

Aerial views of Frankfurt am Main 1945 and in the 1970s

Germany from Partition to Reunification

A Revised Edition of
The Two Germanies since 1945

Henry Ashby Turner, Jr.

Yale University Press
New Haven and London



"Inventory" by Günter Eich (trans. David Young) is reprinted here courtesy of Oberlin College: *Valuable Nail*, Field Translation Series 5, trans. Stuart Friebart, David Walker, and David Young (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1981), pp. 41-42.

"The Solution" by Bertolt Brecht is reprinted here courtesy of Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.: *Bertolt Brecht Poems*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 440

Photo credits: German Information Center, New York: ii, iii, 4, 5, 17, 26, 78, 79, 88, 91, 92, 96, 107, 112, 119, 140, 143, 151, 154, 177, 183, 185, 194, 216, 237, 249. Arbeitsgemeinschaft 13 August e.V., Berlin, 90, 91. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 94. Landesbildstelle Berlin, 235. Patrick Piel/Gamma Liaison, 236.

Copyright © 1992 by Yale University

All rights reserved.

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Set in Melior type by Keystone Typesetting, Inc., Orwigsburg, Penn.

Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, N.Y.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Turner, Henry Ashby, Jr.

Germany from partition to reunification / Henry Ashby Turner, Jr.
p. cm

Rev. ed. of: *The two Germanies since 1945*. 1987

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN 0-300-05345-2 (alk. paper). —

ISBN 0-300-05347-9 (pbk., alk. paper)

1. Germany—History—1945— . 2. Germany—History—Unification, 1990. I. Turner, Henry Ashby. Two Germanies since 1945. II. Title.

DD257 T87 1992

943.087—dc20

92-15192

CIP

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Preface	vii
Abbreviations	ix
1 Defeat, Cold War, and Division	1
2 The Birth of Two New Governments	33
3 The Ulbricht Era in East Germany	55
4 Two Decades of Christian Democratic Leadership in the Federal Republic	104
5 The Social-Liberal Era and the Return to Conservatism in the Federal Republic	148
6 The Collapse of the GDR and the Reunification of Germany	191
7 Fundamental Factors during Four Decades of Division	256
Further Reading	260
Index	265

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDPD National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, GDR)

NPD Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, FRG)

PDS Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, formerly SED)

SDP Sozialdemokratische Partei (Social Democratic Party, GDR)

SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)

SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany, FRG)

VEB Volkseigene Betriebe (People's plants)

1 Defeat, Cold War, and Division

The Wreckage of the Past

Early in May 1945, the German Reich came to an end.

It had existed for seventy-four years, long enough for most Germans to regard their country's unification as an irreversible achievement. Yet as the developments that began unfolding in the spring of 1945 were soon to demonstrate, such was not the case.

The Reich had come into being in 1871, ending centuries of German political fragmentation. Five years earlier, the Kingdom of Prussia, under the leadership of Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck, had defeated Austria, its chief rival for preeminence in the German part of Europe. Then, after Prussia's victory over France in 1870, Bismarck succeeded in bringing the smaller German states into a new polity, the Deutsches Reich or German Empire. As a federal monarchy under an emperor from the Prussian ruling house of Hohenzollern, the Empire immediately became one of the great powers of Europe. Led by Bismarck, who served as its chancellor until 1890, the new Germany displayed great vitality. Its formidable military establishment won it re-

spect and fear, while its rapid industrialization quickly thrust it to the economic forefront. By the end of the century, the Reich was making its influence felt around the globe. The resulting frictions with other powers contributed importantly to the outbreak in 1914 of the First World War, in which Germany fought at the side of the decaying Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires against a coalition that included Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and eventually the United States.

In 1918, in the wake of defeat following more than four years of bloody conflict in World War I, Germany underwent a revolution that transformed the government of the Reich into a parliamentary democracy that became known as the Weimar Republic. After a stormy fourteen years the republic collapsed and was succeeded in 1933 by the so-called Third Reich of National Socialist dictator Adolf Hitler. His Nazi regime imposed a totalitarian tyranny and adopted racist policies that relegated Germany's Jews to the status of resident aliens subject to many forms of harassment. But the regime also surmounted the worldwide depression that defied all remedies in other major industrial countries. Within only a few years the Third Reich had restored virtually full employment and achieved a level of prosperity envied elsewhere. As a result, the dictator won popularity at home and widespread recognition abroad. Hitler intended, however, to use the productive capacities of Germany not to improve the lot of its people but rather to prepare for a war of ruthless and far-reaching conquest. His goal was an empire of continental proportions in which the Germans, by right of alleged racial superiority, would subjugate—or eliminate—lesser peoples.

Following a series of diplomatic triumphs that undid many provisions of the Versailles peace settlement imposed upon Germany by the victors in 1919, Hitler launched what was to become the Second World War by attacking Poland in September 1939. During the ensuing five and a half years Germany, which was joined in 1940 by Fascist Italy, fought against a growing coalition of powers. At first, German military might seemed unstoppable. Poland, France, the Low Countries, Denmark, and

Norway quickly succumbed to Hitler's *Blitzkrieg*, or "lightning war." By the summer of 1940, the Third Reich, allied with the Soviet Union, dominated the European continent and posed a grave threat to the survival of its sole remaining foe, Britain. But in the summer of 1941 Hitler unleashed his armies on the Soviet Union and plunged the Reich into a ruinous war of attrition in that vast country. In December 1941 he declared war on the United States after Japan had attacked American outposts in the Pacific.

Eventually the tide of war turned against the Third Reich. At the end of 1942 the Russians halted the German advance, and the Red Army began pushing the invaders back. The Western Allies expelled the German forces from North Africa and in 1943 pushed northward through Italy, sweeping away Mussolini's Fascist regime. In the summer of 1944 Allied expeditionary forces breached the German defenses on the French coast and began battling their way eastward toward the Reich. In the spring of 1945 the European conflict finally came to an end. With Hitler dead by suicide and the country overrun by invaders, the German army leaders agreed to Allied demands for unconditional surrender. Their signing of the capitulation documents transferred sovereign authority from the German Reich to the victorious occupying powers. Germany had ceased to exist as a state and become a geographical region, ruled by foreigners.

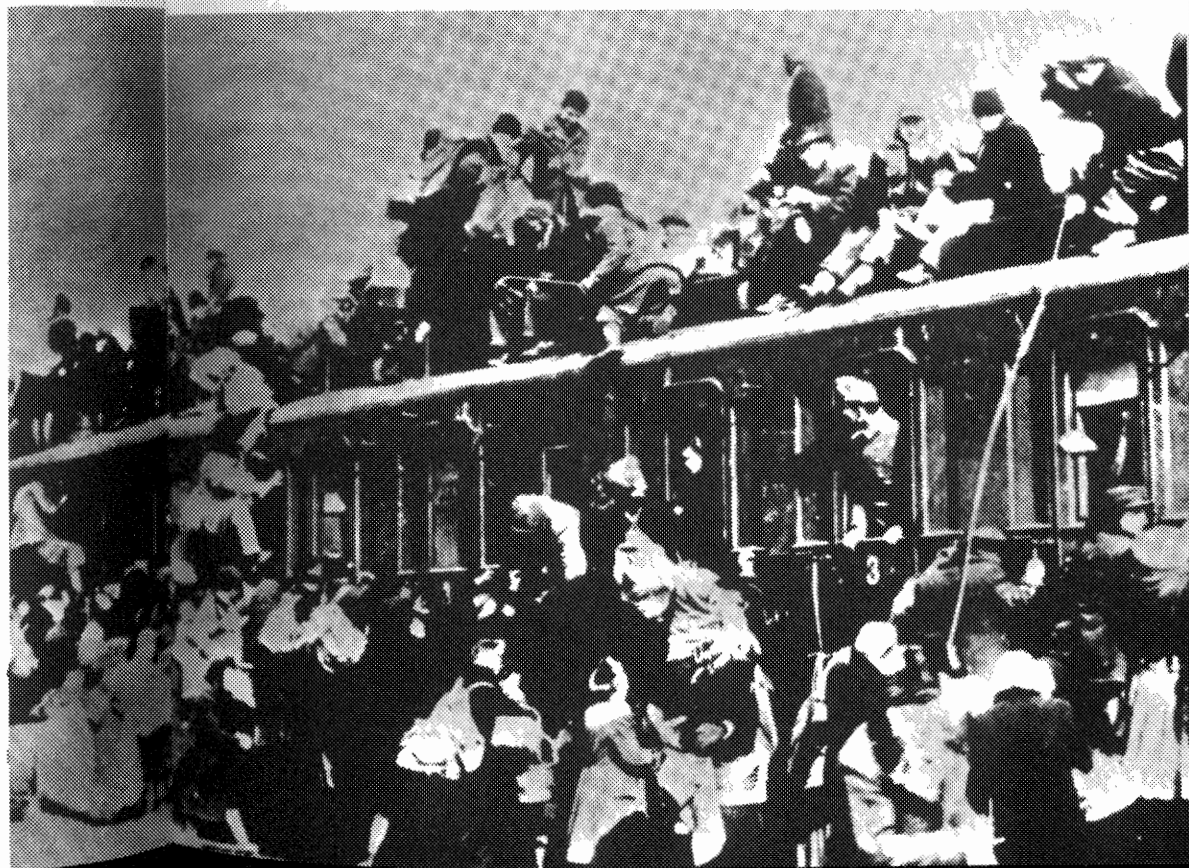
The victors found themselves in possession of a devastated and disrupted country. Whereas the Reich had escaped physical damage in the First World War, which was fought almost exclusively on foreign soil, the second great conflict brought home to Germans the horrors of modern, industrialized war. In the course of Allied bombing raids, millions of tons of high explosives rained down on German factories and cities. During the final stages of the war, large parts of the country became bloody battlefields. The full extent of the human costs can never be calculated with precision, but the toll was heavy. Estimates of the German war dead—military and civilian—run as high as 6.5 million; millions of others suffered disabilities.



Battle wreckage at the Brandenburg Gate in the center of Berlin 1945



Barefoot women carrying possessions through the ruins of a German city 1945



People struggling to board an overcrowded train 1945

The war left the German economy maimed, with thousands of mines, factories, warehouses, and other places of business heavily damaged by bombing raids. The economic infrastructure would eventually prove less seriously impaired than seemed the case at the end of the war, when a paralyzed transportation system obstructed distribution of vital goods and raw materials, including the coal that served as the main source of industrial energy. Still, in 1945 the prospect of economic recovery seemed remote, as industrial production sank to a fifth of the prewar level by the end of the year. So did the rebuilding of Germany's bomb-devastated cities. An estimated quarter of the country's housing lay destroyed or damaged beyond use, and in many cities the toll exceeded 50 percent. The resulting acute shortage of housing left millions without adequate dwellings. A disrupted and understaffed health-care system struggled to cope with an incidence of disease that frequently reached epidemic proportions.

The most pressing problem of all, however, resulted from a dire food crisis that reduced the average diet of Germans to levels dangerously close to the malnutrition level. Foodstuffs had become increasingly scarce as fighting surged into the agricultural regions of eastern Germany and Eastern Europe on which the Reich heavily relied for supplies of grain. The exodus of 10–12 million German refugees from these eastern regions compounded the problems of food and housing. Whereas in 1939 the territories that would comprise postwar Germany—East and West—had a population of under 59 million, by 1946 over 64 million lived there, despite the heavy wartime losses and the absence of millions of former soldiers held abroad as prisoners of war.

The war left Germany ravaged in more than merely material ways. In twelve years of tyrannical dictatorship the Nazi regime had ruthlessly crushed the country's democratic organizations and driven their leaders into exile or subjected them to imprisonment that often ended in broken health or death. On political grounds or to assure "racial purity," the Nazis systemat-

ically purged the bureaucracy, the universities, the arts, the press, and the professions. Deprived of livelihoods and in peril of persecution, some of Germany's most talented people fled abroad, where the resolute and fortunate among them made new careers, greatly enriching the cultural and intellectual life of their new homelands, particularly the United States. Most of these involuntary emigrés looked back with revulsion at the country that had scorned them and resolved never to return. The Third Reich thus inflicted an enormous intellectual and cultural loss upon Germany. At the end of the war, the country's once proud universities and scientific institutes sat idle and discredited after twelve years of collaboration and repression, stripped of much of the talent that had won them worldwide prominence before 1933. The media, which the Nazis had turned into conveyors of propaganda, collapsed along with the regime. In May 1945 the country was without a single functioning newspaper, magazine, publishing house, or radio station of its own. German art and literature, prostituted to the Nazi regime, stood discredited. Once a major contributor to Western civilization, Germany seemed mute and culturally sterile after its relapse into barbarism.

Morally, the country appeared bankrupt in 1945. The Nazi regime had not only inflicted a repressive dictatorship on Germany itself but had also deliberately unleashed a brutal war of conquest that resulted in the deaths of some 40 million people across Europe. In the vast territories they conquered, the Nazis imposed an oppressive domination that awakened hatred of all things German. At the head of their many crimes stood the most massive campaign of premeditated genocide in history. By means of calculated mass-murder, the Nazis systematically slaughtered between five and six million innocent men, women, and children whose only offense was their Jewish ancestry. Others, such as gypsies, Russian prisoners of war, and mentally retarded Germans, were classified as subhumans unfit to share the earth with a Germanic master race and were executed or worked to death as slave labor. When the full magnitude of these

crimes came to light in the spring of 1945, the very word *German*—already stigmatized by military aggression—became anathema for many people.

Once the Germans learned the extent of the crimes committed in the name of their nation, they had to struggle with a heavy burden of shame in addition to coping with defeat, foreign occupation, and hardship. Few sought to defend the Third Reich. Its leaders had already discredited themselves in the eyes of most by refusing to surrender long after defeat became obvious, thereby condemning millions to senseless death or disablement and much of the country to devastation. Some nevertheless harbored ambiguous feelings about the collapse of a regime that had restored prosperity and made Germany, before the war, once again proud and powerful. But even die-hard Nazis found it difficult to defend a regime that had so obviously ended in a national disaster. Few welcomed the imposition of foreign rule, but no popular indignation arose when the victors tried and convicted surviving leaders of the Nazi regime for war crimes and put some to death. For many Germans, their national heritage seemed bankrupt. For them, 1945 became the “year zero.” Shamed or daunted by their country’s immediate past and struggling with the ruins bequeathed them by the Third Reich, most sought to erase what had happened from their minds in hopes of starting anew. Something approaching a national amnesia gripped the country.

Differences among the Victors

The victorious Allies, like the Germans, assumed that the issues of the war would, as after previous conflicts, find resolution in a peace treaty. But no immediate steps in that direction followed the capitulation of Germany. In the spring of 1945 the Second World War seemed far from over in the Pacific. The Japanese Empire still defiantly occupied much of China, large parts of Southeast Asia, and many islands of the Pacific. Unaware that detonation of the first atomic

bombs over two Japanese cities would put an end to the Pacific war by August, the Americans remained preoccupied by the prospect of a long and costly conflict. For their part, the British and Russians became distracted by the tasks of repairing the extensive damage to their own countries and reasserting their influence over what they saw as strategically vital areas abroad. The French, whose Third Republic had collapsed in 1940 after the country’s crushing military defeat, struggled to revive their national institutions and cope with the problems of a crumbling colonial empire.

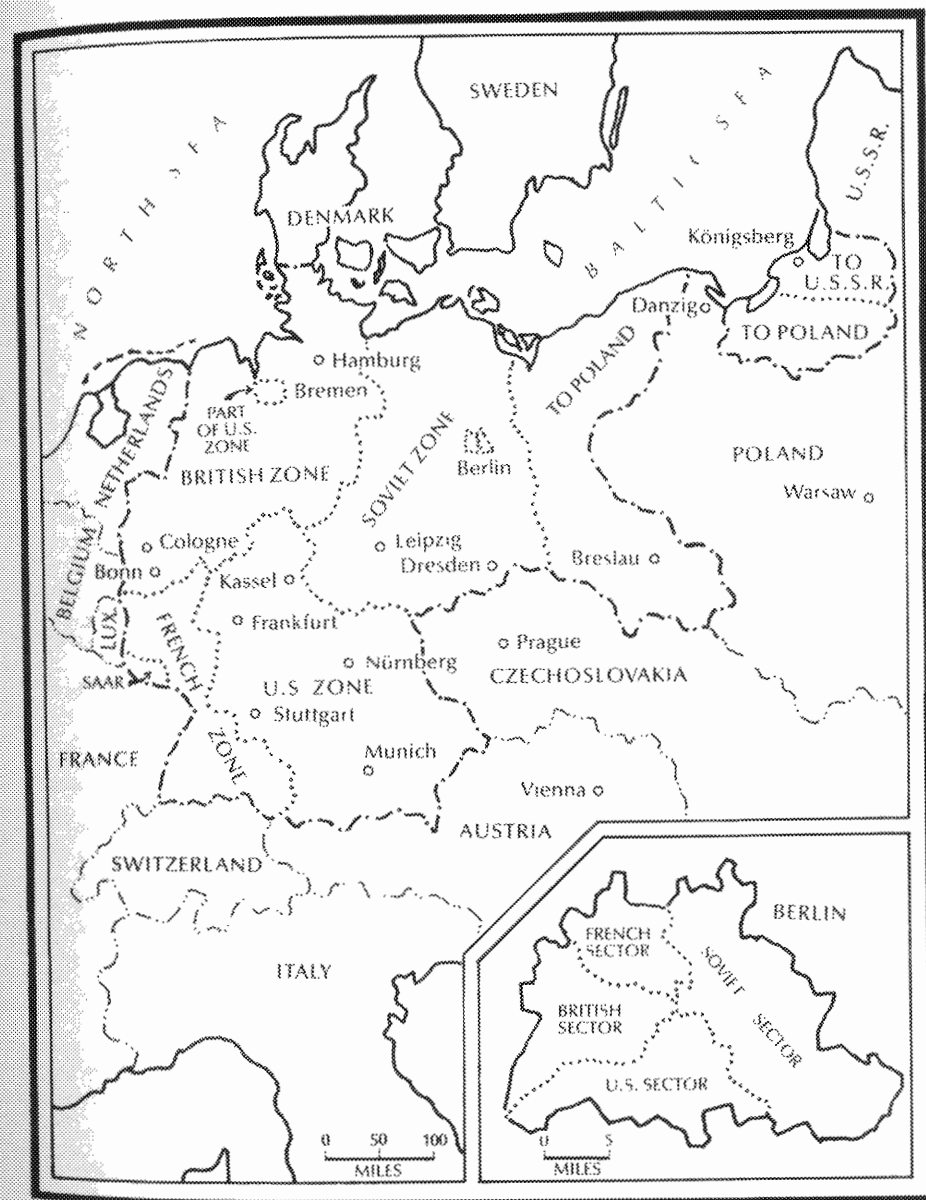
As a consequence of these distractions, the occupation of Germany quickly hardened along the lines of provisional arrangements arrived at in 1944 by a middle-level wartime inter-Allied planning body. This European Advisory Commission had the task of planning for temporary occupation of a Germany reduced to its pre-expansion borders of 1937. Using the boundaries of former German administrative districts, the advisory commission divided the country into American, British, and Russian occupation zones. The Soviet Union was assigned the eastern part of the country, Great Britain the northwest, the United States the south, plus an enclave around the northern city of Bremen and its port, Bremerhaven, to permit access by sea for American troops and supplies. Berlin was to be occupied jointly by the victors, with each accorded a sector of the city. An Allied Control Council situated in the former capital city was to act on behalf of the victors to exercise joint authority over Germany during the occupation period, which was expected to be brief. The council was to reach its decisions on a basis of unanimity, which meant that each of the occupying powers would have the right of veto.

