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All Quiet on the West German Front: Changes in East German Political Agitation in Western Germany, 1945-1955

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<u>Introduction</u>

To many early scholars, the Cold War epitomized bipolarity – between the United States and Soviet Union, between communism and capitalism, between liberty and totalitarianism, between east and west. Beginning in 1991, however, scholarship informed by temporal distance and unlocked archives, has thrown such strict bipolarities into doubt and recognized the agency of the superpowers' allies and satellites in the Cold War. These diverse parties, notably East Germany, waged political warfare using all means short of conventional war to win an existential ideological conflict. One of the most persistent tactics focused on mobilizing foreign populations through propaganda, agitation and organization. Previous studies of East German attempts to influence West Germany have focused on the late Cold War, particularly the 1970s and 1980s, leaving the early Cold War largely unstudied.[1] To fill that gap, this paper asks how East Germans participated in the Cold War's non-violent conflict as Marxists, and as Germans, in the decade from 1945 until 1955. Drawing on East German archives, this paper appraises East German rhetoric towards West Germans as agitation, which targeted foreign audiences with a combination of propaganda and calls to action.

The communist and German identities of East German leaders are crucial for understanding the complex and evolving approach leaders took to agitation in West Germany. On one hand, common perceptions of Soviet propaganda and agitation assume that the gospels of Marx and Lenin produced efforts

which harped on common communist themes and targeted the working class and minorities. On the other hand, historians, including Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson and others, have observed that leftists in the Marxist and anti-colonialist movements reclaimed nationalism and patriotism for their own uses after World War II.[2] The horrors perpetrated by fascists discredited the right's claim to the nation for most of the world. At the same time, the Soviet Union, the left's standard bearer, found traditional devices of Russian nationalism useful for motivating its population through the brutal demands of the Great Patriotic War.[3] As the global communist left rehabilitated nationalism, did they inject it into their agitation when appropriate, as it was the case in a divided Germany? If they did, would they be willing to instrumentalize German nationalism, undoubtedly the most tainted of all national traditions in the post-1945 era?

In the decade following the war, the East Germans adapted their agitational rhetoric in West Germany in response to changes at home and abroad. This investigation, based on East German archives, demonstrates that East German agitation from 1945 to 1955 initially conformed with the stereotypical vision of Soviet-bloc agitation as promoting socialist unity through communist parties. However, 1948 and 1949 brought shifting political objectives in the Soviet zone and Germany's formal division into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany). German national unity and peace became the twin goals for East German agitation and movements in West Germany. Only four years after the horrors of Auschwitz, East German operations to influence West Germans consistently employed rhetoric prioritizing the sanctity of the German nation over traditional communist objectives. Beginning in 1949, the National Front, a new umbrella political group based in East Germany, served as the most important vehicle for delivering new messages emphasizing national unity and peace to West Germans through its operations in West and East Germany. After 1952, East German agitation

retained its language of reunification, but it focused more narrowly on spurring West Germans to oppose various treaties under consideration by the West German parliament.

Rhetoric in 1945-1948: Agitating for Socialist Unity

On May 8, 1945, World War II in Europe ended, and a shattered Germany faced an unclear future. The country, under the control of the war's victors, had the potential to break with the Nazi period, sweep away tradition, and refashion society.[4] The mix of uncertainty and possibility fueled debate, about how the left ought to proceed in the Soviet zone and Germany, between three dominant political groups: Walter Ulbricht's clique, which boasted Soviet backing, the ultra-leftists, and the "unionists." The influence of Soviet military occupation authorities ensured that these disagreements temporarily resolved in favor of Ulbricht, who advanced Soviet demands for policies focused on unifying working-class parties. This section begins by examining the resolution of this debate, including the repudiation of both the radical leftists and the "unionists," denounced by Soviets as nationalist. It then examines how East German rhetoric in and towards the Western zones reflected a consolidation around socialist unity and working-class unity before this message started to break down in 1948. During these years, leaders in the Soviet zone depended heavily on the Communist Party (KPD) as the vehicle for organizing agitation in the western zones, while information efforts slowly gathered steam in the form of papers, radio broadcasts and providing materials to the KPD.

Coalescing Around Socialist Unity

As the German left experienced a post-war renaissance, three strands emerged contesting the primary concern for the leftist program in Germany, particularly in the Soviet zone. These factions were: the ultra-leftists, the "Muscovites," and the union-

ists. Although their debate immediately grappled with the implementation of leftism in regions under direct Soviet control, neither Soviets nor Germans seemed to plan for Germany's division.[5] Thus, the debate was not one whose resolution would or could be constrained to the Soviet zone. Ulbricht's victory propelled rhetoric and techniques designed to build a unified leftist movement across Germany but controlled by the future rulers of East Germany.

Ultra-leftists emerged from the rubble of the Third Reich ready to immediately build new, local-level workers' paradises. Drawing heavily from leftists who weathered the war in Germany, this disorganized strain sought to take advantage of society's near-total destruction to immediately deliver on the long-awaited worker control of local industry and politics. The "Muscovites" were the small clique of German communists, including key future leaders such as Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, who had spent the war under the Soviet Union's protection and returned to Germany in the war's final days as Soviet proxies. They were singularly concerned during these years with reestablishing order, maintaining their status in Soviet eyes and entrenching Soviet control over the zone. The third strand, the "unionists," emerged in 1946 in response to early signs that Germany might be headed towards division. They argued that the left's primary goal should be ensuring German unity above everything else.

The Soviet Union played a key role in the suppression of the ultra-leftists and the crystallization around socialist unity in 1946. In the vacuum left by the collapse of the Nazi government, the ultra-leftists in some towns in eastern Germany set about building local administrations featuring red flags, worker leadership and leftist greetings and anthems. Although local Soviet military authorities sometimes tolerated these experiments, as the Soviet occupation grew more organized, senior officers ordered the experiments be curtailed in preference for administrations less alienating to non-communist Germans. By the end of 1945, pressure from the Soviet military occupation had disman-

tled most projects deemed overly radical.[6] Throughout 1945, the Soviet Union and their Muscovite proxies also suppressed spontaneous drives for socialist unity, much to the confusion of ultra-radicals, and maintained that the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) would survive as an independent party. However, early election results elsewhere in Central Europe returned results favoring social democrats over communists, casting doubt on the KPD's ability to win Soviet zone elections as a stand-alone party. Thus, in 1946, Soviet authorities and their German lackeys abruptly changed course to ensure that Soviet proxies would remain in control in the eastern zone; instead of suppressing the left's impulse to unify, they now forced a union at gun-point. After a hotly-contested deliberation, the Soviet-zone SPD split with the party in the other three zones and elected to unify with the KPD to create the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED).[7] The SED gradually became a vehicle for Ulbricht and his successors to rule East Germany, but immediately following its establishment, it retained a significant role for the SPD and aspirations to spread to the American, British and French zones.

Between 1946 and 1948, the Soviet authorities successfully suppressed unionist dissenters, who challenged the growing emphasis on socialist unity as a threat to Germany's national unity. After the SED's establishment, the unionists argued in a series of public articles and private discussions that the German left should prioritize German unity, asserting that a unique German road to socialism required a singular Germany. These unionists, more so than the ultra-leftists, offered an alternative vision for agitation in the non-Soviet zones, preferring rhetoric and action designed to promote German unity, even if this compromised the nascent socialist unity project.

Sergei Tiul'panov, the director of propaganda for the Soviet Military Administration of Germany, led the charge against unionist campaigns. Even before the unionists emerged, Tiul'panov instructed the SED to avoid any hint of nationalism and repeatedly lectured the Muscovites about the importance of

hewing to a Soviet interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. When the unionists leveled their challenge against the socialist unity project, Tiul'panov derided the "German road" to socialism as "residual nationalism and chauvinism."[8] By the end of 1946, unionist ideas fell by the wayside in both Soviet directions for and the German practice of agitation in the western zones. By the end of 1946, the unionists had been marginalized in communist agitation in the western zones. In January 1947, senior Soviet leaders summoned their German proxies to a meeting in Moscow, described by Naimark as the most important of this period. Here, Josef Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov directed the Germans to intensify the struggle for the German working class in the western zones.[9]

Socialist Unity in Walter Ulbricht's Files

In 1947, acting on Stalin's directions, Walter Ulbricht and other senior Muscovites launched a rhetorical campaign emphasizing socialist unity. Speaking to officials in the western zones, they advocated a merger of the western SPD and western KPD into a single socialist party – replicating the model presented by the SED in the Soviet zone.[10] Reports from and about West Germany also focused on the state of the left, particularly whether it trended towards unification or fragmentation. The SED's work in the west (*Westarbeit*) during this year targeted the Western occupiers when appropriate, but primarily focused on other leftist elements perceived as barriers to a unified socialist unity.

