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Situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany

Report[1]
Relations with European Non-Member Countries
Rapporteur: Mrs Agnes MAXSEIN, Germany

1. 1959 - 11th Session - Second part

A. I. Motion for an Order

The Assembly,

Having taken note of the report of the Committee on Non-represented Nations relating to the situation in the Soviet Zone of Germany (Doc. 1042),

Instructs the Committee to continue its study of the situation in this region and to report thereon to the Assembly in due course.

B. II. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

1. At the Fifth Party Congress of the S. E. D. (German Socialist Unity Party), which took place from 10th to 16th July 1958, a programme under the watchword " Complete socialisation of the German Democratic Republic " was announced. This programme, which i t is intended shall be carried out within a comparatively short period and completed by the year 1965, is already having far-reaching effects on all spheres of life.

It is quite clear from the programme as announced that the aim of SEE) policy is not the reunification of Germany but " the creation of a [so-called] socialist State completely different from that of the Federal Republic ".

2. The Committee on Non-represented Nations has examined certain aspects of this policy. It submits below a survey of the present situation in a few spheres, namely economy, science and law, in which the aims of complete socialisation are at present being consistently pursued, and will later offer a picture of the position of the churches in the Soviet Zone.

Economy

3. From 1950 to 1957, that is to say during the period in which " the building up of socialism " was being pursued, over 300,000 self-employed families engaged in industry, commerce, crafts and agriculture were deprived of their livelihood. In addition, 150,000 selfemployed persons were deprived of an independent livelihood during the same period in sectors not concerned with production and trade. " Complete socialisation " by 1965 means that in the near future 1,270,000 selfemployed persons will be deprived of an independent livelihood.

In the Resolution adopted at the Fifth Party Congress this process is described as " gradual conversion" of former capitalistic production methods into co-operative societies. The Resolution goes on to say that: " The destruction of approximately 160,000 independent livelihoods each year by the year 1965 will be compensated by the Party's task of ' winning over the whole population to the cause of socialism' ". This process is described as a " revolution in the ideological and cultural spheres ".

4. The economic programme laid down at the Fifth Party Congress of the S. E. D. also provides for a considerable boosting of industrial output, which it is intended shall by the year 1965 reach twice the gross value of that of 1957, namely about 100,000 million DM. This will entail a yearly increase of about 8 % or 9 % and is to be made possible by means of Soviet loans. The " German Democratic Republic " is concentrating upon developing the chemical, engineering and light industries and reaching an aggregate volume of production enabling the " G.D.R." to become, after the Soviet Union, the chief producer in these sectors for the whole of the Eastern bloc from 1965 onwards.

This economic programme drawn up for completion by 1965 is not regarded by experts as just wishful thinking. The Soviets have agreed to provide very considerable backing, including assistance to the extent of 240 million DM. to the chemical industry during the next two and a half years to enable t h a t industry to modernise its plant and equipment. Repayment of the loans granted, which may run into thousands of millions of DM., does not have to begin until 1962-1963.

Science and culture

5. It is clear that there is considerable conflict between the Party and the intelligentsia in the sphere of science and culture. The conflict first arose when the demand was made that " socialist principles should be applied to research". Later this demand was somewhat watered down and became : " Scientific research, especially in the natural sciences, must be compatible with dialectical materialism ".

6. Doctors were required to interpret the Hippocrates' Oath along socialist lines. Government interference in the professional and personal lives of doctors led to more and more doctors fleeing the Zone, whereupon the Political Bureau of the S. E. D. announced t h a t " government departments " had " wrongly construed " the Resolutions of the Fifth Party Congress. It even went so far as to state that the exercise of the profession of doctor and scientific activities depended only upon expert professional knowledge and were not subject to compulsory recognition of dialectical materialism. This declaration was necessary to combat the chaos prevailing in health administration.

Schools

7. One of the main problems of the regime in the Soviet Zone of Germany is that of educating the younger generation in the socialist doctrine as a preparation for bringing the whole population to accept a new ideology and ensuring the final triumph of socialism in all spheres. The first aim is therefore to socialise the schools.

It is repeatedly pointed out that not enough encouragement is given to the children of workmen and peasants, and the percentage of such children (43 %) in secondary schools is regarded as too low. " Selection boards " set up recently in secondary schools must ensure that a larger number of children of workmen and peasants are admitted. Selection must not depend " solely on marks obtained ".

