a report on the individual in question had convinced the leader of the local MfS branch that he was a suitable candidate. If the individual agreed, he was required to sign a form stating that he was willing to co-operate unofficially with the MfS.<sup>47</sup> It was not until the fall of 1952 that the MfS issued a detailed directive on the recruitment of informants. All informants were registered in the central Department of Registration and Statistics on a 10 cm by 15 cm card which contained the following information: first and last name, birthdate, place of birth, address, class, occupation, nationality, political affiliation, date of recruitment, name of the MfS officer who had recruited the individual, and codename.<sup>48</sup> The registration and statistics department of each provincial ministry for state security was required to compile monthly reports on the fluctuations in the numbers of informants.<sup>49</sup>

A primary target for MfS secret coworkers in 1950 was the CDU. In November 1950, Mielke revealed the fact that there was still significant resistance in the CDU by instructing MfS secret coworkers to penetrate the CDU.

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Fricke, *Die DDR-Staatssicherheit* (Cologne:Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989), p. 98.

<sup>47</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 9/50, #101091. 20 September 1950 "Richtlinien über die Erfassung der geheimen Mitarbeiter, der Informatoren und der Personen, die konspirative Wohnungen unterhalten," issued by the Head of the Department of Statistics and Registration, confirmed by Mielke.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Mielke justified the penetration by claiming that the leading CDU functionaries who had recently fled to the West had left "bases" (*Stützpunkte*) in the CDU. His claim was a thinly disguised reference to the fact that there were many CDU members who sympathized with those who had fled. In order to determine these opponents of the SED, Mielke ordered secret coworkers to investigate the contacts that members who fled had had in the CDU in the GDR.<sup>50</sup>

Although the MfS used secret coworkers to obtain information on specific oppositional elements of the eastern German population as illustrated in the above case, a web of informants for internal surveillance was not the main priority. In May 1951, the MfS expanded its information gathering in the GDR modestly because of upcoming political activities such as a referendum and the world youth games in Berlin. Department VIa was to be expanded and situation reports from various sections of society to be collected.<sup>51</sup> Department VIa, however, as discussed above, was not a true centre to evaluate the situation in the GDR. In the initial years, the recruitment of informants for the penetration of visible oppositional groups, especially those in West Berlin, took precedence. An internal MfS history alluded to this point, stating: "The [informants] were, from the beginning, the main strength of the MfS for penetrating the conspiracy of the enemy."<sup>52</sup> Directive 7/51 to combat the League of German Youth indicates that the MfS already had

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<sup>50</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 27/50, # 101092, 2 November 1950 Directive I/IVa/50, signed by Mielke.

<sup>51</sup> BStU, ZA, 25 May 1951 Order from Walter to the MfS in all provinces.

<sup>52</sup> BStU, ZA. Studienmaterial, p. 21.

informants in this West Berlin organization by May 1951.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, in order to secure the May Day celebrations in 1952, the MfS instructed the use of informants to determine "enemy" plans to disrupt the activities, and pointed out where to concentrate these efforts: the anti-Communist groups in West Berlin, such as the Fighting Group Against Inhumanity (*Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit* - KgU); the Investigative Committee of Free Jurists (*Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen* - UfJ); the Union of the Victims of Stalinism (*Vereinigung der Opfer des Stalinismus* - VOS); the League of German Youth (*Bund Deutscher Jugend* - BDJ), and the Soviet emigre organization National Labour Alliance (NTS).<sup>54</sup>

The KgU sabotage activities in the GDR, which included blowing up railway bridges, destroying monuments, and damaging factories, were naturally a concern for the MfS. In April 1952, Wilhelm Zaisser called the fight against the KgU one of the MfS' "most important tasks" and issued Order Number 60/52 instructing a more concerted fight against the KgU whereby all information on the KgU from any MfS department was to be passed on immediately to Department V.<sup>55</sup> The MfS furthermore believed that the KgU was

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<sup>53</sup> BStU, ZA, Tgb. Nr. 423/51. 4 May 1951 Directive 7/51, Mielke to Gartmann, *Chefinspekteur* of the MfS in Brandenburg.

<sup>54</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 462/51, #100843. 18 December 1951 regulation for the 20 and 21 December 1951 from Mielke to Fruck, Administration of Greater-Berlin; BStU, ZA, GVS 525/52, #101166. 21 April 1952 regulation for 1 and 8 May 1952 from Mielke to Gutsche, *Chefinspekteur* of the MfS in Saxony.

<sup>55</sup> BStU, ZA, #100030. 24 April 1952 Order Nr. 60/52 from Zaisser.

infiltrating agents into all levels of the GDR government to bring the GDR to a standstill in preparation for "Day X," the day of an American sponsored war against the socialist world. The increased attention on the KgU was visible in a greater number of MfS attacks on its workers in West Berlin, and show trials of its members working in the GDR. In 1952, two show trials against the KgU took place in the First Criminal Division of the Highest Court of the GDR with Hilde Benjamin, the soon to be Minister of Justice, presiding.<sup>56</sup> In February 1953 Mielke issued a directive to combat the KgU which included the by then familiar steps of finding suitable informants in groups likely to be targetted by the KgU, and using these contacts to penetrate the centre of the KgU.<sup>57</sup>

The MfS was initially, therefore, a small organization that dealt with clear opponents of the SED, such as the non-Marxist parties and the anti-Communist groups situated in West Berlin. The days of blanket surveillance of the general population were yet to come.

### **1.3 - The Volkspolizei**

The most important development within the police force of the new state was the creation of para-military forces. In 1949, the SED had begun the establishment of a 45,600 strong para-military force out of the *Bereitschaften* units in the DVdI. This force consisted of 24 infantry units, 8

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<sup>56</sup> The stenographic transcript of the trials are in SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/13/625, pp. 1-371, and SAPMO IV 2/13/627, pp. 1-257 respectively.

<sup>57</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 2523/53, #100896. 23 February 1953 Directive 8/53, Operation Karo.

artillery units, and 3 tank units.<sup>58</sup> After the founding of the GDR, the *Bereitschaften* department was renamed *Hauptverwaltung Ausbildung* (HVA) within the Ministry of the Interior, and was led by Wilhelm Zaisser, the future Minister of State Security. The HVA continued to provide military training to these units, usually with weapons delivered from the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup> The SED was dominant in the embryonic East German army, comprising 92.3% of the officers in the HVA.<sup>60</sup> The HVA also began to develop a navy and air force, founding the *Seepolizei* and the *Luftpolizei* in 1950.<sup>61</sup> The international tensions caused by the outbreak of the Korean War provided further impetus for the SED to increase the military training in the HVA. The HVA ranks grew by over 20,000 to number 52,000 by 1951, and they received more modern equipment.<sup>62</sup>

The SED had difficulty finding these new recruits, however, and the ones they did recruit were often unreliable. Many young people were reluctant to undertake military training so quickly after the end of the war, and the unpopularity of the *Volkspolizei* solidified their reluctance. A Thuringian police report stated: "In general it must be said that the youth have little inclination for

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<sup>58</sup> Eisert, pp. 184-185.

<sup>59</sup> Heinrich Hoffmann, a vice president of the DVdI, took over from Zaisser as head of the HVA in April 1950; Eisert, p. 189

<sup>60</sup> Wenzke, p. 242.

<sup>61</sup> The air force in 1950 numbered only 26 pilots; Eisert, p. 189

<sup>62</sup> Wenzke, p. 248.

the Volkspolizei."<sup>63</sup> At a 1950 public election meeting in Batzow, one high school student criticized the Volkspolizei use of tanks and their conducting of nighttime detonation drills. He added: "I do not want anything to do with these people."<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the units suffered from poor material conditions and low pay. These factors led to general discontent in the HVA and many desertions. In 1950, 600 men deserted from the HVA, in 1951, 395, and in 1952 nearly 1200.<sup>65</sup>

The SED also continued to secure its dominance in the regular police force. In September 1949, Heinrich Hoffmann, a vice president of the German Central Administration of the Interior, emphasized the importance of political reliability by proclaiming one of the main tasks of the police as "the fight for its internal consolidation."<sup>66</sup> To ensure that the police force was loyal to the SED, the *Politkultur* department within the police was expanded. A *Politkultur Hochschule* was founded in the fall of 1949 in Bad Freienwalde (and moved to Biesenthal in 1950) to train the expanded ranks of *Politkultur* officers.<sup>67</sup> The SED also attempted to secure political reliability by running intensive education sessions in the police. These sessions focused on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet

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<sup>63</sup> Eisert, p. 186; Wenzke, p. 243.

<sup>64</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 70. 17 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen."

<sup>65</sup> Wenzke, p. 243

<sup>66</sup> Eisert, p. 186.

<sup>67</sup> Author Collective, *Geschichte der Deutschen Volkspolizei* vol.1 (1945-1961) (Berlin (East): VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1987), pp. 166-167.

Union and Marxism-Leninism.<sup>68</sup> The SED also formed reading groups within the police to discuss Soviet literature, such as Nikolai Ostrowski's *Wie der Stahl gehärtet wurde*, Michail Scholochow's *Neuland unterm Pflug*, and Alexander Fadejew's *Die junge Garde*.<sup>69</sup>

#### 1.4 - The judicial system

The judicial system also came to be molded by the SED into an instrument to carry out the Communist programme in the GDR. After the GDR was founded, the German Central Administration for Justice was renamed the Ministry of Justice but did not undergo any significant structural changes. Max Fechner, former head of the German Central Administration for Justice, became Minister of Justice.<sup>70</sup> On 7 December 1949, the *Volkskammer* passed a law creating the *Oberstes Gericht* and the *Oberste Staatsanwaltschaft*.<sup>71</sup> The *Oberstes Gericht* was established to decide cases of "outstanding importance" of the first and last instance, and was under the leadership of the NDPD member Kurt Schumann.<sup>72</sup> The judges for the *Oberstes Gericht* were nominated by the *Politbüro* (later the *Sekretariat*) of the SED, thus closely linking the judiciary to one party.<sup>73</sup> The SED dominated all

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Werkentin, p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Weber, *DDR. Grundriss der Geschichte*, p. 44.

<sup>72</sup> Werkentin, p.26.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 35. See discussion below on the structure of the SED.

levels of the judicial apparatus in the early 1950s, supplying 53.6% of judges by April 1950, and 86% of public prosecutors.<sup>74</sup>

As was the case with the *Volkspolizei*, the SED sought to improve the political reliability of the judicial apparatus. On 11 December 1951, the *Politbüro* issued "measures for the improvement of the justice departments and their work in the GDR" which called for increasing the ideological level of those employed in the justice field and an improvement of SED work within this field.<sup>75</sup> By 1952 there were 81 SED members employed in the Ministry of Justice, compared to 4 CDU members, 1 LDPD, and 49 who were without political affiliation. The SED was pleased with its political domination in the Ministry of Justice by 1952, reporting that there were no "enemies of the party" among the Ministry of Justice's employees. The SED did see room for improvement, however, recommending that more "proletarian" elements be introduced into the SED leadership in the Ministry of Justice.<sup>76</sup>

The SED also ensured that the provinces could not oppose the central government on legal issues. The provincial ministries of justice were downgraded to *Hauptabteilungen* (except in Thuringia which was permitted to keep a Ministry of Justice until 1952), and prisons were removed from provincial jurisdiction and placed under the control of the *Volkspolizei* in the Ministry of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2 13/419, pp. 8, 18, 23. Undated report from the Ministry of Justice (circa 1952).

Interior.<sup>77</sup> The SED further undermined the independence of the judiciary in 1952 by pushing a law through the *Volkskammer* on 23 May which transferred to the *Staatsanwaltschaft* the task of monitoring the conduct of the government for constitutional breaches, a task previously held by the *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeit*.<sup>78</sup>

One of the first demonstrations of GDR justice was the "Waldheim trials" of 1950. The SED leadership had requested from Stalin in September 1949 that the 3 remaining NKWD "special camps" be closed in order to boost the popularity of the SED in the GDR which was to be founded the following month.<sup>79</sup> The Soviet Union acquiesced and closed the three camps, releasing 15,038 prisoners and transferring 10,513 to the GDR's Ministry of the Interior for the remainder of their sentences. The release of prisoners did not necessarily improve the SED's standing. In Osterburg, the SED was concerned with a rumour circulating that those released from the "special camp" in Sachsenhausen were so weak that "the ditches along the road from Sachsenhausen were filled with ex-prisoners too weak to carry on."<sup>80</sup>

Following the closure of the camps, 3,432 prisoners were handed over to the GDR's Ministry of Justice for sentencing.<sup>81</sup> The sentencings took place in the criminal

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<sup>77</sup> Werkentin, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>80</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/1134, p. 176. Undated *Instrukteur* report on a trip to Osterburg and Salzwedel (circa 1950).

<sup>81</sup> Werkentin, p. 177. On the integration of the released prisoners into GDR society, see Michael Buddrus, " '...im Allgemeinen ohne besondere Vorkommnisse:' Dokumente

division of the Chemnitz provincial court in Waldheim, Saxony, where the prisoners were being held. The judges and prosecutors chosen to conduct the trials were reliable SED members handpicked by Dr. Hildegard Heinze, a *Hauptabteilung* leader in the Ministry of Justice.<sup>82</sup> The trials were conducted behind closed doors with little regard for due process. The trials often lasted only a few minutes.<sup>83</sup> In most cases, the accused were not allowed to present evidence, and were sentenced based on the Soviet protocol of the initial interrogation.<sup>84</sup> By June 1950, 2,981 of those handed over to the GDR for sentencing had been tried and sentenced.<sup>85</sup> Beginning on 20 June, the SED attempted to demonstrate that all previous sentences were justified, by staging show trials of handpicked war criminals from the remaining prisoners. A carefully selected public was bussed in daily to the Waldheim city hall where the trial was being staged.<sup>86</sup> The Waldheim trials launched the vigorous use of the judicial system as a political instrument in the newly founded state.<sup>87</sup> The sentencings did not help secure the

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zur Situation des Strafvollzugs der DDR nach der Auflösung der sowjetischen Internierungslager 1949-1951", DA 29 (1996): 10-34.

<sup>82</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 207.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>84</sup> Werkentin, p. 185.

<sup>85</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 212.

<sup>86</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 206.

<sup>87</sup> The work of the Soviet Military Tribunals effectively came to an end when the GDR was founded, although the Soviet Military Tribunals still ruled in exceptional cases such as those involving western spies. The Soviet Union continued to play an influential role in GDR justice, however. Throughout

SED's position in the GDR, however, but undermined public confidence in the SED regime, as will be seen below.

### 1.5 - The Party

SED molding of the police and judicial systems was accompanied by changes within the party itself. At the 3rd Party Congress of the SED from 20 to 24 July 1950, the SED resolved to undertake new purges against "spies and agents" in the party, especially those with "Titoist or social democratic" views. Between 1950 and 1951, roughly 150,000 members were expelled from the party, including many leading functionaries who had spent their war years in exile in the West rather than in the Soviet Union, and were therefore deemed unreliable.<sup>88</sup> By August 1950, Paul Merker, a member of the first SED *Politbüro* and *Staatssekretär* for agriculture and forestry, and other leading Communist functionaries with roots in the KPD such as Leo Bauer, head of East German radio, Willi Kreikemeyer, the general director of the railways, and Lex Ende, the editor of *Friedenspost*, were expelled from the party for having had contact during the war with Noel Field, a humanitarian worker in Switzerland and alleged American spy.<sup>89</sup>

The structure of the SED was also adjusted to resemble

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the 1950s, the GDR Ministry of Justice reported to the Soviet Control Commission with analyses of the justice situation in the GDR; Weber, *DDR. Grundriss der Geschichte*, p. 44.

<sup>88</sup> Weber, *DDR. Grundriss der Geschichte*, p. 51.

<sup>89</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/114, p.5. Undated party explanation of Field affair, agreed upon at SED Central Committee sitting of 24 August 1950.

that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup> This process had begun in 1949 when the SED created a *Politisches Büro* (Political Office), or *Politbüro*. The *Politbüro* consisted of 7 members and 2 candidates chosen by the SED party executive with the task of "advising on all important questions of the party leadership and on party policies, especially questions regarding Marxist-Leninist education of the party's members."<sup>91</sup> The members of the first SED *Politbüro* were Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, Walter Ulbricht, Helmut Lehmann, Franz Dahlem, Friedrich Ebert, and Paul Merker. Anton Ackermann and Karl Steinhoff were elected as candidates.<sup>92</sup> To ensure the execution of *Politbüro* orders, the *Politbüro* itself elected a *kleines Sekretariat* of 5 members, 2 of whom were to be members of the *Politbüro*. The first members of the *kleines Sekretariat* were Walter Ulbricht, Franz Dahlem, Alfred Oelssner, Edith Baumann, and Paul Wessel. They worked closely with the heads of the government departments to ensure that the orders were carried out as specified. The *Politbüro* and the *kleines Sekretariat* therefore effectively removed power from the *Zentralsekretariat* which had preceded the *Politbüro* as the "braintrust" of the party. At the 3rd Party Congress of the SED in July 1950, the SED replaced the party executive with a new body known as the *Zentralkomitee* (Central Committee). The Central Committee's task was described as the

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<sup>90</sup> Monika Kaiser, "Die Zentrale der Diktatur - organisatorische Weichenstellungen, Strukturen und Kompetenzen der SED-Führung in der SBZ/DDR 1946 bis 1952," in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Historische DDR-Forschung: Aufsätze und Studien* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), pp. 83-86.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

implementation of "the decisions of the party congresses between congresses; it is the highest functioning organ of the party and directs its entire activity."<sup>93</sup> From the SED candidates at the Congress, 51 members and 31 candidates were elected to the Central Committee.<sup>94</sup> The Central Committee then elected the members of the *Politbüro* and the *Sekretariat*, a body with functions similar to those of the earlier *kleines Sekretariat*. Walter Ulbricht was elected as the first general secretary of the *Sekretariat* of the Central Committee, and immediately attempted to transform the *Sekretariat* into the power centre of the party. By 1953-54, however, the *Politbüro* emerged as the most important political body in the party.<sup>95</sup> The *Politbüro* and *Sekretariat* of 1950 were comprised as follows:

**Members and Candidates  
of the *Politbüro***

**Secretaries of the  
Central Committee**

Members

Dahlem, Franz  
  
Ebert, Friedrich  
Grotewohl, Otto  
Matern, Hermann  
Oelssner, Fred  
Pieck, Wilhelm  
Rau, Heinrich  
Ulbricht, Walter  
Zaisser, Wilhelm

Ulbricht, Walter (First  
Secretary)  
Axen, Hermann  
Dahlem, Franz  
Lauter, Hans  
Oelssner, Fred  
Schön, Willi  
Stoph, Willi  
Verner, Paul  
Warnke, Herbert

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany* (Boston: MIT Press, 1972), p. 122.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

### Candidates of the Politbüro

Ackermann, Anton  
Herrnstadt, Rudolf  
Honecker, Erich  
Jendretzky, Hans  
Mückenberger, Erich  
Schmidt, Elli.

(Source: Peter Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany* (Boston: MIT Press, 1972), p. 443)

## **2 - Resistance to the SED Dictatorship**

### **2.1 - Resistance in the non-Marxist parties**

#### **2.1.1 - Resistance to unity lists for the elections.**

By early 1950, the SED and the Soviet Control Commission had begun manoeuvring to ensure that the open, free, and secret elections outlined in the constitution would not take place in the GDR. Both the SED and SMAD pressured the other parties to accept "unity lists" for the October 1950 election to the *Volkskammer*, so that candidates from all parties were on one ballot which a voter either supported or rejected in its entirety. Well aware of the popularity of their parties, the leadership of the non-Marxist parties opposed unity lists, but the presence of the Soviet Control Commission in the GDR meant that their protests were fruitless. In January 1950, the head of the CDU, Otto Nuschke, requested from Semjonow, the Soviet ambassador to the GDR, that elections be held immediately with separate lists. Semjonow replied: "You can have elections immediately, Herr Nuschke, but only with unity

lists. The elections that you desire are driven by mood, and affect the security of the occupying power."<sup>96</sup> At the 15 March 1950 Central Block sitting, both Nuschke and the head of the LDPD, Hermann Kastner, still spoke out against unity lists.

The position of the leadership reflected sentiment at the lower levels of the party. Gerald Götting, general secretary of the CDU, stated: "There is sharp opposition to the unity lists everywhere in the Union,"<sup>97</sup> and added that "everywhere in the CDU, pamphlets were being distributed against the abolition of free elections."<sup>98</sup> There were similar protests at lower levels of the LDPD. The LDPD in Borna opposed unity lists fearing that they would facilitate an SED dictatorship.<sup>99</sup> In Gera, the LDPD stated that the independence of the individual parties must be maintained under all circumstances, and that unity lists must be rejected. Still believing in the rule of law, these local LDPD groups justified their stance by citing the constitution's articles on free elections.<sup>100</sup> In *Kreis Annaberg*, the LDPD clearly rejected unity lists.<sup>101</sup> The

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<sup>96</sup> ACDP, III-013-793. 6 March 1952 CDU *Ostbüro* report by Wilhelm Rost.

<sup>97</sup> Fischer/Agethen, "Die CDU in der SBZ/DDR 1945-52," p. 35.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> ADL, LDPD #13822. Protocol of the executive sitting of the LDPD *Kreis* association for Borna on 22 May 1950.

<sup>100</sup> ADL, LDPD #142499. 28 March 1950 position paper of the LDPD *Ortsgruppe* Gera on the question of the elections.

<sup>101</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/15/15, "Befreundete Parteien." Undated Report entitled: "Bemerkenswerte blockpolitische Erscheinungen in den Kreisen Sachsens" (c. 1950).

rejection of unity lists was most prevalent in Thuringia. Of the 32 LDPD members of the provincial assembly elected in 1946, none offered themselves as candidates at the October 1950 election. Similarly, only 4 of the 20 CDU elected members offered themselves as candidates again.<sup>102</sup>

It seems likely that the broader population also rejected unity lists. Dr. Hans Loch, the LDPD finance minister of the GDR, summarized the attitude of the population at the time as: "Opposition at all costs!" Dr. Walter Koenig, a member of the LDPD executive for Thuringia, also stated that the population was attempting to defend itself against the dictatorship of the SED by expressing a desire for separate election lists.<sup>103</sup> Popular lack of interest in the fall elections, discussed below, also suggests that the population opposed unity lists.

After 3 months of opposing unity lists, the non-Marxist parties in the GDR accepted unity lists on 28 March 1950, and officially announced at the Central Block sitting of 16 May 1950 that unity list elections would take place.<sup>104</sup> The seats in the *Volkskammer* were allotted before the election, so that the SED received 25% of the seats, the CDU and LDPD 15% each, the NDPD and DBD 7.5% each and the rest were reserved for the mass organizations such as the FDJ. At this election, and all subsequent, the *Volkskammer* issued an election act which listed the number of seats each party or organization was to receive in the next *Volkskammer*,

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<sup>102</sup> Weber, *DDR. Grundriss der Geschichte*, p. 45.

<sup>103</sup> ADL, LDPD #2782. Protocol of the sitting of the acting executive of the LDPD provincial association of Thuringia on 17 March 1950.

<sup>104</sup> Suckut, "Die Entscheidung," p. 134.

regardless of the results of the election.<sup>105</sup>

There are two reasons why the non-Marxist parties accepted this arrangement. As noted above, the parties realized any opposition was fruitless as long as the Soviet Control Commission remained in Germany. Michael Richter, in his extensive study on the CDU during these years, suggests that the terror and show trials which were taking place in the countries of Eastern Europe also contributed to the change of position.<sup>106</sup> The acceptance of unity lists meant that the GDR became a *Volksdemokratie* and not a liberal parliamentary democracy which the constitution prescribed.

#### **2.1.2 - SED action against the non-Marxist parties**

The SED acknowledged resistance in the non-Marxist parties through its campaign against them. The SED took advantage of the newly founded Ministry for State Security to conduct extensive arrests of suspected political opponents throughout the GDR. In 1950 alone, there were over 78,000 people tried as political opponents.<sup>107</sup> There is still no definitive breakdown of the 78,000 sentences. Certainly, a considerable number would have been a result of the above mentioned purges within the SED, and a result of removing oppositional CDU and LDPD members. An evident example of these types of sentences was the show trial of Leo Herwegen and Willi Brundert, discussed below. The sentencing of

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<sup>105</sup> Peter Lapp, *Wahlen in der DDR* (Berlin: Verlag Gebr. Holzappel, 1982), p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 246.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Richter, "Vom Widerstand der christlichen Demokraten in der DDR," in Kaff, p. 118

Günter Stempel, the LDPD general secretary, in December 1950 to 25 years for his opposition to unity lists is another example of the sentencing of political opponents.<sup>108</sup> The lack of CDU support for unity lists led to a wave of arrests of CDU members after the fall elections.<sup>109</sup> A portion of the verdicts were also handed down against individuals who conducted underground work in the GDR on behalf of anti-Communist groups in West Berlin, such as the 18 high school students in Werdau. (See below) In sum, the SED used its system of justice against any politically dangerous opponent, which included both obvious opponents such as members of the non-Marxist parties, and those who distributed anti-Communist pamphlets or disgruntled workers who called for strikes.<sup>110</sup> The number of "true" political opponents among those sentenced must await further research.

In 1950, the CDU suffered its largest number of arrests in one year in the GDR in the period under investigation.<sup>111</sup> On 29 March 1950, Frank Schleusener, a CDU member of the Brandenburg legislature and mayor of Brandenburg was

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<sup>108</sup> See Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 68, and below. Stempel was released in 1956.

<sup>109</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 293.

<sup>110</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 240. For an introduction to the SED's use of justice for political ends, see Werkentin.

<sup>111</sup> Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Statistics prepared by Frau Nestler. Investigation number 94RK01. These statistics are preliminary and thus do not represent all those arrested. Nevertheless, the trend in arrests is important. In 1950, there were 406 recorded arrests. After 1950, the largest number of CDU arrests took place in 1953 (296) followed by 1951 (272) and 1952 (252). The number of arrests in 1950 was significantly larger than other years.

arrested by the MfS and presumably killed by torture.<sup>112</sup> The MfS claimed that he had committed suicide, but refused to return his body to the family.<sup>113</sup> The CDU mayor of Potsdam, Erwin Köhler, and his wife, Charlotte Köhler, were arrested in early 1950 and sentenced to death on 2 December 1950 for espionage and anti-Soviet propaganda. The Köhlers were quietly executed in the Soviet Union on 10 April 1951.<sup>114</sup> In *Kreis Mühlhausen*, Thuringia, the entire CDU *Kreis* leadership was removed from office and expelled from the CDU. In *Kreis Worbis*, 50 CDU mayors were arrested. In Mecklenburg, the CDU minister of finance, Dr. Siegfried Witte, was arrested. In Saxony-Anhalt, the provincial chair of the CDU Erich Fascher was arrested. In Potsdam, the SMT sentenced 34 persons, nearly all CDU members, to 25 years labour.<sup>115</sup> In June 1950, the CDU mayor of Gransee, Meyer-Wüstenhagen, was expelled from the Block supposedly because he had "smeared" Communism (*Hetzer*).<sup>116</sup> The CDU chair in Wittenberge, Schätzkel, was expelled for the same reason.<sup>117</sup> In Plauen, the SED

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<sup>112</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, pp. 228, 239.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Richter, "Vom Widerstand," in Kaff, p. 115.

<sup>114</sup> See Erich Ebert's report in Kaff, p. 226.

<sup>115</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, pp. 230-240. At the January 25 sitting of the Potsdam city assembly, the CDU protested against the political persecution of its members. "In der Sitzung war die Frage aufgeworfen worden, wie sich die CDU einem ungesetzlichen Terror weiter beugen soll"; Reinert, pp. 308, 328. See also Fricke, *Opposition und Widerstand*, p. 65.

<sup>116</sup> BLHA, Ld.Br. Rep. 202G, Amt für Information Nr.66, p. 564. 1 June 1950 letter to Amt für Information, signature illegible.

<sup>117</sup> BLHA, Ld.Br.Rep 202G, Amt für Information Nr. 59, p. 395. 30 May 1951 memorandum for Amt für Information from

orchestrated the arrest of 30 members of the CDU group there.<sup>118</sup> At the University of Halle, ten members of the CDU university group were arrested. Nearly all were sentenced to 25 years in prison.<sup>119</sup> By the end of 1950, attacks on CDU members had become so numerous that Otto Nuschke launched a formal complaint with the SED.<sup>120</sup>

The LDPD also suffered SED persecution. In March 1950, the chair of the LDPD Kreis association in Forst, Wilhelm Tietz, was expelled from the Block for being a "reactionary."<sup>121</sup> In August, LDPD general secretary Günter Stempel was arrested by the MfS and handed over to the Soviet secret police. He was later tried by the Soviets, sentenced to 25 years labour and deported to Siberia. Stempel was released in 1956.<sup>122</sup> The MfS also arrested a

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Wagner.

<sup>118</sup> Richter, "Vom Widerstand der christlichen Demokraten in der DDR," in Günther Scholz (ed.), *Verfolgt - verhaftet - verurteilt* (Berlin: Westkreuz Verlag, 1990), pp. 46-47.

<sup>119</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 304. Many of these students had complained of the SED university reforms announced at the Second Party Congress, which aimed to make Marxism-Leninism the basis of higher education. The CDU student groups at the University of Leipzig rejected the compulsory lectures on Marxism-Leninism, and suggested working vigorously to counter these measures; ACDP, VII-013-1421. Position of the extended executive of the CDU University group at the University of Leipzig on the situation of universities in the GDR.

<sup>120</sup> Richter, "Vom Widerstand," pp. 46-47.

<sup>121</sup> BLHA, Ld.Br. Rep 202G, Amt für Information, Nr. 59, p. 395. 30 May 1951 memorandum for the Amt für Information from Wagner.

<sup>122</sup> Papke, p. 41.

number of LDPD members in Schwerin in October.<sup>123</sup>

The SED justified these attacks on members of the non-Marxist parties by claiming that they were co-operating with foreign secret services. An SED declaration of August 1950 stated: "It has been proven that in both "bürgerliche" parties, in the CDU and the LDP, Kaiser's spy centre has formed a solid basis."<sup>124</sup> The MfS directive dealing with penetrating the CDU, outlined in section 1.2.2 above, demonstrates that the SED employed the MfS to determine which CDU members had contacts with, or held beliefs similar to, Kaiser.

The SED further used show trials to legitimize to the public its conduct against the non-Marxist parties. In the Dessau theatre, the largest in Germany, Leo Herwegen, the CDU minister for Work and Social Policy in Saxony-Anhalt, Dr. Willi Brundert, a former SPD member of the SED, and others, were accused of economic sabotage.<sup>125</sup> SED jurists believed in show trials as an instrument to frighten the population into obedience, and therefore arranged for massive propaganda to accompany them. As early as 1948, Max Fechner had suggested that trials of economic criminals should be conducted in factories.<sup>126</sup> During the Dessau show trial, the SED tried to promote its legitimacy by "exposing"

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<sup>123</sup> Sagolla, p. 46.

<sup>124</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/106, ZPKK, p. 3. Undated party declaration on the Field affair.

<sup>125</sup> The report from the trial against Herwegen, Brundert, and the others, Friedrich Methfessel, Hermann Müller, Leopold Kaatz, Ernst Simon, Paul Heil, Ernst Pauli, and Heinrich Scharf is found in SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/60.

<sup>126</sup> Franz-Josef Kos, "Politische Justiz in der DDR. Der Dessauer Schauprozess vom April 1950", VfZ 44 (1996), p.397.

the West German/American "imperialists" who sent spies and saboteurs into the GDR.<sup>127</sup> The Dessau show trial took place in April and May 1950, in front of roughly 1400 people who were bussed in daily.<sup>128</sup> There were simultaneous broadcasts on the radio as well. Willi Brundert concluded about the trial: "Es ging nicht um die Wahrheit; es ging um Propaganda." After a month of the trial, the SED launched a massive press campaign to convince the population that there was a capitalist conspiracy at work through Brundert and Herwegen, and invited the entire town to attend the announcement of the verdict on the square in front of the theatre on 4 May 1950. A series of pamphlets was also issued to advertise the upcoming verdict.<sup>129</sup> Although Dessau had a population of roughly 90,000, only 300 showed up to hear the verdict.<sup>130</sup> Brundert and Herwegen were sentenced to 15 years in prison.

### **2.1.3 - The effect of repression on the non-Marxist parties**

The persecution of non-SED party members, and other widespread injustices, caused several members of the non-Marxist parties to speak out. CDU member Peter Bloch complained of injustice and despotism at a sitting of the CDU faction of the Brandenburg provincial assembly in early

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<sup>127</sup> Kos, p. 414.

<sup>128</sup> Willi Brundert, *Es begann im Theater... "Volksjustiz" hinter dem eisernen Vorhang* (Berlin: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz GmbH, 1958), p. 10.

<sup>129</sup> Brundert, p. 49.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

1950.<sup>131</sup> In March, the CDU party executive removed him from his position and expelled him from the party.<sup>132</sup> Bloch then fled to the West.<sup>133</sup> Alfred Gruner, a member of the CDU executive for Saxony-Anhalt and Kreis chair of Genthin, announced he was resigning from his posts because of the lack of CDU opposition to the SED. In his letter of resignation, he emphasized the lawlessness in the GDR, stating that his rejection of the CDU's political course during the past few months brought risks to his own safety, and he wanted to be careful that he did not follow the same path of other CDU members who had "disappeared without a trace" in 1947 and 1948. He added: "I could name many more sentencings of youths to 15-25 years labour, the last of which occurred when the GDR was presumably sovereign, and therefore for which the government of the GDR is guilty."<sup>134</sup> He also complained that Nuschke's silence in these matters made him an accomplice. In the town of Wachstadt, the CDU chair proclaimed at a public farmers' assembly that "an anti-Marxist Block" had to be founded.<sup>135</sup> In Kreis Leipzig, Herr Krahmer of the CDU said he would only work with the SED if they curbed the activity of their "Politicians of the Fist" (*Faustpolitiker*).<sup>136</sup> In January 1950, the Soviet

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<sup>131</sup> Bloch, p. 165.

<sup>132</sup> Agethen, "Die CDU," p. 59.

<sup>133</sup> Bloch, p. 182.

<sup>134</sup> ACDP, VII-011-3026. 1 September 1950 letter from Alfred Gruner to all CDU provincial executive members in Saxony Anhalt.

<sup>135</sup> THSA, IV 4.08/214. 23 February 1950 letter from KPKK, Weber, to LPKK in Erfurt.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

Control Commission removed Hugo Hickmann, the chairman of the CDU in Saxony, from his position for having criticized the SED's use of force, and its leading-role claim. Hickmann remained in the GDR after his removal, and died in Saxony in 1955.<sup>137</sup>

These sentiments were also prevalent at lower levels of the LDPD. In Kreis Döbeln, Dr. Werner, the vice chairman of the Hainichen LDPD, stated: "With the Nazis it was bad enough, but what we have today is an even bigger terror."<sup>138</sup> During an LDPD public election meeting in preparation for the elections in the fall of 1950, one LDPD member brought out SED persecution: "People should carefully reflect on what they will be electing on October 15. Members of the SED report to the authorities people who listen to RIAS [Radio in the American Sector of Berlin], and these people are then arrested."<sup>139</sup> LDPD opposition during the preparations for the October vote found resonance in the population. In Saxony-Anhalt, at an election meeting in Schochwitz (Halle) the LDPD candidate Buchholz said: "After the election, I am going to resign and work only for my party. I am no friend of the Soviet Union, and if I am rejected for standing, that doesn't scare me."<sup>140</sup> He received tumultuous applause for his comments. In Gottscheina (Leipzig), the LDPD candidate

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<sup>137</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 222.

<sup>138</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/15/15, "Befreundete Parteien." Report entitled: "Bemerkenswerte blockpolitische Erscheinungen in den Kreisen Sachsens." There is no date on the document, but it is clear from the context that it is 1950.

<sup>139</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1150, p. 15. 16 September 1950 report Nr. 4 by HVDVP task force.

<sup>140</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 70. 17 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen."

Christina Hack was vicious in her attacks on the SED. She stated: "Those who are in at the moment are criminals just like Hitler. God wanted Thälmann to be murdered in a concentration camp. Pieck and Grotewohl will get theirs soon."<sup>141</sup>

As was the case during the era of Soviet occupation, the campaign against political opponents produced a differentiated response. The SED campaign against the CDU on the one hand removed many political opponents and caused other oppositional members to leave the party, but drove still others to resist the SED more strenuously.<sup>142</sup> A number of CDU resistance groups in the GDR were founded in 1950 including the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alte Union*, the *Jakob-Kaiser-Gruppe*, the *Christlich-Demokratischer Kampfbund in Mitteldeutschland*, *Deutsche Freiheitsliga*, *Immer bereit sein*, *Camemberth* and *Deutsche Widerstandsbewegung gegen den Kommunismus*.<sup>143</sup> The groups spread pamphlets, sent secret radio reports to the West, listened to western broadcasts, delivered reports to the CDU *Ostbüro*, painted anti-SED graffiti on public buildings, and put up anti-SED posters. They often worked together with the UfJ and the KgU.<sup>144</sup>

Repression in the GDR was the motive behind Norbert Sommer's resistance work. Sommer, a CDU member, distributed pamphlets in Sonderhausen that proclaimed: "Freedom for the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Richter, "Vom Widerstand der christlichen Demokraten," p. 112. Richter, "Vom Widerstand," in Kaff, p. 120. See as well the drop in CDU membership in 1950 documented below, section 2.1.4.

<sup>143</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

eastern zone!" and: "Against Stalinism!"<sup>145</sup> Sommer distributed pamphlets for over a year, before abandoning distribution because of fear of arrest. Sommer was arrested in September 1952, and sentenced to seven years in prison. He was amnestied on 10 July 1956 and settled in West Germany.<sup>146</sup>

One of the larger CDU resistance groups was the group "Michael" based in Halberstadt. The group consisted of between 50 and 60 people composed mostly of former *Wehrmacht* officers who had joined the CDU or the LDPD. Werner Westermann, the CDU mayor of Waldersleben served as a contact between the CDU Ostbüro and the group. After a trip to Berlin on 6 December 1950, two members of the group, Engelbert Lohse and Rudi Fuhrmann, were arrested. Shortly thereafter, 55 other members of the group were taken into custody. It appears that Fuhrmann exposed the group, as he was released shortly after the arrests. The group's activities consisted especially in spreading anti-bolshevik pamphlets and posters. This was one of the few resistance groups that also possessed arms. The group was equipped with ammunition and weapons for roughly 300 people, including grenades, one machine gun, and two artillery pieces. The armaments were hidden in the Langensteiner mountains. The fate of these resisters is undetermined. Westermann suspected that they had been deported to the Soviet Union.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> See Norbert Sommer's report in Kaff, p. 240. He began to engage in underground resistance due to the "totale Unsicherheit."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> ADL, #2929. 30 March 1951 report from Werner Westermann, CDU mayor of Waldersleben, regarding the resistance group "Michael" in Halberstadt, Saxony-Anhalt.

LDPD resistance also increased due to repression. In May 1951, the LDPD resistance group "Scherenfisch" used small rockets to send pamphlets raining over a crowd of 30-40,000 at a sporting event at an unspecified location in the GDR.<sup>148</sup> Later in the year, 8 LDPD members in Weimar, including Otto Sickel, an LDPD *Kreis* member of parliament, were arrested for distributing anti-Communist pamphlets. A Soviet Military Tribunal sentenced all members of the group on 3 October 1951 to 25 years labour.<sup>149</sup> These groups did not always confine themselves to distributing pamphlets, but also engaged in espionage. Various CDU *Ostbüro* informants reported on the number of Soviet tanks near certain bases; the types of fighter craft seen in the skies; as well as the number of landings at certain airfields such as Frankfurt/Oder. The barracks of both Soviet and East German forces also came under scrutiny.<sup>150</sup>

The number of groups or individuals who distributed anti-Communist pamphlets began to wane by the end of 1950 because of the development of other methods to distribute pamphlets. Western-based anti-Communist organizations increasingly adopted balloons as a manner of distributing oppositional pamphlets in the GDR. Launching balloons from the western zones of Berlin or from West Germany both greatly reduced the risk to individuals involved in

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<sup>148</sup> ADL, #2929. 7 June 1951 letter from Otto to Naase. The group was arrested in 1951.

<sup>149</sup> ADL, #2509. 16 August 1956 letter from Brandt (Uelzen branch) to the *Ostbüro* of the FDP.

<sup>150</sup> ACDP, III-013-792. Unsigned report of 7 August 1951.

distribution and increased the area covered.<sup>151</sup>

#### 2.1.4 - The forcing into line of the non-Marxist parties.

The Communist pressure which had begun in force during the debate on unity lists succeeded in placing pro-Communist candidates at the head of all CDU provincial associations by the end of 1950. By the Fifth Party Congress of the CDU in September 1950, the CDU had been essentially forced into line (*gleichgeschaltet*).<sup>152</sup> All CDU provincial associations reported that the CDU co-operated to a greater degree with the SED in carrying out the SED-sponsored "referendum against remilitarization and for the conclusion of a peace treaty" of 1951, than it had done during the 1950 elections.<sup>153</sup> In October 1951 the CDU abandoned Kaiser's "Christian Socialism" platform for the party, and adopted the pro-Communist "Christian Realism." After the Second Party Conference of the SED in July 1952, the CDU officially recognized the leading role of the SED in all branches of state and society. By the Sixth Party Congress of the CDU in September 1952, the CDU had fully become an instrument of the SED.<sup>154</sup> CDU support for Communism translated into a decrease in its membership between 1950 and 1952:

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<sup>151</sup> ADL, #2527. June 1954 monthly report of Büro Anton.

