

**“The Cheapest Atom Bomb”
The East German Uprising of 1953, Deconstructing Socialism, and the Broken
Promises of Rollback**

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Although often forgotten in efforts to track the battles and frontlines of the Cold War, the East German Uprising of 1953 is nevertheless a valuable example of Eisenhower’s Cold War policies and broken promises in the early history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Despite possessing an advanced propaganda apparatus that became an important mechanism for U.S. foreign policy in the Eisenhower Administration and throughout the Cold War, Eisenhower did not use this apparatus to fulfill the promises made to the American people and the people of the world. Radio, print, and diplomatic efforts were all coordinated for detonative propaganda impact. In the case of West Berlin, the value of a small area within communist territory would be proven in the Uprising. Using the mechanisms of propaganda available to the Eisenhower administration, they managed to use West Berlin as “the cheapest atom bomb” and disrupt East Germany through the gradual, persistent propaganda. However, when their bomb finally detonated in East Germany and had built up the momentum for liberal democratic reform that Eisenhower’s propaganda had espoused, the rioters on the ground found no support forthcoming. Eisenhower had promised the international community the “rollback,” pushing communism into retreat from any areas it had advanced. Instead of mere containment, Eisenhower pledged the conversion of countries to democracy and capitalism. These vows were not born out in the handling of the Uprising in 1953. Instead, the focus was to make the Soviet Union look bad in the propaganda opportunities the Uprising afforded the United States. Chaos from the Uprising was not translated into

democratization, nor was that thought ever considered, but administration officials instead pursued a conscious course of manipulating the Uprising to undermine Soviet efforts. Rather than fulfill years of promises, Eisenhower was only interested in the cheap, efficient devastation of East Germany and the Soviet Union through West Berlin's propaganda network.

Before the Uprising, the GDR was under immense pressure as its leadership worked to construct socialism. In the emerging Cold War, the USSR sought to create a stable alternative to the West German Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The GDR was being built in the image of the Soviet Union, but it encountered unending problems in that process that produced growing tensions rather than the stable buffer state the USSR craved. Misguided solutions from top government officials contributed to this instability, but so did campaigns from the United States to undermine it. The many arms of Eisenhower's advanced propaganda machine contributed heavily to creating the hotbed from which the Uprising was possible and then spreading the unrest throughout all of East Germany. Protestors in the GDR initially railed against the work quotas of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED) (Socialist Unity Party), but their focus quickly shifted to democratic rhetoric that mirrored the sorts of overtures made by the United States. After gradually halting the Uprising, the GDR and its SED leadership would come to take a much tougher stance on internal security and crackdown on dissidents. In the meantime, President Eisenhower would remain committed first and foremost to keeping Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in office through the upcoming West German elections and countering the Soviet peace campaign. A U.S. food aid program to the GDR would help accomplish these goals for both the United States and Adenauer. The conflict of the East German people

against their government would become a telling excerpt from the clash of superpowers in the Cold War.

The East German Uprising of 1953 arose from tensions that were mounting in the early Cold War. The leadership of the SED was pursuing a “Construction of Socialism” project that made demands on the people of East Germany, but it also instituted a series of measures aimed at religious groups and political expression. These measures would trigger *Republikflucht*, huge swells of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing East Germany each month. Those citizens who could afford to leave left with their resources and expertise, such that a brain drain resulted in the GDR. As the Eisenhower administration took control in the United States, it escalated a propaganda regimen that included U.S.-sponsored radio stations and pro-Western magazines. The orchestration of these efforts revolved around the ongoing Soviet peace campaign and the successful re-election of Konrad Adenauer as chancellor of the FRG. The East German government grew more and more distressed by the exodus and the ongoing stressors on its country. Following the death of Stalin, the SED would reverse course on its Sovietization programs and admit fault before the entire country. Shortly thereafter, the Uprising would begin.

Before the death of Stalin in 1953, the GDR was pursuing a path toward Sovietization and constructing socialism. The Second Party Conference for the SED took place in July, 1952, where party officials determined their new path for East Germany.¹ In March, 1952, the Soviet Union had launched a new measure for unification in Germany. “The Stalin Note,” as it came to be known, proposed a unified, democratic Germany combining all four sectors. This major concession from the Soviet Union abridged their

¹ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 51.

years of negotiating tactics which included preconditions against a reunited, rearmed Germany. The Soviet Union was willing to change course provided that Germany remained neutral and non-threatening toward the Soviet Union.² The United States viewed such efforts as deleterious to their aims. Dr. Robert Bowie, Director of Policy Planning at the State Department, said, "Germany which was neutral would play games, would try to play both sides of the street, and that, under those circumstances, it was likely to end up with Soviet domination rather than real independence, real neutrality."³ This combined with the West German participation in the European Defense Community talks triggered major changes by the SED. These changes were envisioned as the "construction of socialism" in the GDR. The "construction of socialism" entailed diminishing the youth work done by churches, raising wages for Meister and the intelligentsia, the establishment of armed forces, agricultural collectivization, and more heavy industry development. In order to finance these measures, cuts were to be made in social spending while taxes were to be raised on what remained of private enterprise in the GDR.⁴

The initial reactions to these measures varied from praise to disdain. Initially, German communist groups welcomed the changes that the SED was making toward truer socialism in Germany. "We've been fighting for this for years," one said, "an old dream is finally becoming reality." However, many had hoped that communism would include some form of participation from the workers in governmental decisions. No such popular

² Roberts, Geoffrey, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 356-7.

³ Bowie, Robert R. "Interview with Dr. Robert R. Bowie," Interview by Robert Gerald Livingston, Philipp Gassert, Richard Immerman, Paul Steege, and Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, February 19, 2008, p. 14.

⁴ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 51-3.

involvement was forthcoming. “We pay the state millions in taxes and don’t get anything ourselves,” another worker complained, “we just work so that the Meister and intelligentsia get their high salaries.”⁵

Soon after the path toward socialism was paved that summer, the East German people felt the devastating results of going down that road. Agricultural collectivization and poor harvests combined to lower food supply and dramatically increase prices. Textiles, shoes, and travel all increased in cost for people in the GDR. The supply of consumer goods declined across the country, resulting in a raise in prices across the board. Raised prices coincided with reductions in wages. Factories cut down on overtime hours which resulted in less take-home pay for industrial workers.⁶

Price rises and less pay increased the unrest in East Germany. Sporadic food riots broke out in Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, and Suhl starting in November of 1952. Discontent spread throughout East German factories. Rabble-rousing, anti-SED graffiti, and alleged acts of sabotage were reported across the GDR due to the increased strains posed by the “construction of socialism.” One graffitied slogan in Brandenburg asked, “Why is the worker today still being bled white?”⁷

These stark changes caused a growing refugee crisis as more and more people fled East Germany. The phenomenon was labeled as *Republikflucht* or “Republic flight.” Triggered by the economic issues in the GDR, *Republikflucht* was also spurred by the SED’s efforts to criminalize church youth organizations in East Germany and encourage the youth

⁵ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 53-4.

⁶ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 54.

⁷ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 54.

to join their communist *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth). Criminalizing free expression of religion did little to encourage East Germans to stay.⁸

At the outset of growing emigration, however, the East German government viewed it favorably since they thought it would be a voluntary way to prevent famine or unemployment, but the disproportionate loss of police officers and technical experts became concerning. Over time, the GDR government tried to collect more data on the type of people fleeing the country.⁹

In early 1953, the flight of refugees had reached new heights. In the first half of that year, 225,174 refugees fled East Germany. The SED turned to propaganda to try and combat these enormous losses. Propaganda focused on the misery of East Germans in Western internment camps and the difficulty of finding a job there. The propaganda also portrayed emigrants as saboteurs and traitors to the state. Despite these propaganda campaigns, the number of refugees exiting East Germany continued to rise until the GDR's Department of State Administration was forced to recognize the propaganda efforts as "monotonous and ineffective." The SED also began strengthening border controls between East and West Germany and relocating anyone within five kilometers of the border who were deemed to be "politically unreliable," but the infamous Berlin Wall had yet to be built around West Berlin. The early border measures that were enacted also increased domestic discontent.¹⁰

One of the major stumbling blocks toward effective control of the refugee situation

⁸ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 71.

⁹ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 84.

