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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
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COMMENT ON EAST BERLIN UPRISING

The uprising of tens of thousands of East Berliners on 16 and 17 June, which had to be quelled by Soviet troops, is an unprecedented demonstration of hostility to a Communist regime. In West Germany, the uprising has increased demands for German unification, but East German Premier Grotewohl says the riots will make unity more difficult. The uprising will also have serious consequences for the Soviet "peace campaign" throughout the world.

The rioting apparently commenced with a small controlled demonstration of some 5,000 people, about noon on 16 June, against the recently decreed 10 percent increase in work norms. It is likely, though unproved, that this was planned to enable the government to yield on the question without losing face.

About 2 P.M., however, a cabinet minister addressing the crowd was pushed aside by a worker who shouted, "What you have declared here is of no interest to us. We want to be free. Our demonstration is not against norms .... This is a people's revolt." The demonstration dispersed about an hour later with threats of a general strike. American observers mingled freely with the small remaining groups, in which party workers seemed to be trying to argue down demonstrators complaining against food shortages and lack of freedom. During the evening there was sporadic violence.

At 8 P.M., Premier Grotewohl and Communist Party Chief Ulbricht addressed a closed meeting of the Berlin party members calling for a rallying of the people around the party and promising "further far-reaching measures" to correct the past mistakes.

At 4:30 A.M. on Wednesday, 17 June, a West Berlin Police unit observed 12 Russian tanks approaching the US Sector border in the area of Gross Zeithen. At 5 A.M. an advance unit of 20 Russian tanks was observed passing Adlershof in East Berlin in the direction of the center of East Berlin.

By 8:30 A.M. there were 17,000 marchers in East Berlin. Soviet soldiers wearing battle dress and in troop carriers were located in various sections to reinforce the police, but at this time there was no intervention on their part.

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In the course of the morning struggle, nearly 2,000 persons came into the West sectors of Berlin, but remained quiet. By 11 A.M. some of the Berlin elevated railway traffic had been halted; a complete cessation of both elevated railway and subway traffic was subsequently reported.

Later, up to 30,000 demonstrators on the Potsdamer Platz overturned kiosks and police shelters, and tore down Communist flags and posters. Smoke columns were reportedly seen rising from the East German government's main office building, and Peoples' Police inside finally opened fire on the crowd, wounding some. Fire hoses failed to disperse the crowd.

In the Lustgarten Square, where the demonstrators planned to converge eventually, Soviet tanks took up stations and German reinforcements from the Saxony area were called for. Increasing numbers of the Peoples' Police were reported defecting to the West.

The West German Post Office reported that the East German postal and telecommunications workers struck and that Peoples' Police had taken over the communications. From noon on, the demonstrators were reported to be uncontrollable; the violence being accompanied by shouts of "Ivan go home."

Press estimates of the size of the mobs vary from 50,000 to several hundred thousand.

Shortly after noon firing was audible to listeners in West Berlin. One report stated that 15 Soviet medium tanks, 20 armored cars, and 30 truckloads of machinegunners had been concentrated on the 50,000-man mob storming the government headquarters. Tanks drove into the mob here. Both Soviet and East German forces used small arms fire to scatter the mobs. Forty persons were brought to one West Berlin hospital alone, suffering from bullet or club wounds.

At 2:20 P.M., the East Berlin radio announced a state of emergency in the Soviet Sector, banned all demonstrations, rallies, and gatherings of more than three persons, proclaimed a curfew from 8 P.M. to 4 A.M., and declared violaters punishable according to martial law.

It is believed that the most serious local disturbances had been brought under control when this announcement was made.

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All other broadcasts by the East German radio minimized the uprising. At 4 A.M. on 17 June it referred blandly to an SED meeting the previous evening at which Ulbricht had said that the party should listen more carefully to the criticisms of the working people, and Grotewohl had promised measures to increase the standard of living. Forty-five minutes later it announced in a similar brief, that Ulbricht had promised to increase the supply of consumers goods.