<sup>152</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 289.

<sup>153</sup> ACDP, VII-012-1704. Undated report on CDU work in preparation for the 1951 referendum.

<sup>154</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 363.

CDU Membership in the GDR	
Year	Membership
January 1950	206,114
July 1950	194,934
September 1950	188,652
January 1951	177,280
March 1951	172,628
June 1951	170,568
November 1951	166,000
July 1952	164,250

(Source: Michael Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p.392.)

The drop in membership was directly related to opposition to the CDU's course. In 1950, 59.2% of those who left the party did so because of political considerations; 32.1% left because they moved (likely to the West); 4.2% of the decline was due to death, and only 1.7% were expelled from the party.<sup>155</sup>

The LDPD followed a path similar to that of the CDU in bowing to Communist pressure, becoming nearly fully coopted by 1951. One LDPD member even reported that members of the party in Dresden felt it was "undesirable" to discuss liberalism at the party meetings.<sup>156</sup> After Stempel's arrest in 1950, the new general secretary of the LDPD, Herbert Täschner, began to lead the LDPD on a pro-Communist course. He began this process by adopting the "democratic

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<sup>155</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 392.

<sup>156</sup> ADL, LDPD #2779. Protocol of working conference of Kreis association chairs and secretaries with Dr. Loch on 26 February 1951.

centralism" model of the SED for the LDPD's governing structure. At the LDPD Party Congress in Eisenach in July 1951, the LDPD agreed to support the SED in integrating the remaining private enterprise into the socialist economy of the GDR,<sup>157</sup> thus abandoning one of the central tenets of the party. This course was not popular with the membership. During the party vote of 1951, 1/3 of the candidates opposed Dr. Hans Loch's candidacy for chair of the party because of his support for the Eisenacher programme.<sup>158</sup> The LDPD also suffered a significant drop in membership. In December 1949, the LDPD comprised 184,842 members. By June 1951, that number had been reduced to 155,417.<sup>159</sup> The LDPD leadership likely acquiesced to the SED dictatorship due to fear of reprisal. Manfred Gerlach, an LDPD member who publicly supported the SED, is reported to have said: "If all-German talks do not come about in the near future, and the present conditions persist, nobody will be able to save our party from liquidation. The wave of arrests which will take place will be the likes of which we haven't seen."<sup>160</sup>

## 2.2 - Popular resistance to the SED

Historians attempting to trace developments in the East German population prior to 1952 face source constraints. As outlined above, there was no systematic reporting within the MfS on developments in the broader population. The

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<sup>157</sup> Papke, p. 42.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Weber, *Parteiensystem*, p. 513.

<sup>160</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0370/I. Undated report on Gerlach's comments in the party executive.

Department charged with generating reports on the population - Department VI a - was a small department within a small organization. The reports of this branch have yet to be located within the labyrinth of the former MfS-archives,<sup>161</sup> yet it would be surprising if this information contained systematic evaluation of the situation in the GDR given the size of the department. The expansion of the MfS information gathering network after the 17 June uprising provided future historians with a much broader source base and systematic internal evaluations on which to judge popular developments.

Neither the *Politbüro* nor the Central Committee had means for comprehensive assessment of the situation in the GDR prior to 1952. Departments within the Central Committee sent members to collect information on specific developments in the GDR, but these were not systematic assignments to evaluate the overall situation. The Central Committee's agricultural department, for example, might send its members to a certain region to assess the harvest, or the department of industry might send a delegation to determine the extent to which the latest economic plan was being met in a specific factory. Based on these isolated reports, one cannot draw overall conclusions on the situation in the population. With the founding of the Central Committee department *Leitende Organe der Parteien und Massenorganisationen* in 1952, the SED leadership became equipped with a tool for systematic assessment of the situation in the population. The reports and analyses generated by this branch are a valuable source of information, but begin only in 1952.

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<sup>161</sup> This information was provided verbally to the author by his caseworker in the BSTU, Frau Karin Göpel, Berlin, 10 July 1996.

Reports of the non-Marxist parties in the GDR are only partially helpful for tracing developments in the GDR population prior to 1953. There are no information reports from local CDU groups prior to 1953.<sup>162</sup> The situation with LDPD documentation is better, but reporting on the population was sporadic. These reports have been employed here where possible. The records of the Free German Trade Union (FDGB) may prove a useful source for future researchers in assessing the mood of the population. These records are, however, limited, as they provide information solely on the situation in factories.

Police reports are employed in the present study. The *Volkspolizei* in general did not systematically collect information on the population. During certain important events, however, the *Volkspolizei* collected information on the population. Situation reports collected by the *Volkspolizei* on the October 1950 election are employed in this study.

Given the restrictive source situation, historians must look to manifestations of popular will. Two points in particular suggest that a fundamental resistance to the Communist system was present in the population. First, the period between 1945 and 1949 demonstrated widespread popular support for the non-Marxist parties in the GDR. The support for these parties was at once a rejection of the SED and support for the end of the Communist system in eastern Germany. The evidence presented in this study furthers Michael Richter's assertion that elections in the fall of 1949 would have returned a majority vote for the CDU and the

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<sup>162</sup> Stephan Zeidler, "Zur Rolle der CDU (Ost) in der inneren Entwicklung der DDR 1952-53," M.A. thesis, University of Bonn, 1994, p. 18.

LDPD.<sup>163</sup> The conduct of the SED and SMAD outlined in the above chapter certainly suggested a great fear of the popularity of these parties.<sup>164</sup> Popular support for the non-Marxist parties continued in 1950, but support waned as these parties became coopted into the Communist system. The adoption of unity lists significantly reduced popular support for the non-Marxist parties, and contributed to popular resistance as opposition to the SED was not given an outlet.

Second, the repressive measures adopted by the SED dictatorship from 1945 to 1950 undermined popular trust in the political system in the GDR. This attitude was most evident in the popular rejection of the SED's instruments of control. Contrary to Mary Fulbrook's position, outlined in the introduction, one could indeed categorize the situation in the GDR at this time as a latent civil war. The historian Wolfgang Eisert's conclusion is more accurate: "Indem die Polizei immer mehr zum funktionierenden bewaffneten Machtinstrument der SED wurde, half sie mit, der Entwicklung von Ansätzen einer demokratischen Ordnung entgegenzuwirken. Notwendige Schutzfunktionen der Polizei im Interesse einer möglichen antifaschistisch-demokratischen Entwicklung verloren an Bedeutung zugunsten der Durchsetzung politischer Machtansprüche der SED."<sup>165</sup>

### **2.2.1 - Popular support for the non-Marxist parties**

The rejection of the SED meant that the non-Marxist

<sup>163</sup> Richter, *Die Ost-CDU*, p. 389.

<sup>164</sup> See section 5, chapter 1 on the first elections in the Soviet occupied zone, and section 4.5, chapter 2 on the *Volkskongress* elections.

<sup>165</sup> Eisert, p. 187.

parties continued to enjoy widespread support in the early months of 1950, before they were forced to embark on a pro-Communist course. In the province of Mecklenburg, the CDU and the LDPD called for new elections in February because of their certainty of victory. Both parties issued orders to their members at the *Kreis* and *Gemeinde* level to request the dissolution of the local assemblies and the holding of new elections. Although both parties knew of the deep disenchantment with the SED, they had to appear non-confrontational. The LDPD proposal for new elections carefully worded the popular opposition to the SED: "For a successful rebuilding, the local administrations must have considerable support. They can only gain this support when they have the confidence of the people. This is evidently not the case today. It is most probable that the SED majority would disappear in many instances."<sup>166</sup> The LDPD leadership in Mecklenburg added: "Whoever rejects the application for the dissolution of the *Kreis* and *Gemeinde* assemblies proves his fear of new elections, and of the true opinion of the people."<sup>167</sup>

The SED did, in fact, note the popularity of the non-Marxist parties in Mecklenburg and Brandenburg. In May 1950, the SED in Mecklenburg complained of the strength of the CDU in *Kreis* Malchin. In one *Gemeinde*, the SED dropped from 13 members to 2, and the newly formed CDU group immediately received 20 members.<sup>168</sup> In the *Gemeinde* Joachimsthal, an LDPD

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<sup>166</sup> MLHA, IV L 2/4/1217, p. 22. LDPD Information bulletin of 1 February 1950.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> MLHA, IV L 2/4/1179, "Landesleitung der SED Mecklenburg." 4 May 1950 report by LPKK Mecklenburg.

membership campaign resulted in 100 new members.<sup>169</sup> In Kreis Angermünde, the SED complained about how quickly the LDPD was able to build up a local factory group.<sup>170</sup> One SED report concluded that the widespread support for the LDPD and CDU was hindering the development of a "democratic consciousness" in the population.<sup>171</sup>

The best evidence of significant popular support for the CDU and LDPD remains the conduct of the SED. The insistence on unity lists and the vigorous MfS campaign to force the parties into line reveal the grave fear in the SED of these parties' popularity.

### **2.2.2 - The relationship of the population to the Volkspolizei**

Popular rejection of the Volkspolizei, which emerged in the earlier years under investigation in this study, continued in the 1950s. In an internal report on the 1950 elections, the police complained that during random identification checks in restaurants, its officers were usually insulted and often attacked.<sup>172</sup> In the week prior to

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<sup>169</sup> BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 202G, Amt für Information Nr. 56, p. 250. Report entitled: "Analyse der Tätigkeit der bürgerlichen Parteien LDP und CDU im Kreise Angermünde in den Monaten Januar und Februar 1950."

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>172</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 140. 18 October 1950 report entitled: "Bericht über die Vorkommnisse während der Vorbereitungen und Durchführung der Volkswahl in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik v. 15.9 - 15.10.50."

the elections in 1950, 79 assaults on *Volkspolizei* personnel took place in the GDR.<sup>173</sup>

The impact of repression on the East German population is revealed in *Volkspolizei* reports on the election meetings (meetings at which candidates were presented to the public) and rallies prior to the election. Between 17 September and 2 October, the *Volkspolizei* authored six reports summarizing the situation at election-related events throughout the GDR. Repression was a primary topic at these events. At a public election meeting at a shoe factory in Brandenburg, one man in attendance stated: "These days nobody has the nerve to open his mouth. Everyone is scared of being picked up [...]. The population is numb from the continuous politics accompanied by marching music on the radio."<sup>174</sup> At an LDPD meeting in Tauer, Brandenburg, an undercover *Volkspolizei* officer questioned the LDPD candidate on his position during the Third Reich. The vast majority of those in attendance became suspicious, called the man an SED spy, and forced him to leave the hall.<sup>175</sup> At the end of an election rally in Storkow, Brandenburg, a miner was arrested for criticizing the GDR, the *Volkspolizei*, and the Oder-Neisse border.<sup>176</sup> In the six police reports written between 17 September and 2 October on public election meetings throughout the GDR, the topic of repression or hostility toward the *Volkspolizei* was

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 76. 28 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen und Kundgebungen."

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1150, p. 45. 18 September 1950 report Nr. 13 by HVDVP taskforce.

mentioned most frequently. The *Volkspolizei* noted complaints regarding repression in three reports. There was again regional differentiation here. Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg reported these types of incidents, while in Saxony, Thuringia and Mecklenburg, specific anti-repression sentiment was not expressed in the election meetings.<sup>177</sup> In comparison, hostility to the Oder-Neisse border was mentioned in two reports, and there was no recorded complaints regarding the economic situation.

Reports from SPD *Ostbüro* informants in the GDR at the time of the election also reflected popular fears due to insecurity. The reports stated that the low standard of living, combined with the surveillance and spying, were causing the population to be increasingly disgruntled.<sup>178</sup> Letters from individuals in the GDR to the western SPD stated that the vast majority of the population rejected the "terror regime," but that the population felt that there was little that could be done as long as the "Russians and the NKWD" remained in Germany.<sup>179</sup> One SPD member who escaped from prison in Bautzen and spent 11 days en route to West Germany stated: "The most striking experience of my escape was the willingness to help of other people in the Soviet zone."<sup>180</sup>

Several church members also spoke out against the repression. In *Kreis Niesky*, a Protestant minister declared:

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<sup>177</sup> These reports are found in BA-P, DO 1 11/1121.

<sup>178</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0421. 25 September 1951 report from *Kreis Teltow*.

<sup>179</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/2. 23 November 1951 report from *Stadt and Kreis Waren/Müritz*; *ibid.*, 22 May 1951 report; *ibid.* 0361/1. 1 August 1950 letter.

<sup>180</sup> FNA, VII "SBZ/DDR." Undated report of time in Bautzen.

"[The SED] talks of peace, but spreads hate. [The SED] talks of freedom, but subjugates others."<sup>181</sup> In March 1950, Otto Dibelius, the bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, and Heinrich Grübner, the provost of the Marienkirche in Berlin, met with Grotewohl to discuss the "prevailing questions of the day," which included SED "hate propaganda" and prisoners in the GDR.<sup>182</sup>

These incidents of popular resentment of the *Volkspolizei* because of its role in repression in the GDR represented a general trend against the *Volkspolizei*. Ulbricht acknowledged that this was the case during a speech to the *Volkspolizei* in Rostock in August 1950. Ulbricht candidly stated that the population did not assist the *Volkspolizei* in fighting opponents of the GDR: "Everyone knows where the enemy sits in the GDR, except the instruments of our state."<sup>183</sup> Ulbricht believed that a more "scientific" approach to police work would improve the *Volkspolizei's* relationship with the population. He said that if such an approach were adopted, the population's view of the police would change, and in situations "when enemies attack *Volkspolizei* officers and the officers retaliate, then the population will accept this and support the police officers," indicating that this had not been the case up to that point. Ulbricht was concerned about police excesses

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<sup>181</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1150, p. 46. 18 September 1950 report Nr. 13 by HVDVP taskforce.

<sup>182</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1421. Extract from 2 May 1950 memorandum of the bishop of Evangelical Lutheran provincial church of Saxony.

<sup>183</sup> MLHA, IV L 2/12/525, Landesleitung der SED Mecklenburg, Sicherheit, p. 10. Transcript of Ulbricht's speech from August 1950.

because of their negative effect on German unity: "To win over patriotic forces in West Germany, the question of how things look in the German Democratic Republic is of utmost importance. Is it orderly and democratic? Are democratic laws upheld? Our recommendations for unity will have greater resonance if things look orderly, than if the population talks of [...] conflicts with the police etc. That means that each police officer must be aware of the heavy responsibility that he has with regard to upholding democratic laws, and the importance this has for peace, the unity of Germany, and the preparation for all-German democratic elections."<sup>184</sup>

One aspect of police work which does not fit this pattern was the development of a volunteer system, enabling citizens to assist the Volkspolizei. This system was introduced in 1952 and had 27,000 volunteers by March. By June 1953, that number had risen to 35,000.<sup>185</sup> The rise in the number of volunteers does not necessarily indicate support for the police force, however, as there were attractive perks for volunteering. Part of the rise should nevertheless be attributed to those acting out of political conviction.<sup>186</sup> Police surprise at the uprising of 17 June 1953 suggests, however, that the volunteer system was deficient.<sup>187</sup>

MfS difficulties in recruiting informants from the general population also suggest a distrust of the SED's instruments of control. During "Operation Twilight" against

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>185</sup> Bessel, p. 241.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid..

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

a religious sect in the GDR, Mielke complained that informants often refused to co-operate with the MfS, and that those that did were often negligent.<sup>188</sup> After the 1953 uprising, Ernst Wollweber, the new head of state security, issued Directive 30/53 which called for a substantially increased informant net and better qualified informants.<sup>189</sup> The extensive public relations campaign of the Secretariat for State Security<sup>190</sup> in the aftermath of the 17 June 1953 uprising to soften its image and convince the population to co-operate with it also suggests that the MfS had had difficulty gaining popular support.<sup>191</sup>

### 2.2.3 - The relationship of the population to the judicial apparatus

Popular rejection of the SED's repressive system of justice is also discernible in the early 1950s. The show trials, far from garnering support by "exposing enemies" in the population, alienated the population and eroded its confidence that the government genuinely represented its interests. Thomas Mann alluded to this effect in a 228 page letter to Ulbricht in 1951, in which he complained about the Waldheim trials, and compared them to Hitler's

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<sup>188</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 213/53, #100860. 30 October 1952 Directive 2/53.

<sup>189</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 2920/53, #100874. 19 September 1953 Directive 30/53.

<sup>190</sup> After the 17 June 1953 uprising, the MfS was downgraded to a Secretariat for State Security. See the following chapter.

<sup>191</sup> See the following chapter on the extensive Sfs efforts to increase its support in the population.

*Volksgerichte*.<sup>192</sup>

Popular rejection of the GDR's judicial system was made evident at several junctures. At a trial in Plothen, the audience took up such a position against the public prosecutor, the judge declared the accused innocent out of fear of reprisal.<sup>193</sup> The sentencing of young people particularly angered the East German population. On 10 January 1951 in Dresden, the 18 year old high school student Hermann Joseph Flade was sentenced to death for distributing pamphlets against the regime, which criticized the police in particular. The *Oberlandesgericht* of Dresden reduced the sentence to 15 years in prison.<sup>194</sup> On 3 October 1951, 18 young people, mostly high school students from Werdau, were sentenced to a total of 124 years in prison for spreading pamphlets and having contact with the KgU.<sup>195</sup> The verdicts were well publicized because the regime wanted to send a clear message to the population on the harsh treatment which opponents of the regime could expect.<sup>196</sup> The verdicts, however, simply contributed to the basic distrust of the regime. This effect was not lost on the SED. In 1951, the Ministry of Justice reported that: "The legal position of the *Obersten Staatsanwalt* in Berlin up to now has been that the "young offender's act" [which limited sentences for youths who had committed crimes - GB] was not applicable in

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<sup>192</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, p. 215; Werkentin, p. 181.

<sup>193</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1625. 29 November 1951 letter from Hahn, Weidlich, Pfeuffer, and Plaschke of Hauptverwaltung DVP.

<sup>194</sup> Fricke, *Politik*, pp. 246-250.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

political cases. This will now be changed because it has led to undesirable results. In the future, these types of verdicts are not to be handed down, even in political cases. Although our judicial system has been accused of light sentencing in political matters, it is now accused of the opposite. If it is expected that prison sentences over 10 years will be handed down, the verdict, if indeed such a verdict is deemed an absolute necessity, must be discussed beforehand with the Ministry of Justice of the GDR[...] Public prosecutors are no longer permitted to request the death penalty."<sup>197</sup> This report revealed not only the popular discontent with SED judicial practice, but the close relationship between the SED and the judicial system. Franz-Josef Kos perhaps summed up best the relationship between the judicial apparatus and the population: "The political justice in the GDR, and especially the show trials, did not contribute to the legitimacy of the state, but rather burdened the relationship between the citizen and the judicial apparatus."<sup>198</sup>

### 2.3 - The first elections in the GDR, October 1950.

In the months leading up to the GDR's first elections, popular rejection of the elections was discernible. From the *Volkspolizei* reports summarizing the situation at election-related events throughout the GDR between 17 September and 2 October, it is possible to infer that there was little popular interest in the election rallies and election meetings. In Bautzen, the police reported that the

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<sup>197</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/13/433. 18 October 1951 report by Staatliche Verwaltung der Justiz, signature illegible.

<sup>198</sup> Kos, p. 429.

population was apprehensive and not participating at election meetings.<sup>199</sup> In *Gemeinde Struholmersdorf*, in Thuringia, only 19 out of a population of 1400 attended the election meeting, in *Schmellbach* only 8 out of 826.<sup>200</sup> In the important optics plant VEB Zeiss in Jena, Fred Oelssner's campaign speech was received with disinterest and scepticism. The police reported that those in attendance were "reserved,"<sup>201</sup> and "laughed loudly" at Oelssner's comments that the living standard in West Germany was comparable to that of the GDR. At 4pm, approximately 1/3 of the audience left because the work day was over, although Oelssner had not finished speaking.<sup>202</sup> Workers at the Maxhütte factory in Thuringia refused to attend election rallies saying that they were fed up with the "complete overdose of political events."<sup>203</sup> Attendance at election-related events was so poor, the press was forced to regularly double the numbers of those in attendance in its reports. In Dresden, people complained of the inflated numbers reported in the press on participants at Grotewhol's

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<sup>199</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p.24. 22 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen und Kundgebungen."

<sup>200</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/1121. 26 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen und Kundgebungen."

<sup>201</sup> BA-P, DO 11/1150, p. 13. 16 September 1950 report by HVDVP taskforce.

<sup>202</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1150, p. 13. 16 September 1950 report by HVDVP taskforce.

<sup>203</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0370/I. Summer 1951 report on LDP.

speeches in Dresden and Freital.<sup>204</sup> Of the six summary police reports on election gatherings taken between 17 September and 2 October 1950, four reported a lack of interest in election-related events, with Saxony and Thuringia reporting the least interest in these events.<sup>205</sup>

Popular opposition to the elections was visible in the removal or defacing of election posters. In the days immediately prior to the election, the police were forced to establish special detachments to guard election posters. These measures curtailed the number of defacings considerably, but the police still reported numerous incidents of anti-SED graffiti or destruction of election posters. In the week before the elections in Mecklenburg, 567 cases of anti-SED graffiti or destruction of election posters were reported; in Brandenburg, 308; in Saxony-Anhalt, 246, in Thuringia, 320, and in Saxony 413, for a total of 1,864 incidents.<sup>206</sup>

SED election propaganda seems to have contributed to popular opposition. An episode in Dresden reveals the ineffectiveness of SED propaganda. During a conversation on a streetcar, one man said to his companion that clearly the Russians had begun the war in Korea. Another passenger challenged the man stating that the Americans had begun the war, and was drowned out by laughter and shouting of the

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<sup>204</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 76. 28 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen und Kundgebungen."

<sup>205</sup> See the reports in BA-P, DO 1 11/1121.

<sup>206</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 139. 18 October 1950 report: "Vorkommnisse während der Vorbereitungen und Durchführung der Volkswahl in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik v. 15.9.-15.10.50."

other passengers.<sup>207</sup> At a farmers' meeting in Bendeleben, Kreis Sondershausen, propaganda also played a role. One speaker stated: "We finally want to set aside politics and talk about farming issues [...] Farmers, let me say something. Parties come and go. It was earlier so, and will always be this way. Farmers, let me say one thing. We will continue to exist. There will always be farmers."<sup>208</sup>

The effect of propaganda was also evident in an episode in Joachimsthal. The SED had removed the LDPD mayor, Quast, and a CDU member of the Kreis council, Lipp, because of their alleged corruptness and unwillingness to work with the SED in the Block.<sup>209</sup> The SED organized a mass demonstration against the two politicians, but the propaganda display caused scepticism in the population. A rumour in the Kreis that youths armed with billy clubs were waiting at bus stops for Quast to drive him out of town confirmed popular suspicion. Upon hearing this rumour, people throughout the Kreis complained that the entire affair must have been the working of the SED in order to secure a favourable result at the fall elections. One person reported to a member of the SED that 90% of the population stood behind the deposed politicians, despite the massive

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<sup>207</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 63. 26 September 1950 report entitled: "Stimmungen in Wahlversammlungen und Kundgebungen."

<sup>208</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, 27 February 1952 report from Seifert, Generalinspekteur of the Volkspolizei to Staatssekretär Warnke.

<sup>209</sup> BLHA, Ld.Br.Rep.202G, Amt für Information Nr.56, p.253. "Analyse der Tätigkeit der bürgerlichen Parteien LDP und CDU im Kreise Angermünde in den Monaten Januar und Februar 1950."

propaganda display.<sup>210</sup> The popular discontent with the propaganda was made evident by the LDPD in March 1952 when the LDPD reported to the Soviet Control Commission in Erfurt: "There is great disappointment in the population because the propaganda and reality very often cannot be reconciled."<sup>211</sup>

The elections in October 1950 were, like the *Volkskongress* ones of the previous year, neither free nor secret. To achieve a place on the unity list, a candidate had to present himself to a panel of mainly SED, FDJ, and FDGB members. If the candidate was not able to respond in a manner pleasing to the panel, his candidacy was rejected. An example given by one witness said that in response to a question relating to war, the candidate was not to answer: "I am against all war," but rather that he was against an "unjust, imperialistic or capitalistic war," but not against a "justified, revolutionary war against an imperialist aggressor." In *Kreis Wolmirstedt*, all CDU candidates had to be replaced by more "reliable" ones.<sup>212</sup> The voting procedure itself was also dubious. Upon entering the voting locale, the voter received a ballot with a list of candidates. If the voter approved the list, he simply put the ballot in the election box unmarked. In Thuringia, this led to confusion among election officers because they were unable to distinguish the piles of uncast ballots sitting beside the boxes from the unmarked ones which "supported" the

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>211</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/2. Excerpts from 26 March 1952 LDPD report to the Soviet Control Commission in Erfurt.

<sup>212</sup> ACDP, III-013-630/3. 5 March 1952 report by Hermann Hieke, p. 3.

candidates.<sup>213</sup> If, however, the voter did not approve of the names, he went into a booth. An FDJ member noted the name of the voter as he entered the booth, and requested that his ballot be folded, thus making it easy to identify.<sup>214</sup> In Thuringia, election booths were adorned with signs reading: "Whoever votes in a booth is a war monger."<sup>215</sup> The SED-dominated *Volkspolizei* was responsible for securing the election gatherings and the election sites, thus there was no recourse against these anti-constitutional measures.<sup>216</sup>

The first elections in the GDR, at which 98% of the electorate participated, returned 99.72% support for the unity lists. Because of the agreed upon formula for distributing seats, the SED received 100 of the *Volkskammer's* 400 seats, the CDU and LDPD 60 each, the FDGB 40, the NDP and DBD 30 each, the *Kulturbund* and FDJ 20 each, the *Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* and the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* 15 each, and the *VdgB* and *Genossenschaften* 5 each.<sup>217</sup>

#### 2.4 - Underground work against the elections.

There was considerable underground work in the GDR

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<sup>213</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0357 I. 3 November 1950 report on the conduct of the election in the SBZ.

<sup>214</sup> ACDP, III-013-630/3. 5 March 1952 report by Hermann Hieke, p. 3; AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0357I. 3 November 1950 report on the conduct of the election in the SBZ.

<sup>215</sup> THSA, Bestand 5, 218, MdI, Landesbehörde der *Volkspolizei* p. 130. Various police reports.

<sup>216</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/369, p. 3. 29 January 1951 report Hauptabteilung Schutzpolizei.

<sup>217</sup> Weber, *DDR. Grundriss der Geschichte*, p.45.

against the election of 1950. One group of young SPD members from Zwickau drove to Berlin in May to contact the *Ostbüro*. The group, led by a certain Müller, returned to Berlin in September to obtain more information against the upcoming elections. While in the *Ostbüro*, the group provided information on the names of *Volkspolizei* officers, the weapons of the police, and the Wismut mining operation. In September 1950, the group produced and distributed pamphlets urging voters to vote no in the upcoming election. On 22 September, the group met at Müller's home and, in rudimentary fashion, wrote anti-SED slogans on pieces of paper for distribution. The police arrested all members of the group the same night, two on their way to distribute the flyers, and the rest at Müller's home. The members of the group received sentences between 3 months and four years in prison for "smearing [*Boykotttätetze*] against democratic institutions."<sup>218</sup>

In Werdau, Saxony, members of the SPD *Ostbüro* distributed a large number of pamphlets during the night of 5 September 1950. Additionally, they sent 300 anti-Communist letters to SED members.<sup>219</sup> The group also placed stickers in people's mailboxes or house entrances. The *Ostbüro* found that these stickers would often be spread by unknown opponents of the regime.

The *Ostbüro* report on this group demonstrated shortcomings of the *Ostbüro* of the SPD. The author

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<sup>218</sup> ADL, #2924. 11 November 1950 extracts from the trial of Müller and others.

<sup>219</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0368 a-c. 17 October 1950 report from "Source 13 688/8" entitled: "Final report of the Saxony resistance movement against the so called elections of 15 October 1950."

complained that "only" 300 letters could be sent to SED members because of a lack of financial support, and that the *Ostbüro* had failed to provide materials such as leaflets ahead of time. Because of this organizational lapse, SPD members in the GDR attempted to obtain pamphlets at the last minute which led to unnecessary arrests. The author of the report wrote: "Luckily, we had already safely brought material here 8-10 weeks before the vote. If it had been handled this way in all cases, the personnel losses from acquiring the material at the last minute would have been avoided."<sup>220</sup>

In response to the increased underground activity, the *Volkspolizei* undertook greater security measures. In the four days before the election, the SPD was unable to conduct resistance activities because of increased security. *Volkspolizei* officers and their dogs patrolled the streets nightly.<sup>221</sup> In response to the increased number of oppositional pamphlets entering the GDR, the *Volkspolizei* launched 3 operations: "Gustav," "Heinrich," and "Fritz."<sup>222</sup> The *Volkspolizei* believed, as it happened correctly, that the material was being delivered by train from the western sectors of Berlin, and therefore concentrated on this target. The train lines Berlin-Erfurt via Wittenberg, Halle, Merseburg, and Weimar, and Berlin-Plauen, via Wittenberg, Bitterfeld, Leipzig, and Werdau were particularly active in

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/752, p. 14. 20 September 1950 task force order from deputy head of the *Volkspolizei* for Saxony-Anhalt, Dombrowsky, to the Criminal Police department of the *Volkspolizei* in Saxony-Anhalt.

the transport of oppositional material.<sup>223</sup> Police officers were divided into undercover units which boarded the trains, and stationary units which remained in the stations. Stationary units patrolled waiting rooms, package counters, and platforms looking for suspicious packets. The distribution of the police units provides insight into the areas in which oppositional flyers were most prevalent. Brandenburg had 6 mobile, and 6 stationary units; Saxony 8 and 9 respectively; Saxony-Anhalt 2 and 18 respectively; and Thuringia 6 and 1 respectively.<sup>224</sup> Saxony-Anhalt was therefore the province most affected by resistance pamphlets, while Mecklenburg apparently did not experience enough pamphlet activity to merit any police units. The operations were successful in preventing many resistance pamphlets from being distributed in the GDR. On 24 September, the *Volkspolizei* captured SPD material bound for an SPD group in Plauen. On the same day, the *Volkspolizei* intercepted a CDU member working for the KGU who was distributing material. In Thuringia, the *Volkspolizei* confiscated "considerable amounts" of western-licensed newspapers.<sup>225</sup> In one week in September, the *Volkspolizei* reported confiscation of the following amount of smear material: Brandenburg 84,271, Mecklenburg 10,303, Saxony 55,373, Saxony-Anhalt 28,406, Thuringia 16,846, for a total

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/752, p. 30. 4 October 1950 report from Department K in the *Volkspolizei* to the chief of police for the GDR Maron regarding operation "Gustav."

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

of 195,201.<sup>226</sup>

## 2.5 - The Saalfeld Disturbances

A little known, yet representative, demonstration of the strained relationship between the population and the instruments of control occurred in August 1951 in the small Thuringian town of Saalfeld. At 6:40 pm on 16 August 1951, two workers from the Wismut mining operation were arrested on Saalfeld's market square because of drunken and disorderly conduct. Within a few hours, between 30 and 40 of their friends appeared in front of the police station to express their anger at the arrest of their colleagues. Two of the demonstrators were arrested because of the insults they hurled at the police.<sup>227</sup>

The second set of arrests sparked further unrest. The angry demonstrators proceeded through town gathering more support. Although Wismut workers made up the majority of these new demonstrators, other social groups such as independent business owners also participated.<sup>228</sup> Upon their return to the police station, the crowd entered the police station and attempted to negotiate the release of the prisoners. After making little progress, 4 or 5 women suggested that the demonstrators should stop trying to

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<sup>226</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1121, p. 23. 18 October 1950: "Bericht über die Vorkommnisse während der Vorbereitungen und Durchführung der Volkswahl in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik v. 15.9.-15.10.50."

<sup>227</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/08, p. 27. 17 August 1951 report entitled: "Überfall auf das VPKA Saalfeld," by Mayer, deputy head of the GDR Volkspolizei.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

negotiate, and free the prisoners themselves. In the meantime, 36 police officers arrived from the nearby Maxhütte station as backup. The demonstrators jostled and insulted the reinforcements.<sup>229</sup>

By evening, word of the disturbances had reached Walter Ulbricht. Ulbricht gave both the MfS and the *Volkspolizei* clear orders not to use force to quell the disturbances. At roughly 10 pm, the *Volkspolizei* inspector Zahmel, on orders from inspector Odpadlik at the provincial police headquarters for Thuringia, released the prisoners. The crowd welcomed the prisoners joyously, but the crowd's demands had increased in the meantime. They suspected that there were others inside and demanded the release of all prisoners, as well as the handing over of the *Volkspolizei* officers Hoeg and Enders.<sup>230</sup>

Because the police were not willing to meet these demands, and due to increased numbers of demonstrators because of the addition of Wismut workers who were driving past the police station because of the shift change, the crowd became violent.<sup>231</sup> About 50 demonstrators broke into the building with axes and picks, yelling: "Where are the criminals and scoundrels"; "Strike them dead;" "Throw them out the windows." At 11:15, more reinforcements entered Saalfeld, along with the head of the MfS in Thuringia,

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. The market square in Saalfeld where the police station was located was the gathering point for workers awaiting transport to the Wismut mining operation

*Volkspolizei* chief inspector Menzel.<sup>232</sup> The arrival of reinforcements incited the crowd to further attacks on the police station. They destroyed desks, telephones, typewriters and windows, and stole documents which they later burned on the market square. They were not able to locate police officers, however, as the police had either already left the building or taken refuge on the roof.<sup>233</sup> The demonstrators left on their own accord at about 2 am. They had caused roughly DM 25,000 in damages.<sup>234</sup>

The courthouse and its prison were also sites of unrest on 16 August. The crowd released two Wismut workers there and threatened to hang the *Volkspolizei* officer on duty. This hatred directed at the *Volkspolizei* was notable later in the evening as well. At 1 am, workers in a truck drove around town shouting: "A fast end to the *Volkspolizei*!" It was not until 2 am that calm had returned to the streets of Saalfeld.<sup>235</sup>

The disturbances in Saalfeld prompted the Minister of the Interior for Thuringia, Gebhardt, to travel to Saalfeld

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 62. 19 August 1951 report entitled: "Vorläufiger Schlussbericht über die Ereignisse in Saalfeld bis zum 19.8.1951 -12:00 Uhr," by the head of the *Volkspolizei* in Thuringia, König.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 42. Undated report: "Bericht über die im Auftrag des Chefs durchgeführte Untersuchung über die Ursachen der Vorkommnisse im VPKA Saalfeld in der Nacht vom 16. Zum 17.8.1951," by Flechtner, deputy head of the *Volkspolizei* in Thuringia.

<sup>235</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1124, pp. 29-32. 18 August 1951 Hauptabteilung K report entitled: "Besondere Vorkommnisse in Saalfeld."

and talk to the population on the following day.<sup>236</sup> Gebhardt's speech on the market square in Saalfeld was interrupted by "workers and Saalfeld business people" shouting insults such as: "Shut up you lying pig."<sup>237</sup> Gebhardt was not able to quell the unrest. On the evening of the 17th, approximately 150 workers gathered in front of the court prison demanding the release of 14 Wismut workers. A delegation from the crowd was permitted to enter the building, so that they could see that the workers were not imprisoned there. Satisfied that there were no other workers in custody, the crowd dispersed and by the night of the 17th, the disturbances had come to an end.

The Saalfeld disturbances demonstrated a popular hatred of the police. Indeed, the police were gravely worried after the disturbances. On 24 August, the Saalfeld police reported: "Members of the Volkspolizei no longer feel secure even in their homes. They are especially concerned when duty calls them away and their wives are alone in the house."<sup>238</sup> One police officer refused to go to Weimar to investigate matters there as instructed, preferring to stay home and "protect his wife and family."<sup>239</sup> Fearing future attacks, the head of the Volkspolizei in Thuringia ordered increased

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<sup>236</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/08, pp. 27-30. 17 August 1951 report entitled: "Überfall auf das VPKA Saalfeld," by Mayer, deputy head of the GDR Volkspolizei.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-43. Undated report: "Bericht über die im Auftrag des Chefs durchgeführte Untersuchung über die Ursachen der Vorkommnisse im VPKA Saalfeld in der Nacht vom 16. Zum 17.8.1951," by Flechtner, deputy head of the Volkspolizei in Thuringia.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

security for stations in the area, including Saalfeld, Rudolstadt, Arnstadt, and Ilmenau.<sup>240</sup>

Between the founding of the GDR and the beginning of 1952, the SED had succeeded in removing the most visible anti-Communist resisters in the non-Marxist parties. By the fall of 1951, both the CDU and LDPD were well along the path to becoming instruments of the SED. The result of this transformation was an exodus of members from these parties and at the same time limited, but more rigorous, underground resistance by representatives of these parties.

Between the founding of East Germany and early 1952, popular hostility toward the SED's repression apparatus is discernible. There was a visibly strained relationship between the population and the SED's instruments of control - the MfS, the *Volkspolizei*, and the judicial apparatus - although because the MfS was still in its infancy and concentrated on West Berlin targets, popular scorn tended to be directed toward the other two instruments. The Saalfeld disturbances provide an important case study of the tension between the *Volkspolizei* and the population. Popular opposition to the SED, therefore, must be viewed in relation to the development of its repression apparatus. The following incident reported by an SED member in an automobile repair shop in Güstrow, Mecklenburg, provides insights into the manner in which this opposition manifested itself: "The workers are not open with me. It was like this as well with the Nazis. At that time, if a couple of workers were talking, and somebody came up to them wearing the party symbol, they would stop talking. When workers in our factory

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

are talking and I come up to them, they immediately change the topic."<sup>241</sup> Beginning in the summer of 1952, the increased repression that accompanied the "building of socialism" pressured the strained relationship between the population and the SED, and contributed significantly to the explosive upheavals of the summer of 1953.

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<sup>241</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/76, p. 35 15 July 1952 special report from the Amt für Information.

## Chapter Four: The "building of socialism" and its consequences 1952-53

### 1 - The implementation of the "building of socialism."

The SED's declaration of the "building of socialism" (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*) in the summer of 1952 began the process which led to revolutionary upheavals throughout East Germany the following year. At the SED's Second Party Conference, held between 9 and 12 July 1952, the SED declared: "The political and economic conditions, as well as the consciousness of the working class and the majority of workers, have sufficiently developed, so that the building of socialism has become the main task of the German Democratic Republic."<sup>1</sup> The new hard line against any opponent of socialism was made evident in the declaration: "We [i.e. the SED] must be aware that the heightening of the class war is unavoidable. The working classes must break the resistance of enemy forces."<sup>2</sup> The SED further outlined that the main instrument for the "building of socialism" would be the "power of the government" (*Staatsmacht*).<sup>3</sup> The instruments of the *Staatsmacht* which were to carry out the "building of socialism" were the MfS, the Volkspolizei, and the judicial system. SED members dominated the important

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the Second Party Conference, printed in *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Vol. IV) (Berlin (East): Dietz Verlag, 1954), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.73.

positions in all three of these instruments by 1952.<sup>4</sup>

The "building of socialism" caused major changes to East German society. Some elements of the "building of socialism," such as securing the border with West Germany, establishing armed forces, and changing university curricula, had been implemented prior to the SED's Second Party Conference, but their progress was now to be rapidly increased.<sup>5</sup> Other elements were first introduced with the Second Party Conference. Farmers were to be forced onto agricultural production collectives, a campaign against the Christian churches and their supporters was to be carried out, and increased restrictions were to be applied to independent businesses.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the SED Central Committee now emphasized heavy industry in its economic plans at the expense of the consumer industries.<sup>7</sup> In sum, all sections of GDR society were affected by the implementation of the "building of socialism."