In April 1947, Walter Ulbricht traveled to Frankfurt am Main in the American sector to participate in a KPD conference preparing for zone elections. His speech covered "the Moscow conference and the fight for unity and the democratization of Germany," but Ulbricht's earlier letters coordinating his appearance made it clear that "unity" (*Einheit*) involved the working class, rather than the German state or nation. This correspon-

Walter Ulbricht with Mao and Stalin at a ceremony arranged
for Stalin's 71st birthday in Moscow

dence discussed unity only in the context of the political parties
representing the working class in the western zones, noting that
the SED's work in those zones should unite the working class'
political representation.[11] Thus, "unity...of Germany" meant
uniform SED representation throughout Germany. Likewise, a
joint SED-KPD pronouncement issued after that conference,
and addressed to the working class, discussed "all of Germany"
(*ganz Deutschland*), but only insofar as the SED should replace
the SPD and KPD as the representative for the working class.
This quasi-program, proposing a range of policies associated with
the left, including drastic land reform, cooperative control over
businesses and gender equality, concluded with the statement:
"prepare to achieve the SED in all of Germany."[12]

SED reports from later in 1947 and early in 1948 testi-
fied to the party's focus on unifying the working class and its
political parties, even if questions such as German national unity
occasionally intruded. One report from mid-1947, surveying

the SED's development in the western zones, blamed the SPD party leadership, and to a lesser extent, the American, French and British military governments, for stifling the socialist unification movement. It also noted that a committee coordinating KPD-SED cooperation was established in February 1947 with the primary task of overcoming division and achieving unity, not of Germany as a whole, but of the German working class and socialist movement.[13] The committee's principal task was achieving socialist unity, and its principal foes those West German leftists resisting East German campaigns, rather than the occupying powers who would oversee Germany's division. One year later, reports on a "friends of unity conference" in the western zones discussed using this occasion to foster links between the KPD and other socialist parties, particularly the SPD, to create a quasi-SED.[14] Although references to national unity occasionally peppered these and other documents from this period, those writing SED reports and planning SED agitation in the western zones sidelined this issue in favor of a different kind of unity – that of the working class and its political parties.

Between 1946 and 1948, the SED ignored the official division between itself and the KPD and instead directed the KPD in the western zones to emphasize the socialist unity project in its own elections and campaigns. Although the debate between German unity and socialist unity had already begun in the Soviet zone, the SED's directions to the West German KPD largely ignored or marginalized the question of Germany's future unity. Guidelines issued to the KPD in the British zone observed that conditions were ripe for unifying the working class in this zone and instructed the party to work towards this goal. An after-action report on the well-documented British zone elections also praised the range of campaigns and slogans developed for the election, which either promoted socialism or attacked the leaders of other parties, but never touched the issue of German unification. Reflecting the East Germans' overwhelming concern with opposition in the SPD's senior leadership, the guidelines remind-

ed the recipients to construe the SPD's leadership as ignoring the working-class' interests whenever possible. The SED's officials did aspire to foster positive relations between the KPD and SPD wherever possible. Memos discussing election outcomes and parliamentary interactions between the KPD and SPD celebrated that "objective" (i.e. positive) coverage received by the KPD in SPD newspapers. However, while the two party's representatives in local parliaments cooperated on some issues, KPD reports to East Berlin concluded that truly "close cooperation" was a distant prospect.[15]

Resolutions and similar publications issued by the KPD's local organizations in the western zones in 1947 testified to the rank-and-file's readiness to embrace the SED's instructions to fight for a unified working class and single socialist party. These resolutions, adopted by state and local party branches at KPD meetings, either did not talk about national unity or placed it as a secondary goal dependent on achieving socialist unity first.[16] The KPD at the state level also made public overtures to SPD to cooperate in state parliaments, although they seldom met with success. The SPD in Bavaria, for example, rejected one offer to form an alliance, citing acrimony between the parties on the national level, the KPD's untrustworthiness, and the fact that the public overture revealed that the proposal was a cynical attempt to frame the SPD as a barrier to socialist solidarity. The KPD's media also rallied around the cause of socialist unity, while paying little more than lip service to national unity in their articles. The first edition of *Unser Tag,* a KPD paper, ran a headline reading "Socialists Unified – Germany Unified" but the following article focused exclusively on the need for socialists to unite.[17] Although not published in the Soviet zone, it nevertheless was a product of SED proxies in the western zones and aligned neatly with the general line taken by both the SED and KPD in the late 1940s.

Messing with Success: Crushing Socialist Unity Throughout
Germany

Beginning in 1948, however, the temporary crystalli-
zation around rhetoric prioritizing socialist unity shattered, as
leaders in East Berlin purged social democratic opposition in the
Soviet zone SED and gradually abandoned efforts to orchestrate
a merger of working class parties in the western zones. In the sec-
ond half of 1948, the Soviets and their proxies in the SED leader-
ship realized that the time was ripe to consolidate their control
of the party and implement Soviet-style democratic centralism,
prohibiting internal factions or dissent from leadership decisions.
Naimark traces this decision to strengthen schooling and purge
membership to growing anti-Soviet sentiment in the Soviet zone,
particularly from former SPD-members, and the Marshall plan's
economic allure. (Soviet zone communists were surprisingly si-
lent on the Berlin Blockade, even internally, mentioning it only
as an element of western propaganda.)[18] By October 1948, lead-
ing SED members from the SPD fled the Soviet zone and pub-
licly denounced the project, causing the SED's communist con-
trollers to establish organs to expel any untrustworthy converts
from the SPD who had not already left. Even as Stalin encour-
aged German communists to employ guile to avoid alienating
non-communists throughout Germany, he allowed the SED to
abandon any pretension to serve as a vehicle for unity or equal-
ity between social democratic and communist groups. By early
1949, full implementation of democratic centralism marked "the
end of the unity party in practice and in theory" as the SED be-
came, in the words of one defector, the "Ulbricht KPD."[19]

The Soviet occupation ensured that the Muscovites
emerged triumphant in the debate over the future of leftism in
Germany, as Soviet occupiers ordered their proxies to complete
socialist unification in the Soviet zone and promote it with in-
tensified agitation in the western zones. However, by 1948, both
Soviets and their proxies began to abandon the socialist unity

message underpinning these efforts. In the Soviet zone, the SED became a party explicitly replicating the Soviet Union's Bolsheviks, and thus had no room for social democrat dissenters. But in the western zones the SED increasingly lost its allure as a model for leftist social democrats. With the rhetoric and goals of the socialist unity project vandalized and abandoned by Soviets and Muscovites, East German operations to influence politics in the west would require new goals and language.

Rhetoric in 1949-1951: National Division, National Unity, and Peace

1949 brought a dramatic change as Germany's occupation turned into formal division with the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany on May 23 and the ratification of the German Democratic Republic constitution on October 7. Competition between the two semi-sovereign Germanys for legitimacy, recognition, and survival as *the* German state began immediately, and would persist for the next forty years.[20] The establishment of two separate states, neither of which recognized the other, and each of which asserted its right to be the sole Germany, contributed to a pronounced shift in East Germany's political agitation in West Germany, as well as some change in the practices they employed. The content of East German appeals shifted from a rhetoric of unifying the German working class to one of unifying the German nation and thereby securing peace. This tapped into a sense that Germany's division was unnatural and a growing fear of war and responded to the slow demise of the KPD and the establishment of the National Front for a Democratic Germany (NF). The GDR attempted to expand its organizational efforts in West Germany by founding National Front committees and off-shoots of East German mass organizations, deploying instructors, and supporting a decaying KPD. From home, East Germany also conducted an expanded informational campaign centered around sending literature, organiz-

ing personal correspondence and mentoring West German visitors.

This section traces the rhetorical shift, which began prior to the NF's establishment with a growing interest among East German leaders in working the national question into their agitation in western Germany. I then show how this approach continued to dominate after the National Front's foundation, as highlighted by four core tenets: (1) an emphasis on national unity and peace, (2) a persistent critique of the KPD in West Germany, (3) a desire to reach all Germans and (4) a description of allies in West Germany as patriots rather than socialists. In terms of executing agitation, it suffices to say that the National Front grew in importance, establishing committees directly in West Germany to organize supporters there, while also directing campaigns from within West Germany designed to reshape public opinion in the FRG.

