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Thesis Title: De-Nazification and Reeducation: The Making of Socialism in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany 1945-1949

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

De-Nazification and Reeducation: The Making of Socialism in the Soviet Occupation
Zone of Germany 1945-1949

by

Elizabeth Lakeman

April 18, 2016

The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit in
the Department of History

Michael T. Orr
Krebs Provost and Dean of the Faculty

Carol Gayle, Chairperson

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Abstract

In this thesis I have studied the processes of de-Nazification and reeducation carried out by the Soviet Military Administration in Eastern Germany from 1945 to 1949 to create a socialist country. It begins with a background on the political developments across Germany after World War II. Attention is paid to the creation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. The thesis moves into a discussion of the de-Nazification process as the purging of National Socialists from society. While punitive measures were utilized at first, I highlight the transition that takes place to more rehabilitative measures in 1947. In terms of reeducation I discuss mass organizations, the educational system and the cultural sphere. Each topic receives its own chapter and the development of socialism in each sphere of society is analyzed in depth.

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Introduction

Germany after World War II was in a completely devastated state that the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain had to reconstruct. The problem was in how this reconstruction should take shape. The Nazis had championed a racist and aggressive nationalism that swept through the German people. It was now the responsibility of the Allied powers to undo this ideological damage. Immediately after the surrender of Germany the Allied powers divided Germany into three zones, with France being delegated a small zone of occupation, making a total of four. Though Germany was divided into these four sections, the Allies agreed that they would work together to create a unified, sovereign Germany. The creation of an Allied Control Council and agreements made at a joint Allied Conference, the Potsdam Conference, in July 1945 seemed to indicate that a peace between the Allied powers could be found. There was promise for a genuine, democratic, unified Germany.

The problem arose when it became clear that each Allied Power had a different vision of how this unified Germany should look. While the United States and the Western allies wanted a genuine democracy, the Soviet Union became increasingly interested in imposing its brand of socialism. As the 1940s progressed, the Soviet Union's relationship with the West faltered as its relationship with the Communist Party of Germany in the East flourished. While the Western Allies relationship with the East wavered, relations between the Western Allies strengthened. It grew into the formation of Bizonia, or the combination of the British and American Zones of Occupation, in 1947. This movement solidified the allegiance of the Western Allies to one another and events in the Western zone, such as the announcement of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan,

increasingly made the Soviet Union feel isolated in a country it occupied equally. These feelings of isolation did not subside and the international stage became more heated. This thesis will explore these developments and specifically study the developments toward Soviet-style socialism in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany.

My argument in this thesis is that from the beginning of the occupation the policy of the Soviet Union was directed toward ensuring that a restored Germany would be friendly toward the Soviet Union and as time went on that seemed to require Communist leadership. The devastated state of the defeated country meant that Germany had to completely rebuild and the policy of the Soviet Union sought to transform Germany – or at least the part of it that they controlled – as well as rebuild. The Soviet Union took an aggressive approach toward de-Nazification initially, at the same time that it cooperated with the Western Allies to work toward the eventual reemergence of a sovereign and united Germany. The Communist Party of Germany, itself rebuilt around a core of German Communists who had fled to Moscow when the Nazis took over Germany, went so far as to envision a unified and independent Germany. At times it was even more energetic than the Soviet Union, but in fact its activity was controlled by the Soviet Union, which tended to restrain its ambitions so as not to rock the boat. Throughout the late 1940s, the increase in tensions between the East and the West on the international stage also affected how the occupying powers went about de-Nazification and the reconstruction of Germany. While the West spoke of restoring “democracy,” the Soviet Union called for “anti-fascist democracy” and hinted that this would lead toward the making of socialism. Ultimately, the Soviet Union grew less and less interested in cooperating with the West and gave greater power to the German Communists, which

together led to the creation of the Communist-controlled German Democratic Republic in 1949. The establishment of the institutions of Soviet style socialism can be seen in various aspects of society from 1945-1949. The three areas I focus on in this thesis are mass organizations, the educational system, and the German cultural sphere.

Establishing and controlling mass organizations, the educational system, and the cultural sphere were all part of the Soviet/Communist path to socialism. Mass organizations saw a two-stage process of development throughout the 1940s. They began operating in the Soviet Zone sooner than in the West, which the West saw as a premature attempt to establish a political landscape. In 1947 these mass organizations began to transform into agencies for making good socialists. The educational system and the cultural sphere did not have this same two-stage development. The Soviet Military Administration had total control after 1945 and the influence of the Communist Party of Germany was present from the beginning, though that influence was subtle. As the occupation period passed and tensions between East and West grew, the Soviet Union's efforts to go beyond de-Nazification to the reeducation of East Germans became more overt. It became clear that the Allied powers had different visions for the future of Germany. The increasingly hostile relationship with the West mounted to a break in 1949, resulting in the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

The materials used for my thesis are wide-ranging because of the broad spectrum of topics I cover. Primary sources that proved most helpful to me were the collected works of various prominent Communists and their allies, such as Walter Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl, and Anton Ackermann. Published in German and translated into English,

these works helped provide a better understanding of the language used during the 1940s. The work of Walter Ulbricht was the most accessible, which is why he is quoted often throughout this thesis. Essays and speeches by Otto Grotewohl were also available and these provided valuable insight into the Social Democratic Party and its burgeoning relationship with the Communist Party of Germany in 1945-1946. Newspapers from the time, namely the *Tägliche Rundschau*, *Neues Deutschland*, and *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, were all found in nearby libraries and helped fill in any gaps left by the essays, speeches, and my secondary sources. Any speeches that were not found in the collected works of Communists or Social Democrats could often be found in the newspaper of the days after a speech or order was given. This provided me with an even wider array of sources to look for when trying to understand the complex developments of the Soviet Occupation Zone.