The declaration of the "building of socialism" had consequences for the SED itself. In future, the party would concentrate on developing cadres. A system of schooling

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<sup>4</sup> On the SED takeover of these instruments, see sections 3.2 and 3.3 in Chapter 2, and section 1.2.1 in Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, " 'Die Arbeiter sind zwar geschlagen worden, aber sie sind nicht besiegt,' in Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 36. It is likely that the Soviet Union ordered the increased emphasis on heavy industry and the armed forces to meet its own Cold War needs; Hagen, p. 24. In any case, the "building of socialism" could not have been carried out without Stalin's consent. See Dietrich Staritz, "Die SED, Stalin und der 'Aufbau des Sozialismus' in der DDR", DA 24 (1991): 686-700.

cadres was introduced so that the Party would have ideologically reliable members throughout the entire party apparatus.<sup>8</sup> The schooling was divided into three sections: 1) the schooling of functionaries at special boarding schools, 2) participation of party members at annual party seminars, and 3) ongoing personal study under the guidance of the Party.<sup>9</sup>

The reaction of the SED membership to the "building of socialism" was not uniform. Kowalczyk has identified 5 groups within the party: 1) a group of members that acted reserved, preferring not to take a position on the party's new course. This was the largest of the five groups, 2) a group which fully supported the acceleration towards Communism, 3) a group of sceptics who doubted whether the timing for this policy was right, given the economic situation and the "consciousness" of the population, 4) a group which rejected the "building of socialism," and 5) a group of members who supported the new course, and expected the removal of all "bourgeois" elements in the population.<sup>10</sup> Because of the purges that had taken place in 1951-52, the Central Committee and Politbüro were staffed with reliable party members, all of whom supported the "building of socialism." Misgivings about the party's course in these higher levels first materialized in June 1953.<sup>11</sup>

The SED Central Committee undertook several measures to ensure the proper execution of the "building of socialism." First, it removed any potential opposition to its programme

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<sup>8</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Kowalczyk, "Wir werden siegen," pp. 195-196.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

from the provincial governments by eliminating the 5 provinces in the GDR and replacing them with 14 regional districts called *Bezirke*. The transformation was accomplished through a law issued on 23 July 1952 entitled "law on the further democratization of the state's instruments in the provinces of the GDR."<sup>12</sup> Second, the SED Central Committee outfitted the police, MfS, and judicial apparatus with the necessary tools to conduct the transformation and eliminate resistance to the changes. In the judicial system, the SED Central Committee took advantage of the creation of *Bezirke* to remove "excess" jurists created by the administrative changes. One hundred and four "less reliable" judges were removed from their positions. By the fall of 1952, all *Bezirk* court directors were SED members. Furthermore, all of these directors (except the director of the Dresden *Bezirk* court who had studied law during the *Kaiserreich*) were products of the SED-dominated educational programme for becoming a "people's judge."<sup>13</sup> The police, already firmly under the control of the SED, also underwent changes to prepare it for the increased tasks ahead. On 29 July 1952, the SED issued "measures for the improvement of the work of the German *Volkspolizei*." These measures included recruiting volunteers to help with police duties, developing a system of volunteer surveillance of residences (*Hausvertrauensleute*), and improved arming of the police.<sup>14</sup>

The MfS was also improved in preparation for increased duties. In the fall of 1952, Mielke issued the first

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<sup>12</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Werkentin, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

comprehensive MfS guidelines dealing with the recruitment and running of unofficial informants from the general population. The first guidelines dealing with informants, dated 9 September 1950, as outlined above, was vague. Guideline 21/52 of 20 November 1952 provided significantly more detail, such as reminders to MfS officers to provide cigarettes and snacks during meetings with unofficial informants to make them feel more relaxed.<sup>15</sup> These guidelines, however, did not call for blanket surveillance of the population, but rather called for a concentrated expansion of the informant net to deal with elements in the population likely to resist the "building of socialism." The main targets in this regard were the churches and the non-Marxist parties. The MfS cloaked its interest in these organizations stating that they provided important "reserve troops of the Anglo-American secret services" in the GDR.<sup>16</sup> To streamline the fight against the non-Marxist parties and the churches, the MfS amalgamated Department VI, which had been responsible for these targets, with Department V which was responsible for underground opposition in general.<sup>17</sup> The MfS leadership warned that "reactionary" elements in the non-Marxist parties had often been underestimated in the past, and that secret coworkers should be found to penetrate

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<sup>15</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1855/52, #101097. Guideline 21/52 of 20 November 1952, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1221/52, #100848. Directive 17/52/V/C of 26 September 1952 and Directive 6/52/V/E of 17 September 1952. Section C of the amalgamated department was responsible for the LDPD, Department E for the CDU and churches.

these parties.<sup>18</sup>

In conjunction with the 'building of socialism', the MfS conducted a campaign against the churches in the GDR, and particularly the Protestant church youth group *Junge Gemeinde*. After the Second Party Conference, a more extensive section for church work was established within Department V of the MfS, which contributed to the arrests of 175 members of various religious groups between August and December 1952.<sup>19</sup> The first orders to observe members of the *Junge Gemeinde* and to employ informants to penetrate its leadership were issued by Mielke on 11 November 1952.<sup>20</sup> In early 1953, the MfS arrested 50 pastors, deacons, and lay preachers, and expelled 300 school children who belonged to the *Junge Gemeinde*.<sup>21</sup> The vigorous campaign against church organizations continued until the announcement of the "New Course" by the SED on 11 June 1953.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the tense Cold War, however, the main emphasis for the MfS remained its campaign against anti-Communist

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Stefan Wolf, "Die 'Bearbeitung' der Kirchen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR durch die politische Polizei und das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit bis 1953," in Bernd Florath et al., (eds), *Die Ohnmacht der Allmächtigen. Geheimdienste und politische Polizei in der modernen Gesellschaft*. (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Wentker, "'Kirchenkampf' in der DDR 1950-1953", *VfZ* 42 (1994), p. 110. The *Volkspolizei* also assisted in the campaign against the *Junge Gemeinde*.

<sup>21</sup> Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 267.

<sup>22</sup> Wolf, pp. 200-201.

organizations based in West Berlin.<sup>23</sup> Guideline 21/52 stated: "The main goal [for informants] is always to penetrate the centres of the enemy [anti-Communist groups in West Germany - GB] or the groups set up by him, in order to determine enemy plans early, make enemy activity impossible, and expose agents."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, all examples of informant recruitment in the guideline dealt with western anti-Communist organizations.<sup>25</sup>

The creation of a 5 km deep demarcation zone along the border with West Germany in the early months of 1952 had demonstrated that the SED would not hesitate to use its disciplinary apparatus to carry out its programme. According to CDU reports, the forced evacuation from the demarcation zone of elements deemed "unreliable" was excessive. The Eisenach CDU group stated that the evacuation measures often went against "democratic conformity to law," and complained that many of those affected were not given even 48 hours to evacuate their properties. These members also complained that in general the methods of the SED and the "state

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<sup>23</sup> The integration of West Germany into the western Alliance through the Bonn and European Defence Community treaties of 1952 and the failure of the "Stalin notes" contributed to the Cold War tension. On 10 March 1952, Stalin sent notes to the three western Allies proposing a united, neutral Germany. Whether Stalin's notes were a ruse, or a genuine attempt to solve the German question continues to be debated. See Gerhard Wettig, "Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 als geschichtswissenschaftliches Problem", *DA* 25 (1992): 157-167, and "Stalin and the SED leadership, 7 April 1952," in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Fall 1994, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1855/52, #101097. Guideline 21/52 of 20 November 1952, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

police" were "regrettable."<sup>26</sup> In 1956, those affected by the evacuation measures were still demanding an official explanation as to their removal.<sup>27</sup>

Having outfitted the instruments of control with the necessary tools, the SED Central Committee then proceeded to eliminate both actual and potential opponents to the "building of socialism." The legal basis for the elimination of these opponents was the "law for the protection of the people's property and other societal property" which came into force on 2 October 1952.<sup>28</sup> According to this law, even the smallest economic infraction could be punished with at least one year in penitentiary. The first paragraph of the law read:

Diebstahl, Unterschlagung oder ein sonstiges Beiseiteschaffen von staatlichem und genossenschaftlichem Eigentum oder von Eigentum gesellschaftlicher Organisationen werden mit Zuchthaus von einem bis fünf Jahren bestraft.<sup>29</sup>

The law was applied broadly and abundantly. In October 1952, 283 people were tried under the law; in November, 745 were tried; in December, 1,391 were tried; in January 1953, 1,900 were tried; in February, 2,303 were tried; and in March 1953, 3,572 were tried.<sup>30</sup> Overall, the number of prisoners

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<sup>26</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1361. 10 June 1952 protocol of Eisenach Kreis council sitting. This record group contains a variety of reports on the general discontent with the evacuations.

<sup>27</sup> ACDP, VII-041-001/4. 5 September 1956 letter from CDU Kreis association Bad Salzungen to the CDU Bezirk association for Suhl.

<sup>28</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Werkentin, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Werkentin, p. 69.

in the GDR increased from 30,000 in 150 prisons in July 1952, to 61,377 in 200 prisons by May 1953.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the application of this law affected not only "undesirable" societal sections such as owners of private businesses. In the Leipzig *Bezirk* court, 228 of the 377 tried under this law from October 1952 to April 1953 were workers, and only 8 were independent business owners.<sup>32</sup> Not only were large numbers affected, but the punishments were also severe. A worker who stole a few coal briquettes, for example, was sentenced to one year in prison. Another worker who stole 3/4 kg of sauerkraut from his work place paid for his crime with one year in the Zwickau prison.<sup>33</sup> Some LDPD members left the party out of disgust that a drunkard who had thrown a barrel of oil down a set of stairs was being tried for committing an economic crime.<sup>34</sup> The SED bestowed strict penalties on justice functionaries who did not hand down verdicts of the maximum penalty under the law.<sup>35</sup>

Farmers also experienced the brutal implementation of the building of socialism, with the SED making little distinction between farmers with large land holdings - in theory the class enemy - and those with small land holdings - the presumed ally. Between August 1952 and January 1953, there were 583 trials against farmers with large land holdings, 311 against farmers with medium-sized land

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<sup>31</sup> Hagen, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Heidi Roth, "Der 17. Juni im damaligen Bezirk Leipzig," DA 24 (1991), p. 576.

<sup>33</sup> Werkentin, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> ADL, LDPD #15848. November 1952 working report of LDPD *Kreis* association for Bergen.

<sup>35</sup> Werkentin, p. 70.

holdings, and 353 against farmers with small land holdings.<sup>36</sup> The sentences in these instances were also severe. It was not uncommon for an accused farmer to receive ten years in prison for failing to fill the SED-set quota for produce.<sup>37</sup>

Realizing the negative effect on the population, Dr. Melsheimer, the *Generalstaatsanwalt* of the GDR, approached the Central Committee of the SED in April 1953 suggesting a more cautious use of the law. Referring to the increasing number of those arrested under this law, Melsheimer stated: "This means that alone in the first three months of the year 1953, 7,775 people have acted against the people's property. This means further that if the numbers of sentencings do not increase in the coming months, 40,000 people will be sitting in penitentiary by the end of the year for breaking the [law for the protection of the people's economy.] That is indeed unbearable."<sup>38</sup> Melsheimer's suggestions were not acted upon, however, in face of Ulbricht's desire for the rigorous implementation of the "building of socialism." In January 1953, the Central Committee department dealing with justice stated: "Kreis judicial instruments in the *Bezirke* often do not treat anti-democratic activity according to Article 6 of the constitution of the GDR and Control Council Directive 38, but rather as normal transgressions committed because of personal reasons [...] In so doing, prison sentences are often replaced by conditional sentences and criminals set

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<sup>36</sup> Werkentin, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-84.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Mitter/Wolle, p. 47.

free."<sup>39</sup> In May 1953, Ulbricht warned all judicial and prison employees about leniency in the judicial system: "The party organization must investigate the ideological reasons behind decisions which are politically wrong [...] and in membership meetings deal with every attitude of forgiveness towards the class enemy."<sup>40</sup> Ulbricht's phrase was almost identical to the wording of the resolution of the SED's Second Party Congress: "The party and each individual member of it must exercise great revolutionary attentiveness and conduct a decisive battle against tendencies of forgiveness towards enemies of the party and the people."<sup>41</sup> The Second Party Congress ushered in a hard line against real and potential enemies of Communism in the GDR.

## **2 - Reaction to the "building of socialism" prior to the uprising**

### **2.1 - The non-Marxist parties and the "building of socialism."**

The general membership of the non-Marxist parties had misgivings about their parties' support for the "building of socialism," revealing that the *Gleichschaltung* process had yet to be fully completed by 1952. Because there are no

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<sup>39</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/13/409, Abteilung Staat und Recht. 19 January 1953 judicial report signed by Matter and Trotz, employees of the central commission for state control.

<sup>40</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1560, pp. 218-220. 5 May 1953 letter from Ulbricht to all party organizations of the justice instruments and the prisons.

<sup>41</sup> *Dokumente der SED*, p. 70.

reports of the local level of the CDU prior to 17 June 1953, it is difficult to ascertain the reaction of the CDU membership to the "building of socialism," but there is other evidence which suggests a negative reaction.<sup>42</sup> The CDU had difficulty finding "progressive" candidates to participate in the 6th Party Conference in October which officially recognized the "building of socialism."<sup>43</sup> Following the conference, the general secretary of the CDU, Gerald Götting, announced that investigation committees would be established in the party to ensure that all members were "reliable." The MfS was to assist the CDU in this process.<sup>44</sup> As a result of these investigations, many CDU members were arrested and/or expelled from the party. It appears, therefore, that sections of the CDU membership disapproved of the party's support for the "building of socialism."

Removing CDU opposition, real and potential, to the "building of socialism" was also at the centre of the show trials the SED conducted against the CDU in Erfurt and Gera during the winter of 1952/1953. In December 1952 at the *Bezirk* court of Erfurt, the SED sentenced 7 CDU members who had contact to the western CDU to between 8 and 15 years in prison.<sup>45</sup> This trial was followed by other show trials against CDU members in Gera and again in Erfurt. The campaign to remove opponents and intimidate potential

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<sup>42</sup> Stephan Zeidler, "Zur Rolle der CDU (Ost) in der inneren Entwicklung der DDR 1952-53," M.A. thesis, University of Bonn, 1994, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>45</sup> Franz-Josef Kos, "Der Erfurter Schauprozess und die beiden Nachfolgeprozesse 1952/53," in Kaff, pp. 126-130.

opponents continued in 1953. The MfS conducted searches of CDU offices, including its headquarters, and arrested the CDU Foreign Minister of the GDR, Georg Dertinger, on 13 January 1953 for allegedly conspiring with West Germany to absorb the GDR. Dertinger was sentenced the following year to 15 years in prison. He was amnestied in 1956.<sup>46</sup>

The muted response of CDU members to these arrests and trials is testimony to the *Gleichschaltung* process within the CDU. It should be remembered that resistance activity increased in the CDU after the removal of Kaiser and during the wave of arrests in 1950. This quiet reaction, and as will be seen the lack of CDU participation on 17 June, indicates that SED repression had succeeded in removing democratic anti-Communist resistance in the CDU by 1953.

Reports from lower level LDPD groups to the leadership of the party indicate that there was also resistance in the LDPD to the party's support of the "building of socialism." In *Kreis Eberswalde, Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder*, the LDPD reported that the mood in the membership was very negative. Members simply could not understand the leadership's support for the "building of socialism."<sup>47</sup> The members of the LDPD in *Kreis Borna* also criticized the party's position, believing that there would be no room for a non-socialist party in the "building of socialism." In *Kreis Erfurt-Stadt*, the LDPD representative complained: "Some of our members do not agree with the "building of socialism," and added that

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<sup>46</sup> Richter, "Vom Widerstand," in Scholz, pp. 48-52. See also Joachim Franke, "Der Fall Dertinger und seine parteiinternen Auswirkungen: Eine Dokumentation", DA 25 (1992): 286-298.

<sup>47</sup> ADL, LDPD #12887. 1 November 1952 report from LDPD *Kreis* association for Eberswalde to the *Bezirk* association, Frankfurt/Oder.

they were considering dissolving the party.<sup>48</sup> The LDPD in *Kreis Bergen-Putbus* also stated that the membership opposed the "building of socialism."<sup>49</sup> The LDPD in *Kreis Greifswald* and *Bezirk Schwerin* also complained of only limited support in the LDPD membership of the "building of socialism."<sup>50</sup> In a sampling of 5 LDPD *Bezirk* groups conducted for this study, 3 groups mentioned resistance by the LDPD membership to the "building of socialism," and two did not contain documents on the subject.<sup>51</sup>

The remaining elements of the non-Marxist parties which had not yet been coopted into the Communist system also vigorously opposed the rearmament outlined in the "building of socialism." The CDU in *Schwerin* estimated that 20% of CDU members were against a *Volksarmee* for a variety of reasons, including the threat of civil war, the fear that the army would serve Russian interests, its negative effect on the economy, and the lack of a need for an army as West Germany did not constitute a threat.<sup>52</sup> The SED attributed the 9,211 (6.6%) drop in LDPD membership between 31 July and 20

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<sup>48</sup> ADL, LDPD #14734. 27 August 1952 protocol of the sitting of the *Kreis* executive for *Erfurt-Stadt*.

<sup>49</sup> ADL, LDPD #15848. October 1952 report from the LDPD in *Kreis Bergen-Potbus*.

<sup>50</sup> ADL, LDPD #31926. 10 November 1952 report from *Bezirk Schwerin* LDPD to the LDPD leadership; *ibid.*, LDPD #15848. 17 September report from *Kreis Greifswald* LDPD to *Bezirk Rostock*.

<sup>51</sup> The *Bezirke* analyzed were *Halle*, *Potsdam*, *Rostock*, *Frankfurt/Oder*, and *Schwerin*. The documents on *Halle* and *Potsdam* did not contain information on reaction of the membership to the "building of socialism."

<sup>52</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1361. Undated report by the CDU *Bezirk* association for *Schwerin*.

November 1952 primarily to the creation of armed forces.<sup>53</sup> The issue of rearmament played an important role in the LDPD Leipzig Kreis conference of 26 May 1952. During the conference, the members voted on the following resolution: "The LDP recognizes the necessity of defending our Republic, including by means of national armed forces." 38 members supported the resolution, 37 voted against it, and 19 withheld their vote.<sup>54</sup> The members who voted against the resolution expressed concern that the creation of armed forces would bring closer the possibility of war.<sup>55</sup> The SED recognized that there was opposition within the non-Marxist parties to armed forces. In a report on these parties issued after the Second Party Conference, the SED stated: "There is still large resistance in the CDU and LDP membership with regard to armed forces."<sup>56</sup>

The churches were especially concerned about the founding of an army. On 22 June 1952, a letter from the Magdeburger Synode was read in all Protestant churches in Magdeburg pleading for God's help so that Germans would not fire upon one another. Many ministers encouraged youths not to take up weapons, and offered them protection in the church. In the overwhelming majority of *Gemeinden* in *Bezirk*

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<sup>53</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/15/3. 4 October 1952 report on the situation in the other parties.

<sup>54</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV/2/9.02/75, Amt für Information, p. 63. *Informmitteilung* Nr.II 95/52 of 30 May 1952.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/15/3. 16 August 1952 report on the situation in the other parties.

Magdeburg, ministers spoke out against armed forces.<sup>57</sup>

It is likely that rearmament was also rejected by the general population, perhaps because this was the clearest symbol of the division of Germany and the prelude to a possible civil war. The LDPD Land association for Thuringia reported that the entire LDPD membership rejected remilitarization, as did wide sections of the population.<sup>58</sup> The following incidents support the LDPD analysis. At a factory meeting in Erfurt on 26 June 1952, at which 100-120 people attended, three people spoke out strongly against the GDR and the creation of armed forces, and were greeted with loud applause. Those in attendance adopted a proposal against national armed forces and the *Volkspolizei*, and demanded the removal of a banner in the factory which read: "Women, encourage your husbands defend the homeland. You will be helping to maintain peace."<sup>59</sup> On the day following the meeting, the cultural director of the plant spoke with one of those who criticized the armed forces to "show her the error of her ways." When, after half an hour, she had not returned to her post, the other workers began to form a demonstration column, believing she had already been arrested. Upon her return, she was greeted with cries of joy

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<sup>57</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/76, Amt für Information. *Informmitteilung* II/117/52 of 2 July 1952 on activities of the church.

<sup>58</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0370/I Copy of LDPD Land association for Thuringia report to the Soviet Control Commission on 8 February 1952.

<sup>59</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/76, p. 26. Amt für Information *Informmitteilung* Nr. II/126/52 of 8 July 1952. SPD reports also indicated resistance to East German armed forces. See ADSD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/1. 12 August 1952 report.

and celebrated as a martyr.<sup>60</sup> In Auerbach, the SED issued a questionnaire in the Falkensteiner Gardinenfabrik which was to be filled out by young males, and not women or the disabled. The factory workers protested, believing that the survey would provide the basis for a conscription list. Approximately 50 youths gathered in front of the factory shouting: "We do not want a conscription law, but an election law. We will not fill out the questionnaire because we do not want to be conscripted."<sup>61</sup> Graffiti against remilitarization appeared throughout the GDR. In Bad Berka, Kreis Weimar, someone painted slogans against rearmament such as: "Count us out. Hold on to your husbands tightly. Hold on to your sons tightly" on 7 different sites in the town, including the office of the local SED secretary.<sup>62</sup>

## **2.2 - Popular reaction to the "building of socialism:" Origins and roots of the 17 June 1953 uprising.**

Before the Second Party Conference, the SED Central Committee created a new department within the Central Committee called *Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und der Massenorganisationen* (LOPM). This department was responsible for controlling and guiding all lower levels of the party, the other parties in the GDR, and the mass

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<sup>60</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV/2/9.02/76, Amt für Information, p. 26. *Informmitteilung* Nr. II 126/52 of 8 July 1952.

<sup>61</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/75, Amt für Information. 1 April 1952 special report entitled: "Proteste wegen angeblicher Stammrollenerfassung".

<sup>62</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/75, Amt für Information. Special Report, *Informmitteilung* II/100/52 of 5 June 1952.

organizations. The LOPM department received situation reports from local party organizations on the party and the population, and prepared reports for the *Politbüro* and the Central Committee on a variety of themes, ranging from agriculture to internal security. In addition, the LOPM department organized *Instrukteur* brigades to travel to the lower levels of the party in order to verify the accuracy of lower level reports.<sup>63</sup> This department became the most important department in the Central Committee of the SED.<sup>64</sup> These reports are more revealing than the records of the *Politbüro* and the Central Committee. There exist no transcripts of the *Politbüro* meetings of this period, but only indexes of the topics discussed. The transcripts of the Central Committee sittings are useful, but do not provide the insight into popular developments available in LOPM reports. Nevertheless, the reaction of certain Central Committee members to developments in the GDR can be revealing. On the basis of the documents generated by the LOPM, Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle, and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk have provided new evidence on unrest in the population, and the motivation behind this unrest, in the period preceding the uprising in June 1953.<sup>65</sup> The following account relies on the evidence presented in their work, and on police

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<sup>63</sup> Mitter, "Der 'Tag X' und die 'Innere Staatsgründung'", pp. 29-30.

<sup>64</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, " 'Wir werden siegen, weil uns der grosse Stalin führt!' Die SED zwischen Zwangsvereinigung und IV. Parteitag," in Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle (eds.), *Der Tag X - 17. Juni 1953: Die "Innere Staatsgründung" der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/54* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995), p.195.

<sup>65</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle (eds.), *passim*.

documents and situation reports from the non-Marxist parties.

### **2.2.1 - Sites of initial unrest - urban centres.**

By the end of 1952, there were already signs that latent resistance in the broad population was boiling over as a result of the "building of socialism." It is important to stress that although these protests were linked to the economic situation, they revealed a much deeper motivation of fundamental political resistance. The economic situation was admittedly abysmal, however. Workers had to contend with material shortages in factories, lacking supplies of energy, ineffective machines, a shortage of tools, and few spare parts.<sup>66</sup> Workers were also affected by the fact that failing production meant that their wages remained low.<sup>67</sup> This trying situation did not hinder the Central Committee from declaring at the Second Party Conference that workers should expect to work longer hours. The SED leadership voiced its intention to increase work norms, in an attempt to decrease production costs. At a sitting of the Council of Ministers on 7 August 1952, Grotewohl stated: "The first task is the reduction of production costs [...] If we don't achieve this, we will not be able to make any progress towards Socialism."<sup>68</sup> The emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of consumer industry prescribed in the "building of socialism" contributed to a drop in living standards. During the first half of 1953, basic goods such as butter, fruit

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<sup>66</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, "Die Arbeiter sind zwar geschlagen worden, aber sie sind nicht besiegt!" Die Arbeiterschaft während der Krise 1952/53," in Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle (eds.), pp.39-40.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

and vegetables were difficult to obtain.<sup>69</sup>

In December 1952, factories in Weissenfels, Glauchau, Schkopau, Plauen, Cottbus, Berlin, and Magdeburg experienced work stoppages due to the distribution of Christmas bonuses which favoured party functionaries in the factories.<sup>70</sup> Whereas party functionaries in several instances received a full month's salary or more as a bonus, most workers received only a small bonus, or in some cases nothing at all.<sup>71</sup> At the Karl-Liebknecht-Werk in Magdeburg, roughly 2,000 workers went on strike on 13 December 1952 due to the uneven distribution of the Christmas bonuses.<sup>72</sup> The protests reached beyond mere monetary considerations, however. During a work stoppage at the Magdeburger Werft in December 1952, workers spoke out against the press and the SED's version of democracy, and compared GDR conditions to those of the Nazi dictatorship.<sup>73</sup> Political motivation was also visible during confrontations in December 1952 at the Ernst Thälmann, and Karl Marx plants in Magdeburg.<sup>74</sup> Worker protests and criticisms of the regime continued in April 1953. The SED in a factory in Rathenow reported the following criticisms by workers: "We do not have democracy. If somebody says

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<sup>69</sup> Diedrich, pp. 40-41. For an introduction to the condition of workers in the GDR at this time, see Peter Hübner, *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiss. Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1970* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995)

<sup>70</sup> Mitter/Kowalczyk, " 'Die Arbeiter' ", p. 44

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

something, he ends up in Siberia. These government measures would not be possible in any capitalist country. There would be strikes and rebellion." And: "In the press, everything is presented to the people so wonderfully, but in reality everything is a disgrace."<sup>75</sup>

The initial disturbances are revealing in several ways. First, it is evident that economic circumstances provoked the latent resistance in the population as early as the fall of 1952. As a result, economic demands were consistently coupled with political demands for the removal of the government, a task that East Germans knew could be accomplished through free elections. The nature of this resistance is reflected in the reports of three *Instrukteur* brigades that the Central Committee sent out to Magdeburg to investigate the disturbances there. The fact that the Central Committee sent out these three brigades attests to its concern for the situation there. These three reports, plus local SED level reports on disturbances in *Bezirk Halle* and *Kreis Rathenow-Westhavelland*, all reveal that political demands were expressed during these demonstrations.<sup>76</sup> Second, there was regional differentiation to the initial sites of unrest. Incidents of resistance were more prevalent in the southern industrial cities.

### **2.2.2 - Initial sites of unrest - rural.**

Basic resistance to the SED programme in East Germany was also visible in rural regions affected by the creation

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>76</sup> The reports are cited in Kowalczyk/Mitter, " 'Die Arbeiter' ", p. 44, footnote 75, and p. 46, footnotes 78 and 80.

of agricultural collectives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften* -LPG). It was not only farmers with large land holdings, called *Grossbauern* in SED jargon, who were reluctant to join LPGs, but also farmers with small land holdings, known as "working farmers" (*werktätige Bauern*) in SED vocabulary, who presumably were to benefit from pooling resources.<sup>77</sup> During a farmers' meeting in Friedrichsaue, Kreis Seelow/Mark, the vast majority of the 50 new farmers (*Neubauern*, landless workers who had received land in the land reform of 1945) in attendance protested the founding of an LPG. After the meeting, those who supported the LPG and those against began to brawl in a bar in town.<sup>78</sup> In Neukirche, the new farmer Alwin Weiss was sceptical about LPGs, stating after a meeting that he had been in the Soviet Union and had seen what could be expected from a similar agricultural strategy.<sup>79</sup> In *Landkreis* Leipzig, one farmer with small land holdings said: "As a long-time Comrade, I am happy with the building of socialism, and especially that the village has not been left behind. But I am very worried. Of the 17 new farmers, I am the only one who supports the collectives. Even our comrades are opponents and would rather throw down their party books

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<sup>77</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1361. Two unsigned reports, one dated 8 August 1952 and the other 2 September 1952 on the agricultural situation.

<sup>78</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, pp. 29-31. 23 October 1952 report of *Volkspolizei* investigative committee on events in Friedrichsaue.

<sup>79</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 45. 26 March 1953 report summarizing the reports of all *Bezirk* levels of the *Volkspolizei* by Seifert, general inspector of the *Volkspolizei*, to Maron, Zaisser, Chrenow, and Ministry of the Interior.

[...] They have already called me "Russian slave" and other such things."<sup>80</sup> A police report from September 1952 provides important evidence that not only farmers with large land holdings were opposed to LPGs. The initial draft of this report attributed the recent 40% rise in crime in agricultural regions to the "class enemy," a clear reference to farmers with large land holdings. The draft was revised to state that the crimes were a result of "among others, the class enemy."<sup>81</sup> By January 1953, only 3.2% of farmers with small land holdings had joined an LPG.<sup>82</sup> Between September 1952 and January 1953, more "working farmers" than *Grossbauern* fled the GDR.<sup>83</sup>

The SED faced great difficulty in implementing its agricultural strategy. Founding meetings for the creation of collectives were regularly disrupted. In Burkhardswalde, *Bezirk* Dresden, and Reinsberg, *Kreis* Neuruppin, farmers opposed to the founding of the LPG disrupted its founding meeting and prevented the establishment of the collective. A minister in *Kreis* Meiningen disrupted the founding of an LPG there.<sup>84</sup> It should also not be assumed that all farmers who

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<sup>80</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/76, Amt für Information. Informmitteilung II/153/52 of 15 August 1952 entitled "Tätigkeit des Gegners."

<sup>81</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 8. 11 September 1952 draft proposal to all *Bezirk* heads of the *Volkspolizei* from the Ministry of the Interior (author not specified) entitled: "Die Situation auf dem Lande."

<sup>82</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.1953," p. 87.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/611, Amt für Information. 9 June 1952 special report on conditions in the *Gemeinde* Gösslow, *Kreis* Hagenow.

joined the LPGs did so out of support for the agricultural collectives. At the founding of an LPG in *Bezirk* Erfurt, one agricultural worker made clear his reasons for joining the LPG: "There are only two [other] paths, either into prison or over the border."<sup>85</sup> In a CDU survey of 80 *Kreise* throughout the GDR, all of the *Kreise* reported either rejection or scepticism toward the LPGs.<sup>86</sup> Even in the agricultural north, in *Kreise* such as Greifswald, Prenzlau, Usedom and Rostock, LPGs were not popular, demonstrating that the SED had failed to establish solid political roots in the region despite its land reform.<sup>87</sup> However, the *Bezirke* which reported the most difficulties regarding the agricultural programme since January 1953 were Leipzig, Potsdam, Frankfurt/Oder, Dresden and Magdeburg.<sup>88</sup>

Due to the resistance in the countryside, the SED was forced to use its judicial system to implement its agricultural programme. Between 1 August 1952 and 31 January 1953, over 1200 trials were conducted against farmers.<sup>89</sup> The

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<sup>85</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/409, p. 65. 13 July 1953 report from Kober, head of the *Bezirk* Erfurt police to the Berlin *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>86</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1361. 8 August 1952 report for Götting on the agricultural situation.

<sup>87</sup> Bauerkämper argues that the continuing economic problems in the countryside prevented the SED from creating solid political allegiance there; Bauerkämper, p. 128

<sup>88</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 45. 26 March 1953 report summarizing the reports of all *Bezirk* levels of the *Volkspolizei* by Seifert, general inspector of the *Volkspolizei*, to Maron, Zaisser, Chrenow, and the Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>89</sup> Armin Mitter, " 'Am 17.6.1953 haben die Arbeiter gestreikt, jetzt aber streiken wir Bauern.' Die Bauern und der Sozialismus," in Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle, (eds.), p. 86.

SED also sent out party *Instrukteure* to work closely with the press to convince the population of the benefits of the SED's agricultural policy.<sup>90</sup>

The *Volkspolizei* was gravely concerned about the situation in the countryside. The police were alarmed at the 40% rise in crimes in agricultural regions over the previous year, and attributed the rise to sabotage of the agricultural programme of the "building of socialism."<sup>91</sup> The police furthermore listed the security of LPG foundings as its primary duty: "Besonders bei der Bildung von neuen Produktionsgenossenschaften ist die Hilfe der *Volkspolizei* unbedingt erforderlich."<sup>92</sup> This task was likely to be difficult, given the strained relationship between farmers and the *Volkspolizei*. In September 1952, the police complained that the amount of contact between "working farmers" and the *Volkspolizei* was very low.<sup>93</sup> The SED recommended that the *Volkspolizei* work more closely with farmers in order to overcome the existing shortcomings. The *Volkspolizei* was to create a situation whereby "every member of the agricultural collectives feels that the *Volkspolizei*

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For a breakdown of these sentences, see above, section 1.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Mitter, "Am 17.6.1953," p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 8. 11 September 1952 draft proposal to all *Bezirk* heads of the *Volkspolizei* from the Ministry of the Interior (author not specified) entitled: "Die Situation auf dem Lande."

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>93</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 9. 11 September 1952 draft proposal to all *Bezirk* heads of the *Volkspolizei* from the Ministry of the Interior (author not specified) entitled: "Die Situation auf dem Lande."

is his assistant and his friend."<sup>94</sup>

Farmers' protests against entry into the LPGs revealed both economic and political motivation. On 30 August 1952 in *Gemeinde Kyritz*, farmers gathered to found an LPG. When the speaker talked of his positive experience in the Soviet Union, many in attendance made their scepticism clear by hurling disparaging remarks at the speaker. During the discussion afterwards, even farmers with small land holdings expressed their reluctance to join the LPG fearing they would lose land.<sup>95</sup> Similarly in Markkleeberg/Ost a new farmer stated: "I am outraged at how our government acts.[...] I do not want to be a slave in the collective. I haven't worked day and night for other people. I'd rather throw everything in and hang myself than join the collective."<sup>96</sup>

Opposition to the LPGs often revealed a more fundamental resistance to the SED. On 18 August, at another public farmers' meeting in Friedrichsaue, those in attendance diverted attention away from the LPG issue on the agenda, and instead brought up issues such as the arming of the *Volkspolizei*, the recently introduced requirement of a passport to enter the other zones of Germany, and the SED's desire for armed forces. These issues led to an expression of anti-SED sentiment. One member in attendance accused the SED first secretary of the region of being an enemy of the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>95</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, p. 9. 11 September 1952 proposal to all *Bezirk* heads of the *Volkspolizei* entitled: "Die Situation auf dem Lande."

<sup>96</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/76, Amt für Information. *Informmitteilung* II/153/52 of 15 August 1952 entitled: "Tätigkeit des Gegners."

people because the first secretary demanded that he shoot at his western German brother in the event of war. Others criticized the judicial system. One person said that a friend told him that an investigation had been started against him and that his arrest was imminent, to which another person replied: "Fritz, forget it. Just remember who did it. The day is coming when we will take our revenge."<sup>97</sup> One woman even suggested that all SED functionaries should receive a good beating with a crowbar.<sup>98</sup> The events at this meeting led to several arrests, and the matter was taken up by the MfS for further investigation. In Hagenwander, the SED revealed political resistance in the population by attributing the unwillingness of local farmers to found an LPG to the influence of RIAS.<sup>99</sup> At a general meeting in Kleinow-Westprignitz, farmers shouted down the SED speaker with cries of: "We do not need schooling. We want to conduct our meeting. Away with him!" Others, *Grossbauern*, stated: "With the expression 'working farmers,' they just want to see hate spread among us, and they build their power on this hate. Through the expression 'working farmer,' war is brought into the village. We are all German farmers."<sup>100</sup> In

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<sup>97</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, pp. 29-31. 23 October 1952 report of the Volkspolizei investigative committee on events in Friedrichsau.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> BA-P, DO 1 2/4, p. 45. 26 March 1953 report by Seifert, general inspector of the Volkspolizei to Maron, Zaisser, Chrenow, and the Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>100</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, NL 182/888. Undated report entitled: "Bericht über einige Erscheinungen des Verhaltens antidemokratischer grossbäuerlicher Kräfte bei den Generalversammlungen der Bäuerlichen Handelsgenossenschaften."

Piskowitz near Zahren, similar thoughts were echoed. One *Grossbauer* said: "There is no such thing as a "working farmer" or a *Grossbauer*, only German farmers."<sup>101</sup> Sometimes the anger of farmers was uncontrollable. In *Gemeinde* Gösslow, *Kreis* Hagenow, one *Grossbauer* was so angry with the SED that he threatened the local SED party secretary: "I'll hang you all one day. For you, I've already got the rope ready."<sup>102</sup> In Loburg, *Bezirk* Magdeburg, at a meeting to expand the local LPG, one farmer yelled at the local SED functionary during his talk on the reasons to expand: "You lie. Why don't you tell us the truth?"<sup>103</sup>

The political nature of resistance in agricultural regions was a general phenomenon in the GDR. During a seminar on possible dangers for the upcoming harvest, the *Volkspolizei* reported: "The biggest danger for the harvest is enemy activity [...] An important method of enemy activity is to influence our "working farmers," especially through RIAS' smear, so that they lose faith in the whole project. [i.e. building socialism]."<sup>104</sup> A section within the SED membership itself expressed their doubts about the viability of the reforms, not solely because of the economic situation, but because of the "present state of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/611, Amt für Information. 9 June 1952 special report on conditions in the *Gemeinde* Gösslow, *Kreis* Hagenow.

<sup>103</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/409, p. 21. Undated report by *Bezirk* levels of *Volkspolizei* on "reactionary activities" at founding meetings for LPG's.

<sup>104</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/409. 11 May 1953 report on seminar topics for the police. One of the topics was entitled: "Gefahren für die Ernte."

consciousness in the population."<sup>105</sup> This "consciousness" was a euphemism for popular rejection of the SED. In fact, the situation in the countryside was so unstable that in March 1953 Ulbricht ordered the head of the *Volkspolizei*, Karl Maron, to increase protection of the collectives.<sup>106</sup> By May 1953, the Central Committee of the SED was forced to admit the failure of the collectivization strategy. The Central Committee halted the foundation of new LPGs, and instructed existing ones to not accept new members.<sup>107</sup> In defence of these measures, Ulbricht stated during a conference with the MfS: "If, by the harvest, we have [...] properly worked through all these problems in individual agricultural collectives; if the mistakes have been corrected, [...]; if we are successful in overcoming this backwardness and correcting certain mistakes, then we will have good success at the harvest. We will then see at the harvest, that a much larger number of working farmers will want to join the agricultural collectives."<sup>108</sup> Ulbricht was aware of both the failure and unpopularity of the agricultural policies implemented since the Second Party Conference.

SED members in *Bezirk Schwerin* noted that arrests in the agricultural sector contributed to this resistance to the SED. During a sitting of the SED control commission for *Bezirk Schwerin* in March 1953, one member asked: "Why do we have so many [farmers] that flee to the West?" Another member answered: "Agents try to penetrate our ranks. They

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<sup>105</sup> Kowalczyk, "Wir werden siegen," p. 195.

<sup>106</sup> BA-P, DO 1 2/4, pp. 50-51. 26 March 1953 letter from Ulbricht to Maron.

<sup>107</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.1953," p. 95.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

sow the seeds for these people to flee the Republic by telling them that they will be locked up and other things."<sup>109</sup> The arrests did cause concern in the population. In Basedow, Mecklenburg, the arrest of one farmer led to a protest which saw the village gather 300 signatures for his release. The protest was successful, and the farmer released.<sup>110</sup> SPD reports from their sources in the GDR between the summer and fall of 1952 emphasize that oppression caused the large majority of the population to oppose the regime.<sup>111</sup>

Due to the deep hostility in the population, the MfS took extra measures in February 1953 for the protection of leading SED functionaries. At a *Politbüro* meeting of that month, the *Politbüro* issued a resolution which stated: "Uninterrupted day and night protection is to be guaranteed to all members of the *Politbüro* of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany through escorts from the Ministry for State Security."<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the first and second party secretaries in the *Bezirke* received permits to carry weapons, and all "undesirable" elements were removed from the Berlin neighbourhood of Pankow where the most important SED functionaries lived, in order to better secure the area.<sup>113</sup> Even prior to the revolutionary uprising of 1953,

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<sup>109</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/502. Protocol of the BPKK sitting of 4 March 1953.

<sup>110</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361. 30 December 1952 report from Mecklenburg.

<sup>111</sup> See the reports contained in AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro, 0361.

<sup>112</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 27.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

the population had shown signs that their rejection of the SED programme rose above economic considerations. The population fundamentally resisted the SED regime.