Before the occupation began, these plans underwent several modifications. At the Yalta conference of February 1945, American president Franklin Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill secured Soviet leader Josef Stalin’s approval for creation of a French occupation zone in southwestern Germany and a French sector in Berlin by agreeing to assign France

some of the areas originally earmarked for occupation by Great Britain and the United States. As the Russians advanced into the Reich, they acted unilaterally to assign large parts of their occupation zone to the USSR and Poland, not as occupied territory but rather as lands to be "administered" by those governments. In the case of Poland, where the Soviets installed a regime subservient to them, this assignment of territory amounted to compensation for the USSR's annexation of eastern Poland.

The Western powers had earlier agreed in principle to some sort of eventual territorial compensation in the east at Germany's expense, but the Russians presented their wartime allies with a major fait accompli by immediately carrying out this massive transfer on their own. Most of the severed German territory was handed over to Polish authorities, but the USSR seized the northern part of East Prussia, including the city of Königsberg, a center of German commerce and culture since the Middle Ages. Since the Soviets and Poles expelled virtually all Germans from the areas thus placed under their administration, their actions amounted to a de facto severance from Germany of all territories to the east of a line that ran along the Oder and western Neisse rivers, including large areas that had been inhabited predominantly by Germans for centuries. In this manner, nearly a quarter of the Reich's pre-1938 territory, where some nine and a half million Germans had lived, ceased to be part of the country. At the time, the Americans and British officially took the position that these measures, like the creation of occupation zones, were merely provisional. The demarcation lines drawn on the map of Germany in 1945 would, however, soon harden into the durable political geography of post-World War II Europe.

The provisional arrangements for occupied Germany underwent further refinements at the American-British-Soviet summit conference held at Potsdam, just outside Berlin, in the summer of 1945. There the Western powers acquiesced in the territorial arrangements effected by the USSR in the east but secured the latter's endorsement of the principle that final boundaries must await a peace conference. All the victors agreed that Germany



should be subjected to denazification, demilitarization, democratization, decentralization, and decartelization. They further agreed that the four-power Allied Control Council should administer Germany as one economic entity. The council was, however, not accorded full control over the country, since the victors assigned executive authority in each of the four occupation zones to the American, British, French, and Russian commandants, who were responsible solely to their own governments. The Potsdam conferees also agreed that the Germans' living standard must remain lower than that of their European neighbors.

The Potsdam agreements provided that reparations were to be extracted in the form of machines and other industrial equipment rather than in monetary payments, which after World War I had contributed to the economic instability that undermined Germany's first attempt at democracy. Each occupying power received authorization to seize and remove factories and other productive facilities in its zone. Since the greatest concentrations of heavy industry lay in the Western zones of occupation, a portion of reparations from those zones was to be turned over to the Soviets, whose zone was heavily agricultural. In return, the Russians agreed to ship foodstuffs and raw materials to the Western zones, which lacked sufficient agriculture to feed their populations. As for political life in Germany, the victors decided to permit the revival of democratic parties and trade unions and to establish German organs of self-administration, staffed by non-Nazis, beginning at the local level. All these arrangements were designated as merely temporary, and the Potsdam conferees assigned the task of preparing for a peace conference to their foreign ministers.

No peace conference ever met. As soon as the occupying powers turned to the task of governing Germany, insurmountable differences developed among them. From the very outset, France, which had not participated in the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, resisted implementation of some of the key agreements. Having suffered three invasions and two defeats at the

hands of Germany within seventy years, the French were determined to see their neighbor to the east decisively diminished in size and power. They therefore demanded that the Rhineland, the German-inhabited territory to the west of the Rhine, be separated from the rest of the country and made an independent state. They also wanted the Ruhr valley, the industrial heartland of Germany, placed under international control and the coal-rich Saar basin permanently transferred from Germany to France. When the Americans and British balked at these demands, the French exercised their veto in the Allied Control Council to block proposed measures aimed at restoring a unified German economy in line with the Potsdam agreements.

Whereas implementation of the Potsdam agreements initially became stalled because of French vetoes, differences soon developed as well between the Americans and British on the one hand and the Soviets on the other. The Russians, like the French, called for an internationalization of the Ruhr on terms unacceptable to the British, in whose zone the coal-rich industrial region lay, and to the Americans. The Soviets' most bitter disagreements with the Americans and the British arose, however, over the issue of reparations. The Russians, whose country had suffered enormous devastation in years of fierce fighting, felt justified in seizing as much German industrial equipment as they could. They therefore dismantled and shipped to the Soviet Union from their occupation zone entire factories as well as sizable quantities of motor vehicles, railroad rolling stock, and even rails. The amount of productive capacity removed in this fashion has been estimated at as high as a quarter of the total in their zone. The Russians also insisted upon receiving the full share of such goods promised them from the Western zones at Potsdam.

The Western powers soon balked at these arrangements on reparations. Every reduction of industrial productivity in their zones through removal of factories and machines to the USSR had the effect of shifting the cost of feeding the German population to their own taxpayers. Such was the case because the parts

of Germany occupied by the Americans and British were incapable of producing enough food to sustain their populations. If those zones were to have any hope of feeding themselves, they would have to pay for imported foodstuffs by exporting industrial products. Compliance with the reparations agreements of Potsdam would not only rule out such self-sufficiency but would also, in effect, force the Western allies to subsidize with food shipments at their own expense reparations extracted from their zones by the USSR. The problem was further exacerbated by the failure of the Soviet occupation authorities to make good on their government's commitment at Potsdam to supply the Western zones with foodstuffs as compensation for part of the German industrial equipment shipped from those zones to the Soviet Union. In addition, the Russians increasingly supplemented the reparations they shipped to the USSR in the form of previously existing machines and other industrial equipment by seizing a portion of the current production of factories in their own zone, many of which they took over and operated themselves.

When all efforts to resolve the reparations problem failed, the American commandant, General Lucius D. Clay, ordered an end to the dismantling of industries in his zone in May 1946 and halted reparations shipments to the Russians. The British and French soon followed his example. Under heavy political pressure at home to reduce costly shipments of food to a dangerously undernourished German population, the American and British governments began to foster industrial recovery in order to enable the Germans to pay for the imported food on which they depended. For their part, the Soviets angrily accused the Western powers of violating the Potsdam agreements and used their veto in the Allied Control Council to block joint actions. The resulting chill in relations among the victors marked the onset in Germany of what became known as the Cold War, which also gained force as the Soviets imposed Communist-dominated puppet regimes on the countries of Eastern Europe in violation of wartime promises to permit the establishment, in areas liber-

ated from Nazism, of independent governments based on free elections.

With the victors deadlocked on how to deal with the country as a whole, the foundations of postwar German life were laid by the occupying powers separately in their respective zones. The Soviets made the most thoroughgoing changes. In line with their Communist ideology, they socialized much of industry and effected a radical agrarian reform that distributed large amounts of land among small farmers. That land reform eliminated the huge rural estates that had served for centuries as the economic foundation of Prussia's agrarian gentry, the Junkers, who had played such a disproportionate and often unfortunate role in Germany's history. The Western powers, on the other hand, instituted only modest economic and social reforms. At the insistence of the Americans, who believed that German big business had played a vital role in the rise and depredations of Nazism, measures to break up large trusts and conglomerates were set in motion. The British Labour government had initially favored socializing at least such basic industries as coal and steel. The war-battered British found themselves, however, too dependent upon economic aid from the United States to defy American opposition to imposing such a fundamental change on the Germans without their consent. The Western powers left such matters to be decided at some future date by a reconstituted, democratically elected German government. Unable to provide the extensive personnel needed to manage the day-to-day affairs of a complex and populous country, all the occupying powers early on turned such matters over to German organs of civil administration set up under their supervision at the local level.

The Soviets put the policy of denazification into effect rapidly by summarily excluding all former members of the Nazi Party from positions of responsibility in their zone. The Western powers employed more elaborate and time-consuming methods in an effort to distinguish between those who had participated actively in the Nazi regime and mere nominal adherents of the party. But they, too, disqualified and penalized sizable numbers

of persons with tarnished pasts. After the International Military Tribunal had reached its verdicts on the surviving leaders of the Third Reich at Nuremberg, the occupying powers conducted further trials of less well known Germans accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Nevertheless, in the confusing conditions of the postwar years, with large quantities of records destroyed or missing, many guilty persons escaped punishment. As a consequence of those developments and the pressing need for talented people, some tainted individuals eventually managed to secure positions in the new postwar institutions of all the occupation zones.

The Revival of German Politics

German political life began reviving in the spring and summer of 1945. The USSR was the first occupying power to permit the formation of political parties in its zone, beginning with the Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) in June. At the head of the KPD stood two long-time party functionaries who had spent the war years in Moscow, Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht. Soon thereafter the Soviets allowed the reconstitution of the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or SPD), whose chief spokesman in Berlin was Otto Grotewohl. The Soviets also licensed a wholly new grouping, the Christian Democratic Union (Christlich Demokratische Union or CDU). Its leaders, formerly active in the fragmented moderate parties of the Weimar Republic, including the Catholic Center Party, sought to rally the followers of those parties on the basis of a nondenominational commitment to Christian ethics and democratic institutions. A fourth significant party licensed by the Soviets was the Liberal Democratic Party (Liberal-Demokratische Partei or LPD), which laid claim to the liberal heritage in German politics. The same spectrum of parties soon gained

permission to operate in the Western zones as well, although there the liberals called themselves the Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei or FDP). The Bavarian affiliate of the CDU constituted itself as a separate party on a regional basis, the Christian Social Union (Christlich Soziale Union or CSU). In addition, a number of minor parties were licensed in the Western zones.

In the Soviet zone this constellation of competing parties quickly gave way to arrangements designed to ensure results of a kind desired by the occupying power. In keeping with the "popular front" tactic applied by the Soviets throughout the parts of Europe under their control at the end of the war, they pressed for cooperation among liberals, social democrats, and communists. By making permission for political activity in their zone conditional upon all the parties' joining together in an "anti-fascist democratic bloc," they in effect forced the other parties into a kind of permanent coalition with the KPD. All decisions of this bloc required unanimity, which gave the KPD veto power. Since the bloc determined the ground rules for political activity in the Soviet zone, it placed tight limits on the other parties' independence and effectively excluded an anti-Communist alliance.

Initially, the Communist Party denied any intent to impose a Soviet-style regime and promised to work to create a parliamentary democracy. From the outset, however, the KPD suffered in the eyes of many Germans from its close ties to the Soviets. The plunder and rape indulged in by Red Army soldiers at the end of the war worked to the disadvantage of the KPD. So did the often harsh occupation regime with its sweeping expropriation measures, in which the Soviets assigned key administrative roles to German Communists. Just how serious a handicap the link to the Soviets represented was suggested by the first postwar national election in Austria, parts of which had also experienced Russian invasion and occupation. In the balloting of November 1945 there, the Austrian Communist Party received only slightly more than 5 percent of the votes. Alarmed at signs that the KPD

similarly lacked popularity, the German Communists pressed for a merger with the larger Social Democratic Party.

There was considerable sentiment for such a merger in both parties. The SPD and the KPD both traced their origins to the same socialist movement, which had formed a united party for forty-two years before dividing in 1917 on wartime issues. The resultant split in the socialist political movement was widely regarded as one of the factors that had facilitated Hitler's rise to power. Reunification thus seemed to many one of the best safeguards against a repetition of the calamitous period between 1933 and 1945. Much of the leadership of the SPD remained, however, mistrustful because of the KPD's subservience to Stalin's totalitarian regime in the USSR and the German Communist leaders' reliance on Leninist authoritarian methods in internal party matters. Because of this mistrust, Social Democratic spokesmen in the Western zones, led by a survivor of Hitler's concentration camps, Kurt Schumacher, rejected a merger with the KPD.

Under mounting pressure from Soviet occupation authorities that in some instances assumed coercive proportions, the SPD in the Russian zone, led by Otto Grotewohl, agreed in April 1946 to join with the KPD in forming a Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or SED). As this merger took place on an initial basis of parity, with former members of the old parties equally represented in the policy-making bodies of the SED, the Communists, as the smaller of the two groups, immediately gained in influence. In the "anti-fascist democratic bloc," the SED now completely overshadowed the non-Marxist parties of the Soviet zone. Initially, the new party assumed an ideological position much closer to the SPD than to the KPD, espousing Marxist principles but omitting any mention of Leninism. Its leaders avoided endorsements of the Soviet system and pledged to follow a distinctively German road to socialism.

In the first local elections in the Soviet zone in September 1946, which saw the SED competing for votes with the CDU and the LPD, the new party attained majorities. That apparent show



Communists Wilhelm Pieck (left) and Walter Ulbricht (right) with Social Democrat Otto Grotewohl (center) at the formal founding of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), 1946

of strength resulted in part, however, from the absence of the non-Marxist parties on the ballot in many places because of Soviet delays in certifying their local organizations. A month later, in October 1946, with the other parties more fully represented on the ballots, the SED fell short of majorities in Soviet zone provincial elections. Spokesmen for the CDU and the LPD complained that the Russians favored the SED in allocating paper for newspapers, posters, and brochures as well as in providing access to radio broadcasts. These charges seemed borne out in October 1946 by the first postwar election of a city-wide assembly for Berlin, where four-power rule enabled the other parties to compete on a more even basis with the SED. The outcome was a striking victory for those Social Democrats who rejected the merger with the Communists. The SPD tallied al-

most two and a half times as many votes as the SED and achieved close to an absolute majority. Stung by that defeat, the SED avoided further contested elections.

The reconstruction of German political institutions proceeded apace in all parts of the country. The occupying powers soon approved the formation of regional organs of self-administration called *Länder*, the term for the constituent states in the federal systems of the Empire and the Weimar Republic. By 1947 the states thus established in the Western zones were headed by minister-presidents chosen by freely elected parliamentary assemblies. Institutional developments followed a similar pattern in the Soviet zone except that the political processes remained considerably less than free because of the Soviet-imposed coalition of the non-Marxist parties with the SED.

When repeated meetings of the foreign ministers of the wartime alliance failed to resolve the differences that blocked movement toward a final peace settlement, the Americans proposed at least the economic amalgamation of the occupation zones so as to foster recovery and free the victors of the burden of feeding the vanquished. At first, only the British, whose zone, like the Americans', required massive food subsidies, responded positively. The result was the formation, at the beginning of 1947, of what came to be known as Bizonia, an economic unit comprising the American and British zones that operated through a set of administrative offices situated in the city of Frankfurt am Main. Bizonia's administrative activities were coordinated by an Executive Council composed of representatives of the democratically elected state administrations. The policies of the Executive Council, in turn, were subject to review and challenge by an Economic Council consisting of 52 members named by the state parliamentary assemblies. The political parties were represented in proportion to their strength in those assemblies. In early 1948 the size of the Economic Council was doubled to 104 members, and it became a quasi-parliament. At the same time a second chamber, the Council of States, came into being, providing the regional administrations with a voice in the shaping of

economic legislation. In many respects, Bizonia soon became a proto-government, and its institutional structure provided the model which, with modifications, would eventually serve as the outline for a new West German republic.

In other ways, too, Bizonia anticipated later patterns. Two political parties quickly established themselves as the major alternatives: the SPD and the CDU/CSU. Commanding the largest blocs of seats in the regional parliaments and therefore in the Economic Council of Bizonia, they advocated quite different economic orientations. The Social Democrats held to their party's long-standing commitment to the socialization of basic industries and extensive state control over other aspects of economic life. The Christian Democrats, after initially inclining to a "Christian socialism," swung to espousal of a basically free-enterprise orientation. In March 1948, when the Economic Council chose its first elected Administrative Council, or proto-cabinet, the CDU/CSU joined with the laissez-faire FDP and smaller parties to wrest control of Bizonia's office for economic policy from the SPD. Upon nomination of the CDU/CSU, Ludwig Erhard, an obscure economist without party affiliation, was chosen as chief economic architect, thus beginning a remarkable political career. An advocate of free enterprise, Erhard launched Bizonia upon an economic course that would, like its institutional structure, set the pattern for the future West German government.

Not all Germans in the American and British zones welcomed the emergence of Bizonia. Some influential political figures saw the establishment of such a partial polity as a threat to their country's unity. This gave rise to initiatives designed to bring about cooperation on the part of German office-holders in all four zones of occupation in hopes of surmounting the deadlock that kept the occupying powers from reestablishing institutions for the country as a whole. The boldest initiative came with an invitation issued in the spring of 1947 by the minister-president of Bavaria to his counterparts throughout the country, summoning them to a conference in Munich to consider ways to hold Germany together.

Although the minister-presidents of the states in all the zones assembled in Munich on the appointed day in May 1947, the conference disappointed the hopes placed in it. The spokesmen from the Soviet zone insisted that the agenda must include immediate consideration of German reunification. By contrast, the minister-presidents from the Western zones wanted to avoid thorny political issues that would arouse the occupying powers and call attention to their differences. The Western minister-presidents preferred to limit discussion, at least initially, to economic measures aimed at coping with the pressing problems of feeding the population and reestablishing the flow of goods among the zones. Another obstacle developed when Social Democratic minister-presidents from the Western zones refused to sit down with counterparts who belonged to the SED so long as the SPD was not permitted to operate freely in the Soviet zone. Unwilling to give way on that point and frustrated in their attempts to press consideration of Germany's political future to the fore, the minister-presidents of the Soviet zone departed before the conference formally convened. Although those from the Western zones went on with the meeting, it achieved nothing aside from conclusively revealing that not even the most highly placed German spokesmen were capable of uniting to exert influence on their country's political destiny.

Germany as Focus of the Cold War

A turning point in Germany's postwar development occurred in February 1948 when Britain and the United States decided they could no longer postpone decisions on the future of Germany. Two months earlier, at the end of 1947, the fourth meeting of the council of foreign ministers of the occupying powers had failed to make any progress toward a peace settlement. With no prospect of four-power agreement in sight, the Americans and British concluded that the parts of Germany they occupied could not be allowed to

remain in limbo any longer. Economic conditions there continued to deteriorate at a rate that imposed increasing financial burdens on their countries and awakened fears of renewed political extremism. Britain and the United States therefore invited France and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg) to send representatives to a six-nation conference in London on the future of Germany.