I tried to read as many secondary sources as possible to get a handle on the complexities of the Soviet Occupation Zone. It is interesting to see how different generations of historians perceive the events of postwar Germany. I tried to consult sources that were written during the period of the two Germanies as well as more recent texts in order to absorb the range of perspectives. Recent accounts include Giles MacDonogh's *After the Reich: The Brutal History of Allied Occupation*. Written in 2007, it is part of a wave of books studying postwar Germany that does not see the Soviet Union as the sole enemy. As the title of the book suggests, all Allies were at fault for the brutality that occurred after the war. MacDonogh does not exempt any of the Allied powers from the charge of brutal behavior against the German people. He does not seem to hold the usual Cold War biases and this helped me as I tried to understand the

occupation period myself. It gave an account of Germany as it might actually have been, not an idealized Germany under the great American occupation or the evil Soviet Occupation. Another important source for studying the Allied Powers as a whole was Frederick Taylor's *Exorcising Hitler*, written in 2011. While Taylor focused solely on the process of de-Nazification, like MacDonogh he provides an account of all four occupying powers and remains equally critical of each Allied approach to de-Nazification throughout. He argues that the Soviet Union was the most aggressive of the occupying forces in the de-Nazification process, but he also believes that the Soviet Union gave the most opportunity for reintegration of former Nazis back into society. This was a new perspective on the Soviet Union as most other accounts tended to demonize the Soviet Union. This idea that the Soviet Union was not all bad seems to be a newer approach to the study of the early Cold War years and one that I took into consideration as I worked to formulate my own opinions.

Timothy Vogt's *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany* is an intensive study of the East done in 2001. As this study related to part of my own thesis this dissertation was central to my understanding of the process of de-Nazification in the Soviet Zone. It was well researched and provided a more in depth study of the policies that were implemented to carry out de-Nazification. Vogt introduced the argument that there could have been a transition in the process of de-Nazification that aided in the rehabilitation of Nazis. De-Nazification had purely meant purging people from society before, but through Vogt's argument the real complexities postwar became clearer. Again, like MacDonogh's study, this book was written a while after the Cold War and therefore was distant from the typical animosities against the Soviet Union. While there was acknowledgment of the

high number of purges that took place, the focus on rehabilitation is not found in early studies of policy in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany. This encouraged me to look for more transformations and periods of rehabilitation like this in mass organizations, the educational system and the cultural sphere, although such developments were not always apparent.

The educational system is a complex issue to study and one that I feel deserves much more attention than I gave it in this thesis. Benita Blessing's *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (2006) gave an account of the Soviet Zone educational system that placed more power in the hands of the Germans in the reconstruction of their schools. This falls in line with the other recent literature that does not as readily condemn the Soviet Union for the developments in the East. She argues that educational values were founded in the history of German education and merely changed to fit the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) agenda. This was a new perspective for me about the whole of the Soviet Zone because it did not give much consideration to the influence of the Soviet Military Administration. While the Soviet Military Administration was the controlling power, to Blessing the reformation of the educational system was something that was German-initiated. Reading this account forced me to reconsider how I looked at the development of the educational system because it was not as clear as in other areas of society. There was a lot of curriculum change throughout the late 1940s and as the de-Nazification process changed so did the nature of the teaching profession. Education was constantly changing to fit the demands of the Soviet Zone and I drew this same conclusion as I continued to study the cultural sphere in the late 1940s.

Historian David Pike has done much work studying the cultural sphere in East Germany. His book *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Occupied Germany 1945-1949* (1993) and his work on censorship in East Germany argued that the Soviet Military Administration and the Communist Party of Germany were aggressive in their control of culture from the beginning of the occupation period. He was not shy in displaying his biases. He wrote much of his work in the few years following the reunification of East and West, so he may still be subject to the attitudes of the Soviet Union as the ultimate enemy. It fits in with the trend that develops as historians studying the Cold War become farther removed from the period itself. Pike was still very much a part of Cold War history only a few years after its end, and so he can hold on to such notions. Other facets of his study that I found helpful were that Pike provided examples of activity in the West to compare to developments in the East and it was this comparison that helped me see the different sides to the cultural sphere in Germany. It was also through these books that I started to see that there was not a two-stage process of transformation in the cultural sphere as could be seen in the de-Nazification process and the revival of mass organizations. Censorship and other methods of control were exercised from the beginning of occupation, and this is central to understanding the origins of the German Democratic Republic.

