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Situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany

Report¹

Relations with European Non-Member Countries

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A. Draft Resolution

The Assembly,

Noting the present situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany;

Considering that, in that Zone, the pressure exercised in every sphere with a view to the systematic destruction of fundamental freedoms has become accentuated during the last few months;

Considering, in particular, that all means are employed to prevent the inhabitants of the area from contacting their families living in the Federal Republic of Germany, as witness the 85% reduction, compared with the preceding year, in the traffic between the Soviet Zone and free Germany in 1958;

Considering that this state of affairs has led to a considerable increase in the number of refugees, who now total over three million since 1946,

1. Expresses to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, the only lawful spokesman for the population of that Zone, its solidarity with and sympathy for all those suffering under totalitarian oppression;
2. Reminds the European peoples of the seriousness of the situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany;
3. Reaffirms the right to the population of that region to be allowed freely to determine its political fate.

B. Explanatory Memorandum by Mr. KIRK¹

1.

1. The following few observations on the general situation in the Soviet Zone are intended as an aid to understanding the drastic measures recently introduced by the Government, with their resultant deterioration in conditions. The keynote in the Soviet Zone of Germany at the present time is the increased activity of the S.E.D. The Government of the Soviet Zone continues to consider the area under its control as an advance-post of what is termed the world socialist system, and it is this attitude which has led to the new stringency. The latest political catchword is " confederation ". The SED Politburo has rectified a Western misconception concerning the so-called German Confederation. In the civil service journal *Neuer Weg*, No. 6, 1958, we read: " Confederation means directing our policy and projects towards helping the progressive forces in Western Germany to change the existing situation. We shall throw all our authority and power into this struggle. " The Praesidium of the National Council of the National Front in East Berlin has stressed the use of extra-parliamentary weapons and has offered its full support if " recourse is had to the weapon of large-scale strikes for political ends ". For the past year and more all the armed bodies of the Zone have been devoting their main attention to military exercises in the form of street and house-to-house fighting, as well as surprise night operations by armoured units. The military authorities are making an all-out effort, through newspapers and technical journals, to popularise the revolutionary fighting tradition of the Communists in the armed groups and to convert it into tactical training. Students and pupils of technical schools are forced to take part in military study courses.

2. On 17th January 1957 the Act on the rights and duties of the Lower House (Volkshammer) vis-d-vis the local popular councils of the zone was adopted. Since then the S.E.D. has been trying to consolidate its position among the population with the help of control organs. Despite all efforts and all ideological prompting from above, only formal work has been done, and contacts with the population have not grown any deeper. The regime of fear is most clearly seen in the field of justice. Laws do not serve to uphold right but are a means towards supporting and expanding Communist power. I am selecting a few revealing examples of drastic judicial decisions to illustrate their tendentious nature.

3. In March 1956 there appeared to be some tendency in Soviet Zone legal circles towards upholding the principle of a State based on the rule of law. A " commission to review the code of criminal procedure " was formed in the Ministry of Justice and prepared a report containing practical proposals for amending or supplementing the code. Had they been adopted, the position of the accused before the Soviet zone criminal courts would have been considerably improved. But the 30th and 33rd General Assemblies of the S.E.D. quashed these proposals. They were condemned as " liberalisation trends " and rejected outright. Shortly afterwards (11th December 1957) the Criminal Law (Extension) Act (SEG) and the Passport Laws (Amendment) Act were promulgated, and the hunt was on. Under the significant clause, " any person who attempts to overthrow the constitutional order of State and society in the German Democratic Republic by force or systematic subversion " is punishable as a traitor by not less than five years' penal servitude and the seizure of his property. In serious cases the death-penalty or penal servitude for life may be ordered. No attempt is made in all this to define the " constitutional order of the German Democratic Republic ". For example, one man was convicted of high treason because he deviated from the SED Party line and sought his own road to socialism. The Leipzig District Court found that import and distribution of literature published by " Jehovah's Witnesses " were " treasonable propaganda and provocation " within the meaning of Section 19 of SEG and sentenced two accused on 11th February 1958 to three and a half and two years' penal servitude. Among the manifestations of the class war—externally fostered propaganda designed to induce the boycotting of Soviet zone products, etc.—the criminal offence known as " Abwerb-bung " (incitement to desert) was already punishable prior to 1st February 1958. The term is more precisely defined in paragraph 21 SEG as " incitement to leave the German Democratic Republic ". The Chemnitz District Court sentenced a Soviet zone inhabitant to one and a half year's imprisonment because he had yielded to a request from some West German friends to supply them with a maidservant from his home town. He was found guilty of " inciting a young person to leave the Democratic Republic ". There have been hundreds of similar cases. For example, two youths of 15 and 16 recently received heavy prison sentences for having visited the Federal Republic. Before the 1957 Act was promulgated, it had already been possible, under the Identity Cards Regulations of 29.10.1953 (GB1. page 1090), to sentence any person deserting the Republic to imprisonment not exceeding three years. The amendment introduced into the passport laws by the Volkskammer contains a new element in that the preparation and attempted commission of an offence is subject to the same penalty as the offence itself. Another new feature is the provision that unauthorised entry into the Soviet zone or deviation from the