Start of the Shift

In January 1949, the SED created its West Commission, which coordinated East German agitation in West Germany. Initially, the Commission focused on the same economic questions and the working-class' unity that drove political agitation in prior years. For example, at its first meeting, the body discussed using radio broadcasts in West Germany to publicize East Germany's success in economic reconstruction. This type of economic focus occasionally recurred in the coming years.[21] However, April saw the first East German attempt to weaponize the national question in agitation. Although the West Commission did not explicitly discuss the motivation for focusing on German unity, Germany's blatantly deepening division between east and west, whether because of growing hostility between the U.S. and USSR, the Berlin blockade, or the gradual consolidation of the three western zones, thrust the prospect of the country's future disunity into the spotlight. Another important factor may have been that, in

the summer of 1949, Stalin recalled Sergei Tiul'panov to Moscow. Tiul'panov had been essential in suppressing the unionists and driving the Soviet Union's proxies towards the message of socialist unity that dominated earlier years. His removal may have opened space for a return to a nationalist rhetoric, which could have attracted East German leaders for its potential appeal to not just the working class, but all Germans.

East German leaders expected a message focused on national unity to resonate with most West Germans, who they imagined considered a unified Germany to be normal but were exhausted by the conflict in German life over the past thirty years. At the time, a forty-year division was unthinkable for both West and East Germans. Despite their Marxist pedigree, East German leaders may have been predisposed to this narrative; the attitude that reunification was a fast-approaching, worthy goal was particularly pronounced in older generations, including those in charge of East Germany, who had only known a unified German state. Outside of the GDR, East German intelligence confirmed West Germans' faith in reunification. Throughout the first decade of the post-war era, this information came from travel reports filed by any East German functionary or instructor travelling in the FRG, conversations with visitors from West Germany, and compiled reports titled "Voices from West Germany" that drew from both public statements and private correspondence. These tended to confirm East German leaders' belief that their compatriots in the West viewed national reunification as a priority, reporting growing West German support for a program emphasizing national unity and peace even into the 1950s.[22]

By the end of 1949, the four core tenets of the GDR's new approach to political agitation in West Germany had emerged. First, SED West Commission meeting minutes testify to the organization's focus on promulgating narratives of national unity and peace. Second, in October, a senior SED official in charge of *Westarbeit* blasted the KPD for campaigning on unpopular issues such as socialism and the USSR. Third, in pursuit

of a broad audience, the official suggested that the Communists should seek common ground with bourgeois West German parties, instead of attacking them. Finally, Dahlem emphasized that West Germany's national liberation required participation from not just the working class, but patriots from all classes. To ensure a consistent agitational message, the West Commission formalized these positions at a meeting with the East German media.[23] The West Commission also made these expectations clear to the KPD, when they issued directions to the KPD leadership in Frankfurt am Main.[24]

National Unity and Peace

The National Front (NF) played a central role in driving the German unity rhetoric. While of marginal importance in the GDR's legislative history, considering that the SED dominated East German domestic politics, a history of East German political agitation in West Germany would be wholly inadequate without an examination of the NF's work. By November 1949, the slowly developing NF offered a new locus and inspiration for East German efforts to find novel, persuasive ways of winning over West Germans and motivating them to resist. Formally established in March 1950, but active before then, the NF claimed to represent all of East Germany's political parties and mass organizations in the People's Assembly and presented a unified list to voters during elections designed to ensure continued dominance by the communist SED. From the beginning, the NF's public literature and private meetings emphasized its crucial role in planning, organizing and executing East German efforts to woo and mobilize West Germans with a message of national unity and peace.

One of the first platforms issued by the NF offered a clear example of the new organization's philosophy and aims in its work. The NF proclaimed its commitment to a sustainable peace grounded in German unity, demanding a just peace treaty

and the withdrawal of all occupation troops – the sole "path for winning Germany's unity and national independence."[25] Overall, the platform set a number of goals reinforcing the conclusion that the National Front took its moniker seriously: unification on a democratic basis, ending the special status of all parts of Germany (i.e. the Saarland Protectorate and the Ruhr valley); opposing remilitarization; opposing the return of German industrialists; and defending German culture against the "cultural barbarianism of the American imperialists."[26] It differentiated the National Front's task in West Germany from its overall approach to the German nation. In the West, the NF sought to "enlighten" West German citizens about how policies enacted by Adenauer on behalf of the Western powers would lead to war, "destroy Germany and annihilate the German nation" and then organize the "peace-loving and patriotic" into a network of circles capable of undertaking further work.[27] The concluding call to arms was ad-

The National Front's Headquarters in East Germany in 1953

dressed to all Germans, "regardless of station, gender or profession" and promised that the NF was on the march in and would soon liberate all of Germany.[28]

The NF also linked their national unification struggle to international events that provided ammunition to their agitators, as was the case with the 1950 Prague Declaration. In October 1950, the foreign ministers of the Soviet bloc states met in Prague and issued a declaration affirming their commitment to the unification of Germany but voicing concern that West German rearmament would prevent this. The NF leaderships' reaction to the declaration, which neatly aligned with the combined message of unity and peace they had developed since the start of the year, indicated how their rhetoric had matured. At the start of November, the NF's central office accepted a proposal that called for committees in both Germanys to popularize the Prague declaration and its twin goals of peace and reunification. In West Germany, NF committees were to redouble their efforts to educate fellow West Germans through events, gatherings and the leveraging of members' personal connections and influence outside the organization. The leadership also committed to expanding the corps of instructors they had available to deploy to West Germany. The proposal instructed committees in the GDR to take over the sending of literature and letters to targets in the west, particularly leveraging members with significant ties to or history with Germany's western half. The plan also assigned GDR committees the task of engaging visiting individuals and delegations from the FRG to correct western "lies" and lay the foundation for future correspondence and cooperation.[29] The nature, extent and trajectory of these practices from 1949 until 1951 are discussed in depth below. Here, it suffices to note that while none of these practices were new, their combination into a unified plan designed to advance a single objective was. In the following years, the NF repeatedly responded to both international reunification initiatives and West German treaty ratifications with plans that sought to channel the full spectrum of their

capabilities into shaping West German politics on a single issue.

An emphasis on safeguarding German culture closely followed the shift towards national unity as the organizing principle of East German *Westarbeit*. At the NF's high-level conference in November 1950, the president of the National Front's top committee spoke about the translating the motto of unity and peace into action. To him, this could be achieved by sending more personal-political letters from East Germany, engaging with West Germans traveling to the GDR, and expanding committees in West Germany. Crucially, he concluded with an appeal to all Germans by encouraging them to participate in these activities as participants in a national liberation movement to defend German culture. Particularly, efforts at all levels and in all dimensions would do well to portray the GDR as at the forefront of a German "national cultural reinvention" and in stark contrast to West Germany, which was allegedly sinking ever further in American "unculture" and cosmopolitanism.[30] Indeed, even simple bulletins bound for NF committees in West Germany anticipated these high-profile pronouncements, noting that the cells should "show the movement for national unity, independence and peace in West Germany" and highlight the ways in which the GDR's accomplishments furthered German national independence and cultural revival.[31] East Germany's close affinity with German culture is surprising for a state ostensibly following Marx, who famously claimed that workers had no nation.[32] However, roots of this development may lie in the Soviet Union's appropriation of Russian culture and patriotism during the depths of the Second World War and its strident condemnation of western "cosmopolitanism."[33] An accident of geography further contributed to this emphasis on German culture. Many towns central to German culture – Jena, Wittenberg, Leipzig – lay within the GDR's borders, allowing the state to claim that it guarded the memories linked to these sites as well.

Socialism's Eclipse

Despite billing itself as the guardian of German culture, there was one living piece of German history that East Germans in charge of West German agitation were eager to remake – the KPD. Communism and Marxism had their roots in giants of nineteenth century German philosophy – Hegel, Feuerbach, and of course Marx and Engels. The KPD itself had a proud tradition of defying authority and attempting to make revolution – most famously in 1919 when street revolutions to turn Germany socialist red instead left stained streets of Berlin and Munich a bloodier shade of red.