Memoirs were invaluable when trying to get a better sense for the realities of Nazi Germany and postwar East Germany. They also followed a more traditional feeling of animosity toward the Soviet Union and the German Communist Party. Wolfgang Leonhard's *Child of the Revolution* provided insight into the KPD leadership that I might not have otherwise have had access to. As a defector from the Communist Party of

Germany I understand his biases against the Communist Party of Germany and its relationship with the Soviet Union, but his accounts of the early postwar years still need to be considered when searching to understand the development of East Germany. Other memoirs used in passing are Joel Agee's *12 Years* and Joachim Fest's *Not I*. While Agee focuses on life in East Germany, Fest recounts his experience in Nazi Germany. Fest's account of Nazi Germany is interesting because his family did not actively support the Nazi Party. He provides insight into the life of a boy who was forced into the activities of the Nazi Party, such as the Hitler Youth, without the enthusiasm of a committed Nazi. Agee mirrors Fest's lack of enthusiasm for politics in his relationship with Communism. He joins the Free German Youth group mostly because he has to, partly because he wants to be with his friends. Agee does not have positive memories of the KPD and the Soviet Military Administration and this is indicative of literature being produced during the Cold War. Both Fest and Agee enlighten the reader about developments in Germany during various points of its history through their memoirs. They provide points of reference, what Germany was like during the Nazi years in Fest's book and to how it became a socialist state in Agee's. Studying the similarities and differences of the two Germanies was interesting as I tried to better understand the transformation of Germany. Each memoir gave me a different opinion on the occupying powers and influences in Germany and helped me see how people felt about these forces immediately after the war. They were a solid baseline as I studied more recent sources that changed this traditional postwar opinion.

This thesis is broken down into five chapters, beginning with a chapter on the political developments in all of Germany after World War II. The political relationships

between the West and the East as well as between the Soviet Union and the KPD are the foundation for the overarching argument about de-Nazification and the making of Socialist East Germany. They also help explain the political landscape within East Germany. Specifically, it provides further explanation about the development of a unified working class party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which would come to rule East Germany for its forty-year history. It is the political relationships set up in Chapter 1 that dictate the process of de-Nazification examined in Chapter 2. The Allied powers all agreed upon the necessity of de-Nazification, but as we see throughout the rest of German society, there were disagreements on the best path for Germany. Chapter 2 looks at the physical removal of Nazis from positions of power in German society through de-Nazification. It studies how this process began and how it transformed into the rehabilitative process that helped create socialist citizens.

Chapters 3-5 each focus on a different dimension in the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Mass organizations are studied in Chapter 3. Major social and political organizations are discussed to better understand their contributions to the indoctrination of the East German people. Trade Unions and youth organizations are the main focus, but it is all connected back to their relationship to the political sector. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on education and culture respectively. Since these are the two areas of society that did not undergo the two stages of development like the others they have been grouped together at the end. They act as an exception to the idea that implementation of socialist ideas began in 1947 and instead demonstrate that socialist influence was being implanted in different institutions all along. In studying the various levels of education and how the schools dealt with the German past and progressing into the future, it became more apparent that

socialism was a vision for the future of Germany from the beginning. The cultural sphere produced similar thoughts when looking at the urgency with which the Soviet Military Administration and the Communist Party of Germany tried to bring cultural figures back to the East. Their infusion of art and film from the Soviet Union into Germany early on in the period of occupation suggest that the Soviet Military Administration wanted to exert its influence over the future of Germany immediately.

Ultimately, the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany underwent a series of developments from 1945-1949 that make up the body of my thesis. While the developments of different spheres of society were all occurring at once, they were not all happening in the same way. This is what made studying the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany so difficult. There did not seem to be one pattern I could follow that inevitably led to the creation of the German Democratic Republic. I enjoyed taking on the challenge of working through the early, complicated years of post war Germany and particularly the problems facing the KPD and the Soviet Military Administration. There were many factors contributing to the decisions of the leaders in the Soviet Zone and when also considering the developments in the West at the same time I can begin to appreciate the how difficult it must have been to understand these developments as they were taking place. There were so many unknowns in the years after World War II, and trying to understand them all 70 years later is still a challenge. I look forward to continuing this study in the future and hopefully gaining an even better grasp on the postwar years of Germany.

Chapter 1:

The Soviet Occupation Zone: Birthplace of the German Democratic Republic

The German Army surrendered on May 8, 1945. The Russian Army reached Berlin toward the end of April and had to fight district by district and street by street to dislodge determined defenders, some of whom went underground. Therefore, the Red Army had to pick the city apart to establish control. Their behavior was brutal, extremely aggressive and acquisitive. Russian soldiers looted with impunity: some were seen with multiple watches on their arms and others collected novelties, such as cigarette lighters, which were then a new commodity. The commodity many demanded for themselves was German women, and unfortunately rape became the norm. A rough estimate of the number of women raped in Berlin right after the war is 20,000. Sometimes men told their wives to give themselves to Russians quickly, while others were killed trying to defend them.¹ The harrowing account by one woman of her life in Berlin in May 1945 tells how she survived by submitting to one Russian soldier with whom she stayed and who then became her protector, warding off the rest of his friends and fellow soldiers.² Difficult as this situation was, it was better than living in fear of the rest of the men of the Red Army. It was a tactic for survival, and that was the struggle for most Germans after the devastation of World War II. When the German Army surrendered to the Russian army on May 9, the Red Army controlled all of Berlin. After negotiation with the other Allies, British and American soldiers arrived in Berlin beginning in June 1945 and a more

¹Giles Macdonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of Allied Occupation* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 96-100.

²Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Phillip Boehm (New York: Picador, 2005), 64.

lasting peace came to Berlin.³ The Russians now occupied the Eastern Sector of Berlin and the Eastern party of Germany and had to work together with the Allied powers in the Western Zone toward the reconstruction of Germany.