¹⁰ Fulbrook, Mary, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, p. 34.

continued to be a lack of compliance from lower-level functionaries in the party apparatus. After the Politburo passed a resolution to encourage local agencies to deal with the flight of refugees, the response from local government was lackluster. SED internal reports from early 1953 note, “as of the beginning of March 1953, those comrades made responsible by the resolution have hardly done a thing worth mentioning.”¹¹

Vyacheslav Molotov, foreign minister under Josef Stalin who formed a governing troika with Lavrentiy Beria and Georgy Malenkov, later recalled the period as one of East German unrest.

In 1953 we began receiving reports that the situation in the German Democratic Republic was not particularly stable . . . We discussed the problem and worked out some proposals in writing. The first was what we should do about the GDR. At the head in Germany then was Ulbricht, a dedicated communist, a politically conscious comrade, who was somewhat blunt and lacked flexibility. It turned out that the German comrades began talking at the top of their voices about building socialism without having laid the proper groundwork for it.¹²

Molotov goes on to describe debate in the Soviet presidium about what guidance to provide the GDR. Beria, in Molotov’s memoirs, only cared that East Germany remain non-hostile to the Soviet Union as per the “Stalin Note” from the previous March. Molotov, on the other hand, thought “it was imperative to set a firm line on building socialism but without rushing the process.”¹³ With Malenkov’s approval, the Presidium agreed “building socialism in the GDR must unfold gradually in order not to alienate the population.

¹¹ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 86.

¹² Chuev, Feliks Ivanovich, and Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, Translated by Albert Resis, Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993, p. 333-4.

¹³ Chuev, Feliks Ivanovich, and Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, Translated by Albert Resis, Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993, p. 334-5.

Otherwise revolts might flare up, and then we would have to forcibly repress the very Germany we had only just started to rebuild.”¹⁴ Subsequently, Moscow sent a secret resolution to the SED’s leaders promising aid and relief in reparation payments while confronting the GDR on its failures in constructing socialism. In their resolution at the SED’s Second Party Conference, later dubbed “The New Course,” the Soviet Council of Ministers urged an end to forced collectivization, a relaxation of political controls, and a shift to consumer industries.¹⁵

At this point, the United States under the Truman Administration was evaluating the Second Party Conference. A telegram by the Director of the Berlin Element of the United States High Commission for Germany (HICOG), Cecil B. Lyon, conveyed his interpretation to the HICOG offices at Bonn. “Our tentative impression is that it represents in part [a] turning point [in] Sov[iet] policy in direction transformation GDR to ‘Peoples Democracy,’ and also that timing of conf[erence] and dramatic Ulbricht pronouncements partly bluff and designed for shock effect in West Ger[many],” Lyon wrote. Lyon also went on to describe to his superiors how the East Germans, under Walter Ulbricht’s leadership, were smearing the West with allegations of intransigence towards German unity.¹⁶ After the denial of the “Stalin Note,” such criticisms are more understandable from the GDR government. However, the Second Party Conference was viewed as an act of aggression rather than understandable frustration. A report from N. Spencer Barnes, Chief of the Eastern Affairs

¹⁴ Chuev, Feliks Ivanovich, and Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, Translated by Albert Resis, Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993, p. 336.

¹⁵ Ostermann, Christian F., “‘Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 63.

¹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713. Print.

Division of the Berlin Element of HICOG, described the moves by the SED as a display of Soviet unwillingness to compromise with the United States and consolidation of their power in East Germany.¹⁷ Acting Secretary of State David Bruce sent out a missive to all U.S. diplomatic offices in response reminding them not to recognize the GDR and instead insist it is still the “Soviet Zone of Occupation.”¹⁸

Among the top priorities of U.S. foreign policy was supporting Chancellor Konrad Adenauer for his reelection in 1953. Upon becoming Secretary of State for President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles toured Europe to meet with a variety of foreign leaders on current issues, particularly the European Defense Community. In meeting with leaders from West Germany’s *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), or Social Democratic Party of Germany, Secretary Dulles discussed the European Defense Community and warned the SPD leaders, like Chairman Erich Ollenhauer, from “any hesitancy to do the right thing” in terms of approving the EDC agreements. However, the SPD countered that the EDC must “not widen gulf between Federal Republic and East Germany thus making hope of German unification more remote. Only when German people could be convinced, according to Ollenhauer, that all possibilities of reaching agreement with Soviets had been exhausted would they be prepared for full integration with West.”¹⁹ Ollenhauer and the SPD were much more resistant to Western integration or rearmament for the FRG if these goals would decrease the chances for future reunification with East Germany while it was under Soviet control.

¹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 704. Print.

¹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 705. Print.

¹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume V, Part 2, Western European Security*, No. 274. Print.

Adenauer and the *Christliche Demokratische Union*, or Christian Democratic Union (CDU), offered a different path for U.S. foreign policy. Adenauer had already signed onto early drafts of EDC treaties requiring ratification throughout other European capitals. When Secretary Dulles discussed the matter with Adenauer, he found, "As far as substantive aspect of German defense contribution is concerned, Chancellor maintained all preparations on paper which are within German power to make at this stage have already been made." Not only had Chancellor Adenauer continued to make his commitments toward rearming Germany for the European Defense Community, but he also promised opportunities for U.S. investments.²⁰ In Adenauer's speeches of the same period, he even stoked American exceptionalism, saying, "Today I am very glad to observe that the people of the United States have recognized this responsibility better than almost any other nation in history. They are perfectly clear as to the tremendous scope of that responsibility; they see themselves as the leaders of mankind and the protectors of all humane ideals."²¹ The results of these meetings and public pronouncements were so friendly that notes from a later National Security Council meeting recall, "the President said that he would do almost anything to help the German Chancellor."²² Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles were also faithful friends of Chancellor Adenauer. Their sister, an economist working in Berlin, Eleanor Lansing Dulles, would describe Adenauer as a "truly great man, who was to be a friend to me and my brothers." Chancellor Adenauer's friendship even allowed Director Allen Dulles to build a tunnel in early 1953 from West

²⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume V, Part 2, Western European Security*, No. 275. Print.

²¹ Adenauer, Konrad, *World indivisible: With Liberty and Justice for All*, Translated by Clara Winston, New York: Harper, 1955, p. 82.

²² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 715. Print.

Berlin to East Berlin which allowed the CIA to tap Soviet officials' phones.²³ The preferences the U.S. had for West German elections would later be reflected by the United States Information Service (USIS). In the words of historian Kenneth Osgood, "the USIS especially targeted the SPD and its labor constituents because they were perceived as 'especially susceptible' to disengagement and disarmament schemes."²⁴

Another primary concern of the United States was the momentum toward Four-Power talks amidst the Soviet "peace offensive." The USSR had relinquished its territorial claims on Turkey, established diplomatic relations with Israel, worked to improve ties with Yugoslavia and Greece, and begun emphasizing "peaceful coexistence" between the USSR and the West. Georgy Malenkov spoke in front of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR about his willingness along with the rest of the troika to work toward agreements with the West on all unsettled issues.²⁵ "At the present time there is no disputed or unresolved question that cannot be resolved by peaceful means," Malenkov said. However, the Eisenhower administration viewed this only in terms of Cold War conflict. The State Department believed "the purpose for such campaign is painfully obvious: by this method the Communists hope to break the wall of resistance which the West has been constructing."²⁶

In response, Prime Minister Winston Churchill called for a "conference on the highest level . . . between the leading powers." His speech was well-received and the international community seemed ready to move toward a Four-Power Conference that

²³ Kinzer, Stephen, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and their Secret World War*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2014, p. 154-5.

²⁴ Osgood, Kenneth Alan, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006, p. 112.

²⁵ Osgood, Kenneth Alan, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006, p. 56-7.