Furthermore, the curriculum includes technical and paramilitary training for schoolboys which is intended to promote the development of the socialist idea in two ways : it is hoped, on the one hand, to exert a political influence, particularly on " reactionary" pupils ; and, on the other hand, to stimulate their interest in technical subjects and thus increase the country's technically-trained manpower.

8. The traditional secondary schools, whose " undoubted class-consciousness " is stressed by the Deutsche Lehrerzeitung, must disappear. Drastic educational reforms are heralded in most cases by " suggestions " in the organ of the United Socialist Party, Neues Deutschland. This paper calls for the introduction of a 10-year period of compulsory education, followed by two years of apprenticeship combined with a vocational training course of two years of secondary education. This basic reform, it is announced officially, " should enable the Government to lean more on the schools in the application of its policy ".

Teachers are in fact the greatest problem, since socialist education depends on them. Experience has shown that most teachers reject the predominance of the Party and its ideology. The Government is counting, therefore, for the future success of its educational policy, on having children taught by young workers " who will bring them up and educate them resolutely from the start in the ideals of socialism ".

Universities

9. While they are engaged in reforming secondary education and making it a tool of the State, the authorities are also applying themselves assiduously to the socialisation of the universities. A systematic effort is being made to prevent the university staff from exercising any positive influence on students, and to strengthen the influence of the working class on students and staff alike. The authorities were mistaken, however, in believing t h a t the workers were deeply attached to the present regime. The events in Poland and in Hungary and the heavy sentences of forced labour imposed in October 1948 on students and young workmen in Jena proved the contrary. Accordingly, the Party has been careful to send students only to firms on whose staff they could count to instil the right ideas.

10. The authorities regard the " interdependence of theory and practice " as of decisive importance for the progress of socialism. They are therefore contemplating introducing a pre-university year of practical work. As from 1960 at latest, all students will work for a year in agriculture or in a socialist firm in order to " become one with the working class and familiarise themselves with the whole socialist production process". This period may be replaced by two years of service in the armed forces in the Soviet Zone of Germany. Since the middle of 1958, all students undergo military training during university vacations. All are obliged to attend meetings of the Sport und Technik Association.

11. The authorities are also expecting the new socialist ideology to be fostered by various university reforms designed to strengthen the influence of the Party in the universities. It is true that no major amendments have yet been made in university legislation but it only remains to endorse officially measures already introduced in various universities.

12. The most serious blow to the traditional independence of German universities was the decision to deprive university Senates of their autonomy. The election of the Rector thus becomes a mere formality, simply a matter of confirming the appointment made by the Secretary of State for Higher Education. The composition of the Senates has been modified by the incorporation of Party officials in order to ensure a preponderant vote for the Socialist Party.

13. The rise of the socialist university is to be achieved not only by constitutional reform but also by the introduction of new educational standards. According to the article in Neues Deutschland, " it is quite wrong and harmful to believe that the main purpose of universities is to train chemists, engineers or biologists; in fact their first aim must be to produce a good socialist who is also an engineer, chemist, biologist or doctor ". The new principles of higher education involve the substitution of Communist concepts for those of Humboldt.

University staff protest against this harsh policy, sometimes openly, and so many of have them fled the country that the authorities have been obliged to mitigate its severity. Patience and persuasion are to be used to win over the unco-operative, but, in the meantime, the Party is adamant on the decisions taken.

Law

14. Considerable obstacles in carrying out the socialisation programme of the Soviet Zone leaders lie in political science, the science of the law and existing legal standards. At the Conference on Political Science and Science of Law, held in April 1958 at Babelsberg, M. Ulbricht said that current law still bore to a marked degree the stamp of " middle-class individualism " and the dual relationship in law of individual and society. " In reality, however ", said Ulbricht, " the Resolutions adopted by the Party provide the basis of political science and the science of the law... The law is a means of exercising socialist state power;.. The criterion of the scientific nature of our political science doctrine and jurisprudence is the extent to which it is of use in promoting the growth of socialism".

15. Reorganisation of the judicial system is proceeding hand in hand with the appointment of new court judges, State prosecutors and legal counsel and with reorganisation of law studies. As from 1st January 1959, all judiciary staff will be reviewed and, where necessary, replaced by 1965. In fact almost all conventionally trained judges have already been removed from the courts and replaced by members of the so-called workers' and peasants' class.

