

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED

2003

VIA AIR
(Specify Air or Sea Pouch)

DISPATCH NO. HOLW - 448

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
~~SECRET~~ RYBAT
CLASSIFICATION

28 MAY 1954

TO : Chief of Station, Lincoln

DATE _____

FROM : Chief, WH

SUBJECT { GENERAL KUGOWN
SPECIFIC Theme Suggestion

RYBAT PBSUCCESS

The attached guidance regarding Anniversary of 17 June 1953 Uprisings in East Germany might be used as a peg for the line that Guatemalan Commies imported tanks to shoot the workers, to silence their demands for freedom from communist control and direction of their country. The situation though not strictly parallel to that in East Germany today very soon will be when the Communists can direct the use of the newly arrived tanks.

[
OLIVER G. GALBOND /

27 May 1954
Distribution:
Orig & 1 - LINCOLN

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ RYBAT
CLASSIFICATION

25 May 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHIEFS,

ATTENTION:

SUBJECT: Anniversary of 17 June 1953 Uprisings in East Germany

1. 17 June will be the first anniversary of the anti-communist workers' uprising in East Germany. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany has declared 17 June a legal holiday and termed it a "day of German unity and freedom". It is planned that the day will be observed with celebrations throughout West Germany and West Berlin in commemoration of the East Germans who risked their lives to oppose Soviet tyranny. It is expected that the German people will adopt the day as a national commemorative holiday similar in spirit to "Bastille Day" and "the Fourth of July".

2. Covert media should give maximum publicity to 17 June as a symbol of the continuing struggle for freedom from communist oppression. While the events which occurred during last year's uprising can be freely commented upon, media should be careful not to anticipate this year's observances but to comment on such events in West or East Germany only as they are covered in the press. The indigenous nature of 17 June should be highlighted.

3. In dealing with 17 June, one point should be made over and over again: that this date will go down in history as the day when unarmed workers rebelled against a so-called workers' government and were silenced in their demands for freedom from communist oppression by Soviet tanks and guns.

4. Attached hereto for background information is a USIS Feature summarizing the events of 17 June 1953 and conditions leading to them. General propaganda guidance on the uprising and unrest in satellite Europe was contained in PYD memoranda of 17 June 1953 and 10 July 1953.

The Riots in East Germany

On June 16 and 17, a general strike accompanied by rioting and attempted attacks upon the communist government of Otto Grotewohl and Walter Ulbricht, took place in East Berlin. This manifestation of popular discontent and unrest in the Soviet occupied sector of the former German capital quickly spread to other areas of East Germany where the events of the 16th and 17th repeated themselves. Not until Russian troops were brought to the scene were the quelled. The "Vopos" or people's police were either unable or unwilling to cope with the situation.

The immediate cause of the June revolt was the deteriorated state of the East German economy. By June 1953, Communist attempts to quicken the pace of industrialization of East Germany had brought about a shortage of consumer goods, had caused higher work norms, lower wage scales, and consequently a greatly diminished standard of living. Communist attempts at farm collectivization had resulted in a tidal wave of defections to West Germany. This depopulation of the countryside together with the inevitable decline in productivity resulting from compulsory collectivization, had reduced agricultural output to well below the minimum needs of the East German people.

Rumblings of discontent could be discerned in East Germany as early as November 1952. On the 17th of that month, the European news agency, ICC issued a news release entitled: "The Feeling of Insurrection in the Soviet Zone of Germany". The release stated: "In West Berlin and West Germany people are very anxious about the effects of the deep, depressed tone of the population of the Soviet Zone Germany, because it may mean that the active resistance against the communist regime will be used by the dictatorship as grounds for the liquidation of numerous opponents of the regime. News has come from all districts of the Soviet Zone concerning bloody fights, riots and mass arrests on account of the additional danger of starvation.

"Within a week it resulted in pitched battles in Furstenburg an der Oder.....Two functionaries were beaten to death. In Rathenow an der Havel some 400 workers of the HO (Government) stores stormed the railroad station and plundered the food cars. The reason for this riot was that here had been no margarine for several weeks.....In Leipzig, Dresden, Halle and Suhl there were small riots against the shortage of food.....

"The East German press is full of malicious accusations against 'Fascists and Agents of.....Kaiser (West German Minister of All-German Affairs)'. Through radio, the press and leaflets West Berlin is exhorting the population of East Germany not to allow themselves to be provoked. However, it is known that these admonitions do not help a great deal under the newly increased pressure....."

Again in May of 1953, new reports were received telling of workers in East Germany who were reportedly registering their dissatisfaction with norms and wages by an increasing incidence of sporadic protests and work stoppages.

On May 28 1953,

On May 28 1953, the East German government introduced a new norm reducing wages. Ironically enough, it was the construction workers of the much propagandized Stalinallee project in East Berlin who, by protesting against the new norms, sparked the chain of developments which led to the general uprisings.

On June 5th and 8th, payment of wages on the basis of the new norms were made to Stalinallee workers, concrete evidence of the government's determination to force the norm increases upon the workers. After fruitlessly protesting the new norms, the construction workers, on the morning of June 16, took the situation into their own hands and decided to take their complaints personally to Premier Grotewohl. For this purpose they formed a demonstration march, and, joined by sympathizers along the way, reached the seat of the East German government in the Leipzigerstrasse about 3,000 strong. Here they demanded cancellation of the forced norm increases of May 28, and price cuts in the government-run HO stores.