The London Conference, one of the most important of the postwar years, took place in two sessions, February 23 to March 5 and April 30 to June 2, 1948. To deal with the economic problems posed for much of Europe by a still-prostrate Germany, the participating governments decided to authorize extension to the Western occupation zones of the American-sponsored Marshall Plan for economic recovery. Under the terms of the plan, the American government had in 1947 offered massive financial aid to European countries that had suffered wartime damage. The battlelines of the incipient Cold War hardened when the Russians refused to allow the Communist-dominated regimes they had imposed on Eastern Europe to participate in the Marshall Plan. Extension of American aid to the Western zones of Germany now unavoidably shifted the economic frontline of the Cold War to the boundaries between those zones and the portion of Germany occupied by the Soviet Union.

The six-nation London Conference of 1948 also served to focus the political Cold War on Germany by calling for formation of a West German government. French opposition to such a move gave way when the Americans and British accepted the Saarland's de facto detachment from Germany and the close association of that major coal basin with France and, in addition, agreed to place the coal and steel industries of the Ruhr region under supervision of the Western occupying powers.

A major step toward consolidation of the Western zones came through currency reform. By the spring of 1948 the German Reichsmark had lost much of its value as a result of the combined effects of far-reaching price controls inherited from the

Third Reich and a swollen money supply left from the war years. Few goods aside from the tightly rationed necessities of life came onto the open market, as producers balked at selling at controlled prices for devalued currency. A burgeoning black market developed, with transactions taking place on the basis of barter or cigarettes, which became a kind of substitute currency. With the purchasing power of money greatly diminished, the incentive to work declined for many wage earners. Introduction of a new monetary system thus became the inescapable prerequisite for an economic revival that would stabilize social conditions and remove the financial burdens occupation had imposed on the victors. When the Russians proved unwilling to surrender control over currency in their zone to a central monetary authority, the Western powers introduced new money in their zones in June 1948. Holders of the old marks were initially permitted to exchange only a limited amount for the new currency, the *Deutsche Mark* or DM, which would become one of the most successful currencies of the postwar era. When the new currency quickly gained acceptance, steps were taken to relax price controls and allow market forces to set the value of goods.

Russian responses to these Western moves took drastic forms. In March the Soviet representative walked out of the Allied Control Council in Berlin, protesting that the London Conference violated the Potsdam Agreement by undertaking decisions on Germany without the participation of the USSR. Then in June the Russians objected strenuously to introduction of the new currency for the Western zones, charging that the Potsdam Agreement required unanimous approval for any such significant measure. Although the Western powers pointed out that the Soviets' exit from the Control Council made unanimous approval on currency matters impossible, the Russians reacted harshly. They imposed a blockade on West Berlin, which was surrounded by territory occupied by the Red Army and lay more than a hundred miles distant from the nearest Western-occupied territory. They sealed off all the railways, highways, and canals upon which the Western sectors relied for delivery of food and

fuel as well as for the transport of raw materials into and finished products out of what remained Germany's largest industrial city. They also cut off the delivery of power from generating plants in their zone, upon which the Western sectors depended for most of their electricity. While civilians were permitted to move back and forth between the Western and Soviet sectors of the old capital, transport of goods between the two parts of the city was subjected to close controls and sharply curtailed.

It quickly became evident that the Soviets intended more than merely to block the introduction of the new Western currency into Berlin. As the commandant of their occupation zone soon announced to his Western counterparts, the USSR wanted the steps toward formation of a government for western Germany halted. Until that happened, West Berlin would be held hostage. If the Russians could not realize that goal, they seemed determined at least to drive the Western powers out of Berlin and incorporate the whole city into their zone of occupation, thereby greatly strengthening their hold over part of Germany. In their communications with the Western powers, the Soviets accordingly began to claim that the American, British, and French sectors of the former German capital lay in their zone, and the Soviet commandant began to designate himself as military governor of all of Berlin. As they tightened their noose around the isolated Western sectors of the city, the Russians seemed to hold the overwhelming advantage, for virtually no one believed the more than two million people of West Berlin could long survive such a blockade.

For a brief period after the Russians' imposition of the Berlin blockade the danger of a new war seemed acute. For in addition to prohibiting civilian travel and transport to West Berlin, the Russians refused to permit military units of the Western occupying powers to pass through the Soviet zone to provision their garrisons stationed in Berlin. As the Western powers discovered to their chagrin, they had neglected to reach written agreements with the Russians guaranteeing them use of the rail, highway, and canal links between West Berlin and their occupation

zones. Some Western officials favored challenging the Russians militarily by sending a supply column accompanied by tanks along one of the *Autobahnen* (divided highways) that linked western Germany with the former capital city. Had that advice prevailed, a test of will with the potential for triggering a third world war would have ensued. What was to prove the first of several grave crises over Berlin threatened to turn the Cold War into a shooting conflict among great powers.

The Russians had, however, miscalculated. They had overlooked the possibility that West Berlin could be supplied from the air. In written agreements reached during the early stages of the occupation they had granted the three Western powers access rights to their sectors of the city through three air corridors over the surrounding Soviet zone of Germany. Before trying to break the blockade on the ground, the Western allies decided to attempt to supply West Berlin by air. To most observers, this seemed an impossible task. Few could conceive of using airplanes to meet all the needs of more than two million people for food, fuel, clothing, and all other necessities except water. Especially daunting was the task of supplying throughout the winter months a large urban complex wholly dependent upon heavy, bulky deliveries of coal for heating and electricity.

Despite what seemed overwhelmingly unfavorable odds, the Berlin airlift, which came to be known as "Operation Vittles," succeeded. Remobilizing hundreds of planes used in World War II, the Western powers organized and put into operation an unprecedentedly massive display of the possibilities of air transport. At the height of the airlift, one plane reached West Berlin every thirty seconds. Reconditioned bombers dropped cargoes such as coal from the air onto fields cleared for that purpose and returned for reloading to their bases without even landing. Millions of pounds of supplies of all sorts reached the city by air each day. The enormity of the operation required precise planning and exact coordination. To the amazement of the world, it worked. Throughout the severe winter of 1948–49 the airlift met the needs of a West Berlin whose population made



An American plane lands in Berlin during the Berlin airlift of 1948–49

its contribution by making do with a rudimentary diet, minimal heat, and sharply curtailed hours of electricity during an especially cold winter. A high human cost was paid—thirty-one Americans, forty Britons, and five Germans lost their lives in air accidents. But by the spring of 1949 the failure of the attempt to coerce the Western powers by starving and freezing West Berlin into submission had become manifest. On May 12, 1949, the Soviets lifted the blockade, opening access to West Berlin once again via highways, railways, and canals.

The Russians' attempt to prevent the political consolidation of western Germany by blockading Berlin ended by accelerating that development. Instead of halting the movement in that direction begun at the six-nation London Conference, the blockade—along with the Communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia

in early 1948—convinced the Western leaders that they must take swift and decisive measures to strengthen the part of Germany outside the Soviet orbit. The close cooperation which the blockade necessitated among the Western occupying powers in Berlin also served to surmount the remaining differences between the Americans and the British on the one hand and the French on the other. In April 1949 the French began merging their occupation zone into Bizonia to create Trizonia, a quasi-polity encompassing all of postwar Germany except the Soviet zone, Berlin, and the Saarland, the latter of which retained a separate status in close association with France. The experience of the blockade had dispelled the last lingering misgivings among the leaders of France about the advisability of creating a West German government. Henceforth, the three former Western wartime Allies—Britain, France, and the United States—would closely coordinate their policies on Germany. For all three, the Soviet Union had come to replace the Germans as the chief threat to their security and prime peril to the peace.

The Berlin blockade and the successful airlift also lessened German hesitations about proceeding toward creation of a government for the Western occupation zones. Many thoughtful German political leaders had initially viewed the step taken in that direction at the London Conference in early 1948 as an unacceptable threat to the political unity of their country. Still hoping that the victorious powers would manage to resolve their differences and sit down at a peace conference that would deal with Germany as a whole, they preferred to see the country remain under temporary occupation arrangements. That anomalous situation, they argued, would eventually force the victors to put Germany back together under one government, whereas the creation of a government for only part of the country would reduce the incentive for a peace settlement encompassing Germany as a whole.

Those who held such views swiftly diminished in number under the frightening impact of the obvious Soviet determination to subjugate West Berlin during the blockade. Throughout

that ordeal, the Russians and the German Communists subjected the hard-pressed West Berliners to sustained psychological warfare. In radio broadcasts and the press of East Berlin they relentlessly proclaimed that all Berlin came under their authority and predicted the imminent abandonment of the city by the Western occupying powers. The Russians also harassed the democratically elected city-wide administration, which sought to conduct its business and the sessions of its assembly in the city hall located in the Soviet sector.

In the autumn of 1948 it became impossible for the non-Communist majority in the Berlin city-wide assembly elected two years earlier to attend that body's sessions in the Soviet sector. As SED-controlled policemen looked on passively, Communist-led mobs repeatedly invaded the city hall, interrupted the assembly's sessions, and physically menaced its non-Communist members. Led by Social Democrat Ernst Reuter, who had been elected mayor a year earlier by the assembly but denied that post by Soviet veto, the majority moved the city administration to the Western part of Berlin in September. There Reuter, at last installed as mayor, rallied the population to hold out during the blockade in the face of privation and intimidation by the Russians. A free election in the Western sectors of the city in December 1948 produced a turnout of 86.3 percent and an overwhelming victory for the non-Communist parties. A month earlier the Soviets had effectively divided Berlin by recognizing an SED-dominated puppet municipal regime in their sector of the city.

In the eyes of most Germans in the West, the airlift to Berlin came to seem a struggle to protect their freedoms, and the Western occupying powers became their protectors. For their part, the Americans, British, and French found themselves working side by side with Germans to keep the necessities of life flowing to the millions of West Berliners whose fortitude and endurance gave rise to admiration and esteem among their former foes. Especially impressive was the rejection by the great majority of West Berliners of food and other supplies offered them by the

regime in East Berlin. By the time the Russians lifted the blockade in the spring of 1949, the animosities of the war years had with remarkable rapidity begun to give way among Americans, British, French, and Germans to a recognition of common interests, shared values, and mutual respect.

When the Berlin blockade ended, normal traffic to Berlin resumed and international tensions diminished sharply, but the situation of Germany remained drastically altered. Although the Russians reopened the transit routes to Berlin, they continued to insist that the Western powers had violated the Potsdam agreements. They therefore refused to return to the Allied Control Council in Berlin, so that the four-power occupation authority foreseen at Potsdam could not function. After the creation of Trizonia, Germany (leaving aside the special cases of Berlin and the Saarland) in effect consisted of two distinct political and economic regions. Trizonia, by far the larger and more populous region with about 49 million inhabitants, encompassed territory roughly the size of England, Scotland, and Wales or Pennsylvania and New York. The Soviet zone, with about 17 million inhabitants, was less than half as large or about the size of the state of Ohio. Each had its own administrative system, its own laws and judiciary, its own economic system and currency, its own measure of civil and political liberties. Movement of people and goods between the two parts remained possible. But the breakdown in the spring of 1949 of the last postwar conference of Allied foreign ministers without any progress toward a peace conference served to underline the fact that in the four years since the end of military conflict Germany had become a divided country.

In its immediate origins, that division was the product of deep, often irreconcilable differences among the victors who assumed *de facto* sovereignty over Germany in 1945. In many instances, each side's case had incontestable validity. The Soviets had strong claims to reparations from a Germany which had invaded and devastated much of their country. The Western powers, on the other hand, saw no reason why they should in

effect finance reparations to the Soviet Union by pumping resources into their occupation zones at the expense of their own citizens to feed and provision Germans while the Russians extracted goods and resources from the other side of the country. Because of understandable fears about a revival of the German industrial power that had made possible repeated invasions of their countries, first the French, then the Soviets, obstructed American and British efforts to restore German economic unity so as to increase industrial productivity, revive internal trade, and promote the exports needed to enable the Germans in the populous but agriculturally limited western and southern regions of the country to feed themselves without aid from the taxpayers of Britain and the United States.

The wartime arrangements for what was then expected to be a brief period of occupation contributed to the split among the victors, since those arrangements required unanimity for Allied decisions. The Americans and British repeatedly found themselves faced with a choice between accepting French and Soviet vetoes or stepping outside the four-power framework to deal with the pressing needs of the German population and the demands of their home governments for relief from the cost of feeding a defeated population. They chose the latter course and were eventually joined by the French. This enabled the USSR to claim that the Western powers had violated the Potsdam and wartime agreements and were therefore responsible for the division of Germany. The alternative hardly represented a viable option, however, in view of the financial consequences for the Western powers and the specter of renewed political radicalism among a German population condemned to protracted deprivation. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the German population in the Western zones soon rallied behind the decision to consolidate and revive at least part of Germany in order to ensure that it would not disappear behind the iron curtain, as had the other part.

Despite repeated consideration in Allied circles during the war of a division of Germany into several states, none of the

victors afterward consistently followed policies designed to produce that outcome. The only clear and incontestable responsibility for the country's division lay with the regime that had functioned in the name of the German people in Berlin from 1933 until 1945. By launching its war of calculated aggression against a large part of the world, the Third Reich called into being an unlikely coalition of powers which, as victors after its fall, proved unable to agree on the future of Germany and so ended by partitioning the country.

2 The Birth of Two New Governments

The Federal Republic

While the stirring events of the Berlin blockade and airlift held the attention of much of the world, the future political shape of Germany was being determined in less dramatic fashion. Beginning in the West, then in the East as well, adjustments to postwar circumstances produced two new German governments. At the time, both seemed mere improvisations, but they were to prove surprisingly durable.

The proposal by the six-nation London Conference of spring 1948 for creation of a government encompassing the Western occupation zones was relayed to the minister-presidents of the states in those zones at the beginning of July by the American, British, and French military commandants. The three Western governments called upon the West Germans to convene a constituent assembly that would draft a constitution for a new government and submit it to the population for ratification. This new government would operate, they specified, within the confines of an occupation statute that would closely circumscribe

its authority and reserve sovereign powers to the occupying countries.

This proposal initially encountered considerable hesitation in German political circles. Many political leaders in Western Germany viewed with dismay the drastic limitations which the draft occupation statute would impose on the authority of a new German government. It seemed to them that they were being asked to set up a mere regional administrative apparatus for the convenience of the occupiers. That apparatus would not, critics argued, give the West Germans significantly more independence than they already had, whereas acceptance of it could cast doubt on their commitment to the goal of a unified government for the entire country. There was widespread reluctance to write a new constitution for only part of the country, as the occupying powers proposed, lest that make eventual reunification more difficult and place the onus for Germany's division on the authors of such a constitution.

Misgivings about the possible consequences of forming a government in the West soon gave way, however, to fears of Soviet expansionism arising from the Berlin blockade and to hopes for better terms than those initially proposed by the occupying powers. In intense negotiations among political leaders in the Western zones during the summer of 1948 a consensus developed which favored acceptance of the proposal if some modifications could be achieved. Supporters of that view argued that formation of a West German government would amount to no more of a hindrance to restoration of national unity than the creation of Bizonia. The best hope for a united and free Germany lay, they insisted, in establishing a new government for at least part of the country so as to bring about political stability on a democratic foundation and ensure rapid economic recovery. Such a government would, they predicted, act as a magnet for the rest of Germany.

Swayed by these arguments and by fear of abandonment to Communist encroachment if the proposal of the Western powers was rejected, the minister-presidents of the states in the Ameri-

can, British, and French zones agreed to move toward formation of the sort of federal government specified by the occupation authorities. In delicate negotiations with those authorities they gained a number of concessions. To lessen the danger of obstructing reunification they successfully insisted that the new government be explicitly designated as a provisional arrangement that would cease to exist as soon as the country as a whole could freely determine its political institutions. In order to emphasize this, they gained the consent of the Western occupying powers for substitution of a Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) for the constitution originally foreseen by the London Conference. They also sought, and eventually obtained, elimination of the occupying powers' plan for ratification by plebiscite. Instead, they substituted ratification by at least two-thirds of the state parliaments, a less dramatic procedure which they hoped would underline the provisional nature of the Basic Law.

In line with the desire of the minister-presidents to play down the formation of the new government, the task of designing a Basic Law was assigned to a body called a Parliamentary Council rather than a constituent assembly. Its sixty-five members convened at the beginning of September 1948 after being chosen by the parliaments of the eleven states which then comprised the American, British, and French zones. Since the occupying powers ruled out participation of representatives from Berlin, lest that call into question its four-power status, five observers from the Western sectors of the old capital attended without votes.

In terms of party affiliation, twenty-seven members of the Parliamentary Council belonged to the SPD and twenty-seven to the CDU/CSU, five to the FDP, and the rest to splinter parties, including two Communists. Although many of the members of the council had participated in the strident politics of the Weimar Republic, they demonstrated that they had learned important lessons from the failure of their country's ill-fated first experiment with democracy. Whereas the parliaments of Weimar had often been characterized by unyielding doctrinaire stands and confrontations, the Parliamentary Council displayed

a far-reaching commitment to sober practicality and a general willingness to compromise. That willingness to settle for less than the optimal also enabled the members of the Parliamentary Council to find formulas that avoided opposition on the part of the Western powers, with whose spokesmen many points had to be negotiated.

The principal differences within the council arose over the degree of authority to be apportioned to the federal institutions on the one hand and to the states on the other. The SPD and the FDP generally favored stronger central powers than did the CDU or its Bavarian affiliate, the CSU, the latter of which took an extreme position in defense of states' rights. On most points, however, compromise solutions won broad support among the members of the council. On a few issues, such as the degree of fiscal centralization in the new polity, the Western powers' observers at the sessions of the council objected to positions taken by the majority of the delegates. But there, too, mutually acceptable compromises were worked out. By early May 1949 the council had completed its assignment and approved a Basic Law for a Federal Republic of Germany by a vote of 53 to 12, with both of the largest parties, the CDU and the SPD, solidly in favor. After assent by the Western occupying powers, the Basic Law was then ratified by all of the state parliaments except that of Bavaria, where states' rights advocates mustered a negative majority. The Bavarian parliament nevertheless voted to recognize the binding nature of the Basic Law and so entered willingly into the Federal Republic, which officially came into being on May 23, 1949.

Initially, the Federal Republic was far from a sovereign polity. Acceptance of the Basic Law implicitly carried with it acceptance as well of the Occupation Statute drawn up by the Americans, British, and French. That document circumscribed the authority of the new West German state less tightly than had the earlier draft. The occupying powers nevertheless retained ultimate control over foreign relations and foreign trade, over the level of industrial production and reparations as well as over all matters bearing on demilitarization, decartelization, and scien-

tific research of potential military significance. Only with the permission of the occupying powers could the Federal Republic legislate or otherwise take action in those areas. The occupying powers retained the right to veto within twenty-one days any piece of West German legislation which in their judgment was unconstitutional or in conflict with occupation policies. Alterations in the Basic Law required their unanimous consent. They reserved to themselves control over all military matters and the right to resume their full authority as occupying powers in the event of an emergency that endangered the new West German constitutional order. Otherwise, their remaining authority was to be transferred, upon ratification of the Basic Law, from their respective military commandants to three civilian high commissioners.