### 3 - The descent towards 17 June 1953.

Despite signs of unrest, the SED believed that the situation in the GDR was stable enough to continue its "building socialism." At the 13th sitting of the Central Committee, held on 14 May 1953, the Central Committee of the SED called for "increased work norms of 10% by June 1." <sup>114</sup> Increased work norms translated into increased number of hours worked, without a corresponding increase in wages. Although these norms did not become law until 2 June, the call for the increase on 14 May meant that factory party chairmen would feel obliged to have their workers "voluntarily" raise the production level before the law came into effect.<sup>115</sup> The increased norms caused strikes as early as May 1953. In Leipzig, 900 workers at the iron and steel pouring works went on strike on 13 and 16 May.<sup>116</sup> There were also short work stoppages due to the norms at the end of May and beginning of June in Eisleben, Fürstenwalde, Chemnitz, and Borna.<sup>117</sup> An SED Central Committee analysis of the origins of the uprising concluded: "Erste Signale waren, dass es in einer grösseren Anzahl von Betrieben bereits vor der Veröffentlichung des Kommuniqués [of 9 June announcing the New Course - GB] zu kurzfristigen Streiks vor allem

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<sup>114</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 46.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>117</sup> Hagen, pp. 28-29.

gegen die nunmehr angeordnete administrative Normenerhöhung kam."<sup>118</sup> The SED took little notice of these disturbances, however. In an analysis of the background to the uprising Marshall Sokolovskii, the Soviet Deputy Defence Minister, Vladimir Semyenov, head of the Soviet High Commission in the GDR, and Pavel Yudin, Chairmen of the Soviet Control Commission in the GDR wrote: "In December and January-February 1952 [sic] there were isolated incidents of small and short-lived workers' strikes within a few enterprises; these, however, did not catch the attention of the [...] SED and [Soviet Control Commission] organs."<sup>119</sup>

The Soviet Union, which closely monitored the situation in the GDR, was aware that the stability of the GDR was at risk in the early summer of 1953. From the end of 1952 through the first four months of 1953, the Soviet Control Commission in East Germany did research into the attitude of the East German population and found that the population was not only discontent, but that it was "facing the regime with increasing hostility."<sup>120</sup> The Soviet Union therefore called three leading members of the SED to Moscow. On 2 June, Fred

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<sup>118</sup> SAPMO, ZA, IV 2/202/15, p. 29. 20 July 1953 report entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.- 22.6.53". This document is now available, translated in English, in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Spring 1995, p.11. Document obtained by Christian Ostermann, translated by Helen Christakos.

<sup>119</sup> This document appears in translation in the *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project*, Spring 1995, p. 10. The document was obtained by Vladislav Zubok and translated by Danny Rozas.

<sup>120</sup> Gerhard Wettig, "Sowjetische Wiedervereinigungsbemühungen im ausgehenden Frühjahr 1953?" *DA* 25 (1992), p. 945.

Oelssner, Walter Ulbricht, and Otto Grotewohl travelled to Moscow to meet with the interim leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which had replaced Stalin after his death in March. The SED delegation met with Nikita Khrushchchev, Lavrenty Beria, W.M. Molotov, G.M. Malenkov, and W.S. Semyonov from 2 to 4 June to discuss the situation in the GDR. On the situation in the GDR, the Soviet leadership stated: "There is serious dissatisfaction in the majority of the population, including the workers, farmers, and intellectuals, regarding the economic and political measures which have been introduced in the GDR."<sup>121</sup> It was clear to the Moscow leadership that political developments had contributed to the unrest. Based on its analysis, the Soviet Union forced the SED to slow down the "building of socialism." One of the main changes suggested by the Soviets was the adoption of a more lenient approach to the religious community. The Soviet Union made this desire evident in a communique to the SED: "It should be kept in mind that repression of the church [...] can only contribute to strengthening religious fanaticism in residual sections of the population, and to increasing their dissatisfaction."<sup>122</sup>

Apparently surprised by this information on its own population, the Central Committee took measures upon the return of its leadership from Moscow to improve its knowledge on the mood of the population. Central Committee displeasure with the information gathering system became evident on 12 June, when Karl Schirdewan, head of the

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<sup>121</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 55.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 57. The Soviet resolution prepared for the SED members in Moscow is reprinted in Rolf Stöckigt, "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32 (1990): 649-663.

*Leitende Organe der Parteien und der Massenorganisationen* branch, ordered a special group of three members of the LOPM branch to produce daily reports on the mood of the population based on reports from the SED *Bezirk* leadership, from the central leadership of the mass organizations, from the party *Instrukteure*, and from the various departments within the Central Committee apparatus.<sup>123</sup> It is important to emphasize that Schirdewan's order did not involve instructions to use MfS reports. This further demonstrates that MfS information gathering on the GDR population was deficient in the early years of the organization.

The SED *Politbüro* heeded the advice of the Soviet Union by recommending in a communiqué of 9 June that the government adopt a "New Course."<sup>124</sup> Two days later, the government announced in its organ *Neues Deutschland* that a "New Course" would be embarked upon. The news of the impending "New Course" spread quickly throughout East Germany in the two days following the issuing of the communiqué. On 11 June, *Neues Deutschland* sold out within a few hours of appearing on newsstands, with some people in Berlin paying up to 30 times the regular price to obtain a copy.<sup>125</sup> The "New Course" entailed a relaxation of the collectivization of agriculture, the end of the persecution of church members and the *Junge Gemeinde*, and the elimination of restrictions on private business owners. There was no mention of a reduction of work norms,

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>124</sup> Hagen, p. 33.

<sup>125</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 63.

however.<sup>126</sup>

In recognition of the abuse of basic rights, the government also announced that a release of prisoners would take place, and that there would be a general increase in *Rechtssicherheit*.<sup>127</sup> The Soviet authorities in Germany had recognized the role that arrests had played in popular discontent. In an analysis of the roots of the uprising, high ranking Soviet officers in Germany attributed the uprising to the lack of basic consumer goods combined with *Rechtsunsicherheit*: "This [i.e. material shortages] was joined by the measures taken by the [Central Committee of the SED], as part of their mistaken policy of liquidating the petit and middle bourgeoisie of both city and country, which in some places took the rather ugly forms of insular administrative planning and mass repressions, directed also at workers."<sup>128</sup> The Soviets indicated that the excesses might have been the result of over zealous local authorities: "In a number of instances, SED district and regional committees completely supplanted government organs, bringing under their authority police operations, arrests, the day-to-day administration of enterprises, etc."<sup>129</sup>

### 3.1 - Sites of protest immediately prior to the uprising - urban.

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<sup>126</sup> *Neues Deutschland* 11 June 1953

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> See note 101 above. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Spring 1995, p. 17. Unfortunately, the translation of this document is poor.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

The population interpreted the "New Course" as an admission of weakness by the government. The population therefore began to act, believing that an opportunity existed to affect political change. Even before the widespread disturbances of 17 June, isolated work stoppages and other disturbances, often with clear political overtones, took place in the GDR. About 200 people gathered in front of the prison in Stralsund to demand the release of prisoners there on 12 June.<sup>130</sup> On 12 June at a workers' meeting in the Mathias-Thesen-Werft in Wismar, workers began demanding free elections and the resignation of the government.<sup>131</sup> On 15 June near Leipzig, 40 workers of the VEB Sowahr in Rosslau went on strike for 1 hour. On the morning of the 16th at the Warnow-Werft in Warnemünde, somebody hung a large sign demanding the removal of the increased norms and free and secret elections.<sup>132</sup> In Berlin, about 900 demonstrators gathered in front of the prison on Barnimstr at 9 am demanding the release of prisoners.<sup>133</sup> Prior to the 16th, the most dramatic protest against the government occurred in Brandenburg. On 12 June, 6 workers appeared at the *Kreis* public prosecutor's office and demanded the release of their boss who had been jailed for not having paid taxes. After the request was rejected, the workers proceeded to the prison in the middle of town and began protesting. Within an hour, the crowd had grown to over

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<sup>130</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/524. 14 June 1953 daily report VI signed by Schirdewan.

<sup>131</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 50.

<sup>132</sup> Hagen, p. 36.

<sup>133</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, p. 128. 5 July 1953 report from the prison to the political department of the Volkspolizei.

5,000 demonstrators. The demonstrators demanded free elections and the resignation of the government.<sup>134</sup>

The *Politbüro* and Central Committee gradually came to recognize discontent in the population, but the members refused to abandon the course. At the *Politbüro* sitting of 13 June, Grotewohl emphasized that the SED would not "give up." He stressed that the *Politbüro* had to demonstrate that the raised norms and "frugality" were not mistakes.<sup>135</sup> By 15 June, the Central Committee was visibly nervous with regard to popular discontent. Schirdewan ordered more information on the population to be collected, especially in industrial centres: "At present, the Central Committee does not possess *Bezirk* overviews on certain important sites, such as Leuna-Werke, Buna, Bitterfeld, Mansfeld, Karl-Marx-Stadt, the border regions, and large factories in Berlin."<sup>136</sup>

Thus, there were isolated protests in the industrial centres of the north and south of the GDR at the beginning of June. The most dramatic protests took place in Brandenburg. The desire for political change was, however, common in the protests prior to the uprising. In an LOPM report summarizing the reports of the *Bezirk* level party reports on 12 June, the authors stated that typical opinions of protesting workers were: "Now the GDR is bankrupt." And: "Now those at the top realize that they're at their end."<sup>137</sup> Despite these protests, the SED leadership refused to reduce

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<sup>134</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 77. See also SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/524. 14 June 1953 daily report VI signed by Schirdewan.

<sup>135</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 80.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>137</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," pp.49-50.

the norms.<sup>138</sup>

### 3.2 - Sites of protest immediately prior to the uprising -rural.

Rural regions also experienced unrest on the eve of the uprising. In an increasing number of LPGs, farmers indicated their desire to be rid of the agricultural collectives, and met with only isolated protests by other farmers for their views.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the rural population also interpreted the "New Course" as a chance to affect political change. In some districts, entire villages gathered in local pubs and drank to Adenauer's health.<sup>140</sup> On 13 June at a village gathering in Eckolstädt, after joyously receiving four farmers released from prison, those in attendance demanded free elections and the resignation of the government.<sup>141</sup> In Muchow, Kreis Ludwigslust, during the night of 16 to 17 June, farmers demonstrated for the removal of the SED mayor.<sup>142</sup> In Schmergow, Rathenow, and Jessen, demonstrators

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<sup>138</sup> Christoph Buchheim speculates that the Central Committee could not reduce the norms, because of its economic obligations to the Soviet Union; Christoph Buchheim, "Wirtschaftliche Hintergründe des Arbeiteraufstandes vom 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR", VfZ 38 (1990):415-433.

<sup>139</sup> Armin Mitter, "Am 17.6.1953 haben die Arbeiter gestreikt," p. 102.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>142</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/587, p. 41. SED Bezirk leadership BPKK report on enemy activity 1952-1956. Analysis of 17 June and its aftermath.

demanded the release of imprisoned farmers.<sup>143</sup> The SED in *Bezirke* Gera and Schwerin noted an increase in "enemy arguments" and increasing calls for an end to the SED.<sup>144</sup>

These open demonstrations of political resistance were not isolated phenomena. All *Bezirke* reported oppositional activity in the villages, ranging from "drunken fests" to demonstrations, all of which revealed a hostility toward the government.<sup>145</sup> It is therefore not surprising that all *Bezirke* also reported an increased number of attacks against SED functionaries in rural regions.<sup>146</sup> The Central Committee was dismayed by the situation in the countryside. On 15 June, Schirdewan sent instructions to all SED *Bezirke* heads criticizing the reports of negative occurrences in the rural population: "Certain *Bezirke*, such as Gera, Halle, Wismut have provided good analysis of the situation taking into account present opportunities. The other *Bezirke* limit themselves to repeating the well-known daily reports, without providing true analysis."<sup>147</sup> Mitter and Wolle have concluded that the Central Committee was particularly shocked by rural disturbances because it was in those regions that the Central Committee had expected the most loyalty. In sum, demonstrations in rural regions even before 17 June reveal the close relationship between *Rechtsunsicherheit* and anti-Communist resistance.

The historians Arnulf Baring and Torsten Diedrich argue

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<sup>143</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," pp. 107-109.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-109.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>146</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," p. 106.

<sup>147</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 79.

that the protests in the summer of 1953 did not become political until the afternoon of 17 June.<sup>148</sup> These historians argue that the uprising should not be interpreted as revolutionary from the outset. For the purposes of this study, it is important to establish the fact that political demands accompanied economic demands in demonstrations leading up to the 17 June uprising.

#### 4 - The Revolutionary Uprising

##### 4.1 - The state of the literature

The first major work on the 17 June uprising was Stefan Brant's *Der Aufstand: Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Deutung des 17. Juni 1953* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben Verlag, 1954). This work was based on eyewitness accounts and personal experience, as Brant himself took part in the uprising. The work claims to be based on SED documents, but the lack of footnotes means it is impossible to verify this claim. It is in any case extremely unlikely that the author would have been able to obtain access to substantial amounts of SED material in 1954. Brant's work is therefore an unreliable, memoir-type account. Nevertheless, he was the first to suggest that the events of 17 June represented more than an uprising, but were rather a revolution.<sup>149</sup> Brant also noted that the uprising involved a variety of social groups

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<sup>148</sup> Diedrich, p. 83; Baring, p. 74.

<sup>149</sup> Stefan Brant, *Der Aufstand: Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Deutung des 17. Juni 1953* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben Verlag, 1954), p. 303.

because, although workers started the uprising, the GDR had been "ripe" for unrest.<sup>150</sup>

The first academic work on the topic, Arnulf Baring's *Der 17. Juni 1953* (Cologne: Kippenheuer & Witsch, 1965), which appeared in English as *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), concluded that the uprising was primarily a workers' uprising, and that economic demands prevailed: "There is danger in paying too much attention to the large scale demonstrations which took place in certain towns, for they tend to create the impression that June 17 was a popular uprising. In fact, the eyewitness reports prove conclusively that this was not the case. It was the industrial workers - actively supported by the youth of the GDR - who were responsible for the events of June 17. They started the rising and were the dominant factor in every major demonstration. By contrast, the farmers were involved only in isolated incidents, and the middle classes and the intelligentsia played little or no part in the day's events."<sup>151</sup> There were two factors that hindered Baring's analysis: the lack of a sufficient source base, and the interpretation of the uprising in isolation. These two are related, for the opening of the archives has revealed that the uprising took place within a longer period of turmoil. Examining unrest before, during and after the uprising suggests that disturbances in the summer of 1953 involved various societal groups. Karl Wilhelm Fricke and Ilse Spittmann's, *17. Juni 1953: Arbeiteraufstand in der*

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 304-306.

<sup>151</sup> Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 52-53. Baring also stated that only a small number of workers took part, between 5.5% and 6.8% of the work force.

DDR (Cologne: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1982) contributed more information to the debate, but took essentially the same position as Baring, arguing that the uprising was exclusively a workers' revolt which centred on economic demands.

The first major work to appear after 1989 on the 17 June uprising was Torsten Diedrich's *Der 17. Juni 1953: Bewaffnete Gewalt gegen das Volk* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991) which was concerned with the military response to the uprising, and especially the role of the GDR's People's Police in Barracks (*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*). Like Baring, Diedrich believed that "one clearly cannot come to the conclusion that the June 17 uprising was a popular revolt."<sup>152</sup> Treating the uprising in isolation was the primary reason for this conclusion, but it was also likely a result of an unscientific use of sources, and an insufficient source base. Diedrich limited his research to police reports and the odd SED report to describe the uprising, but his account does not satisfy the requirements of historical scholarship. His citation of sources is sparse, and the few citations provided are vague. Diedrich provides only the archival call number for the record group without the precise location or description of the document. As some of these record groups contain hundreds of documents, it is impossible to know which documents Diedrich has used, and therefore to judge their value. Diedrich's account of the uprising is vague and in some instances incorrect. Through a scientific use of similar sources to the ones used by Diedrich, combined with records from the MfS, CDU and LDPD, especially in the period following the

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<sup>152</sup> Torsten Diedrich. *Der 17. Juni 1953* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991), p.149.

uprising, this study challenges Diedrich's contentions that the uprising was exclusively a workers' uprising, and that it did not represent political resistance.<sup>153</sup> Gerhard Beier's *Wir wollen freie Menschen sein* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1993) added documents from the East German Free German Trade Union and western archives to the debate in support of Diedrich's analysis of the nature of the uprising, as well as the earlier interpretations of Baring, Fricke and Spittmann.

The first work to offer new evidence that the uprising was more than a workers' protest was Manfred Hagen's *DDR-Juni 1953* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992). Based primarily on eyewitness reports and letters to himself, Hagen offered an in-depth look at all aspects of the uprising and its progress throughout the days of 16 and 17 June. Hagen's thoroughness allowed him to contend that other social groups were involved in the uprising. He found, for example, that workers often encountered other protesting groups on the streets already, not groups which joined the workers only after they saw them protesting.<sup>154</sup> Through these examples, Hagen demonstrated that the middle class, technical intelligentsia, farmers, youth and women all played an important role in the uprising. Hagen therefore employs the term *Volkserhebung* (popular uprising) to describe the events of 17 June in the GDR. The eyewitness reports should not substitute for archival evidence, however. Hagen lists 26 instances of storming of locations where prisoners were being held. Some of the locations named

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<sup>153</sup> For other weaknesses in Diedrich's work, see Armin Mitter, "Der "Tag X" und die "Innere Staatsgründung"," p. 12.

<sup>154</sup> Manfred Hagen, *DDR-Juni '53* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), p. 199.

are not verified in documentary material, and there are at least 10 other locations where disturbances took place which Hagen does not mention.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, Hagen mentions only 2 MfS stations being attacked<sup>156</sup> but there were at least six. Hagen's work offers important corroborative evidence to archival documentation.

With the publication of Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle's *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1993) historians were presented with a radical interpretation of 17 June, based on the most thorough use of sources to date. The work attempted to trace the decline of the GDR through key episodes in East German history: the 17 June 1953 uprising, the destalinization of 1956 and the events in Hungary, the building of the Wall in 1961, and the Prague Spring of 1968.<sup>157</sup> For the first episode, Mitter and Wolle sought to answer the following question: "Was June 17 a workers' revolt or a people's revolt? Did the population protest in the streets and squares of the German Democratic Republic against the decaying standard of living or for the abolition of the Communist regime?"<sup>158</sup> By expanding the discussion to include

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<sup>155</sup> Hagen, p. 172. The locations which Hagen does not mention are Hennigsdorf, Quedlinburg, Fürstenwalde, Rüderstadt, Apolda, Jessen, Gommern, Lübben, Preschen, and Worbis.

<sup>156</sup> Hagen, p. 172; Diedrich, p. 278.

<sup>157</sup> Mary Fulbrook in particular has taken issue with this approach, believing that 1989 could not be read off of 1953; that there was not a constant, if latent, state of civil war in the intervening 35 years. Fulbrook, *Anatomy*, p. 172.

<sup>158</sup> Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten* (Munich: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1993), p. 160.

the prelude to, and the aftermath of, the uprising and introducing much new archival material, Mitter and Wolle offered a convincing argument that 17 June was more than a workers' revolt, preferring the term *revolutionäre Erhebung* (revolutionary uprising). They argued that the most important conclusion the population drew from the events was that the SED rested on Soviet power, that "the GDR was an artificial product of the Cold War without internal legitimacy."<sup>159</sup> The present work comes to similar conclusions regarding the nature of the uprising, based on an entirely different set of documents; documents which have an advantage over the MfS files presented by Mitter and Wolle in that they are accessible. During January 1990, when the "Citizens' Committee" occupied the MfS headquarters in Berlin, Mitter and Wolle were able to access and photocopy archival material relating to the uprising. The archival holdings were allegedly lost during the transfer of files in 1990 from the MfS archives to the German Federal Agency for the Files of the State Security Service of the former GDR.<sup>160</sup> These files are now only available from Mitter and Wolle. Unlike the MfS files in Mitter and Wolle's work, the police records on which the present study is based are publicly verifiable.

Mary Fulbrook argues that the uprising cannot be categorized so neatly. She feels that economic issues in favour of better living conditions and anti-communist motives were too closely related for historians to be able to separate. In analyzing the character of the uprising, Fulbrook concludes: "A debate which counterposes economic

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<sup>159</sup> Mitter/Wolle, *Untergang*, p. 162.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Armin Mitter, 11 November 1996, Berlin

dissatisfaction (economist strikes in favour of better living conditions) to political demands (anti-communism, unification with the West) [...] fails to capture the ways in which these were so closely interrelated as to be almost inseparable."<sup>161</sup> Fulbrook's claims notwithstanding, historians must work in terms of priority. The danger in Fulbrook's approach is to raise economic concerns to an artificially elevated motive for resistance. Were better living conditions the reason for simultaneous demonstrations and strikes in over 350 sites in the GDR on 17 June 1953? Could one make the counterfactual argument that if the GDR had satisfied the material situation of the population, the uprising would not have taken place? A report by an SED member after his trip to Halle in July 1953 helps to prioritize the issues: "The main slogans that the enemy brings into the factories and spreads in the countryside, which are cleverly disguised as smaller, more immediate economic demands but which are increasingly brought to the fore, are: free elections, release of all political prisoners since 1945, apolitical unions [...]"<sup>162</sup> It is important not to confuse the sparks which set off the uprising with the powder keg of latent fundamental resistance. There were much deeper issues at work during the summer of 1953 than economic demands. To underscore economic aspects of the uprising is to disregard the development of the repression apparatus in eastern Germany from the end of the war. The uprising demonstrated a fundamental lack of trust in the system of government. This view was, of course,

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<sup>161</sup> Fulbrook, p. 178.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter sind zwar geschlagen worden, aber sie sind nicht besiegt!" Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle (eds.), *Der Tag X*, p. 67.

partially related to economic difficulties attributed to the regime. However, the history of repression in the GDR and SBZ was crucial in transforming opposition to government economic policies into fundamental resistance to the political system. Police, MfS, CDU, and LDPD documentation from the days and months of the uprising and following the uprising - documentation not cited by Fulbrook - attest to the political nature of the demonstrations, and the importance of SED repression in popular motivation to resist.

Another ground-breaking work on the uprising was Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, and Stefan Wolle's richly documented *Der Tag X, 17. Juni 1953: Die "Innere Staatsgründung" der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/54* (Berlin: Ch.Links Verlag, 1995).<sup>163</sup> This work augmented the conclusions in *Untergang auf Raten* that the 17 June uprising was a popular revolutionary upheaval and proposed that the SED and the Soviets drew the conclusion from the events of 1952-53, particularly the June uprising, that the GDR had to be "internally founded" to ensure that a repetition of the disturbances would not be possible. The SED thus expanded its security and repression apparatus. This analysis has expanded the context of the uprising, based primarily on LOPM documents, to include events up to 1954. The present study offers documentation not available in *Der Tag X* - including LDPD documentation, police reports, and in particular MfS material - on events up to 1955 in support of the thesis that the uprising represented an act of popular political resistance. The "internal founding of the state"

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<sup>163</sup> This work appeared as part of the series *Forschungen zur DDR-Geschichte* which is presently the venue for the most valuable research on East Germany.

as such, is not addressed.

Leo Haupts' article "Die Blockparteien in der DDR und der 17. Juni 1953" (VfZ 40 (1992):383-409), on the basis of documentation from the CDU and LDPD archives, illustrated that CDU/LDPD participation in the demonstrations of 17 June was negligible. This lack of participation, he emphasized, should not be interpreted as support for the SED, nor the leadership of the CDU/LDPD. There were clear tensions between the general membership of the non-Marxist parties and the pro-SED leadership. This study presents evidence from archives of the East German provinces and from police records to support Haupts' assertion of tension in the non-Marxist parties, yet negligible participation during the demonstrations. Udo Wengst's "Der Aufstand am 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR. Aus den Stimmungsberichten der Kreis- und Bezirksverbände der Ost-CDU im Juni und Juli 1953" (VfZ 41 (1993): 277-295) also offers insights into the lower levels of the non-Marxist parties. Wengst furnishes the reader with two reproduced documents, both evaluations prepared for the CDU Secretariat based on studies conducted by lower party levels. The documents support Haupts' findings of tension between the base membership and the party leadership. The second document provides a summary of local level CDU and popular concerns following the uprising. This is a valuable document, but in itself provides no comprehensive conclusions regarding popular concerns. The present study provides additional CDU, MfS and LDPD documentation, to provide a more complete picture of developments after the uprising, which allows for comprehensive conclusions regarding popular concerns. Wengst does not conclude the overriding popular concerns following the uprising. This study forwards *Rechtsunsicherheit* as the predominant

concern. On the course of the 17 June uprising, Wengst's documents are less valuable. The CDU in Fürstenwalde, for example, reported simply that over 1,000 people demonstrated on 17 June for the resignation of the government and for free elections.<sup>164</sup> In contrast, the local police reported which factories went on strike, the times at which events occurred, and the fact that 100 demonstrators stormed the police station, forcing the police to call for reinforcements from Seelow.<sup>165</sup>

Christoph Buchheim's "Wirtschaftliche Hintergründe des Arbeiteraufstandes vom 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR" (VfZ 38 (1990): 415-433) has been unhelpful in furthering knowledge on the uprising. Buchheim argues that the SED's room for manoeuvre in the economic sphere was limited by the eastern bloc system. The forced hand-over of economic resources to the Soviet Union and the rearmament introduced at the Soviet Union's request meant that the GDR government had no other option than to reduce wages and the manufacturing of consumer goods. While Buchheim puts in context the economic constraints with which the SED was faced, the article proceeds from the premise that the roots of the uprising are found in the GDR's economic difficulties. This study challenges this interpretation by arguing that the economic situation merely sparked the uprising, and that the central issue for the demonstrators was the removal of the Communist system in East Germany. Buchheim offered no documentation

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<sup>164</sup> Udo Wengst, "Der Aufstand am 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR", VfZ 41 (1993), p. 289.

<sup>165</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 4. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 17:00 to 24:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by the head of the operations staff Weidhase.

from East German archives in his analysis.

In sum, this study challenges the argument that economic concerns dominated the uprising. Instead, it proposes that political concerns were of greater significance. SED repression was a primary factor behind the political nature of the uprising.

#### 4.2 - The outbreak

The spark for the uprising came from construction workers in East Berlin, although, as has been proven throughout this study, the underlying willingness to resist was already well established and not limited to a location or region. On the morning of 15 June, angered not only that the 10% norm increase had not been retracted in the "New Course," but that the FDGB newspaper *Tribüne* justified the raise in norms and indicated that a retraction of the norms would not occur, construction workers on the site of a future hospital in the Berlin district of Friedrichshain forced the party chair for the work site to draft a resolution to be handed to Grotewohl. The resolution read: "We colleagues of the construction site of the Friedrichshain hospital of VEB *Industriebau* turn to you, Mr. Minister President, asking that you take note of our concerns. We believe that the 10% norm increase is a great hardship for us. We demand that our construction site be exempted from the raised norms [...] Considering the agitated mood of all employees, we demand a completely satisfactory position on these difficult matters, and await your position until tomorrow noon."<sup>166</sup> As arranged during the

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<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Mitter/Wolle, p. 89.

previous Saturday's VEB *Industriebau* boat excursion on the lakes and canals of Berlin, members from other construction sites attended this meeting of the Friedrichshain hospital construction workers. Through these attendees, word spread quickly to other construction sites and by the end of the 15th, construction workers throughout Berlin anxiously awaited Grotewohl's response.<sup>167</sup>

On the following day, 16 June, Grotewohl's personal secretary announced that Grotewohl would not be taking a position on the resolution right away because the question of work norms required lengthy consultation with various levels of the party.<sup>168</sup> To deliver the message to the construction workers at the hospital in Friedrichshain, the party sent out 15 *Instrukteure* who explained that a retraction of the norms would not take place. Between 400 and 500 construction workers from the Friedrichshain site attended the meeting, joined by 200 workers from the construction site of Fernheizwerk.<sup>169</sup> During the meeting with the *Instrukteure*, the director of the construction site had the entrance to the site locked. The construction workers immediately became suspicious that they would be arrested, causing two workers from the nearby massive Stalinallee construction site to return to their comrades and enlist assistance. They arrived breathless reporting that

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<sup>167</sup> Mitter/Wolle, pp. 87-88.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>169</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 258. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee." See also Mitter/Wolle, p. 91. Mitter and Wolle's account is based on an MfS report on the origin of the uprising, also from July.

"construction workers of the Friedrichshain hospital were locked up and being held against their will."<sup>170</sup> Roughly one hour later, between 8 and 9 am, a column of construction workers from Block 40 on the Stalinallee appeared at the hospital construction site and forcefully opened the gate. Workers from both sites then joined together in a demonstration of about 700 people who marched through town, leaving the Friedrichshain hospital along Leninallee, and then following the route: Stalinallee, Moltkenmarkt, Mühlendammbrücke, Breitestrasse, Marx-Engels-Platz, Unter den Linden, Wilhelmstrasse, Thälmannplatz, Leipzigerstrasse, and then to the House of Ministries located on Leipzigerstrasse.<sup>171</sup>

During the march to the House of Ministries, the demonstration increased in numbers. What started out as several hundred had increased to at least 5,000 by the time they reached the House of Ministries.<sup>172</sup> Women and children are clearly visible in pictures of this marching column.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>171</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 107. 17 June 1953 report of the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* entitled: "Auszug aus dem Lagebericht Nr. 167 des Operativstabes PdVP vom 16.6.1953, von 07:00 bis 24:00." In *Untergang auf Raten*, Mitter and Wolle describe a slightly different route, but their information is based on an MfS report a month after the uprising. This police report of the following day is more reliable; Mitter/Wolle, p. 91. Diedrich does not mention the construction workers being locked up; Diedrich, pp. 59-60.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 107. Mitter and Wolle claim that 10,000 participated in the demonstration on 16 June, but do not provide a citation for this claim; Mitter/Wolle, p. 93. Diedrich claims 2,000 participated, but does not provide a citation; Diedrich, p. 60.

<sup>173</sup> Hagen, p. 38.

By the time the crowd had gathered in front of the House of Ministries, they had already begun to call for free elections and the resignation of the government.<sup>174</sup> The police recognized the political nature of the demonstration, reporting that demonstrators' demands became "anti-democratic" towards the end of the demonstration in front of the House of Ministries. These "anti-democratic demands" included calls for a general strike on 17 June and the overthrow of the government.<sup>175</sup> The political nature of the uprising is evidenced by the fact that the news delivered by Fritz Selbmann, the minister for steel industry and mining, that the norms were to be rescinded found little resonance in the crowd. Selbmann was shouted down.<sup>176</sup> The demonstration of 16 June in front of the House of Ministries suffered from a lack of leadership, however. There was a general desire to remove the government, but little idea of how this should be accomplished. Between 2 and 3 pm, due to the lack of leadership and the intense summer heat, the demonstrators began to disperse, but not before several demonstrators appealed to the crowd to hold a general strike the following day.<sup>177</sup>

The present historiography has not adequately dealt with the evening of 16 June in East Berlin. Various episodes from that evening demonstrate the revolutionary nature of

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<sup>174</sup> Kowalczyk, Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 56.

<sup>175</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 259. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee."

<sup>176</sup> Hagen, p.44.

<sup>177</sup> Hagen, p. 45.

the uprising.<sup>178</sup> Upon leaving the House of Ministries, the demonstrators headed back along the path they had come and continued further towards Warschauer Bridge and finally to Oberbaum Bridge, where at 7:30 the demonstration began to disperse.<sup>179</sup> Along the way towards Oberbaum Bridge, demonstrators ripped down SED symbols, such as FDJ flags and SED posters.<sup>180</sup> On Chausseestrasse, the demonstrators took over an FDJ truck which had a loud speaker and broadcast demands like: "Down with the SED." And: "Overthrow of the government."<sup>181</sup> Although the demonstrators began to disperse at 7:30 pm, this did not signal the end of the disturbances. At 8:12 pm, a new marching column of about 1,000 people formed on the Stalinallee and began marching towards the centre of the city. They ripped down flags and propaganda boards of the SED on construction sites along the Stalinallee, and yelled slogans such as: "Down with the

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<sup>178</sup> Baring, and Fricke in "Der Arbeiteraufstand," in Karl Wilhelm Fricke, Ilse Spittmann (eds.), *17. Juni 1953: Arbeiteraufstand in der DDR* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982.), pp. 12-13 simply did not have the sources to be comprehensive. Diedrich provides more detail, but his account suffers from a lack of proper citation, and he has missed some important police reports; Diedrich, p. 63.

<sup>179</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 108. 17 June 1953 report of the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* entitled: "Auszug aus dem Lagebericht Nr. 167 des Operativstabes PdVP vom 16.6.1953, von 07:00 bis 24:00."

<sup>180</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 108. 17 June 1953 report of the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* entitled: "Auszug aus dem Lagebericht Nr. 167 des Operativstabes PdVP vom 16.6.1953, von 07:00 bis 24:00."

<sup>181</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 259. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee."

SED."<sup>182</sup> A monument to Stalin was also attacked along the way. By 9:08 pm, another column had joined the first which brought the number of participants to 3,000.<sup>183</sup> At 9:50 pm, these demonstrators tore down SED flags and posters on the Marx-Engels-Platz. Shortly thereafter, demonstrators turned over a government truck.<sup>184</sup> At Bersarin square, some demonstrators even tried to break into the houses of SED functionaries.<sup>185</sup> Torsten Diedrich argues that the political slogans of 17 June were "implanted" by West Berliners who crossed the border to join the demonstrations. As evidence, Diedrich states that there were no demands for the fall of the government on 16 June.<sup>186</sup> Diedrich's conclusion is not supported by the events of 16 June.

The *Volkspolizei* were extremely nervous about the developing situation. At 9:50 pm, the Berlin police called for reinforcements from Potsdam, Magdeburg, and even from as far away as Leipzig.<sup>187</sup> The Berlin police ordered an extra 200 officers to guard the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin,

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<sup>182</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 110. 17 June 1953 report of the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* entitled: "Auszug aus dem Lagebericht Nr. 167 des Operativstabes PdVP vom 16.6.1953, von 07:00 bis 24:00."

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>186</sup> Torsten Diedrich, "Zwischen Arbeitererhebung und gescheiterter Revolution in Berlin und der DDR" in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), p. 299.

<sup>187</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/34, p. 55. 16 June 1953 unsigned report entitled: "Getroffene Massnahmen."

and extra troops to guard the *Generalstaatsanwaltschaft*.<sup>188</sup> The allotment of these reinforcements provides evidence of what the *Volkspolizei* felt would be targets of the demonstrators - the instruments of the repression apparatus. The *Volkspolizei* was eventually able to disperse the crowds on the evening of the 16th, reporting that by 11 pm, the situation in East Berlin was stable.<sup>189</sup> The police were careful not to use their weapons, and to avoid arrests where possible, as they were fearful that the situation would escalate.<sup>190</sup>

At 4:30 pm on 16 June, the American "Radio in the American Sector" reported for the first time on the disturbances in Berlin. The 90 second clip called the disturbances a "mass demonstration," and claimed that the *Volkspolizei* had not dared to disperse the crowd. For the rest of the day, and throughout the morning of the 17th, RIAS continually played this message. By the 17th, wide sections of the GDR had been well-informed of the disturbances in Berlin.<sup>191</sup>

Berlin was not the only city to experience disturbances on 16 June. On 16 June, 300 people in VEB Hammerschuh in

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>190</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 261. 13 July 1953 report from the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee."

<sup>191</sup> RIAS was careful not to call for a general strike though, largely because its American owners were not sure of the results of such an occurrence in the tense Cold War of 1953; Hagen, p. 37.

Döbeln went on strike.<sup>192</sup> At RAW "Einheit" in Engelsdorf near Leipzig, a factory meeting took place at which the workers demanded the release of all political prisoners, the conducting of secret elections, and the resignation of the government.<sup>193</sup> In fact, all *Bezirke* reported work stoppages or factory disturbances, and noted that these disturbances revealed political motivation.<sup>194</sup> Thus, although construction workers incited further disturbances in Berlin, the rest of the GDR was clearly restless and showed a willingness for action. Based on this evidence, Armin Mitter has concluded that the Berlin disturbances were the catalyst (*Auslöser*) of the uprising, but not the origin (*Ausgangspunkt*).<sup>195</sup> Indeed, on the following day, demonstrations across the GDR began simultaneously with those in Berlin.

On the night of 16 June, the *Politbüro* held a meeting (*Parteiaktivtagung*) in the Friedrichstadt-Palast of the most reliable party members for Greater Berlin in order to deal with the unrest. The *Politbüro* announced that the "obligatory" raising of the norms would be rescinded, and that the *Politbüro* would appeal for a voluntary increase of the norms instead. On that night, Ulbricht stated: "In today's sitting, the *Politbüro* of the SED resolved to recommend to the government that the directives of the

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<sup>192</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>193</sup> Kowalczuk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 54.

<sup>194</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 93.

<sup>195</sup> Kowalczuk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 55. Other examples are cited in Kowalczuk and Mitter's account.

individual ministries for the obligatory increasing of work norms be lifted. We believe that an increase in work norms can only take place on a voluntary basis."<sup>196</sup> The norms were therefore to be rescinded. For this reason, demonstrators' demands on the following day centred around the removal of the government and free elections.<sup>197</sup> Diedrich's argument that protests on 17 June were largely the result of workers' confusion as to whether or not the norms would actually be rescinded<sup>198</sup> is not as convincing as that of Mitter and Kowalczyk, which claims that Ulbricht's speech was a provocation for another reason: It did not announce changes to the system of rule.<sup>199</sup>

#### 4.3 - 17 June 1953 in Berlin

On 17 June, a rainy Wednesday, Berlin erupted. The earliest report of a strike in Berlin was 6:35 am, when between 250 and 300 workers at the Fortschritt Werk III began marching towards the Stalinallee.<sup>200</sup> At 6:40, workers at RAW Friedrichshain and Bremsenwerk went on strike.<sup>201</sup> Striking workers from various other factories such as RFT Treptow, RFT Edison-Strasse, ABUS Lichtenberg, and Kabelwerk

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<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 56.

<sup>197</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 57.

<sup>198</sup> Diedrich, p. 64.

<sup>199</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 57.

<sup>200</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 102. 17 June 1953 summary report of Volkspolizei Hauptabteilung K on updates from various Volkspolizei posts around Berlin on 17 June 1953 (signature illegible).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Köpenick also began to proceed towards the city centre.<sup>202</sup> The most dramatic marching column came from Hennigsdorf, where workers from two large factories walked 27 km to join the demonstrations in Berlin.<sup>203</sup> As early as 7 am, slogans of striking workers revealed political motive behind the uprising. At approximately 7:15 am, striking workers of the Kabelwerk Oberspree shouted: "Down with the police, the *Volksarmee*, and the government!"<sup>204</sup> At 7:25 am, a crowd of between 400 and 500 workers heading towards Strausberger Platz - the gathering destination announced by demonstrators in front of the House of Ministries on the previous day<sup>205</sup> - from Lichtenberg shouted: "We are at the end of our torture. We demand free elections."<sup>206</sup> At 8:45 am, two columns of demonstrators marching towards Marx-Engels-Platz shouted: "We do not need a *Volkspolizei*, we will free ourselves."<sup>207</sup> The demands of demonstrators in other areas of Berlin had also moved beyond economic considerations. Although there were calls for the reduction of the work norms, demonstrators also called for free elections, the overthrow

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<sup>202</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 Central Committee report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>203</sup> Hagen, pp. 48-49.

<sup>204</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>205</sup> Diedrich, p. 64.

<sup>206</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 103. 17 June 1953 summary report from *Volkspolizei* Hauptabteilung K on updates from various *Volkspolizei* posts around Berlin on 17 June 1953 (signature illegible).

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

of the government, the end of the SED, and the release of all political prisoners.<sup>208</sup> In typical SED jargon, the police revealed that the political nature of the uprising was a general phenomenon in Berlin: "The demands and placards of the *early morning hours* demonstrated the strong presence of provocateurs in the demonstration."<sup>209</sup>

Around 7:50 am, the first demonstration left Strausberger Platz. Between 300 and 500 people broke through a human *Volkspolizei* chain on the square shouting: "We want to be free workers. We are at the end of our torture. Free elections."<sup>210</sup> By 8:18 am, the police reported that all demonstrators had left Strausberger Platz.<sup>211</sup> The demonstrators began marching towards the previous day's target, the House of Ministries. Political demands occupied a prominent place in the demonstrations of the early morning hours of 17 June. Of the police posts around Berlin that

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<sup>208</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>209</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 262. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee." Italics added.

<sup>210</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 104. 17 June 1953 summary report of *Volkspolizei Hauptabteilung K* on updates from various *Volkspolizei* posts around Berlin on 17 June 1953 (signature illegible). Manfred Hagen's account of the uprising in Berlin relies almost exclusively on eye witness reports or letters to the author in 1989. The police reports presented here as evidence are more reliable.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 105. These sources offer evidence that Diedrich and Baring are incorrect to point to an "escalation" in the uprising from demonstrations concerned solely with economic conditions in the morning to political issues in the afternoon; Baring, pp. 74-75.

reported on the slogans of the demonstrators, none mentioned economic slogans prior to the demonstrators' arrival at the House of Ministries.<sup>212</sup>

The issue of whether or not 17 June was a workers' uprising continues to be debated. It is unlikely that a definitive breakdown of the social backgrounds of the demonstrators can be compiled because of the lack of sources on this topic, but archival sources do reveal that the workers met with widespread moral and physical support in their demonstrations. Historians should therefore look beyond the fact that workers made up the largest societal group in the demonstrations to the deeper issue of why broad sections of society took part in the demonstrations. It is prudent, therefore, to revise the arguments of Baring, Fricke, and Diedrich to take into account the participation of a variety of social groups in the demonstrations. In Berlin, marching workers were constantly joined by other people in the streets. The police reported that one group of about 1,000 construction workers near Strausberger Platz was "joined by passers-by on the streets who marched along with them."<sup>213</sup> At 8:17 am, near the Café Warschau in Berlin, a group of between 300 and 400 women formed a column and joined the demonstrations shouting against the creation of a *Volksarmee*.<sup>214</sup> Eye witnesses also report the strong support

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<sup>212</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 262. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee." Italics added.

