

- GDR: Internal affairs
Foreign relations

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CONTINUED EAST GERMAN JUSTIFICATION OF INTERVENTION

Summary: During the past week or so, the central SED press has almost every day printed articles or speeches by high-level functionaries which from various viewpoints -- political, ideological, cultural or military -- attempt to rationalize and justify the military intervention in the CSSR. The repetition of the arguments indicates the continuing need of the East German regime to convince both the functionaries and the population of the correctness of its actions, which seem to have met with wide-spread -- though mostly unpublished -- criticism. A preventive tightening in all sectors of East German life is also apparent and can be considered as one effect of the recent events in the CSSR. In addition, the articles under consideration featured the first explicit East German attacks on the Italian CP and on Yugoslavia.

The opinion expressed by a deputy editor-in-chief of Neues Deutschland (1) regarding Czechoslovakia, namely, that it would require "strenuous ideological labor to restore and consolidate correct political-moral unity in the CSSR on the basis of Marxism-Leninism," would seem to apply in many respects to the situation in the GDR, judging from the numerous articles in which East German spokesmen attempt to justify and rationalize the intervention in Czechoslovakia.

(1) Dr. Hajo Herbell, Neues Deutschland, 15 October 1968.

Attack on the Italian CP

One recent major effort along these lines was a full-page article by Hermann Axen, candidate Politburo member and CC-secretary, which appeared in Neues Deutschland under the title of "Proletarian Internationalism in Our Time." (2) The article, a basic and largely theoretical statement, categorically rejected the principle of polycentrism and upheld the supremacy of proletarian internationalism over motivations of national independence and sovereignty.

Having claimed initially that the "majority of communist parties ... supported the military aid operation of the allied socialist countries" -- thus testifying "to the maturity of the international communist movement" -- the author admitted that there were some groups and parties which had assumed a wavering "and negative" attitude towards the operation of the Warsaw Five. As an example of alleged "misunderstanding," Axen cited the Italian position of 24 August, which specifically rejected any violation of the independence of another state by military force.

The incorrectness of Axen's claim concerning support by the majority of communist parties is so blatant it need not be argued here. More remarkable is the fact that this is the first East German public admission that the PCI has disagreed with the military action. So far, East German media have taken to task prominent individual Western Communists for their dissenting views (for example, the Austrian Ernst Fischer and the Swede Carl Hendrick Hermansson) (3); but the posture of any dissenting party as a whole had not been explicitly recorded. By the same token, it is also the first official East German reprinting of at least parts of any condemning resolution, which should surprise those few East Germans who rely entirely on their domestic media for information.

Axen, of course, proceeded to take apart the Italian objections by arguing that "the independence of a state" (i.e. any state) is different from the "independence of a socialist state" when viewed in the necessary Marxist-Leninist way: the problems which the Warsaw Allies assisted Czechoslovakia in solving are problems of class struggle, of socialism pitted against imperialism, an

- (2) The article, which was published in the daily on 13 October, is an abbreviated version of a piece in the October issue of the theoretical monthly Einheit. The reason for its having been printed in the main SED daily is undoubtedly to provide a wider circle of readers.
- (3) See RFE Research report "GDR Attacks Opponents of the Czechoslovak Invasion," 17 September 1968, by Francis Miko.

influence from which no socialist country can consider itself isolated and sovereign. According to Axen, the CSSR acquired independence only thanks to the Soviet Union, which delivered it from the evils of the Masaryk-Benes regime.

The second mistake committed by the Italian comrades, Axen continued, consisted in their equating the "independence of a socialist state with the absence of foreign troops." Axen's answer to that objection is simply that "fraternal assistance is different from foreign troops."

In a highly didactic fashion, the East German functionary argued that the Italian Party's thesis of "unity through diversity" could and should never take precedence over the Leninist law of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Axen's position: the role of the working class had been downgraded in favor of other groups, thus leading to petit-bourgeois nationalism and subsequently necessitating the help of the fraternal countries.

In the self-satisfied tone which has characterized many of the East German statements after the August events in the CSSR -- implying or stating that the East German Party had always chosen the correct way in contrast to the road chosen by the CS Party, for example -- Axen wrote with reference to the Italian position:

The SED considers the theory of polycentrism entirely irreconcilable with Marxism-Leninism and contradictory to all the experiences of communist and workers' parties.

Finally, Axen made great efforts to discount the Italian contention that the Soviet Party was imposing itself as the "uniform center" and as the "leading party" on the rest of the communist states and parties. He claimed that there does not exist any "unified organizational leading center," but immediately added that after all, the Soviet Union is the most "progressive and powerful state in the world" and that without the Soviet Union, there would be no "socialist world system and no powerful communist world movement." (4)

- (4) Hermann Axen's schoolmasterly diatribe met with an almost immediate reaction from the PCI. Luigi Longo himself rejected the East German charges during his speech to the Italian CC; Unità, 19 October 1968.

In addition to Axen's direct criticism of the PCI, Ulbricht also took an indirect swipe at this party in a speech delivered on the 20th anniversary of the East German Academy of Law. (5) In his lengthy indictment of Czechoslovak developments prior to 21 August, Ulbricht accused "political pluralism" -- a variant of the Italian theory of diversity -- of having become the "state doctrine of counterrevolution in order to legalize the struggle for the elimination of socialism." Without explaining further any logical connection, Ulbricht then mentioned:

... Comrade Palmiro Togliatti, who has acquired great merits in the fight for the international workers' movement. In former years, I have worked well with him in the Comintern...

