

April 30, 1953

**Cable from N. Spencer Barnes to US Department of
State Reviewing Developments in the GDR since
Stalin's Death**

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Summary:

Barnes analyzes developments within the GDR following Stalin's death. Although there was an initial period of confusion within the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), it has been confirmed that Ulbricht is now directing SED and is continuing to implement socialization policy, though perhaps less dramatically than in the past. Barnes suggests that the Soviets may also be striving, to some extent, to decrease zonal tension.

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Subject: Review of SED Policy Developments Since Stalin's Death and Possible Significance

Summary

This dispatch analyzes developments within the Soviet Zone of Germany during the transition period following Stalin's death. Whatever confusion and indecision may have existed initially within the SED hierarchy as a result of Stalin's death, it is now quite clear that Ulbricht is currently directing SED policy in conformity with Kremlin directives. This policy is not at variance but in harmony with the Kremlin's current efforts to convince the Western Powers that it desires to reduce international tensions.

In the realm of Soviet-SED strategy and tactics, it is concluded that internally the SED has been ordered to proceed, perhaps less dramatically than in the past, with the task of implementing the program of socialization proclaimed at the SED Second Party Conference of 1952. While there have been no apparent basic changes in substance there has been possibly a modification of tempo and specific programmatic areas of emphasis.

With regard to local Soviet actions during the period from March 5 to the present, these suggest the possibility that what the Soviets may be striving for is the creation of an atmosphere of decreased zonal tension under which the Soviets hope to foster the impression, and possibly have the intention, of eliminating some past causes of friction in Germany between themselves and the Western Allies. This does not mean that the Soviets are in fact changing from a dynamic to a static policy in Germany. Continuation of the present tactic would appear to mean that, with respect to the Soviet objective of accentuating and deepening differences and frictions between the Allies and between the latter and the Germans, they have shifted from a policy of more or less open harassment to one of limited concessions and apparent conciliation in the hope that this approach will be more successful in generating friction in the West.

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Introduction and Background Chronology of Developments

It has been recognized that developments within the Soviet Zone of Germany may shed some light upon the power struggle going on within the Kremlin, including any significant shift in Soviet policy growing out of this struggle for succession to Stalin's position of leadership and the consolidation of power in the hands of one particular group of men. Accordingly, an effort has been made to observe and report upon such straws in the wind as:

1. Ulbricht's arrestingly prompt and vigorous restatement of SED policy in an article published March 8th--that is, following the death but preceding the funeral of Stalin.

2. Taegliche Rundschau's article of March 25 on Lenin's strategy of retreat, in order to obtain breathing room.

3. The inconspicuous manner in which Neues Deutschland of April 5, 1952, buried in the second page under a meaningless headline the Moscow announcement regarding the release of famous Russian doctors.

4. Following Stalin's funeral and Ulbricht's return from Moscow, the noticeable shift in the public treatment by Ulbricht, the Central Committee of the SED and prominent SED spokesmen of such important SED policies as (a) National Armed Forces, (b) production cooperatives, (c) strengthening of State power, and (d) "protective" security measures to combat terrorist and subversive activities emanating from West Berlin.

5. The diminution of the more violent and vicious anti-American propaganda on the part of East German press and radio media, observed and reported also by our British colleagues and subsequently confirmed semi-officially in a B-2 documentary intelligence report, according to which April propaganda directives for Taegliche Rundschau contained the admonition to avoid sharp attacks against the Western Powers. This same directive called instead for a centering of propaganda attack[s] against Chancellor Adenauer as the evil force and isolated opponent to a peaceful solution of the German problem. This directive has in fact been reflected in the SED and Soviet controlled radio and press media.

6. Neues Deutschland's editorial of April 5 containing implications regarding the new Soviet Korean policy and Soviet tactics with respect to Germany.

7. Ulbricht's lengthy policy statement of April 15th and 16th which, as stated in our immediate analysis, amounted to orders to the Party to continue implementation in a less dramatic and modified form, of the basic SED program of July 1952. With the publication of this policy statement the period of noticeable inactivity and indecision on the part of Ulbricht and the SED from March 8 to April 16 came to an end.

Recalculation Regarding Power Relationships Between Ulbricht, Beria and Malenkov

During the course of the developments in the GDR briefly set forth in chronological order above, major aspects of which will be analyzed in more detail subsequently, there have been various theories put forward locally as to what has been developing in the Kremlin since Stalin's death. Some of these are based at least partially on the developments within the GDR and Ulbricht's (supposed) personal relationship to various top Kremlin leaders such as Malenkov and Beria.

