

## WAS THE SBZ/GDR IN THE SOVIET BLOC?

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The purpose of this essay is to explore the question of whether the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany (SBZ) and the newly created German Democratic Republic (GDR) were considered part of the Soviet bloc by Moscow communists and their comrades in Germany. In the traditional literature on the development of the Soviet bloc, eastern Germany is either excluded from the discussion or considered part and parcel of the common processes involved in the Sovietization of the region.<sup>1</sup> The problem of the extent to which the SBZ and the years of the GDR belong to postwar East European history is of course central to a number of other historical issues, the most persistent of which involves the willingness of the Soviet Union to countenance the unification of Germany. Now that the GDR is gone, these kinds of questions also resonate in discussions about the organization of GDR studies itself. To what extent should the GDR be studied as a subdiscipline of German history or as part of East European studies, or perhaps as both.

Part of the problem in answering the questions posed above derives from the wide variety of images and concepts surrounding the idea of the „Soviet bloc.“ If one accepts the definition of the Soviet bloc as that cho-

sen circle of countries which were designated as „Peoples Democracies“, then the SBZ and GDR remains outside the group. As a „workers and farmers state“, even in its late phases the GDR never assumed the appellation of Peoples Democracy. In addition, concrete organizational and institutional signs of being a member of the Soviet bloc came relatively late to the GDR. Only in November 1950 did the GDR become part the RGW (Rat für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe), the last of the East European countries to join. Even at that, one should perhaps date the GDR's joining of the bloc to 1955, when it became officially sovereign and was admitted to the newly formed Warsaw Pact. But, at that point, at least in military-strategic terms, the GDR's membership was still more formalistic than real. One could argue the same for its position as member of the Soviet bloc.

Formal definitions and formal institutional arrangements, however, cannot capture the essence of the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. First of all, the weight of Soviet military might must be taken into account; in this instance, the SBZ/GDR should be considered part of the Soviet bloc from the spring of 1945, when the Red Army marched into the country. In the famous passage, Milovan Djilas quoted Stalin as saying: „Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.“<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is probably better to think about issues of Soviet control in political rather than military terms, and in this sense, the origins of the Sovietization of the SBZ might be better traced to June 11, 1945, and the official formation of the KPD, or to the spring of 1946 and the unity of the KPD and SPD into the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED). One could make the argument as well that the development of the SED as a „party of the new type“ in the summer and winter of 1948-49 formally marked the entry of the SBZ into the Soviet bloc. With a Leninist-Stalinist party and a newly formed military formation, the „barracked People's Police“, Ulbricht and his fellow German communists could think of themselves, at least, as part and parcel of the new „democratic“ bloc. At this point, Ulbricht could even threaten the use of force to drive the reactionaries to the English channel.

However one chooses to think about the entry of eastern Germany into the Soviet bloc, it is clear that the SBZ, if not the GDR in its mature phases, was an exceptional case within the East European countries, like Po-

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution*, 3rd ed., (New York: Praeger, 1961); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc, Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Jens Hacker, *Der Ostblock* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1983); and Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962), p. 114.

land and Czechoslovakia, were also exceptional cases!<sup>3</sup> Eastern Germany was the only part of the Soviet realm that was a partition of a country, the only one whose legitimacy could not be based on national grounds. Despite the similar processes of Sovietization that it went through with its eastern neighbors, for the first decade of its existence the SBZ/GDR always remained somehow separate from the others. The purpose of this essay is to examine this separateness against the background of new documents that have become available in Moscow and in some cases published abroad. First, the essay reviews new Cominform documents that have been made available in the former Central Committee Archives, the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary Documents of History (RTsKhIDNI). They have been translated, interpreted, and published by a team of Italian and Russian historians, sponsored by the Feltrenelli Foundation. Especially valuable in the collection are the full publication and annotations of the protocols of the three meetings of the Cominform.<sup>4</sup> Second, the essay will discuss a series of documents from the period of the Soviet Control Commission, 1949-1953, asking the question whether the relations between Soviet military authorities in Germany and the German communists changed substantially after the founding of the GDR in October 1949.<sup>5</sup> This will help us answer the question whether the founding of the GDR itself marked an entry point for the East Germans into the Soviet bloc. Finally, I will look at the ways in which the German communists in the SBZ thought about their special place in the Soviet bloc. This history – which is mostly of frustrated ambitions – is taken primarily from Soviet and East German materials presented in my recent work.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example, Charles Gati makes the case that Poland was „sui generis within the bloc“.