At 6 A.M. the radio stated that the demonstrations of the previous day had been only local, incited by provocateurs from West Berlin. At 10:30 it announced that the majority of the workers in Berlin had resumed work. At 1:35 P.M. a Grotewohl statement announced that the 28 May decree for the raising of work norms by June 30 had been abolished.

Shortly after, at 2:20 P.M., came the broadcast declaring a state of emergency and 15 minutes later the entire East German network went on the air again with the appeal that provocations and grave disturbances in the Democratic sector of Berlin would only make the establishment of German unity more difficult. The government asked the population to help restore order and create conditions for normal and peaceful work; and also to apprehend the provocateurs and turn them over to the police.

At 5:33 P.M., in ostensible capitulation to the demands of the workers, the radio announced that "the decisions of the Politburo of the SED and of the government assure the prompt fulfillment of your justified demands." The regular program was interrupted about an hour later for a similar appeal to the people to maintain order. Western provocateurs were again blamed for the disturbances.

Actually, the only known formal encouragement from West Germans came at 5 A.M. on 17 June, when the leader of the West Berlin German Trade Union Federation, using the facilities of the American Radio in Berlin, requested the East Berlin population to support the day's demonstrations. He stated that he could not give them instruction, but only advice. He spoke of the justification of their demands for tolerable work norms, prompt payment of wages, and a reduced cost of living.

Latest press reports state that the entire Soviet Zone railroad network is on strike, and that rioting and strikes have broken out also in Dresden, Halle, Chemnitz, Zwickau, and a large number of other industrial centers.

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The rioting, coming hard on the heels of the East German government's 9 June campaign of conciliation, has left the regime in a dilemma.

To quiet popular clamor Deputy Premier Ulbricht has already ordered an increase of consumer goods production. Steps will probably be taken also to improve working conditions and adjust wages.

But the regime was defeated in its effort to bow gracefully to the demands of workers, and instead has given the appearance of weakness. This could encourage the populace to even greater resistance. Hence the government, for its own security, may have to reverse that part of its 9 June program calling for freer movement of the populace. Severe reprisals have already been ordered for the "provocateurs," and this move runs directly contrary to the "peace offensive."

Finally, the dependence of the regime on Soviet armed force has been clearly demonstrated at the very time it was trying to speak with authority for all of Germany.

In West Germany, the riots have sparked a strong surge of national solidarity with the East German people and a wave of contempt and distrust for the East German regime.

Initially, the riots have increased public pressure for something to be done about unity. The Secretariat of the West German Trade Unions quickly charged that the separation of Germany was the main reason for the present unrest. It called for immediate four-power talks on unification. American officials in Berlin, reporting on the first day's rioting, said that the US must avoid creating any impression of hanging back on unity discussions.

Nevertheless, if the Soviets had hoped to undercut Adenauer in the September elections with a few additional conciliatory gestures, they will now have to do much more. Because the East Berlin mobs shouted not for wage concessions but for free elections, West German attention will now more than ever be focused on what guarantees the Soviets would offer of free all-German elections.

Grotewohl's statement that the riots will make unity more difficult suggests that the Soviets may not be willing to move ahead on unity.

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The USSR is likely to continue its conciliatory diplomatic approaches elsewhere, however. Their effectiveness will not be completely nullified by the Berlin events, although these will have a world-wide adverse effect on Communist propaganda in support of the "peace campaign."

It is unlikely that the overt resistance manifested in Berlin will spread to the other Satellites. If a liberalization policy similar to that instituted in East Germany had been planned for the other Satellites, it will certainly be reviewed. Thus far there has been no evidence of such a policy in Eastern Europe.

The riots are likely to result in a purge in the newly-installed Soviet hierarchy in Germany. The repercussions of this could affect the delicate power-balance in the Kremlin.

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