By this time, the demonstrating workers realized the "Vopos" or people's police had made no effort to interfere with the march of the strikers, nor had the government yet condemned the strikers as "saboteurs" or "fascists". Perhaps taking this apparent leniency as a sign of weakness, the workers began to expand their sphere of protest. Demands for "free elections" were heard, and banners calling for the removal of the government leaders were displayed. Still the policy did not interfere.

In an attempt to placate the crowd, East German Ministers Selbmann and Rau appeared and assured the workers that the government considered their demands regarding the deduction of norms justified. The people, however, remained unconvinced, and at about three in the afternoon they decided to disperse and call a general strike for the next day. At 4:30 PM, the Communist Radio Berlin announced that the SED (Communist Party) Politburo had proposed to lift the 10 percent norm increase reaffirming, however, the principle of increasing norms on the basis of persuasion and volition. The Party decision was made known to those gathered before the government offices, and in the statement read to the throng, the government warned the workers to be on guard against "provocateurs". The statement continued: ".....the politburo requests the workers unite around the Party and Government and to unmask the hostile provocateurs who seek to bring discord and confusion" to the ranks of the working class."

The demonstrations on the 16th lasted well into the afternoon, and even at nightfall many of the demonstrators remained in Potsdamerplatz. Small groups remained on the streets arguing with communist party agitators, and sporadic outbreaks of violence between communists and demonstrators took place. The people's police, however, were under orders not to use live ammunition or antagonize the demonstrators.

Realizing the serious proportions the situation had assumed Grotewohl and Ulbricht called a meeting of the SED (communist party) during the evening of the 16th. The rally of the Party faithful took place in the Friedrichstadtpalast, nor far from where the protest meetings were taking place. Grotewohl started the meeting with the statement that "The people

and Government

and Government belong together always." He went on to admit that the communists had made serious errors in the past, though these had been "sincere" mistakes. He admitted that the East German standard of living had been sacrificed "inadmissibly" to the increased pace of industrialization. Later, Walter Ulbricht assured the Party that production targets under the 1953 economic plan would be altered so as to considerably increase the output of mass consumer goods. The object of the new party line, according to Ulbricht was the "creation of an exemplary democratic order and the building of a peace economy which will lead to a higher living standard than that in West Germany....."

Having thus far failed in their attempts to conciliate the workers, the communists then began to prepare for the worst. During the early morning hours of June 17, Soviet motorized infantry (including tanks) and units of garrisoned people's police in company strength began to move into East Berlin. By midafternoon, about 20,000 Soviet troops and 8,000 garrisoned people's police were occupying East Berlin. The order of June 16 to the people's police forbidding the use of live ammunition was rescinded.

Fully aware that they faced Soviet troops and tanks, the workers continued with their general strike and demonstrations. Tens of thousands of railroad, textile and steel workers, and others from factories in and near East Berlin began to march in pouring rain towards the center of the city. By 7 a.m. some few thousand of them had assembled at Strausberger platz, near Stalinallee. They were evidently headed for the government buildings in Leipzigerstrasse, where about 10,000 gathered after breaking through three cordons of people's police. Three Soviet tanks were present at this point, with 12 more in reserve. Here and at other points of disturbance, the people's police and Soviet tanks moved against the crowds attempting to disperse them. Some shots were fired but actions of the Russian troops were limited chiefly to backing up the people's police who were still, apparently, under orders to be cautious.

Under pressure from Soviet tanks, some demonstrators moved to Potsdamerplatz joining others already there. Here a great deal of violence took place. Police cars were overturned, communist propaganda kiosks were set afire, policemen were forcibly disarmed and two large buildings in the square were set on fire. At 11:10 a.m., the demonstrators tore down the Red flag from Brandenburg Gate, and at 12:40 p.m., West Berlin police went on emergency alert. At 1:45 p.m., retroactive to 1:00 p.m. martial law was declared. Assemblies of more than three people were not permitted, and a curfew was imposed between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. Transportation was paralyzed. Food distribution broke down. Postal service ceased.

At 3:30 p.m. the government made an appeal for order and resumption of work. The government announced that those guilty of fomenting trouble in East Berlin were "agents" of foreign powers and their "German lackeys", and they would be severely punished.

Under the combined pressure of Soviet tanks and people's police, some semblance of order was restored, but by 5 p.m. there were still

heavy crowds

heavy crowds in the streets, and the Soviet sector of the city was full of Soviet tanks and troops. The borderline between the east and west zones of Berlin was tightly sealed.

At 6 p.m. the communist Berlin radio announced that the norm increase of May 28 had been cancelled. By about 8 p.m., order was mostly restored, and the 9 p.m. curfew was largely observed.

Taking their cue from the June 16 work stoppages in East Berlin, strikes and demonstrations broke out all over the "German Democratic Republic". Although sporadic work stoppages had previously occurred throughout East Germany the uprising in the capital was the signal for violent demonstrations, in such cities as Potsdam, Magdeburg, Leipzig, Warnemuende and Goerlitz on June 17. At least 75 East German cities were ringed with Soviet and German armed guards. It is estimated that more than 200,000 men went out on strike in the Halle district alone. One of the hardest hit areas was the mining districts in the south where the valuable uranium mines are located. By the end of the day (June 17) martial law almost blanketed the entire Soviet Zone of Germany, extending even to the agricultural areas where farmers took advantage of the general unrest to vent their feelings against the regime.

Telephone, telegraph and rail communications were disrupted in many localities. The food supply, never in good shape, was most adversely affected by the uprising, and remained in a chaotic state for several days.