<sup>213</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 102. 17 June 1953 summary report of *Volkspolizei Hauptabteilung K* on updates from various *Volkspolizei* posts around Berlin on 17 June 1953 (signature illegible).

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

that demonstrators received from people along the streets.<sup>215</sup> In a recollection of the events on 17 June, *Volkspolizei* commander Koch stated: "More and more [...] people, who had nothing to do with the construction workers, appeared on the scene."<sup>216</sup>

Attacks against symbols of the regime and its representatives point to the political nature of the uprising in Berlin. Along the way to the House of Ministries, demonstrators attacked members of the FDJ and damaged *Volkspolizei* cars in the streets.<sup>217</sup> One group of demonstrators even tried to throw some FDJ members into the river, but were prevented from doing so by other demonstrators.<sup>218</sup> Other demonstrators were not as violent, but simply ripped the party symbol from those wearing it.<sup>219</sup> The police were constantly subject to verbal abuse, often being called "traitors of the working class."<sup>220</sup> By 10 am, there were thousands of demonstrators in the streets of East

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<sup>215</sup> Hagen, p. 48.

<sup>216</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 298. Undated personal report of Comrade Commander Koch, political department.

<sup>217</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 104. 17 June 1953 summary report of *Volkspolizei* Hauptabteilung K on updates from various *Volkspolizei* posts around Berlin on 17 June 1953 (signature illegible).

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. Baring describes 17 June as an orderly demonstration against economic conditions in the morning which escalated into riotous, revolutionary demonstrations in the afternoon. As evidence, he states that during the morning of the 17th, only SED members who had behaved badly in the past were beaten up, whereas in the afternoon, anyone wearing a party symbol fell victim to the mob; Baring, p. 75. Clearly, Baring has erred on this point.

Berlin either heading towards the House of Ministries, or already demonstrating in front of the building.<sup>221</sup> Political slogans adopted early that morning, such as "free elections," were visible on demonstrators' placards here as well.<sup>222</sup>

Upon arrival at the House of Ministries, a regiment of the MfS used water cannons to prevent demonstrators from entering the building.<sup>223</sup> Few of the members of the government dared to speak to the crowd, Walter Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl preferring to watch the unfolding of events from the comfort of the Soviet headquarters in Karlshorst.<sup>224</sup> Only Fritz Selbmann, the minister for iron and steel works and mining, Robert Havemann, a professor at the University of Berlin, and state secretary Heinz Brandt emerged from the House of Ministries to talk to the crowd, but they were quickly drowned out by the hostile audience.<sup>225</sup> The popular resistance to the regime would not be quelled by speeches. At roughly 11:00 am, the Volkspolizei, with the assistance of Soviet tanks which had been posted at the Brandenburg

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<sup>221</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR." SED estimates on the number of demonstrators in front of government buildings on 17 June in Berlin (25,000) correspond to Soviet estimates (30,000). See Christian Ostermann, "New Documents on the East German Uprising of 1953," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Spring 1995, p. 13.

<sup>222</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 letter from Albert Norden to Walter Ulbricht.

<sup>223</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>224</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 104.

<sup>225</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 104. Fricke, "Der Arbeiteraufstand," p. 12.

Gate early in the morning of the 17th, began dispersing the outer edges of the crowd.<sup>226</sup> At 1 pm, the Soviets declared a state of emergency and vigorously dispersed the crowd, although avoiding excessive force.<sup>227</sup>

Another target of the demonstrators in Berlin was the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* at Alexanderplatz. Here, an angry crowd of between 4,000 and 5,000 armed with rocks tried to storm the building. Police officers on Alexanderplatz tried unsuccessfully to disperse the crowd using billy clubs. During the scuffling, one police officer was stabbed. Throughout the skirmishing, workers at a finance office on Alexanderplatz cheered when the police were hit by stones thrown by the demonstrators, and called the police "dogs and ruffians" when they dispersed the crowd. The crowd on Alexanderplatz was finally dispersed after 1 pm with the announcement of a state of emergency and the arrival of the Soviets.<sup>228</sup>

The police had not been able to disperse the crowd on their own because they had received an order not to use

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<sup>226</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 264. 13 July 1953 report by the political department of the *Volkspolizei Präsidium* in Berlin entitled: "Der Beginn der Streikbewegung in der Stalinallee." ; Hagen, p. 110.

<sup>227</sup> Hagen, p. 110. According to Soviet sources, only 33 demonstrators were killed and 132 wounded throughout the GDR; 20 June 1953 report from Grechko, Tarasov, Operations Division, Main Operations Administration, General Staff of the Soviet Army to Bulganin, reproduced in Christian Ostermann (ed.), *The Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and the 17 June 1953: The Hidden History* (Washington: National Security Archive, 1996), Document #20.

<sup>228</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR"; BA-P, DA 1 11/304, pp. 301-307. Undated personal report of Comrade Commander Koch, political department.

their weapons against the demonstrators. A police report by General Koch after the uprising explained why no order to use firearms had been given: "A bullet can, and this has been demonstrated throughout history, lead a world into catastrophe." He stated that the goal of those operating "behind-the-scenes" was to provoke and demonstrate confrontation between state and people, thus use of weapons would have played into their hands. It seems that the training of the police was also an issue, for Koch commented: "The officers' level of training for active duty is insufficient."<sup>229</sup> Torsten Diedrich has further suggested that the SED's uncertainty about the reliability of its security apparatus caused the SED to be cautious in employing its own troops during the uprising.<sup>230</sup>

#### **4.4 - Targets and demands of demonstrators outside Berlin.**

An analysis of the targets and demands of demonstrators reveals that the uprising reached far beyond economic considerations. Legal insecurity, which was characteristic of life in eastern Germany from 1945 and which had been exacerbated in the months prior to the disturbances, was visible in the widespread attacks on the symbols of the repression apparatus in the GDR: the Volkspolizei buildings, prisons, MfS buildings, judicial buildings, and party buildings. Furthermore, the demonstrators' demands revealed

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<sup>229</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, pp. 301-7. Undated personal report of Comrade Commander Koch, political department.

<sup>230</sup> Diedrich, *Der 17. Juni 1953*, passim.

a desire for change in the political system. In the vast majority of disturbances, the demonstrators demanded free elections. The population hoped to affect political change and rid itself of the SED regime through free elections.

**Bezirk Magdeburg.**

At 9:30 am in Magdeburg, workers at the VEB Schwermaschinebau Ernst Thälmann, Karl-Liebknecht-Werk, and Dimitroff Werk went on strike. In the Karl-Liebknecht-Werk, where workers had gone on strike in December 1952 because of the Christmas bonuses, workers yelled at police officers of the small police station in the factory and attacked the head of the station.<sup>231</sup> Workers from the three sites gathered together to form a marching column, and began marching towards the city. The roughly 8,000 demonstrators shouted through megaphones: "Workers, lay down your work. Down with the government."<sup>232</sup> As was common during the uprising, they

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<sup>231</sup> Bessel, p. 243. It is important to correct Bessel's suggestion that the scorn of the population was directed primarily at Volkspolizei stations with prisoners. There were several instances like the above mentioned case where attacks on Volkspolizei officers occurred where the motive of releasing prisoners was absent. Attacks and insults against the police were evident during the Berlin demonstrations, noted above. Popular attacks on the police did not simply aim to release prisoners, but were an act of resistance against this instrument of the regime's apparatus.

<sup>232</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 1. Extracts from the Bezirk police situation reports for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff, Weidhase. Diedrich reports that only 5,000 demonstrators took part, but his citation cannot be verified for he does not provide a description of the document, only the archival record

were joined by supporters in town.<sup>233</sup> At approximately 10:15, demonstrators stormed the city council building and the FDGB building. During the storming of the FDGB building, the demonstrators beat up several FDGB functionaries. At 10:55, while some demonstrators stormed the FDJ building, others headed to the SED *Bezirk* headquarters and the building of the newspaper *Volksstimme*. The demonstrators then turned their attention to the *Volkspolizei* prison, first beating a *Volkspolizei* officer before storming the building.<sup>234</sup> The demonstrators set the front gate of the prison on fire, but were unable to free the prisoners due to the arrival of Soviet troops at 12:30 pm.<sup>235</sup> However, demonstrators freed prisoners awaiting transport in a train at the railway station.<sup>236</sup>

Other sites in the area around Magdeburg where prisoners were being held also drew the attention of the

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group number; Diedrich, p. 112.

<sup>233</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>234</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 1. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by the head of the operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>235</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR"; BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 1. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by the head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>236</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 1. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by the head of operations staff Weidhase.

demonstrators. Demonstrators stormed the police station and justice building in Magdeburg-Sudenburg, releasing a total of 20 prisoners. During the fighting, 2 police officers were killed.<sup>237</sup> According to one participant, most of the police officers fled to the roof of the police station, but, after hearing that the Soviets were making their way to the police station, began shooting into the crowd, killing 4 people and injuring 8. Soviet tanks then arrived at about 11:30 am and tried, with the help of a few warning shots, to disperse the demonstrators. As the crowd refused to disperse, the Soviets fired into the crowd.<sup>238</sup> The Soviets were able to disperse the crowd in this manner. Another centre of unrest was the prison on Moritzplatz in Magdeburg-Neustadt, where demonstrators released between 50 and 60 prisoners. It was necessary for the Soviets to use force here as well to disperse the demonstrators.<sup>239</sup> The fighting on the streets of Magdeburg led to the deaths of two police officers, 1 MfS Officer, 4 demonstrators, and the injuries of 42 others.<sup>240</sup>

Rural regions of *Bezirk* Magdeburg experienced limited unrest. The most significant demonstration occurred in Gommern. At 4pm, several hundred people stormed the prison and released some of the prisoners. These actions were likely popular with the population. In Salzelnen, several

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<sup>237</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 1. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase

<sup>238</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0436b #03347. Undated report by a worker of the Karl-Liebknecht Werk Magdeburg who took part in the uprising and later fled to the West.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

houses hung banners reading: "Germans awake! The hour has come."<sup>241</sup> In total, 32,000 people took part in demonstrations in *Bezirk* Magdeburg.<sup>242</sup>

### ***Bezirk* Dresden**

In *Bezirk* Dresden, the main plants to strike were LOWA Waggonwerk Görlitz, EKM Maschinenbau, and the Nagemawerk Sachsenwerk Niedersedlitz where 1,000 workers laid down their work. Sites targeted by workers in *Bezirk* Dresden were similar to those in Magdeburg. In Niesky, demonstrators stormed the local SED building and dragged out the first SED secretary for the region. He was beaten and had to be delivered to hospital. The MfS building was also attacked. The *Volkspolizei* attempted to clear the MfS building of demonstrators with threats to shoot. Demonstrators answered: "You pigs want to shoot at workers!" After the *Volkspolizei* fired warning shots, someone yelled: "They only have blanks!" The crowd then attacked the *Volkspolizei* with rocks and beer bottles. The *Volkspolizei* did not fire on the demonstrators, however, as their taskforce leader had instructed them not to.<sup>243</sup> The police retreated to the local police station. Fifteen border guards who had been sent from Bautzen assisted the police in preventing the crowd from

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<sup>241</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 2. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk* police for the period of 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>242</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 11. 18 June 1953 report #166 on the events of 17 June 1953 by Gönstein, deputy head of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>243</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 75. 29 June 1953 update report from *Bezirk* Dresden police.

storming the police station. After an hour and a half, the crowd retreated, and mounted a renewed attack on the MfS building. They stormed the MfS building, disarmed the few officers who remained in the building, and locked up four of the officers, including the leader of the branch, in dog cages located on site.<sup>244</sup>

Similarly, demonstrators in the nearby town of Görlitz focused their anger on the government's power apparatus. The demonstrators swelled in numbers as workers were joined by "thousands of people" from the town.<sup>245</sup> Demonstrators surrounded the detention centre for those awaiting trial and hurled rocks at the windows while chanting: "Free the political prisoners." The crowd then stormed the prison. After the crowd had broken through the first outer barriers, the leader of the prison tried to negotiate with the crowd. The discussions lasted for 20 minutes, after which time the crowd became more unruly and pushed into the building. Once inside, the demonstrators opened the cells on the lower levels of the complex and freed all prisoners in the installation.<sup>246</sup> The building of the Soviet commander and the MfS building in town were also stormed. During the storming

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<sup>244</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/305, pp. 245-247. 1 July 1953 report from the *Bezirk Halle Volkspolizei* on the 17 June 1953 demonstrations; ACDP, VII-013-1300. 22 June 1953 report from CDU *Kreis* association of Niesky to the CDU; ACDP, VII-011-1300. 17 June 1953 report from *Bezirk* association for Dresden to Götting. This detail is not available in the party sources in the central archive. See SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>245</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/305, p. 67. 29 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Dresden* police.

<sup>246</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 49-50. 29 June 1953 update report from *Bezirk Dresden* police.

of the MfS building, demonstrators attacked SED functionaries and ripped down posters and slogans.<sup>247</sup> After the storming of city hall and the local courthouse, demonstrators armed with axes removed the SED mayor from office. Before they deposed him, however, they forced him to sign a form ordering the release of all prisoners.<sup>248</sup>

In Dresden, the roughly 1,000 workers who went on strike at Sachsenwerk Niedersedlitz headed towards the Abus-Werk factory to garner support. En route, they were joined by workers from Hutfabrik Niedersedlitz, Gardinenfabrik Dobritz, Kamerawerke Zeiss-Ikon, and Berufsschule Mügeln Strasse. At approximately 4 pm, the Volkspolizei notified the Soviet officer for Dresden that the crowd was heading towards the theater square to hold a rally. Upon hearing the news, the Soviet officer announced a state of emergency. The Soviets and the Volkspolizei dispersed the crowd with the use of warning shots. No shots were fired on the demonstrators. By 9 pm, order had been restored in Dresden.<sup>249</sup>

Demonstrators' demands in *Bezirk Dresden* centred on political and economic issues. Workers at Sachsenwerk Niedersedlitz demanded the reduction of norms, the removal of the government, and the release of all political prisoners.<sup>250</sup> A delegation from Betrieb Koh-i-Noor demanded

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<sup>247</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 7. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>249</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/305, pp. 72-73. 29 June 1953 update report from *Bezirk Dresden* police.

<sup>250</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/305, p. 70. 29 June 1953 update report from *Bezirk Dresden* police.

German unity and free elections.<sup>251</sup> In Niesky, one of the slogans on the 17th was the demand for the dissolution of the *Volkspolizei* in Barracks and the *Staatspolizei*.<sup>252</sup> In Görlitz, striking workers of the LOWA Görlitz Werk demanded a reduction in store prices, higher wages and removal of the increased norms. One third of the plant left to take part in demonstrations. Of those who stayed behind, one worker who was acting as speaker for the group told the local party leader that the government should resign because it had lost the trust of the workers. He also recommended that new and secret elections be held, and that the union and party representatives in the factory should resign. All workers eventually left the plant.<sup>253</sup>

Political resistance was made evident in *Bezirk* Dresden on 17 June by demands for the permitting of the SPD. The main centre of SPD activity on 17 June was the town of Görlitz, where the SPD was publicly refounded on Lenin square in the centre of town.<sup>254</sup> The people that undertook this action quickly disappeared for fear of arrest. At other sites in Görlitz, such as the fine optics plant and the hospital, "initiative committees" of the SPD were formed.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. Report on the situation in *Bezirk* Dresden for 17 and 18 June 1953.

<sup>252</sup> ACDP VII-013-1300. Report of 22.6.53 from CDU *Kreisverband* Niesky to the CDU leadership; ACDP VII-011-1300 Report of 17.6.53 from *Bezirksverband* Dresden to Götting.

<sup>253</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/305, p. 70. 29 June 1953 update report from *Bezirk* Dresden police.

<sup>254</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/546, p. 239 Report on 17 June 1953 based on reports from the *Bezirke*.

<sup>255</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/535, p. 7. 17 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk* leadership in Dresden.

In VEB Lwa, speakers at a rally demanded the unity of Germany, free elections, and the revival of the SPD.<sup>256</sup> The countryside surrounding Görlitz also experienced SPD activity. At least one SPD group was formed, and several SED members demanded to have their SPD membership books back.<sup>257</sup> SPD influence overall in the uprising was of considerable concern to the SED. Horst Sindermann, leader of the Central Committee Agitation and Propaganda department said in October 1953: "We should examine how it is that agents of the SPD *Ostbüro* have a relatively large influence with the working masses compared to other agents."<sup>258</sup>

### **Bezirk Leipzig**

In Leipzig, demonstrators attacked the police station and the prison, but the police were able to defend the buildings against the crowd.<sup>259</sup> Demonstrators in the streets of Leipzig attacked the FDGB building, the FDJ building, the

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<sup>256</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0434b. 22 June 1953 report on Görlitz strikers, reconfirmed in reports by sources 20984, and 20924.

<sup>257</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/596, p. 42. 20 July 1953 report on the events of 17 June 1953.

<sup>258</sup> Bärwald, p. 78.

<sup>259</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 10. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk* police for the period 17:00-24:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by the head of the operations staff Weidhase. This report provides an example of the discrepancy between the police reports and the SED reports. The central SED analysis of the situation in Leipzig stated that the demonstrators had occupied the police station; SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

radio building, and the *Volksstimme* building.<sup>260</sup> In Delitzsch near Leipzig, approximately 300 people stormed the local police station. In Düben, 300 people failed in their attempt to storm the city hall.<sup>261</sup> Demonstrating Leipzigers demanded the abolition of the government, the introduction of democratic rights and freedoms, and free and democratic elections.<sup>262</sup>

Bezirk Leipzig also experienced SPD activity. The strike in the precision tool factory in Schmölln was led by Heinz Neumann, an SPD member who had been expelled from the SED in 1951. He led the crowd in singing the SPD song: "Brüder, zur Sonne, zur Freiheit."<sup>263</sup>

Heidi Roth's local history of the uprising in Bezirk Leipzig emphasizes that although workers comprised the main social group during the uprising, other social groups participated. Roth therefore concludes that 17 June in Bezirk Leipzig was a popular uprising.<sup>264</sup> Roth concluded that the increasing legal insecurity and forced implementation of the socialist programme caused both affected and unaffected to oppose the regime.<sup>265</sup> Roth's conclusions support the

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<sup>260</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 10. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 17:00-24:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by the head of the operation staff Weidhase.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Heidi Roth, "Der 17. Juni im damaligen Bezirk Leipzig," *DA* 24 (1991), p. 583.

<sup>263</sup> Walter, p. 455.

<sup>264</sup> Heidi Roth, "Der 17. Juni im damaligen Bezirk Leipzig," *DA* 24 (1991), p. 583.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 576. Roth does not address the period prior to the "building of socialism," and therefore does not

evidence presented in this study.

### **Bezirk Potsdam**

The most dramatic disturbances in *Bezirk Potsdam* occurred in Brandenburg. The starting point for the demonstrations here was the Bau Union in the Stahl-und Walzwerk Brandenburg, where between 500 and 700 people left their work at about 7:30 am on 17 June. It is worth remembering that by this time, demonstrators in Berlin had only started to gather at Strausberger Platz, but had not yet begun marching towards the House of Ministries. The outbreak of disturbances occurred, therefore, virtually simultaneously in Berlin and Brandenburg. The Stahl-und Walzwerk workers went to other nearby factories to enlist support for their demonstration. By 9:30 am, the number of demonstrators had risen to between 12,000 and 15,000.<sup>266</sup> The first target of the demonstrators was the *Kreis SED* building, where demonstrators threw propaganda material and telephones out of the windows. The SED members in the building were also physically attacked. The second party secretary for the district narrowly avoided being thrown out of a third story window.<sup>267</sup> The demonstrators then proceeded to the prison on Steinstrasse, storming the prison and the

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sufficiently take into account the loss of trust in the government prior to 1952.

<sup>266</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p.281. 23 June 1953 *Instrukteur* report. Diedrich reports that 5,000 people took part in the demonstrations, but because Diedrich does not provide a description of the document which provided him with this number, it is not possible to compare his source to the one presented here; Diedrich, p. 105.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

local court house located in front of the prison, and freeing roughly 40 prisoners. During this attack, demonstrators brutally beat several Volkspolizei officers. One police officer was stripped before being beaten.<sup>268</sup> The uprising in Brandenburg was so extensive that both demonstrators and police believed that the government had fallen.<sup>269</sup>

After releasing the prisoners, the demonstrators stormed the FDGB building and threw documents out of the windows. The crowd then demonstrated in front of the House of German-Soviet Friendship before reaching the police station, where the crowd was met with warning shots by the police. The shots provoked the crowd into a frenzy, resulting in between 50 and 80 demonstrators successfully breaking into the station. The demonstrators were likely spurred on by overhearing one police officer shout to his subordinates who were protecting the building: "Don't shoot. Don't shoot. The Kreis office said not to." Once inside, demonstrators beat up several police officers and SED functionaries. One demonstrator smashed open the head of a member of the SED with a wooden stick. Soviet troops, which appeared at roughly 12:30, were needed to free the police station of demonstrators.<sup>270</sup> Afterwards, the police

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 282. Diedrich reports that only "some" demonstrators penetrated the police station. His incomplete citations, again, do not allow for an evaluation of his source, but it is extremely unlikely that it is more reliable than the one presented here; Diedrich, p. 106.

complained about these orders not to use their weapons.<sup>271</sup>

Hostility towards the judicial system was evident during the demonstrations in Brandenburg. After demonstrators had freed all prisoners in the prison on Steinstrasse, the crowd began chanting for Judge Benkendorf to be handed over to them. One member of the crowd felt that it was unnecessary for Benkendorf to be handed to the crowd, but rather that he should be locked up because he would "be hanged tomorrow in any case." The demonstrators did, in fact, catch Benkendorf, and beat him up. They then dragged him along with them. Benkendorf narrowly escaped death due to the presence of a doctor nearby who treated him for his injuries. During the demonstrations, the public prosecutor was also jailed by the demonstrators.<sup>272</sup>

A large demonstration also took place in Hennigsdorf, near Berlin. Many of the nearly 4,000 demonstrators from LEW Hennigsdorf attacked FDGB buildings and the local courthouse. They freed the prisoners held in the court prison before continuing their journey to Berlin.<sup>273</sup> In Potsdam, workers at the Karl-Marx-Werk first went on strike at 2:30 pm. Local SED functionaries speculated that the sight of Soviet tanks heading towards Berlin provoked the strike. The striking workers demanded the resignation of the government, the removal of the newly introduced work norms,

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<sup>271</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, pp. 281-282. 23 June 1953 *Instrukteurbericht*.

<sup>272</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, pp. 281-282. 23 June 1953 *Instrukteur report*.

<sup>273</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled "Über die Lage am 17.6 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

lower store prices, and free elections.<sup>274</sup>

Political demands accompanied economic ones in demonstrations in *Bezirk Potsdam*. The police reported that the most common slogans were: "Free elections, removal of norms, HO reduction in prices, removal of the zonal boundaries, fall of the government, and tanks out of Berlin."<sup>275</sup> The call for free elections, the fall of the government, and the removal of zonal boundaries reflected popular desire to be rid of the Communist system in East Germany.

### ***Bezirk Halle***

Buildings and personnel associated with SED repression were attacked throughout *Bezirk Halle*. In both Rosslau and Quedlinburg, the police office and the prison were stormed.<sup>276</sup> In Rosslau, the popular nature of the uprising was evident. Striking workers at the Rosslauer Schiffswerft demanded the resignation of the government and the freeing of political prisoners. At 9:30 am, 3/4 of the employees (about 1,600) left the plant heading towards the town centre. According to the police, the crowd "grew quickly" to number between 3,000 and 4,000 people, as "many petit bourgeois" elements joined the workers.<sup>277</sup> In Eisleben, the

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<sup>274</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 29 June 1953 report from the SED *Bezirksleitung* for Potsdam entitled: "Bericht über die Vorgänge in der Stadt Potsdam ab 17.6.1953."

<sup>275</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 397. 28 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Potsdam* police on the uprising.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>277</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 240. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk Halle* police on the course of the fascist provocation

police station and detention centre for those awaiting trial were stormed and the prisoners released, following which the demonstrators proceeded towards a prison camp in Volksstaedt. They did not reach their destination because Soviet soldiers dispersed the approximately 1,000 strong crowd.<sup>278</sup> In Merseburg, the police station, prison, and MfS buildings were stormed, their interiors destroyed, and prisoners in all sites released.<sup>279</sup> Police officers on the streets were attacked in Weissenfels.<sup>280</sup>

In Kreis Bitterfeld, the entire complement of the VEB Farbenfabrik in Wolfen- between 5,000 and 6,000 workers - laid down their work on the morning of 17 June. At 8 am, the workers marched to the nearby Filmfabrik. En route, a "large number of inhabitants from Wolfen" joined the workers. The workers forcefully entered the Filmfabrik. The demonstration then swelled to nearly 10,000 people. The crowd proceeded to the Elektrochemischen Kombinat to join with workers there. At 10:30 am, this group marched towards the police station in Bitterfeld. Along the way, various SED functionaries were attacked, including the local SED secretary for propaganda, who was knocked down and dragged along with the

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in *Bezirk Halle* on 17.6.53.

<sup>278</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 244. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk Halle* police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk Halle* on 17.6.53.

<sup>279</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 245-246. 1 July 1953 report from *Halle Bezirk* police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk Halle* on 17 June 1953.

<sup>280</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 3. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

demonstration.<sup>281</sup> Upon arrival at the police station, a delegation, identifying itself as an "SPD delegation," demanded to see the books of the prison to determine if there were any political prisoners there. The demonstrators then freed an undetermined number of prisoners. A number of demonstrators then proceeded to attack the MfS *Kreis* building and the FDJ *Kreis* building.<sup>282</sup>

In Halle itself, workers at the Waggonfabrik gathered to discuss a strike at 6 am. This, it should be emphasized, was before any action had been undertaken in Berlin. At 6:30 am, about 2,000 workers gathered in front of the factory's administration building. Speakers from the crowd demanded removal of the increased work norms, reduction of store prices, and the resignation of the government. At 10:20 am, the crowd began heading towards the centre of town. During their march, the demonstrators were joined by workers from Ifa-Karosserieweri, Maschinenfabrik Halle, and MTS-Reparaturenwerkstatt. The crowd grew from 2,000 to 6,000 due to the additional workers and, according to the police, "many members of the petit bourgeoisie."<sup>283</sup>

In Halle, protests took place in front of three symbols of SED repression, Halle prison I, Halle prison II, and the

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<sup>281</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15, p. 6. 20 July 1953 report "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.1953."

<sup>282</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 3. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk* police for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by the head of the operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>283</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 239. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk* Halle police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk* Halle on 17 June 1953

building of the justice administration. Other SED buildings were attacked, however, including the MfS building, the FDJ building, the police office and the SED building.<sup>284</sup> During these protests, several police officers and a judge were beaten up. Halle is one of the few instances where there is clear evidence of the use of weapons to quell unrest, as demonstrators attempting to enter Halle prison I and the police station were kept out through the use of weapons.<sup>285</sup> In the words of one SED report: "In Halle, calm and order were first reestablished after armed units from the Soviet army and the Volkspolizei were employed and shots fired."<sup>286</sup> During the fighting in Halle, Erna Dorn, a former concentration camp commander, was freed from one of the prisons and took an active part in the demonstrations.<sup>287</sup> She was captured afterwards, and sentenced to death.<sup>288</sup> The SED

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<sup>284</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 3. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase; SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6. in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>285</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p.4. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk Volkspolizei* from 17 June 1953, for the period 0:00-17:00; BA-P, DO 111/305, p. 242 1 July 1953 report of Halle *Bezirk* police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk* Halle on 17 June 1953. This detail is not available in SED reports in the central archive, which state simply that prisoners were freed from the police station; SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>286</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15, p. 6. 20 July 1953 report "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.1953."

<sup>287</sup> Diedrich, p. 123.

<sup>288</sup> Hagen, p. 170.

made great use of the propaganda value of this incident, holding up Dorn's release and participation in the demonstrations as evidence that the uprising had been a cloaked "fascist putsch." Following a trial, Dorn was beheaded on 1 October 1953 in Dresden.<sup>289</sup>

Attacks on jurists, as had occurred in Halle and Brandenburg, are perhaps the best evidence that repression was a leading cause behind resistance. In Rosslau, a similar occurrence took place to the one in Halle. Demonstrators successfully penetrated the police station and the prison and freed all prisoners. In the process, the *Kreis* district attorney was badly beaten.<sup>290</sup>

Demands of demonstrators were fairly uniform throughout *Bezirk* Halle. Workers at the Otto-Brosowski-Schacht in *Kreis* Eisleben did not demonstrate in the streets, but elected a strike leadership who demanded the removal of the government, lowering of prices, and the release of prisoners. The Volkspolizei acknowledged the importance of political demands for these demonstrators stating that the "fascist leadership" issued "extreme demands, including the resignation of the government."<sup>291</sup> In *Kreis* Rosslau, workers at the Rosslauer Schiffswerft went on strike demanding the removal of the government and the freeing of political

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<sup>289</sup> Karl Wilhelm Fricke, "Todesstrafe für Magdeburger 'Provokatuer.'" SED Rachejustiz nach dem Aufstand vom 17. Juni 1953", DA 26 (1993), p. 527.

<sup>290</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 245-246. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk* Halle police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk* Halle on 17 June 1953.

<sup>291</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 238. 1 July 1953 report from the Halle *Bezirk* police on the course of the fascist provocation on 17 June 1953 in *Bezirk* Halle.

prisoners.<sup>292</sup> At the RAW in Halle, workers went on strike demanding that the government resign because it no longer held the trust of the population, and that food prices be lowered.<sup>293</sup> After witnessing the extent of the uprising, the police in Merseburg indicated a fundamental hostility to the regime by stating that they were unaware of "the true attitude of a large part of the workers."<sup>294</sup>

Bezirk Halle also experienced SPD activity on 17 June. At the sprawling Leuna works "Walter Ulbricht," demonstrators called for the reestablishment of the SPD.<sup>295</sup> At the Soda factory in Bernburg, signs bearing the slogan: "We demand the permitting of the SPD in the eastern zone" were hung up.<sup>296</sup>

### **Bezirk Gera**

In the town of Gera, about 200 workers of the VEB Roto-Record held a meeting at 8 am on 17 June, at which a resolution was issued. The resolution demanded reduction of prices in stores, reduction of norms, dissolution of the MfS, release of political prisoners, and the end of the

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1435, p. 12. Report on overview of the situation with railway installations on 17 June 1953.

<sup>294</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 245-246. 1 July 1953 report from Halle Bezirk police on the course of the fascist provocation in Bezirk Halle on 17 June 1953.

<sup>295</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0434b One report from Quelle 20718, the other an unsigned report II on 17 June 1953.

<sup>296</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0434b, (#03347). Report from Quelle 3-622/1

government. The workers then left the factory to gather support from workers at other factories such as the compress works, Firma weber, EKM boiler construction, Thuringian carpet works, WMW Union Gera, TEWA and RFT. The demonstrators then headed to various SED sites. By 1 pm, with the addition of workers from other factories, the number of demonstrators had grown to about 6,000.<sup>297</sup> In Greiz, one car drove through town with the banner "Freedom-down with the government." In nearby Weida, approximately 1,500 people took part in demonstrations, shouting: "This is not the will of the people. The *Spitzbart* must go." *Spitzbart* was the common derogatory name for Ulbricht. Demonstrators also attacked the police station here yelling: "Count your days."<sup>298</sup> The police report on the occurrences in Weida is notable for the manner in which it formulated the development of events. The police reported that one protestor went from factory to factory "and took advantage of the mood of the population" to get others to join the strike.<sup>299</sup> The phrasing suggests that there was an underlying hostility to the government which could be taken advantage of.

An episode in Jena reveals the extent to which the population had come to despise the SED and its instruments of control. In Jena, buildings of the National Front, the local branch of the German Soviet Friendship Society, the

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<sup>297</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 8. Extract from the *Bezirk* situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by Weidhase, head of operations staff. The documents do not provide information on how the uprising was brought to an end.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

MfS, and the SED were stormed by over 20,000 agitated demonstrators.<sup>300</sup> Once in the buildings, demonstrators threw files onto the streets.<sup>301</sup> Demonstrators also attacked the prison and released between 50 and 60 prisoners there. During the storming of the prison, 4 police officers were injured and taken to hospital. Doctors at the local hospital refused to treat the police officers, however. When one police officer was brought in, the doctor yelled "another one of those criminals," and slammed the door of the examining room on his way out. The police officers had to be transported to a nearby Soviet military hospital.<sup>302</sup>

### **Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder**

Attacks on the symbols of the SED repression apparatus were also prevalent in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder*. In *Fürstenwalde*, about 100 people tried to enter the police station, causing the police to call for reinforcements from *Seelow*.<sup>303</sup> Demonstrators also toppled the Karl Marx monument

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<sup>300</sup> BA-P, DO 1/11/306, p. 243. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk Halle* police on the course of the fascist provocation in *Bezirk Halle* on 17 June 1953.

<sup>301</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 159. 22 June 1953 report of HVDV Hauptabteilung K signed by Werthmann and Rodis.

<sup>302</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 159. 22 June 1953 report of HVDV Hauptabteilung K signed by Werthmann and Rodis; BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 10. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk* police for the period from 17:00 to 24:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase; BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 37. 20 July 1953 Hauptabteilung K report on poor examples of party work in and around 17 June.

<sup>303</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 4. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 17:00 to 24:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

in town and laid it across a main street to block traffic.<sup>304</sup> In Angermünde, a group of between 80 and 100 youths demonstrated in front of the SED Kreis building.<sup>305</sup>

Demonstrators from Strausberg near Berlin also focused their anger on a symbol of state repression by marching towards the prison camp in Rüdersdorf. The demonstrators were joined by cement and phosphate workers along the way. The commander of the camp was determined that the demonstrators would not succeed in freeing the prisoners there, however. The police report on the occurrence does not clearly state the result of the encounter, but the innuendos suggest that the camp was defended with the use of force: "When the provocateurs showed up in front of the installation and demanded the release of prisoners, [the person in charge] prepared for the rigorous defence of the installation. The security of the installation was guaranteed by clear orders, including the order to shoot."<sup>306</sup>

Demonstrators' demands in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* revolved around political and economic issues. In a tire factory in Fürstenwalde, banners were put up with the slogans: "We demand free and secret elections," "Remove the government," "Abolish the KVP," and "Reduce the prices in the HO stores by 40%." Apart from these general demands, the

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<sup>304</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 9. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 17:00 to 24:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>305</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 17a. 29 June 1953 report: "Analysis of the events since 16 June 1953" from Kotulan, head of the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the head of the *Volkspolizei in Berlin*.

<sup>306</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 23. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei*.

demonstrators specifically called for revision of the verdicts against two workers.<sup>307</sup> On the night of 16 June 1953, three different sites in Herzfelde, Kreis Strausberg, were painted with graffiti reading: "SED must go," "Volksarmee must go," and "HO must go."<sup>308</sup> On the following day, these slogans were physically put into practice. In Strausberg, one SED member was attacked by demonstrators and beaten. In the nearby train station at Herzfelde, another SED member was shot at.<sup>309</sup> Railway installations were also centres of unrest. In RAW Basdorf, workers went on strike demanding 40% lower prices in the state-run stores and free elections.<sup>310</sup> In Eberswalde, demonstrators spread hand made pieces of paper through the Abus-Kranbau demanding free elections and the fall of the government.<sup>311</sup> The police in Kreis Bernau reported that the "free elections" demanded by the demonstrators corresponded to the West German elections.<sup>312</sup> In Bogensee, construction workers of the "FDJ-

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<sup>307</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 22. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>309</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 4. Extracts from the *Bezirk* situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>310</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p 19. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>311</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, p. 18. 29 June 1953 report by *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police chief Kotulan entitled: "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 16.6.1953."

<sup>312</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 19. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei*.

Hochschule Wilhelm Pieck" revealed that they wanted elections to be held like those in West Germany, stating: "We would then see how popular they are. (They are referring to the government of the GDR)." <sup>313</sup> There can be little doubt that the widespread call for free elections was due to the popular desire to be rid of the Communist system in the GDR.

### **Bezirk Erfurt**

Demonstrations for the release of prisoners occurred in various cities of *Bezirk Erfurt*. In Worbis, demonstrators in front of the *Kreis* court demanded that prisoners be freed. <sup>314</sup> In Apolda, between 500 and 600 people protested on the market square in front of the *Kreis* court demanding the release of prisoners. <sup>315</sup> The judicial system also came under attack in Apolda. On 17 June, a government lawyer, Vogel, drove to Jena on a motorcycle, and seeing the unrest there, returned to Apolda and contacted the local court judge. Vogel proposed a meeting to remove all SED members from the *Kreis* court. <sup>316</sup> The MfS arrested both Vogel and the court judge.

In the countryside, demonstrators demanded the release

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<sup>313</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p 19. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk* Frankfurt/Oder police to the operations staff of the Volkspolizei.

<sup>314</sup> THSA, IV 4.01/124. 24 June 1953 report from SED Apolda *Kreis* leadership to BPKK Erfurt.

<sup>315</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, pp. 280-282. 29 June 1953 report of the *Bezirk* Erfurt police on the events since 17 June 1953.

<sup>316</sup> THSA, IV 4.02/124, KPKK. 24 June 1953 letter from Rotter to BPKK Erfurt.

of prisoners and the end of the government. In Mühlhausen, a farmers' assembly took place which attracted 2,500 people to the market square. One of the primary demands of the demonstrators was the release of imprisoned farmers.<sup>317</sup> In the towns of Oberdorla and Altengottern, farmers also demonstrated for the release of prisoners.<sup>318</sup> Demonstrations in the countryside were likely more widespread than reported. One police report stated that: "Even in small localities of the *Bezirk*, agents and provocateurs were active. In Tunzenhausen, for example, a gathering took place at which 100 people took part." At this demonstration, protestors called for the release of all economic criminals and the peaceful unification of Germany.<sup>319</sup> At a farmers' demonstration in Sömmerda, demonstrators demanded free all-German elections and economic changes.<sup>320</sup>

Striking workers also demanded the release of prisoners and the end of the Communist system in the GDR. Workers from the VEB Rheinmetall Sömmerda demonstrated on the Marktplatz demanding a reduction in norms, and release of political prisoners. In RFT Funkwerk, Erfurt, the tool construction section of the plant went on strike demanding the release of one of their members who had been arrested.<sup>321</sup> In Heiligenstadt, the leader of the VEB Mewa, gave a speech in which he strongly condemned the conduct of the government,

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<sup>317</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, p. 281. 29 June 1953 report from *Bezirk* Erfurt police on events since 17 June.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>321</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, pp. 280-282. 29 June 1953 report of *Bezirk* Erfurt police on the events since 17 June 1953.

and demanded its removal.<sup>322</sup>

Bezirk Erfurt also witnessed SPD activity on 17 June. In Niedersiedlitz people wrote slogans on the side of a school in support of the demonstrators. The slogans read: "Long live the SPD." And: "The SPD still lives."<sup>323</sup> In Kreis Arnstadt, the SED party secretary in Behringen stated that several comrades suggested to him that it might be better to form an SPD group because the SED had made mistakes. He added that he felt "isolated" by those members who wanted to establish an SPD group.<sup>324</sup>

### **Bezirk Cottbus**

Release of prisoners was at the centre of demonstrations in the city of Cottbus. Early in the morning of 17 June, workers from RAW Cottbus laid down their work and began marching through town,<sup>325</sup> shouting: "Down with the government," "Freedom for all prisoners," "Reduction of the

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<sup>322</sup> THSA, B IV 2/4-49, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt. 16 June 1953 report entitled: "Bericht über das Verhalten von Parteiorganisationen, leitende Functionäre, und Mitglieder unserer Partei während des faschistischen Putschversuches in der Zeit des 17.6.53."

<sup>323</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0434b (#03350) from Quelle 13.7.53. Buschfort argues that *Ostbüro* was surprised by the uprising and therefore did not play a role during it. See Buschfort, *Das Ostbüro der SPD*, passim.

<sup>324</sup> THSA, B IV 2/4-49, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt. 3 September 1953 report entitled: "Analyse über die Ereignisse während des und nach dem 17.6.53 in Bezirk Erfurt."