The new Federal Republic comprised the states of the American, British and French occupation zones. Only six of these had previously existed as political entities: Baden, Bavaria, Hesse, Schleswig-Holstein, and the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg. The remaining five, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Württemberg-Baden, and Württemberg-Hohenzollern, were creations of the occupying powers. Yet with the exception of the last two, which would, together with Baden, merge in 1951 into a single state of Baden-Württemberg, the new states rapidly established themselves as functioning polities and won widespread acceptance among their populations. When the Saarland joined the Federal Republic in 1957 as the result of a plebiscite, the number of states became ten. Although marked by discrepancies in territory and population, none so greatly exceeded the others in size as had Prussia during both the Empire and the Weimar Republic. A more balanced federal system thus came into being.

Although Berlin was included in the article of the Basic Law which enumerated the states where its validity would apply, that city's status proved complicated. The Western powers were intent upon preserving the four-power occupation of the former capital that provided the legal foundation for their presence in

its Western sectors. They therefore refused to allow full incorporation of West Berlin into the Federal Republic. For all practical purposes, however, the Western sectors of the former capital would function like a state of the Federal Republic, whose currency was used there. To preserve West Berlin's special status, important legislation enacted in the Federal Republic would routinely be adopted by its democratically elected government. Measures that raised sensitive issues with the Russians, such as the military draft and the Western powers' recognition of West German sovereignty, would not be applied to West Berlin. In both the Bundestag and Bundesrat the city would be represented by nonvoting delegates chosen by its government. West Berlin would also receive extensive financial aid from the Federal Republic by way of compensation for the economic handicaps resulting from its isolated location. In part to emphasize that removal of the government from Berlin should be viewed as only a temporary expedient, the Parliamentary Council chose as the provisional capital of the Federal Republic the small Rhenish university city of Bonn, where the council had held its sessions in a building formerly used as a teachers' college.

Although the new republic was to exercise authority over only part of Germany, the Basic Law claimed for it the right to represent all Germans until such time as those denied freedom of choice should regain their political rights. When that day came, the Basic Law would give way to "a constitution adopted by a free decision of the German people." To express its claim to the democratic tradition of Germany, the new Republic adopted for its flag the black, red, and gold horizontal stripes that had served as the banner of the unsuccessful revolutionaries of 1848 and as the official colors of the Weimar Republic.

The first section of the Basic Law consists of an enumeration of the civil and political rights of all citizens. As a result of the loss of virtually all individual rights under Nazi rule, a long and detailed list was included. The freedoms enumerated were, however, in some instances not unconditional. Because of the experiences of the Weimar Republic, when extremist move-

ments of left and right exploited the broad liberties granted by Germany's first democratic constitution to work for its overthrow, the Basic Law provides for withdrawal of political rights from those who seek to use them to undermine the democratic foundations of the Federal Republic. Political movements that seek the destruction of democracy can be banned. The provision for freedom of speech is, moreover, so phrased as to exclude its misuse against individuals or groups of people, as in advocacy of anti-Semitism. Because of deadlocks among the parties in the Parliamentary Council, the Basic Law does not contain the sort of provisions which in the Weimar constitution had prescribed relationships between workers and employers. With regard to the economic order, the Basic Law thus remained an "open" document, leaving determination of those matters to democratically enacted legislation. In contrast to the Weimar constitution, however, women gained a guarantee of rights equal to those of men.

In a revival of the states' rights tradition that had prevailed prior to the highly centralized Third Reich, the new West German state was cast as a federal polity. The Basic Law explicitly reserves some areas of legislative competence for the federal government. The most important of these are foreign and military affairs, citizenship and immigration, monetary policy, and the copyright, patent, postal, rail, air traffic, telegraph, and telephone systems. Another broad range of responsibilities may be assumed by the federal government if it deems uniformity necessary, but if it does not lay claim to those matters, they fall to the states. These include civil, criminal, and labor law, public health and welfare, prevention of the abuse of economic power, as well as highway construction and maintenance.

All other public affairs are reserved to the states, except insofar as they have effects that extend beyond a single state. For example, education, including the university level, falls to the states, but if laws affecting education have ramifications for the country as a whole, federal authority may be invoked. Where conflicts develop, the Basic Law specifies that as a general rule

federal law takes precedent. As in the Empire and Weimar Republic, the federal government enjoys extensive legislative authority as compared to that of the United States, but execution of most federal laws rests with the states, so that the federal bureaucracy is of limited size. An intricate and carefully designed taxation system divides revenues between the federal government and the states. The states must be democratic republics and uphold the principles set forth in the Basic Law, which also obligates them to provide representative bodies for their citizens at the local level.

The key democratic institution established by the Basic Law is the federal parliament or Bundestag. It enjoys the greatest measure of political power within the governmental system. Approval by a majority of its deputies is required for passage of legislation. Amendments to the Basic Law can be carried only if a two-thirds margin can be attained. The deputies are chosen in elections open to all citizens eighteen years of age and older (until 1971 the minimum age was twenty-one). Bundestag elections must be held at least every four years and may occur after less time has elapsed if sufficient backing cannot be found for a cabinet.

The method of electing parliamentary deputies is governed not by the Basic Law but by a special electoral statute, certain details of which have been revised from time to time. That statute, whose basic outlines have remained the same, was designed to avoid the misfortunes of the Weimar Republic, whose elections had been conducted under a purely proportional system of representation that allocated parliamentary seats on the basis of the share of the votes cast, in large regional electoral districts, for parties rather than individual candidates. In the judgment of West German leaders, that system had contributed to the downfall of the first republic by depersonalizing parliamentary representation and by encouraging the proliferation of splinter parties, thereby weakening the moderate parties on which governmental stability depended. By a compromise arrangement, the electoral law of the Federal Republic combines a

basically proportional system of representation with elements of a constituency system similar to those of Great Britain and the United States, in which voters choose among individual candidates in relatively small electoral districts.

This system has come to be known as "personalized proportionality." In an election each voter has two ballots, one for a candidate in the local constituency and one for a list of candidates presented by the party of the voter's choice within the state of the voter's residence. This permits voters to split their ballots, casting one for the constituency candidate of one party, the second for the state list of another. Every local constituency is represented in the Bundestag by the candidate who tallies the most first ballots. The deputies elected in this fashion are then supplemented by an equal number of candidates drawn from the party lists in the states in such fashion as to have the overall political composition of the Bundestag reflect the preferences registered by voters with their second ballots. To discourage a proliferation of splinter parties, the voting law denies representation to any party that fails either to win at least three constituency seats or obtain a minimum of 5 percent of the total second ballots cast throughout the Federal Republic. Similar voting laws govern balloting and the distribution of seats for the state parliaments.

At the head of the state in the Federal Republic stands the president. In the Weimar Republic a crucial part in the destruction of democracy was played by the presidency, a popularly elected office with a seven-year term which commanded extensive authority. Accordingly, the founders of the Federal Republic strove to remove the presidency as much as possible from partisan politics and strictly limit the powers of the office. Rather than being elected by popular vote, the federal president is chosen indirectly, by a Federal Assembly which comes into being only when the need to select a new president arises. Half of this assembly consists of the members of the Bundestag, the other half of delegates chosen by the parliaments of the states. On the first two ballots an absolute majority is required to elect a

president, but if that cannot be achieved, a plurality suffices thereafter.

The president performs a variety of functions but has little power. He promulgates all treaties and federal laws but lacks a veto. All his decrees and orders must be countersigned by the head of government, the chancellor. He does, however, exercise the authority to pardon those convicted under the laws of the Federal Republic. For the most part, the president serves, in much the same fashion as do the crowned heads of the democratic, constitutional monarchies of Europe, to relieve the head of government of such time-consuming formal responsibilities as greeting foreign guests and representing the Federal Republic abroad or at commemorations and other ceremonial occasions at home. The president also serves as a symbolic figure of political unity above partisan strife. All the incumbents in the office have, regardless of their own political backgrounds, striven to remain aloof from party politics, just as the framers of the Basic Law intended. Some have used the office effectively as a rostrum from which to educate citizens about the institutions of their democracy and to remind them of the moral values that undergird it.

One of the most important functions of the president is nomination of the chancellor. To succeed, that nomination must be in line with the distribution of political strength among the parties in the Bundestag, which exercises final authority over selection of a chancellor and can override the president's nomination, to the initial rounds of parliamentary balloting an absolute majority is required, but if that proves impossible, the Basic Law permits a chancellor to be elected by a plurality of the deputies. If all attempts to find majority parliamentary support for a candidate fail, the president may, with the concurrence of the incumbent chancellor, dissolve the chamber and schedule new elections. But only under those circumstances does the president command that important power to influence the political process. Once elected, the chancellor nominates a cabinet made up of the heads of the federal ministries; they are then installed by

the federal president, who removes them from office, if the need arises, at the request of the chancellor. As leader of the government, the chancellor "determines, and assumes responsibility for, general policy."

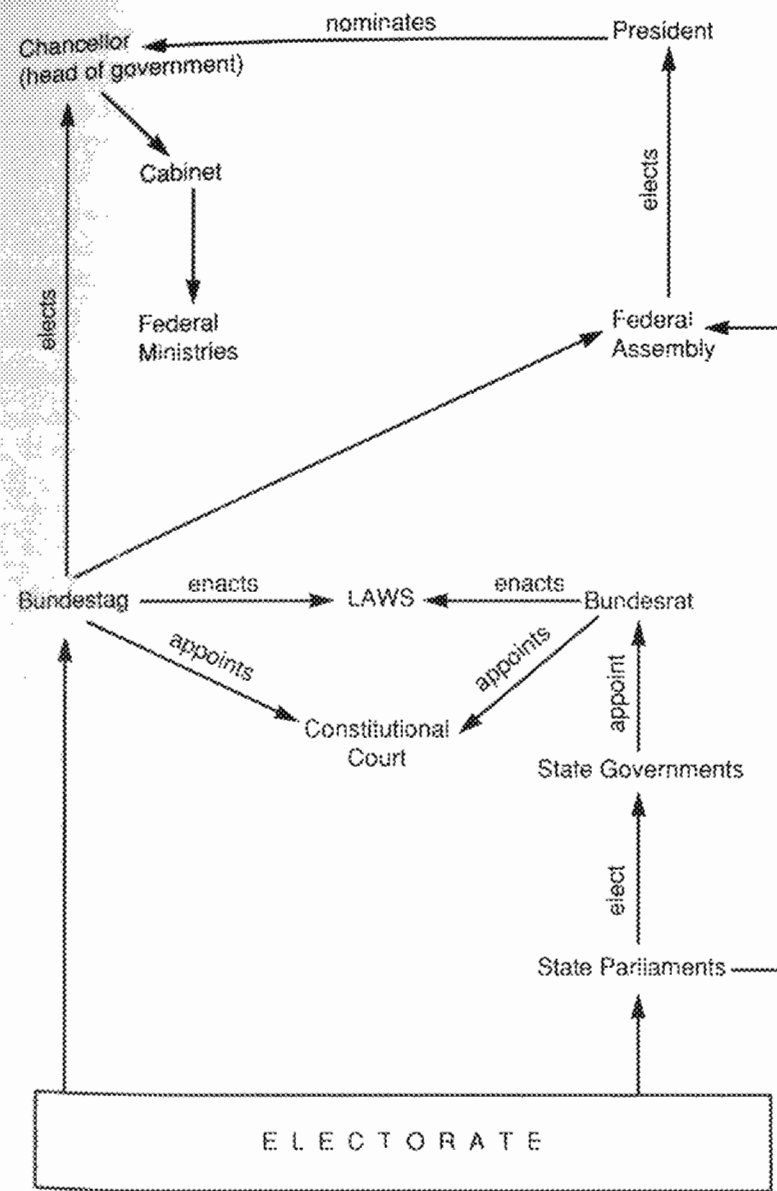
Since shifting parliamentary alignments had weakened the chancellorship during the Weimar Republic and reduced the average term of office to less than a year, the authors of the Basic Law included a provision designed to strengthen the chancellor against the Bundestag. It rules out felling a chancellor, as in the Weimar Republic and most other parliamentary democracies, through a vote of no-confidence in which a majority of the deputies express their opposition. In the Federal Republic, such a vote of no-confidence can bring down a chancellor only if it is coupled with a majority vote of Bundestag deputies in favor of a substitute candidate for the chancellorship. This provision for a "constructive vote of no-confidence" resulted in no chancellor's being turned out of office by parliamentary opposition until the Federal Republic was in its thirty-third year, whereas that was a common occurrence in the Weimar Republic. As a consequence, the chancellorship has become, just as the architects of the Basic Law hoped, a powerful office and a stabilizing factor.

The Basic Law accords representation to the states through a federal council or Bundesrat. It functions in many respects as an upper legislative chamber somewhat similar to the British House of Lords or the American Senate. But it is more properly the voice of the state governments. The Basic Law entitles each state to three seats, while those with more than two million inhabitants receive four and those with more than six million five. This arrangement gives the smaller states a greater voice than they would be entitled to simply on the basis of population. The delegates are members of the state governments, appointed by them. The minister-president of one of the states presides. Unlike Bundestag deputies, Bundesrat delegates may not determine their votes independently but must cast them as blocs, upon instruction from their state governments.

The Basic Law gives the Bundesrat more power than the

corresponding body had in the Weimar Republic. On federal legislation affecting the rights of the states the Bundesrat commands an absolute veto. In all other legislative spheres a majority of the Bundesrat can block enactment of bills approved by the Bundestag with what is known as a "suspensive veto." A majority in the Bundestag can, however, override that veto. If the veto is carried by two-thirds of the Bundesrat, only a similar margin in the Bundestag can overturn it. The Basic Law's provision for resolution of legislative differences between the Bundesrat and Bundestag by means of a joint committee has minimized resort to the veto, however. Two-thirds approval by the Bundesrat, as by the Bundestag, is required for constitutional amendments. In times of closely balanced political situations, the Bundesrat serves to make shifts in public opinion quickly felt. When parties in opposition in the Bundestag achieve successes in state elections sufficient to give them control of governments at that level, their influence at the federal level increases through their selection of new Bundesrat delegations bound to vote as their governments instruct. If a majority of the votes in the Bundesrat comes under the control of the opposition, it can obstruct the government's fiscal and legislative program by use of the suspensive veto. If the opposition commands two-thirds of the Bundesrat, it can, through a veto of that margin, force a cabinet unable to muster a similar margin in the Bundestag to modify its program to secure passage. As its designers intended, the Bundesrat has proved a key institution in West German federalism.

The final major institution in the structure of the Federal Republic is its Constitutional Court. The Basic Law made provision for such a judiciary body but left its design to subsequent legislation, which was not completed until 1951. Like the American Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court enjoys far-reaching independence from both the executive and legislative branches of government, a point emphasized by placing the court in the city of Karlsruhe, geographically removed from Bonn. Half of its sixteen justices are chosen by the Bundestag.



Principal Political Institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany

half by the Bundesrat. They serve for terms of twelve years and may not be reelected. Prior to the point of mandatory retirement, the justices can be removed only by the federal president after a specific request from the court itself. They sit as two separate chambers, each with specific spheres of responsibility, to review appeals from lower courts. Their jurisdiction encompasses such matters as disagreements among the states or between states and the federal government, the compatibility of state with federal laws, infringements of the basic rights of citizens, violations of electoral laws, and misuse of political rights.

The Constitutional Court has introduced into German law the Anglo-American principle of judicial review. The constitutionality of federal laws and measures taken by the government is subject to challenge before the court, and its findings are binding on the authorities. Although the justices have limited opportunities to shape the law under the German system of codified law, as opposed to the heavy Anglo-American reliance on precedent and case law, the Constitutional Court has played an important role in shaping the Federal Republic. Its justices, unlike those of the high courts of the Empire and the Weimar Republic, have been drawn heavily from the ranks of lawyers previously active in political life rather than from those of legal technicians. They have showed themselves both sensitive to public opinion and vigilant in their protection of the republic's democratic institutions, making the court a respected arbiter of disputes and guardian of the Basic Law.

For a document regarded by its framers as a mere provisional expedient, the Basic Law has proven a remarkable success. By strengthening the executive, it has provided for stable political leadership. Through a variety of safeguards it has protected the democratic institutions it established. By a combination of clear delimitation and flexibility it has enabled the complex federal system to function with a minimum of friction. More than any other German constitutional document of modern times, it quickly won the respect and allegiance of the population.

The German Democratic Republic

While the Parliamentary Council was designing the Basic Law in Bonn, very different developments in the Soviet zone shaped the birth of a second new German state. Of crucial significance for those developments was the increasing demand by the USSR for conformity on the part of the regimes within its power sphere, which in part resulted from the bitter dispute between Soviet dictator Stalin and the renegade Yugoslav leader Josip Tito during 1947 and 1948.

During the period of the Stalin-Tito clash, the SED underwent transformation into an authoritarian party dominated by functionaries subservient to Moscow. This meant an end to the last vestiges of pluralism within its ranks. Instead, a Soviet-style "democratic centralism" prevailed, in which all authority flowed downward from the top leadership. Within that leadership the principle of equal representation for Social Democrats and Communists in all party organs was abandoned. Many former SPD members and even some from the KPD were deemed insufficiently reliable and purged from the SED; others were arrested and accused of being foreign agents. By early 1949 Communists predominated in the key organs of the party, which was now capped by a Soviet-style Politburo. Nominally elected by the Central Committee, a body of several hundred which bore responsibility for carrying out decisions of the infrequent party congresses, the Politburo was actually a small, self-selecting inner circle. It quickly became the locus of power, and all important decisions flowed downward from it rather than, as in theory, upward from the party's membership.

Along with these organizational changes came an important ideological shift on the part of the SED. Its founders' pledges to seek a distinctively German path to socialism were soon forgotten. Instead, the goal became emulation of the USSR and construction of a "people's democracy" similar to those of the re-

gimes set up with Soviet backing in Eastern Europe. In schools and universities throughout the Russian zone, indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism became a compulsory part of the curriculum. So stifling did this ideological pressure become that many faculty members fled to the West. In 1948 a large part of the student body and faculty of the University of Berlin, once the flagship of German higher education but now located in the Soviet sector of the old capital, seceded because of ideological repression and founded the Free University of Berlin in the Western part of the city.

Repressive methods of rule were soon applied throughout the Russian zone by the SED-dominated civil administration. Those holding or aspiring to positions in the bureaucracy, the judiciary, or the school system had to pass ideological scrutiny. An elaborate political police apparatus kept the population under close surveillance. Dissent or even disagreement with policies of the occupation regime was discouraged by denying offenders advancement in their careers, dismissing them from their jobs, or imprisoning them. A tight system of censorship restricted access to print or the airwaves.

These police-state measures further diminished the SED's standing with the population in the Soviet zone. With all signs suggesting the likelihood of a severe setback in the event of new, competitive elections, the SED contrived a substitute for a representative parliament. At the end of 1947 it convened in the Soviet sector of Berlin a so-called People's Congress for Unity and a Just Peace. Most of the more than two thousand delegates were from the Soviet zone, but a few did attend from the Western zones, even though the democratic parties there refused to participate. Rather than being elected by the populace, delegates were chosen by a variety of organizations, most of which were under the control of the SED or, in the West, sympathetic to the KPD. Claiming to represent all of Germany, the People's Congress called for speedy reunification of the country. In October 1948 a committee of the Congress set forth the draft of a constitution for a German Democratic Republic. Originally this draft



The Two Germanies

was proposed for an all-German government, but it eventually served as the basis for an East German constitution.