2. From notes prepared by M m e Maxsein.

prescribed routes, destinations or time-limits is also punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years. Simultaneously with the inclusion of the new clauses in the Passport Act, the Federal Republic—as Hilde Benjamin stated in her explanatory remarks to the Volkskammer—was officially declared to be a foreign country. Here is an example of a judgment Tendered: a wife wanted to take a suitcase of crockery, towels and bed-linen to her husband, a " deserter " from the Democratic Republic. Having failed to obtain a permit for her journey from the Kreis Council of Kamenz, she formed the intention of visiting her husband without permission: twelve months' imprisonment—Berlin (Central) District Court, 14.4.58.

4. Tranfer of residence from the Soviet Zone to the Federal Republic of West Berlin Every transfer of residence or flight to West Germany means, in the eyes of the Soviet Zone leaders, " additional labour for NATO's West German military base. " To desert the Democratic Republic is counted a betrayal of the " peaceful interests of the people ". At present the Soviet Zone authorities grant permission for such transfers only in isolated cases, mostly to elderly people desirous of joining relatives who lived in the present territory of the Federal Republic or West Berlin before 1945. Permission is almost always refused where such relatives formerly resided in the Soviet Zone. The ban applies in particular to members of the same family—wives, with or without children, parents, brothers and sisters. It is also enforced if the applicant is of working age or is engaged in an occupation considered important to the Soviet Zone. Moves for matrimonial purposes are also to be barred and in practice are now hardly ever authorised.

5. Inter-zonal Travel

Persons not employed by the " State machine " or in the Administration of Nationalised Undertakings

In principle, applications are almost always refused in cases where a close relative has fled from the Soviet Zone. A further ground for refusal is any suspicion that the applicant may not return. This is the pretext for refusing the majority of applications to visit the Federal Republic.

In recent months the number of visitors to the Federal Republic from the Soviet Zone has been less than half last year's figure. At Christmas 1956, 262, 538 entries were recorded, whereas in December 1957 there were only 123,268. In January 1958, 48,054 visitors from the Soviet Zone were reported as against 115,839 in the previous year. The March figures were 178,326 in 1957 and only 70,654 in 1958. Since then the number of entries has become almost insignificant. Journeys by university students and schoolchildren in upper forms have long since been prohibited.

Employees of the " State machine " (in the broadest sense) and the administration of nationalised undertakings

A staff instruction of the Ministry of the Interior dated 25.9.57, prohibits all private journeys by such persons into NATO territory, including the Federal Republic. Exceptionally, travel permits may be issued in the event of the death or dangerous illness of parents, children and brothers or sisters. But the exceptions are few and far between.

Permits to visit the Soviet Zone

Citizens of the Federal Republic require a permit to visit the Soviet Zone and the Soviet sector of Berlin. Applications, on printed forms, must be made to the Burgomaster.

West Berliners require a pass to enter the Soviet Zone. Of the applications submitted only a small number are granted.

