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NSC Briefing

EAST GERMANY

8 July 1953

To turn now to Germany and the implication of recent events:

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[Redacted]

has prepared an analysis

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of the East German uprisings based on all information available [Redacted]

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Since the full facts of the situation are still

not known, this is not a final analysis. Nevertheless, it strikes

me as valuable as the best possible estimate to date [Redacted]

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The uprising in the East zone began on 16 June as an apparently spontaneous, small-scale movement launched by the working class. It appears that the East German regime winked at the early stages of the development. The uprising grew in size as other segments of the population joined the original demonstrators.

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During the early stages, the intervention of the East German People's Police was sporadic and half-hearted, and was successful only where backed by Soviet military might. Soviet intervention reflected a swift appraisal that the situation was getting out of control. It also indicated a definite lack of trust in the effectiveness of the People's Police.

The situation which developed rapidly was potentially revolutionary. It was generally based on widespread popular hatred of the SED functionaries, the managerial bureaucracy and the organs of repression. A number of additional factors seem to account for the explosion of feeling at this time:

- A. The ten percent raise in production norms was only the last straw. It inflamed the prevalent bitterness over drastically reduced living standards under the SED economic program. The repressive measures accompanying this program had caused large-scale desertions from the East zone. A further aggravation was the food shortage and the chronic lack of consumer goods.

B. The new course of conciliation announced by the East German Politburo on 9 June afforded enough respite for the uprising to get underway. The workers apparently felt that under the new line reprisals against them would be less severe. The SED leadership seemed confused and unable to chart a course for the workers -- so the workers took things into their own hands.

The resulting large-scale uprisings were unquestionably spontaneous. Some of the local demonstrations, however, showed a remarkable degree of organization which suggested good mass discipline and ad hoc leadership by experienced tacticians. There was a visible pattern in most of these local uprisings. First the news of the East Berlin strike, next declarations of solidarity, then strikes, and finally marches against such strongholds as SED headquarters, city halls, jails, and police installations.

It is believed that shop stewards and the revolutionary tradition of the German trade union movement played a vital role in providing leadership and unity. "New" Soviet methods of production had affronted the pride of the German worker and upset the accepted pattern of organization of the working class.

East German developments have demonstrated that an uprising from below is possible, under certain circumstances, even in a Communist police state. The Kremlin faces the imperative necessity of forestalling similar developments in the Satellites, but is loathe to admit the popular nature of the German uprisings. Consequently, Soviet propaganda insists that the riots in East Germany were engineered by outside agents who exploited "justified grievances" for their own ends.

The "uprising from below" theme should be useful in psychological warfare against the USSR. The following points inevitably suggest themselves:

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- A. SED authority is demonstrably based on Soviet bayonets.
- B. The SED not only does not have the support of the workers, but is an instrument for their repression.
- C. Soviet troops, "protectors of the workers," were used against them.
- D. Communism, far from being progressive as it claims, is reactionary in that it represses the revolution it claims to espouse.

The riots in East Germany have created problems of great magnitude for the Kremlin. In the first place, Soviet capabilities there may have depreciated to the point where the Soviet leaders must question the value of East Germany as a base for an offensive against Western Europe. They must be gravely concerned over the security of their lines of communication through East Germany in the event they launch an attack. The Kremlin must fear that the morale of East German paramilitary and police forces would break under the impact of a major war, and that these instruments could not be trusted to maintain order in the Soviet rear.

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The new economic policies of the SED run counter to the East German quest for economic self-sufficiency. If the SED policies are implemented, the build-up of heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods production will have to be scrapped. Emphasis must be placed on the farmers and consumer goods producers, but this will weaken the SED and in turn the Soviet hold over the East zone populace.

The disclosure of the extreme hostility of the East Germans to the communist system may make the German Democratic Republic less useful to the Kremlin as a base for penetrating and subverting West Germany. The appeal of communism to the West Germans, never great, has now vanished.

While Soviet unity appeals still carry some weight with the West German electorate, they no longer constitute a potent drawing card--this despite German socialist contentions that the riots prove the validity of their "unity before integration" policy.