It is hardly possible to defile the memory of Togliatti more crudely than to recall the times of Comintern which was dissolved in 1943.

Attacks on Yugoslavia

In consideration of the current flurry of Soviet-Yugoslav polemics, it is in fact rather surprising that the East German had so far refrained from openly attacking the leadership of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Party's unequivocal stance on the invasion of the CSSR. Ulbricht dealt with the subject indirectly in the above-mentioned speech when he argued that "bourgeois self-management, even though it is termed socialist, has nothing in common with socialist democracy." Again, the frame of reference was the CSSR and the "destructive imperialist influences" on that country before the action of the Warsaw Five; but the allusion to Yugoslavia, including the rejection of a decentralized economy, was unmistakable, as borne out by the immediate Yugoslav reaction. (6)

The first straight-forward attack on Yugoslavia was delivered by Politburo reporter Gerhard Grueneberg during the current session of the Ninth SED-CC Plenum. (7) Once again, it was in context with the Czechoslovak situation that the Yugoslavs were mentioned as "having joined the choir of those who have loudly condemned the assistance given to the CSSR by the five socialist countries." Grueneberg specified that "some leading functionaries of the League of Yugoslav Communists"

- (5) The speech was made on 12 October and printed in Neues Deutschland, 16 October 1968.
- (6) The Yugoslav Politika, 17 October, featured a Tanjug dispatch in which Ulbricht's remarks are interpreted as applying to Yugoslavia. The charge was also rejected by the theoretical weekly Komunist, 24 October.
- (7) Neues Deutschland, 23 October 1968.

termed the events of 21 August as "interference in the internal affairs of that country" and as "a severe blow against socialism." Raising a warning voice, the Politburo speaker added emphatically that "whether it was admitted or not, the Warsaw Pact Five, above all the Soviet Union, represented a guarantee for the socialism in Yugoslavia also and for its so-called non-aligned policy." Such words have indeed an ominous ring when one thinks of the "protection" given to the CSSR by the Warsaw Five.

Treatment of the Czechoslovak Situation

Basically, East Germany's attitude towards Czechoslovakia has not changed since the first justification of the invasion. The theme -- of anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary forces in Czechoslovakia which collaborated with imperialist, primarily West German, elements -- has been repeated and elaborated ad nauseam. No matter what the occasion, this stand is reaffirmed by East Germany as the only correct one, and one that has been correct for many years. To mention a few recent examples: Werner Lamberz, CC-secretary, speaking at the opening of the Party year in Rostock, stated that the SED had always rejected any model of a "third-road" which had begun before August in the CSSR. (8) In his first lengthy statement on the CSSR after the invasion, Walter Ulbricht (9) polemicized harshly against the Czechoslovak revisionists, reviewing in detail the crimes of the theoreticians and the intellectuals, and pointing out proudly that, as early as 1965 the SED had refuted the alienation theories of Professor Goldstuecker in the ideological-cultural field. At a reception for graduates of the military academy, Ulbricht returned to this subject and claimed that the common military action "had sharply retraced for everyone to see the Bohemian Forest border which had become dimmed in the view of some Western positions." (10) At the 13th session of the State Council, Walter Ulbricht ascribed the Czechoslovak crisis to the ideological co-existence preached by numerous writers and intellectuals. (11) During this same session, Ulbricht was outdone in clarity only by his Minister of Culture, Klaus Gysi, who ascribed the 1963 Kafka-Conference at Liblice as the beginning of the evils in the CSSR, and urged East German artists and writers to always maintain an ideologically pure, partiinost point of view, stemming

(8) Neues Deutschland, 15 October 1968.

(9) See (5) above.

(10) Neues Deutschland, 18 October 1968.

(11) Neues Deutschland, 19 October 1968.

from conscious class struggle and using socialist realism. It was Gysi who also singled out Professor Robert Havemann, and the protest singer Wolf Biermann, as isolated and defeated political elements.

From the repetition and variations of the theme, a number of conclusions can be deduced:

1. The need to continuously justify the invasion stems from the internal situation of the GDR. The voluble ideological campaign against revisionism is supposed to suppress, if not kill, the many objections which have been voiced, though not published in East Germany. One manifestation of the open criticism of East German participation in the invasion and of sympathy with the Prague reformers, are several teen-agers (among them two sons of Professor Havemann), who according to the Western press are on trial for their stated objections to the invasion.

2. The affluence of anti-revisionist statements denotes not only the East German determination to nip any isolated or organized criticism in the bud, but also the regime's vulnerability to such criticism. The same reasons for the GDR's sensitivity to the Prague Spring still prevail.

3. The GDR has resorted to open polemics with various communist countries and parties in an effort to: (a) isolate itself from revisionist influences; (b) consolidate those who remain orthodox and (c) to prevent further deterioration of communist unity.

4. Because of the result of the pre-August Czechoslovak developments which immanently threatened the security of the East German regime, the SED is further tightening, if that is possible, all political, ideological and cultural reins in its own domain.

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