²⁶ Osgood, Kenneth Alan, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006, p. 61-2.

included the issue of a divided Germany. “The New Course” proposed by the SED was viewed by the U.S. in the lens of these Four-Power talks. After it was proposed, Director Lyon wrote a report stating that the reforms were due to “Kremlin recognition of necessity [to] slow down tempo and aggressiveness [of] GDR socialization process” in the light of *Republikflucht* and economic downturns. However, Lyon blamed the timing on “influencing [the] outcome of Federal Republic elections by increasing votes for [the] SPD” and “increasing in minds [of] Germany and [the] world public impression that Soviets are meeting President Eisenhower’s conditions for 4-Power talks.”²⁷ Given the political environment in Germany and internationally, it became more and more unpopular for the U.S. and the Adenauer government to oppose Four-Power talks while it simultaneously became clear that the USSR was gaining ground on the world scene as they disavowed the totalitarian methods of Stalin.²⁸

Meanwhile, the United States had also initiated a series of campaigns to counter the legitimacy of the GDR and undermine Soviet foreign policy in relation to Germany. Since the Carroll-Speier Report of 1950, the United States had committed to shaping a “unified, strong, growing resistance movement within the Soviet zone.”²⁹ The most prominent of these forces that would come to play a role in the Uprising of 1953 was Rundfunk in Amerikanischen Sektor or Radio in the American Sector (RIAS). As of “The Report of the President’s Committee on International Information Activities” from June 30, 1953, RIAS

²⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 712. Print.

²⁸ Ostermann, Christian F., “Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 66.

²⁹ Ostermann, Christian F., “Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 64.

spent \$866,000, or \$7,840,000 in today's dollars,³⁰ for a staff of eight Americans and 648 Germans in Berlin. The report made clear that the dollars were well spent. According to their analysis, RIAS was "accepted by many of its German listeners as a bona fide German station."³¹ The usefulness of RIAS as a vessel for propaganda was also gauged by Soviet efforts to jam its signal. "RIAS has been so effective that Communists are making a determined effort to jam it," wrote a memo from W. Bradley Connors at the International Information Agency (IIA).³² This was because RIAS not only built morale in West Berlin, but it also "made an important contribution in impressing on the population of eastern Germany the determination of the West and in sustaining their hopes for eventual liberation from the Soviet Union."³³ In fact, the first U.S. High Commissioner for Germany John J. McCloy described RIAS as "the spiritual and psychological center of resistance in a Communist-dominated, blacked-out area."³⁴

Hanns Peter Herz, editor for RIAS from 1950-1966³⁵ and dual citizen of West Germany and the United States,³⁶ described RIAS as a news station providing information to communist East Berlin and East Germany. In an interview with C-SPAN, he asserted the

³⁰ "CPI Inflation Calculator." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

³¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume II, Part 2, National Security Affairs*, No. 370. Print.

³² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 708. Print.

³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume II, Part 2, National Security Affairs*, No. 370. Print.

³⁴ Ostermann, Christian F., "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 65.

³⁵ Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands. "Herz, Hanns-Peter." SPD Berlin.

<https://www.spd.berlin/partei/landesverband/unsere-geschichte/personen/a-k/herz-hanns-peter/>.

³⁶ Mautner, Karl F. "Interview with Karl F. Mautner," Interview by Thomas J. Dunnigan, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, May 12, 1993, p. 39.

aim of RIAS was to “give people a real picture of the world.” It was supposed to provide news for the East German people. Despite providing substantial financial backing, United States government “never tried to influence” RIAS or the content it produced, claimed Herz,³⁷ but given the Eisenhower administration’s surprise and elation that Germans had accepted RIAS as a “bona fide German station,”³⁸ Herz seems clearly to be understating the involvement of the United States.

By June 3, 1953, the United States was also involved with the distribution of a variety of publications. The Eisenhower administration subsidized a West German technical journal for magazine subscribers in the GDR to keep “Soviet Zone scientists informed about the progress and philosophy of Western science and fills a void in this field which would otherwise be filled by Communist propaganda organs.” In addition, 2,500 copies of pro-Western publications were financed out of Frankfurt to distribute to targeted individuals in the GDR. The message of these monthly magazine subscriptions was supposed to be such that they could act “as a means of keeping alive the spark of democratic tradition, the will to resist totalitarianism, and the hope of eventual liberation, which exist among peoples of East Germany.”³⁹

It is clear that the policies of the United States were designed to fall within Eisenhower’s promise of rollback. The containment policy of the Truman administration was not enough for Eisenhower’s campaign for the presidency. Instead of merely containing the Soviet Union and communist ideology, Eisenhower promised to “roll back”

³⁷ *Radio in the American Sector in Berlin*, C-SPAN, April 9, 1990, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?11888-1/radio-american-sector-berlin>

³⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume II, Part 2, National Security Affairs*, No. 370. Print.

³⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 710. Print.

communism's progress. Dr. Bowie, Director of Policy Planning in Eisenhower's State Department, described it saying, "The Eisenhower campaign had been urging more attention to the liberation of Eastern Europe, and Dulles was particularly eager to do this, to appeal to the votes which would be attracted by the idea of the liberation of Eastern Europe."⁴⁰ Rollback included the use of nonmilitary means to push back against Soviet influence and bring liberation to Eastern Europe. In substantive terms however, it was merely an extension of initiatives and policies started under Truman.⁴¹

In response to the staggering flight of refugees as well as pressure coming from both the Soviet Union and the United States, the SED had no choice but to pursue a change in its policies. On June 11, 1953, the SED announced "The New Course" toward constructing socialism which included a milder stance toward the middle class and farmers.⁴² It ended higher taxes and more burdensome insurance which had become a major complaint of East German farmers.⁴³ "The New Course" also ended the ongoing confrontation of the SED government with East Germany's Christian youth groups, sensing a losing battle.⁴⁴ On top of that, the GDR recognized their failings and apologized for the mistakes of the regime that had precipitated the *Republikflucht*. Even Director Lyon conceded that with these changes, "Politburo in effect calls off war on private sector in economy in industry, trade and

⁴⁰ Bowie, Robert R. "Interview with Dr. Robert R. Bowie," Interview by Robert Gerald Livingston, Philipp Gassert, Richard Immerman, Paul Steege, and Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, February 19, 2008, p. 11.

⁴¹ Osgood, Kenneth Alan, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006, p. 39.

⁴² Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 55.

⁴³ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 81.

agriculture: announces intention [to] attempt [to] really solve consumer supply problems.”⁴⁵

The response from the United States viewed these not as a course correction but instead a more insidious plot engineered from the Kremlin itself. Director Lyon maintained that this change in policy by the Soviet Union and the GDR was intended purely to have a propaganda effect and nothing more substantive could be gleaned from it. Possible Four-Power talks between the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom were front and center among policy concerns for the Eisenhower administration as they worried about the developing Soviet “peace offensive.” Given the already shaky French resolve when it came to the EDC agreements with their former invader, Germany, the Eisenhower administration was especially mindful of any Soviet moves that might make it seem as though the Soviet Union were the more reasonable party in these negotiations. Not only that, but Prime Minister Winston Churchill had received praise throughout Europe for a speech mirroring the language of peace the Soviet Union had pursued when discussing future Four Power talks.⁴⁶ When evaluating any Soviet aims at manipulating potential Four Power talks, Molotov’s memoirs coupled with the food riots in East Germany and the hemorrhaging of citizens into West Germany seem to make clear, in retrospect, that the “New Course” was designed to remedy internal issues. The U.S. was too preoccupied cultivating devastating propaganda weaponry to clearly assess the state of the GDR. It would not be the last time that U.S. interest in devastating propaganda warfare would overwhelm any interest in following through on their propaganda’s promises.

⁴⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 711. Print.

⁴⁶ Ostermann, Christian F., “‘Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 65.

In the GDR, “The New Course” failed to address the strenuous work norms for East German workers.⁴⁷ On May 28, 1953, industrial work quotas had been increased by 10%. This effectively made East German factory workers produce 10% more for the same take-home pay.⁴⁸ These norms were, understandably, widely unpopular, but when the SED shocked its population by hastily introducing “The New Course” to correct past failures, it remained plainly obvious to East German workers that they were still being required to work harder at no increased pay.⁴⁹

On June 16, 1953 starting at seven in the morning,⁵⁰ construction workers marched from Stalin Allee, a row of workers’ houses in East Berlin.⁵¹ Disgruntled laborers formed a column of angry voices. Chanting for an end to the increased production demands from the ruling SED party, these workers moved on Alexanderplatz at the heart of Berlin past police officers who stood by making no effort to interrupt the demonstration and only redirected traffic.⁵² The workers began calling for a general strike to make clear the severity of what they were seeking.⁵³ It also became clear that this group of construction workers had memorized a set of slogans. “We don’t want a people’s army, we need butter!,” the

⁴⁷ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Ostermann, Christian F., “Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 62.