Journeys from the Soviet Zone to West Berlin

Permits are still unnecessary to visit Berlin, but if the police suspect that flight is intended the traveller's identity card is confiscated and he is sent back to his last place of residence. It is likely that proceedings will then be taken against him for attempted desertion from the Democratic Republic. Employees of the " State machine " were again forbidden, in December 1957, to visit the Western sectors of Berlin, even in transit, and were made to sign an acknowledgement that they had been duly warned.

6. Agriculture Measures to " socialise " farms have been taken since the start of the occupation. The first step was expropriation (without compensation) of all farms with over 100 hectares (247 acres) of productive land—the " agrarian reform " of 1945 and 1946. The second step was the introduction of the " agricultural producer cooperatives " (L.P.G.) in 1952. This was foreshadowed from 1949 onwards by ruthless propaganda against " large farmers ", in order to stir up public opinion against them as " exploiting capitalists ". The

economic weapons used were, and still are, oppression through excessively high crop targets, unfavourable treatment in regard to allocations of seeds, fertilisers, labour and machines on loan. (A "large farmer", in Soviet Zone terminology, is one whose total productive land exceeds 20 hectares (49 acres). Owners of farms up to 20 hectares, and they, alone, are known as "working class" farmers). Results of the system: in 1953, or more exactly up to the popular rising of 17th June, almost 14% of the productive agricultural land has been transferred from private ownership to the L.P.G. After the rising the measures were relaxed. The upshot was that by the end of 1954 the L.P.G. still handled only a bare 13% of the productive land, or slightly less than before. The figure gradually increased to 25% in the three years up to the end of 1957, in which year the rise was hardly 3%. The "socialisation" process was thus a slow affair. No speeding-up could be expected unless methods were made more severe. The farmers' powers of resistance were proving too strong. It should be borne in mind that opposition to the regime has gradually come to be limited to the best type of farmers on what, by Soviet Zone standards, are well-managed holdings. The new drive began about the beginning of this year.

6.1. Propaganda: As a preparatory measure this had already been in full swing since the late summer of last year (once the agenda of the 33rd Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the S.E.D. was announced). The slogan was; the large "socialised" farm, or L.P.G., is a more economic proposition (the opposite has been proved to be true, and the lords of the Soviet Zone are well aware of the poor results obtained by the L.P.G.).

6.2. Economic measures: Retention of the excessive targets, increasing in proportion to the size of holdings. Continued unfavourable treatment in regard to allocations of seeds and fertilisers. Plus :

a. Practically no further supplies of labour;

b. The fact that the M.T.S. (machinery and tractor stations), by order of the 2nd Central MTS Conference of January 1958, may work on private farms only if "there is free capacity after all work for the L.P.G. has been done". In practice this means that in future most of the MTS tractor teams will be stationed at the L.P.G. and under the direct control of its chairman. Withdrawal of MTS services alone has ushered in a new stage in "rural socialisation". The remaining independent farmers, who cannot in fact manage without the technical assistance of the M.T.S., are being increasingly compelled either to join an L.P.G. or to give up their farms. Result of stricter measures: In the first quarter of 1958 productive farmland held by the L.P.G. increased by about 3%. This equals the increase in the whole of 1957. \ If the rate is maintained it will inevitably mean that by the end of 1958 at least 35%, and by the end of 1960 at least 55 %, of the productive farm land will have been transferred from private ownership to the L.P.G. The feeling among independent farmers in the Soviet zone at present is one of despair. By way of comparison: in relation to the total productive land in the different countries of the Eastern bloc, the degree of socialisation there is as follows: Bulgaria 86%, Czechoslovakia 65.5 % .Rumania 37 %. In Poland and Hungary for the past two years, and for still longer in Yugoslavia, developments have been slower: in these three countries the degree of socialisation is less than in the Soviet zone of Germany.

