

September 1953

Report of the Polish Diplomatic Mission in Berlin for the Period 21 June - 31 August 1953

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Summary:

Polish ambassador to the GDR, Jan Izydorczyk, reports on the internal political situation in the GDR as a result of the June riots. New plans and proceedings deliberated at the 15th Plenum of the SED CC are also discussed.

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Polish

Contents:

Translation - English

[...]

The Internal Political Situation

After the June events the party became convinced how inadequate its work has been with the masses. It has been ascertained that the method of commandeering, applied so far, was harmful.

The plenary meeting of the SED CC of June 21 stated that if the masses did not understand the party's policies, it was the party that was guilty. The Plenum recommended that the employees of the party apparatus at all levels go out to the industrial plants to hold meetings with their employees and to explain to them the new course of the party and government.

Starting on 23 June, a large educational campaign has been started in the GDR. Leaders of the party (among them Grotewohl, Ulbricht) went out to the workers to discuss their problems and explain the significance of the new course.

To correct mistakes committed previously, a Bloc of Political Parties and Democratic Organizations and the National Front Committees are going to be activated. This Bloc at its meeting of 25 June adopted a declaration, in which it supports the government's policies and resolutions of the 11 and 25 June. The Democratic Bloc of the GDR decided to eliminate harmful shortcomings that existed in its activities and to improve its work in the central leadership and its lower echelons.

Demonstrations and protest rallies against the 17 June provocation were held in the GDR's cities, expressing support for the GDR government. Significant support in this action came in the form of a solidarity action of the working masses of the Soviet Union and countries of the people's democracies.

A characteristic feature of German mentality is submission to commandeering. Thus, on 17 June in Leipzig about 25,000 people participated in an anti-government demonstration, and 3 weeks later in a pro-government demonstration about 150,000 people took part (including many of those who participated in the June 17 demonstration). The behavior of Soviet soldiers, who in the June events and in the later period have shown a high degree of indoctrination deserves to be emphasized. Soviet soldiers on 17 June behaved unusually worthily and quietly, despite importunate provocations from the demonstrators.

During the agitation campaign among the people of Berlin and the GDR, the youth of FDJ showed particularly friendly feeling toward Soviet soldiers. They were organizing joint parties and concerts, many people were expressing their gratitude to the soldiers of the Soviet Army for their action against the organized provocation. It should be emphasized that in this area Soviet forces have performed a great political work among the GDR's population, which brought about good results.

The fiasco which met the organizers of Day "X" has forced them to seek again and again new propaganda maneuvers, new provocations. One of these maneuvers is an American proposal to extend the so-called "food assistance" to the GDR population. Beside that the Americans, with the assistance of their West-German stooges started the distribution in West Berlin of food packages (flour, fat, powdered milk) for the GDR population. This "assistance" has an openly diversionary character, aimed on the one hand to shed responsibility for their 17 June provocation, and on the other it is a propaganda trick and a way to recruit new spies and saboteurs. Beside that this action is designed to support Adenauer in the ongoing election campaign. Unfortunately, it needs to be said that many Germans, even from regions far away in the GDR, are coming to Berlin to pick up packages. But, each stick has two ends. Distribution of packages is causing ever-greater indignation among the unemployed

and retirees in West Germany, and particularly in West Berlin. More and more scuffles are taking place between the unemployed of West Berlin and people from the GDR coming to pick up packages. Recently there were also numerous demonstrations in West Berlin.

Most of the people using this assistance are: retirees, the middle class, peasants and quite often even well-to-do people.

This phenomenon throws some light on German mentality, which in this instance can be defined as follows: "if they are giving [it away for] free, why not take it."

The GDR authorities, however, for political reasons have not taken any drastic measures (except for making it more difficult to travel from the GDR to Berlin), and are standing up against the "beggars' packages" not only through their propaganda, but also through an organized campaign of returning packages by their recipients, which in turn will be distributed among the unemployed and retirees of West Berlin. At the beginning stage of this "assistance" at the borders of Berlin's sectors people from the democratic Berlin could purchase fruits and vegetables according to the exchange rate 1 East Mark = 1 DM West, in the amount of 5 DM per month, for which special bonuses were distributed. This operation did not bring about the desired effects, since prices there were often higher than in the democratic sector. Thus, a mayor of one of West Berlin's boroughs, [Willi Karl] Kressmann, personally sold potatoes at 30 Pfennig per kilo, while at the same time in the democratic sector they cost 25 Pf. Kressmann was ridiculed by people. During these sales there were cases when inhabitants of the democratic sector of Berlin were buying the potatoes ostentatiously at 30 Pf. and then giving them away to the unemployed and pensioners of West Berlin. Groups of activists were everywhere hard at work, explaining to the people the whole meaning of this "assistance."

In this situation the mood of the population is swinging with emotions caused by provocations, and part of the society is suspecting that the change in exchange rate has resulted from the June provocations.

At the industrial plants some workers are behaving aggressively, pretentiously. They are demanding higher benefits, deeper price cuts, etc.

As a result of implementation of the new course and stronger ties with the masses, the party is regaining confidence among the working masses. In places where the party work is satisfactory, it is occurring relatively fast.

The 15th Plenum of the SED CC, which took place on 24-26 July, discussed the new course and tasks for the party. It stated that the new course had already achieved a series of successes, both in the area of raising the standard of living of the population, as well as in the area of strengthening law and order in the GDR, that the unmasking of Beria indicated that the provocation was based on a broad international network. The June events had shown that in the GDR there is an organized fascist underground, supported by the Americans. There are also underground organizations of former members of SPD, who did not break with social democracy and thus became victims of agents of the so-called Eastern Bureau of SPD. The resolution stated that the June events led to the activities of anti-democratic elements in the political, ideological and economic areas.

Former Minister of Justice [Max] Fechner exploited the existing situation to defend fascist provocateurs from well-deserved punishment.

On his recommendation a number of instigators and organizers of the June events (who are being rounded up [and sent] back to prisons) have been released.

Obviously, it was conscious assistance to the enemy. In the same period Fechner was tolerant of a whole range of abuses toward the working people, who were harshly punished and who were not treated fairly. The Central Committee dismissed Fechner from the CC and from the party as an enemy of the party and the state.

[...]

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Jan Izydorczyk
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