⁴⁹ Ostermann, Christian F., “Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 64.

⁵⁰ Sullivan, Walter, “Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953. p. 1.

⁵¹ “Berlin Uprising,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 21, 1953, p. E.

⁵² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713. Print.

⁵³ Smale, Alison, “60 Years Later, Germany Recalls Its Anti-Soviet Revolt” *The New York Times*, June 17, 2013, Web, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/18/world/europe/germany-puts-spotlight-on-its-own-anti-soviet-revolt.html>

dissidents shouted.⁵⁴ More and more workers joined the growing demonstration from other streets as they approached Leipzigstrasse. On Leipzigstrasse were a series of government buildings where the protestors hoped to make their economic demands heard by government officials.⁵⁵

Construction workers were among the first to organize and protest the policies of the SED, because they had been able to find ample work in West Germany since there were no stringent barriers between East and West Berlin. The Berlin Wall would not be built until 1961, and many East German construction workers happily commuted to West Germany for additional income. West Berlin was undertaking a series of ambitious building projects, and these workers often found it beneficial to commute across the sector borders to a job market with an acute scarcity of construction workers. The West Germans were willing to pay well for labor, and these construction workers experienced both the better working conditions and freer governmental system on the other side.⁵⁶ In addition on the morning of June 16, construction workers found an article in the trade union newspaper, *Die Tribüne*, that emphasized increased work norms and may have further animated workers that morning.⁵⁷

As the Politburo met to discuss the crisis, Heinz Brandt, an SED official who would later defect to West Germany, was told to meet the crowd in Leipzigstrasse. Standing on top of a bicycle seat, Brandt tried to assuage the crowd and assure them that their demands were being heard. As chants of “we are not slaves” filled the streets, Brandt promised that

⁵⁴ Sullivan, Walter, “Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953, pg. 1.

⁵⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713, Print.

⁵⁶ Baring, Arnulf. *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1972), p. 40.

⁵⁷ Steele, Jonathan, *Inside East Germany*. New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977, p. 90.

the Politburo was planning revisions to the increased production demands made on the workers. A “remarkable roar of triumph, mingled with joy, anger and laughter” resulted from his pronouncement. Even after a promise for some sort of concession, some of the crowd still reacted with anger. Professor Robert Havemann, a communist and professor of chemistry at Humboldt University, stood up and blamed West Germany for perpetuating many of the problems afflicting the East. He was shouted down, and he would also go on to defect and become a leading critic of the East German government.⁵⁸

Eventually, Ministers Rau and Selbmann, both members of the ruling SED government and high-level ministers stood out on a balcony to listen and respond to the demands being made of the SED government. The mob would not be satisfied as Rau and Selbmann persistently tried to pacify and disperse the protestors. As their efforts proved unsuccessful, Minister for Heavy Industry Fritz Selbmann left the balcony and went down to the ground floor. After leaving his building, Selbmann walked amidst the workers and told them that he was a worker too. He stood atop a table along the street the better communicate with his audience. Constant interruptions barraged Selbmann as he tried to appeal to the mass of people. They told Selbmann that “he had forgotten that he was once a worker.” Communist bona fides under attack, Minister Selbmann continued to attempt to communicate with the demonstrators. As Selbmann claimed to speak for the government, he told the workers that their complaints were justified but urged calm.⁵⁹

Then the tone of the demonstration shifted dramatically. After attempting to calm the demonstrators, Minister Selbmann was told by one of the workers, “we are not against

⁵⁸ Steele, p. 90-91.

⁵⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713, Print.

the norms in the Stalin Allee, we are against the norms in all Germany. We want free elections." At this point, a fervor in the crowd arose with seeming assent against the undemocratic traditions of their people's republic. Selbmann could not help but notice a growing hostility toward him as he was pushed aside from the table upon which he spoke. Another demonstrator stood upon the table and began to speak for the movement that had sprung up.⁶⁰

"What you have declared here is of no interest to us," the worker shouted to Selbmann after taking his place upon the outdoor table, "we want to be free. Our demonstration is not against norms. We come not just from the Stalin Allee but from all of Berlin, this is a people's revolt." The production norms had provided the spark for the Uprising, but the movement had shifted its concerns to governmental reform. The demands were now political, not economic.⁶¹

The march left Leipzigstrasse having been unable to make Premier Otto Grotewohl or Secretary General of the SED Walter Ulbricht listen to their demands. Some estimates suggested that a total of 5,000 to 10,000 demonstrators participated in the initial June 16 demonstration as the mob chanted "Everyone out of your houses!" Many East Berliners laughed or applauded as the demonstration passed through the streets.⁶² "We don't want a Volkskammer," they shouted in unison of East Germany's parliament, "We want free elections."⁶³

⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713, Print.

⁶¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 713, Print.

⁶² Sullivan, Walter, "Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953, p. 1.

⁶³ Sullivan, Walter, "Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-

Witnessing the perilous situation arising, the East German government announced by two o'clock in the afternoon that day that their decision to demand more work for the same pay was "a mistake" in a communiqué to the public. It was also announced that the order to increase work demands on laborers would be revoked. Despite such concessions, the Politburo of the SED still implored "the workers to unite around the party and the Government and to unmask the hostile provocateurs who seek to bring discord and confusion to the ranks of the working class."⁶⁴ After that point, the strikes and demonstrations seemed to dissipate with workers returning home in the warm glow of their victory with only a few hundred continuing to parade. That evening, however, held ominous, portentous signs for how the demonstrations would persist. After the economic demands were met, there were reports of various incidents across East Berlin where citizens were spotted arguing with loyalist workers or yelling threats for protests the next morning.⁶⁵ These debates on street corners lasted up to six hours as different shifts of workers continued to argue their view for or against the SED government.⁶⁶

As the night's arguments portended, the protests continued and spread. One likely reason for the spread of the Uprising that had been isolated to Berlin to other areas across Germany was likely RIAS. Operated by Americans, the German language radio programs from West Berlin reported on events transpiring there and spread the word through their broadcasts. When asked on June 18, 1953 at a ten o'clock am National Security Council

Red Driven West," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, Walter, "Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953, p. 1.

⁶⁵ "Berlin Uprising," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 21, 1953, p. E.

⁶⁶ Sullivan, Walter, "Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953, p. 1.

meeting⁶⁷ whether these American broadcasts had been responsible for the spread of the protests across Germany, Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, commented that “the United States had nothing whatsoever to do with inciting these riots, and that our reaction thus far had been to confine ourselves, in broadcasts which were not attributable to expressions of sympathy and admiration, with an admixture of references to the great traditions of 1848.”⁶⁸ The traditions of 1848 refer to the pro-democracy riots from the working and middle classes of Germany urging for national unity and more democracy.⁶⁹ Allen Dulles then claimed that “The New Course” and Soviet peaceful coexistence rhetoric “obviously had not escaped the notice of the satellite peoples, who evidently were interpreting the soft policy as offering real possibilities of action against the Soviet Union.” Director Dulles’ assertions that RIAS did not encourage pro-democracy riots with its allusions to 1848 seem quite unlikely in the light of the nationalist and democratic connotations of 1848.

Due to RIAS broadcasts and unreconciled demands for greater government accountability, what began as isolated demonstrations on June 16, 1953 spread across all of East Germany on June 17. Estimates vary, but it appears that between 20,000 and 50,000 workers in East Berlin alone began rioting the next day against the East German government. Due to widespread publicizing, the demonstrations spread to other major East German cities, like Halle, Magdeburg, Leipzig, and Dresden.⁷⁰ In Berlin, a member of the

⁶⁷ Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives, *The President’s Appointments, 1953*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 715, Print.

⁶⁹ O’Boyle, Lenore, “The Democratic Left in Germany, 1848,” *The Journal of Modern History* 33, no. 4 (1961): p. 374-83.

⁷⁰ Ingimundarson, Valur, “The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953,” *Diplomatic History* 20.3 (1996): Web, 20 Sept. 2016, p. 388.