Months before the Red Army established military control in Berlin and Eastern Germany, a small visionary group of German Communist exiles who had sought refuge from Hitler by fleeing to the Soviet Union began to develop a broad program to restructure German society. Their *Aktionsprogramm* (Action Program), adopted in October of 1944, laid out the central differences with the Hitler Regime, what the German Communist Party (KPD) saw as key issues and finally how they proposed to change society. The Nazis were accused of imperialism and being a terrorist regime contributing to the economic, political and overall national catastrophe that was Germany.⁴ The KPD set forth four main action goals:

- 1) Develop broad antifascist and antimilitary mass propaganda
- 2) Develop a mass movement for the struggle for democracy that includes all organizations, parties, groups, to create popular democracy to annihilate the fascist-imperialist regime tendency in society and begin the fight for a democratic People's regime.
- 3) Create a bloc of organizations to struggle for democracy
- 4) Create a unified working class, that is closely unified and ready to support the correct policies and thus can be the leading force in the democratic struggle.⁵

This four-point action program provided the Communist Party with a foundation for action as soon as the war ended. No immediate plans were outlined because the German Communists recognized that the basic conditions were to be controlled by the Red Army.

³ Macdonogh, *After the Reich*, 103.

⁴ Communist Party of Germany, "Aktionsprogramm des ZK der KPD für einen Block der kämpferischen Demokratie zur antifaschistisch-demokratischen Umgestaltung Deutschlands, 21. Oktober 1944," in *Dokumente zur Geschichte der SED* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1981), 392.

⁵ Communist Party of Germany, "Aktionsprogramm des ZK der KPD für einen Block der kämpferischen Demokratie zur antifaschistisch-demokratischen Umgestaltung Deutschlands, 21. Oktober 1944," 393-394.

But the action program did give them a vision for the future and allowed them to begin preparation for the large task of reconstructing Germany. They wanted to reconstruct Germany in their own image, but knew their power would be limited because they foresaw the influence the Soviet Union would have on reconstruction.

Some of these exiled German Communists grouped around Walter Ulbricht, and often called the Ulbricht Group, returned to Berlin on April 27, 1945.⁶ Walter Ulbricht (1893-1973) was a leader in the the German Communist Party (KPD) and fled Germany in 1933 to escape Hitler and the Nazi Party. Initially in exile in Paris and then Prague, Ulbricht moved to Moscow in 1938 where he became the KPD's permanent representative to the Communist International Organization (Comintern).⁷ He helped the Red Army process information about the German army and helped indoctrinate prisoners of war to communism.⁸ He organized a group of committed German Communists in Moscow to help him in reconstructing Germany after the war. Prominent members of the Ulbricht group included Fritz Erpenbeck, Hans Mahle, and Wolfgang Leonhard. Fritz Erpenbeck (1897-1975) and Hans Mahle (1911-1999) assisted in the cultural reconstruction of Germany through their contributions to theater and Radio Berlin. It was this group of men that assisted the Soviet Military Administration in the early months after the war to stabilize Germany.

Wolfgang Leonhard (1921-2014) defected to the West in 1949 and later provided a detailed account of his experience in the Communist Party of Germany. He described the lack of communication among the Ulbricht Group as they set out for Germany

⁶Macdonogh, *After the Reich*, 104.

⁷Carola Stern, *Ulbricht: A Political Biography* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 77.

⁸Stern, *Ulbricht*, 86.

because no one but Walter Ulbricht knew where in Germany they were headed or what type of work they were to do. He only knew that he and his fellow German Communists “had a political mission to carry out, the target of which was Fascism...[and a] purpose which was the transformation of Germany into a democracy.”⁹ Like the Action Plan put forth by the German Communists in 1944, this was a vague program for the future of Germany. With Walter Ulbricht as leader of German Communist reconstruction, though, no questions were asked. Leonhard characterized Ulbricht as a hard-line man who followed the party line with no exceptions. To Leonhard, “[his] tone...permitted no contradiction. His manner left no room for doubt that the Party’s policy was to be settled by him.”¹⁰ This strict following of the Party line continued to characterize Ulbricht and his policies for the Soviet Zone.

The Ulbricht group joined the Red Army in Germany as it forged its way into Berlin, but they had no authority yet as they were still citizens of a defeated nation. The Soviet Union redefined its role in Germany, from conquering army to occupation force through the creation of the Soviet Military Administration on June 9, 1945. The Western Allies about the same time similarly created Military Administrations. Under Soviet Military Administration, order slowly emerged in the Soviet Zone of Germany. Order No. 1, which established the organization of the military administration in the Soviet Zone, stated that, “The Soviet Military Administration has been formed to control the fulfillment of the conditions imposed on Germany by her unconditional surrender and to

⁹Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C.M. Woodhouse (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 287-288.

¹⁰Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 300.

administer the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany.”¹¹ Red Army Marshal Georgy Zhukov (1896-1974) was made Chief of the Soviet Military Administration.¹² Zhukov had worked his way up in the Red Army, first being noticed in 1937 for his effective defense during the undeclared conflict with Japan on the Manchurian border and then advancing rapidly at the end of the 1930’s as Stalin’s regime needed fresh leadership after the secret military purge. His largest contribution to World War II was his work as commander of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts and his leadership of one of the key armies involved in the capture of Berlin.¹³ His command over the Soviet Military Administration in Germany was his reward for the work he had done with the Red Army, but the functions of the new Soviet Military Administration were distinct from the function of the military. While the Red Army facilitated the official end of the war and carried out the occupation of Germany, the Soviet Military Administration’s job was to oversee the reestablishment of German society. The Soviet Military Administration also provided support for the KPD in Berlin. It helped bring back to Germany more than 70 German Communists and 300 prisoners of war who were trained in Russian anti-fascist schools throughout June 1945.¹⁴ The myriad of jobs for the Soviet Military Administration provided a structure for the Soviets as they exerted control over Germany and provided a foundation for the development of Germany as a whole.