One theory holds that Ulbricht is and always has been a Beria protégé. The evidence on which this belief is founded is deduced from the fact that Ulbricht once held a responsible position in the Comintern, which in turn was closely associated with Beria. Some supporters of this theory interpret developments within the Kremlin as indicating that Malenkov is the leader of a group which believes in the advocacy of a policy leading to diminished international tension; that Beria leads a faction believing in an intensified "cold war" policy; that there are signs (reversal of the "doctors plot," Malenkov giving up or being shorn of his position in the Party Secretariat, etc.) indicating Beria is gradually getting the upper hand over Malenkov; that Ulbricht knows, or believes, Beria will win out in the end and pursue a vigorous "cold war," possibly turning to "hot war" policy; that this explains why there has been no basic change in the internal SED program for the GDR or in the aggressive propaganda line of SED media; and that Ulbricht, with Beria's approval, is adhering to a policy which is at variance with that desired by Malenkov.

A second theory rests more on the belief that events in Moscow to date indicate Malenkov and Beria are currently working together in support of the "diminishing tension" policy, opposed possibly by an unidentified group, with Molotov as a potential figurehead, in favor of the intensified "cold war" policy. Within this school of thought there are those who believe Ulbricht was strictly a Stalin man; that he had no secure ties to either Malenkov or Beria; that Stalin's death left Ulbricht in an exposed and precarious position; that he may now be faced with a struggle for his personal

survival; and that developments in the GDR since his return from Stalin's funeral reflect uncertainty and improvisation on his part. There are some who go so far as to maintain that the SED is in a state of near paralysis, with a so-called vigorous "cold war" Stalin faction building up around Ulbricht, including [Wilhelm] Pieck, [Wilhelm] Zaisser, [Rudolf] Herrnstadt and [Edith] Baumann, and a so-called Malenkov faction headed by Fred Oelssner and including such men as [Otto] Grotewohl, [Franz] Dahlem, [Herbert] Warnke, [Willi] Stoph, [Fritz] Selbmann, and [Werner] Eggerath.

While recognizing that knowledge of what is going on within the Kremlin in the assumed struggle for leadership among the various contenders may provide a key to solving crucial policy questions, including a possible change in the Kremlin's German policy, it is believed not to be within the competence or ability of EAD to go beyond submitting such spot evidence as it detects in the GDR for the Department and others to fit into the larger picture. Consequently, no effort is made here to evaluate in any detail the validity of one of the previously described theories over the other. Either one or a synthesis of some aspects of both may be close to the truth.

What can, however, be pointed out with certainty is that in looking back over the period from Stalin's death to the present, there existed a status of hiatus, from the time of Stalin's funeral until April 16, during which Ulbricht and his lieutenants were adjusting themselves and the SED's policy, both internal and external. It is an unresolved and still open question as to whether this period of silence and outward inactivity on the part of Ulbricht was due to (a) lack of instructions from the new Kremlin leaders and therefore uncertainty and need for cautious improvisation; (b) conflict of ideas; or (c) a normal lapse of time required by Ulbricht to revamp the SED program in conformity with explicit Kremlin instructions. Whether Ulbricht has been acting partially on his own, on instructions from Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, or any of several possible combinations of these three, we cannot detect as yet the sign of any fundamental changes in Soviet strategy and tactics regarding Germany. There have only been those variations and hints of possible changes reported separately in the referenced communications. The summary in the opening chronology may assist in piecing together what appears to be a gradually crystallizing, but as yet imperfect, picture of the future pattern of coordinated Soviet-SED policy.

Summary Analysis of Major SED Policy Developments

The Period of Inactivity and Apparent Indecision: On March 8, 1953, one day prior to Stalin's funeral and Premier Malenkov's first policy statement, Neues Deutschland and Taegliche Rundschau published an article by Ulbricht. This article reasserted in the most vigorous terms determination to proceed with the previous quite dramatic and accelerated implementation of all of the basic SED programs, including creation of National Armed Forces, and Ulbricht was at pains to attribute these policies directly to Stalin. However, upon Ulbricht's return from the funeral ceremonies in Moscow, there began a noticeable period of silence and apparent indecision. Such SED programs as National Armed Forces, strengthening the State power, protective security measures in and around Berlin, and creation of more and more production cooperatives, all of which prior to Stalin's death had been so actively propagated in the SED press and by Ulbricht personally, through an unusually sustained and vigorous schedule of speeches, were suddenly soft-pedaled. The period of sustained public silence on these subjects was striking--the more so in light of Ulbricht's policy article of March 8th, the publication of which had preceded Malenkov's first policy statement delivered at Stalin's funeral.