SED wearing a red button with Karl Marx was shouted down by the mob.⁷¹ The man was unhurt, but violence quickly escalated. Police were stoned or beaten. Demonstrators manhandled and pushed Deputy Premier Otto Nuschke as he stepped out of his limousine until he was chased into West Berlin and held by Western police. Climbing the Brandenburg Gate, the disaffected tore and drug the Soviet flag from atop the gate and replaced it with the West German flag. Upon reaching the ground, protestors burned the flag of the USSR.⁷² The crowd approached the border between the Soviet and United States sectors and destroyed boundary markers as well as burning the control shack which guarded the border between East and West.⁷³

Recognizing the call for a general strike and ongoing unrest in the streets, the Soviet Union had moved troops into East Berlin as early as six-thirty am. Armored trucks of Soviet troops zigzagged down a central promenade in East Berlin, Unter den Linden, attempting to peacefully corral demonstrators who were in front of the new Soviet embassy. Other trucks just drove alongside assembled crowds to keep watch and remain ready. RIAS broadcasts advised listeners not to engage Russian troops, but it also simultaneously encouraged them to “concentrate on German forces.” This represents another instance in which Director Dulles may not have accurately conveyed the involvement of RIAS to the National Security Council at the next day’s meeting.

After the increased violence and unrest of the East German citizens, martial law was declared by the Soviet Major General P.T. Dibrowa, military commandant of the Soviet

⁷¹ Sullivan, Walter, “Turmoil Grips East Berlin; Thousands Assail Regime,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 17, 1953, p. 1.

⁷² “Berlin Uprising,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 21, 1953, p. E.

⁷³ Sullivan, Walter, “Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-Red Driven West,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

Sector of Berlin, at one o'clock in the afternoon. All demonstrations and assemblies of more than three people in public spaces were banned. A curfew from nine pm to five am was also implemented. At this point, the trucks of Soviet troops began firing automatic weapons into the air to disperse protestors.⁷⁴

These moves did not prevent the spread of the unrest. Protestors moved on the government buildings on Leipzigstrasse that had been an epicenter for conflict the previous day, but Soviet tanks moved in front of the buildings in a defensive perimeter. From there, they stormed the People's Police Headquarters only to be driven back by water jets and rifle fire. Several police vans were overturned and set alight. *Neues Deutschland*, the official paper of the SED, had its headquarters attacked. Assaults on Politburo offices on Lothringerstrasse were prevented only by lines of Soviet troops with prone bayonets. Power cables were cut preventing subway transportation. Shops were looted.⁷⁵

Unrest surfaced throughout the rest of East Germany as well. As word spread through RIAS, more and more areas across the country were affected. In Erfurt, a district of East Germany centered on the city of Erfurt, youths in Martinfeld had been seen on June 16 confronting police officers and overturning their vehicles. The next day strikes took place across the cities of Erfurt, Weimar, Eisenach, Sömmerda, and Mühlhausen. Thirty-two thousand workers in Erfurt went on strike, or about four percent of the working population. About 10,600 East Germans in Erfurt took part in some form of demonstration. Schoolchildren in classrooms began emulating their parents and took down pictures of Stalin that remained after his death along with those of SED party officials. They refused to

⁷⁴ Sullivan, Walter, "Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-Red Driven West," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Sullivan, Walter, "Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-Red Driven West," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

take part in Russian language instruction or participate in the Young Pioneers program of the SED.⁷⁶ Across all of East Germany, 372,000 workers went on strike in 274 towns, or about six percent of the total work force.⁷⁷

Premier Grotewohl maintained that these demonstrations were perpetrated by outside provocateurs. Grotewohl implied in his statements that the demands of construction workers from the day before had been met after the SED rescinded its raised production quota mandate. Grotewohl said the specific demand “has been disposed of since the Government canceled this measure.” “Workers and all honest citizens,” Grotewohl said, “are requested to seize the provokers and hand them over to state organs.”⁷⁸ Retaliation against demonstrators and their leaders would be swift. In Vyacheslav Molotov’s later memoirs about this period when he was still Minister of Foreign Affairs and part of the troika of Molotov, Georgy Malenkov, and Lavrentiy Beria as they controlled the Soviet government, he wrote, “Beria had been dispatched to Berlin to suppress the unfolding revolt there. He was excellent in cases like that. We had passed a decision to use tanks. We had approved the use of drastic measures to put down the revolt, the most ruthless measures. Let the Germans rise against us? Everything would have turned shaky, the imperialists would have taken action. There would have been total collapse.”⁷⁹ The initial casualties for the first day of the Uprising were put at 16 dead and 119 wounded.

In the night, mass arrests and the round-up of leaders took place. Just before

⁷⁶ Allinson, Mark, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 56-57.

⁷⁷ Steele, Jonathan, *Inside East Germany*, New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Sullivan, Walter, “Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-Red Driven West,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Chuev, Feliks Ivanovich, and Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, Translated by Albert Resis, Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993, p. 346.

midnight, East German government radio announced that an undisclosed number of “provocateurs” from the Bergmann-Borsig heavy machinery plant had been arrested.⁸⁰ In the night People’s Police, raided the apartments of workers involved in the demonstration and different resistance leaders in East Berlin.⁸¹ Soviet military courts expedited the process. In one example, an unemployed painter named Willi Goettling was sentenced to death and immediately shot. Thousands more found themselves in jail.⁸² About 1,400 people of those were convicted for life imprisonment in East Germany.⁸³

In the meantime, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of the Federal Republic of Germany was reaching out to the United States and President Eisenhower. On the night of June 17, the United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Winthrop W. Aldrich, reported back to the United States on meetings he had conducted with Herbert Blankenhorn, Director of the Political Affairs Section of the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Blankenhorn had met with John Selwyn Lloyd, Minister of State for the United Kingdom, and Frank K. Roberts, British Representative on the Brussels Treaty Commission. According to Ambassador Aldrich, Blankenhorn “brought message that Adenauer believes a dangerous situation now exists in Germany as result of international developments, that he is worried about election prospects.” Adenauer wasted no time in sending a signal to the United States about shoring up his election prospects amidst chaos in the GDR. According to Aldrich, the

⁸⁰ Sullivan, Walter, “Martial Law Is Set: Toll Placed at 16 Dead, at Least 119 Wounded--Pro-Red Driven West,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 18, 1953, p. 1.

⁸¹ Associated Press, “Workers' Homes Are Raided,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 19, 1953, p. 12.

⁸² “Berlin Uprising,” *The New York Times* (New York City), June 21, 1953, p. E.

⁸³ Read, Anthony, and David Fisher, *Berlin rising: biography of a city*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1994, p. 271.

British were understanding but non-committal.⁸⁴

On June 18, Magdeburg was the site of another large strike with 13,000 laborers at the Thaelmann heavy machinery works going on strike. The People's Police quickly retaliated in a battle that left as many as 22 people dead.⁸⁵ East Germany's largest single enterprise, a gasoline refinery in Halle, was set ablaze as the country was engulfed in conflict. Erfurt saw 10,000 demonstrators rush the city hall and burn the adjoining People's Police offices. Along the Baltic Sea in Rostock, the Neptune shipyards witnessed major strikes. Similar strikes were seen at the Warnow-Werft shipyards in Warnemeunde, a silk factory in Rathenow, a Zeiss optical plant at Jena, and several uranium and coal mines throughout the country.⁸⁶ Many of the cities' unrest followed a similar pattern of strikes at heavy industry plants followed by cascading strikes at food, textile, or hospitality industries. Areas with strong communist traditions were more likely to strike, and younger workers played a much larger role in the demonstrations.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, it was gradually becoming clear that the SED was regaining control of East Germany from their citizens. Those East Germans who fled to West Berlin and tried to return to their houses in the Soviet sector of Berlin after the riots found the People's Police waiting to apprehend them.⁸⁸

As the days of the Uprising wore on, Soviet troops supplanted local People's Police

⁸⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 1, Germany and Austria*, Print, No. 198.

⁸⁵ Associated Press, "Workers' Homes Are Raided," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 19, 1953, p. 12.

⁸⁶ Associated Press, "Reds Smash East German Worker Riots," *Chicago Tribune*. June 21, 1953, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Steele, Jonathan. *Inside East Germany*. New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977. Print. Pg. 92.