<sup>4</sup> The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949, ed. by Giuliano Procacci (Milan: Feltrenelli Editore, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> These documents are located in the former Central Party Archives in Moscow, RTsKhIDNI, fond (f.) 17, opis (op.) 137.

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Bernd Bonwetsch, Gennadii Bordiugov, and Norman M. Naimark, *SVAG: Upravlenie propagandy (informatii) i S. I. Tiul'panov, 1945-1949* (Moscow: „Rossiia Molodaia“, 1994).

## The Cominform

Historians have suggested that the disbandment of the Comintern – the organization of the Communist International – in 1943 was the result of Stalin's attempts to defuse his Western Allies' suspicions of Moscow's adherence to the goals of world revolution. But it is also important to point out that Stalin and his lieutenants had no love for multilateral relations between the communist parties, preferring instead to deal with each party separately. As a result, during the war, Stalin and Georgi Dimitrov expanded institutional arrangements within the Soviet Central Committee to handle relations with foreign communist parties. In various iterations, the International Department of the Central Committee, responsible initially to Dimitrov (and later to Andrei Zhdanov and to Mikhail Suslov), became the primary link between Soviet policy imperatives and foreign communist parties.<sup>7</sup> Many of the personnel and functions attached to the Comintern then shifted to this Central Committee department. Even after the formation of the Cominform, the International Department in its various forms remained the political backbone of the Soviet bloc because of its focus on relations between the Soviet party and its East European clients.

According to the most recent research on the Cominform, as early as June of 1946, communist leaders – among them Dimitrov and Tito – began talking about an information bureau to coordinate the activities of the various communist parties and to provide a forum for problems of mutual interest.<sup>8</sup> Stalin was against the formation of a new Comintern. Still, by June of 1947, Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka expressed the consensus among communist leaders when he suggested that a common meeting of party leaders should be held without necessarily forming a new organization of the workers' movement. Between June 1947, when Gomulka called for a meeting, and September 1947, when the first meeting of the

<sup>7</sup> In this period, the department was called variously: International Information Department, July 1944 - December 1945; the Foreign Affairs Department, January 1946 - July 1948; and the Department of the Foreign Relations of the Central Committee; July 1948 - March 1949. In March 1949 it became the Foreign Policy Commission, in October 1952 the Commission for Relations with Foreign Communist Parties, and in March 1953, the Department for Relations with Foreign Communist Parties.

<sup>8</sup> Up-to-date histories of the rise and fall of the Cominform are available in the collection *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, cited above. See, in particular, the articles by Anna Di Biagio, „The Establishment of the Cominform“, pp. 11-35; Leonid Gibianskii, „The Beginning of the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Cominform“, pp. 465-483, and Silvio Pons, „The Twilight of the Cominform“, pp. 483-505. See also G. M. Adibekov, *Kominform i poslevoennaia evropa* (Moscow, „Rossiia Molodaia“, 1994).

Cominform was held in Szklarska Poreba in Poland. Soviet thinking about the meeting underwent a pronounced shift. In August 1947, L. S. Baranov, deputy head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Central Committee, suggested that the parties meet not only to exchange information, in the spirit of Gomulka's call, but to develop a „common point of view“ about the international situation. He named in particular three points that needed to be stressed. First, democratic organizations should struggle against the economic enslavement of the European nations through the newly proclaimed Marshall Plan. Second, the party leaders should discuss the governmental and economic structure of Germany. Finally, the meeting should lead to more intense relations between the Soviet communist party and the European parties.<sup>9</sup> From the documents evaluated by Anna Di Biagio, it is clear as well that Baranov (and his boss Andrei Zhdanov) rejected Dimitrov's call for the founding of an International Committee against War and Fascism. Like Stalin, they were not interested in unnecessarily increasing antagonisms with the West. The meeting with communist parties would be held in secret and only a brief communique would be distributed on its conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