Franz Dahlem first encouraged the KPD to prioritize German unity and German peace over German socialism in October 1949. Nevertheless, the KPD's inadequate movement towards the National Front's line remained a recurrent challenge for those in the SED and NF charged with managing East German efforts in the FRG. In March 1950, the SED's West Commission decided again that the NF's policy must become the KPD's general line at all levels of its work. Particularly, they ordered the KPD to highlight the dangers of western occupation for the freedom and material interests of the non-working class in their campaigning and outreach. In May, members of the SED's West Commission again lambasted the KPD for performing poorly in recent elections in North-Rhein Westphalia, losing control of unions, and failing to adequately engage with dissatisfied SPD members. While this last point is at first reminiscent of earlier pushes for a unified socialist party, they proposed rectifying these shortcomings with political instruction on the importance of "the struggle for peace and German unity." Statements by Otto Grotewohl, East Germany's prime minister, exhorted to Germans to vote for national unity, rather than socialist unity.[34]

Emphasizing this prioritization of reunification while avoiding the question of whether a united Germany would adopt

socialism was a deliberate strategy. In January 1951, a NF working conference with representatives from West Germany explicitly noted that all participants in the national struggle should put aside the question of how Germany would look ten years after reunification. Instead of dealing with this thorny question, the West German committee leaders and instructors present were directed to focus their efforts on building a movement that focused on the uncontroversial goal of pan-German understanding as the precondition for German reunification. Through the end of 1951, senior NF leaders continued to argue that national reunification needed to precede any conversation about a united Germany's economic future.[35]

From the outset, the National Front's Western Division expressed frustration with the KPD, complaining that the KPD's membership was ignorant of the national struggle's importance to be an effective tool in the FRG. The exasperation is palpable in an August 1950 NF report condemning a KPD speech in Hamburg as adequate for a communist crowd, but wholly inappropriate for the broad audience they should be courting.[36] Also in August, the SED's West Commission issued explicit, actionable correctives to the KPD to draw parallels between the reunifications struggles of Korea and Germany and organize national resistance.[37]
These critiques underscore the importance placed on messages coopting both German unity and peace by the SED and NF. Yet such attempts to shift the emphasis of GDR agitation in the west did not go unnoticed or uncontested by KPD members. One Hamburg comrade, writing in June 1950 to the East German government, protested the NF's promise to respect private property and suggested that he might have to break with the party.[38] Such pushback, in combination with the KPD's persistent narrow concentration on West German communists, may have driven the NF to explore the feasibility of alternative media outlets that would appeal to broad swathes of West Germany from a non-communist angle.

A Broadly Appealing Message on a Broad Wavelength

As the National Front propelled East German agitational rhetoric in a nationalistic and pacifistic direction, both it and the SED also insisted that this message should reach a broad audience of all Germans, regardless of class, in both the east and the west. This marked a distinct departure from the KPD and SED's narrow focus on the working class during the years from 1945 until 1949. The importance of this widened appeal cannot be understated. It provides insight into both the motivation for the shift and the logic behind the East Germans' tactics. East German leaders likely held a sincere belief that a rhetoric of soft nationalism and pacifism could win West Germans to the GDR's cause.

By the middle of 1950, the National Front's appraisals of their own organizational work in West Germany highlighted the emphasis they placed on creating a broad, national movement to work for national unity, rather than Germany-wide working-class socialism. These noted that, although the number of committees had grown prodigiously, members often confused the NF's priorities. To rectify this, they recommended reminding members that the NF's essence was the national question, and not any other. Furthermore, these committees still drew heavily on the working class, which leaders in the NF's senior East German ranks explicitly named a serious weakness.[39] Notably, instructions for the NF's West German committees directed them to improve their outreach to the commercial class, who might be influenced by promises of renewed trade with East Germany and Eastern Europe. This allegedly brought the NF success in Hamburg, where one NF committee claimed almost two hundred merchants as members.[40] Some senior officials, reflecting the mentality reinforced by intelligence reports from West Germany, expressed frustration that this supposedly broad resentment of the United States, France, and Great Britain had not yet translated into a rapid expansion of the National Front's movement. Walter Fisch,

a member of the SED's West Commission, blamed this failure primarily on the National Front's rank and file, particularly in West Germany where too much attention had been paid to the number of committees and not enough to developing the committees' political lives to influence West German politics on the national question.[41]

The focus on building the presence of the National Front itself and other mass organizations in West Germany was a tacit recognition of the KPD's further decline. By August 1950, the SED and the National Front jointly admitted that the KPD drew ever fewer votes in elections and won ever fewer seats in parliaments, although this decline was naturally ascribed to repression and "terrorism" by the Adenauer government. Nevertheless, the participants at this conference concluded that their work in West Germany should center around mass organizations, particularly the National Front, rather than the KPD, now that elections seemed not to reflect the popular will.[42] Simultaneously, during large conventions in East Germany designed to draw West Germans, they made a deliberate effort to limit the weight of the KPD in West German representation. For example, at the National Congress in September 1950, they placed explicit caps on the percentage of West German delegates who should be drawn from the KPD in an effort to invite and perhaps turn West Germans in groups that were not yet working for East German interests.[43] The SED's senior leaders passed similar instructions to the mass organizations operating in West Germany, challenging them to extend their membership to West Germans who were not already communists or in the working class.[44]

Allies in West Germany occasionally encouraged East German agitators to redouble their attempt to craft broad appeals and movements. An evaluation of pan-German work in June and July 1951 discussed efforts to pass literature to and engage in conversation with West Germans at the inter-zone crossing points. It particularly praised one example in which a "friend" chided a West German for thinking that they were any different,

reminding him "that we are Germans and that Germans belong to Germany."[45] Another report from the middle of 1951 criticized work in the border regions, but featured feedback from a West German in contact with East Germans who encouraged them to continue finding language that appeals to all Germans, rather than just communists or the working class.[46] Both cases offer clear examples and implicit evidence for the kind of rhetoric that the SED and National Front deemed desirable – talk of Germany targeting all Germans rather than talk of socialism targeting only the lowest classes.

The insistence on a broad movement capable of reaching all West Germans, regardless of political view or social class, remained constant through the end of 1951. A NF evaluation of a year of work in West Germany noted that the organization needed to insinuate itself in West German movements and co-opt them for "the national resistance and the struggle against remilitarization and for the reunification of our fatherland." Particularly, NF committees in West Germany were to engage with a wider circle of West Germans and support any willing to cooperate with the national movement. East German analysts argued that the supposedly quickening pace of war preparations would make ever more West Germans receptive to the NF's message of unity and peace. To hasten this process, they encouraged all GDR initiatives in West Germany to denounce Adenauer as a national traitor and to show how the GDR worked on behalf of all Germans.[47]

Supporting a Patriotic Resistance

The way in which East German documents often described their collaborators and supporters further reinforces the impression that proper national identity supplanted class identity as a delineating factor between ally and foe. Authors and speakers often referred to those whom they saw as furthering their interpretation of national unity as "patriots," rather than "com-

rades." One proposal for a future National Front office meeting, for example, suggested offering legal help to "patriots" persecuted by the West German government.[48] In fact, this emphasis on German national patriotism traced back to the National Front's earliest days. One of the first public National Front resolutions for a pan-German audience from February 1950 concluded by claiming that all who "love their German fatherland," whether in the GDR or FRG, had a duty to join the NF's ranks.[49]

An uproar in April 1951 over Helgoland's status provided an ideal opportunity for this East German blend of peace and unity. Helgoland is a small island off Germany's North Sea coast, which the British military retained immediately following World War II for training purposes, thus making it impossible for Germans displaced from the island during the war to return. In early 1951, a band of West German youths illegally sailed to Helgoland, planted the German flag and a peace banner and were promptly arrested by authorities. This chain of events provoked a passionate response from East German leaders and the assets they controlled on both sides of the border in an attempt to exploit what seemed to be a series of fortunate events. Agitators cried both for the return of the islands to Germans who had lived there and against the island's use in British "war preparations" in appeals directed at the entire German population. The National Front's public resolutions protested that the youths should not be charged for raising the German tricolor over German soil. Furthermore, they called for the island's immediate return to the German nation and for displaced Germans to return and rebuild their lives there. This might have been one of the National Front's rare successes, as the British government did agree to allow West German citizens to return to Helgoland and a British Labor MP wrote to the National Front expressing his satisfaction at the island's return.[50]

The passage of time only intensified this portrayal of West German supporters. Patriotism featured heavily in a November 1950 guideline for committees and agitation groups in both Ger-

manys. The central National Front committee tasked branches in both the west and the east with strengthening the "national resistance struggle of German patriots in the west and south of our homeland." German "patriots" could do this by organizing unified protest actions and supporting the solidarity movement for West Germans caught participating in strikes, protests, or other actions that might require them to pay fees, face legal action, or forgo wages.[51] Patriots could certainly be found in the working class and the call for strikes suggests that NF leaders expected to draw significant support from that quarter. However, there was never any indication that the working class monopolized the love of the German fatherland. Repeated references to broad movements and expansion beyond the working class reinforce the impression that East German leaders expected patriots to be found in all sections of West German society.