⁸⁸ Associated Press, "Germans Raid Reds' Offices in U.S. Sector," *Chicago Tribune*. June 20, 1953, p. 1.

throughout East Germany to help maintain order.⁸⁹ Plain clothes troops or police would infiltrate strikes and demonstrations to ascertain the ringleaders in the various groups. Rather than risk a direct confrontation, these same officers would come in the night to apprehend the leaders. The movement gradually lost all coherent leadership as strikers would continue their efforts each morning finding more and more of their friends and leaders missing.⁹⁰

Members of the SED who had participated in the strikes or riots found punishment too. In Erfurt, 89 SED members were expelled from the party. In the three months after June 17, 163 SED members from Erfurt would flee to West Germany. Local party leaders were also told to investigate SED members who had not rallied to counter-demonstrations or participated in aiding the government. Few local SED officials proved willing to pursue the matter. At one disciplinary hearing in Erfurt, an investigation had concluded one party member had not duly supported the SED, but the member was still not fired from the factory at which he worked. Additionally, not all local members voted to expel him from the party. Inspection commissions by the SED concluded, "The party leadership are shying away, there are strong tendencies of retreat and appeasement." "There are some comrades who are wavering or have capitulated," a similar investigation in Weimar found, "It is evident that none of these comrades has ever acted as a comrade."⁹¹

Although the Eisenhower administration had contributed through its use of propaganda to the East German Uprising of 1953, it was still caught off-guard by the

⁸⁹ Associated Press, "Workers' Homes Are Raided," *The New York Times* (New York City), June 19, 1953, Pg. 12.

⁹⁰ Allinson, Mark, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 58.

⁹¹ Allinson, Mark, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 59-60.

suddenness of the riots in East Berlin. In many cases, the Eisenhower administration or U.S. officials encouraged calm and even pushed back against solidarity demonstrations for the East German workers that were planned in West Germany.⁹² Eisenhower never had any intention of offering arms or military aid to the rebelling East Germans. Given some time, however, the opportunities that the Uprising provided became clear. Special Assistant to the President C.D. Jackson would even say, "Oh, this is now a wonderful opportunity; we'll just exploit this to the full."⁹³ In his official memorandum to the president, Jackson made clear, that "unless some sign is forthcoming very soon from the United States, there could be a terrible letdown in both East and West Germany, which would seriously affect the U.S. position and even more seriously affect Adenauer's position."⁹⁴ Given the high value that the Eisenhower administration placed on keeping Adenauer and the CDU in power, the United States would analyze in coming weeks the political uses of the Uprising.⁹⁵

By July 2, the United States High Commissioner for Germany, James Conant, had prepared alongside the Adenauer government an idea to utilize the East German Uprising for their mutual political benefit. The idea was a food aid program to be distributed to East Germans in the aftermath of the chaos. Given the upcoming West German elections, Adenauer had to keep up appearances so, "if the government is attacked during the campaign for alleged callousness regarding plight of East Zone Germans, [the West

⁹² Ostermann, Christian F., "Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 66.

⁹³ Bowie, Robert R. "Interview with Dr. Robert R. Bowie," Interview by Robert Gerald Livingston, Philipp Gassert, Richard Immerman, Paul Steege, and Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, February 19, 2008, p. 12.

⁹⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 722. Print.

⁹⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 718. Print.

German] Government could point to this program as illustration of quite effective work.”⁹⁶

Despite some initial uncertainties about pursuing the humanitarian food program, Allen Dulles at the CIA and the Psychological Strategy Board approved of the program overwhelmingly. Adenauer and the West German government were instructed to coordinate their humanitarian efforts through the State Department and the CIA.⁹⁷ From there, subsequent steps forward with the food aid program were to be run past the Psychological Strategy Board for maximum propaganda impact in the Cold War.⁹⁸

The United States then prepared to supply the West German government with \$15 million in total food shipments coming from U.S. agricultural surpluses of grain, soy beans, lard, sugar, and some meats. More immediately, food could be provided from Army rations still stockpiled in Germany.⁹⁹ It was viewed that an outright gift from the Federal Republic of Germany would be summarily rejected by the East German government. Instead, the food aid would have to be distributed through religious organizations.¹⁰⁰ Given the ongoing tensions between the East German government and religious organizations within the GDR, these churches could be trusted to act as pro-Western surrogates, while not bearing the actual name of the FRG or the United States. The amount of food distributed should be enough to placate the humanitarian concerns of the West German people, so that they were convinced that Western institutions were sufficiently handling the fallout from the

⁹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 720. Print.

⁹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 723. Print.

⁹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 725. Print.

⁹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 725. Print.

¹⁰⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 725. Print.

Uprising, but communications from within the Eisenhower administration also made it clear that “this would alleviate the immediate crisis but cause no long-range change in the deteriorating economic conditions in the East Zone.”¹⁰¹ With U.S. aid being redirected through private charities, Eisenhower felt confident that the East German and Soviet governments would be compelled to accept the aid.¹⁰²

However, the Soviet government was convinced that the aid was being orchestrated for propaganda reasons given that no coordination had taken place between the United States government and the government of the GDR. The USSR made clear that it was already providing food to East Germany and would not allow U.S. aid, even through private charities, into East Germany.¹⁰³ By July 10, President Eisenhower had published the Soviet letter denying \$15 million in food aid.¹⁰⁴ Adenauer began insisting that the aid was then given to West Germany for them to distribute in their own territory of West Berlin where East Germans would be welcomed to receive it.¹⁰⁵ In the meantime, the U.S. would publicize the Soviet denial of aid to East Germany in a time of crisis. Anxious not to fall into the Soviet line of using humanitarian aid as propaganda, the aid the U.S. did distribute would be done more quietly. No firm ties would be established between the food and the United States, but outlets like RIAS and Voice of America would broadcast to East Germans that they should come to the west to receive food parcels. At one point, Conant even recognized, “if Soviet

¹⁰¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 725. Print.

¹⁰² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 729. Print.

¹⁰³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 730. Print.

¹⁰⁴ Ostermann, Christian F., “‘Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 731. Print.

Zone authorities confiscate packages, that will also make excellent publicity.”¹⁰⁶

Huge crowds of people flooded into West Berlin. Entire families poured in with young children and babies in strollers. Everyone took as much as they could carry of the *Lebensmittelhilfe* or “Grocery aid.” Those same strollers that had carried babies would come back to East Berlin filled with canned goods while the baby was either carried or nestled on top.¹⁰⁷ All told, over 100,000 East German refugees applied for food packages on the first day. By the third day, the United States and West German government were able to distribute 200,000 parcels daily. With 5.5 million parcels distributed, an estimated 75% of East Berliners received packages before the program was ceased. This means that the U.S. was able to reach the outer reaches of East Berlin which may have not been able to receive pro-Western broadcasts or other propaganda.¹⁰⁸

The food aid program fulfilled all of the objectives that the Eisenhower administration had laid out for them. Conant explained, “Widest possible use is made of RIAS . . . success of program here presently exceeds anything we could have anticipated.”¹⁰⁹ More and more emphasis was placed on ensuring East Germans could get to West Germany and enjoy the food parcels publicized over RIAS. Commissioner Conant sought to use this issue to consolidate antipathy toward the Soviet Union in German High Commission meetings. He informed the State Department,

I intend to suggest once more that three High Commissioners approach Soviet

¹⁰⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 733. Print.

¹⁰⁷ *Food for Berlin 1953*, British Pathé, <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/food-for-berlin/query/berlin+1953>

¹⁰⁸ Ostermann, Christian F., “‘Keeping the Pot Simmering’: The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953.” *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 71.

¹⁰⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 737. Print.

authorities once again on elimination of inter-zonal passes. Such proposal to Semenov [Soviet High Commissioner] will embarrass him considerably if he, as is almost certain, is forced to turn it down. If, unexpectedly, he is authorized to accept proposal and inter-zonal passes are indeed removed, possibilities of food distribution to East Germans directly from territory of Federal Republic would become reality and present food program would achieve greater dimensions than ever.¹¹⁰

RIAS now adopted the message at the behest of U.S. top government "that nothing stood in the way of feeding the East Germans except the police authorities, and that it was up to the workers to take the matter into their own hands."¹¹¹ Special Assistant to the President C.D. Jackson told Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, "If Adenauer wins a resounding victory with quite a number of German socialists shifting over to the Adenauer foreign policy, it will have been due in large part to the food program."¹¹² The Psychological Strategy Board would further urge RIAS to allege that East Germany was committing crimes against its people, but the PSB determined that it was important that the U.S. government itself not overemphasize its connection to distributed food aid out of fear that the humanitarian aid would be perceived as propaganda.¹¹³ After all, a leading SPD member of the German parliament had alleged that the food program served no purpose but to aid in Adenauer's re-election that November, and this sort of talk had an obvious

¹¹⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 739. Print.