If Baranov's notes on the proposed meeting represented an escalation of goals from that of Gomulka, Zhdanov's own ideas developed at the end of August and the beginning of September 1947 represented another important shift. Zhdanov was both more radical in his goals and more focussed. He wanted no general discussion of the German question, presumably to keep maximum flexibility on the issue in the Kremlin. At the same time, he looked for a discussion about the „errors“ of the French, Italian, and Czechoslovak parties. Also, Zhdanov made an important connection between the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine – as part and parcel of an aggressive and expansionist imperialist policy directed by Washington – that went far beyond Baranov's initial analysis.<sup>11</sup> It is probably not an exaggeration to say that the Soviet leaders were shocked, confused, and outflanked by the Marshall Plan. As a result, in the weeks before the Cominform meeting, an appropriate response was utmost in their minds.

From the new research in the Cominform materials, it is also clear that the notion of different roads to socialism had already been thoroughly discredited in Soviet circles. There would be only one road, that of the Soviet Union. Especially in the preconference document, „Zakonomernost' rosta

vliiania kommunisticheskikh partii v evropeiskikh stranakh“ (The Lawfulness of the Growth of the Influence of Communist Parties in European countries), the Soviet party bureaucrats emphasized the necessity for all Peoples Democracies to go through well-defined stages mimicking the Soviet past to accomplish the dream of socialism. The document indicated that Yugoslavia and Albania had gotten a good start on this road, while Bulgaria was following somewhat behind. The Hungarians lagged further behind, and the Czechoslovak party, according to this document, made so many errors that it endangered the new democracy at its core.<sup>12</sup>

During the conference itself, Zhdanov was clearly in the driver's seat. In almost daily contact with Stalin, Zhdanov imposed his point-of-view on the assembled communist leaders. In order to undermine the hegemony of the Marshall Plan, communist parties were urged to strengthen their alliances with bourgeois parties. Although Zhdanov developed elements of his „two-worlds“ theory, based on inherent antagonisms between socialism and capitalism, he also held out some hope that the contradictions in imperialism – especially those between the United States and England – might result in war. As far as correcting the mistaken ideas of „separate roads to socialism“, which he attributed in particular to the French party, Zhdanov urged closer ties between the Soviet party and the parties in Western Europe. The routine distinctions made between the communist parties in Western and Eastern Europe already indicated that a Soviet bloc was in the making. The German party, the SED, was left hanging somewhere inbetween, though Zhdanov made it clear in his formal speech that the USSR stood for a united, peaceful, demilitarized, and democratized Germany.<sup>13</sup>

The second meeting of the Cominform, held June 19-23, 1948, was almost exclusively devoted to the problems between the Soviet and Yugoslav parties. During the preparation for the meeting, all other questions were stricken from the agenda. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that in the pre-meeting documents the Yugoslavs were accused of having encouraged the Austrian party to seek an extended Soviet occupation of Austria. Zhdanov was particularly riled by the Austrian comrades, whom he felt relied excessively on Soviet support. In a meeting with them in February 1948, he insisted that they accelerate the struggle for national sovereignty, like the German communists, and eliminate the need for an

<sup>9</sup> Di Biagio, „The Establishment of the Cominform“, pp. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the First Conference“, The Cominform, pp. 217-251.

occupation. He also made it clear that he was against the partition of Austria, just as he opposed the division of Germany.<sup>14</sup>