It is important to recognize that national unity and pacifism were guiding, but not exclusive, frameworks for East German influence operations in West Germany after 1949. In a state as expansive as the GDR and in organizations as broad as the National Front and the SED conflicting statements were inevitable. Just as the period from 1945-1949 saw isolated cases of individuals emphasizing national unity over class unity, the period from 1949-1951 saw instances where officials continued to favor a rhetoric centered on working-class political unity rather than on national reunification and peace. Indeed, the KPD, as we have seen, was particularly obstinate, even in the face of repeated prodding from superiors in East Berlin. In East Germany, it was the SED that continued to mix messages through the end of 1950. In July, Otto Grotewohl, a figure closely associated with the East German SPD's decision to subsume itself under the SED, spoke at a SED party conference about the need for the working class to democratize and unify Germany.[52] In November, the SED organized a conference on the "Action Unity of the Working Class." There, senior East German politicians offered speeches which fluidly switched between unity of the nation and

unity of the working class, while West Germans in attendance emphasized socialist unity in their controlled comments and speeches.[53] However, these occasional conferences and comments were marginal compared to the pervasive invocations of peace and patriotism, national resistance, and national reunification.

Rhetoric in 1952-1955: Narrowing Focus on Treaties and a General Collapse

From 1952 to 1955, East German political agitation applied the same central themes and practices to narrower causes, but increasingly struggled to make a mark in the face of both German and global events. During this period, Germany's *de facto* division persisted and themes of national unity and peace remained central to East German agitation in West Germany. Diffuse exhortations to expand the national and peace movements transformed into specific instructions to counter individual West German initiatives, particularly treaties that more firmly drew Bonn into the Western orbit. Appraising work in 1951 and looking ahead to 1952, East German planners expressed reserved satisfaction with the state of work in West Germany and believed that conditions would continue to favor their efforts.[54] However, these ambitions and specific instructions accompanied a series of events that posed serious challenges to the credibility of East German messaging and stymied their ability to operate directly in West Germany. Thus, by 1955, the content of East German political agitation had lost its confident promises of national reunification, while its execution shifted almost exclusively towards techniques grounded in East Germany. While the execution of East Germany agitation is beyond the scope of this paper, during these years, the scale and organization of letter writing, literature distribution and visitor mentorship each expanded. In contrast, activities in West Germany, particularly around the National Front (NF) and mass organizations, increasingly decayed.

Continuing the Rhetoric of a Broad, National Campaign

As demonstrated in Chapter IV, the National Front's establishment accelerated a shift in East German agitation towards a message emphasizing national unity and directed to a broad audience. This surprising emphasis on appealing to all Germans, rather than just the working class traditionally receptive to communism, remained a constant into 1952. The first work plan of that year outlined a need to rally West Germans, regardless of religious confession or party membership, in a common struggle to secure German national sovereignty and to defend German culture, both of which American troops and weak West German leadership supposedly threatened.[55] Internal planning documents acknowledged and accepted that East Germany would be unable to achieve its objectives in the FRG through the West German working class alone. Public speeches sponsored by the SED in 1952 also explicitly acknowledged this fact and described the NF as the only tool capable of welding together all forces "rejecting the politics of division and embracing the politics of unity." One particular speech concluded with an appeal to Germans of "all parties, world views, jobs and social classes" to immerse themselves in the battle for unity and peace that East German leaders saw themselves as fighting.[56] Similarly, descriptions of West German sympathizers as "patriots" saturated even reports criticizing the overall effort and specific shortcomings, such as an annual review of East German political agitation in 1954. This report featured explicit admissions that many West Germans no longer believed national reunification to be a realistic cause. Yet the report continued describing West German supporters as patriots and ordered informational campaigns to further emphasize the national question.[57] The western middle classes and nationalists targeted by such rhetoric and planning may have been indifferent to such appeals. However, judging by their public statements and private planning, East German leaders were committed to a broad, pan-German agitation.

The most senior East German leaders affirmed the shift towards nationalism, and NF elites turned to these statements to legitimize their decision to prioritize nationalist rhetoric over socialism. During a May 1952 meeting of the NF's leading council, one speaker quoted Ulbricht as saying, "the central question is and remains the national question." Based on this, the speaker argued that the task before the NF was to lead "Germans of all world-views, without regard to their party affiliation, to the ranks of the great national movement."[58] Likewise, in a speech in December 1953, the president of the NF, Erich Correns, noted that "…our serving minister President Walter Ulbricht … has drawn the attention of all Germans to the fact that today it is less about parties than it was in 1947 – rather, today, more than in 1947, it is about the entire nation."[59] In these comments, Ulbricht not only explicitly renounced the overwhelming but narrow focus of the 1940s on replicating the SED in West Germany, but also

Dr. Erich Correns, President of the National
German Front, in 1961

condoned the rhetorical turn towards agitation founded on German sovereignty, identity, and independence. Correns' speech offered a stellar example of the narrative to which Ulbricht was referring. Correns listed a standard battery of complaints – Adenauer's national betrayal and the ruin of West German culture by American "gangsters" – and proposed now-standard solutions – protests, efforts to "save German national culture," and petitions publicizing Soviet and East German peace and unity proposals.[60]

The rhetorical priority on reunification and peace was not the sole preserve of the elite, but continued to bubble up in the reports percolating from the local- and district-level organizations towards the national archives. One such report, on East German informational efforts, framed these as necessary to convince West Germans of the need to "do everything in order to secure peace and German unity."[61] This statement not only conformed to the twin themes dominating agitation after 1949, but also clearly revealed a belief that informational efforts should produce action. However, the local level was far from uniformly disciplined around the message that East German leaders desired, particularly in cases involving the West German Communist Party (KPD). A KPD conference in 1952 oscillated between condemnations of the American cosmopolitanism's deleterious effects on German culture and full-throated defenses of Bolshevism, Marx, and Lenin. Similarly, the KPD's own report to East Berlin on their work to advance the "broad patriotic protest movement" focused on unions and other entities traditionally part of the left.[62]

Attempted Ban of the KPD

Although East German leaders sharply criticized the KPD for its failure to embrace the nationalist-pacifist rhetorical line, they did defend it from external efforts to eliminate the party. In 1952, when West German authorities threatened to ban the KPD on the grounds that its activities and message were un-

constitutional, East German leaders and their operation rallied to the beleaguered party's defense. The KPD avoided prohibition in 1952 (although it met this fate in 1956), but this episode marked the first major challenge for East German political agitation in West Germany and the start of a gradual retreat from the FRG.

Although structural limitations prevented this study from encompassing West German reactions to East German agitation, Bonn's attempt to ban the KPD offers some insight into West German awareness of East German efforts. The charges laid against the KPD described it as part of East German political activity designed to further German reunification. The Adenauer government not only understood the national question's significance in East German agitation, it also knew that the KPD was not the sole vehicle for East German influence in the Bonn Republic. A crucial passage noted that there existed in the FRG "a network of associations, which are either part of the GDR's 'mass organizations' or of 'pan-German character' that the NF influenced, even when they [the organizations] were organized in West Germany." The indictment identified almost 40 West German organizations considered to be proxies for the East German government, whether wittingly or otherwise.[63] West German authorities clearly aimed to stifle East Germany's influence operations and recognized the NF's role in these activities.

As the FRG connected the SED and NF in East Germany to a stunning array of organizations and groups in West Germany, East German leaders scrambled to deny the charges against the KPD. They unsurprisingly concluded that this was a U.S.-driven effort to deepen German divisions, advance American interests, and prepare for war. In their response to the charges, East Germans claimed that a ban would contravene the will of the burgeoning national reunification movement in both Germanys.[64] Unsigned letters, ostensibly by West Germans, but edited by Ulbricht's East Berlin office, defended the KPD on national grounds and charged West German leadership with national treason for their supposed subservience to the U.S.[65]

While East Germany's leaders publicly presented the KPD as an indispensable party in the struggle for reunification, private communications revealed grave misgivings about the KPD's actual commitment to the national project. Reports submitted to Walter Ulbricht's office at the time sharply criticized the KPD's poor activity and organization at the local level and its reluctance to make any effort at finding common ground with the bourgeois parties through the national question.[66] While internal assessments did not clearly state the indictment's direct effects on the KPD and NF in West Germany, reports had already discussed both organizations' fraying networks and a high-profile charge would have accelerated this unravelling.