<sup>325</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 102. 27 June 1953 report from the Cottbus *Bezirk* police to the head of the Volkspolizei.

norms and HO-prices." The crowd moved towards the detention centre for those awaiting trial but security forces prevented them from entering the building.<sup>326</sup> In nearby Lübben, demonstrators attacked the local police station.<sup>327</sup> There is also evidence that prisoners themselves were restless. In *Bezirk Cottbus*, the police were nervous because prisoners in the prison work camps were becoming unruly. The guards called for additional reinforcements.<sup>328</sup>

In the countryside, demonstrators also targeted buildings associated with SED repression. A group of about 250 *Grossbauern* from Jessen demonstrated in front of the *Kreis* administration building and demanded the release of all imprisoned *Grossbauern*. They also planned to go to the prisons in Herzberg and Liebenwerda to free farmers there, but, for reasons not mentioned in police reports, did not carry out this plan.<sup>329</sup> In Lübbenau, demonstrators demanded freedom of press and speech.<sup>330</sup>

Late in the evening of 17 June in the agricultural region of *Gemeinde Sielow* in *Kreis Cottbus*, a column of demonstrators was formed. The police report on the activities of this column reveals the underlying widespread resistance to the SED regime in the countryside: "In the late evening hours of 17 June, a demonstration column was

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 102. 27 June 1953 report from Cottbus *Bezirk* police to the head of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305. 27 June 1953 report from the Cottbus *Bezirk* police to the head of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>330</sup> ACDP VII-011-1268. Situation report of 18 June 1953 from CDU *Kreisverband* Calau to the CDU leadership.

formed in *Gemeinde Sielow, Kreis Cottbus*. SED members were attacked and struck down. The ring leaders opened the doors of the volunteer fire department and began ringing the fire siren. Due to this, the larger part of the village population gathered on the village square. The ring leaders called for the murder of active comrades of the SED and also tried to organize the plundering of certain police officers' homes. We only became aware of these occurrences the following day, and therefore conducted a planned operation against the ring leaders on the evening of 18 June."<sup>331</sup>

### **Bezirk Rostock**

There were only limited disturbances in *Bezirk Rostock* on 17 June, but even these revealed political resistance and issues related to repression. In Rostock itself, there was an attempt at an easier method of releasing prisoners. One person phoned the prison and, posing as a local authority, ordered the release of all economic criminals.<sup>332</sup> During a demonstration in Sievershagen, one farmer yelled: "Up to now, we have been muzzled, now we can breathe freely."<sup>333</sup> In *Volkswerft Stralsund*, there were also political slogans, where workers on 17 June demanded: "We need parties, and not just an SED".<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 102. 27 June 1953 report by the *Bezirk Cottbus* police entitled: "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 16. Juni 1953."

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>333</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," p. 111.

<sup>334</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 337. 26 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

### **Bezirk Schwerin**

In Güstrow, *Kreis Schwerin*, approximately 50 workers gathered in front of the *Kreis* court and demanded the release of the former owner of a chair factory in town.<sup>335</sup> Otherwise, there were no major disturbances. Although there were fewer disturbances here, the SED recognized that there was anger similar to that expressed in other regions of the GDR. The SED in *Bezirk Schwerin* reported that the LPGs were unreliable during the revolt, and that many of those who worked on the agricultural collectives sympathized with the striking workers.<sup>336</sup>

### **Bezirk Neubrandenburg**

The only site of significant unrest in *Bezirk Neubrandenburg* was Teterow, where about 400 people demonstrated in front of the prison demanding the release of prisoners. The police also stated that many pamphlets showed up on the streets of the *Bezirk* with slogans like: "Down with Ulbricht," "We demand free elections," and "Russians

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<sup>335</sup> MLHA, IV L/2/4/587, p. 40. 20 June 1953 analysis of the situation in *Bezirk Schwerin* due to the "fascist adventure," signed by the SED *Bezirk* leadership; MLHA, IV 2/4/587, *Bezirksleitung der SED*, p. 41. "Analyse über die Lage im *Bezirk Schwerin* am 17.6.1953" by *Bezirk* leadership of SED.

<sup>336</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/587, p. 44. 20 June 1953 analysis of the situation in *Bezirk Schwerin* due to the "fascist adventure," signed by the *Bezirk* SED leadership.

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### **Bezirke Karl-Marx-Stadt and Suhl**

Although there was unrest in these *Bezirke*,<sup>338</sup> there were no serious disturbances.<sup>339</sup>

### **4.5 - The CDU and LDPD during the uprising**

A telegram from the leadership of the CDU to the SED Central Committee claiming its support of the government on 17 June reflected the views of a majority of its membership.<sup>340</sup> There were, however, isolated incidents of CDU participation in the uprising. In *Bezirk* Erfurt, *Kreis* Heiligenstadt, the CDU deputy chair of the *Kreis* council, stated that the SED should resign and that the CDU should take over the leading role.<sup>341</sup> A CDU factory chair in Heiligenstadt agreed, saying: "If the government makes

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<sup>337</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 361. 27 June 1953 report from Neubrandenburg *Bezirk* police, signed by inspector Münchow.

<sup>338</sup> See the locations listed in Kowlaczuk/Mitter/Wolle, pp. 338-340.

<sup>339</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.1953 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>340</sup> This telegram is in SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/545. The telegram was signed by August Bach, Hans-Paul Garter-Gilmans, Charlotte Hallscheidt, Max Reutter, Dr. Heinrich Toeplitz, Dr. Gerhard Descyk, Gerald Götting, Dr. Reinhold Lobedanz, Luitpold Steidle, Erich Wächter, and Josef Wujciak.

<sup>341</sup> THSA, B IV 2/4-49, p. 9. 3 September 1953 report on the events during and after 17 June 1953 in *Bezirk* Erfurt.

mistakes, then it must be dissolved."<sup>342</sup> In Ershausen, Steinbach, and Arenshausen, the CDU had already prepared a list for new elections to the *Gemeinde* assemblies.<sup>343</sup> The SED also pointed to the CDU *Kreis* secretary of Sternberg and the local CDU chair in Karow, *Kreis* Gadebusch, for their "provocative" positions.<sup>344</sup> In a sugar factory in Wismar, *Bezirk* Rostock, CDU members were aggressive toward SED members and supported the strike. In *Gemeinde* Meschwitz, *Kreis* Bautzen, *Bezirk* Dresden, the CDU local chairman removed all slogans and posters in the *Gemeinde* council building.<sup>345</sup> In Strassfurt, *Bezirk* Magdeburg, the VEB *Werkmaschinen* and *Apparatebau* elected a four person delegation, 3 of which were CDU members, to negotiate with the chair of the VEB council. The delegation was arrested before talks took place, however.<sup>346</sup> In Fürstenwalde, *Bezirk* Frankfurt/Oder, the CDU member Heinze was branded as a ring leader.<sup>347</sup> In *Kreis* Eisleben, *Bezirk* Halle, the SED pointed

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<sup>342</sup> THSA, B IB 2/4-48. July 1953 letter from KPKK Heiligenstadt to BPKK Erfurt.

<sup>343</sup> THSA, B IV 2/4-48, *Bezirksparteiarchiv* der SED Erfurt.

<sup>344</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/587, p. 17. BPKK analysis on the situation in *Bezirk* Schwerin on 17 June 1953.

<sup>345</sup> Leo Haupts, "Die Blockparteien in der DDR und der 17. Juni 1953," *VfZ* 40 (1992), pp. 396-397. Udo Wengst, "Der Aufstand am 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR," 41 (1993), p. 300.

<sup>346</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1268. 23 June 1953 report of CDU *Bezirk* association for Magdeburg to the CDU leadership.

<sup>347</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/5/532, p. 90. 17 June 1953 report from *Bezirk* leadership Frankfurt/Oder.

to CDU members as the instigators of the unrest.<sup>348</sup> In *Bezirk Gera*, a CDU member stated: "Now our time has come. After the fall of the government, we will bring our people into the government."<sup>349</sup> Soviet sources also reveal that there were elements in the CDU that felt the CDU should form the government in light of the failures of the SED.<sup>350</sup>

There were, on the other hand, CDU members who supported the SED and attempted to disperse crowds and bring the demonstrations to an end.<sup>351</sup> These members certainly chose the safer option. The former chair of a CDU group in *Kreis Rudolstadt* was executed out-of-hand for his participation in the uprising.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/533, p. 164. 20 June 1953 report on *Bezirk Halle*.

<sup>349</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/5/534, p. 185. 20 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Entwicklung des faschistischen Abenteuers im *Bezirk Gera*."

<sup>350</sup> 27 June 1953 report from Lieutenant General Fedenko, Operations Division, Main Operations Division, General Staff of the Soviet Army, to Lieutenant General Pavlovsky, reproduced in Ostermann, *The Post-Stalin*, Document #25.

<sup>351</sup> Haupts, p. 398; Wengst, p. 289. *Kreis Saalkreis* CDU supported the suppression of the uprising; *ibid.*, p. 294. The CDU *Kreis* chair for *Gera* helped disperse crowd; *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>352</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY 30 IV 2/5/560, p. 6. 1 July 1953 summary of the important events from the *Bezirk* reports of 30 June 1953. Of approximately 1,600 individuals tried for their participation in the uprising, two were executed. One of those executed was the former National Socialist concentration camp commander Erna Dorn, the other a worker from Magdeburg, Ernst Jennrich. The GDR's supreme court sentenced Jennrich to death on 6 October 1953. He was beheaded on 20 March 1954. For details on his case, see Fricke, "Todesstrafe für Magdeburger 'Provokateur,'" pp. 527-531.

There was also a certain amount of LDPD activity during the uprising. Dr. Hans Loch, chair of the LDPD in the GDR, acknowledged LDPD involvement in the uprising: "There were also certain members of our party [the LDPD] who had an idea of taking over leadership on [17 June]." <sup>353</sup> In Magdeburg, one of the leaders of the uprising was an LDPD member. In *Bezirk* Dresden, Ebersbach, *Kreis* Görlitz, the CDU and LDP replaced the SED mayor. In Halle, 22 LDPD *Kreis* secretaries voted to hold open, free, and secret elections. In many cases, LDPD members demanded the resignation of the party leadership at the same time. <sup>354</sup> In Schwerin, the main demands of the LDPD during the uprising centred around economic issues and, according to the SED, "so called personal freedoms." <sup>355</sup> In Kranichfeld, *Kreis* Weimar-Land, *Bezirk* Erfurt, an LDPD member of city council demanded that all citizens of Kranichfeld who were in prison should be immediately released. <sup>356</sup> In Döring, *Kreis* Rosslau, *Bezirk* Halle, an LDPD member was involved in the leadership of the uprising. <sup>357</sup> In Freital, *Bezirk* Dresden, the LDPD gathered signatures in support of *Grossbauern* obtaining their

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<sup>353</sup> ADL, #2367. FDP Ostbüro report from August 1953.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/587, p.17. Analysis on the situation in *Bezirk* Schwerin on 17 June 1953.

<sup>356</sup> THSA, B IV 2/4-48/1. 23 June 1953 report by SED sekretariat for Weimar-land on strikes and demonstrations between 16 June and 21 June 1953.

<sup>357</sup> MLHA, IV 2/5/531, p. 71. Situation report of 18 June 1953 on the factories of the *Bezirk* Schwerin; *ibid.*, IV 2/5/533, p. 164. Report on *Bezirk* Halle of 20 June 1953.

property that had been taken from them.<sup>358</sup>

Overall, however, CDU/LDPD participation in the demonstrations was negligible. In *Bezirk Leipzig*, out of 59 "ring leaders," 3 were SED, one LDPD, one former CDU and 16 FDJ.<sup>359</sup> After extensive study of the documents of the non-Marxist parties, Leo Haupts has concluded that the non-Marxist parties did not firmly support the SED on 17 June, but they did not actively resist the regime either.<sup>360</sup> Haupts' conclusion is supported by police records. Of 2,916 people arrested between 17 June and 30 June for their part in the uprising, only 4.6% were members of the CDU or LDPD.<sup>361</sup> The lack of resistance can be attributed to the fact that the non-Marxist parties had been coopted into the Communist system by 1953, as outlined in the previous chapter.

#### 4.6 - The nature of the uprising

Although workers initiated the disturbances on 17 June, the latent resistance to the regime was visible in the speed with which these demonstrators gained support from other sections of society. The participation of other societal elements in the demonstrations has already been established

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<sup>358</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/5/535, p. 3. 17 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Dresden* leadership.

<sup>359</sup> Heidi Roth, "Der 17. Juni im damaligen *Bezirk Leipzig*." DA 24 (1991).

<sup>360</sup> Haupts, p. 42.

<sup>361</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 4. 2 July 1953 report by Weidlich, head of the investigation department of the *Volkspolizei*, on those arrested in connection with the "fascist putsch."

in the above discussions of *Bezirke* Magdeburg, Leipzig, Halle and Berlin. The other *Bezirke* reported similar occurrences. According to a police report on demonstrations in Cottbus: "The demonstrators quickly gained adherents during the march through town."<sup>362</sup> A theme common to the police reports on Halle was the willingness of other people in the city to join the demonstrations. In Stadtroda, people eagerly joined the 200 protesting workers on the streets. Police also complained of the trucks transporting demonstrators between Gera and Greiz: "Over 50% of the people in the trucks were in my opinion not Wismut workers, but provocateurs from the population and youths."<sup>363</sup> In *Bezirk* Frankfurt/Oder, construction workers demonstrating at the border crossing of Dahchwitz/Hoppegarten were joined by other people in town. According to one police report: "When the construction workers, and other sections of the population who had gathered there, tried to break through, the comrades of the border police put an energetic stop to their efforts."<sup>364</sup> In Wittenberge, a demonstration of 400 people "from various societal groups" took place.<sup>365</sup>

A police report from 18 June offers excellent evidence that 17 June was a popular uprising, not exclusively a

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<sup>362</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 102. 27 June 1953 report from the Cottbus *Bezirk* police to the head of the Volkspolizei.

<sup>363</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p.243. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by Weidhase, head of operations staff.

<sup>364</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 9. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 17:00 to 24:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>365</sup> MLHA, IV 2/4/587. "Analyse über die Lage in *Bezirk* Schwerin am 17. Juni 1953" by the *Bezirk* leadership of the SED.

workers' revolt. This report separated the numbers involved in strikes and those involved in demonstrations as follows:

Work Stoppages and Demonstrations				
Bezirk	Work stoppages or strikes	No. of strikers	Demonstrations	No. of demonstrators
Potsdam	45	40 250	32	53 350
Frankfurt/O	18	8 000	7	9 000
Cottbus	13	5 000	6	5 000
Dresden	35	24 200	5	49 000
Leipzig	3	1 400	5	30 000
K-Marx-Stadt	7	1 200	-	-
Erfurt	6	15 000	7	15 000
Gera	30	15 000	10	51 900
Suhl	1	70	-	-
Halle	56	60 000	14	94 000
Magdeburg	59	-	42	32 000
Rostock	-	-	-	-
Neubrandenburg	-	-	-	-
Total	313	170 120+	129++	339 450++

+ - excluding Magdeburg and Berlin

++- excluding Berlin

(Source BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p.11. 18 June 1953 report #166 on the events of 17 June 1953.)

Although these were preliminary figures, a trend is nevertheless discernible. The chart indicates that in 7 out

of 9 *Bezirke* where disturbances took place (excluding Suhl because the disturbances were negligible and Magdeburg because of the missing data), there were more demonstrators than strikers. Only in one *Bezirk* (Karl-Marx-Stadt) did a strike occur without an accompanying demonstration. In other words, in 7 *Bezirke*, even if all strikers had joined a demonstration - and this was not the norm, as some strikers simply went home<sup>366</sup> - other members of the community would have had to join to make up the total number of demonstrators. This finding corroborates the police records on the events presented in the above discussion, which noted the participation of other townspeople in the worker-incited demonstrations.<sup>367</sup>

The participation of other sections of society in the demonstrations of 17 June is also confirmed by police statistics on arrests after the uprising. Between 17 June and 22 June, the police arrested 3,791 people for their part in the disturbances on 17 June.<sup>368</sup> By 25 June, 2,269 remained in the custody of the *Volkspolizei*, the others were either released or handed over to the MfS.<sup>369</sup> Of the 2,269

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<sup>366</sup> See the reports in BA-P, DO 1 11/304,305, and 306, and DO1 11/45.

<sup>367</sup> Soviet sources offer different numbers, but suggest a similar trend. Soviet military official reported 132, 169 strikers in the GDR on 17 June, but 269,460 demonstrators. 27 June 1953 report from Lieutenant General Fedenko, Operations Division, Main Operations Administration, General Staff of the Soviet Army, to Lieutenant General Pavlovsky, reproduced in Ostermann, *The Post-Stalin*, Document #25.

<sup>368</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 18. 25 June 1953 report by Weidlich, head of the investigation branch of the *Volkspolizei* on arrests of those involved with the "fascist provocation."

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

prisoners, the social background of 2,065 was recorded. The breakdown was as follows:

workers -	68.6%
government/intelligentsia -	13.4%
tradesmen -	3.8%
LPG farmers -	.7%
Small and middle farmers -	3.6%
Large farmers -	.7%
Businessmen -	1.9%
Unemployed -	2.4%
Other -	4.9% <sup>370</sup>

In a final summary of those arrested for participating in the demonstrations, similar numbers were reported:

workers -	65.3%
government/intelligentsia -	13%
independent tradesmen, etc.-	4.3%
LPG farmers -	.3%
Small and middle farmers -	1.9%
Large farmers -	.5%
Businessmen -	.4%
Unemployed -	1.7%
Other	12.6% <sup>371</sup>

Although workers made up the largest societal section which took part in the uprising, there was clearly substantial involvement from other sections of society. It is therefore inappropriate to continue to characterize 17 June

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p. 34. 6 July 1953 summary report from the head of the investigation branch of the Volkspolizei, Weidlich.

exclusively as a "workers' revolt."<sup>372</sup> It was indeed a popular uprising. These statistics reveal further that the demonstrators cannot be dismissed as rowdy youths.<sup>373</sup> Of 2,645 people arrested between 17 June and 30 June for their part in the uprising, 10.4% were under the age of 18; 27.6% were between 18 and 24; and 62% were above the age of 24.<sup>374</sup>

It is also important to address the interpretation of certain historians that the uprising was not revolutionary, because it had ended before the Soviets arrived. The sources suggest that both Baring's and Diedrich's arguments that the uprising had basically ended prior to the arrival of Soviet troops contain weaknesses.<sup>375</sup> Baring was forceful in his argument:

But let no one imagine that the rising was actually put down by the Soviet troops. By the time they were deployed, the revolutionary wave had already begun to ebb. The Soviet intervention was not a turning point, it merely served to mark the end of the day's events: the demonstrators had run out of steam; their rising had come to a standstill before it had really gotten off the ground.<sup>376</sup>

Although Baring's conclusion can be explained by the appearance of his work prior to 1989, and therefore a lack of sources, it is odd that Diedrich would come to this

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<sup>372</sup> See the above literature discussion of Diedrich, Beier and Baring.

<sup>373</sup> Baring stresses the youth component in demonstrations, pp. 52-52

<sup>374</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 5. 2 July 1953 report by Weidlich, head of the investigation department of the Volkspolizei, on those arrested in connection with the "fascist putsch."

<sup>375</sup> Diedrich, p. 157.

<sup>376</sup> Baring, p. 76.

conclusion as well, considering his own evidence suggests that the uprising was far from over by the time the Soviets arrived. His assertion that the uprising had begun to wind down because the demonstrators lacked concrete objectives, cannot be applied universally to the GDR.<sup>377</sup> The danger in Diedrich's approach is, of course, to minimize the revolutionary character of the uprising.

Although the Soviets declared a state of emergency at 1 pm in Berlin, there are a variety of examples of disturbances late in the day on 17 June. In Eisenberg, workers at the VEB Schamotte Werk first went on strike at 2 pm. Only at 3 pm, did workers of the steel work in Silbitz go on strike and proceed to occupy various posts around town, including the SED building and the central telephone switchboard.<sup>378</sup> In the industrial area of *Bezirk* Cottbus, Lauchhammer, the *Volkspolizei* were overwhelmed by the number of demonstrators and had to call on the support of the Soviets. Many demonstrators were armed with axes and spades.<sup>379</sup> It was not until late in the evening that Soviet tanks first appeared on the streets of Lauchhammer.<sup>380</sup> In fact, it was not until 5 pm on 17 June that the Soviet commander in *Kreis* Eberswalde declared a state of emergency,

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<sup>377</sup> Diedrich, p. 157.

<sup>378</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 240. Extract from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953, signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>379</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 5. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>380</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 102. 27 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk* police in Cottbus entitled "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 16. Juni 1953."

because the situation had become so serious by then.<sup>381</sup> Similarly, the Soviet commander did not declare a state of emergency in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* until 8 pm.<sup>382</sup> In Halle, demonstrators began gathering again at 6 pm on the main square.<sup>383</sup> There is evidence, therefore, to bring into question the contention that the uprising had exhausted itself before the arrival of Soviet troops. Future local histories will likely assist in clarifying this issue.

It should be noted that in some instances, the appearance of the Soviets caused further disturbances. In Eberswalde, at EKM Finow, at about noon on 17 June, 300 workers and clerks stopped working. They refused to work as long as Soviet troops occupied the plant, insisting that it was unreasonable to expect them to work under Soviet aegis 8 years after the end of the war. When the workers returned to their jobs, they demanded that nobody from the factory be arrested for their views. Should this occur, the workers threatened, they would stop working once again.<sup>384</sup> In Potsdam, construction workers became incensed later in the day of the 17th when they saw tanks driving through Potsdam

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<sup>381</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, p.18. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police chief Kotulan entitled "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 16.6.1953."

<sup>382</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 9. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>383</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 4. Extracts from the *Bezirk* police situation reports for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 signed by Weidhase, head of operations staff.

<sup>384</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p .18. 29 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the *Volkspolizei*.

on their way to Berlin.<sup>385</sup>

The uprising, however, did not affect the GDR uniformly. The northern *Bezirke* of the former province of Mecklenburg experienced significantly fewer disturbances on 17 June than the other *Bezirke* (see chart above). This trend in regional resistance was evident previous to the uprising, as demonstrated by the *Volkskongress* vote of 1949 and the 1946 elections. The sites where disturbances occurred correspond to the *Kreise* which reported higher than average "no" votes in the *Volkskongress* election.<sup>386</sup> Police reports on the October 1950 election reported less interest in the election in Saxony and Thuringia than in Mecklenburg.<sup>387</sup> Nevertheless, sites of rural unrest during the uprising, and especially after it as will be seen, corresponded largely to where LPG's had been established.<sup>388</sup> The uprising affected those sites most, where the forced implementation of the SED's programme had taken place.

The 17 June uprising was an act of popular political anti-Communist resistance which had been caused in large part by Soviet and SED repression. A cross-section of East German society took part in the storming of prisons and demanded free elections, which would have rid them of the Communist system. Certainly, demonstrators voiced economic demands as well, but this does not detract from the fact that demonstrators in 11 of 14 *Bezirke* called for free

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<sup>385</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 29 June 1953 report on the events in the city of Potsdam on 17 June 1953.

<sup>386</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>387</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>388</sup> See Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," *passim*.

elections and the end of the SED. The deputy head of the *Volkspolizei* listed the following as the most common demands of demonstrators throughout the GDR: 1) reduction of the work norms 2) reduction in prices of state store wares 3) removal of agricultural quotas 4) release of prisoners 5) free elections 6) against the SED 7) resignation of the government 8) removal of zonal boundaries.<sup>389</sup> The similarity of the demands, especially their political content, provided the SED Central Committee with "evidence" that West Germany had organized the demonstrations. As a Central Committee analysis stated: "The agent-provocateurs from West Berlin succeeded in misusing the workers for their political smear slogans."<sup>390</sup> Soviet officers in East Germany also claimed that the commonality of the demands and their "anti-state" character were a result of western behind-the-scenes manoeuvring.<sup>391</sup> The widespread attacks on the repression apparatus were intimately entwined with the political slogans. In essence, the political nature of the uprising was a result of the demonstrators' desire for protection of basic rights. Events in East Germany in the months and years

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<sup>389</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 12. 18 June 1953 report Nr. 166 on the events on 17 June 1953, signed by Grünstein, deputy to the head of the *Volkspolizei*. ACDP, VII-011-1268. The vast majority of situation reports from CDU *Bezirk* organizations in this signature mention that the demand for free elections permeated the uprising.

<sup>390</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 17 June 1953 report entitled: "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR."

<sup>391</sup> 17 June 1953 report from Grechko, Tarasov and Malinin (Operations Division, Main Operations Administration, General Staff of the Soviet Army) to N.A. Bulganin, in Ostermann, *The Post-Stalin Succession Struggle*, Document #15.

following the uprising, and secret police reports on the population, support this conclusion, as will be seen in the following chapter.

**Chapter Five: The aftermath of the uprising: Repression and popular resistance between June 1953 and the Geneva Conference of 1955.**

**1 - Disturbances in the GDR after the uprising.**

**1.1 - Disturbances in the days immediately following the uprising.**

Strikes and disturbances continued to affect the GDR throughout the week following the uprising. Indeed, in *Bezirk Cottbus*, for example, more workers went on strike on 18 June (14,983) than did on 17 June (11,017).<sup>1</sup> Soviet sources estimate that overall in the GDR, more workers went on strike on 18 June (218,700) than on 17 June (132,169).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the disturbances in the week following the uprising, like those of 17 June, centred around issues of repression and the end of the Communist system in East Germany.

***Bezirk Cottbus***

The city of Cottbus was a centre of unrest following the uprising. On 18 June, striking workers from VEB

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<sup>1</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305. 27 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Cottbus* police.

<sup>2</sup> 27 June 1953 report from Lieutenant-General Fedenko, Operations Division, Main Operations Administration, General Staff of the Soviet Army, to Lieutenant-General Pavlovsky, reproduced in Ostermann, *The Post-Stalin*, Document #25.

Kraftverkehr Cottbus proclaimed: "We demand free discussions without personal disadvantages. We demand truly free and secret elections in the GDR and all Germany."<sup>3</sup>

Demonstrations took place in front of the Cottbus prison where the crowd demanded the release of political prisoners.<sup>4</sup> In total, 47 factories went on strike in *Bezirk* Cottbus on 18 June. By the 19th, only 29 of those had returned to normal operation. At two of the factories that returned to normal operation, VEM Cottbus and VEM Anlagebau, workers observed 5 minutes of silence for those who had been shot the previous day.<sup>5</sup>

Aware of the demonstrators' interest in the fate of prisoners in East Germany, the *Volkspolizei* evacuated the prison work camp in Preschen on the night of 17 to 18 June. The police successfully transported the prisoners to a prison in Cottbus by the morning. Police reports indicate that the prisoners were well behaved, but "were astounded by the significant movements of Soviet troops."<sup>6</sup> However, the police were unable to complete the evacuation of the prison camp in Drewitz and were forced to leave about 200 prisoners in the camp. On 18 June, about 400 people gathered around the camp and demanded the release of prisoners. Because most of the police force had already left for the new site, the

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<sup>3</sup> Andreas Peter, "Der Juni-Aufstand im Bezirk Cottbus," DA 27 (1994), p. 587.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 589.

<sup>5</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15. SED Central Committee report entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.53," p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> BA-P, DO 1 /11/305, p. 106. 27 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk* Cottbus police to the head of the *Volkspolizei*.

police guarding the camp immediately called for a KVP company and tank unit to protect the site. The additional forces arrived just as demonstrators began to attack the fences of the camp.<sup>7</sup>

### **Bezirk Potsdam**

Work stoppages and disturbances were prevalent in *Bezirk Potsdam* in the aftermath of the uprising. In Potsdam, work stoppages occurred in the major factories such as Karl-Marx-Werk, Reichsbahn Ausbesserungswerk, DEFA, and APAG on 18 June. Not until the 19th did all factories in Potsdam return to normal operation.<sup>8</sup> Abus Wildau and Thälmann Werk in Brandenburg also continued to strike on 18 June. On the same day, demonstrators stormed the LPG office in *Gemeinde Gülpe*, *Kreis Rathenow*, and beat up the SED mayor.<sup>9</sup> In *Kunstfaserwerk Friedrich Engels*, workers attempted to form a strike committee as late as 20 June.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> BA-P, DO 1 /11/305, p. 106. 27 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Cottbus* police to the head of the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>8</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. 29 June 1953 report on the events in the city of Potsdam beginning on 17 June 1953.

<sup>9</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 39. 20 July 1953 *Volkspolizei* Hauptabteilung K report on examples of poor party work during the fascist disturbances of 17 June 1953 and in its aftermath.

<sup>10</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15. SED Central Committee Report entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.53," p. 12.

### **Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder**

At the Bau Union Spree in Kreis Fürstenwalde, most workers went on strike on 18 June, demanding that political prisoners be freed.<sup>11</sup> On the construction site of Stalinstadt, very few workers showed up to their jobs on 18 June. Instead, they planned a demonstration for 4 pm to free prisoners. Arrests of the leaders, however, prevented the demonstration from taking place.<sup>12</sup> Political slogans were also evident in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder*. 430 construction workers from the Guldendorf construction site went on strike after meeting and adopting a resolution which demanded the fall of the government.<sup>13</sup>

### **Bezirk Dresden**

In *Bezirk Dresden*, workers at Sachsenwerk Niedersedlitz still had not returned to their jobs by 18 June.<sup>14</sup> No other major disturbances or work stoppages were reported.

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<sup>11</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 22. 29 June 1953 report of the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police to the operations staff of the Volkspolizei.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 17a.

<sup>13</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/306, p. 19. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* police chief Kotulan entitled: "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 16.6.1953."

<sup>14</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. Report on the situation in *Bezirk Dresden* for 17 and 18 June 1953.

### **Bezirk Rostock**

Unlike 17 June, *Bezirk Rostock* experienced considerable unrest in the week after the uprising. On 19 June in Warnow-Werft Warnemünde, workers issued the following demands: Removal of the Grotewohl government, release of the factory head, reduction of norms, "not one cent" for the KVP, and the lifting of the state of emergency.<sup>15</sup> The police sent one company of the para-military troops in the *Volkspolizei* (Department HV A) to Warnemünde to quell the unrest. Upon arrival, however, the police realized that they did not have sufficient numbers to disperse the demonstrators. The workers were apparently trying "with all their force" to initiate a demonstration. The police were therefore forced to call for the backup of the KVP.<sup>16</sup>

In support of these striking workers, about 230 workers from Bootswerft Gehlsdorf - Rostock, went on strike on 19 June demanding: 1) same wages as in Warnow-Werft 2) reduction of norms 3) release of imprisoned colleagues, and 4) removal of Soviet tanks from the streets of Berlin and Rostock. Receiving no indication that the demands would be met, 200 workers went on strike the following day, adding to their list of demands free elections, a lifting of the state of emergency, and flying the flag at half mast in memory of a demonstrator who had been shot.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 334. 26 June 1953 report by *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>17</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 336. 26 June 1953 report by *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

Stralsund also experienced unrest following the uprising. At 9:45 am on the 18th, about 200 workers of the Schiffsbau and Reparaturwerft Stralsund went on strike. It took until 2 pm for Soviet troops to quell the unrest here.<sup>18</sup> In Bau Union Küste, Schwedenschanze, workers went on strike almost simultaneously with Schiffsbau Stralsund. Here, the strike leadership demanded punishment of those who were involved with the laws that led to the lowering of the living standards, substantial improvement in living standards, the release of their arrested colleagues, free and secret democratic elections with the licensing of all parties, and removal of the KVP from factories and public places.<sup>19</sup> About 2,200 workers went on strike in Kreis Stralsund on 18 June.<sup>20</sup>

Free elections and the removal of the government were also central to other strikes after 17 June. During a strike at Mathias Thesen Werft in Wismar on 18 June, one demonstrator stated: "Our elections are not free elections. We can't really talk of democracy."<sup>21</sup> Another protestor stated that the "government should and must disappear."<sup>22</sup>

The anger at the government meant that SED functionaries also had to be cautious in the aftermath of the uprising. On 20 June, 20 people attacked the SED party secretary from Kreis Rostock shouting: "You've ruled up to

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<sup>18</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 338. 26 June 1953 report by the *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 342. 26 June 1953 report by the *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

now. Now we rule."<sup>23</sup>

### **Bezirk Erfurt**

At the VEB Ifa-Schlepperwerk in Nordhausen, approximately 1,200 of the 2,204 workers went on strike on 18 June demanding the removal of the government and the end of state of emergency.<sup>24</sup> In SAG-Betrieb Pelz in Erfurt, workers went on strike issuing only one demand: "Free all-German elections."<sup>25</sup> VEB Optima in Erfurt and EKM-Werk Feuerungsbau in Erfurt went on strike on 18 June in solidarity with workers who had been shot in Berlin during the demonstrations.

Unrest in *Bezirk Erfurt* continued into the week following the uprising. On 19 June, all 3,000 workers at RFT-Funkwerk Erfurt, and 2,500 of the 4,000 workers of VEB Optima in Erfurt went on strike.<sup>26</sup> In Weimar, demonstrators occupied the central telephone exchange and built barricades.<sup>27</sup> In isolated cases throughout the *Bezirk*, SED party members were "terrorized."<sup>28</sup> It was not until 20 June

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<sup>23</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/304, p. 341. 26 June 1953 report by the *Bezirk Rostock* police chief Ludwig.

<sup>24</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 284. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Erfurt* police entitled: "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 17.6.1953."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 284-285.

<sup>27</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, J IV 2/202/15. Report of the SED Central Committee entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.53," p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

that the police in Erfurt reported that a day had passed without strikes or work stoppages.<sup>29</sup>

### **Bezirk Halle**

In contrast to 17 June, *Bezirk Halle* was fairly quiet in the week following the uprising. No demonstrations took place, and most factories were at full strength by 18 June. Only *Lowa-Ammendorf*, *Ifa-Karosseriewerk*, *Diamalt*, *EKM Hohenthurm*, and "several" small factories continued to strike on 18 June.<sup>30</sup> The railway outfitting plant also went on strike temporarily.<sup>31</sup> In the evening of 18 June, a crowd gathered on the Halle market square, but 200 armed *Volkspolizei* and KVP units dispersed the demonstrators before any major disturbances could take place. One woman who was not taking part in the demonstration was shot during the dispersal.<sup>32</sup>

Vigorous police measures prevented major disturbances in *Bezirk Halle* following the uprising. To prevent a demonstration in the unsettled *Waggonfabrik*, units of the KVP occupied the plant on the morning of 19 June. The soldiers handed out pamphlets stating that the KVP would not tolerate any demonstrations, and that they would continue to occupy the plant until "workers who want to get back to work

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<sup>29</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 284-285. 29 June 1953 report from the *Bezirk Erfurt* police entitled: "Auswertung der Ereignisse seit dem 17.6.1953."

<sup>30</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 243. 1 July 1953 report on the course of the fascist provocation on 17.6.1953 in *Bezirk Halle*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

can do so safely."<sup>33</sup> These measures were adopted in Ifa-Karosseriewerken and EKM-Hohenthurm as well.<sup>34</sup>

In the Mansfeld-Kombinat, the majority of workers went on strike on 18 June, although workers had not gone on strike on 17 June.<sup>35</sup> Apparently, the second SED party chair of the *Bezirk* was able to convince the workers to return to the plant by the 19th. On the same day, however, new strikes broke out in Sangerhausen, where the Thomas-Münzer-Schacht, the machine factory Sangerhausen, Mifa, and other small factories went on strike. Police measures helped force workers back to the factories by 20 June.<sup>36</sup>

### **Bezirk Magdeburg**

On 18 June, the Magdeburg plants RAW, Elmo, Kupferwerk, and all Kaliwerke went on strike. In the outlying *Kreise* Oschersleben and Gardelegen, workers returning to Magdeburg tore down flags and banners and called for a general strike. They also tried to storm the control point at Weissenborn.<sup>37</sup> In *Gemeinde* Egel, *Kreis* Strassfurt, opponents of the regime demonstrated their support for the uprising, and their version of the nature of the uprising, by laying at a war memorial a wreath with a ribbon reading: "June 17 1953 - To

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15. Report of the SED Central Committee entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.53," p. 7.

the victims for freedom and human rights."<sup>38</sup> In Wernigerode, the SED tried to convince striking workers not to hold a demonstration. Only through "warning shots from the Friends," however, was the demonstration prevented.<sup>39</sup> By 20 June, 90% of factories in Magdeburg were back at full strength.<sup>40</sup>

### **Bezirk Neubrandenburg**

Unrest in *Bezirk Neubrandenburg* was most prevalent at construction sites. At the construction site Gross-Dölln, 1,700 workers went on strike on 18 June. No demonstration took place, however, as 80% of the workers simply returned to their homes.<sup>41</sup> At the construction site Bau-Union-Nordost, workers threatened to strike but did not carry through on the threat.<sup>42</sup> In the countryside of this *Bezirk*, no demonstrations took place, but there was a massive exodus from the LPGs in the days following the uprising.<sup>43</sup>

### **Bezirk Suhl**

There were no disturbances in Suhl following the

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<sup>38</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p. 10. 22 June 1953 report Nr. 170 for the period from 6:00 on 21 June 1953 to 6:00 on 22.6.53.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> SAPMO, ZPA, JIV 2/202/15. Report of the SED Central Committee entitled: "Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6.53," p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

uprising. Farmers dissolved a large number of LPGs, however.<sup>44</sup>

### **Bezirk Gera**

Most factories had returned to normal operation by the morning of 18 June. In the town of Gera, only the construction site Maxhütte and the section of the Zeiss plant that had started the strike on 17 June remained on strike.<sup>45</sup> In Kreise Rudolstadt and Eisenberg, only one factory in each Kreis experienced work stoppages in the week following the uprising.<sup>46</sup> On 19 June, there was a short work stoppage by truck drivers delivering food supplies.<sup>47</sup>

### **Bezirk Schwerin**

No major disturbances occurred in *Bezirk Schwerin* following the uprising. In Grabow, a demonstration took place in front of city hall during which the SED Kreis secretary was attacked.<sup>48</sup> Otherwise, there were only "agitated discussions" and threats to demonstrate.<sup>49</sup>

### **Bezirk Leipzig**

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Strikes in *Bezirk Leipzig* were more widespread on 18 June than on 17 June. Six *Kreise* here experienced work stoppages: Döbeln, Delitzsch, Geithain, Wurzen, Eilenburg, and Leipzig-Land. The SED also noted that on 18 June, "enemy activity" spilled over into the countryside.<sup>50</sup> On 22 June, there were isolated attempts to strike, and a number of LPGs dissolved.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt***

There were only two minor disturbances on 18 June in *Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt*. Freiberg and Werdau experienced disturbances involving construction workers. The SED leadership was able to convince the workers in Werdau not to hold a demonstration.<sup>52</sup>

Only through arrests, the occupation of factories, and Soviet assistance was the SED able to prevent demonstrations in the week following the uprising. Even during these limited disturbances, however, demonstrators voiced political demands, and exhibited concern for prisoners in the GDR. It was not until one week after the uprising that the MfS could finally report: "The situation in Berlin and the German Democratic Republic was completely quiet on 24 June. No occurrences, strikes, demonstrations etc. took place."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 108.

## 1.2 - Disturbances in the second half of 1953.

The desire of the population for the removal of the SED regime was evident in the SED's inability to garner support in the aftermath of the uprising. The *Politbüro*, like certain historians of our time, believed that the uprising was largely related to economics, and therefore believed that improving the material situation in the GDR would placate the population. The *Politbüro* announced on 25 June that there would be significant improvements in living standards. The GDR government arranged for extra foodstuffs to be imported from the Soviet Union, reduced public transit prices, and set aside funds to rebuild living accommodations and to improve hygienic conditions in factories.<sup>54</sup> The *Politbüro*, however, had erred in its analysis of the situation, for, in the words of an MfS employee: "Above all things, the dissatisfaction in the population is so large, it is unlikely we can ever make it up."<sup>55</sup> The MfS officer's observations were confirmed by strikes three weeks after the announcement of improved living conditions.

In July 1953, the GDR experienced another wave of strikes, although much smaller than that of 17 June, and mainly in the industrial region in the south. The site most affected by strikes was Bunawerk in Schkopau, *Bezirk Halle*, where political considerations were clearly at the forefront of workers' demands. From 15 to 17 July, over 5,000 of the

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<sup>54</sup> Mitter/Kowalczyk, "Die Arbeiter," p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0046 f/a. 28 October 1953 report.

16,000 workers at Bunawerk went on strike and demanded 1) free, all-German elections as quickly as possible, 2) the release of all political prisoners, 3) new elections for the union leadership, 4) until such elections, no union dues to be paid, and 5) removal of the party from the union.<sup>56</sup>

An important example of the dominance of political issues over economic ones comes from the reaction of the population towards the food packets that the US was supplying to the eastern German population in the aftermath of the uprising.<sup>57</sup> When the SED confronted people who intended to accept these packets with arguments that the SED was improving the standard of living in the GDR, East Germans replied that they were going to pick up the packets not because they needed food, but to show support for the American policy. In *Bezirk Cottbus*, the *Volkspolizei* were put on alert because of the thousands of workers threatening to leave for Berlin to pick up the packets.<sup>58</sup>

The strike in Jena at the Zeiss works optic plant on 7 July 1953 also demonstrated political considerations. The first point of the 33 point programme that the strikers adopted demanded free, secret elections in Germany.<sup>59</sup> One MfS report summarized the situation at the Jena plant as the following: "Over and over we see that in meetings where

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<sup>56</sup> Mitter/Wolle, pp. 134-135.

<sup>57</sup> For an analysis of the American strategy behind these packets, see Christian Ostermann, " "Keeping the pot simmering:" The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953," *GSR* 19 (1996): 61-90.

<sup>58</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Summary of situation reports of *Bezirk* association taken between 17 June and 17 July 1953.