7. Cultural Life The increased political pressure can also be felt in all aspects of cultural life. This is especially true of the Churches, universities and schools, but it also applies, for example, to sport. The general trend is towards stifling or restricting all contacts and imposing an active and positive faith in dialectical and historical materialism. The attack on the Church, particularly the Evangelical Church, still occupies a special place in the general offensive. Furthermore, a major attempt is in progress to split the Churches in order to break the resistance they have offered and still offer. The evident aim is an East-West schism, but at the same time a division within the Eastern Church itself. Under a new order dated 12th February 1958, the Christian teaching of the Church is to be subordinated to State school supervision by atheist inspectors. The struggle for man's soul reaches its climax in the growing pressure imposed upon the teachers themselves, culminating in the formula "a Christian cannot be a teacher". Hitherto it was possible to assert oneself as a positive Christian within the school sphere. Not so in future—opposition will henceforth be met by exclusion from the Party, and in almost all cases the result is ostracism. In the universities and colleges a similar "clean-up" is proceeding. Every teacher will in future be required to declare his full allegiance to the scientific principles of Marxism. Everywhere indoctrination courses are being re-started for the intelligentsia, who are being ordered to "adopt" the fundamentals of historical and dialectical materialism. This means not only becoming acquainted with them, as before, but making them part and parcel of one's being. Anyone desirous of rising in his profession must first leave the Church. SED members and civil servants are expected to renounce the Church without hesitation. This state of affairs is clearly bound to meet with some reaction. An interesting example is the "Intellectuals' Conference" at Halle on 12th April 1958. Here there was a genuine outbreak of opposition, and the Soviet Zone Party leaders attached so much importance to it that alongside

the speech of Party Secretary Ulbricht they printed a reply by the boldest of the audience, Professor Mothes (President of the "Leopoldina", Halle) almost verbatim—admittedly adding also a statement by a speaker on the other side. However, the readers of Neues Deutschland were able to read the following sentences in connection with the debate: "If we scientists are to achieve any worthwhile results we must, as it were, question the validity of everything. Scientific progress consists in questioning all that has gone before. But if we are ceaselessly bombarded with such statements as that Mendel's laws are wrong and that the universe is infinite because Engels has said so, and that the physicists' view of the finite universe is false—we must counter this by saying that we scientists can only exist if we question everything. We question not only the conception of the Creation, but also the theories of Engels as to the infinity of the universe. We need professors who have the courage sometimes to go their own way. I often wonder whether, in the conditions prevailing in our universities today, men like Karl Marx and Engels would be given a hearing. They used to have violent arguments. Today, on every problem, other people always know better. A form of scholasticism is spreading that is inimical to all scientific development. I believe that this had to be said. You I may think what you like about it. I only want to say that that is how things are; you have perhaps an over-simplified view. We are trying today to reduce everything to the same level. Professors live in constant disquiet. You must pardon me, Mr. Prime Minister, for frankly saying so. It is a fact. Some fundamental changes must be made, and we shall then find that your socialist endeavours in the political and economic fields have been helped in every way. Please see that we can work with a little more peace of mind, and trust us a little more—not me alone, but others too." Neues Deutschland did not print the following sentences, which appeared later in the Tagesspiegel of 23.4.58, page 2: "Crucify me if you will, Mr. Prime Minister, for what I have said here, but you should be grateful that you still have in your universities a few professors with the courage and character to say how matters really stand. Not until the tone of the universities ceases to be set by gasbags with no real scientific knowledge, prepared to say yes to anything for the salaries they draw, can you expect any real scientific achievements from your universities." But since this Congress the situation has worsened, and this has led in recent months to an increase in refugees, more and more of whom now belong to the liberal professions. It is remarkable that new arrivals include many doctors, who were hitherto among the protected and privileged groups. From 1st January to 31st August 1958 the refugees included 813 doctors, 115 pharmacists and 2,500 teachers, among them the Rector of the University of Jena. Their reasons may have varied, but an example like the following should serve to explain their action: the doctor in question has been living for a long time among working class and peasant children, a fact to which he has drawn special attention; he is seriously war-disabled and is wearing himself out in the medical service in the parishes he covers. But all this, according to a decision rendered by the "Workers' Conference for Socialist Education", is immaterial and is not taken into account. If parents send their children to boarding-schools in West Berlin or West Germany, they are subjected to constant pressure to fetch them back and are prevented from going to see them.

2. Conclusion

To sum up, the situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany is becoming increasingly serious. The best proof of this is the growing number of refugees many of them being people, who, as intellectuals, have enjoyed satisfactory material conditions in the Eastern zone. The root of the matter is thus manifestly the progressive suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the situation is one which concerns no longer Germany or Europe alone but the whole of mankind.