Narrowing Specificity on Treaties

While nationalist appeals between 1949 and 1951 had diffuse goals of shaping West German opinion and expanding the national movement, the following years brought this rhetoric to bear on a series of concrete causes – preventing West German from agreeing to treaties with the West. East German leaders devoted significant energy to these efforts because they entailed diplomatic recognition of the FRG, entrenched West Germany in the capitalist camp, and paved the way for West German remilitarization, which could threaten the "correlation of forces" between the communist and capitalist blocs. As early as 1951, East German planners framed West German participation in western treaties as initiatives that their operations in both parts of Germany should oppose.[67] However, East German organizational and informational operations only focused upon opposing treaties beginning in 1953. Despite East Germany concentrating their national-patriotic and pacifistic agitation on these treaties, West Germany proceeded to sign and ratify the Bonn-Paris conventions (also known as the *Generalvertrag*, signed May 1952, revised October 1954, implemented May 1955) and European Defense Treaty (ratified in Germany in 1953, but torpedoed by

France in 1954).

The Bonn-Paris treaty signed in May 1952 offered the first test case regarding the possibility of disrupting a treaty's ratification through parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition. In November 1952, the presiding member of the NF's assembly, Dr. Erich Correns, urged Germans in both East and West to agitate against the Bonn-Paris treaty and to remind members of the Bundestag, the West German parliament, of their duty to reject it. These treaties, he noted, could "only bring about the unhappiness and annihilation of our nation."[68] This appeal was premeditated. Two days prior to the speech, Dr. Correns had explained at a planning meeting that the NF must "intensify political activity" in order to prevent the Bonn-Paris Treaty's ratification in the FRG. Furthermore, he expected both the NF at large and the KPD's representatives in the Bundestag to explain how opposing the treaty would contribute to strengthening national resistance and furthering national reunification.[69] Thus, the NF and SED's leaders preserved the broad, pan-German, class-transcending appeals that they had developed in the previous two years and turned them towards treaties relevant to the German question's resolution.

The NF, attempting to influence the Bundestag, compiled lists of members across parties who had either voiced opposition to any of the treaties under consideration, or at the very least demonstrated no overt hostility to the GDR or KPD. These lists were sometimes forwarded to correspondence circles, suggesting that they were primarily destined for the local levels, where they would be used to inundate the representatives with letters from the GDR. The lists included parliamentarians from all the major West German parties (the Free Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Social Democrats), attesting to the NF's determination to appeal broadly to Germans, both in the general population and in West German parliaments.[70] Beginning in January 1953, planners in the NF division responsible for coordinating agitation in and towards West German called on committees to send letters

and literature directly to Bundestag members – including those listed in these compendiums.[71]

Other documents included directions for correspondence circles on rebutting the SPD's "conservative" arguments in support of the European Defense Treaty. These offered specific arguments about Adenauer and the SPD leadership – namely that neither cared about "the fate of the German nation" – for East German writers to replicate. For material, they provided quotes from Adenauer that portrayed him as a willing American puppet and noted that the debate over a Western European collective security apparatus carried existential implications for the German nation. War between the blocs would annihilate Germany – intertwining the goals of national unity, national survival and global peace. Such directions offered clear evidence that East Germany did not sacrifice broad appeals amidst the pivot towards opposing West German treaties. In fact, these directions explicitly described as imperative the need to mobilize the entire GDR population, not just workers, to write letters that could produce a unified national movement. To those writing this report and others, letters would not contribute to socialism's spread but would instead reunify a divided Germany through German efforts alone.[72]

Even as assets in West Germany deteriorated in 1954 and 1955, East German leaders continued to bring their agitation to bear against Western treaty initiatives. In December 1954, the NF's National Council issued a statement framing the Paris Treaty as a step towards war and away from fostering understanding between Germans split by the intra-German border, thereby staying true to their two cardinal themes. After describing resisting the "Paris War-Pact" as the "great national task of all German people," the declaration concluded by noting that German patriots across both Germanys could themselves secure a peaceful reunification. The working class received a passing mention in the closing lines. But this declaration, intended in large part for West German consumption, held aloft the prospect of national

reunification, rather than a worker's paradise, as cause for rejecting the Bonn-Paris treaty.[73]

A 1955 report surveying the NF's agitation during 1954 testified to the transition from a diffuse attempt to develop a national movement in West Germany to more focused efforts against the ratification of individual treaties opposed by the Communist bloc. This report's sweeping overview repeatedly and explicitly linked various aspects of their work to their efforts to oppose the entrenchment of the treaty system through the European Defense Treaty and other "war" treaties. It described these letters, conversations and pamphlets as contributing to understanding between East and West Germans, thereby advancing peace and unity, and trumpeted all new connections between East and West Germany as the key to unlocking German unity. While there is brief mention of West German committees, the sole example of actual work involved farmers in Rhineland-Palatinate, suggesting that the organization in West Germany, while not dead, had certainly wilted.

That simple example, however, does offer insights into the NF's simultaneous desperation and flexibility as they still endeavored to mount a final counterattack against the looming implementation of the Bonn-Paris treaty in early 1955. While East German-backed formal organizations in West Germany certainly shriveled during this focused shift towards treaties, officials in the NF's central administration leaped on *ad hoc* opportunities to link their systematic treaty-opposition campaign to local grievances in West Germany. In late 1954, a coalition of West German farmers contacted the East German organization due to grievances over the effect American military installations had on their livelihoods. Those in the office responsible for work in West Germany thought they recognized the situation's potential, and, in January 1955, issued instructions to East German farmers affiliated with the NF to exchange letters with their West German peers and ascribe their suffering to the Paris Treaty's provisions.[74] Nevertheless, the absence of any instructions for NF cells in the

FRG to contact or work with the West German farmers is striking. By early 1955, the East Germans in charge of implementing the influence campaign were reduced to relying on one-off events. At this point, East German efforts to shape West German politics retained ambitious goals but were completely dependent on informational efforts from East Germany to achieve them.

Sustaining a National Anti-Treaty Message in 1954 and 1955

In 1954 and 1955, East German focused its political agitation on condemning West German treaties by emphasizing national unity and peace, while adjusting to increasingly limited possibilities to act within West Germany. In May 1954, NF leadership meetings addressed East German efforts to influence West German politics. On May 10, the conversation centered on youth protests in West Germany, yielding admissions from both NF and Free German Youth (FDJ) leaders that they lacked any real influence with the promising youth groups. During that meeting, Dr. Erich Correns, the NF's president, first explained that a forthcoming East German appeal should feature "a picture of Germany appealing to all patriots." Four days later, another senior leader in the East German *Westarbeit* clarified to colleagues that the forthcoming manifesto should strictly avoid socialist language, as it was designed to appeal to West Germans who agreed with the East German "...opposition to the European Defense Treaty, but [were] not yet all on the territory of democracy."[75] Yet again, leaders in the NF deliberately tailored their message toward the national and militarization issues they imagined were dear to West Germans and consciously sought to avoid conjuring the specter of socialism.

Those coordinating agitation remained so committed to a rhetoric prioritizing national reunification and peace that they were willing to condone attacks on communism itself. At a NF conference in May 1955, Correns singled out a protest on January 29 in Frankfurt am Main for praise and as evidence of

a West German impulse towards unity, democracy, and peace. This protest group met in Frankfurt's Paul's Church, where early German nationalists made an abortive bid for German unification in 1848. Like those early national heroes, this protest did convene under a program promoting German unity. However, protesters also convened under banners decrying communism.[76] Despite this hostility toward communism, Correns argued that this gathering, like its 1848 predecessor, should be lauded as a step towards a single German state. In earlier years, the NF had condemned the Neuheimer Kreis for unacceptable positions on German neutrality and compiled lists of targetable Bundestag members based in part on whether they attacked the leftist movement. That, in 1955, an openly anti-communist movement received unqualified praise from the NF's president was astounding and signaled how dramatically East Germany's networks in the FRG had collapsed.