During the Second Cominform Congress itself, the Soviets used the alleged Tito conspiracy as a means to strengthen the bloc and eliminate any opposition within the communist party leadership. Now, the idea of a separate road to communism was fiercely and uncompromisingly attacked. (Anton Ackermann recanted his ideas on the subject after the meeting in September 1948). The Second Congress also selected a permanent Secretariat, which met twice in Bucharest, July 5, 1948, and June 14-15, 1949. The leading communist at these meetings was Mikhail Suslov; Zhdanov died in August 1948. This was a period in which the East European purges grew in scope and intensity. Gomulka was removed from his post as General-Secretary in June 1948 and arrested in 1951. In May 1949, the Hungarian communist leader Laszlo Rajk was, in Charles Gati's words, „arrested as a Titoist, tortured, sentenced, and killed.“<sup>15</sup> In these cases and others, the Cominform documents indicate that the Soviets played the role of the agitator rather than the instigator, encouraging the local parties to root out alleged counterrevolutionaries rather than identifying the enemy's agents.

The third meeting of the Cominform, November 16 – November 19, 1949, showed no more interest in Germany or the German communists than the first two. Most of the discussion focused on Rakosi's report about the Rajk trial and the relative success of various European parties in exposing „enemies of the people“. The founding of the GDR was mentioned and the famous congratulatory telegram from Stalin to Otto Grotewohl was cited.<sup>16</sup> But at the third meeting, like the first two, the problems and interests of the German communists was very far away from the main concerns of the Central Committee of the Soviet party and the Cominform.

## The Soviet Control Commission and the German Communists

A second new document base that can help us understand the way the German communists fit (or did not fit) into the Soviet bloc is comprised of protocols, about a dozen in all, that recount a series of meetings in 1950 between the Soviet leadership in the GDR and SED party leaders. On the Soviet side, this means Army General V. I. Chuikov, his chief political advisor V. S. Semenov, and sometimes Semenov's deputy I. I. Il'ichev and the chief Soviet economic officer, K. I. Koval. The main interlocutors on the German side were Walter Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl, Wilhelm Pieck, and sometimes Hermann Matern, head of the SED's party control commission. In comparing the overall tone and content of these meetings with those of Soviet and German communists before the founding of the GDR, it is fairly clear that little had changed in the essence of the occupation. From the Soviet point of view, the German communists could never do things exactly the right way; either they were too willful and did not follow instructions carefully enough or they were too dependent and did not take sufficient initiative on their own. At the same time, there appeared to be somewhat better relations between the interlocutors than in the SBZ period. It was clear that the conversation was among comrades, and the Soviets treated the Germans with politeness and respect. Still, there was no question who listened and who gave the orders.

Typical of these conversations were those revolving around the Soviet concerns about the German's preparations for a new Five Year Plan. During a discussion of February 28, 1950, when Ulbricht was in Moscow, General Chuikov let Pieck and Grotewohl know how unhappy he was that Ulbricht had written a letter placing much of the responsibility for the plan on the Soviet Control Commission. Pieck tried to assure the general that Ulbricht indicated only that the German communists and Soviet Control Commission had common interests in the plan and that the help of the „brotherly party“ would be necessary to complete it successfully. Chuikov remained firm. Certainly the Soviets would help, he said. But the Germans had to understand that they were now adults and would have to formulate their own economic plans. Pieck tried to ameliorate the conflict by suggesting that although the Germans now had their independence, they were also very inexperienced and therefore needed the help of the Soviets. It would be wrong, Pieck stated, to go to Moscow with an unrealistic plan.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Pons, „The Twilight of the Cominform“, pp. 489-490.

<sup>15</sup> Gati, Hungary and the Soviet Bloc, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> „Minutes of the Third Conference“, The Cominform, p. 695.

<sup>17</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 309. 11. 1-7. (Chuikov, Pieck, Grotewohl, with participation of Semenov, Koval, Il'ichev, Rau, February 28, 1950).