<sup>59</sup> Mitter, "Die Ereignisse im Juni und Juli 1953 in der DDR," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 5/1991, p. 36.

reactionary elements speak against the government and its measures, a large number of workers are won over to their goals."<sup>60</sup> An SED *Instrukteur* in *Bezirk* Halle recognized the true situation in the GDR in his report from the beginning of July: "Die Hauptlosungen, die der Gegner geschickt in den unmittelbaren kleineren ökonomischen Forderungen, die er ständig immer höher schraubt, in die Betriebe hineinträgt und auf dem Lande verbreitet, sind: Freie Wahlen, Freilassung aller politischen Gefangenen seit 1945, unpolitische Gewerkschaften und Anschluss an den DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), Neuwahlen der Gewerkschaftsleitungen, Freie Wirtschaft, Beseitigung des Ablieferungssolls, des Viehhalte - und Anbauplanes, Gleichstellung der Einzelbauern mit den Genossenschaftsbauern, Beseitigung der Politabteilungen (in den MTS.)"<sup>61</sup>

As indicated in the above report, the countryside was turbulent in the wake of the uprising. In *Bezirk* Halle, one farmer shouted at the mayor: "On 17 June, the workers struck. Now we farmers are going to strike." The head of the *Volkspolizei* operations staff lamented that these sentiments were widespread in the countryside.<sup>62</sup> At the end of July in *Bezirk* Gera, farmers still demanded the end of the government, free elections, and the release of prisoners.<sup>63</sup> At a farmers' meeting in Kribitz, *Kreis* Plauen, one farmer

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Mitter, "Die Ereignisse," p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> Kowalczyk/Mitter, "Die Arbeiter," p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/1144, p. 170. 12 December 1953 HVDVP Operations staff report on the situation in the countryside, signed by the head of operations staff Schmidt.

<sup>63</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," p. 116.

shouted his demand for political change: "Gentlemen, it is five minutes past twelve. The day of reckoning is almost here. RIAS, that is the station. All the people in the eastern zone who fight for human rights are locked up. My wife was sentenced to 5 years in prison for this."<sup>64</sup> These were not uncommon occurrences. At another gathering, one farmer said: "Why isn't Ulbricht locked up? We do not need these puppet figures. We want to choose our own government," and received tumultuous applause for his words.<sup>65</sup> Popular opposition to the SED's agricultural strategy was also visible in the massive dissolution of the agricultural collectives. In *Bezirk Neubrandenburg*, the police reported: "Since the events of 17 June [...] there has been a movement towards dissolving the LPGs in nearly all Kreise."<sup>66</sup> In *Kreis Weimar-Land*, there was a major exodus from the LPGs Trommlitz and Kottendorf, during which farmers departed under the slogan: "We want to be free farmers again."<sup>67</sup> At the 14th Sitting of the Central Committee on 21 June, Otto Grotewohl acknowledged the catastrophic situation in the countryside: "In der uns vorliegenden gründlichen und exakten Analyse wurde festgestellt, dass es ein sehr grosser und bedeutsamer Fehler ist, wenn die Anziehungskraft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik im Rahmen der gesamtdeutschen Politik nachlässt und keine magnetische

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<sup>64</sup> Mitter, "Die Ereignisse," p. 35.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/409, p. 102. 3 August 1953 from *Bezirk Neubrandenburg* police to the *Volkspolizei* in Berlin.

<sup>67</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 36. 20 July 1953 report of *Hauptabteilung K* on examples of poor party work during 17 June and its aftermath.

Kraft mehr ist, sondern eine abstossende Kraft, die darin ihren Ausdruck findet, dass Hunderttausende von Bauern ihre Höfe verlassen haben und in den Westen geflüchtet sind."<sup>68</sup>

The rejection of the LPGs was a common phenomenon in the GDR. On 15 July alone, 217 out of 5,000 LPGs were dissolved. By the end of July, 10% of the LPGs had been dissolved, and a further 10% reported a massive exodus of membership.<sup>69</sup> Considering that a state of emergency was in effect until 11 July, this was a significant demonstration against the LPGs.<sup>70</sup>

The police were gravely worried by the number of attacks on SED functionaries in agricultural collectives in the aftermath of 17 June. In October and November 1953, SED members in *Gemeinde Wüstenmark*, Harlow, Jahna, Kospoda, Gladow, Seelow, Oranienburg, Werneuchen, Frauenhain, and Klingenberg were attacked. In several instances, they had to be treated in hospital for their injuries.<sup>71</sup> In *Gemeinde Melchow*, celebrations marking the 36th anniversary of the October revolution were continually interrupted by boos and whistles. After the event, the main speaker was beaten up.<sup>72</sup>

Due to the presence of this fundamental hostility to the SED, it is not surprising to find that the SED's propaganda events designed to "prove" that the population was loyal to the regime were ineffective. SED members from

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," p. 112.

<sup>69</sup> Mitter, "Am 17.6.53," p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/24, pp. 77-78. 5 January 1954 letter from Maron, head of the *Volkspolizei*, to Ulbricht.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

the lower levels of the party reported that these events were rejected by the population.<sup>73</sup> SED functionaries who went into factories in the aftermath of the uprising to talk on the situation were often drowned out.<sup>74</sup> When Ulbricht came to the Leuna works to talk to workers there, workers who had been invited to a discussion with Ulbricht were not interested in hearing what he had to say, but rather demanded that he release all political prisoners and separate the party from the union.<sup>75</sup> An LOPM report summarizing the general situation among the working class in the GDR from 23 June 1953 acknowledged that the speeches of functionaries met with such hostile reaction because of the lack of trust in the government.<sup>76</sup> In June 1953, Grotewohl acknowledged that the government had to win back the trust of the population, but that this could not be accomplished by mere demonstrations.<sup>77</sup>

### **1.3 - The non-Marxist parties in the aftermath of the uprising.**

Although the CDU and the LDPD had become instruments of the SED by 1953, there was hostility in the general membership to the leadership's support for the "building of socialism." It is difficult to characterize this hostility as resistance, however, because the protests tended to be

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<sup>73</sup> Mitter/Wolle, pp. 113-114.

<sup>74</sup> Kowalczyk, "Wir werden siegen," pp. 212-213.

<sup>75</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 63.

<sup>76</sup> Mitter/Kowalczyk, "Die Arbeiter," p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 114.

directed against certain aspects of the "building of socialism," rather than the Communist system itself. Religious CDU members, for example, tended to be the most critical because of the SED's campaign against the *Junge Gemeinde*.<sup>78</sup> Resistance in the CDU and LDPD had been broken by 1953, but oppositional elements continued in the parties until the end of the GDR.<sup>79</sup>

Following the uprising, the CDU general secretary Götting met with all CDU *Bezirk* associations. The protocols from these meetings provide insights into the tensions between the general membership and the leadership of the party. The CDU membership in *Bezirke* Karl-Marx-Stadt, Potsdam and Leipzig expressed dismay that the party had supported the SED's "leading role" claim and that the party had participated in the campaign against the *Junge Gemeinde*.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, a report on the situation in the CDU after the uprising stated that there were "substantial" criticisms due to the campaign against the *Junge Gemeinde*.<sup>81</sup> In *Bezirke* Suhl and Rostock, members also criticized the

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<sup>78</sup> Zeidler, p. 80.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>80</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 18 July 1953 report on the meeting between the CDU association for *Bezirk* Potsdam and the general secretary of the CDU; *ibid.*, 9 July 1953 report on the meeting between the CDU association for *Bezirk* Karl-Marx-Stadt and the general secretary of the CDU.

<sup>81</sup> Günter Buchstab, "Widerspruch und widerständiges Verhalten der CDU der SBZ/DDR," *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland,"* published by the German parliament, Vol. VII/1, p. 41.

party for not practising more independent politics.<sup>82</sup> In two local CDU groups in Halle, the majority of members even complained that Nuschke should not have agreed to unity lists in 1950.<sup>83</sup> In a report written by Götting after his meetings with the *Bezirk* groups, Götting acknowledged that he had undertaken the visits because of "serious accusations" by lower levels of the party against the leadership, including demands for resignations and new elections to the CDU leadership.<sup>84</sup> The impression he formed from these meetings, however, was that CDU members desired improvement in Block work.<sup>85</sup> Because of the negligible participation of the CDU during the uprising, and the lack of CDU interest in a new political system - only the improvement of the Communist system - one cannot consider grumblings in the CDU after the uprising to be resistance. From 1953 on, the CDU had oppositional elements, but was not a home for anti-Communist resistance as it had been previously.

The LDPD also experienced isolated protests by its members in the aftermath of the uprising. LDPD members who spoke out against the leadership tended to emphasize that the LDPD was not practising independent politics. In one

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<sup>82</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 3 July 1953 report on the meeting between the CDU association for *Bezirk* Rostock and the general secretary of the CDU; *ibid.*, report on the meeting between the CDU association for *Bezirk* Suhl and the general secretary of the CDU.

<sup>83</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 24 - 25 July 1953 report on the CDU in Pretzsch and Schmiedeberg.

<sup>84</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Undated report by Götting on his visits to the CDU *Bezirk* associations.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

locality, one LDPD member left the LDPD because he felt it was equally responsible for the situation in the GDR, and would pay the price in another revolt, stating: "No, I'm not taking part anymore. I don't want to be hanged, like they're going to hang you all one day."<sup>86</sup> The LDPD in Kreis Dessau also reported that party members had lost faith in the leadership of the party.<sup>87</sup> The LDPD in Kreise Saalkreis, Rosslau, Halle, and Greifswald also expressed their displeasure with the LDPD leadership.<sup>88</sup> In a sampling of five *Bezirke* conducted for this study, four LDPD *Bezirke* associations indicated opposition in the membership to the leadership of the party.<sup>89</sup>

Opposition still lingered in the LDPD into 1954. Johannes Dieckmann, deputy chairman of the LDPD, reported in April 1954 that reports from LDPD members repeatedly stated that they were opposed to unity list elections like the Fall of 1950. Dieckmann further reported that there was a considerable portion of the LDPD membership who wanted an

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<sup>86</sup> ADL, LDPD #23534. 16 July 1953 letter from Kreis association Brandenburg-Stadt to Bezirk association for Potsdam.

<sup>87</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. 29 September 1953 working report from the Kreis association Dessau for the month of September.

<sup>88</sup> ADL, LDPD #15848. Protocol of Kreis executive meeting on 6 July 1953; ADL, LDP #25366. Working report of Kreis association Saalkreis for October 1953; *ibid.*, 29 September 1953 report from Kreis association Rosslau; *ibid.*, addition to the questionnaire of the Kreis association for Halle for the months of August and September 1953.

<sup>89</sup> The *Bezirke* surveyed were Potsdam, Halle, Leipzig, Rostock, and Frankfurt/Oder. Only Frankfurt/Oder reported no difficulties within the party.

election system as practiced in Bonn.<sup>90</sup>

#### 1.4 - Popular concern with *Rechtsunsicherheit*

One of the primary causes behind the 17 June uprising was legal insecurity. In the aftermath of the uprising, this issue continued to occupy the population. On 29 July, Max Fechner, the Minister of Justice, called for a strengthening of "our democratic adherence to the law," stating: "In the recent past, verdicts have been handed down which have no relation to the crime committed."<sup>91</sup> The verdicts were indeed extraordinarily harsh. In *Gemeinde Poplitz*, one woman was sentenced to six years in prison for selling eggs in West Berlin. In *Kreis Schwerin*, the population complained because cigarette factory workers had been sentenced to three years in prison for smoking on a break.<sup>92</sup>

Situation reports of the non-Marxist parties in the aftermath of the uprising point to the destabilizing effect of *Rechtsunsicherheit*. These reports reveal that districts most affected by disturbances on 17 June and in the days following the uprising, also expressed the most concern for *Rechtssicherheit* in the aftermath of the uprising. In *Bezirk*

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<sup>90</sup> ADL, LDPD #L2-28. Protocols of the sitting of the political committee of the central executive of the LDPD on 6 April 1954. These themes were repeated in the 9 February 1954 sitting.

<sup>91</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0370/I. 15 December 1953 special information report Nr.3/53 of Ostbüro of the FDP entitled: "Die Liquidierung des Neuen Kurses."

<sup>92</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 18 July 1953 report on CDU *Bezirk* association Potsdam conference with the CDU general secretary.

Halle, which experienced the second most demonstrations or strikes between 16 and 21 June (after *Bezirk Magdeburg*), *Rechtsunsicherheit* was at the centre of popular discontent. CDU members in Bitterfeld reported that *Rechtsunsicherheit* was the primary topic of discussion in the population.<sup>93</sup> The CDU in Bitterfeld suggested placing the MfS under the Ministry of the Interior as had been done in the Soviet Union, in order to both help with administrative costs, and to increase the population's trust in the state. Reports of torture chambers in the MfS building in Bitterfeld caused much unrest in the population.<sup>94</sup>

The CDU and LDPD in other centres in *Bezirk Halle* reported popular concern with *Rechtsunsicherheit*. In the city of Halle, the CDU reported that the trust of the population in the MfS and the *Volkspolizei* was minimal.<sup>95</sup> At an LDPD meeting in Sellin in July 1953, LDPD members argued that the *Volkspolizei* was a state within a state, and that as a result, trust in the government had been lost.<sup>96</sup> In *Kreis Bernburg*, the trust in the government had been irreparably shaken due to judicial practice. People here stated that "the years behind bars for innocent people, and

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<sup>93</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Report on sitting of extended *Kreis* association Bitterfeld on 24 and 25 July 1953.

<sup>94</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1268. 7 July 1953 situation report from CDU *Kreis* association Bitterfeld to the CDU leadership.

<sup>95</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1268. 24 June 1953 situation report from CDU *Bezirk* association Halle to the CDU leadership.

<sup>96</sup> ADL, LDPD #15848. Protocol of membership meeting of group Sellin on 13 July 1953; Protocol of membership meeting of group Gingst on 14 July 1953 also stated that the trust in the government was lost, and that this could not be changed by simply admitting that mistakes had been made.

the tears of farmers, craftsmen and private business owners could never be made up." The population was especially critical of arresting procedures, saying it took "one night to lock someone up, but weeks to release them."<sup>97</sup>

Because of Fechner's support for the workers' right to strike on 17 June, which he voiced in a *Neues Deutschland* article, he was replaced as Minister of Justice on 16 July 1953 by Hilde Benjamin.<sup>98</sup> Fechner was sentenced in 1954 to eight years in prison, and amnestied in 1956. Popular response to the appointment of Hilde Benjamin as the new Minister of Justice demonstrates the extent to which the population in *Bezirk Halle* was concerned with judicial practice. Eleven CDU *Kreis* associations in *Bezirk Halle* went so far as to call the appointment of Hilde Benjamin a "provocation of the population,"<sup>99</sup> because of her involvement in the harsh sentencing practices during the "building of socialism." The LDPD in Köthen reported that the population lost confidence in the government through measures such as appointing Hilde Benjamin Justice Minister.<sup>100</sup> In *Kreis Artern*, the population overwhelmingly rejected Hilde Benjamin as Justice Minister because they saw her as responsible for the harsh sentences prior to the uprising, and believed that the SED was returning to the Old

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<sup>97</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. LDPD *Kreis* association Bernburg supplement a to h for the monthly report of July 1953.

<sup>98</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 141.

<sup>99</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1268. Situation reports of CDU *Kreis* association Forst/Lausitz to the CDU leadership.

<sup>100</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. LDPD *Kreisverband* Köthen supplement to monthly report for July 1953.

Course.<sup>101</sup> In *Kreis Eisleben*, the population also rejected the appointment of Benjamin.<sup>102</sup>

The extent to which suppression affected the population in *Bezirk Halle* was evident in reaction to the establishment of communal living units called "House and Court Societies" (*Haus- und Hofgemeinschaften*). These were broadly considered to be a method of "political supervision."<sup>103</sup> One LDPD member, commenting on the advertisement in a movie theatre which portrayed the living units as centres in the fight against agents, spies and provocateurs, stated: "Due to these ads, wide sections of the population believe that these are installations for surveillance, and they are therefore rejected by the population."<sup>104</sup>

In *Bezirk Potsdam*, the *Bezirk* which experienced the third most disturbances during the uprising, the non-Marxist parties reported deep popular concern regarding *Rechtsunsicherheit*. The LDPD in Potsdam reported that the population desired trials of government officials, especially those involved in the judicial apparatus: "People

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<sup>101</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. LDPD *Kreis* association Artern Monthly report of July 1953 25 July 1953 to LDPD *Bezirk* association Halle.

<sup>102</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. LDPD *Kreis* association Eisleben supplement of 20 July 1953 to monthly report for July.

<sup>103</sup> ADL, LDPD #13822. Protocol of LDP *Kreis* executive meeting for Borna on 27 July 1953. ADL, LDP #25366 says population rejected the communal living units. LDPD *Kreis* association Köthen supplement to monthly report for July 1953; *ibid*, #25366. LDPD *Kreis* association Nebra monthly report of 1 October 1953 to the LDPD *Bezirk* association Halle.

<sup>104</sup> ADL, LDPD #25366. LDPD *Kreis* association Eisleben supplement to the monthly report for July 1953, 20 July 1953.

have repeatedly expressed the hope that those in [...] middle and lower administrations (especially the justice administration) will be held accountable for their conduct."<sup>105</sup> The CDU echoed these sentiments: "The number one demand, expressed over and over, is the introduction of *Rechtssicherheit* in the Republic."<sup>106</sup>

There was a similar reaction in *Bezirk* Potsdam to the founding of *Haus- und Hofgemeinschaften*. In *Kreis* Gransee, at the founding of the communal living units, people stated: "When we no longer have to fear that we will be picked up, and when we are allowed to speak, then we'll go along with everything."<sup>107</sup>

The CDU in *Bezirk* Magdeburg, which had experienced the most disturbances in the GDR during the uprising, did not report *Rechtsunsicherheit* as the most pressing issue, but rather the lack of coal.<sup>108</sup> *Rechtsunsicherheit* still played a role in the *Bezirk*, however. In *Gemeinde* Vogelberg, there was "great unrest" on the LPG because of a rumour that the SED had compiled a list of 15 farmers who were to be sent to prison. That the farmers immediately believed the rumour

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<sup>105</sup> ADL, LDPD #23534. 13 June 1953 LDPD situation report on New Course from to leadership of the LDPD.

<sup>106</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 18 July 1953 report on meeting between functionaries of *Bezirk* Potsdam and the CDU general secretary.

<sup>107</sup> ADL, LDPD #23534. 19 June 1953 situation report from the LDPD *Bezirk* association Potsdam to the LDPD in Berlin.

<sup>108</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Summary from situation reports of the *Bezirk* associations taken between 17 June and 17 July 1953.

demonstrates the pervasiveness of lawlessness.<sup>109</sup> The communal living units in Magdeburg were also rejected as "centres of spying."<sup>110</sup>

In *Bezirk* Dresden, the centres of greatest unrest, Niesky and Görlitz, continued to show their concern for *Rechtssicherheit* in the aftermath of the uprising. In Görlitz, during a talk by MfS members to the workers of the Lowa plant, one of the workers stood up and asked why the MfS felt it had to keep files on GDR citizens. The MfS officers denied the practice, after which the workers produced some of these MfS files which had been taken during the storming of the MfS building on 17 June. The workers then threw them on the floor and burned them. The workers also produced what they believed to be a torture device which had been taken from the building, and destroyed it with a welding torch.<sup>111</sup> The CDU in Niesky reported that the population was very critical of the MfS.<sup>112</sup>

In *Bezirk* Frankfurt/Oder, the CDU reported that MfS measures were worse than those of the Gestapo, and demanded changes to its practices. These members wanted guarantees of

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<sup>109</sup> BA-P, DO 1 2/4, p. 80. 5 January 1954 letter from Maron to Ulbricht.

<sup>110</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1268. 17 June 1953 report from CDU *Kreis* association Magdeburg to the CDU leadership.

<sup>111</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Report of *Bezirk* association Dresden conference of 29 June 1953. *Kreis* association of Görlitz reporting.

<sup>112</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Report of *Bezirk* Dresden conference of 29 June 1953. *Kreis* association Niesky reporting.

legal security in the constitution.<sup>113</sup> The CDU in Frankfurt/Oder concluded that MfS practices contributed to popular opposition, and estimated that the SED was backed by only 8-10% of the population.<sup>114</sup>

The population in *Bezirke* which witnessed limited or no activity on 17 June also expressed concern regarding *Rechtsunsicherheit* in the aftermath of the uprising. On 16 July 1953, the CDU *Bezirk* association for Suhl recommended a relaxation of the application of the "law for the protection of the people's economy," saying that the population was agitated by the harsh sentences. This CDU group even brought into question whether the infamous Article 6 of the constitution was being applied properly. To improve the judicial system, the CDU in Suhl recommended that Communist ideology in the judiciary be tempered: "It is especially important to implement a unified administration of justice in the Republic. The administration of justice should closely follow laws, and avoid expanding the application of laws according to a certain ideology [...]"<sup>115</sup>

LDPD situation reports from Schwerin taken between May and October 1953 reveal that the population was still alarmed by the abuse of German women by Russian forces after the war. These reports also concluded that although there were no demonstrations in the region on 17 June, "there was

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<sup>113</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1300. July 1953 report from CDU *Bezirk* association Frankfurt/Oder to the CDU leadership.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> ACDP, VII-011-3026. 16 July 1953 memorandum from CDU *Bezirk* association Suhl to the CDU leadership.

still plenty of dissatisfaction."<sup>116</sup> The LDPD also noted that past suppression continued to have a negative effect on the population, reporting that people did not "speak openly and freely."<sup>117</sup> Another LDPD member warned of "great unrest" in the population because the police did not always provide a reason for arrest within 24 hours, as required by the constitution.<sup>118</sup>

The CDU in *Bezirk Gera* also brought up issues of *Rechtssicherheit* in their conversation with Götting. The CDU here was concerned for CDU members that were sentenced during the Erfurt trials. In *Kreis Zeulenroda*, the population complained of public prosecutor Schletta's remark that it was a pleasure for him to sentence a capitalist to 20 years in prison.<sup>119</sup> The LDPD *Kreis* association for *Gera-Stadt* went so far as to adopt a resolution stating: "The arresting practices of public prosecutors and the courts are untenable. The respect for personal freedom is often frighteningly low."<sup>120</sup>

In the city of Jena, *Bezirk Gera*, which had experienced widespread disturbances on 17 June,

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<sup>116</sup> ADL, LDPD #31926. Reports from May - October from the LDPD *Bezirk* association *Schwerin* on party work.

<sup>117</sup> ADL, LDPD #13822. Protocol of sitting of LDPD *Kreis* association of *Borna* on 14 September 1953.

<sup>118</sup> ADL, LDPD #13822. Protocol of LDPD *Kreis* executive *Borna* sitting on 13 July 1953.

<sup>119</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 8 July 1953 report on the meeting between the CDU functionaries for *Bezirk Gera* and the general secretary of the CDU.

<sup>120</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0370/I. Special information report Nr.3/53 of Ostbüro of the FDP of 15 December 1953 entitled: "Die Liquidierung des Neuen Kurses."

*Rechtsunsicherheit* was an issue following the uprising. At a meeting between Johannes Becher and members of the Jena intelligentsia on 9 July 1953, at which approximately 80 people attended, the audience sharply criticized the conduct of the MfS. Professor Knöll, a winner of the GDR's national prize, and Professor Hämel, rector of the Friedrich Schiller University, supported the public's stance by emphasizing that the judicial system and the *Volkspolizei* were to protect the people, and were not to be used as an instrument of the power apparatus. They received enormous applause for their comments. Hämel provided insight into the situation in the GDR when he stated: "It is unacceptable that every time a black car stops in front of the house in the evening, you have to grab your day bag."<sup>121</sup>

In *Kreis Freital, Bezirk Leipzig*, the population demanded a "true" press and the dissolution of the MfS and *Volkspolizei* in barracks.<sup>122</sup> This fear was echoed at a meeting of the *Kreis* executive Borna on 1 July 1953 where one LDPD member commenting on 17 June stated: "Every citizen was frightened and didn't dare express his true opinion. He did not want to run the risk of holding the wrong political opinion."<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps the most striking feature of the reports of the

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<sup>121</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 14 July 1953 report on talk between Johannes Becher and members of the Jena intelligentsia on 9 July 1953; ACDP, VII-011-1300. 25 July 1953 from CDU *Kreis* association Jena-Stadt to CDU leadership.

<sup>122</sup> ACDP, VII-011-1300. July 1953 report from CDU *Bezirk* association Dresden, *Kreis* association Freital, to CDU leadership.

<sup>123</sup> ADL, LDP #15848. Minutes of 1 July 1953 Borna *Kreis* association meeting.

non-Marxist parties in the aftermath of the uprising is the absence of mention about the material situation of the population. Only the CDU in Magdeburg specifically commented on the lack of coal as a source of unrest.<sup>124</sup> In contrast, the *Bezirke* Potsdam, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Schwerin, Gera, Rostock, Halle, Cottbus, Leipzig, Frankfurt/Oder, Suhl and Dresden all reported concern regarding *Rechtsunsicherheit*. In Halle and Potsdam, where the second and third most disturbances had taken place, *Rechtssicherheit* was clearly at the forefront of people's concerns. The importance of *Rechtssicherheit* was also emphasized at a conference of CDU *Kreis* leaders in the GDR in the summer of 1953. The *Kreis* leaders reported that the population rejected the lies in the SED press, was displeased with the conduct of those in administration positions, was displeased with the demarcation zone, desired an improved agricultural situation, and desired freer access to West Berlin. However, the main concern in the population was the "strengthening of *Rechtssicherheit* in the Republic." The CDU *Kreis* leaders summarized: "People demand over and over that every person arrested must be informed as to the reason for the arrest. His next of kin must also be informed as to the reason for the arrest."<sup>125</sup> The CDU *Kreis* leaders insisted that this issue be addressed as quickly as possible.

Popular concern with *Rechtssicherheit* can only partially be dismissed as a result of the arrests which took place throughout the GDR in the aftermath of the uprising.

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<sup>124</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. Summary of situation reports of the CDU *Bezirk* associations taken between 17 June and 17 July 1953.

<sup>125</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1743. 13 July 1953 report on meetings of the *Kreis* secretaries in the previous two weeks.

In *Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt*, 5 of 7 *Kreise* emphasized restoring *Rechtssicherheit*, although only 5 people had been arrested by 30 June.<sup>126</sup> In *Suhl*, where *Rechtsunsicherheit* preoccupied the population, only one person had been arrested by 30 June.<sup>127</sup> In *Halle*, the arrests of 712 people in connection with the uprising (137 were immediately released) likely contributed to the emphasis on *Rechtssicherheit*, but in *Potsdam*, where there was clear emphasis on the need for legal security, there had been only 230 arrested, of which 27 were immediately released.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, sentencings in the GDR in the months following the uprising were mild.<sup>129</sup> Popular emphasis on *Rechtssicherheit* which was reflected in the reports of the non-Marxist parties was a reaction to systematic repression over an extended period of time, not a reaction to a recent phenomenon.

### 1.5 - The Eisenberg Circle

The only known organized resistance group between 1953 and 1955 is the Eisenberg Circle. The motives of these resisters reflected those concerns of the population made evident in the reports of the non-Marxist parties. The Eisenberg Circle began in September/October 1953 as a loose

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<sup>126</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 8. 2 July 1953 report on those arrested in connection with the "fascist putsch," by Weidlich, head of the investigation branch in the *Volkspolizei*.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> See section 2.1 below.

collection of five or six high school students from Eisenberg who were reacting to the expulsion of other students for being members of the *Junge Gemeinde* and the general "Stalinization" of the school curriculum.<sup>130</sup> One of the founders recalled that SED repression in general, not solely against the *Junge Gemeinde*, contributed to deep fear in the population.<sup>131</sup>

The founding members of the Eisenberg Circle were Thomas Ammer, Johann Frömel, Günter Schwarz, Reinhard Spalke, and Ludwig and Wilhelm Ziehr.<sup>132</sup> Initially, the group was unsure of a course of action and spent the first few months discussing various options. The group's name was a primary issue. The group had considered naming itself the Stauffenberg Circle in recognition of the officer who had attempted to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944. The name was rejected, however, for fear that, if arrested, GDR authorities would charge members of the group with planning assassinations. The group had no firm political agenda, although all members desired free elections and the return of a state based on the rule of law.<sup>133</sup>

Within a few months of its founding, the Eisenberg Circle had begun its first actions against the regime. Activities of the Eisenberg Circle were modest in its initial years. They consisted of tearing down SED propaganda and symbols and distributing anti-Communist material. The

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<sup>130</sup> Patrik von zur Mühlen, "Widerstand in einer thüringischen Kleinstadt 1953 bis 1958. Der "Eisenberger Kreis," in Poppe/Eckert/Kowalczyk (eds.), p. 165.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-165.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

Eisenberg Circle contacted West Berlin anti-Communist organizations like the KgU and the *Ostbüro* of the SPD to procure material. At the end of 1955, the group undertook its first major action. Members of the group broke into the local museum to procure arms. The raid was unsuccessful as the museum had only old guns, for which ammunition was not available.<sup>134</sup> Shortly after that action, the group took up contact with a group of oppositional students from Eisenberg studying at the University of Jena. These students were Peter Herrmann, Rudolf Rabold, Ludwig Götz, and Roland Peter. To reduce risk of arrest, the two groups maintained their independence. Members of one group were not necessarily known by the other group. The groups had loose organizational structures; they did not hold elections or membership meetings. On 21 January 1956 the Eisenberg Circle undertook its first major action by burning down a shooting range of the East German army near Eisenberg.<sup>135</sup> The Eisenberg Circle continued its resistance work until February 1958 when the MfS began arrests of the group's members. One of the founders attributed the group's longevity to the basic support in the population for its endeavours.<sup>136</sup>

## **2 - State reaction to the uprising.**

Changes to the state apparatus in the aftermath of the uprising reveal on the one hand, SED concern for the effect of its repression apparatus, and on the other hand, a desire

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 168-169.

to expand this apparatus. This concern for the negative effect on the population provides further evidence of the important role that repression had played in popular resistance to Communism in East Germany.

### 2.1 - The judicial apparatus.

When Hilde Benjamin took office as Minister of Justice on 16 July, she signalled that she would run a strict judicial system. Benjamin criticized the previous Justice Minister, Max Fechner, for his "dangerous" ideas that the uprising was simply a strike, not a fascist putsch: "In judicial practice since 17 June, there have been tendencies towards a new criminal law."<sup>137</sup> She warned that the "provocateurs of 17 June" would not be seen through these "rose coloured glasses."

Benjamin's stance ran counter to the general trend in the Central Committee towards a milder system of justice. A resolution of the Central Committee issued after the uprising entitled "Der Neue Kurs und die Erneuerung der Partei" demonstrates that the Central Committee desired an improved relationship between the judicial system and the population: "It is important to create a GDR whose prosperity, social justice, legal security, national traits, and atmosphere of freedom will meet with the approval of all honest Germans."<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, between June and October

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<sup>137</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0048 f. Report entitled: "Urteile der Bezirksgerichte und der sowjetischen Standgerichte gegen Teilnehmer am Juni Aufstand 1953."

<sup>138</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, IV 2/4/391, p. 221. Resolution of the Central Committee of the SED.

1953, the SED released 23,853 prisoners in the GDR.<sup>139</sup> The SED also wanted to be careful not to add to the hostility of the population through severe judicial measures against the demonstrators of 17 June. Of the 13,000 people arrested for their part in the demonstrations, the vast majority were released shortly after their arrest. Roughly 1,600 were sentenced.<sup>140</sup> In September 1953, the *Politbüro*, still concerned about the hostility in the population, ordered the *Oberstes Gericht* to issue milder sentences against economic criminals.<sup>141</sup> Even Hilde Benjamin acknowledged that some sentences were too harsh, and that these sentences did little to strengthen trust in legal security in the GDR.<sup>142</sup>

Relaxation in the judicial field did not meet with universal approval of the MfS nor the *Volkspolizei*. During a conference with Benjamin in September 1953, an MfS representative complained that the *Bezirk Magdeburg* court had reviewed 4,027 cases and reversed decisions in 2,295 cases.<sup>143</sup> The representative complained: "In so doing, not only those who committed small economic crimes are amnestied, but reactionaries and enemies of the GDR are also let out of prison [...] Public prosecutors and the courts [...] consider the GDR government's "New Course" an excuse to be soft on criminals. Many cases illustrate that since the events of 17 June, the judicial apparatus has gone to

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<sup>139</sup> Werkentin, p. 89.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>143</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1909, p. 86. Draft for the conference with Benjamin on 12 September 1953.

the opposite extreme."<sup>144</sup>

The head of the investigative unit of the Volkspolizei was also concerned with the trend in judicial practice in the aftermath of the uprising. He complained of three tendencies in recent sentences : 1) unjustifiably mild sentences against provocateurs and ring leaders of 17 June, 2) unjustified release of other sentenced criminals, and 3) inappropriate judicial practice in the application of the "law for the protection of the people's economy." To support his contention, he cited the example of a demonstrator in Magdeburg who had stormed the police station and threatened the police officers there with a knife, but who was not sentenced.<sup>145</sup>

## 2.2 - The conduct of the MfS in the aftermath of the uprising.

The most important result of the disturbances in the GDR in the summer of 1953 was the expansion of the SED's instruments of control. At the 15th Plenum of the SED, held between 24 and 26 July, the SED called for a more complete system of monitoring and controlling the population. The importance of the 15th Plenum in the history of the GDR has recently received attention in Armin Mitter, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, and Stefan Wolle's *Der Tag X: Der 17. Juni 1953*. The authors argue that the crisis of 1953 led to the "internal founding of the state" (*Innere Staatsgründung*) in

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> BA-P, DO 1 11/758, p. 9. 20 July 1953 report of the Investigative Unit of the Volkspolizei signed by the head of the unit Weidlich, to the SKK, ZK, and department responsible for penal institutions.

order to prevent future disturbances which would require Soviet assistance and further undermine the legitimacy of the SED. Some measures that the SED adopted included the creation of interior troops such as factory militias (*Kampfgruppen*) and a "rapid reaction" motorized police unit with over 4,000 men.<sup>146</sup>

The MfS also underwent significant changes as a result of the "internal founding of the state." At the 15th Plenum, the Minister for State Security, Wilhelm Zaisser, and the editor of *Neues Deutschland* were expelled from the SED for having challenged the leadership of the party. The MfS was then dissolved as an independent ministry, and transferred to the Ministry of the Interior as a Secretariat for State Security (*Staatssekretariat für Staatssicherheit* (SfS)).

As part of the expanded control apparatus, the SfS vastly expanded its information gathering apparatus on the GDR population. In August 1953, Wollweber issued Order 279/53 which created information groups within the SfS.<sup>147</sup> An MfS report outlined the information groups as follows: "The information group in the *Bezirk* administration [of the SfS - GB] examines and evaluates the incoming reports on a daily basis. On the basis of these reports, a situation report is to be produced. The situation report is to be forwarded to the head of the *Bezirk* administration, to the information group in the [SfS headquarters-GB] and to the first secretary of the SED *Bezirk* leadership. From the reports of the information groups in the *Bezirk* administrations, the information group in the [SfS headquarters -GB] produces a

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<sup>146</sup> Diedrich, p. 184.

<sup>147</sup> BStU, ZA, *Allgemeine Sachablage* (hereafter AS), 43/58, Vol. 9, p. 384. Instructions by head of Information branch Tilch.

situation report on the GDR for the head of the SfS, for the *Politbüro*, and for the government."<sup>148</sup>

These information groups collected and evaluated reports of informants from the general population. The SfS was careful not to repeat mistakes of the past, when reports from party members tended to present an inaccurate picture of the mood of the population. In instructions outlining the procedure for collecting information, Heinz Tilch, the head of the new information service (*Informationsdienst*) noted that unofficial informants from the general population should be used to collect information on the mood of the population, rather than "official sources" such as factory party chairmen, because "real enemies do not usually show their true colours to functionaries."<sup>149</sup> In outlining the advantages of informal sources, Tilch wrote: "An informant who is a mechanic in a factory, for example, will be able to bring us worthwhile information on the mood of workers because he has access to various departments[...] Because nobody will know that he has contact to the SfS, workers will talk to him exactly how they talk to other colleagues who don't have any particular function."<sup>150</sup> In warning against the use of reports from factory party chairmen, Tilch revealed the popular distrust of the Party by stating that workers did not talk, or only rarely talked, to party functionaries.<sup>151</sup> The SfS still used official sources in assessing the mood of the population, but these were second

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<sup>148</sup> Quoted in Mitter/Wolle, p. 146.

<sup>149</sup> BStU, ZA, A/S 43/58, Vol. 9, p. 388. Instructions by Tilch.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

in importance to unofficial informants' reports. Summary reports on the overall situation in the GDR were compiled twice weekly, and were divided into five sections: 1. The situation in industry and transportation, 2. the supply situation, 3. the agricultural situation, 4. noteworthy occurrences, 5. evaluation of the situation.

The most important factor in improved monitoring of the GDR's population was a reliable informant network. In the *Politbüro* resolution of 9 September 1953, the *Politbüro* had emphasized that the Sfs information net was exceptionally weak, and called for an increased and more reliable informant net.<sup>152</sup> The Secretary for State Security was aware of the deficiencies in the informant net. Four days before the *Politbüro* resolution, Wollweber had issued Directive 30/53 which called for a substantially increased informant net and better qualified informants.<sup>153</sup> In Directive 30/53, Wollweber complained: "Apart from the poor quality of the information network, the network does not have sufficient numbers, and is therefore incapable of uncovering enemies in all sections of GDR society [...]"<sup>154</sup> Unlike Directive 21/52 which emphasized obtaining informants who could penetrate western organizations, this directive focused on widening the informant net in important economic and administrative

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<sup>152</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/62. Resolution of the *Politbüro* from 23 September 1953, pp. 2-3.

<sup>153</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 2920/53, #100874. Directive 30/53 from Mielke. The Party complained: "The MfS information net is badly organized, both with regards to the people and to their deployment and allocation"; SAPMO-BA, ZPA, DY30 IV 2/12/101. Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Central Committee, p. 8.

<sup>154</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 2920/53, #100874. Directive 30/53 from Mielke.

sites in the GDR.

To increase the informant base, however, the Sfs realized that it would have to overcome popular rejection of this instrument of control. It should be remembered that during the uprising of 17 June, demonstrators attacked Mfs installations in Bitterfeld, Görlitz, Niesky, Jena, Merseburg, and Halle.<sup>155</sup> It is likely that the number of Mfs installations attacked would have been greater had the Mfs had a larger system of internal surveillance. To overcome the basic distrust, the Sfs embarked on a venture most peculiar for a Communist secret service; it undertook a public relations campaign. The campaign began in November 1953 when Wollweber stressed to his subordinates the need for greater popular involvement in information gathering, suggesting that Sfs officers speak in factories and other sites.<sup>156</sup> The speech launched a series of unprecedented appearances by Wollweber himself: In November, he talked to Wismut workers. In December, he spoke at an SED public meeting in the mechanized weaving mill in Zittau. In January 1954, he spoke in a Berlin brake factory, in February at a steel sheet plant in Berlin-Adlershof and in the Weimar administration school, in April at a factory rally in Ludwigsfelde, in August in H.F. Werk Köpenick and Leuna Werk

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<sup>155</sup> SAPMO-BA, ZPA, JIV 2/202/14. "Über die Lage am 17.6.53 in Gross-Berlin und der DDR"; BA-P, DO 1 11/305, pp. 245-247. 1 July 1953 report from *Bezirk Halle* to *Volkspolizei*; BA-P, DO 1 11/305, p. 67. 29 June 1953 report from *Bezirk Dresden* to *Volkspolizei*; BA-P, DO 1 11/45, p.3. Extracts from the situation reports of the *Bezirk* police for the period 0:00 to 17:00 on 17 June 1953 by the head of operations staff Weidhase.

<sup>156</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 2613, p. 296. Transcript of Wollweber's speech at the *Parteiaktiv* meeting in the Sfs on 2 November 1953.