Once the impending formation of a West German government became clear in the spring of 1949, selection of delegates for a new People's Congress was scheduled in the East. In line with the SED's insistence that it sought reunification, some delegates from the Western zones were again to be chosen by various organizations other than the democratic parties. In departure from previous practice, those from the Soviet zone were to be elected by the populace as a whole. But to ensure an outcome favorable to the SED, those elections would not be free and competitive. Instead of choosing among parties and candidates, voters were permitted only a Soviet-style election, modified slightly to accommodate the German multi-party political pattern. On election day in May 1949 voters in each electoral district therefore faced only the choice of endorsing or rejecting so-called unity lists of candidates.

In these unity lists, SED candidates occupied only a minority position, but that was deceptive. By the spring of 1949 the Christian Democratic and Liberal Democratic parties had been thoroughly intimidated by the Soviet authorities and the SED-dominated civil administration. Some of their leaders had been imprisoned and others had fled to the Western zones. Those who remained at the head of these nominally independent parties managed to do so only by avoiding the displeasure of the SED, since their parties had become little more than its satellites. In order to mobilize voters unattracted by the CDU or LDP, the unity lists also included two new parties cultivated by the SED. These were the Democratic Farmers' Party (Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands or DBD) and the National Democratic Party (National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands or NDPD). The DBD appealed to a rural population traditionally hostile to Communism, while the NDPD directed its attention to former Nazis, army officers, and others tainted by involvement with the Third Reich. The addition of these two new parties ensured, among other things, further fragmentation of the non-Communist

portion of the political spectrum. Since all the satellite parties received substantial subsidies from the SED, they quickly became financially dependent upon it.

In addition to these parties, the unity lists soon came to include candidates named by a variety of organizations such as a league of trade unions, a league of women, a youth league, and a cultural league. All these "mass organizations" were, in reality, also satellites of the SED. Despite that party's apparent minority position on the unity lists, it was thus assured firm control over the new People's Congress chosen in May 1949. Nevertheless, although the ballots were designed to discourage opposition, the SED-dominated Soviet zone civil administration which tabulated the results claimed only that 61.6 percent of the voters had endorsed the unity lists. Opposition sentiment was apparently still too widespread and evident to make plausible the Soviet-style victory margins of more than 99 percent for unity lists that would later become routine.

The new People's Congress "elected" in this manner and augmented with carefully chosen delegates from the Western zones protested vigorously against the preparations for formation of a West German government. It assigned full responsibility for the impending division of the country to the politicians in the West and the Western powers. At the same time, the People's Congress took measures of its own for formation of a separate East German government. In May 1949, a week after proclamation of the Basic Law in Bonn, a People's Council appointed by the People's Congress and consisting of 330 of its delegates from the Soviet zone approved the draft constitution which had been under preparation for some time. Then, on October 7, 1949, following installation of the first cabinet of the Federal Republic, the People's Congress unanimously approved the formation of a German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik or DDR; in English GDR).

Initially, the intent behind the formation of the new GDR was shrouded in ambiguity. On the one hand, its founders soon proclaimed it, in keeping with Communist doctrine, as "the first

worker's and peasants' state on German soil" and depicted it as the product of irresistible historical forces. Their pledges to defend it against all threats suggested a permanent commitment. On the other hand, they described the new state on some occasions as a merely provisional arrangement that could provide the basis for a government encompassing all of Germany if the West German state were abandoned. Adopting, as had the new government in Bonn, the black-red-gold flag that had symbolized national unity at the time of the ill-fated revolution of 1848, the founders of the GDR portrayed themselves as steadfast champions of German reunification and denounced the leaders of the Federal Republic as separatists. There were grounds for skepticism about their commitment to reunification, however. For, barring a nation-wide Communist takeover, the SED would from all indications shrink to the status of a minor party in a free and reunited Germany.

In practice, the GDR quickly became the government of the Soviet occupation zone. Following adoption of the constitution and conversion of the People's Council into a provisional People's Chamber, or parliament, the Soviet military commandant announced that the USSR was transferring the civil affairs of its zone and, nominally at least, foreign affairs as well, to the new government. On October 11, the provisional People's Chamber met jointly with a Chamber of the States made up of representatives of the state governments of the Soviet zone to elect long-time Communist functionary Wilhelm Pieck the first president of the GDR. The next day the provisional People's Chamber chose former Social Democrat Otto Grotewohl of the SED as the first minister-president at the head of a cabinet including ministers from the non-Marxist parties. Some five months after the formation of the Federal Republic, a second German government had established itself in the Russian sector of the four-power city of Berlin.

In line with the Communist pledges to pursue a separate German path to socialism rather than imposing the Soviet sys-

tem, the constitution of the GDR guaranteed citizens a wide range of fundamental rights. These included freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech, as well as religious freedom, confidentiality of postal communications, and the right to strike. The right to emigrate was expressly and unconditionally confirmed. The constitution even included guarantees of private property and inheritance rights. Only natural resources were to be socialized immediately. Compensation for dispossessed owners was assured in the event of any subsequent socialization measures.

In formal respects, the governmental institutions provided for by the constitution of the GDR generally paralleled those of the Federal Republic. The chief focus of authority was to be the parliament, the People's Chamber, elected for a term of four years under a system of proportional representation by means of a secret ballot. All citizens over eighteen years of age were entitled to vote. As in the Federal Republic, participation in the political system was restricted to parties that endorsed democracy. The People's Chamber received far more extensive powers than those assigned to the Bundestag in the West, since it could by itself adopt legislation on a broad range of matters. A degree of federalism characterized the constitution of the GDR, too, but it was much weaker than in the West. Its organ was to be a Chamber of States similar in composition to the Bundesrat but with fewer powers. Its consent was not required for legislation, but it was empowered to veto laws enacted by the People's Chamber, with the latter enjoying, like the Bundestag in the West, authority to override such vetoes.

The government of the German Democratic Republic, headed by a minister-president, was to be elected by the deputies of the People's Chamber and had to command a parliamentary majority to remain in office. As did the Basic Law, the constitution of the GDR required a constructive vote of no-confidence for removal of a government by the People's Chamber. As in the Federal Republic, the president of the GDR was accorded a

largely ceremonial role following election for a term of four years by a joint session of the People's Chamber and the Chamber of States.

The constitution adopted for the German Democratic Republic in October 1949 would have made possible a democratic, parliamentary government quite compatible with that of the Federal Republic. But as events were soon to demonstrate, the decisive political force in the new GDR—the SED—had very different intentions as well as the means to put them into effect.

3

The Ulbricht Era in East Germany

The Communist Regime and Its Leader

Throughout the first twenty-two years of the German Democratic Republic, its policies were dominated by veteran Communist functionary Walter Ulbricht. Never an absolute dictator, he skillfully maintained his primacy within the leadership of the East German state during its formative period and left an indelible imprint upon it.

Born in 1893, the son of an impecunious tailor in Saxon central Germany, Ulbricht grew up in a socialist environment, completed an apprenticeship as a cabinetmaker, and joined the SPD at the age of nineteen. Following service in the army in the First World War, he joined the Communist Party shortly after its formation at the end of 1918. Unswerving in his belief in a simplistic Marxist view of the world and unfailingly subservient to the Soviet Union, Ulbricht rose in the KPD's ranks as a full-time functionary and sat as one of the party's deputies in the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic from 1926 until 1933. After exile in the Soviet Union during the Third Reich, he returned to

Berlin under Russian auspices in the spring of 1945 to oversee reestablishment of the party in Germany.

Ulbricht's success did not result from popularity. Never a colorful or personable figure, he was an inept orator who wrote and spoke in stilted party jargon. He excelled, however, at what many perceived as the dull work involved in overseeing personnel matters and bureaucratic procedures within the party. Following Stalin's example, he exploited that role to build a network of loyal followers by manipulating party patronage so as to reward those who backed him with desirable posts. His management of the central party bureaucracy enabled him to exercise influence over policy decisions by determining which matters were brought to the leadership's attention. His close ties to the Russian occupation authorities placed him in a position to impose his will at crucial junctures by calling upon them for backing. A secretive, mistrustful person, Ulbricht imbued the Socialist Unity Party and the regime it established in East Germany with a conspiratorial elitism similar to that of the Communist Party of the USSR.

When the SED was formed, Ulbricht quickly became the decisive figure in the new party, so that his reign over East Germany began well before the formation of the GDR. Upon establishment of the governmental apparatus in 1949 he assumed only an obscure post as one of several deputies to the minister-president. The modesty of that official post was, however, deceptive. As in the USSR, the government of the GDR was thoroughly subordinated to the ruling party, and Ulbricht's position atop the SED as its general secretary made him the key figure in the new regime. During the GDR's first decade Ulbricht's leadership position remained precarious. In order to retain the support of a majority in the party's decisive body, the Politburo, he repeatedly had to deal with rivals and sometimes had to moderate his course during those years. Only later did he come to wield virtually unchallenged authority.

From the outset, the new East German regime paid little heed to the constitution adopted in 1949. That document specified

election of the parliament, the People's Chamber, by proportional representation, a system which distributes seats among parties according to the percentage of the vote they tally. That provision was, however, systematically violated as a consequence of the compulsory coalition which the Soviets had imposed on all political parties in their zone after the war. When the GDR was formed, that coalition became known as the National Front. It encompassed not only the four political parties permitted to operate in the Soviet zone but also the so-called mass organizations subservient to the SED. Through control over composition of the unity lists of candidates on the ballots laid before the voters, this SED-dominated National Front in effect determined the outcome of elections in advance. Voters could choose only between approving the lists in entirety or rejecting them.

Under this system, the word *election* lost all meaning in the sense of voters' exercising a choice. Instead, elections in the GDR became, as in the Soviet Union, occasions when the regime elicited a ritualistic show of affirmation on the part of the population, with great stress placed upon achieving a maximum turnout at the polls. Participation was often less than voluntary, as many voters were marched in groups from their place of work to the polling places. There, public marking of ballots was encouraged and resort to the constitutionally guaranteed right to a secret ballot discouraged. Use of the secrecy of a voting booth soon became a rare exception that branded the individual as a deviant, a status that entailed heavy disadvantages in a society where all-powerful officials determined many aspects of the citizenry's life, such as who would get which jobs and who would be allotted an apartment or quarters at a vacation resort.

Beginning with the first balloting in 1950, parliamentary elections in the GDR invariably produced predictable outcomes. With monotonous regularity the regime proclaimed that turnouts of more than 98 percent of the eligible voters had by margins in excess of 99 percent endorsed the unity lists prepared by

the National Front. The distribution of seats in the People's Chamber remained essentially unaffected by the elections. The SED received only a modest minority of the seats. But when combined with those assigned to the mass organizations it dominated, the SED's seats ensured it a firm majority. After 1963 the composition of the People's Chamber froze according to a set formula. The SED occupied 127 seats, the four other parties, the CDU, the LDP, the NDPD, and the DBD, 52 each. The remaining 165 were assigned to the mass organizations. The same techniques produced similar results in local and regional elections.

Aside from this novel electoral system, the formalities of constitutional, parliamentary government were initially observed in the GDR. All legislation was duly enacted by votes in the People's Chamber, which after each election regularly went through the motions of reinstalling Otto Grotewohl as minister-president at the head of nominal coalition cabinets that included ministers from the non-Communist parties. From the outset, however, the Soviet system of "democratic centralism" prevailed behind the scenes. All important policy decisions were made by the SED's Politburo and then effected by the parliament and government. No dissent was tolerated. The parliament met for only a few days each year, not to debate and test the strength of varying viewpoints but rather to transform Politburo policies into law by unanimous vote.

By 1954 the formalities of parliamentary rule were relaxed so as to allow the cabinet, now called the Council of Ministers, to enact laws by decree without approval by the People's Chamber when it was not in session. In the same year the authority of the Council of Ministers was, between its increasingly infrequent full meetings, assigned to an inner circle of ministers, designated as the Presidium and not provided for by the constitution. Two years earlier, in 1952, the federal component was eliminated when the People's Chamber enacted a law replacing the five states of the GDR with fourteen district administrative units thoroughly subordinated to the central government. It was a measure of the regime's indifference to constitutionality that the

Chamber of States remained nominally in existence until 1958, although the states themselves had disappeared six years earlier.

The regime showed scant respect for the rights guaranteed to citizens of the GDR by its constitution of 1949. Although the constitution assured freedom of expression and ruled out censorship, dissenting opinion was suppressed by a variety of methods. The government-controlled radio stations served as propaganda organs of the regime. Theaters and movie houses, all of which depended upon the regime for financial support, were brought into conformity as well. The regime's control over all publishing houses enabled it to determine which books would be printed and which would not be. Newspapers and magazines posed more complicated problems, but they, too, were brought into line. Those which failed to comply found it impossible to obtain adequate allotments of paper from the state monopoly that controlled its distribution. Organizations critical of the regime or out of step with its policies were denied the use of halls for meetings. Whereas the constitution contained extensive guarantees of religious freedom, in practice the regime harassed the churches in countless ways, banning the customary religious instruction from primary schools and imprisoning clergymen who criticized official policies. At the same time, the regime provoked such criticism by seeking to indoctrinate children with atheism at school and through the sole officially approved youth organization, the SED-controlled Free German Youth.

Although the constitution assured citizens equal rights, practice departed sharply from that principle. Children whose parents were classified by the regime as other than workers and farmers were discriminated against by the admissions policies of the state-run universities and other institutions of higher education. In other respects, too, citizens of "bourgeois" background encountered difficulties. Those who sought to flee to the West made themselves vulnerable to prosecution in the GDR, despite the constitutionally guaranteed right of emigration. The

regime charged them with "flight from the Republic," a crime for which lengthy imprisonment could be imposed.

The increasingly repressive methods of the SED regime had a stifling effect on cultural life and artistic creativity. At the end of the war many talented intellectuals, writers, and artists had settled in Berlin, the former cultural capital of the country, and applied their energies there and in the surrounding Russian zone. With great idealism they hoped to help create a new and more humane Germany, freed from the reactionary influences that had played such a baneful role in their country's past. Initially the Soviet occupation authorities displayed liberality in cultural matters, tolerating a wide variety of plays, books, and other forms of expression. But with the onset of the Cold War at the time of the Berlin blockade, the Soviets and the SED imposed tight controls on cultural life in the East. Books and plays by Western authors ceased to be sold or staged there; translations of Russian literature flooded the bookstores while Soviet plays received lavish and protracted productions. Organizations of writers, artists, and musicians established after the war, ostensibly to foster their creative efforts, became repressive organs of thought control under a regime-directed League of Culture. Censure—or worse, expulsion—from those organizations curtailed or eliminated the access of offending individuals to galleries, concert halls, or publishing houses, thus making it difficult or impossible for them to find audiences for their work or to make a living through it.

The SED regime did not content itself with punishing deviants in the cultural sphere. Increasingly it emulated the Soviet practice of telling creative people not only what they must not do but also what they must do with regard to both the content and the form of their work. In architecture the heavy, ornate "wedding-cake" style developed in Stalin's USSR became obligatory, and the regime launched construction of a showpiece in East Berlin in the form of a huge housing and shopping project on a major boulevard renamed Stalinallee. Artists and writers were instructed to produce works of "socialist realism." This

entailed abandonment of timeless human themes, introspection, and experimental forms in favor of depicting contemporary experiences of the working class in an idealized, optimistic light and in uncomplicated language and simple literary forms. Such works were intended to hold up to millions of readers positive socialist heroes, each totally loyal to the leadership of the SED and the Soviet Union, who would serve as models for emulation. Only through such works, the regime proclaimed, could artists and writers become productive members of a progressive society bent on creating "a new human being."

These strictures, which in practice entailed conformity to shifts in the current party line, made it increasingly difficult for creative persons to continue their work with intellectual honesty. Some gave up and fled to the West. Others conformed readily and were handsomely rewarded by the regime. Still others paid lip service to the regime's demands, producing some works that appeased its ideological watchmen but continuing to pursue in private genuinely creative endeavors in hopes of finding audiences for them in better times. Many incurred the disfavor of the regime for works that failed to measure up to its expectations. Among those who ran into difficulties was the foremost literary figure of the GDR, the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, who had with great fanfare chosen to settle in East Berlin (equipped with an Austrian passport and a West German publisher) after his wartime exile in the United States.

Little danger of any organized political opposition existed. Two of the non-Communist parties, the NDPD and the DBD, were from the outset creations and tools of the SED. Although initially independent, the remaining two, the CDU and LDP, quickly fell into the hands of compliant spokesmen. Well before formal creation of the GDR, those of their leaders who displayed independent-mindedness in the Soviet zone found that they risked imprisonment, so that many chose to flee to the West. The formation of the East German state was followed by the arrest or flight of additional leaders of those parties, including some who held ministerial posts in state governments as a result of Soviet-

imposed compulsory coalitions. Talk of free elections or criticism of authoritarian methods of rule called forth accusations of conspiracy with an unspecified "enemy" which for some resulted in long prison terms. Those persons who subsequently took over leading positions in the CDU and LDP had to be willing to accept an acquiescent role and to ingratiate themselves with the SED and the regime it dominated. In return, they were well paid for undemanding, secure party jobs.

Increasingly, individual resistance to official policies became criminalized. Those who dissented found themselves accused of participation in counter-revolutionary, imperialistic plots on the part of an allegedly aggressive Federal Republic bent on revenge and renewed war. Since the GDR claimed to be "the first workers' and farmers' state on German soil," any criticism of its policies or methods became subject to denunciation as an attack on those social groups, which comprised a majority of the population. While well-known persons so accused sometimes received show trials staged for propaganda effect, most victims of political repression in the GDR were tried in secret and quietly spirited away to serve lengthy prison sentences without the publication of any specific grounds for their conviction. The arbitrary and coercive system of Stalinist terror that had so long ravaged Soviet society had been transplanted to East Germany in the name of democracy.

The SED, like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, became itself a prime target of these Stalinist methods. At the time of the new party's formation, Social Democrats had comprised the larger part of its rank-and-file membership, but they soon made themselves suspect in the eyes of the SED's dominant Communist leadership. Their scruples were offended by breaches of constitutionality and police-state methods, and they saw no reason why they should not maintain contact with Social Democrats in West Germany. The latter were, however, anathema in the eyes of the SED leadership, which made *Sozialdemokratismus*, or democratic socialist attitudes, a deviation meriting expulsion. An estimated 200,000 former SPD members

were purged from the SED in the years 1948-50 on such grounds. More than 5,000 landed in GDR prisons or Soviet labor camps, and at least 400 died while incarcerated. During 1951 membership in the SED, by both former Communists and former Social Democrats, underwent further reduction when members had to turn in their old party documents and apply for new ones, which were issued only to those who passed close scrutiny for loyalty. Whereas overall membership in the SED had stood at about 2 million in 1948, it had dropped to around 1.2 million by 1952 as a result of these measures.