During this same period we have noted the cautious SED handling of the reversal in the famous doctors' case; Taegliche Rundschau's treatment of Lenin's policy of retreat to gain a breathing spell[;] and a gradual diminution of the previous vitriolic and vicious anti-American output of GDR media. It was inevitable that these developments should lead to a mixture of both sober and wild speculation as involving a shake-up in the SED hierarchy.

Resumption of Coordinated Soviet-SED Activity: On April 5th, Neues Deutschland published a major editorial analyzing the shift in the Kremlin's Korean policy. This constituted the first outward sign that at least in the field of external affairs

coordination, if in fact temporarily disrupted, had been reestablished between the Kremlin leaders and the SED. The purpose of the editorial appeared to be to prepare the SED for an Armistice in Korea and to make sure the Party members interpreted such an eventuality to mean strength and righteousness on the part of the Soviet Union in its "fight for peace" as against the weakness and unjustness of the "war policies" on the part of the Western capitalist and imperialist forces.

Without interpreting the significance thereof, the foregoing editorial tied in rather loosely to the new Kremlin-Korean policy the letter of General [Vasilii] Chuikov to ex-Chancellor [Joseph] Wirth of the Deutsche Sammlung and his invitation to the Western Allies for four-power discussions on the air corridors. The implication was that if the Four Powers could get together over a peaceful solution of the Korean policy, it should be possible to reach agreement on the German problem. This implication has since been given more substance--not in SED editorials or statements by GDR leaders, but as yet only through prominent SED press coverage of West German statements to this effect.

On April 15 and 16 the silence of Walter Ulbricht with regard to internal SED policies was broken through the publication in Neues Deutschland and Taegliche Rundschau of an article in two parts entitled, "There is a Force Capable of Solving the German Problem." As stated in our analysis of this policy statement, it amounted to orders to the Party to continue implementation, in a less dramatic and modified form, of the basic SED program of July 1952.

Unity Campaign: On the all-German Unity issue, Ulbricht has nothing new to offer, relying on reference[s] to the long-range KPD reunification program, to be implemented through efforts of the Deutsche Sammlung, and conclusion of a peace treaty by the Four Powers on the basis of previous Soviet proposals.

Internal Policies: With regard to internal policies, Ulbricht's new pronouncement, in contrast to his March 8th statement, makes no mention of the necessity of building National Armed Forces or implementing additional drastic security measures in and around Berlin. It plays down the subject of strengthening the power of the state. Instead of stressing the necessity of creating more production cooperatives, it underlines again the voluntary character of this process. He blamed the flight of the middle and small class farmers on improper actions by local party and court officials; and he attempted to lessen the fears of these elements by promising them aid and calling for a revision of what Ulbricht describes now as incorrect sentences against some farmers, whereas prior to Stalin's death he was berating these same officials for having been too lenient in their punishment of farm elements.

On the positive side, Ulbricht's new policy directive calls for renewed effort and concentration by all elements of the GDR population to strengthen: (a) the MTS (Tractor Stations), (b) the existing LPG's (Farm Production Cooperatives), (c) socialist industry through raising of labor productivity and introduction of a "dispatcher service," (d) the savings or economy drive (Sparsamkeit), (e) program [illegible] increasing the technical knowledge and qualification of workers, intelligentsia and scientists, and (f) internal Party organization [illegible] discipline, especially with respect to development of better and stronger cadres.

Reactivation of Party and Government Policy Apparatus: Following implication of the foregoing statement, the SED Central Committee, the Politburo and the GDR Council of Ministers have again swung into action passing and publishing resolutions and directives aimed at sparking implementation of the new internal goals. Ulbricht has begun again to visit key spots throughout the GDR delivering personal follow-up pep-speeches to insure that new enthusiasm is built up for implementation of the less dramatic, but equally essential, economic contents of the SED's socialization program. On the unity issue, the SED went into action by having the Volkskammer forward a communication to the British House of Commons calling for the latter's support of a Four Power conference. Aside from this section, the SED has acted primarily upon prominent press play of statements issuing from Deutsche Sammlung leaders in support of Four Power talks.

Anti-Church Campaign: Throughout the whole period we have been witnessing a decidedly sharpened and sustained attack against the institutions of the Church (including individual pastors who have been arrested) directly concerned with Protestant and Catholic youth activities. On the surface the SED anti-Church

campaign appears to be in direct contradiction to the new Kremlin policy of diminishing international tension through concrete peace overtures. It has also led some observers to conclude that there are differences between SED boss Ulbricht and the new Kremlin leaders; and that Ulbricht is acting independently and in defiance of the latter. Careful consideration of all relevant factors leaves doubt as to the validity of this conclusion. Rather, it would seem that the anti-Communist bias of East German youth, rooted in and nourished by youth's ties to various church institutions is a force which the Kremlin's leaders themselves feel impelled to break; that they have decided, or agreed with Ulbricht, that energetic measures are required; that the Kremlin's actions in Korea and elsewhere are considered sufficient to divert and hold the attention of the Western powers, despite the campaign against the Church in East Germany which, if not representing inconsistency to them, they probably realize from experience will be so looked upon by the West; and that an effort must be made to break the power of the Church as a resistance force in East Germany, irrespective of whether the final Kremlin decision is to hold on to East Germany or eventually to risk relinquishing its present direct control over it in a compromise formula for the reunification of Germany.