Walter Ulbricht, in September in the House of German-Soviet Friendship, Köpenick, in December in Mansfeld Combine, and in March 55 at a rally in Kröllwitz.<sup>157</sup> During these appearances, which continued into 1956, Wollweber emphasized the important role of the Sfs in fighting western anti-Communist organizations like the SPD *Ostbüro*, the Kgu, and the UfJ. By stressing the important work of the Sfs, Wollweber hoped to gain informants for the Sfs who would report on any "enemy" activity in the GDR. During his speech to the administration school in Weimar, Wollweber stated that the best manner to defend against the enemy was the "personal vigilance" of each citizen of the GDR.<sup>158</sup>

As part of the campaign to gain public confidence, the Sfs increased its propaganda activities. In July 1954, the Sfs created a new section in its apparatus, the "Agitation" branch, headed by General Bormann. The Sfs outlined the duties of the "Agitation" branch as the systematic informing of the GDR population on the activity of the Sfs so that the "vigilance of all workers and [...] the willingness to work for the instruments of state security will be increased."<sup>159</sup> The "Agitation" branch organized speeches in factories, administrations, and on radio; published brochures; mounted exhibits; and produced documentary films which emphasized the important duties of the Sfs.<sup>160</sup> As Wollweber stated during an Sfs conference in August 1954: "The political

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<sup>157</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 2613, pp. 143, 153, 156, 161, 185, 208, 222, 250, 257, 260.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>159</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1924, p. 107. 10 July 1954 proposal for the creation of the department "Agitation of the Sfs," signed by General Bormann.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

importance of our work must be continually emphasized."<sup>161</sup> The "Agitation" branch used all means at its disposal to justify the existence of the Sfs to the public. In its efforts to stress the need for the Sfs in the face of an enemy like the Gehlen Organization, the "Agitation" branch prepared arrests of mock Gehlen agents, who were really Sfs agents who had been exposed and were therefore no longer of use to the Sfs. The "Agitation" branch used these exposed agents to conduct staged arrests and trials of "imperialist agents."<sup>162</sup> Operation *Pfeil* against the Gehlen Organization was accompanied by a carefully coordinated propaganda plan.<sup>163</sup> The Sfs also took special measures for the fifth anniversary of the agency, planning for Sfs representatives to be in large factories during the week of 1 to 6 February 1955 in order to discuss the "political importance" of the Sfs, and showing a documentary film on the Sfs in movie theatres the following week.<sup>164</sup>

To increase popular loyalty to the Sfs, the Sfs addressed a leading issue behind resistance. The Sfs took careful measures to reduce wrongful arrests and to improve treatment of its prisoners, aware that these occurrences had tarnished the Sfs' image. In August 1953, a member of the Department of Registration and Statistics in the Sfs

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<sup>161</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 172. Remark on the conference which took place at 10:00 am on 13 August 1954.

<sup>162</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1909 VIII/1, p. 63. Undated plan for propaganda measures to accompany "Aktion Pfeil."

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1909 VIII/1, p. 55. 4 January 1955 proposal resulting from the meeting of the *Kollegium* committee responsible for events in honour of the 5th anniversary of state security on 8 February 1955.

commented: "In the past, thousands of people were examined in the investigation departments. But at the same time, the former MfS did not know how to find the right people. Arrests were handled thoughtlessly."<sup>165</sup> Wollweber himself warned his subordinates: "If anyone treats a prisoner unlawfully to reach his goal more easily, he will be punished. If anyone puts a person in prison only to show results, he will be punished."<sup>166</sup> Mielke supported Wollweber's position by stating that a "trusting relationship" had to be established between the Sfs and the working class.<sup>167</sup>

During the Sfs campaign in the fall of 1953 to expose enemy agents in the GDR, Wollweber warned that *only* agents should be fearful of arrest in the GDR: "There should be no shock effect for the population. People should not feel that a wave of arrests is moving through the GDR, or that we are at the beginning of such a wave [...] The population must believe that the instruments of state security aim for, and hit, the right targets. The population must believe this, *then they will support us.*"<sup>168</sup> Wollweber even went so far as to use the radio to allay people's fears. During one broadcast, Wollweber stated: "There is no wave of arrests. There are carefully targeted strikes against important sites

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<sup>165</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 225. Protocol of the conference between the heads of the *Bezirk* administrations and the department heads on 21 August 1953.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>168</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 2613, p. 302. Transcript of Wollweber's speech at the *Parteiaktiv* meeting in the Sfs on 2 November 1953. Italics added.

of enemy activity."<sup>169</sup> The following year, the Sfs still considered the "fight against wrongful arrests" one of its main duties because "wrongful arrests create enemies."<sup>170</sup> It appears that the Sfs did act more cautiously following the uprising. In April 1954, the Sfs reported that it had arrested fewer people than during the same period the previous year.<sup>171</sup>

These attempts to soften the image of the Sfs were not always successful. During the May Day parade of 1955 in Potsdam, one spectator swore at the Sfs troops as they paraded by, and had to be restrained from breaking through the barriers to attack them. A housewife from Suhl expressed similar sentiments during the May Day parade there, saying "here come the dangerous ones" when the Sfs officers paraded past.<sup>172</sup>

Overall, however, it is difficult to determine if the Sfs campaign to increase public support was successful. The numbers of secret informants working for the Sfs had increased by 1955,<sup>173</sup> but there appear to have been many who were simply on the rolls but not active. In November 1954,

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<sup>169</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 2612, p. 105. Undated remark on Wollweber's radio address (1953).

<sup>170</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 169. Note on the conference held on 13 August 1954 at 10:00 am.

<sup>171</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 183. Remark on the conference between the heads of the *Bezirk* administrations and the department heads on 22 April 1954.

<sup>172</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58, vol. 3. p. 21, 29. 8 May 1955 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>173</sup> Wollweber stated that the number of secret coworkers had increased to number "several divisions" by 1955. BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 72. Transcript of Wollweber's speech at the Sfs conference on 5 August 1955.

50% of the informants working for *Bezirk* Potsdam had no contact to the Sfs.<sup>174</sup> The following year, Wollweber complained that too many informants were SED members and that there were many informants who were inactive. Wollweber referred to these informants as "ballast."<sup>175</sup> Robert Gellately's arguments regarding the Gestapo should also be taken into account here. Gellately argues that public support for the Gestapo was visible by the fact that the Gestapo could operate with a small apparatus. Spontaneous denunciations from the public eliminated the need to recruit informants.<sup>176</sup> Sfs need for a large number of secret coworkers suggests that GDR citizens did not spontaneously denounce others to the Sfs.

### 2.3 - The Sfs and the *Ostbüro*

The Sfs campaign against the SPD *Ostbüro* in the aftermath of the uprising provides evidence of the importance of political motive behind the uprising. After the uprising, Wollweber commented that there had been "strong social democratic organizations in factories of the GDR."<sup>177</sup> Due largely to the prevalence of demands for the SPD during the uprising, Wollweber launched a campaign against

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<sup>174</sup> BStU, ZA, 1921, p. 156. Disposition on conference of 2 November 1954.

<sup>175</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 38. Protocol from the Sfs conference on 5 August 1955.

<sup>176</sup> Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, passim.

<sup>177</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 208. Protocol of the Sfs conference between the heads of the *Bezirk* administrations and the department heads on 21 August 1953.

the *Ostbüro*. In early 1954, Wollweber reprimanded the Sfs leadership in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* for not having accorded the *Ostbüro* the necessary attention.<sup>178</sup> The campaign against the *Ostbüro* was not simply a witchhunt for convenient scapegoats,<sup>179</sup> but an attempt to eliminate what the SED believed was a substantial negative influence on the population of the GDR. In August 1953, during a meeting between Wollweber and the heads of all Sfs *Bezirk* administrations, certain Sfs officers expressed confusion as to the manner in which they should operate. They asked Wollweber whether the Sfs should work according to site - a penetration of specific installations in order to monitor for "enemy" activity - or whether it should work according to departmental lines (*Linien*), which would involve a more general investigation to determine which sites were targeted by western organizations for disruption, either through sabotage or propaganda activity. Wollweber felt that the Mfs should work offensively: "The question regarding our work in factories, which has been raised here, must be cleared up: Do we work according to specific *Linien* or do we work according to sites? My opinion is that Departments IV and V should concentrate on centres outside the GDR and expose matters there. In the future, the main struggle in factories will be played out between us and representatives of the

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<sup>178</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 336/54, #100895. Directive 10/54 of 4 February 1954, Wollweber to head of the Sfs in *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder*.

<sup>179</sup> Stefan Wolle, " 'Agenten, Saboteure, Verräter...' Die Kampagne der SED-Führung gegen den 'Sozialdemokratismus'," in Kowalczyk/Mitter/Wolle (eds.), pp. 243-277. Wolle describes the campaign as a witchhunt.

Ostbüro."<sup>180</sup> Wollweber clearly believed that there was considerable interest among East German workers in the SPD, and by extension the alternative political system it represented.

### **3 - The lingering hope for a new political system.**

In the years following the uprising, the Sfs continued to note the population's desire for an alternative political system. Reports on the population collected by the Sfs provide evidence that the population still hoped for the removal of the political system in East Germany into the fall of 1955. There were three events during this period at which this desire was visible: the February 1954 foreign ministers' conference in Berlin, the October 1954 elections in the GDR, and the July 1955 Geneva Conference.

#### **3.1 - The Berlin foreign ministers' conference, 1954**

In February 1954, the foreign ministers of the war-time Allies met in Berlin to discuss the possibility of German reunification. There was keen interest throughout the GDR in the outcome of the Berlin foreign ministers' conference, because the end of the division of Germany, and the riddance of the SED political system were at stake. Thus, the refusal of the SED to print the speeches of the western foreign ministers was a source of hostility to the SED. At a sitting of the political committee of the LDPD central executive, Sasse commented that people continually questioned her as to

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<sup>180</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 1921, p. 210. Protocol of the Sfs conference between the heads of the *Bezirk* administrations and the departments heads on 21 August 1953.

why only Molotov's comments were published in the press, and not those of the other foreign ministers. Another LDPD member at the meeting added that people in his *Bezirk* fully supported British foreign minister Anthony Eden's plan for Germany because it would allow free elections. The LDPD member countered these arguments by stating that the elections proposed by Eden were not free, but "Hitler style elections."<sup>181</sup> CDU reports also reveal that East Germans repeatedly rejected the method of elections like those held in the GDR in 1950 for eventual all German elections.<sup>182</sup>

The result of free elections was clear to workers at the "Torpedo" factory in Bernau. In February 1954, in anticipation of a successful conclusion of the Berlin foreign ministers' conference, workers at the factory began discussing the possibility of a reinstatement of the SPD.<sup>183</sup> Workers at the VEB-Stahlblechbau Berlin Adlershof also hoped that the foreign ministers' conference would bring the end of the Communist system in East Germany. They repeatedly asked why Molotov's speeches were printed in the GDR's

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<sup>181</sup> ADL, LDPD #L2-29. Protocol of extraordinary sitting of the political committee of the Central Executive of the LDPD on 9 February 1954.

<sup>182</sup> ACDP, III-045-183/7 Undated report from CDU *Bezirk* Gera to the CDU leadership. Reports before the conference reveal popular optimism that a solution to the German question would be found. The SPD *Ostbüro* also reported the pessimism after the conference; AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0361/2. Summary of reports from February 1954 on Berlin conference; situation report from Dessau of 20 February 1954; situation report from Suhl of 6 February 1954.

<sup>183</sup> AdsD, SPD-PV-Ostbüro 0330 Report from *Neuer Tag* 6.2.54

newspapers, but not the speeches of Dulles and Eden.<sup>184</sup> According to the Sfs, only 20% of the workers in the plant supported the GDR's "democratic order."<sup>185</sup> The situation in this plant was so tense that many members of the SED refused to let it be known that they were Party members.<sup>186</sup>

These incidents do not allow for a comprehensive conclusion on popular views of the conference. Because the Sfs information gathering apparatus had been established only five months earlier, there are few reports on the population, and no comprehensive Sfs analyses. Nevertheless, the similarities between Sfs, CDU, and LDPD findings is striking. Sfs information gathering had improved considerably by the October elections.

### 3.2 - The October 1954 elections in the GDR.

The information department within the Sfs noted that the population continued to reject the SED manner of conducting elections because it removed from the population the possibility of deciding its political future. In the fall of 1954, both prior to and after the elections, the Sfs information department reported popular contempt for the conduct of the elections. A mechanic in VEB Böhlen/Leipzig complained: "Our elections of 17 October have nothing to do with democracy."<sup>187</sup> Another worker summed up the elections as

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<sup>184</sup> BStU, ZA, SdM 2613, p. 229. Background report for Wollweber on the situation in VEB Stahlblechbau Berlin Adlershof for his talk on 4 February 1954.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>187</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58, Vol. 11, p. 218. 4 October 1954 Informationsdienst report.

the following: "The results are already determined, whether we vote against or for, or even go to vote at all. The results of the election were already determined at the 4th Party Congress of the SED."<sup>188</sup> One worker from Zschopau lamented for the electoral practice of the Weimar era: "We should conduct elections like we did during the Weimar era. The SED wouldn't know what hit it."<sup>189</sup> In the months prior to the election in Dessau, the LDPD reported that a large part of the population repeatedly asked if the voting would be open or secret.<sup>190</sup>

Employees of the Sfs information department noted that rejection of the election was a general phenomenon in the GDR. Significant numbers of election posters were torn down in the period leading up to the election.<sup>191</sup> Sfs workers were also gravely worried about the increased attacks on party functionaries in the period leading up to the elections.<sup>192</sup> In *Bezirk Schwerin*, for example, a member of the SED and a *Kreis* FDJ secretary were beaten up. In Quedlinburg, three members of the National Front who had come to talk on the upcoming elections were beaten up.<sup>193</sup> East Germans also demonstrated their rejection of the upcoming elections by

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 324. 21 September 1954 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>190</sup> ADL, LDPD #25413. Protocol of the *Kreis* association Dessau meeting on 11 June 1954.

<sup>191</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1922/54, #100095. 12 October 1954 Information report on the situation in the GDR during the preparations for the elections.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

fleeing the GDR or applying to travel to the West during the election. The SfS information department was alarmed that on certain days, the number of people leaving the GDR "illegally" was 50% higher than in previous months.<sup>194</sup> There was also a drastic increase in the number of applications to travel to West Germany during the period around 17 October 1954. The SfS information department acknowledged that this increase was likely a result of people wanting to avoid the election.<sup>195</sup>

After the election, there continued to be strong criticism against the SED's electoral practice. In the words of one factory worker: "That wasn't even an election, but just a handing over of a piece of paper."<sup>196</sup> One SfS report summarized: "Relatively strong criticism of the conducting of the election, of the voting ballot, and the lack of pencils comes from all sections of the population."<sup>197</sup> These sentiments were echoed in another SfS summary report: "There are sections of the population in each societal group who do not understand why there was nowhere on the ballot to cross off yes or no, and why there were no pencils in the election booths. Enemy elements use this, in association with RIAS arguments, to portray to the population the elections as undemocratic."<sup>198</sup> The phrasing of these reports suggests that

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58, Vol. 11, p. 9. 26 October 1954 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 79. 19 October 1954 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 63. 20 October 1954 *Informationsdienst* report.

the lack of pencils in election booths was a calculated SED manoeuvre, and not just.

### 3.3 - Material shortages

In the first half of 1955, acute material shortages plagued the East German population. Basic foodstuffs such as sugar and fatty products were scarce, causing extensive line ups whenever the products were available. People also complained that the beer had been watered down.<sup>199</sup> In May in *Gemeinde Altruppin, Kreis Neurüppin*, 300 people awaited the delivery of butter. Police accompanied the shipment to ensure order. In *Ecknitz, Kreis Pasewalk*, the police had to be employed because 100 people were shouting about the lack of goods. In *Görlitz*, fights broke out in the local HO store during the selling of butter.<sup>200</sup> There were similar scenes in Brandenburg, Puttlitz, and Luckenwalde, where fights and other disturbances occurred because of the lack of butter.<sup>201</sup> There were also repeated popular complaints about the poor quality of the dark bread. During a visit by a West German delegation to the VEB RFT-Fernmeldewerk in Arnstadt, one female worker approached the delegation with her sandwich in hand and said: "Do you see this dark bread that we have to eat here?"<sup>202</sup> The worker's comments led to her removal from

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<sup>199</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol.2, p. 187. 25 March 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>200</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 3, p. 203. 31 May 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 220. 31 May 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>202</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 3, p. 38. 7 May 1955 Informationsdienst report.

her job. Upon hearing this news, roughly 100 other workers demanded that she be reinstated, threatening to strike if she did not receive her job back. On the following day, the workers struck from 7 until 10 am in protest of their colleague's removal, stopping once the arrested worker had been reinstated.<sup>203</sup>

Popular reaction to the shortages illustrate the extent to which the East German population had come to distrust the SED. Rumours abounded that the government was hoarding goods in preparation for an upcoming war.<sup>204</sup> In some instances, people pleaded for the truth on the situation: "Why aren't we told the truth? We don't believe that the present situation is the result of a bad harvest."<sup>205</sup> At a factory in Arnstadt, another worker stated:

It is a disgrace that there is no butter or sugar for sale, and then bad bread on top of that. Nobody should be too surprised that workers are so dissatisfied. We are always lied to. Nobody can tell us that these problems are the result of the previous harvest.<sup>206</sup>

In Karl-Marx-Stadt, the population was "furious" because GDR radio reported a completely successful harvest in the region, which the population knew not to be the case.<sup>207</sup>

Erich Mielke believed that this unrest in the

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 187. 25 March 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.; BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 149. 1 April 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>206</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 51. 19 April 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>207</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 59. 19 April 1955 Informationsdienst report.

population might erupt into attacks on the Sfs and the Volkspolizei during the May Day festivities of 1955. In plans for the securing of the May Day festivities in the GDR, the Sfs leadership instructed its subordinates to be wary of "enemies" who spread unrest among the population and encouraged people to either disrupt, or simply not take part, in May Day events.<sup>208</sup> Mielke also instructed his subordinates to be especially cautious in protecting Sfs buildings, KVP buildings, and sites of "the Friends" during the May Day festivities.<sup>209</sup> Clearly, the Sfs regarded attacks on installations of the repression apparatus as a possibility during the celebrations. It appears, therefore, that material dissatisfaction was a catalyst for unrest, but that SED repression continued to be a source of fundamental popular resistance.

As June 1955 approached, there was an increase in the number of threats in the population of a repetition of 17 June. Statements such as: "The second 17 June will be a lot worse than the first." And: "If it keeps on like this, a day like 17 June cannot be far off" were common in factories and workplaces of the GDR.<sup>210</sup> If an uprising were to take place, the SED was to be targeted. In VEB Glaswerk near Suhl, workers stated: "If another 17 June comes, all Comrades will

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<sup>208</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1054/55, #100946. 21 April 1955 Directive Nr. 11/55 from Mielke.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 189. 25 March 1955 Informationsdienst report; *ibid.*, p. 6. 29 April 1955 Informationsdienst report. There are also numerous references to the possible repetition of 17 June in *ibid.*, AS 43/58, Vol. 4/2, pp. 32-255.

hang."<sup>211</sup> On 17 June 1955 in *Gemeinde Oberndorf, Kreis Apolda*, a member of the SED stated: "I am waiting for another 17 June, and then I'm going to get going with a knife. I will cut up like pigs anything that belongs to the SED or anyone wearing a uniform."<sup>212</sup> Several strikes had, in fact, already taken place. In February 1955, 11 sites in the GDR went on strike. In March, four sites went on strike. The strikes were a result of the difficult material situation and problems specific to the plants.<sup>213</sup>

The Sfs took seriously the threats of another uprising. To secure the GDR on 17 June 1955, the Sfs adopted Operation *Bumerang*. Mielke instructed Main Departments I and XIII, and Department VII to ensure that their units would be prepared if needed suddenly, and that all arms and munition were in perfect working order.<sup>214</sup> In Halle, Leuna, Leipzig, Rostock, Greifswald, Magdeburg, Gera, Jena, Potsdam, Henningsdorf, and Brandenburg, the Sfs was to ensure that there were enough police forces nearby in case of unrest. Wollweber reminded his subordinates that gathering these forces together would have to be done discreetly.<sup>215</sup> Due to the agitated state of the population, Mielke wanted to avoid what had been a primary cause of unrest in the summer of

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<sup>211</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p. 189. 25 March 1955 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>212</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 2, p.105. 17 June 1955 *Informationsdienst* report.

<sup>213</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1499/55, #100104. 6 June 1955 report from Mielke to the heads of all *Bezirk* administrations.

<sup>214</sup> BStU, ZA, GVS 1500/55, #100104. Directive Nr. 14/55 from 8 June 1955 issued by Mielke.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

1953 - added repression. He wrote that all departments in the Sfs were to carefully follow the guidelines from the leadership, in order to ensure that "wrong or unwarranted measures" did not provoke "dissatisfaction or anger in the population."<sup>216</sup> Wollweber further instructed the Department PS, which was responsible for the protection of party functionaries, to increase protection of SED party members, SED buildings, and the homes of Party functionaries. More troops were added to protect these buildings, and increased security was to be furnished on the routes driven by party functionaries.<sup>217</sup> Wollweber also added troops to protect Sfs buildings, KVP and Volkspolizei buildings.<sup>218</sup> Sfs preparations reveal a fear of popular reprisal against the instruments of SED repression.

### 3.4 - The Geneva Conference

In July 1955, representatives of the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and the United States met in Geneva to discuss the German question. According to Sfs reports, the GDR population watched developments in Geneva with great interest, as it had the foreign ministers' conference of 1954 in Berlin. The beginning of the conference was marked in several regions of East Germany. In Jüterbog and Neukirchen, church bells pealed through town on 18 July to mark the beginning of the conference. In a factory near Leipzig, workers observed two minutes of silence in

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

recognition of the beginning of the conference.<sup>219</sup> Sfs reports on the population noted the keen interest in the Geneva conference: "On the overall opinion on the Geneva conference, it can be said that besides the four power conference in Berlin, rarely has a political event found such popular interest."<sup>220</sup> The Sfs remarked on the numerous discussions in factories prior to and during the conference, noting that because of the overwhelming interest in the Geneva conference, all other concerns of the population had faded into the background.<sup>221</sup> Another report summarized the situation as the following: "The strong interest in the Geneva conference is largely due to the hope for a rapid solution to the German problem. This is true for all sections of society. The difference is that progressive elements are interested in a democratic Germany, while reactionary and enemy elements desire unity along the western model."<sup>222</sup> Situation reports from the CDU echo the views of the Sfs reports on the strong interest in the Geneva conference because of its potential impact on the GDR. All available CDU *Bezirk* analyses noted popular desire for a successful conclusion of the Geneva Conference in order that free elections could take place.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58, Vol. 4/1, p. 54. 19 July 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>220</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/1, p. 200. 4 August 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>221</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/2, p. 71. 22 July 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>222</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/1, p. 205. 4 August 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>223</sup> ACDP, VII-013-1262. Undated report of CDU *Bezirk* association Erfurt to the CDU leadership; 19 July 1955

The SfS information department reported the great interest in the conference was due to the fact that East Germans saw in the conference the possibility of an end to the Communist system in the GDR. For this reason, the population consistently demanded that German unity take place on the basis of free all German elections. SfS situation reports are replete with quotations from people expressing their desire for free elections. One farmer in Dienststadt near Jena stated: "If free elections come, Adenauer doesn't have to worry because I -and many others - would vote for him."<sup>224</sup> A mechanic at a Machine Loan station in Eilenburg near Leipzig echoed these comments: "If free elections are carried out, the SED would get the least number of votes."<sup>225</sup> One worker in Magdeburg stated that free elections must be carried out, but that all parties should be allowed in the GDR. He was certain that the KPD and the SED would not receive the majority of votes.<sup>226</sup> One worker at a factory near Gera said: "They should just hold a referendum. Then they would see the true will of the

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report from the CDU *Bezirk* association Magdeburg to the CDU leadership; 18 July 1955 report from CDU *Kreis* association Burg to the CDU leadership; 25 July 1955 report from CDU *Bezirk* association Karl-Marx-Stadt to the CDU leadership; political information report 19/55 of 14 November 1955; 30 November 1955 report from the CDU *Bezirk* Dresden association to the CDU leadership.

<sup>224</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/2, p. 179. 12 July 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 255. 8 July 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>226</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/1, p. 71. 19 August 1955 Informationsdienst report; *ibid.*, p. 87. 16 August 1955 Informationsdienst report.

people."<sup>227</sup> This desire, Sfs employees in the information department acknowledged, was only partly a result of the dissatisfaction with the economic situation and factory shortages.<sup>228</sup> Near Frankfurt/Oder, five "working farmers" stated that they wanted free elections, and not "Russian democracy."<sup>229</sup> Graffiti against the SED regime also called for free elections. At a bus stop in Eisenwerk West, someone had hung a handmade sign reading: "Away with the norms, better supply, just wages, away with the SED regime, we want free elections, the spirit of 17 June lives, away with the KVP, [...] 90% are against the government, free elections mean the end of the Ulbricht clique."<sup>230</sup> On a street in Grossdubrau near Bautzen, someone had painted: "Free elections. Down with the SED."<sup>231</sup> The unpopularity of the SED was not lost on members of the SED. One Party member who worked in the VEB Landmaschinenbau in Torgau stated: "The population no longer agrees with the government. One sees this most clearly by the fact that no one comes to meetings anymore. If free elections were to take place, the government would fall because everyone would vote for Adenauer."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/1, p. 19. 26 August 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>229</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol.5,p. 278. 16 September 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>230</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 5, p. 175. 4 October 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>232</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 5, p. 319. 9 September 1955 Informationsdienst report.

The desire for free elections in order to remove the Communist system in East Germany was a general phenomenon in the GDR. The Sfs information department reported that there was a great "lack of clarity" in wide sections of the population on the manner in which Germany would be united, and that they did not understand why free elections on the western model were not possible.<sup>233</sup> The Sfs reported that instead of noting the deficiencies in the western manner of conducting elections, people argued that the SED was afraid of free elections because of certain defeat.<sup>234</sup> Although Sfs reports attributed the desire for "free elections to change the political structures in the GDR,"<sup>235</sup> solely to farmers with large land holdings, intellectuals, and those from a "bourgeois" background. The Sfs' own reports reveal that these sentiments prevailed in all sections of society. The Sfs information department report summarizing the popular attitude towards the Geneva conference stated: "There is a great lack of clarity in all sections of the population about the manner of achieving German unity, and the form of a united Germany. Propaganda must be increased to deal specifically with these questions, but also why the carrying out of free elections is presently impossible."<sup>236</sup>

Ernst Wollweber, the head of East German state

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<sup>233</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 7, p. 4. 21 September 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 6. Also BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/2, p. 105. 24 July 1955 Informationsdienst report and BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 4/1, p. 202. 4 August 1955 Informationsdienst report.

<sup>235</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 7, p. 7. 21 September Informationsdienst report.

<sup>236</sup> BStU, ZA, AS 43/58 Vol. 7, p. 9. 21 September 1955 Informationsdienst report.

security from 1953 to 1957, noted the significant popular interest in free elections during a conference of the leading members of the Sfs in August 1955. Furthermore, he was aware that the interest in these elections was due to the possibility they would afford to remove the Communist system in Germany. Wollweber stated: "We [state security workers] should have no illusions regarding the content of our fight for reunification. There were these illusions. There were these illusions in general. We see this in our daily information reports [...] We should have no illusions - we can't say this outside - that the situation is this simple: We hold free elections and then see what happens based on the result of the vote. We are Democrats, but not idiots. We support free elections, if at these elections the working class and its leading Party play the decisive role. We support free elections, where those who do not deserve freedom, do not have freedom."<sup>237</sup> Ernst Wollweber was evidently concerned with the significant popular support for free elections.

The immediate aftermath of the uprising was characterized by popular concern for *Rechtssicherheit*. Disturbances in the days and months following the uprising and reports of the non-Marxist parties reveal that *Rechtsunsicherheit* actually eclipsed material concerns in the population. The changes to the MfS and judicial apparatus following the uprising further demonstrate that the *Politbüro* was aware of the negative impact of its

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<sup>237</sup> BStU, ZA, *Sekretariat des Ministers* 1921, p.73  
Transcript: "Rede des Genossen Staatssekretär auf der Dienstbesprechung am 5.8.55."

repression apparatus, although this did not stop it from expanding the apparatus. In the years following the uprising, the East German population continued to make visible its resistance to the Communist system by calling for free elections, which would have resulted in the end of the SED regime. SED and Soviet repression were intertwined with popular political resistance to Communism in the GDR of the 1950s.

### Conclusion

This study of resistance in the Soviet Occupied Zone and German Democratic Republic between 1945 and 1955 has demonstrated the close relationship between fundamental anti-Communist resistance and state-sponsored repression. In the initial years following the war, this resistance was present in the membership of the non-Marxist parties. The land reform of 1945 encountered resistance because of the reform's impact on individual basic rights. Of the non-Marxist parties, the CDU was the most vocal opponent of the manner of the land reform, but sections of the LDPD also resisted the reform. Although the higher levels of the SPD were, in general, more supportive of the land reform, lower levels showed little enthusiasm in carrying it out. The following year, after the fusion of the SPD and the KPD, the most concerted anti-Communist resistance came from members of the SPD. An examination of records on these resisters reveals that repression in the Soviet zone was at the centre of resistance motivation. Based on records of the eastern German security apparatus, it is possible for the first time to gauge and periodize this resistance. Between 1946 and 1948, resistance of SPD members in the Soviet zone was the predominant concern of the eastern German security apparatus. Due to a concerted campaign in 1948, the eastern German security apparatus was able to halt most SPD resistance activity. From 1949 on, there was negligible organized SPD group activity in the Soviet zone. This finding is confirmed by SPD *Ostbüro* reports on resistance activities in the Soviet zone. Resistance in the LDPD was also a function of repression. The unjust confiscations taking place in the Soviet zone, both in the land reform and the sequestering of industry, met with LDPD resistance, particularly in Thuringia. The widespread

resistance of lower level LDPD members to the Communist programme in Germany is confirmed for the first time in this study.

The founding of the GDR marked the beginning of the accelerated process of forcing the non-Marxist parties into line. Beginning in 1950, following the acceptance of unity lists and the vigorous MfS campaign to rid the non-Marxist parties of oppositional elements, the non-Marxist parties increasingly became instruments of the SED to carry out the Communist programme in East Germany. At the same time, the campaign to remove opposition in these parties led to some members conducting limited, but more vigorous resistance. Oppositional elements lived on within these parties however. The leaderships' support for the "building of socialism" in 1952 did not meet with universal approval of the membership. This fact was demonstrated in the situation reports from the period following the 17 June 1953 uprising. The literature currently available has not used these reports in a systematic fashion.

Popular resistance to Communism in East Germany was a function of the development of the Communist repression apparatus. The lack of sources on popular developments in the initial years after the war (unlike the favourable source situation from 1952 onward) means that historians must look to manifestations of this relationship. Such manifestations include the elections of 1946 and the *Volkskongress* vote of 1949. The first elections do not reveal fundamental hostility to the SED, but do suggest that the party was popular with only a minority of the population. The inability of the SED to garner over 50% of the vote in any province under extremely favourable conditions suggests this to be the case. More important, the reaction of the SED and SMAD to the election

demonstrates that they were displeased with the result, and angered at the success of the LDPD and CDU. The situation regarding the *Volkskongress* vote of 1949 was similar. The SED was visibly unnerved by the *Volkskongress* vote, despite the SED's apparent victory. It is notable, however, that leading politicians in East Germany attributed the "poor" result to *Rechtsunsicherheit*. Beginning with the elections of 1950, the source base becomes wider, but still not as advantageous as from 1952 on. Police reports on election-related events prior to the elections of October 1950 reveal that the primary topic raised in these events was *Rechtsunsicherheit*. Notably, no concerns regarding the economic situation were raised.

The disturbances of August 1951 in Saalfeld- detailed for the first time in this study - provide a case study of the strained relationship between the instruments of control - in this case the *Volkspolizei* - and the population. Although Wismut workers made up the majority of demonstrators, other societal sections were represented in this popular expression of hatred towards the *Volkspolizei*. There is at present no reliable history on the early years of the MfS. The history of the MfS prior to 1953 reveals a small organization that did not concentrate on widespread popular surveillance, but on specific enemy elements in the population such as members of the non-Marxist parties, and anti-Communist groups based in West Berlin. It is for this reason that there is no systematic documentation in archival holdings of the MfS prior to 1953 on which to base analyses of popular developments. This explains why MfS installations were not a primary target of demonstrators on 17 June 1953.

The nature of the relationship between popular anti-Communist resistance and repression was made evident in the uprising of 17 June 1953. The events of 17 June and

disturbances afterwards, reveal that wide sections of the East German population - not exclusively workers - participated in acts of resistance against the SED regime. Indeed, police records reveal that the main targets of demonstrators were buildings associated with the repression apparatus: *Volkspolizei* offices, court houses, and prisons. The purpose behind these attacks was the freeing of what demonstrators perceived to be wrongfully imprisoned members of their communities. Furthermore, the political demands of demonstrators eclipsed economic ones. Calls for the resignation of the government and free, all-German elections, were present in all *Bezirke* where demonstrations took place. These demands were similar to those voiced by oppositional members of the non-Marxist parties prior to their being forced into line. It was clear to the demonstrators that such elections would bring the end of the Communist system in East Germany. In this light, economic demands of demonstrators were of secondary importance. It is inappropriate, therefore, to characterize 17 June as exclusively a workers' revolt which revolved around economic considerations. Repression by Communist authorities in East Germany (initially Soviet and then SED) over an extended period of time was of greater importance in fuelling political demands during the demonstrations. Documentation collected by the non-Marxist parties in the GDR following the uprising attests to this fact. Lower levels of both the CDU and LDPD, based on independent analyses, noted that *Rechtstunsicherheit* was the predominant issue for the population.

Following the uprising, the East German secret police began detailed reporting on the population. These documents should remove any doubts as to the political nature of popular resistance. Sfs reports taken during the Berlin foreign

ministers' conference, and to a greater extent during the October 1954 elections and the Geneva Conference of 1955, noted that there was considerable interest in East Germany in free elections. Based on information entering the Sfs, even Ernst Wollweber was forced to comment that there was general popular interest in free elections, and by extension the end of the Communist system in East Germany. Analyses compiled by the Secretariat for State Security are confirmed by LDPD and CDU situation reports on the population. One must be careful not to attribute this desire strictly to the difficult economic situation, although material shortages certainly played a role in popular hostility toward the SED. As has been demonstrated in this study, repression played a greater role in undermining popular trust in the GDR's political system. Indeed, the Sfs leadership showed a concern for the negative impact of unwarranted arrests in the period following the uprising. The Sfs therefore was cautious in the expansion of its duties within the parameters of the "internal founding of the state."

There is at present only one documentary verifiable example of organized anti-Communist resistance in East Germany between 1953 and the end date of this study, 1955. It is possible that other acts of individual or group resistance will become known as more documentation from the Mfs becomes located and catalogued, but this is unlikely as the records from post-1953 are already fairly complete. Reasons behind the lack of organized resistance will require future research, but will inevitably return to the 17 June 1953 uprising. The uprising had demonstrated in bloody fashion that it would not be possible to change the political system in East Germany without the acquiescence of the Soviet Union. The failures of international conferences on the German question to change the political system in the German Democratic Republic also

contributed to an increased feeling of resignation in the population.<sup>1</sup> Both the Sfs and the CDU noted deep popular disappointment in the wake of the failed Geneva Conference. It appeared to East Germans that there was no immediate prospect for a united Germany under the western democratic model. It might indeed be that given these conditions, resistance would have seemed pointless. On the night of 13 August 1961, the SED removed any last vestiges of popular hope that the division of Germany - and thus SED-rule in East Germany- was temporary. On 13 August 1961, East German police troops erected the Berlin Wall. The fact that there was no significant protest in East Germany to the building of the Wall,<sup>2</sup> although this act was equally, if not more, provocative than the increased work norms which had sparked the 17 June uprising, indicates the extent to which the population had resigned itself to the situation in East Germany.

The present study permits a perspective upon the years leading up to the building of the Berlin Wall. The erection of the Berlin Wall was a result of a crisis that had been developing in the GDR from 1956. In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev announced forthcoming de-Stalinization in a secret speech at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The de-Stalinization process launched in the Soviet Union had repercussions for East Germany. The *Politbüro* renounced the personality cult, and the terrorist methods of Stalinism.<sup>3</sup> The darkest days of Stalinism were relegated to

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 75.

the past following the 20th Party Congress.

Fundamentally, however, de-Stalinization did not affect political structures in the GDR. The SED retained its monopoly on power. The non-Marxist parties, which had been fully co-opted during the period of this study, continued to be transmission organs of the SED to implement the Communist programme in East Germany. At the LDPD's 7th Party Congress of July 1957, the LDPD supported state takeover (initially only partial) of remaining private enterprises. At the CDU's 9th Party Congress of 1958, it claimed its desire to bring the Christian population closer to the "building of socialism." At its 10th Party Congress in 1960, it officially declared: "The members of the CDU recognize the working class and its party as destined leaders of our nation and put all their force behind the securing and strengthening of the GDR."<sup>4</sup> These parties were clearly not centres of anti-Communist resistance as they had been prior to 1953. It should be expected, however, that future research will find, as has been demonstrated in this study, that the lower level membership of the parties were not always in agreement with the SED's policies, nor those of the leadership.

De-Stalinization in the GDR led to, in general, a milder system of justice, although the SED continued to be strict against political opponents.<sup>5</sup> In 1956, many of those tried for

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<sup>4</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Following the Hungarian rebellion of October and November 1956, revisionist socialists in the GDR were no longer tolerated. Wolfgang Harich, philosophy professor at Humboldt University and member of the SED was arrested on 29 November 1956 and sentenced in March 1957 to 10 years in prison. He was amnestied in 1964. High-ranking SED members, including the *Politbüro* member Karl Schirdewan and the Minister for State Security Ernst Wollweber were also removed due to their opposition to Ulbricht; Childs, pp. 53-

resistance activities in the GDR and Soviet Occupied Zone were amnestied. This included the majority of SPD resisters and members of the non-Marxist parties who had been arrested for oppositional activity. Members of the SED who had been expelled during the various purges between 1945 and 1956, including former prominent members of the Central Committee, Franz Dahlem, Anton Ackermann, and Paul Merker, were amnestied. Overall, the number of prisoners in the GDR decreased dramatically. In the first quarter of 1956, there were 48,747 prisoners in the GDR, of whom 13,014 were in prison because of "crimes against the state."<sup>6</sup> This means that 31.2% prisoners were political prisoners. By the end of 1958, the total number of prisoners in the GDR had dropped to 22,343, but 8,115 (39.9%) of those had been sentenced for "crimes against the state." In other words, although the overall number of prisoners in the GDR fell in the course of 1956, the percentage of political prisoners rose. Between 1958 and 1960, that percentage hovered around 20%. By the end of 1960, the percentage of prisoners who had been sentenced for "crimes against the state" rose sharply. Of 23,414 prisoners, 18,198, or 39.5%, were "criminals against the state."<sup>7</sup>

The high percentage of "criminals against the state" - the highest percentage since 1953 - was a reflection of the *Politbüro's* renewed push for the "building of socialism."<sup>8</sup> These efforts were most visible in the countryside. The *Politbüro* was determined to collectivize agriculture, after the failed attempts of 1952-53. Erich Mielke, the Minister of

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<sup>6</sup> Werkentin, p. 409.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

State Security, saw the collectivization as a primary duty: "We must focus our informants so that they help us to push through all measures on the development of agriculture."<sup>9</sup> As had been the case prior to the uprising of 17 June 1953, state use of repression in 1960-61 to bring about the realization of the Party's programme caused increased resentment in the population. As Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle have written: "Durch die rigide Handhabung der Strafgesetzgebung sollte sich die ablehnende Haltung vieler Menschen nicht noch zusätzlich verstärken."<sup>10</sup>

The economic situation deteriorated in 1960-61, primarily as a result of a lack of production in agriculture during the collectivization phase and industrial difficulties caused by the unrealistic expectations of the 7 Year Plan introduced in 1959.<sup>11</sup> Agricultural difficulties had led to serious supply problems. From March 1961, all *Bezirke* in the GDR had difficulties meeting the food needs of the population. Basic foodstuffs such as bread, milk and butter were not always available.<sup>12</sup>

East Germans did not have to endure these conditions. In 1960, it was still fairly easy to relocate to West Germany, provided one was willing to leave all possessions, including home and land, to seek a new life in the West. A subway ride from East to West Berlin was all that was required. And indeed, many East Germans chose this option. In 1959, 143,000 East Germans fled to the West; in 1960, that number had risen to 199,000; by August 1961, approximately 160,000 East Germans

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Mitter/Wolle, p. 331.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>11</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Mitter/Wolle, p. 343.

had fled the GDR.<sup>13</sup> Although further research is needed to determine precisely the nature of popular opinion in the months prior to the building of the Berlin Wall,<sup>14</sup> it appears that the increasing tensions between the Allies of 1958-61 - in particular the failed Khrushchev-Eisenhower summit of 1960 - convinced many that there was no immediate prospect of the end of the SED regime through union with West Germany.<sup>15</sup>

Politically and economically unable to tolerate this bleeding of its population, the SED sealed the permeable border between East and West Berlin. The barbed wire laid on the night of 13 August 1961 was soon transformed into a concrete barrier. The SED had erected the Berlin Wall, or in SED jargon an "anti-fascist protective barrier."<sup>16</sup> With the building of the Berlin Wall, the story of East German resistance began a new chapter. The Berlin Wall marked the end of fundamental political resistance until the fall of 1989. The reality after the erection of the Wall was that the SED dictatorship in East Germany was firmly installed. East Germans opposed to Communism were left with little alternative than to accommodate themselves with the regime.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Weber, *Grundriss*, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> For an introduction, see the chapter "Die DDR zu Beginn der sechziger Jahre: Der Weg ins sozialistische Ghetto," in Mitter/Wolle.

<sup>15</sup> Childs, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> On the erection of the Berlin Wall, see Jürgen Rühle, Günter Holzweissig, *13. August 1961. Die Mauer von Berlin* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Eckert, "Widerstand," pp-54-55.

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LV Sachsen	BV Rostock	KV Eberswalde
LV Thüringen	BV Schwerin	KV Erfurt

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 SED- Befreundete Parteien  
 SED- Zentrale Leitende Parteiorgane - Politbüro  
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