Through such purges and through restrictive admission policies, the SED ceased to bear the characteristics of a mass party, open to anyone who wished to join, which it had initially inherited from the SPD. Under the direction of Ulbricht and his adherents it became, like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, an organization reserved for those judged suitable for admission to its ranks after having petitioned for membership and successfully completed a probationary period. After admission, for which membership in the party youth organization would become a prerequisite for younger generations, members would henceforth enjoy good standing only by maintaining a prescribed level of party activity. Those admitted to full membership, about 12 percent of the adult population, could no longer withdraw voluntarily without special reasons. An inner circle of members, the so-called cadre, held the key jobs in the party and the upper levels of the government. A broader circle comprising those known as "activists" assumed more exacting obligations than did ordinary members. The distribution of rewards conformed to this hierarchical pattern.

Only a few years after formation of the SED, little remained of the open, democratic, united working-class party for which so many Social Democrats in East Germany had hoped at the time of the merger with the Communists in 1946. Those who survived the purges found themselves subjugated to an authoritarian Stalinist Apparatus, a party machine designed to convey orders from top to bottom, ensure conformity, and impose

punishment when compliance did not follow. For their part, the members of the SED cadre had become a privileged elite whose dominant status and material rewards depended upon preservation of the regime.

A younger generation of Communists accustomed only to the authoritarianism of the Third Reich and the GDR soon augmented the ranks of those who had experienced democracy during the Weimar Republic. Drawn from underprivileged backgrounds, exposed to higher education in many cases by doctrinaire workers' and peasants' faculties set up by the regime at universities, and shielded from exposure to outside influences by rigid censorship, this second generation of GDR officials was very much the creation of the SED. Its members received advancement as much according to obedience as to ability. With rare exceptions, they unquestioningly accepted policies dictated by the top leadership. As a result, the GDR became a society administered by a small army of subservient functionaries executing decisions reached by remote, self-appointed power-holders.

The SED leadership displayed little commitment to the pledge, set forth in the constitution of the GDR, to move toward the reunification of Germany. To be sure, the regime repeatedly proposed steps it characterized as prerequisites for reunification in extensively publicized open communications directed at Bonn. Its proposals always contained provisos, however, which ensured that they would go unaccepted by the West Germans. The most fundamental of these provisos, repeated over and over again, called for an all-German conference that would draw up plans for reuniting the two parts of the country. While that made good propaganda, these proposals specified that at such a conference the two German governments must have equal voices in determining the country's future, an arrangement that would, in effect, grant the GDR veto power. The same proviso lay at the core of East Berlin's proposals for formation of a confederation of East and West Germany. Granting that sort of parity to the SED regime was wholly unacceptable to Bonn, since the regime in

the GDR enjoyed no democratic legitimacy and could in any case speak, even if it somehow became legitimized, for far fewer Germans than could the Federal Republic. Bonn countered by insisting upon free elections throughout both parts of the country in order to reestablish a democratically based political voice with which the German people as a whole could speak out on the terms of reunification and a new nation-wide government. But the regime in East Berlin ignored those appeals rather than face the possibility of competition from other parties in a free and open electoral contest.

Most observers agreed that the monotonous rhetoric of reunification employed by the leaders of the SED served mainly to mask an aversion to ending Germany's division, which had become the basis for their authority over that part of the country where the presence of the Red Army enabled them to rule without regard to the political preferences of the citizenry. In May 1952 the regime in the GDR deepened the division of the country by converting the demarcation line between East and West Germany into a fortified border and limiting passage between the two to a few closely controlled checkpoints. That left Berlin, where four-power occupation remained in effect, as the only place where East Germans could move westward unhindered. West Berliners could still visit East Berlin but were now denied access to the rest of the GDR. Telephone communications between the two parts of the former capital were drastically curtailed by the East German authorities.

Socialization and Industrial Expansion

Although the 1949 constitution of the GDR guaranteed property rights, private ownership of productive assets was from the outset precarious at best. Much property had already been expropriated by German Communist administrators under Soviet auspices during occupation rule. Initially, only the estates of great landowners and the businesses

of active Nazis were ordered seized, but "occupation socialism," as it came to be known, actually resulted in the expropriation of many others as well. Nearly half the total farmland in the Soviet zone was seized in the course of the postwar agrarian reform. Some two-thirds of the confiscated land was distributed among small farmers and the rest assigned to collective farms similar to those in the USSR.

Insofar as a socialist revolution occurred in East Germany, it came about at the order of the Soviet occupation authorities, not as a consequence of any popular upheaval. Most industries seized during the occupation became *Volkseigene Betriebe* ("people's plants" or VEB) and were operated initially by the SED-dominated zonal administration and later by the GDR. Special occupation decrees resulted in the blanket takeover of certain categories of enterprises, such as banks, energy-producing utilities, pharmacies, and motion picture theaters. Some industrial plants were seized and exploited for the extraction of reparations by the Soviet Union, which only later relinquished them to the GDR, for the most part years after the formation of the East German state.

After creation of the GDR, the SED regime continued the process of socializing the economy, but at a slower pace and usually by indirect means. The constitution of 1949 specified that expropriation must involve compensation for the former owners, but the regime could avoid such payment by bringing about the transfer of property to state ownership without resort to the formal procedure of expropriation. Since owners of private farms and businesses had to compete for labor and raw materials on unfavorable terms with government-owned enterprises and had to sell most of their products at prices controlled by the government, they were vulnerable to crippling harassment. They were also required to pay heavy taxes, and if they fell into arrears with payments, their property became subject to foreclosure. By 1952, the private sector of the economy had shrunk to the point where over three-quarters of the industrial workers in the GDR were employed by state-owned enterprises.

Also in 1952, despite disclaimers at the time of the postwar land reform of any intent to socialize agriculture, the SED regime began to exert pressure on private farmers to merge their land into collective farms, which then employed only about 15 percent of the rural population. Farmers proved reluctant, however, to surrender title to their land, which many had gained only as a result of the recent agrarian reform.

These and other policies led to a massive exodus from the GDR. Rather than lose their independence through collectivization, many farmers abandoned their farms and fled to the West, leaving uncultivated land behind them. The mounting difficulties encountered by proprietors of independent businesses led many of them to flee as well. Also departing were those East Germans who could not accept the increasingly stringent ideological constraints on intellectual and cultural activities, the harassment of the churches, or the discriminatory policies regarding admission to higher education. During the years 1949–52 over 675,000 persons from the GDR registered in the West as refugees in need of aid. Still others joined relatives there and did not register, so that the full extent of the exodus from the GDR went unrecorded. Those who did register amounted alone to more than 3.5 percent of the GDR's 1949 population. That represented the highest annual population loss in the world during that period. Since the exodus consisted mainly of young, able-bodied people, its economic consequences bulked even greater than the numbers of those leaving would suggest.

This sustained population drain posed a major handicap to the SED regime's attempt to make the economy of the GDR viable. Even without handicaps, that attempt posed a formidable task. The territory of the new East Germany had long been integrated into the larger economy of the Reich. The predominantly light industries located there had mainly manufactured finished goods made from raw and half-finished materials purchased largely in other parts of Germany or abroad. Those manufactured goods had in turn been sold throughout Germany and the world. Establishing a separate economy for the GDR

thus entailed extensive investment in heavy industry and in other essential sectors that had previously remained underdeveloped. Since the Soviet Union ruled out acceptance of Marshall Plan aid from the United States and offered little assistance itself, most of the capital for that investment had to be obtained through a bootstrap operation. That is, a considerable part of production was withheld from consumption so that it could be invested in the development of basic industries. These included steel plants and rolling mills, installations for extracting coke from lignite, and factories to manufacture items such as agricultural tractors, which had previously been mainly obtained from other parts of Germany. Another significant part of current production had to be withheld from consumption and exported to earn the foreign currency needed to purchase raw materials and technical equipment unavailable in the GDR.

From the outset, the economy of the GDR reflected the regime's dependence on the Soviet Union. Through 1953, the USSR exacted heavy reparation payments, placing still another drain on current production. During the GDR's first two years, no less than 25 percent of the gain realized by the regime from industrial production had to be earmarked to cover the costs of reparations and maintenance of Russian troops in East Germany. Trade, which had previously flowed predominantly westward, toward the rest of Germany and Europe, shifted eastward. Coal, for example, which the GDR lacked but could have purchased more cheaply from West Germany, was imported from Siberia at a much higher price. Much industrial production was geared to the needs of the Soviets and shipped eastward, often on terms disadvantageous to the GDR. By 1954 nearly three-quarters of its trade was with the Eastern bloc, which marked a profound redirection of the traditional flow of goods and commodities.

The economy was operated, as in the USSR, through centralized planning and administration. The governmental machinery of the GDR, which politically played only the limited role of enacting and enforcing the decisions of the SED, became

for the most part one great monopolistic economic enterprise. Through centralized planning, beginning with a two-year plan for 1949-50 and continuing with a five-year plan for 1951-55, the regime allocated investment capital, distributed scarce resources, administered trade, managed plants and mines, and set prices and wages. Since no constraints of a competitive nature restricted the resulting proliferation of administrative personnel, a luxuriant economic bureaucracy soon developed, imposing still further burdens on the productive parts of the economy.

Despite all these obstacles, the regime made remarkable progress toward realizing the first five-year plan's goal of increasing industrial production by 190 percent between 1951 and 1955. Annual output of steel, which in 1936 had amounted to 1.2 million tons in the parts of Germany that became the GDR but which had stood at only about 10 percent of that level in 1946, increased to 2.1 million tons by 1953. Similarly dramatic advances were achieved in other basic industries, such as chemicals and energy generation. At the end of 1952 the regime announced that overall production had reached 108 percent of the 1936 level. That figure lost some of its luster when compared with the level of 143 percent achieved by then in the Federal Republic. But the GDR's attainment was impressive by virtue of its having pulled its economy upward by its own bootstraps, whereas West Germany's economic miracle had been facilitated by American aid under the Marshall Plan.

The price for these accomplishments was a depressed standard of living for most East Germans, for the growth of heavy industry came at the cost of the wage-earning consumer. Despite the overall growth of the economy by 1953, the output of consumer goods had failed to reach prewar levels. Low wages held purchasing power down, and even where money became available for discretionary spending consumers could choose from only a very limited selection of goods. Housing remained an acute problem for many East Germans forced to continue living in crowded, outmoded dwellings by the regime's slowness in allocating resources and manpower to new construction. Eco-

conomic experts in the GDR itself estimated the purchasing power of workers' wages in 1950 variously between half and three-quarters of the prewar level. The dearth of consumer items was worsened by the inefficiencies of the centralized planning system, which frequently failed to produce what was planned. The system also proved sluggish in adjusting production to shifts in consumer tastes and needs, so that unwanted goods went on being produced while new needs went unmet. The cumbersome government distribution system repeatedly delivered goods where they were not needed or failed to provide them where they were.

Food became a chronic problem. Problems arising from the expansion of collective farming and from the abandonment of land by farmers who fled to the West rather than submit to collectivization resulted in repeated shortages of foodstuffs. Butter, cooking oil, meat, and sugar remained under rationing controls, as available supplies lagged far behind prewar levels. Imported foods, such as citrus fruits and chocolate, were rarely available, and then only at exorbitant prices, because the regime tightly controlled foreign currency to reserve it for purchases abroad essential to the expansion of industrial plant.

All these difficulties loomed larger when compared with the rapid emergence in the West of an affluent, consumer-oriented economy in which workers' purchasing power steadily increased, enabling them to choose from an expanding array of imported foodstuffs, automobiles, electrical appliances, fashionable clothing, and new, modern dwellings. Travel and correspondence between East and West, as well as Western broadcasts, made it difficult for East Germans not to notice the extent to which, for all the triumphs of the regime's five-year plan, their standard of living lagged far behind that of Germans in the Federal Republic.

Since the SED justified its rule on the grounds that it formed the vanguard of the proletariat, it placed great stress upon winning the loyalty of the GDR's workers. The importance and dignity of manual labor were celebrated ceaselessly in the regime's propaganda. Workers who set new production records

received awards and lavish publicity. Athletic organizations and recreational outings offered free leisure activities. Group transportation to Berlin and other cities enabled workers to attend plays and operas with subsidized tickets and take part in special educational tours of museums and art galleries. Free lending libraries and inexpensive, subsidized editions of literary classics promoted reading. A comprehensive welfare state relieved workers of concern about the cost of health care. Guaranteed employment banished the specter of joblessness that still haunted some West German workers during the 1950s. The cost of housing was held down by a government system of rental administration. The construction of new housing, although lagging far behind that in the West, enabled at least some workers who enjoyed good standing with the regime to move into modern quarters. Preferential admission of workers' children to higher education further underlined the GDR's social priorities.

Despite all these measures, worker morale remained a problem. The GDR's laggard standard of living and the chronic shortages of consumer goods and foodstuffs left many workers less than grateful to a regime that claimed to be theirs. Fundamental conflicts of interest also plagued relations between workers and the regime. Only by extracting a maximum of labor at the lowest cost in terms of consumer goods could the regime realize its goal of rapid, bootstrap industrialization. But after years of toil under spartan conditions, many workers felt entitled to immediate material rewards for their labor and became impatient with promises of a bounteous socialist future. Attempts to appease workers by appealing to their idealism and by pitting factories against each other in "socialist competitions" designed to raise production proved of only limited effectiveness.

The absence of any organizations that workers could regard as their own increased the alienation of many. In 1948, even before formation of the GDR, Communist administrators had abolished the elected factory councils spontaneously set up after the war to provide a representative voice with which workers could make their grievances known. Given the choice, workers had

tended to elect former Social Democrats or colleagues without party affiliation rather than Communists. As a result, the factory councils frequently proved troublesome obstacles to Communist administrators' efforts to accelerate production regardless of the burdens imposed upon those who provided the labor. The constitution of 1949 guaranteed workers the right to participate through trade unions in decisions regarding production, wages, and the conditions of work. But the unified labor union organization established after the war, the Free German Trade Union League, soon fell, like the SED itself, under Communist domination and became a mere organ of the regime rather than a genuine vehicle of the workers themselves.

Starting in 1951 officials of the SED-controlled trade unions began to present workers with Soviet-style plant contracts. By the terms of those contracts, the workers committed themselves "voluntarily" to increase output, often beyond even the level set by the five-year plan. Their pay was determined by production quotas set by the government, that is, by management. The quotas applied to groups of workers rather than individuals, with bonuses going to members of those groups that exceeded their quotas. This system was designed to provide workers with an incentive to spur on laggard colleagues.

So many workers protested vigorously—in some instances with work stoppages—against the rigorous production quotas set by the new plant contracts of 1951 that the regime had to revise many output schedules downward in order to reduce the labor requirements. In 1952 additional resistance from the workers brought still further concessions on quotas. Some quotas dropped below reasonable production expectations, enabling workers to augment their income substantially by routinely collecting the bonuses available for exceeding the prescribed levels of output. Instead of accurately reflecting the potentialities and limitations of production as originally intended by the planners, the quotas were being set by what amounted to informal bargaining between the regime and the workers in whose interest it claimed to rule.

Unwilling to accept the curtailment of rapid industrial growth which such concessions to workers entailed, Ulbricht and his associates embarked upon a hard-line course. At a party conference of the SED in July 1952 they arranged for adoption of a resolution proclaiming that conditions had reached a point that permitted the GDR to begin "the construction of socialism." In Communist terminology this meant more rapid development of basic industries at the expense of consumer-goods production and improvement in the standard of living. The conference also proclaimed that it was time to move ahead with the further collectivization of agriculture and the absorption of independent tradesmen, such as auto mechanics, plumbers, and other artisans, into cooperatives. In the coming phase of development, the conference warned, a heightening of class conflict would be unavoidable.

The Uprising of June 17, 1953

The course charted at the second party conference in July 1952 soon jeopardized the reign of Ulbricht and seems to have cast doubt, at least briefly, upon the viability of the GDR in the eyes of some of its Soviet patrons. Under heavy criticism from the SED for making too many concessions to workers in the past, the official labor union organization pressed for austerity in the operation of government-owned plants and for establishment of work quotas determined by the realities of productive capacity rather than by worker resistance. In practice, this meant a raising of quotas in the new plant contracts for 1953 and a resulting reduction of worker income. To enforce compliance, the regime instituted a number of show trials at which supervisory workers in government-owned plants were found guilty of sabotage for failing to meet the new production goals. In the countryside government officials exerted pressures designed to bring private farmers to turn their land over to collective farms. Some success was achieved, but the regime's harsh measures also accelerated the exodus to

the West. By the end of 1952, nearly 15,000 farmers and their families had fled, leaving about 13 percent of the GDR's arable land untended. As a consequence, food shortages developed.

The problems triggered by the regime's adoption of hard-line policies multiplied throughout late 1952 and early 1953. In attempting to cope with shortages of food, the authorities withdrew ration cards from those who earned their living independently, such as craftsmen, shopkeepers, repairmen, and other small businesspeople. To obtain vital foodstuffs such as butter, cooking oils, meat, and sugar they now had to pay the greatly inflated prices that prevailed outside the rationing system. By way of reducing demand for consumer goods and acquiring additional capital for acceleration of industrial investment, the regime raised prices and increased a number of taxes. A new wave of secret police arrests and political show trials, as well as a purge of Jews in the ranks of the SED on the charge of Zionist sympathies with Israel, added to the atmosphere of repression. The response of many was to flee. In the second half of 1952 some 110,000 East Germans registered as refugees in the West, whereas about 72,000 had done so during the first half, before adoption of the regime's new hard line. During the first half of 1953, some 225,000 followed, a figure that would swell to over 330,000—nearly 2 percent of the total population—by the end of the year. This loss of manpower led to a decline in tax revenues that added to the woes of the economy, and the regime fell behind its schedule for industrial growth.

This mounting crisis came to a head in the spring of 1953. At the time of Soviet dictator Stalin's funeral in March, Minister-President Otto Grotewohl sought to obtain aid from the USSR for the GDR's faltering economy, but in vain. Despite cautionary advice from the new leaders of the Kremlin, Ulbricht and his associates decided to toughen their already hard-line course, invoking Stalin's methods as justification. In mid-May the Central Committee of the SED denied any responsibility for the plight of the economy, blaming instead such "class enemies" as Trotskyites, Zionists, Free Masons, traitors, and morally degen-

erate individuals. By way of remedy, the Central Committee proposed an increase in work quotas on the average of 10 percent, which amounted to a wage cut of the same extent. At the end of May the Council of Ministers adopted the new quotas and scheduled them to take effect at the end of June, when festivities to celebrate Ulbricht's sixtieth birthday were planned.