The Churches

16. The advance of socialism has made opposition between Church and State increasingly acute. In January 1959, Grotewohl announced that the Democratic Republic was an atheist State. Naturally, the Government regards the Church as its ideological opponent par excellence, the only one of such opponents that is officially represented in both parts of Germany. Hence, Government policy is basically directed towards destroying the Church, its immediate object being to provoke a split between the Churches in Western and Eastern Germany in order better to secure its hold over the latter. In spite of the fact that the Constitution of the Democratic Republic guarantees complete freedom of conscience and religion to all citizens, the Communist regime in fact does all it can to hinder the Church from carrying out her proper mission, spiritual, charitable, educational, etc. It can do so the more easily as it controls every means of propaganda and possesses large financial resources while the Church has neither the one nor the other.

Two Christian publishing firms are still in existence, one Protestant and the other Catholic, but all their publications are censored by the State on the principle that Christian literature is undesirable and doctrinal publications inadmissible.

All this means that Communism can spread its atheistic propaganda far and wide and openly attack the Church and religion. The Church, on the other hand, has its hands tied every way; she can neither carry out her missionary work nor make any reply to the vituperations constantly poured out by the press and the radio.

17. Last year, we referred to the Jugendweihe described by official representatives of the Communist State as the initiation rites of an atheistic philosophy. Early official announcements stated that participation in the rites was optional, but it has appeared, little by little, that they are in fact intended as a means of forcing the younger generation into the ranks of socialism. Anyone who refuses to take part in the Jugendweihe must expect economic reprisals, give up any idea of professional advancement and may even risk being refused entrance to the high school or university. Such pressure has been exercised on the younger generation and their parents that the movementh as indeed had a certain degree of success.

The position of the Church is indeed appalling. Her essential task now is to decide how a Christian ought to behave when faced with today's situation... Spokesmen of the Protestant Church say that the conflict is not one that can be solved by an appeal to principles; that only in one or two individual cases would a simple yes or no be possible. The Catholic Church says t h a t the average man is not obliged to act heroically. As always, the Church's task is to draw attention to the fearful conflict that must be waged in the individual conscience. The Church militant is suffering a martyrdom...

18. The pastoral activities of the Church are grievously obstructed. In the hospitals, virtually no spiritual comfort is available. Priests are only allowed in at certain fixed times and then only if a patient has specially asked for them, while experience has shown that these requests are not always passed on and that a number of patients die without the consolation of religion. It is not too much to say that the sick are denied all spiritual ministration.

In the same way, the Church is prevented from aiding the poor and the Protestant and Catholic missions on the railway stations have disappeared.

Religious teaching is another sphere where the Church's work has been seriously curtailed. The decree of 12th February 1958, known as the Lange Erlass, was aimed at the systematic suppression of all religious teaching in the schools. Such teaching may now only be given in " institutions other than schools " and only two hours after the end of the school day. Persons giving this instruction must have a sympathetic attitude towards the worker and peasant State. They have to be licensed by the head of the school who himself supervises both the form and the content of their lessons. The decree has other clauses and is aimed at the total elimination of religious teaching. On account of the international situation, however, it is not everywhere enforced to the letter.

19. In an attempt to integrate the main events in the life of the individual with the communist ideology, the regime has established a socialist form of baptism and betrothal, and similar ceremonies have also been established in connection with birth, marriage and death. The " Principles " make it plain that these ceremonies are of an ideological character. For example, they contain the statement : " These workers' ceremonies glorify socialist humanism which is by its nature atheistic and recognises no being superior to humanity, toiling and fighting for peace, democracy and socialism. " The model speech for the marriage ceremony contains the following passage : " We believe in earthly happiness; there is no happiness outside this life and the world of socialism. " And again : " Religion cannot safeguard a marriage because the churches are powerless and God has no existence. " It is particularly advised t h a t marriages take place on a Sunday morning because this is thought to be one of the best means of competing with the Christ i an services.

20. These examples of the religious difficulties in the Russian-occupied zone give only a faint idea of the bitter reality. In face of this reality, the Protestant and Catholic Churches, knowing that the Christian values for which they both stand are being threatened as never before, are helping and supporting each other. Together, they represent the most solid of the ramparts against Communist propaganda. In their struggle for right and freedom they are also defending the basic values of democracy, so t h a t the religious struggle in the Russian-occupied zone has taken on a fundamental political importance and the courage shown by the Church merits that the eyes of the whole free world should be drawn to it.