Local Soviet Action: Local Soviet actions during this same period have consisted of: (a) General Chuikov's letter to the Deutsche Sammlung in support of a Four Power conference; (b) General Chuikov's invitation to the British and later the French and Americans to join in discussions regarding safety of flights in the air corridor which are currently taking place; (c) opening of Rothensee canal locks; and (d) more accommodating treatment of Warenbegleitschein submissions.

Conclusions

In retrospect, developments within the GDR with respect to SED actions indicate that, while there was a transitional period where the Party and Government apparatus approached a near stand-still and apparent state of indecision, this is no longer the case. It appears that coordination between Pankow and Moscow, if ever interrupted, has been fully reestablished. The SED-GDR policy and administration apparatus is functioning again in the familiar form, actively endeavoring to achieve acceptance and implementation of what amounts to basically the same internal SED program as before, with some slight outward modifications, the full significance of which time alone will bring out. There is every indication that Moscow is now exercising complete control of SED policy and actions.

There have been some slight signs that Walter Ulbricht may have had his wings clipped somewhat by Moscow. It is possible that eventual Kremlin policy shifts--conceivably to be implemented by the new Soviet political advisor, [Pavel] Yudin, who recently replaced Semeonov [Semyonov]--may call for more drastic curtailment of Ulbricht's dominating position of control. Here, too, time alone will bring the answer. A key to the riddle may be offered to us, if and when the SED Party Congress takes place--rumored to be sometime this summer. If Ulbricht's position in the Party and Government remains the same or is strengthened in any reorganization, it may be a fairly good indication that the Kremlin is not thinking of making any basic or important tactical changes in their German policy. If Ulbricht's position is weakened, it may indicate that a shift in strategy and/or tactics is receiving Kremlin consideration. It is conceivable, of course, that a shift in policy will take place without any change in Ulbricht's position. Ulbricht is a thoroughly loyal and disciplined Moscow Communist. As such, he is a capable and reliable instrument who could administer a changed policy and adjust himself readily to it. However, the latter possibility is considered less likely due to Ulbricht's identification with the previous policy.

With respect to the enumerated local Soviet actions during the period under review, they suggest the possibility--also supported by Ulbricht's shift of emphasis with respect to some SED policies--that what the Soviets may be striving for is the creation of an atmosphere of decreased tension, under which the Soviets give the impression of desiring to eliminate some of the past causes of friction in Germany between themselves and the Western Allies. The objectives of this tactic could be several. It could serve the limited tactical objective of encouraging the Germans to believe the

Allies were quietly agreeing with the Soviets to live and let live on the basis of the status quo of a divided Germany and thus increase German pressure, on the one hand, upon the Western Allies to negotiate with the Soviets for unification prior to final action on EDC, and encourage French reluctance, on the other hand, to proceed with ratification. It could serve the objective of a genuine feeler by the Soviets to see if the Western Allies would accept such an interim unwritten de facto agreement, irrespective of German reaction. Whatever the short and the long term objectives may be, the foregoing and other recent actions by the Soviets and the SED, under Soviet orders, suggest that the current Soviet tactic, possibly involving readiness to make some minor concessions eliminating areas of friction regarding Allied lines of communication with Berlin, is aimed at pointing up the division of Germany.

In any event, there are no indications that the Soviets have abandoned their ultimate objective of gaining control or dominant influence over the whole of Germany, however distant the achievement of this goal may now appear to them. Following a tactic which at one level gives the appearance of desiring or being satisfied with a permanently divided Germany, does not mean the Soviets have in fact changed from a dynamic to a static policy in Germany. Continuation of the present tactic means that, with respect to their objective of accentuating and deepening differences and frictions between the Allies and between the latter and Germany, they have shifted from a policy of more or less open harassment, which on the whole has tended more to unite than to split the Allies and the Germans, to one of limited concessions and apparent conciliation in the hope that this approach will be more successful in generating frictions. While this tactic is being explored, the process of "socialization" in the GDR goes on apace, possibly achieving in the end more solid results under the revised SED program, in which it appears the tempo and specific programmatic areas of emphasis rather than the basic substance has been modified.

For the Director:

[Signed]

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Chief

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