General Chuikov questioned the Germans' work on the plan in another discussion on April 21, 1950, in which Ulbricht also took part. Chuikov warned the German comrades that the time was passing by quickly and that the draft of the plan that he had seen by Heinrich Rau contained very few important details. Ulbricht was apologetic, promising the general that he would take responsibility for writing up the plan himself. But Ulbricht also made it clear to the Soviets that the GDR was at a distinct disadvantage in meeting its economic goals given the fact that the People's Democracies continued to make demands – albeit just ones – on the East German economy. Ulbricht also used the opportunity to voice one of his pet complaints, that the Soviet Stock Companies (SAGs) removed materials from the East German economy at will and outside the plan. Chuikov's response in many ways contradicted his earlier statements. He let Ulbricht know in no uncertain terms that the Soviet Central Committee's directives about the plan were to be treated as military commands; they were to be fulfilled under any circumstances. As for the SAGs, Chuikov made it clear that – as in the early years of the occupation – the Soviet commander-in-chief had no competence to deal with their activities. If Ulbricht wanted changes in their procedures, he would have to deal with their chief, B. S. Kobulov.<sup>18</sup>

As in the case of the plan, on political questions General Chuikov also chided the Germans for not acting with sufficient independence. Grotewohl regretfully concurred, stating at one point that the government of the GDR functioned as if it stood only on one leg of an administration, the other of which was to be found in Karlshorst with the Soviet command.<sup>19</sup> During this same conversation, Semenov chimed in with his own rather contradictory complaint that a number of German communists did not make sufficient effort to inform the Soviet authorities about their actions in questions of principle. Semenov even interpreted this as an expression of German nationalism among the SED leaders.<sup>20</sup>

From Semenov's comments, it is apparent that the Soviets remained highly interested in exerting executive control over every aspect of the political life of the GDR. Chuikov regularly instructed Grotewohl on how one should deal with government ministers, and Grotewohl and Ulbricht

were anxious to use the general's influence to sway recalcitrant government members from the „bourgeois“ parties. Chuikov and Semenov were also not hesitant to interfere directly in the appointments of important leaders. For example, on May 17, 1950, Chuikov and Semenov made it clear to Pieck and Grotewohl that the leader of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (Jürgen Kuczynski) was incapable of leading the mass organization and should be replaced by someone with the appropriate „national adherence“, meaning not a Jew. Semenov suggested Anton Ackermann for the post. Ulbricht carefully demurred, stating that it would be better if the new head of the organization was not so closely associated with the SED party leadership („überparteilich“).<sup>21</sup>

The conversations between the Soviet Control Commission leaders and the SED chiefs ranged over a broad spectrum of issues. They talked about the problems of getting more workers for the Wismut uranium mines, about paying off Hermann Kastner for his loyalty, about communications with German POWs, about the return of General Paulus to Germany, about entering the RGW, and so on. The Soviets also made a point of keeping close tabs on the workings of the SED party control commission. On April 19, 1950, Chuikov and Il'ichev had a conversation with Matern about Horst Sindermann's past, in which Matern sheepishly admitted that he knew little about Sindermann's supposed sins. The Soviets then provided references to Gestapo documents which allegedly implicated Sindermann in turning over antifascists to the Nazis. The Soviets also hinted that Ulbricht himself was responsible for Sindermann's elevation in the party and that it was up to Matern to clear up the matter. The Soviet comrades acted the part of experts on „conspiracies“, instructing Matern on the importance of reconstructing patronage networks, especially those that included Paul Merker and Pieck's secretary, Walter Bartel. Constant questions from the Soviets about repercussions of the Rajk „conspiracy“ in the GDR no doubt left Matern scurrying for a serious reply of any sort.<sup>22</sup> Later, Semenov chided Ulbricht and Grotewohl for allowing Sindermann to continue his functions when compromised by the Gestapo documents.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 309, ll. 84-98. (Chuikov, Grotewohl, Ulbricht, with participation of Semenov, Il'ichev, Kiiatkin, April 21, 1950).

<sup>19</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 309, l. 5. (Chuikov, Grotewohl, Ulbricht, with participation of Semenov, Il'ichev, Kiiatkin, April 21, 1950).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., l. 6.

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One could discuss many instances of Soviet influence on the development of the GDR in the early 1950s. In the three brief cases cited above – economic planning, political development, and party purges – the Soviets exerted more than what they liked to call „control“ over their German comrades. Even if one considers the GDR a full member of the Soviet bloc in 1950-51, this membership did not relieve the SED leaders of an occupation regime that was both willing and able to interfere directly in the decisions of government and the economy.