¹¹¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 741. Print.

¹¹² Ingimundarson, Valur, "The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 3 (1996), p. 405.

¹¹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume VII, Part 2, Germany and Austria*, No. 742. Print.

effect on PSB plans.¹¹⁴ The U.S. government fully acknowledged that their propaganda's effectiveness was inversely correlated to how much their aid looked like propaganda.

Thereafter, the United States would be careful to keep its propaganda efforts from causing too much disturbance. As Commissioner Conant told Secretary Dulles, "we don't want to do anything that will cause any more bloodshed . . . keep the pot simmering but not bring it to a boil." The administration recognized that total insurrection was not advisable, but instead a gradual reduction of Soviet control over their satellite states could be achieved. C.D. Jackson admitted that no real progress toward rollback had been made except "raising hatred of Russia" amongst the East German public. Crackdowns by the East German government were proving to finally show some successes in diminishing the number of their people willing to risk retrieving food.¹¹⁵

West Germany recognized the strategic importance of West Berlin now in undermining their eastern neighbor. Mayor Reuter of West Berlin during the Uprising described the propaganda effect of West Berlin as "the cheapest atom bomb in the heart of the eastern empire."¹¹⁶ RIAS and other U.S. propaganda organs in West Berlin had demonstrated their efficacy. Using RIAS and other propaganda weapons operating out of West Berlin, the United States had shown its power in undermining the GDR and the Soviet Union. This use of such power also revealed their motives. When given the opportunity to rollback communism, Eisenhower did not. When given the chance to push for liberal

¹¹⁴ Ingimundarson, Valur, "The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 3 (1996), p. 397.

¹¹⁵ Ostermann, Christian F., "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 77-8.

¹¹⁶ Mautner, Karl F. "Interview with Karl F. Mautner," Interview by Thomas J. Dunnigan, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, May 12, 1993, p. 38.

democratic reforms that had been the hallmark of American propaganda, Eisenhower did not. Instead, the only goal was to use this explosive propaganda power to deconstruct security and confidence in the Soviet sphere and make hay internationally of the backlash against the USSR. Mayor Reuter, who so aptly described the power wielded from West Berlin, passed away soon after these events; the man to take his spot would be Hanns Peter Herz, the former editor of RIAS.¹¹⁷

Adenauer, knowing his election was forthcoming in September, began a series of initiatives to emphasize the Soviet domination of East Germany and the weakness of the SPD's position with regard to unifying with such an oppressive state. Adenauer took part in a burial for victims of the riots who had been able to cross over into West Berlin.¹¹⁸ A new Bundestag was to be created in West Berlin on top of the destroyed Reichstag. The Bundestag would act as propaganda in architecture with a "Hall of Heroes." Among the first people to be featured in this hall would be Willi Götting, the painter who was so famously shot during the riots.¹¹⁹ West Germany made June 17 a national holiday.¹²⁰ Adenauer even unveiled new plans to hold a Four-Power Conference in Berlin. The proposal by his Foreign Minister, Herbert Blankenhorn, included the withdrawal of foreign troops from both Germanys as they unified while Germany would be allowed to develop divisions of troops under certain limitations. Blankenhorn's addition of disengagement of the united Germany

¹¹⁷ Mautner, Karl F. "Interview with Karl F. Mautner," Interview by Thomas J. Dunnigan, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, May 12, 1993, p. 39.

¹¹⁸ Weymar, Paul, *Adenauer: His Authorized Biography*, New York: Dutton, 1957, p. 463.

¹¹⁹ Ostermann, Christian F., "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 69-70.

¹²⁰ Mautner, Karl F. "Interview with Karl F. Mautner," Interview by Thomas J. Dunnigan, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, May 12, 1993, p. 35.

was vetoed by Adenauer. Although this worked very well publicly, a Germany that was rearmed and allowed to threaten to the Soviet Union again would never garner their approval.¹²¹

These propaganda efforts and the aftermath of the Uprising led Adenauer to an overwhelming sweep in the polls on September 6, 1953. Chancellor Adenauer was able to undercut the SPD position that advocated friendlier ties with the Soviet Union by demonstrating the domination that Soviets had imposed on East Germany. Continual propaganda kept the memory alive, and a food aid program ensured that Adenauer appeared generous rather than boastful in the East Germans' time of need.¹²²

On the East German side, these developments would have a lasting effect on the legitimacy of the GDR. First and foremost, it revealed a lack of popular support among the workers who were essential to communist ideals of a workers' republic. Members of the SED resigned in droves after the shocking loss of control. After the SED acknowledged the mistakes that led to the Uprising, there were calls to create a form of communism unrelated and distinct from Russian communism in East Germany.¹²³ Walter Ulbricht blamed the Uprising on "The New Course" adopted by the GDR. Although Ulbricht admitted his part in producing the Uprising, the Central Committee of East Germany quickly adopted the path he outlined of building socialism and abandoning the reforms of "The New Course." Ulbricht also blamed Western involvement. The presence of Eleanor Lansing Dulles, sister

¹²¹ Maulucci, Thomas W. *Adenauer's Foreign Office: West German Diplomacy in the Shadow of the Third Reich*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012, p. 238.

¹²² Ostermann, Christian F., "Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 75.

¹²³ Allinson, Mark, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 59.

to the U.S. Secretary of State and CIA Director, only fed this view further.¹²⁴ Despite the challenges to his leadership, Ulbricht was able to remain Secretary of the Central Committee, and in fact, Ulbricht consolidated his leadership once Lavrentiy Beria's efforts to make a single, united, unaligned Germany were abandoned by the Soviet Union, and Beria was charged with treason.¹²⁵ Beria's failure to stop the Uprising provided the pretext for his treason sentence.¹²⁶ Although Ulbricht failed most of the tests of June 17, his ability to retain power and then subsequently restore some order provided him an opportunity to prove himself.¹²⁷

Ulbricht also saw the dangers of the U.S. food aid program. SED members were told to stand on the demarcation line with West Berlin and hold back or at least agitate those East Germans who strayed into West Berlin for food. The East German interior minister announced travel restrictions to West Berlin on August 1 in an effort to prevent the continued influence of this humanitarian propaganda. Party members who were caught retrieving such parcels were to be excommunicated from the SED. One mayor of a town near Potsdam was found to have collected food from West Germany, and he faced summary dismissal from the ranks of the SED. As more and more people, including SED members, retrieved the U.S. aid from West Berlin, East German propaganda attempted to counter the success of American efforts. "Who is the main benefactor of this deceptive maneuver?" one propaganda campaign asked,

it is primarily the Yankee-comrade Adenauer. By making the begging trips, you

¹²⁴ Srodes, James, *Allen Dulles: Master of Spies*, Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999, p. 445.

¹²⁵ Steele, Jonathan, *Inside East Germany*. New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977, p. 97-8.

¹²⁶ Smith, Joseph, and Simon Davis, *Historical Dictionary of the Cold War*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000, p. 135.

¹²⁷ Ostermann, Christian F., "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 79.

provide him with crutches in his crumbling reelection campaign, thus enabling the Yankees to keep their servant. Profiting exclusively from this 'relief action,' the Yankee-mercenaries make their profiteering by using the interests and compound interests to pay for their planned war in Europe.¹²⁸

Despite such efforts, an SED report would later cite the opinion of the workers of East Berlin, that "it does not matter where we get the food, the important thing is that we have something to eat."¹²⁹ The most successful propaganda measure that East Germany managed was the redistribution of some of the confiscated food parcels to unemployed West Berliners to emphasize the inequalities there.¹³⁰

Given the severity of the Uprising, the East German government sought to do everything possible to prevent future Uprisings. SED leadership became much more concerned with shopfloor discontent and the mood in factories. Stationed in factories were *Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse* (Fighting Groups of the Working Class). These groups were designed to keep track of the factories and the mood of workers while quelling any signs of potential insurrection. These on-the-spot groups would be the front line against any future unrest. More emphasis was also put into state internal security forces. The most infamous of these efforts was the *Ministerium für Staatsicherheit* (Ministry for State Security) otherwise known as the *Stasi*. District Headquarters around East Germany prepared preventative measures for future anniversaries of the Uprising. The District

¹²⁸ Ingimundarson, Valur, "The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 3 (1996), p. 401-2.