Even as their strength in West Germany withered, those in charge of East German agitation retained aspirations to operate freely in West Germany, believing that their efforts had borne some fruit. In the same speech, Correns credited the NF's informational work for holding up the West German army's establishment and reinforcing patriots.[77] The public appeal published at the conference's end clearly aspired to galvanize broad support against the Bonn-Paris both on national and personal grounds. To entice businessmen and the middle class to join the national resistance movement, the appeal promised trade with Eastern Europe. At the same time, the declaration asserted that the Bonn-Paris Treaty's repudiation was a precondition for Germany to "enjoy once again national unity and sovereignty."[78] The SED still explored opportunities to exploit West German agents when they had the chance, as they did in the summer of 1955 in North-Rhine Westphalia. In this case, a SPD party member contacted the SED, offering to provide addresses and deliver agitational literature in West Germany. Notably, he did not offer to join his local NF chapter, but seems to have offered his services

directly to the SED in East Germany.[79] Similarly, East German planners still compiled detailed lists of SPD functionaries for each West German state, including their roles, history of contact with the GDR, and comments such as "ready to help" and "ready to be contacted."[80]

Yet, by the end of 1955, the operation stagnated. A report about future preparations for pan-German work simply called on members to develop the same techniques more energetically and with greater participation from mass organizations. Reports raised the same issues —incomplete information, lackluster engagement, and incorrect positions on the national question— and gave the same prescriptions without any effort to explore new approaches or rhetoric. A "Program Clarification" pamphlet issued in November featured fiery language, including charges that the Bonn Government employed political subversion in the GDR. A few pages were dedicated to discussing the NF's pan-German task connecting East and West Germans, but much of the pamphlet simply encouraged East Germans to dedicate themselves to East German development, on the logic that every small victory for the GDR was a step towards reunification.[81] What little support still existed within West Germany was also rapidly evaporating. One report in Ulbricht's files, compiled from West German contacts in November 1955, noted that many in the previously sympathetic leftist SPD faction now claimed that the USSR and GDR contributed to global tensions as much as the "imperialistic" U.S. and FRG. Other SPD members doubted that Germans alone could achieve reunification, believing instead that the matter lay in the hands of the four powers.[82]

Late 1955 and Looking Ahead

How did the content of East German agitation develop after 1955? Although this question lies outside the scope set in this thesis, it seems likely that national unity increasingly lost its allure for both West German targets and East German agitators.

Both global developments—most importantly the four-power conference's failure in 1954 and the success of Adenauer's trip to Moscow in September 1955—and popular rejection of the GDR amid fading hopes for reunification could have driven this process. In any case, by the end of 1955, East German leaders downgraded their ambitions, dropping their confident assertions that immediate reunification was near and admitting publicly that this goal lay beyond their powers.

By September, the NF's programs shifted from talk of national reunification to national détente. Several speakers at the NF's September assembly repeatedly announced that the organization's task now was to work towards national détente across all social classes, an assignment facilitated by Adenauer's landmark trip to Moscow in the summer of 1955. The public call published after the conference framed reunification as a government-level task and détente as a job for the masses. This re-calibration of East German agitation was an attempt to accommodate the difficult fact that East Germany's sponsors in Moscow had now recognized the FRG. Indeed, speakers baselessly credited NF agitation for Adenauer's surprising moves in Moscow, claiming that pressure from anti-war forces at home forced him to accept an agreement in the Kremlin. Speakers singled out the Paris Treaty and NATO as targets for "patriots," but this convention hinted at the start of a new shift in East German rhetoric.[83]

In early December, a statement of principle issued by the NF's division overseeing agitation reinforced the appearance of new content in East German messaging. On the heels of the 1955 four-power meeting in Geneva, the document explicitly admitted that German reunification was no longer attainable simply through pan-German understanding and resistance to Adenauer, and instead required significant changes in global politics. The authors, who clearly recognized that reunification could no longer serve its rhetorical purpose, did not revert to appeals rooted in unadulterated socialism. They continued to describe Adenauer as a traitor and encouraged all Germans to take action

promoting cross-border understanding in expectation of the day of reunification.[84] The 1956 New Year's Appeal published by the NF offered similarly muted ambitions. In this case, the majority of the statement instructed East Germans to help reconstruct their part of Germany. They were also encouraged to build ties with West Germans to spread GDR propaganda and agitate for an end to the Cold War and Germany's division. In a key difference, however, instead of promising reunification as possible in 1956, the declaration settled for a lesser aim of "taking a large step" toward achieving a unified German homeland.[85]

By the end of 1955, East German leaders clearly tempered the content of their agitational appeals, not in response to the suggested KPD ban or to the 1953 uprising, but to the challenges presented by the USSR's recognition of the FRG and to the fading possibility of reunification in 1955. This followed both a narrowing application of East German agitation against West German treaty ratification on national reunification grounds and that effort's utter failure. Emphasizing peace in rhetoric and action in West Germany may have been the future direction of East German agitation, particularly considering the close relationship between peace movements and Soviet bloc intelligence agencies during the Cold War. That question lies outside the scope of this project. As we have seen here, however, until at least the end of 1955, East German leaders stubbornly stood by rhetorical appeals emphasizing nation and peace over class and Marx.

Conclusion

From 1945 until 1955, East German influence operations in West Germany evolved dramatically, both on the level of rhetoric and action, reflecting the communist and German characters of East German communists. East German leaders and agitators began their efforts to influence the western zones with drives to unify the left on the model of the Soviet zone's SED, until the crushing of the SED's social democrat wing at home left

this message unusable. After 1949 and Germany's formal division, national unity and peace remained the twin guiding principles of East German rhetoric, with the early 1950s bringing a narrower focus in deploying this rhetoric to undermine treaty initiatives in West Germany. Novel developments and persistent shortcomings characterized the vehicles by which the East Germans brought their rhetoric to bear. The National Front offered opportunities to organize supporters directly within West Germany and somewhat skirt the KPD's toxic brand. Correspondence circles represented a bold attempt to mobilize the East German masses and shape West German minds. Each period, however, also struggled with lasting issues of organization, mobilization, and resources, and developing ones, such as the withering of East German organizations in the FRG after 1952. East Germany's operations also draws out broader insights about the role of agency, ideological flexibility and geopolitical restraints in political warfare.

The trajectory of the GDR's rhetoric supports the conclusion that geopolitics plays a decisive role in determining what influence campaigns say and whether they work. Writing on Iraqi influence campaigns, Samuel Helfont has noted that although Saddam Hussein's regime employed "political operations" in the 1980s, they only gained relevance after 1991, when Iraq could more plausibly claim to be a revolutionary regime taking on the U.S.-led world.86 In East Germany's case, geopolitical shifts did not bolster the country's influence operations so much as force their leaders to explore new narratives. The events of 1949 and 1950 spurred the shift toward appeals grounded in national unity and peace. Germany's formal division into two states made reunification a relevant goal, while war in a divided Korea and nuclear proliferation gave peace a new urgency. Likewise, promises of national reunification lost their credibility because of key diplomatic events in 1954 and 1955. The final four-power conference in Geneva and Adenauer's mission to Moscow both dashed what meager hope remained for a unified Germany and

may have precipitated a new direction in East German agitation.

The role of geopolitical events and conditions, which can be beyond the control of a state conducting agitation abroad, makes flexibility an indispensable virtue for those seeking to conduct influence operations. The narratives that resonate with a target audience might not align neatly with the ideologies of the states or leaders implementing these operations. East German agitators demonstrated flexibility when they abruptly embraced national rhetoric in 1949 in response to Germany's division, despite having suppressed East German unionists the year before. Throughout this period, however, throughout the period, East German agents compromised on the tactical level —employing nationalist rhetoric, cooperating with non-communist groups, and praising anti-communist nationalists— in pursuit of aims on the strategic level —spreading the SED westwards, undermining the West German government, and hindering western treaties. The East German case underscores that even notoriously ideologically actors can recognize the utility of abandoning or adapting ideological principles to win over foreign audiences.

Although East Germans needed flexibility in the face of global events that they were often powerless to affect, East German political agitation in West Germany highlights their agency. The Soviet Union played a critical role in the story of East German agitation in West Germany during the immediate postwar years, but its role after 1949 is far less clear cut. From 1949 onward, the private meetings of the SED and NF's committees planning work in West Germany featured neither Soviet representatives nor direct orders from Moscow. East Germans themselves drove the transition towards the rhetoric of reunification and peace, and the lack of explicit criticism from the Soviets or their proxies implies that neither group opposed this innovation.