### The Soviets and the SBZ

Moscow considered all of Eastern Europe its sphere of influence, an important and in some cases critical realm of security interests. At the end of the war, Poland and Romania fell clearly within the most immediate Soviet security zone. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were cases in which there was room for compromise, at least at the outset of the postwar period, but they too gradually became part of the Soviet bloc. As for the countries of Western Europe, Stalin quickly recognized that the security interests of the United States and Great Britain would be vitally affected by any direct Soviet interference. The communists in the region were therefore left to promote Soviet interests by making coalitions with middle-class parties in support of bourgeois governments. The case of Germany was much less clear. In fact, my work on the Soviet Military Administration in Germany has led me to conclude that Soviet policy in Germany – both during the war and after – was fundamentally opportunistic in character and therefore left a great deal of room for tactical manoeuvring and diplomacy.

The unsettled character of the German question left the German communists in a terrible position. Pieck and Ulbricht were simply not allowed to talk about a Peoples Democracy in Germany or to establish serious relations with so-called „brotherly“ parties. Repeatedly, they were told by their Soviet „friends“ that they were not developed enough to join the hallowed ranks of the community of socialists. The Soviet authorities argued that the party was still too unformed and the state too wedded to its bourgeois past to think of a socialist transformation. Colonel Sergei Tiul'panov, who guided the political life of the zone more than any other single figure, seemed to enjoy putting his German comrades in their place by making it clear that they were not as important as they thought. In April 1948, he told them that the SBZ stood far behind the countries of Eastern

Europe: „Yugoslavia has already reached the other bank [a socialist state]; Bulgaria is taking the last few strokes to reach it; Poland and Czechoslovakia are about in the middle of the river, followed by Romania and Hungary, which have gone about a third of the way, while the Soviet Occupation zone has just taken the first few strokes away from the bourgeois bank.“<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, Tiul'panov wanted the SED to swim faster, and he said so at the first Party Conference in January 1949, when he noted as well that the SBZ was already a partition state. But Tiul'panov had powerful opponents on this issue in the Soviet Central Committee, and he was disciplined by the Moscow comrades for his rash and injudicious statements. While the SED leadership was chomping at the bit to assume the mantle of „a party of the new type“ and push forward the class struggle in the zone, even Stalin tried to calm their ardor, warning them in December 1948 not to play the Teutons, „brave, perhaps, but very stupid.“<sup>25</sup> Stalin was the ultimate tactician on the German question. He was in no mood to let the SED leaders interfere with his complex chess match with the West over the fate of Germany.

Not only were the German communists not allowed to interfere with Stalin's diplomatic manoeuvres regarding Germany, except when told to do so, for example in the movement for the „National Front“, but they were also kept out of the councils of international communism – the Cominform. The SED was not invited to send representatives to the first meeting in Szklarska Poreba and were not told about its proceedings until the meeting had concluded. The German communists were also kept isolated from any further Cominform activities. Their job was to assimilate the Cominform resolutions for their own tasks in the zone, but they were not allowed to play any role in their formulation. Even after the foundation of the GDR, Pieck conceded to Chuikov in one of their conversations that the SED was not strong enough to take an active role in national German politics and to participate in the international peace movement, critical at that point to international communist organizations.

All of this must have been very painful for the German communists. They were almost completely isolated within the Soviet realm of influence, forbidden both to interfere with Soviet manoeuvring in the German question and unable to deal politically with their socialist neighbors. They

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 326.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 312.

were told that they were the most backward of socialist parties and they were not allowed to transform their society into a People's Democracy. In other words, even if one considers the SBZ or the GDR in its earliest period part of the Soviet bloc, they have to be considered a peculiar ghetto within the bloc, one whose leaders constantly had to ask permission from their Soviet „friends“ to assert their prerogatives as a Marxist-Leninist party. Like a different sort of ghetto during the war, the East German ghetto could also have been eliminated at any time by the dictator. Perhaps, indeed, that was its purpose.

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