¹²⁹ Ostermann, Christian F., "'Keeping the Pot Simmering': The United States and the East German Uprising of 1953." *German Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1996), p. 71.

¹³⁰ Ingimundarson, Valur, "The Eisenhower Administration, the Adenauer Government, and the Political Uses of the East German Uprising in 1953," *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 3 (1996), p. 401-2.

Headquarters of Berlin produced twelve reports on preventative steps taken by police for June 16 and 17 of 1955 alone to prevent demonstrations on that anniversary. Although he had managed to stop demands from the SED and the USSR that he be removed from government,¹³¹ Walter Ulbricht remained ever-vigilant during the anniversary of the Uprising which could act as an opportunity for unrest against his regime. One prominent example of this paranoia, was the relocation of the SED from a Berlin suburb to a secluded, secret enclave at Wandlitz which was surrounded by high walls, watchtowers, and armed guards.¹³² Eventually, the Soviet Union and GDR would move to construct the Berlin Wall and concede separate spheres for the West and the East in Germany without the chance for unification.¹³³ Ulbricht successfully built these security apparatuses to maintain constant watch over the state of workers in East Germany and whether or not any dangers to the peoples' republic were arising.¹³⁴

However, after the sharp disconnect that the events of June 17 demonstrated between East German top government and the grassroots of their society, the SED government would never again be able to exert the kind of influence it had wanted to construct. Rather than issuing top-down reforms across all of the GDR, the SED government would rely on informal arrangements and deals made at individual factories. Foremen learned to work more closely with their workers to prevent future unrest, and the government maintained a safe distance from all decisions on work norms. Although this

¹³¹ Dulles, Eleanor Lansing, *One Germany or Two; the Struggle at the Heart of Europe*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1970, p. 64.

¹³² Read, Anthony, and David Fisher, *Berlin rising: Biography of a City*, New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1994, p. 272.

¹³³ Whetten, Lawrence L. *Germany's Ostpolitik: Relations between the Federal Republic and the Warsaw Pact Countries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 57-8.

distance provided safety for the SED government, it ensured that they would never again be able to mobilize the grassroots from the factory floor. Future efforts to raise production without raising wages in the early 1960s faced no rebellion, but factory managers simply could or would not compel their workers to fulfill them.¹³⁵

Moreover, the workers of East Germany were dissuaded from further insurrection for generations. The workers saw little to be gained from open and direct confrontation with their government since it had been so hopelessly quashed in 1953. The images of Soviet tanks ready to pounce at any moment remained a vivid reminder for East German workers, as the Soviet Union granted sovereignty in name to the GDR while stationing 22 battle-ready divisions in East Germany.¹³⁶ Not only that, but the East German people also noticed the obvious reticence of the United States to get involved in East German affairs. One factory worker in Cottbus described the disappointment, saying, "We can't strike, no one supported us either on 17 June." This led to resignation among the GDR's workers and greater apathy. Attempts to feel further invested in their government by democratizing it were shifted toward a jaded disdain within days of the Uprising. By the end of June, one worker at the Prenzlauer Berg Factory in East Berlin said, "It was senseless. I've spoken with my colleagues and they don't even know any longer why they went out into the streets."¹³⁷ Not only did a deep skepticism take hold of the average East German, but this apathy resulted in part from a lack of action from the United States after barrages of rhetorical promises.

¹³⁵ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 59.

¹³⁶ Dulles, Eleanor Lansing, *Berlin: The Wall is not Forever*, Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967, p. 41-2.

¹³⁷ Ross, Corey, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, University of London, 1998, p. 58-9.

Although it is not always remembered amongst Cold War confrontations or the U.S. involvement is labeled as “nothing except issue protests,”¹³⁸ the East German Uprising of 1953 represents the hope and forgotten promises that typified the Cold War. The Eisenhower administration continued a propaganda campaign that had begun under Truman through organs like RIAS, RFE, and Voice of America. Rollback of Soviet controlled areas had been a top campaign promise from Eisenhower. He was not going to solely contain communism, but instead, he promised to push the progress it had made in Eastern Europe and around the world back as far as possible. The Uprising was an occasion that should have matched such desires from his administration. After aggressively attempting to make East Germany a socialist state quickly, the SED government discovered systemic problems in their plan. Not only was the population not complying with their changes, they were in fact “voting with their feet” in the massive *Republikflucht* in which hundreds of thousands of East Germans fled westward following reforms in religious observance, military spending, and production norms. Seeing the horrible results of “constructing socialism,” the troika in the Soviet Union directed East Germany to change direction. “The New Course” offered more private enterprise and fewer repressive measures, but it was simultaneously viewed as a spot of weakness. Both the East German people and the United States saw this as a triumph for Western ideology. “The New Course” failed to change one fundamental aspect of workers’ lives, however: the increased production norms. These norms kept pay constant while increasing the work demanded. Coupled with inflationary prices on consumer goods and food, workers in East Germany were feeling a definite crunch as their government refused to resolve the most pressing issue facing them.

¹³⁸ LaFeber, Walter, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad*, Vol. 2. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994, p. 544.

Although it started with a relatively small carpenters' demonstration, the Uprising spread throughout Berlin as word caught on. Not only that, but the types of demands spread from simple work reforms to wholesale democratization. With the help of RIAS, democratic traditions were idealized among the protesting Germans until all of the GDR was engulfed in strikes, demonstrations, and rioting. Not until Soviet tanks came in could the insurrection be entirely stopped.

Upon seeing these events transpire, the Eisenhower administration was initially shocked. Unsure how to proceed, they began over the course of the next few weeks and months to assemble plans with the Psychological Strategy Board for the effective propaganda usage of the Uprising. Memorials and broadcasts for it became prominent. The most successful scheme designed in the aftermath of the Uprising was the food program. By siphoning food into West Berlin, the United States was able to lure East Germans to the West, display their generosity, and provide among East Germans an impression of the West as the virtuous counterpart to the GDR government who had so quickly quelled their hopes of change. Chancellor Adenauer was also able to use the Uprising to undermine his oppositions' arguments of peaceful reintegration with the GDR and better ties with the USSR by highlighting the totalitarian style they exhibited. Participating in the food program, meanwhile, helped to shield Adenauer from any accusations of callous disregard for his fellow Germans. Conversely, the East Germans were left to languish. The food aid from the United States, West Germany, and the Soviet Union was welcome, but the East German government would forever remember the events of June 17. Although the production norms were revoked, the SED with power consolidated under Walter Ulbricht would create more repressive measures to ensure such insurrection would never reach the extent it had

in 1953. *Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse* and the *Stasi* worked to maintain surveillance of factory floors and ground out any burgeoning democratic feelings. Although the initial demands of the Uprising were met as the SED conceded their mistakes, the hope for democratization or government accountability dissipated. Apathy became the status quo among a people who had hoped for change but not seen the rhetoric of rollback supported by the administration that espoused it.

If Eisenhower's true aim was rollback, a more opportune moment would have been hard to find. His "cheapest atom bomb" in West Berlin generated as good of an explosion as the administration could ever have imagined. There was widespread popular support within East Germany for substantive regime changes, and crowds on the street were willing to fight against the SED with force. Eisenhower's real goal was never really to roll back communism. Instead, he and those in his administration were far more concerned about Adenauer's election prospects, generating international backlash against the Soviet Union, and creating propaganda that undermined Soviet effectiveness within their bloc. Those goals were successfully accomplished, but the cost was the East German people who saw that promises made to them month after month and year after year were not the true U.S. foreign policy. Instead of supporting liberal democratic reform and the rollback of communism as had been the drumbeat of American propaganda under Eisenhower, the people of East Germany saw his propaganda weapon had entirely different uses. Although U.S. foreign policy was couched in the appealing language of freedom and democracy, a cover it is wont to seek, the East Germany Uprising demonstrated that the United States' rhetoric on that front was fundamentally hollow even when the U.S. had all the explosive power necessary to enforce such a vision.

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