Upon learning of these actions, the cautious new collective leadership in the Kremlin intervened and forced the SED regime to beat a retreat. Embarking in early June upon what became known as the New Course, the East Berlin regime rescinded many of the harsh measures of the previous year and promised to improve the living standard of the population. Investments in basic industrial projects were scaled back. Additional funds and resources were allocated to production of consumer goods. Foreclosures on farmland and other private property for delinquent taxes were halted. Credit, seeds, and farm machinery were offered as inducements to attract back farmers who had abandoned their land and fled to the West. Similar enticements were held out to owners who had been forced to close private businesses. Ration cards for foodstuffs once more became available to all citizens. Schools were again opened to students who had been expelled because of their families' political or religious views. Many of those imprisoned in the recent crackdowns were accorded amnesty. New and vigorous efforts to establish ties with West Germany and bring about reunification were pledged. In the course of announcing these measures in early June 1953, the regime confessed to having committed many "errors" in the past.

As did not go unnoticed by many workers in the GDR, the increase in work quotas scheduled to take effect at the end of June remained unaffected by the New Course. Any hope that this might have been an oversight seemed dashed on June 16, when the newspaper of the SED-controlled labor union organization published an editorial stating that the quotas must remain in effect. Despite pressure from Moscow for more moderate policies, the East Berlin regime thus stubbornly upheld the

one measure which more than any other had aroused the ire of the very workers whose interests it claimed to place above all else. The result was the uprising of June 17, 1953, the first attempt at revolt within the postwar Soviet bloc.

On the morning of June 16, members of the construction crews at work on the Soviet-style buildings going up along the boulevard Stalinallee in East Berlin laid down their tools. Joined by other workers along the way, they marched to the headquarters of the official labor union organization in the center of the city to protest against the regime's failure to rescind the new, higher work quotas. Finding the union headquarters tightly locked up, the procession of workers, which had by then grown to about 10,000, proceeded to the Council of Ministers building. When they discovered that its doors, too, were barred to them, the swelling crowd of workers stood outside and demanded in chants to speak with Ulbricht and Minister-President Otto Grotewohl.

As the situation grew increasingly tense during the early afternoon, the minister for heavy industry emerged from the beleaguered government building to announce that the new work quotas had been rescinded. The initially calming effect of that announcement was, however, dispelled when trucks bearing loudspeakers moved through the streets of East Berlin during the afternoon, broadcasting the text of an obscurely worded Politburo resolution that seemed to leave in question whether the quotas had in fact been rescinded. One of these trucks was commandeered by some of the demonstrators, who used its loudspeaker as the crowd dispersed to issue a call for a general strike the next morning. News of that development reached others in East Berlin that evening through a radio news broadcast from the American sector of the city.

On the morning of June 17, many workers in East Berlin declined to take up their tools. Instead, they gathered at their places of employment, elected strike committees, and marched to the government district, where they took over the city hall and surrounded the headquarters of the regime with a mass of

humanity. On the way into the city, they tore down the regime's ubiquitous propaganda posters and billboards. Through Western news broadcasts, workers elsewhere in the GDR learned of developments in East Berlin and joined the strike, which quickly spread to over 200 localities throughout the GDR, especially those where industrial workers were numerous.

Encountering no resistance, the demonstrators in East Berlin began to add political demands to the economic ones that had given rise to the strike. Some shouted that Ulbricht and Grotewohl must step down. Others called for free elections. As the day wore on with no resolution in sight, the crowds, swollen by spectators, some from West Berlin, grew increasingly unruly. The headquarters of the political police in East Berlin was ransacked and then burned. Still other buildings were seized and plundered. Fire was set to kiosks where regime-controlled newspapers and magazines were displayed for sale. Prisoners, including some common criminals, were released from jails. Police agents of the regime were mishandled and, in a few cases, killed. Elsewhere in the GDR similar incidents took place.

From the outset, the crowds lacked any coordinated leadership or practical goals. The demonstrators merely vented their anger on whatever representative or symbol of the regime they found at hand. As a consequence, the uprising had already begun to disintegrate when Russian troops and tanks appeared in East Berlin and other cities throughout the GDR during the afternoon of the seventeenth and dispersed the crowds, in some places forcibly. The next day, the SED regime found itself back in control, thanks to its Soviet patrons. According to official GDR statistics, 21 persons had died, but other evidence suggests a considerably higher toll of fatalities. Afterward, severe retribution followed from the side of the GDR, whose courts sentenced at least 18 persons to death and more than 1300 East Germans to prison terms, some for life.

The uprising dealt the Ulbricht regime a staggering moral and political blow. Officially, East Berlin portrayed the events of June 17 as the result of a fascist, imperialist plot on the part of

Washington and Bonn to overthrow the GDR and subjugate East German workers to capitalist exploitation. But the absurdity of that explanation was obvious to those in the GDR who had observed the uprising's spontaneous origins and the lack of any coordinated leadership. Also, the official version failed to explain the inactivity of the West during the uprising and the absence of any Western attempt to interfere with the suppression of the demonstrations by Red Army divisions stationed in the GDR. The official version omitted as well any explanation for the lack of resistance to the uprising among the East German workers who purportedly made up the backbone of the regime. Shortly after the event, the foremost Communist literary figure of East Germany, Bertolt Brecht, gave expression to the sentiments of many in a poem he secretly circulated among his acquaintances after publicly endorsing the regime's suppression of the uprising:

After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers' Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

Paradoxically, the uprising of June 17, 1953, had the effect of strengthening the position of Walter Ulbricht and ensuring the survival of the GDR. On the eve of the event, there had been signs that the new leadership in Moscow was considering Ulbricht's replacement, since he had been the main source of resistance to Soviet pressure to modify the harsh policies adopted by the SED in 1952. During the uprising Ulbricht had proved indecisive and ineffectual. Afterward, however, the Russians apparently concluded that removal of the central figure in

the East German regime would be viewed as a sign of weakness. Ulbricht was therefore allowed to retain his dominant position.

Prior to the uprising, there had also been intimations that at least some of Stalin's successors in the Kremlin were giving consideration to sacrificing the GDR altogether in exchange for the neutralization and disarmament of Germany as a whole. After nearly five years, grounds certainly existed for doubting the viability of the East German regime and its economy. The danger must have seemed real that the GDR might become a burden instead of an asset for the USSR. But the decision to blame the mass upheaval of June 1953 on a Western plot made it difficult, if not impossible, for Moscow to open negotiations with the West over a new status for all of Germany. The purge, shortly after the uprising, of Lavrenti Beria, the member of the collective leadership in the Kremlin widely believed most inclined to abandonment of the GDR, further reduced the threat to its preservation. In the wake of that development, Ulbricht felt sufficiently emboldened to purge some of his leading critics from the Politburo of the SED. The justice minister, a former SPD member who had, just after the uprising, reaffirmed the constitutional right of workers to strike, was removed from office, expelled from the SED, and imprisoned. Just days after he had seemed doomed, Walter Ulbricht had emerged more fully in command than ever.

The New Course Gives Way to Renewed Repression

Although he remained skeptical about the New Course adopted at the prodding of Moscow's new leadership, Ulbricht upheld that policy line after suppression of the uprising. As a result, the GDR felt some of the effects of what came to be known as the post-Stalin thaw in the USSR. The non-Marxist political parties were allowed greater leeway, at least in their internal affairs. The campaign to dissuade people from attending church and enrolling their children for re-

ligious instruction was eased. Ideological constraints were somewhat relaxed so that artists and writers felt less pressure to conform to the formulas of "socialist realism." Despite his sometimes irreverent political utterances and his deviant views on drama, Brecht was assigned a theater in East Berlin for his repertory company and given considerable liberty in its direction. Other Communist intellectuals, among them the young social theorist Wolfgang Harich, began to ask whether the institutions and methods the GDR had taken over from the Stalinist USSR were suitable for realization of a society both socialist and democratic. Hopes for a more humane future that had been dashed a half decade earlier were rekindled.

The New Course also made itself felt in the economic sphere, as the regime recognized the unavoidability of at least some material concessions to the inhabitants of the GDR in the wake of the uprising. Accordingly, priorities were altered to give greater attention to consumer goods, which resulted in a slowdown of investment in basic industries. Measures to force private farmers to join collectivized farms were suspended. So were efforts to force small private firms out of business. Many of the goals of the first five-year plan were in effect abandoned, although the regime would claim fulfillment of the plan in 1955.

The Russians, whose commitment to the GDR had been strengthened by the uprising, came to the aid of Ulbricht and his shaken regime. Previously, the Soviets had contributed to the economic problems of East Germany by extracting heavy reparations. Now they agreed to end all reparations by the beginning of 1954. For the first time, they wrote off debts and extended large-scale credit to East Germany, some of it in convertible currencies usable for purchases of needed resources and machines from the West. They also handed over 33 major industrial plants confiscated after the war and operated by the USSR since then to produce, by way of reparations, goods amounting to about 12 percent of the GDR's overall industrial output. Finally, Moscow reduced the payments imposed upon East Germany to cover the cost of the hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops stationed there.

In addition to this material aid, the USSR upgraded the GDR within the Soviet sphere of influence so as to make its international status appear comparable to that of the Federal Republic. Previously, as a part of the Germany which had invaded and devastated the USSR, the GDR had been relegated to a tightly circumscribed secondary status within the emergent Soviet bloc, so that the SED regime was denied the sort of recognition Moscow extended to its other satellites. Now, in the wake of the regime's survival of the 1953 uprising, that began to change. In March 1954 the USSR proclaimed the GDR a sovereign state. In May 1955 East Germany was included as a charter member in the Warsaw Pact, the Eastern alliance that linked the countries of the Soviet bloc under Russian leadership and subordinated their armed forces to Moscow. A National People's Army, a professional military force whose nucleus was provided by already armed People's Police units, officially came into being in March 1956. The GDR had become an integral part of the Eastern bloc's military system. Since 1950 East Germany had been integrated as well into that bloc's economic system through its trading organization, the Council for Mutual Economic Aid or Comecon. The adoption in 1959 of a new flag that differed from that of the Federal Republic through the superimposition of an emblem consisting of a hammer and draftsman's compass on the black, red, and gold stripes added symbolic emphasis to the regime's efforts to promote a sense of separate identity among the population.

The New Course did not last long in the economic sphere. Less than a year after the uprising, the regime began to shift its economic priorities once again toward rapid industrialization at the expense of wage-earning consumers. A second five-year plan, covering 1956-60, closely resembled the first plan in its overall thrust. Independent farmers once more came under pressure to turn over their land to agricultural collectives. Plumbers, mechanics, and other craftsmen found it increasingly difficult to maintain their independence, so that many joined the artisan cooperatives sponsored by the regime. Private businessmen encountered similar difficulties, with the result that increasing

numbers abandoned their businesses while others entered into joint ventures with government enterprises that put an end to their independence.

The regime also soon resumed its attacks on the churches. Beginning in 1954, membership in the official young people's organization became contingent upon participation in a secular "youth consecration" ceremony that amounted to a negation of religious values. The Protestant church, to which the vast majority of religious East Germans belonged, objected to the atheistic content of this ceremony, which the regime sought to make obligatory for all, and withheld religious confirmation from youths who participated. When the regime retaliated by denying admission to higher education to those who received religious confirmation, the church had to back down, however. In 1955 the educational authorities sought to diminish the influence of religion by banning Christian student groups from the universities. The SED regime also objected to the organizational links between the Protestant churches in the two Germanies, which served as a reminder of the country's past unity. The religious authorities resisted pressures to sever that link until 1969, when they finally gave in on that point and constituted the Eastern church as a separate body. But the quiet struggle of will between churchmen and the atheistic regime would continue throughout the duration of the GDR.

Ulbricht's stock soared in Moscow when the GDR proved impervious to the wave of rebelliousness that shook much of the Soviet bloc during 1956 and culminated in the bloody, unsuccessful Hungarian revolution that autumn. Thus strengthened, he settled scores with critics in the leadership of the SED who objected to his doctrinaire imposition of Soviet patterns on the GDR. Branding them as an "anti-party group," he succeeded in stripping those critics of their government and party offices and relegated them to insignificant positions. His dominance received formal expression in 1960 when he became chairman of a newly created National Defense Council. Later that year, following the death of President Wilhelm Pieck, he assumed chairmanship

of a newly created State Council elected by, and responsible to, the People's Chamber. Through constitutional amendment, the presidency was abolished and its functions, along with others, were assigned to the State Council, making it the nerve center of the government apparatus that carried out the policies of the SED. After a decade of sometimes precarious dominance, Walter Ulbricht had secured for himself a position of what seemed unassailable paramountcy atop both party and government.

Repression also increased in the cultural and intellectual spheres. The campaign of de-Stalinization launched by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had never appreciably curtailed the police-state apparatus of the SED regime, so that the crackdown amounted to only an intensification of standard practices. Still, heavy blows fell upon the intellectual community in the GDR. The social theorist Wolfgang Harich, who had become an admirer of Tito's heterodox Communist regime in Yugoslavia, was arrested in November 1956 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment the following year for allegedly conspiring to alter the social order of the GDR by threat of force. Numerous less well known persons also went behind bars. For many artists and writers the regime's heightened insistence on conformity to the party line meant the end of hopes raised by the New Course. Some chose to stay on, even if, as in the case of writers, they could hope to make their works known only by smuggling them to the West. Some gave up and migrated westward, so that much promising creative talent was lost. Engineers, physicians, and scientists along with other highly skilled professionals also left as the migration of hundreds of thousands of East Germans to the Federal Republic via the open borders of Berlin continued throughout the latter part of the 1950s.

Despite the repressive methods of the Ulbricht regime, the GDR made notable progress economically. Sustained investment in basic industries began to yield results. Industrial and handicraft production, which had accounted for 43.7 percent of the total in 1950, rose to 53 percent by 1960. Agricultural output, which had stood at 30.8 percent of the whole in 1950, shrank to

18 percent in the expanded economy of 1960. By 1958 the regime was able to end the last remnants of food rationing, but only by depressing demand through higher prices. Consumer goods became less difficult to find, although those available still often failed to please the public. By the latter part of the decade, the 45-hour workweek had become general in state industries, an achievement that paled only slightly in view of the fact that West German industrial workers had, with rare exceptions, already achieved the 40-hour workweek and enjoyed significantly greater purchasing power with which to choose from a larger selection of higher-quality goods. Such knowledge, along with antireligious measures and ideological repression, continued to feed the yearly exodus of thousands upon thousands of GDR residents to the West via the open borders in Berlin. During 1960 nearly 200,000 persons from East Germany officially registered with West German authorities as refugees, while an unknown number of others settled in the West without claiming that status.

Increasingly, the ire of the Ulbricht regime focused on West Berlin. Simply by arriving there on foot or by public transportation from East Berlin, residents of the GDR could gain immediate recognition as West German citizens and fly to the Federal Republic, where a new life awaited them. This exodus imposed a costly drain on the Eastern economy, since most of those who left were young, skilled people. It also imposed limits on how much the regime could require of those who remained but had the ready option of leaving. For many years the regime appears to have seriously hoped to end the flow to the West by realizing its promises to provide a higher standard of living and a more just society than could be found in the Federal Republic. But by the late 1950s that goal seemed as remote as ever. The regime and its patrons in Moscow therefore focused their attention on Berlin in the knowledge that so long as the four-power status of the old German capital kept the border between East and West open, there would be no way to halt the outward flow of humanity that had become so damaging and embarrassing.

In November 1958 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev issued an

ultimatum to Britain, France, the United States, and the Federal Republic: Unless the Berlin problem were solved within six months, the USSR would sign a peace treaty with the GDR and turn over to it responsibility for West Berlin, which Khrushchev claimed lay on the territory of the GDR. Surrounded by Soviet and East German troops, West Berlin would become a demilitarized "free city," emptied of occupying powers, and the West Germans would have to negotiate with the GDR (the existence of which Bonn did not recognize) for access to it. Conflict, possibly even war, between the USSR and the Western powers over Berlin seemed imminent. But when the West ignored Khrushchev's ultimatum, it proved a bluff, for the Soviets took no action against West Berlin. Instead, the Berlin crisis flared and subsided repeatedly at the verbal level over the next three years as the Russians issued new threats, each time occasioning concern about a great-power conflict over the former German capital.

The Berlin Wall

Within the GDR developments were taking shape that contributed to the climax of this second postwar Berlin crisis. Beginning in late 1959 the regime launched a massive drive to collectivize the remainder of privately owned farmland. By mid-1960 only a small fraction of those who had been independent farmers only months earlier retained title to their land. At least 15,000 deserted their farms and fled to the West rather than submit to collectivization. Their departure, along with the dislocations occasioned by a wholesale reorganization of much of the GDR's already collectivized agriculture, led to another major food shortage when the 1960 crops fell far short of expectations. That, in combination with another escalation of Khrushchev's threatening rhetoric about West Berlin in the spring and summer of 1961, produced a panicky flight from the GDR of persons fearing that the option to leave would soon disappear. The exodus reached proportions not seen since 1953. By the second week of August, more than



Refugees fleeing East Berlin through an apartment house at the border to West Berlin at the time of the Berlin Wall's construction by the East German regime in August 1961

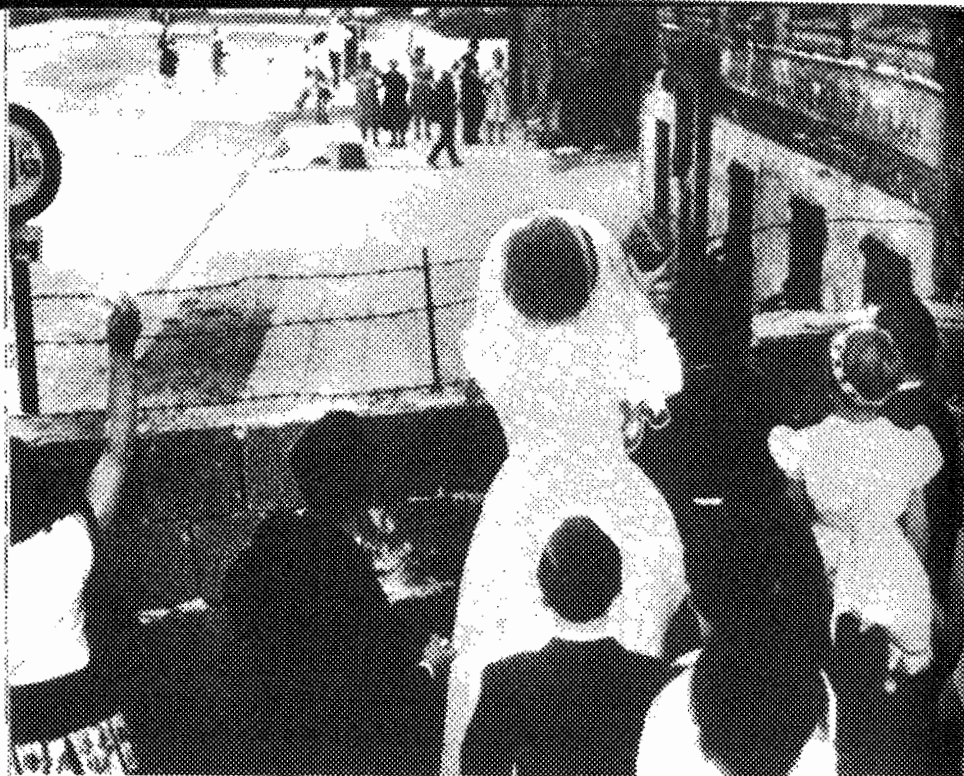
155,000 residents of the GDR had registered in the West as refugees since the beginning of 1961. That brought the total of those who had fled Communist rule since the end of the war to over three million, or one out of every six persons in the part of Germany occupied by the USSR in 1945.