¹¹Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 1: The Organization of the Military Administration for the Administration of the Soviet Zone,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 37.

¹²Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 1,” 37.

¹³Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 203.

¹⁴Norman A. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 42.

On June 10, 1945, just one day after the formal establishment of its own Military Administration, the Soviet Military Administration announced that the German people were able to form political parties.¹⁵ Order No. 2 allowed for “the formation and activity of all anti-fascist parties having as their aim the final extirpation of all remnants of fascism and the consolidation of the foundations of democracy and civil liberties in Germany.”¹⁶ The Nazi Party as well as most of the right wing parties of the Weimar period had been immediately dissolved after the Red Army’s arrival as well as most of the right wing parties of the Weimar period, such as the German People’s Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*; DVP). With the announcement on June 10, the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*; KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland*, SPD), were reestablished as independent parties.¹⁷

German Communists had been working with the Soviet Military from the beginning, but it was not until Order No. 2 was issued that the Communists were officially recognized as a political party. They were aligned with the Soviet Union because of their common belief in the Communist cause, and many of the German Communists had spent the Hitler years in exile in Moscow. Though they were allies with the Soviets, German Communists were still Germans by nationality and were held responsible for the atrocities of World War II like their fellow countrymen. The KPD had a ready made leadership of exiles, such as the Ulbricht Group, who had spent the war in

¹⁵Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 330.

¹⁶G.K. Zhukov, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 2: Establishment of Anti-fascist Parties and Free Trade Unions in the Soviet Zone,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 38.

¹⁷Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 326.

Moscow and returned to Berlin with a strong Marxist-Leninist base.¹⁸ There were suggestions that the KPD should become a mass people's party as opposed to a cadre party, which implied that it should appeal not only to the working class but also to farmers, peasants, Christians, and intellectuals.¹⁹ These Communist returnees were committed to this idea of an anti-fascist, democratic political front and were deeply opposed to merging the Communist Party and the Social Democrats, whom they considered unschooled reformists.²⁰ With its deep suspicion of newly-minted Communists and a historic distrust of the Social Democratic Party, the KPD was insistent on remaining an independent party in the beginning.

The SPD in the Soviet Zone was in a different position than the KPD because it did not have a close relationship with the Soviet Union like the KPD. Fewer members of the SPD had worked underground in Germany than had Communists during World War II. Much of its leadership had fled west as opposed to the KPD, which fled to Moscow, and come the end of the war many did not return. The SPD had many of the same policy goals as the KPD, namely the empowerment and unification of the working class, but they did not have the support of the Soviet Union like the KPD, nor indeed of any great power.²¹ This made it difficult for them to organize immediately after the war. Many in the SPD were willing to unify with the KPD from the moment the political arena was restored in June 1945, particularly a prominent Social Democrat Otto Grotewohl.

¹⁸Henry Krisch, *German Politics under Soviet Occupation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 54.

¹⁹Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53: From antifascism to Stalinism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 64.

²⁰Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 110-111.

²¹Krisch, *German Politics under Soviet Occupation*, 61.

Grotewohl (1894-1964) had joined the party in 1922 and in 1925 became a member of the *Reichstag*. In 1933 he was removed in Hitler's takeover and was imprisoned several times throughout the reign of the Nazi Party. He later became the first Prime Minister of East Germany. Grotewohl argued in mid-June 1945 that the SPD ultimately wanted the same things for the working class as the Communists, that is, "the abolition of class rule and ...equal rights and responsibilities for all without discrimination by sex or descent."²² Grotewohl wanted to unite all parties in his fight for working class people.

The KPD asserted its independent role by announcing to the people their program for the reconstruction of Germany, which came in a speech on June 25, 1945 by Ulbricht. He stressed that democratization was "in the national interest and in the immediate interest of the working class, for such a democratic-parliamentary system gives the working class the opportunity to unite after long division and thus create the guarantee for the future unification of the people." He went on to say that socialism could not yet be realized in Germany because of division in the working class and the ideological devastation caused to the working class by the Nazi Party.²³ Thus Ulbricht placed more emphasis on forging a path for democracy and for the complete destruction of Nazism than on the need to establish a socialist system. Ulbricht reassured the people that Germany would not be forced to follow an externally determined road to socialism and said that the KPD believed in a uniquely German path to socialism. He declared, "We must enter upon that road in Germany which corresponds to the conditions of development in Germany, and this will not be exactly the same road as in other

²²Otto Grotewohl, "Entwurf für den Aufruf der SPD vom 15 Juni 1945," in *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei* (Berlin: Satz, Druck und Verlag, 1994), 5

²³Walter Ulbricht, "Program of the Anti-fascist Order," in *On Questions of Socialist Reconstruction in the GDR*, trans. Intertext Berlin (Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1968), 17

countries.”²⁴ Two points are worth underlining about this speech. First, Ulbricht framed the KPD approach to reconstruction in terms of anti-fascism rather than socialism. Second, he seemed to sense a fear that Soviet control of Eastern Germany meant that it would be Sovietized and responded by consistently stressing that Germany must find its own path to democracy. He was acknowledging the current struggles of Germany and in doing so was expressing solidarity with the German people. Through this speech, Walter Ulbricht was trying to become a leader the German people could trust.