In East Germany itself, it is now unlikely that the SED can muster popular support on a mass scale. Eventually it may have to be reduced to a mere cadre organization. However, reports that the East zone regime is about to be reorganized with the SED out and the bourgeois parties taking over appear to be highly wishful and premature. Moves which would bring the bourgeois parties more to the fore and give them an ostensible role in the government are, of course, possible. And it seems likely that an attempt will be made to broaden the popular base of the SED.

The future position of Deputy Premier Ulbricht is uncertain. However, in the light of his present treatment in the East German press his continued influence seems assured.

Despite the critical damage to the East German government's prestige it appears that the Kremlin has no other logical choice at present to maintaining the SED in power. To restore its authority, however, the USSR may be forced to compromise its

policy of concession by resorting to mass arrests. These actually have already begun. In general, however, the conciliatory course set earlier by the SED politburo will probably undergo no major change as a result of the uprising. But the concessions dictated by this course should be recognized only as tactical detours.

It is expected that the USSR will make every effort to restore order in East Germany before any four-power conference is proposed. At the moment, the Kremlin could not very well demand that SED representatives be present at such a conference.

In preparation for the remote contingency that it may have to concede German unity on Western terms, the Kremlin will maintain a covert nucleus of communist control within the East German bourgeois parties, as it probably would in any event. The long-range prospects for the success of this maneuver are not very bright, however.

This analysis of the German situation

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deals ably with the most pressing and immediate problems confronting the Kremlin as a result of the riots in the East zone. The Soviet position in East Germany and the Kremlin's entire German policy have sustained at least temporarily a paralyzing blow.

The broader, and perhaps in the long run more serious, implications of the German developments for the Orbit as a whole are still unfolding. Germany highlights for the Kremlin the question whether an alien people can indefinitely be held by force alone. If, as an alternative to force, a policy of concession be adopted, then can this be implemented without changing the basic character of the satellite regime and in the end forfeiting a serious measure of the control on which it depends? That is the dilemma.

Western press reports of large-scale demonstrations in Poland as an aftermath of the East German riots are denied by US embassy officials in Warsaw. They report that the situation is calm in Warsaw, and they noted no evidence of demonstrations or increased security precautions during trips through central, northern and southwestern Poland in late June.

Similarly, reports of strikes and demonstrations throughout the other Satellites are unconfirmed and probably untrue.

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None

of the other Satellites is known to have taken additional security precautions.

Following the riots in East Germany, the Hungarian, Albanian, and Rumanian governments announced concessions designed to improve living conditions and bolster morale. While the timing of these concessions may have been partially influenced by the

events in East Germany, there is no evidence that a sudden worsening of the situation forced the changes. Moreover, the nature and extent of the Hungarian Party and government reorganization, coinciding with the announced intent of the regime to slow down the tempo of socialization, appear to be more a reflection of the Kremlin's new conciliatory tactics, now applied to Eastern Europe. Failure of the Hungarian Parliament to meet on June 17 as prescribed by the constitution suggests that the internal changes were at least being formulated prior to the outbreak of the East German riots.

The changes in the top leadership in Hungary, which apparently ended Rakosi's one-man dominance, resemble those in the USSR following Stalin's and in Czechoslovakia following Gottwald's death. Although Rakosi retains his post as the principal member of the new Politburo and Secretariat, his post as secretary general has been abolished and he has been dropped from

the government. Imre Nagy, a long-time Communist and former minister of Crop Collection, was promoted to the premiership, while former number-two man Erno Gero retained his post on the Politburo and assumed the additional responsibilities of first deputy Premier and minister of interior.

The new government has pledged a slowdown in industrialization and collectivization, a partial return to private trade, the abolition of internment camps, an amnesty, and a rise in living standards.

In Albania, the government on 22 June cancelled all agricultural debts for the years 1949-1952. Rumania recently relaxed its grain collection program and released additional food supplies in order to alleviate a severe shortage of foodstuffs. On 6 July the Czech government suddenly repealed a week-old decree specifying stringent measures to combat labor absenteeism. Although there have been no similar developments in Bulgaria and Poland, these concessions in the other Satellites may presage a softer policy throughout the Orbit.