At that point, in the early morning hours of August 13, 1961, the regime moved to slanch the population hemorrhage by sealing East Berlin off from West Berlin. Under the guns of the People's Police, workmen blocked with barbed wire entanglements the many street crossings between the two parts of the city. GDR guards permitted passage at only a handful of points, turning back all Germans from East and West who lacked the SED regime's permission to cross. The fortifications that would soon grow into the Berlin Wall went up all around West Berlin.

more than a hundred miles in length, sealing off access from the East. The few telephone lines in operation between East and West Berlin were severed. Transport between the two parts of the city by subway and elevated trains was closed down with the exception of one transit point, which was tightly policed by the East to prevent unauthorized departures to the West. In contrast to the blockade of 1948–49, no move was made to interfere with the overland transit routes or rail service between West Berlin and the Federal Republic. Military and civilian personnel of the occupying powers continued to pass between East and West Berlin, but only at a few crossing points.

During the weeks and months that followed erection of the wall the rest of the world was witness to numerous frantic escape attempts by East Germans. When buildings in East Berlin bordering on western parts of the city became escape routes, the doors and ground-floor windows were bricked up. Desperate East Germans then began leaping into West Berlin from upper-story windows and roofs, usually into nets held below by West Berlin firemen but sometimes to injury and even death. As a result, the buildings were sealed off entirely and then demolished. Soon the eastern side of the wall was rimmed by a desolate strip of land containing only multiple barbed wire fences, watchdog runs, searchlights, and towers manned by armed guards with instructions to shoot to kill anyone attempting to flee. Similar barriers were erected to bolster the GDR's border with the Federal Republic. Some East Germans managed to surmount these obstacles to reach the West, but others were shot by zealous border guards. Still others escaped through tunnels laboriously and secretly excavated beneath the wall in Berlin.

Escape became progressively more difficult and hazardous as the GDR authorities discovered gaps in their inward-facing fortifications and closed them. Desperate East Germans nevertheless continued to seek ways out. In 1962 West German authorities recorded 5,761 successful escapes, and in 1963 a high point of 8,692 was reached. Thereafter the number declined, reaching the level of a few hundred each year by the 1980s. The SED regime re-



A newly married couple waving to relatives across the Berlin Wall soon after its construction.

leased no statistics on thwarted escapees, but gunfire as well as the explosion of land mines and other automatic explosive devices at the Berlin Wall and along the border with West Germany left little doubt that these were numerous. In all, more than two hundred East German citizens would die at the Berlin Wall and the fortifications along the GDR's border with the Federal Republic.

Construction of the Berlin Wall revealed that the Soviets had, at least for the time being, abandoned their designs on West Berlin and decided instead merely to allow the Ulbricht regime to contain the population of the GDR. In that, the move proved successful. When the Western powers failed to obstruct erection of the wall, the flood of refugees diminished to a trickle. The price was hardship for countless innocent persons. Thousands of fam-

ilies found themselves separated by an impassable barrier. Those with relatives on the opposite side could see them only by exchanging waves over the wall and across the no-man's-land on its eastern side that prevented approach by citizens of the GDR, now prisoners of their own government. By way of justifying its measures, the Ulbricht regime announced that construction of an "anti-fascist, protective wall" had proved necessary to halt infiltration by Western agents preparatory to a planned military assault on the GDR by West Germany. Observers noted, however, that the new fortifications were designed to thwart approach primarily from the East rather than from the West and that the Federal Republic had no troops in West Berlin.

The wall between East and West Berlin not only reduced the flood of refugees but also represented a step toward solution of another major problem of the Ulbricht regime. Previously, its capital in East Berlin lay, legally speaking, outside of the territory of the GDR, which comprised what had been the Soviet occupation zone. This anomalous situation existed because of the four-power status of the old German capital under the terms of the occupation agreements. The Russians had continued to respect at least some of those agreements in order to assert their occupation rights in West Berlin, which included providing military guards for a Soviet war memorial and a prison for Nazi war criminals, both in the British sector of the city. They had therefore hitherto restrained the GDR from incorporating East Berlin into its territory, even though in actuality the USSR had long since turned over administration of its sector of the city to the Ulbricht regime. With the construction of the wall, the regime could now, with the permission of the Soviets (who nevertheless continued to exercise their rights in West Berlin), lay claim to authority over its own capital city.

That claim was promptly recognized by the other Communist-ruled countries, but the Americans, British, and French refused to do so. They made a point of asserting their rights throughout the old capital by sending into East Berlin Western occupation personnel who refused to recognize the authority of



American tanks (foreground) confronting Soviet tanks (above) at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin following the East German regime's erection of the wall separating the two parts of the former German capital in 1961.

East German border officials and would deal only with Russians. When the Russians absented themselves at the border, the Western powers acquiesced to the extent of allowing their officials to show their credentials to GDR guards through closed car windows upon entering East Berlin. During the winter of 1961–62 this situation brought the world perilously close to a war between the superpowers when altercations at Checkpoint Charlie, the principal crossing point between the two parts of the city for western vehicles, led to a prolonged confrontation of American and Soviet tanks separated only by a few dozen yards of pavement. In the end, however, a modus vivendi was worked out, and the tension subsided. Henceforth the SED regime governed East Berlin as an integral part of the GDR, despite the

Western powers' continuing assertion that it legally remained under four-power occupation. The Berlin crisis, which originally had arisen with regard to the status of West Berlin, thus ended in at least partial alleviation of the handicap posed for the GDR by the special status of East Berlin.

While the Berlin Wall exacted a heavy toll in human misery and became the scene of numerous escape attempts that ended in death, its construction facilitated stabilization of the GDR. Previously, the regime had been forced, by its need for labor, to tolerate a great deal of complaining and malingering in order to minimize defections to the West. Now it could crack down on dissent without fear of such consequences. Slacking on the job in government-run enterprises became a punishable crime, and prison sentences were imposed upon some convicted of that offense, obviously as an example to others. In factories and other places of work throughout the GDR, the SED orchestrated "discussions" designed to identify malcontents and convince them of the error of their ways. Party activists began a campaign to effect "voluntary" increases in work quotas, which rose on the average of 5 percent within months. Brigades of Free German Youth groups identified television antennas aimed toward Western transmitters and put pressure on their owners to reorient them to receive only the programs of the SED-controlled channels. Ideological constraints on the arts and scholarship were again tightened. The wall also made it possible to strengthen the GDR militarily, for with the escape route through West Berlin sealed off, the regime could for the first time institute conscription for the National People's Army without fear that draftees would flee westward. A law to that effect, obliging all able-bodied young men to perform military service for eighteen months, took effect in January 1962. Beginning in 1964, those unwilling to bear arms for reasons of conscience were allowed to serve in army construction units. No alternative civilian service similar to that in the West was permitted, and those who refused to don a military uniform became subject to prosecution and imprisonment.



The Berlin Wall

The New Economic System and the Second Constitution

The effects of the wall soon became evident in the economic sphere. For the first time, the regime could make labor allocations for the economy without having to reckon with the constant, yet unpredictable, loss of skilled workers and supervisors. No longer would an appreciable part of its investment in education drain away, since the option for young people to leave for jobs in the West after completing their schooling in the East had, except for the most venturesome and determined few, disappeared.

After this stabilization of the labor force, the regime struggled with a succession of experiments in an effort to extract better performance from the economy. In 1962 it announced abandonment

of a seven-year plan which had been launched with great fanfare in 1959 with the goal of nearly doubling production in key sectors of industry but which had fallen far behind schedule. In an effort to eliminate the heavy-handed inflexibility of the central planning system, Ulbricht in 1963 proclaimed implementation of a New Economic System (which he renamed the Economic System of Socialism four years later). Far greater discretionary authority than ever before was assigned to individual productive plants, whose performance was now measured in terms of profitability rather than the mere quantity of goods produced. Managers of those plants no longer had to accept whatever materials and equipment the plan assigned to them but could shop for the best available quality and the most favorable terms. Plants in the same sectors of production were encouraged to join together to form "socialist concerns" that would cooperate to increase output. Market mechanisms such as interest rates and prices that at least partially reflected supply and demand were introduced in an effort to provide some self-regulation of the economy. The role of central planning was to be restricted, according to the new system, to establishment of overall goals and allocation of scarce materials. Individual managers whose plants registered profits received bonuses and extra vacations. The New Economic System proved difficult to manage, and the constant adjustments it required kept the administrative organs in turmoil. But it did loosen up the rigid bureaucratic structure of the East German economy somewhat and encourage individual initiative and innovation on the part of managers of state-owned plants.

The New Economic System never functioned as envisioned, but it did work well enough to produce what came to be known as the "other German economic miracle." During the 1960s the industrial economy of the GDR became, in terms of per capita productivity, the strongest in the Eastern bloc. The peak achievements came in the period 1964–67, when the regime claimed a growth rate in national income of 5 percent and in industrial output of 7 percent. Although those figures were regarded in the West as inflated, virtually all observers were im-

pressed at the performance of the GDR's economy. In terms of the standard of living, the GDR outstripped the USSR and its client states in Eastern Europe. Basic foods became available at prices wage-earners could afford, although the centralized distribution system still gave rise to annoying shortages from time to time.

Even though the GDR still lagged behind the Federal Republic in the production of consumer goods, it began to appease the hunger of its citizens for material conveniences. Whereas in the 1950s private automobiles had been virtually unknown, by 1969, when 47 percent of the households in the Federal Republic owned a car, 14 percent in the GDR had acquired a vehicle despite inflated prices and waiting periods of years for delivery. Only 6 percent of East German households had possessed refrigerators in 1960, but by 1969 the figure had risen to 48 percent, as compared to 84 percent in West Germany. Also by 1969, 48 percent of households in the GDR owned washing machines, whereas the figure for the Federal Republic was 61 percent. Two-thirds of East German households, as contrasted to nearly three-quarters in the West, had acquired television sets by that time.

Increased access to television created problems for the SED regime, as it brought with it in most parts of the GDR exposure to broadcasts from West Berlin and the Federal Republic. The attempts of the regime to discourage viewers from watching Western broadcasts soon proved in vain. In addition to giving East Germans an alternative source of information about the world, those broadcasts provided compelling visual reminders of the extent to which the economy of the GDR lagged behind that of the West in the production of affordable consumer goods. That in turn served as a goad to the SED regime to make more and better goods available.

East Germans also became better dressed and enjoyed more leisure time. More clothing than ever before was produced, and both the quality and the range of choice grew. With the workweek reduced to five days in state industries by 1967, people now had

more time to enjoy the fruits of their labors. In terms of the hours of work necessary to pay for consumer items, however, citizens of the GDR still had to toil considerably longer for what they acquired than did West Germans, who continued to enjoy a greater choice among better-quality goods. The length of vacations was also increased, but for citizens of the GDR vacation trips abroad still had to be limited to Soviet-bloc countries. The prohibition on travel to Western countries, including West Berlin and the Federal Republic, became a source of chronic discontent.

After a crackdown on dissenters and deviationists following the erection of the Berlin Wall, the regime somewhat relaxed its controls over artists and writers during the 1960s. The Stalinist style of architecture gave way to venturesome experiments with what was known in the West as "the international style." Abstract works of art and experimental theater found greater toleration. Some interesting books and plays came out of an undertaking endorsed by Ulbricht at a writers' gathering in the town of Bitterfeld in 1959. This "Bitterfeld movement" called upon writers to experience the lot of workers by laboring for a time in factories or on collective farms before writing about contemporary life. The movement also sought to encourage workers to take up writing themselves, but little came of that.

For a brief period, talented and serious writers in the GDR found the regime willing to allow them to deal with life there honestly. Symptomatic was the novel *Divided Heaven*, published in 1963 by Christa Wolf. It gave expression to the painful dilemmas that honest, hard-working East Germans faced in deciding whether or not to flee to the West, and also accurately depicted some of the shortcomings in the GDR that had led so many to leave. Wolf's book, along with some others by younger East German writers, quickly won acclaim in both parts of Germany. By late 1965, however, another of the recurrent ideological freezes began to set in. Venturesome writers again encountered difficulties in getting their works published in the GDR or ran afoul of the regime's ideological watchmen when they expressed themselves in heterodox fashion. Much of the best writ-

ing produced in East Germany could still be published only in the Federal Republic.

By the latter half of the 1960s Walter Ulbricht dominated the GDR as never before. As first secretary of the SED, chairman of the State Council and of the National Defense Council, he brought together in his hands the key posts in the one-party dictatorship. By using his control of personnel matters in the SED to reward those loyal to him, he ensured the subservience to him of the "nomenklatura," the privileged elite which filled the top party and government jobs.

Ulbricht also began to assert a claim to ideological leadership in the Communist world. In 1967 he formulated a new interpretation of what was known in Marxist-Leninist doctrine as "socialism." Soviet theoreticians had long held that socialism would prove a brief transitional phase between the class-conflict-ridden society of capitalism and the future classless society of communism, in which the state would wither away. Ulbricht challenged that position by contending that socialism—which the GDR claimed to be constructing—amounted to a distinct phase of history in its own right. It could be expected—along with a continuing role for the state—to last for some time, he asserted. His version had the virtue of providing an explanation for the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities and the continuing dominance of the bureaucracy. Not content with speaking out independently on doctrinal matters customarily left to Moscow, he also suggested that the GDR could serve as a model for other Communist-ruled countries, another role previously reserved for the USSR in boasting that East Germany had achieved a "developed socialist society." Ulbricht seemed to infer that the GDR had surpassed the other countries in the Soviet bloc, including the "motherland of the revolution."

By 1968 Ulbricht felt sufficiently secure to seek institutionalization of his rule through adoption of a new constitution for the GDR. That document reflected the many changes in governmental structure that had taken place since 1949, when the first constitution had been put into effect. The new document aban-

doned the fiction that the GDR was a politically neutral, democratic entity. Instead, it proclaimed the GDR to be "a socialist state of the German nation." The SED-controlled National Front received constitutional recognition as the sole organ through which the political parties and so-called mass organizations shaped the development of socialist society. The parliament, the People's Chamber, remained, but the new document contained nothing that would enable it to function as anything other than the obedient rubber stamp of the SED it had always been. The provision in the 1949 constitution for elections by proportional representation disappeared, so that the unity list system of balloting no longer violated the constitution. The Council of Ministers, the cabinet installed by the People's Chamber, was downgraded, becoming an organ for the implementation of policy. The head of the cabinet no longer enjoyed the title minister-president, becoming merely chairman of the Council of Ministers. At the top of the government the new constitution placed the Council of State, the body which Ulbricht had chaired since its founding in 1960. Its chairman and his deputies were to be installed by vote of the People's Chamber. Policy-making authority resided with it rather than with the Council of Ministers. The Council of State was to represent the GDR internationally and nominate the chairman of the Council of Ministers. Between the infrequent and brief sessions of the People's Chamber, the Council of State was empowered to carry out "all fundamental tasks."

The most striking feature of the 1968 constitution lay in its elimination or diminution of the generous guarantees of citizens' rights contained in the old constitution. While the new document echoed the earlier assurances about freedom of speech, the press, peaceful assembly, and religious practice, it qualified those freedoms with the proviso that they must be exercised in harmony with the principles of the new constitution. In practice, that proviso enabled the regime to restrict freedom in those spheres whenever it chose. The right to emigrate disappeared altogether. So did the right to strike. Work now became not only a right but also a duty. The regime-con-

trolled trade unions achieved constitutional recognition as the sole permissible organs for representation of workers. In these and other provisions the realities of Walter Ulbricht's GDR found expression in the constitution of 1968. Put to the populace in a referendum, it received, according to official statistics, a surprisingly low affirmative vote by GDR standards: 94.5 percent. In East Berlin the figure was only 90.9 percent.

During the so-called Prague Spring of 1968, when Communist reformers in Czechoslovakia ended censorship and began to dismantle that country's system of closed bureaucratic rule, Ulbricht's regime consistently attacked the reformers across its southern border and cowed sympathizers at home. When, in August 1968, the USSR put an end to the Czech experiment by instigating a Warsaw Pact invasion, East German troops marched across that border and took part in the occupation alongside troops from the Soviet Union and its client states in Eastern Europe. Under Ulbricht's leadership the GDR seemed to have developed into a model "people's democracy," unshakably loyal to the USSR.

Despite the apparently unassailable position that Ulbricht had come to occupy atop the GDR by 1968, he fell from power only three years later. The grounds for his removal were shrouded in the secrecy with which the Communists of East Germany and the Soviet Union cloaked their political affairs, but a number of factors seem to have played a role. At home, Ulbricht's policies gave rise to uneasiness within the leadership of the SED. His increasing allocation of authority to the Council of State, an organ of the government, appears to have aroused apprehension among party officials, for whom that development represented a threat to the political paramountcy of the SED over the state. In the economic sphere Ulbricht's championing of greater autonomy for the technical managers who directed the factories and other units of the economy that actually produced goods seems to have produced similar dissatisfaction in the upper reaches of the SED, which had been accustomed to party control over economic policy. A different sort of concern

arose from Ulbricht's growing preoccupation with achieving a dramatic technological breakthrough that would permit the GDR to leapfrog beyond the Federal Republic economically. His pursuit of that goal involved the diversion of a mounting portion of the regime's investment capacity into ambitious research and development projects in new fields such as cybernetics, an undertaking which many in the SED hierarchy regarded as wasteful and unrealistic. Setbacks in other areas of the economy further heightened doubts about the party leader's judgment.

Although difficulties at home may have facilitated Ulbricht's removal, a great deal of evidence indicates that he ultimately fell because he had lost favor with his patrons in Moscow. His claim to originality in the sphere of ideology, as expressed in his theory of a distinctly socialist phase of history, seems to have proved offensive to some in the leadership of the USSR, which had grown accustomed to unchallenged ideological preeminence in the Soviet bloc. Ulbricht's attempts to present the GDR as a model for other Communist-ruled countries appears also to have encountered hostility in the ruling circles of the USSR. Still another factor in Moscow's disenchantment with Ulbricht apparently lay in his ill-concealed misgivings about the implications for the GDR of the thaw in relations between the USSR and the Federal Republic that set in at the end of the 1960s.

When the Soviet axe finally fell in the spring of 1971, the seventy-eight-year-old Ulbricht was permitted a dignified exit. In a speech before the Central Committee of the SED in May 1971 he requested to be relieved of his position as head of the party on grounds of failing health. Stripped of his power although allowed to retain the title of chairman of the Council of State, he died in obscurity in 1973. Only forty-eight days after his demise, following a period of conspicuous hesitancy, did the new regime in the GDR provide a state funeral for the man who, more than any other, had shaped East Germany and preserved it against the many perils that beset it during its early years. In the official announcements, no mention appeared of the presence at the funeral of a Soviet representative.