Other non-Communist parties also emerged in June 1945 and challenged the political monopoly of the KPD, the most important of which were the Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*; CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (*Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*; LDPD). The ideological motivation for the CDU was the belief that social behavior was inspired by the gospels and that it was a political and moral obligation to help unify the people.²⁵ The CDU was initially a popular organization for Germans who had been involved in right-wing parties dissolved by the Allied Powers after World War II.²⁶ Despite its early popularity among right-wing Germans, the CDU was not well represented in the administration or later in elected bodies. Though Communists by nature are anti-clerical and not religious, it has been suggested that allowing the CDU to exist was a kind of demonstration to the rest of the world, specifically West Germany,

²⁴Ulbricht, “Program of the Anti-fascist Order,” 18.

²⁵Howard Frost, “Non-Communist Parties and Mass Organizations in the German Democratic Republic,” *The Potomac Review* (1979): 18.

²⁶Martin McCauley, “Liberal Democrats in the Soviet Zone of Germany, 1945-1947,” *Journal of Contemporary History* (1977): 783.

that there was democracy in the Eastern Zone.²⁷ The CDU existed alongside other non-Communist organizations and together helped to create this image of democracy.

The other non-Communist party, the Liberal Democratic Party, was founded as a successor party to the several German liberal parties of the Weimar Republic. Howard Frost contrasts it to the CDU, which believed in a platform of social welfare. The LDPD was more interested in a free economy and limited government, while sustaining Western Christian culture.²⁸ Because political parties of the right were not allowed to form at all after World War II, the CDU and the LDPD worked hard to draw members of the previously established right-wing parties into their ranks. The LDPD hoped that it would attract members who had been active in the Weimar years, but more members opted to join the CDU, hurting membership in the LDPD early in the postwar years. Historian Martin McCauley argues that many of the LDPD's early problems stemmed from its lack of an official party program. It was centered around one political figure and accepted its role in the Soviet dominated Eastern Zone. This did not spur membership and therefore relegated it to the status of a less-influential party than the KPD or SPD.²⁹ Ultimately, the revival of the non-Communist CDU and the LDPD in the summer of 1945 encouraged the formation of the anti-fascist bloc with the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in July 1945.

These four political parties joined together on July 14, 1945 to announce that they were going to work together to solve the problems of Germany, which they defined as the existence of Nazi thought in Germany and the need for anti-fascist activity. Their

²⁷Frost, "Non-Communist Parties and Mass Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," 19.

²⁸Frost, "Non-Communist Parties and Mass Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," 19

²⁹McCauley, "Liberal Democrats in the Soviet Zone of Germany, 1945-1947," 783-784.

declaration reads, “The representatives of the four parties, notwithstanding the full mutual recognition of their independence, are resolved to solve these great problems with unanimous strength by uniting in a firm front of anti-fascist and democratic organizations.”³⁰ Though the political parties differed in ideology, all of them gathered under the umbrella of an anti-fascist bloc to participate in German political life. These parties said that the “creation of an anti-fascist and democratic political order will be required if the life of the German nation is to be saved.”³¹ It was a powerful statement that demonstrated the urgent need to create a new Germany. The formation of the front was meant to show the world Germany’s level of commitment to creating a new democratic society for itself.

The Potsdam Conference in July 1945 brought together the three major Allies from World War II, the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, to discuss the fate of defeated Germany, focusing on the whole of Germany and not the separate details of each individual sector. The Big Three revealed a number of important agreements “on the political and economic principles of a coordinated Allied policy toward defeated Germany...”³² Stating that the Allied powers intended to work together to reconstruct and unify Germany while each ally maintained its individual sector for the time being, they covered politics, economic principles, reparations, and the handling of war criminals.

³⁰Representatives from the Social Democratic and Communist Parties, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Liberal Democratic Party, “Extract from a Joint Declaration by Representatives of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Liberal Democratic Party of the Soviet Zone at a Meeting in Berlin,” in *Documents of Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press. 1955), 40.

³¹Representatives from the Social Democratic and Communist Parties, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Liberal Democratic Party, “Extract from a Joint Declaration,” 40.

³²J.V. Stalin, Harry S. Truman, and C.R. Atlee, “Extracts from the Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 17 July-2 August 1945,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press. 1955), 42.

Specifically, they called for demilitarization of Germany and the eradication of National Socialist influence on society “to prepare for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful cooperation in international life by Germany.”³³ Key words such as “peaceful” and “democratic” were utilized throughout the Potsdam Agreement. They helped stress the values the Allies wanted to instill in Germany. The Allied powers may have appeared unified on these values, but the East and the West divided on how they were actually defined.

The Soviet Union had suffered huge human and industrial losses during the war. These losses seemed to explain the vengeful behavior of the Red Army in the part of Germany they occupied. Great Britain and the United States, remembering the mistakes after World War I, had renounced any reparations from Germany, but the Soviets demanded \$10 billion dollars to help rebuild their broken economy.³⁴ The Russians firmly believed that the taking of reparations should occur before any economic rehabilitation to ensure that Germany could not resume hostilities in the future.³⁵ The Soviet Union remained steadfast about this condition because it had already started taking reparations before the formal discussions at Potsdam. Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin’s right hand man at the Potsdam Conference, admitted that by the time of the meeting the Soviet Union had already taken \$300 million in reparations in the East Zone.³⁶ These preemptive moves by the Soviet Union sparked some concern on the part

³³Stalin, Truman, and Atlee, “Extracts from the Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 17 July-2 August 1945,” 43.