Indeed, recognizing the agency of East Germans and the tacit Soviet acknowledgement of East Germany's adapted agitational rhetoric sheds light on previously confusing episodes of Soviet history. For example, following Stalin's death in 1953, the

Soviet Union proposed a reform that included passages stressing reunification, peace infrastructure, and broad appeals to the people of East and West Germany. Hope Harrison notes that this emphasis has confused scholars, but my research has demonstrated that references to national unity, peace, and broad mobilization in both Germanys were well-worn elements of GDR agitation.[87] Just as Harrison's groundbreaking work highlighted Ulbricht's critical role in lobbying his Soviet superiors for the Berlin Wall, this research suggest that the Soviet Union's approach to the German question at a critical juncture of Cold War history reflected a position pioneered by East German leaders and party members.

Still, however much East German influence operations exemplified agency and flexibility in the face of geopolitical changes beyond their control, their success in adaptation cannot mask their ultimate failure. East German agitation inflicted no casualties among the treaties it opposed, the Adenauer government survived into the 1960s, and Germany remained divided for over forty years. What explains this persistent failure to fully exploit the opportunities presented by the leftist groundswell of the immediate post-war years and Germany's division? Although measuring impact lies beyond the strict scope of this thesis, planners remained consistently unhappy with the overall East German influence operation. More fundamentally, East Germany's rulers could not avoid association with the reviled Soviet occupation and compounded their poor reputation with political repression and economic stagnation. In a struggle for the hearts and minds of a foreign country, repellent regimes can render offensive influence operations impotent as quickly as weak messaging or sloppy execution can.

The Soviet bloc's collapse thirty years ago drew back the Iron Curtain, but the recent revival of influence operations as a danger to democracy has resurrected both fears of Russia's threat to the West and the language of the Cold War. While the Cold War has shaped the development of international relations the-

ory and remains a popular vantage point for assessing contemporary policy challenges, applying that conflict wholesale to the present would be a mistake. Examining particular cases, such as that of East German agitation, however, can shed light on how core elements of international relations have both changed and endured. Despite echoes of the Cold War, the actors and actions have changed —a weakened Russia stands in for a strident Soviet Union, and Twitter bot networks have replaced mass letter-writing campaigns. Playing to nationalist fears of decline is a tempting but superficial parallel, masking Germany's unique situation after 1945. At a time when Russian President Vladimir Putin can be too readily credited with deciding everything within and beyond Russia's borders,   this study's most striking lesson is the importance of locating where agency is exercised in influence operations. The Soviet Union tasked East Germans with political operations, but East Germans themselves crafted narratives that spread to both West Germany and Moscow. Today, greater attention should be paid not to Russia's leader, but instead to the radical European politicians courted by Russia. Ultimately, they determine the narratives and sow the chaos that have caused such alarm in recent years and may do so in ways unanticipated by Putin. Researchers studying modern influence operations today ought to ask whether the dog wags the tail, or the tail wags the dog.

Notes

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[2] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

[3] Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 291–92.

[4] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Helmut Smith, "Germany Is No More: Defeat Occupation and the Postwar Order," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[5] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation*, 1945-49, 258.

[6] Naimark, 252–69.

[7] For a full account of the Soviet Union's initial attitude towards socialist unity, German reactions, and the development of the SED, see Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 271-284.

[8] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation*, 1945-49, 284; Naimark, 302–3.

[9] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation*, 1945-49, 299–301.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] NY 4182 863, "Werktätig in Stadt und Land!" 20.4.1947.

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[15] NY 4182 863, "Richtlinien zur Arbeit der KPD in der britischen Zone," 2.1.1947; NY 4182 863, "Zu den Landtagswahlen am 20. April in der Britischen Zone – Die Stellung der Parteien in der Zone," 21.3.1947; NY 4182 863, "Bericht über die Unterstützung der Wahlkampagne in der Britischen Zone durch das Zentralsekretariat der SED," 23.4.47.

[16] NY 4182 863, "Resolution angenommen auf dem Bezirksparteitag am 8. und 9. February 1947 in Wanne-Eickel"; NY 4182 864 "Sozialisten Vereint

- Deutschland Vereint: Manifest des Landesparteitages der KPD Niedersachsen" 1947.

[17] NY 4182 864, "Unser Tag, Beilage Nr. 1," 27.7.1947.

[18] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-49*, 306.

[19] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-49,* 311-313.

[20] See Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* for a treatment of this dynamic.

[21] DY 30 14733, "Protokoll," 16.3.1949; DY 30 14733, "Protokoll Nr. 19," 13.10.1949.

[22] DY 6 2172, "Bericht über die Aussprache mit einem Gast aus Westdeutschland," 4.1.1951; DY 6 2057, "Stimmen aus Westdeutschland" 18.1.1951 – Even those FRG sources lamenting an apolitical population report that West Germans increasingly trade "culture-decomposing jazz" for consciousness of the national question.

[23] DY 30 14733, "Protokoll zur Sitzung am 6.10.49," 6.10.1949.

[24] DY 30 14733, "Protokoll Nr. 23," 11.11.49.

[25] DY 6 128, "Programm der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschland," February 1950, p. 1.

[26] Ibid., p. 4-5.

[27] DY 6 128, "Programm der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschland," February 1950, p. 2-3.

[28] Ibid., p. 10.

[29] DY 6 2170, "Vorschläge des Büros des Präsidiums des Nationalrats zur Popularisierung der Erklärung der Aussenminister in Prag," 2.11.1950.

[30] DY 6 130, "Stenographische Niederschrift der 6. Tagung des Nationalrats der Nationalen Front," 14.11.1950, p. 75-83.

[31] DY 6 2901, "Vermerk: Betr.: Bulletin für Westdeutschland,"14.4.1950.

[32] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 488.

[33] Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 309–17.

[34] DY 6 130, "Entschliessung zu den Aufgaben der Ausschüsse und Aufklärungsgruppen...," 14.11.1950.

[35] DY 6 2171, "Betr. Konferenz am 7.1.1951," 7.1.1951; DY 6 2168, „Besprechung über gesamtdeutsche Aufgaben beim Büro des Präsidium des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front," 27.10.1951.

[36] DY 6 2170, "Bericht über die Besprechung in Hamburg am 12. Und 13. August 1950," 15.8.1950.

[37] DY6 2172, "Lagebericht über die Entwicklung der Nationalen Front in Westdeutschland," 7.5.1950; DY 30 14734, "Protokoll Nr. 37," 16.3.1950; DY30 14734, "Protkoll Nr. 44," n.d.; DY 30 14734, "Protokoll Nr. 62," 2.8.1950; DY 6 2170, "Bericht über die Besprechung in Hamburg am 12. Und 13. August 1950," 15.8.1950.

[38] DY 6 2170, "An den Volksrat der DDR," 29.6.50.

[39] DY 6 2901, "Übersicht über die Entwicklung der Bewegung der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschland in Westdeutschland," 1.6.1950.

[40] DY 6 2901 "Arbeitsplan für September und Oktober 1950"

[41] DY 30 14734, "W. Fisch über den Stand der Bewegung der Nationalen Front in Westdeutschland," 27.6.1950.

[42] DY 6 2170, "Sitzung der Westkommission das ZK der SED mit Vertretern der Massenorganisationen und des Nationalrats," 4.8.1950.

[43] DY 30 14733, "Einschätzung der Delegation zum III. Deutschen Volkskongreß." 1.6.1949; DY 6 2901, "Schlüssel für die Benennung der Mitglieder für den westdeutschen Arbeitausschuss," (15.8.1950); DY 6 2901, "Vorbereitung des Nationalkongressess," 5.8.1950.

[44] DY 6 2170, "Sitzung der Westkommission das ZK der SED mit Vertretern der Massenorganisationen und des Nationalrats," 4.8.1950

[45] DY 6 2173, „Bericht über gesamtdeutsche Arbeit in den Monaten Juni und Juli," 6.8.1951.

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[54] DY 6 2168, "Arbeitsplan für die Monate Januar und Februar 1952," 4.1.1952.

[55] DY 6 2168, "Arbeitsplan für die Monate Januar und Februar 1952,"

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[56] DY 30 20543, "Ausschuss demokratische Rechte Bund der Deutschen." n.d..

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Images

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Page 94: "Erich Correns," photographed by Peter Heinz Junge (May 30, 1961), provided by the German Federal Archive, accessed on May 6, 2018 via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-83285-0022,_Erich_Correns.jpg.