³⁴Michael Neiberg, *Potsdam: The End of World War II and the Remaking of Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 198

³⁵Neiberg, *Potsdam*, 186.

³⁶Neiberg, *Potsdam*, 202.

of the Western powers. British Prime Minister Attlee later said it had seemed to him that “as far as [Stalin] was concerned...[the German people] could all starve.”³⁷ The Soviet Union proclaimed that it supported the creation of an anti-fascist democracy and that it had a genuine commitment to the growth of a Germany independent of the Soviet Union, but the Western powers continued to be concerned that the power of the Soviet Union over Germany was too great. American leaders believed that Soviet policy toward the reconstruction of Germany was just an attempt to facilitate future Soviet exploitation of the human and material resources of Germany.³⁸ But because the agreement solidified the fact that the armies of the Allied powers were in place in their occupation zone, this created a tension between the Allies about efforts to maintain stability and agreeing on ways to work toward a more lasting peace in Germany.

The suspicions among the Allies were effectively put aside to formally establish the Allied Control Council on August 30, 1945. The idea of an Allied Control Council had been discussed in February 1945 at the previous Big Three Conference in Yalta, but it was not until the Potsdam Conference that plans were confirmed. The Allied Control Council was meant to unify the Allied powers and commit them to a common goal to reconstruct Germany. A proclamation to the German people reiterated that the Allied Powers held supreme authority over Germany and that all matters affecting Germany were to be decided upon by the Control Council. It stated that “Any military laws, proclamations, orders, ordinances, notices, regulations and directives issued by or under the authority of the respective Commanders-in-Chief for their respective Zones of

³⁷Clement Attlee, *Twilight of Empire: Memoirs of Prime Minister Clement Attlee* (New York: A.S. Barnes. 1962), 77.

³⁸Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht: The Communist Reconstruction of East Germany 1945-1949* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1983), 37.

Occupation are continued in force in their respective zones.”³⁹ Through the Allied Control Council, Germany was governed as a single economic unit, but individual military administrations were given the responsibility in their own zones.⁴⁰ The creation of the Allied Control Council showed a willingness on the part of the allies to work together to reconstruct Germany while giving each allied power jurisdiction over their individual zone. This gave the Soviet Military Administration some freedom in the construction of the East in its own image.

Efforts to merge the SPD and the KPD took place in the second half of 1945 and into 1946 heightened political tensions within the Soviet Zone. As the Communist Party watched the popularity of the Social Democratic Party grow after it was revived it became clear to them that the KPD needed to widen its base to retain political dominance, and that brought back the idea of a merger with the SPD. In order to make unity a possibility, the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD proposed a joint conference with the Social Democratic Party on December 20, 1945. Despite disagreements over the influence of the Soviet Military Administration, the two parties agreed that they envisioned the same future for Germany. This was enough to hold a preliminary conference to discuss a possible merger. As much as the SPD wanted to sort out and address past conflicts with the KPD, the December Conference was dominated by KPD insistence on discussion of the future. The SPD wanted to know the KPD stance on external influence on its party agenda, but this point was mostly ignored.⁴¹ At the

³⁹Allied Control Council, “Control Council Proclamation No. 1: Establishment of the Control Council,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 59.

⁴⁰Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 9.

⁴¹Krisch, *German Politics under Soviet Occupation*, 134-137.

Conference what distinguished the agendas of the two parties were their differences on how to think about unification. The SPD spoke of the necessity of uniting all German socialist workers, while the KPD focused on the leaders, praising the work that the Soviet Military Administration had done and the success that had been achieved by the anti-fascist bloc.⁴² The December Conference did not produce a firm plan for the future unification, but the SPD agreed that discussions could continue. Otto Grotewohl expressed the SPD's stance in his proclamation after the Conference, saying that the representatives of both parties had laid the foundation for future unanimity in the development of a unified German worker's party.⁴³ His conciliatory tone signaled the unification to come in the near future.

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) was formed four months later, at a convention on April 21-22, 1946 of both the KPD and the SPD.⁴⁴ In the proclamation of aims and principles of the Socialist Unity Party, one can see the outline of a German road to socialism. Walter Ulbricht had said that the German people were not ready for socialism. The creation of a unified working class party signaled to the members of the KPD and the SPD that their leaders now thought it was possible to work toward socialism in Germany. The united party issued a proclamation of principal aims, declaring: "The working class alone has a great historical aim: socialism. The future therefore belongs to it, together with all of the working men

⁴²Krisch, *German Politics under Soviet Occupation*, 131.

⁴³Otto Grotewohl, "Auf dem Wege zur Einheit," in *Über Politik, Geschichte und Kultur: Reden und Schriften 1945-196* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979), 33.

⁴⁴Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 214-215.

and women.”⁴⁵ Though the Soviet Zone of Occupation was not expressly mentioned, in that this was a proclamation for the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, it can be inferred that the party leaders were really speaking of the East German zone. The immediate goal was an anti-fascist, democratic Germany, led by a government of all the anti-fascist democratic parties. The statement affirmed that the SED was committed to working through the political process, but it did recognize the possibility of revolution if the capitalists tried to prevent democratic change from taking place: “The Socialist Unity Party of Germany aims at the achievement of socialism by democratic means; but it will resort to revolutionary means if the capitalist class departs from the basis of democracy.”⁴⁶ Previously there had been no mention of revolutionary means on the road to socialism in Germany, so that was a significant change in the rhetoric of the left. The SED was indicating that force was a possibility in the event that democracy faced class opposition using undemocratic means. The merger of the working class parties creating the SED accelerated the Soviet Zone along a path to socialism.

On the outside, the founding of the SED appeared to be a genuine step forward in the development of democratic politics in Germany. The proclamations of the SED leadership about the future of Germany suggested there could be a new unified government drawn from the left. Wolfgang Leonhard found great the hope in the air at the convention. There was a sense that with the foundation of the SED the German socialists were going to have independence from Russian control. They could actually set

⁴⁵ Socialist Unity Party of Germany, “Principles and Aims of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. 21 April 1946,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 121.

⁴⁶ Socialist Unity Party of Germany, “Principles and Aims of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany,” 123-124.

out on the road to socialism tailored to Germany, founded on their own traditions, and free from the restrictions of Soviet occupation. He notes that,

Everything seemed to point to the fulfilment of our wishes: the equal composition of the leadership [of the SED], the admonitory words about the comradeship and mutual confidence, which Pieck had addressed to the Communists; Grotewohl's insistence on freedom of the personality in the new Party; the thesis of a separate German road to socialism, which had found its echo in the SED programme; and Grotewohl's hints of the possibility of an early end to Soviet occupation.⁴⁷

Leonhard was expressing the hope that the formation of the SED would bring good things to Germany, but in saying everything "seemed" to point to these things he touched on the issues that later divided him from the KPD/SED. Though the SED appeared strong, there was much political infighting that gave it a weak foundation. The SED was ultimately a façade to appease the politically active left and, in fact, as time passed the KPD, backed by the power of the Soviet Military Administration, increasingly exerted more power within the SED.

The unification of the SPD and the KPD into the SED was a momentous occasion for the Soviet Zone. Despite the excitement about this development, the creation of the SED made the West more suspicious of Soviet aims in the East. Ulbricht addressed this issue in a speech about the strategy and aims of the SED in October 1946:

Some working class people in West Germany consider the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany a party of the Soviet Union. Although the creation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany began in the Soviet Occupation Zone, it has become the leading force of the working people in the whole of Germany. For it has shown the working class and the working people throughout Germany the path to the rebirth of the German working-class movement and also created a great example of the unification of the two streams of the German working-class movement for West and South Germany.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 356-57.

⁴⁸Walter Ulbricht, "Strategies and Tactics of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany," in *On Questions of Socialist Reconstruction in the GDR*, trans. Intertext Berlin (Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1968), 99.

This speech was one of the first times Ulbricht directly referenced the West as distinct from the East. He acknowledged Western criticism of his party and its dependence upon the occupying Soviets, but sought to dispel that charge. As in his other postwar speeches, Ulbricht drew the message back to the unity and empowerment of the working class, a message that he promoted throughout his career in the GDR. The reference to the West, if brief, recognized the growing tensions that were rising to the surface between the Allied Forces. These tensions became all the more important as local provincial (*Land*) elections took place later that October throughout the Soviet Zone, most importantly the elections in East Berlin scheduled for October 20.

The SED undertook a zone-wide initiative to improve its reputation among the people. Public debates effectively spread information on the party's political aims. In September 1946 the SED's newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published the proclamation entitled "Basic Rights of the German People – The Path to German Unity" in which the party aim of unifying Germany was meant to draw many people to the party. These zone-wide local elections were held in order to reestablish political life in Eastern Germany and probably to give the new SED legitimacy as the ruling party. The SED held elections throughout the Soviet Zone outside of Berlin in October 1946 on the assumption that a decisive victory in the rest of the Zone would bolster enthusiasm for the party in the capital, where the KPD and the SPD had not merged. Otto Grotewohl emphasized that an SED victory in these elections was important not just for the Soviet Zone, but for all of Germany. These local elections were the stepping stones to the creation of an all German government. Despite all these efforts to boost its own image, the party still did not manage to win a majority in the October 1946 elections. After the October local

elections, it was clear that the SED had support among the working class, but not enough to gain an overall majority. The other parties in the election, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD), had held their own and prevented the SED from achieving an overall majority. Worse still, in the elections in Berlin on October 20, 1946, the SPD won a decisive victory over the Communist SED.⁴⁹ Wolfgang Leonhard states that the SPD won a decisive 48.7% of the vote in Berlin, while the CDU came second with 22.1%, and the SED was in third with a mere 19.8%.⁵⁰ These defeats across the Soviet Zone forced the SED to reconsider its tactics once again, ultimately driving it along stricter, more Soviet lines.

The decisive defeat of the SED in the October elections sparked a change in the SED's public image. Wolfgang Leonhard attributed the SED loss in the 1946 elections to its close relationship with the Soviet Union. The German people associated the SED with the Russians and to them the Russians were occupiers, not necessarily allies. The SED was dependent upon the Soviet Military Administration and many of the main leaders had close ties to Moscow, which they used as they worked to establish themselves in the Soviet Zone, but this only served to hurt them with the general public. The Berlin vote suggested that German people wanted to define their own path for their future, not something that was determined by a foreign power. Leonhard saw the development of the SED after the 1946 elections as being, unfortunately, "not toward greater independence, but exactly the opposite, their links with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Occupation

⁴⁹Dirk Spilker, *East German Leadership and the Division of Germany: Patriotism and Propaganda 1945-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97-101.

⁵⁰Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 359.

authorities became stronger.”⁵¹ If the SED had been in tune with its constituents and genuinely believed in a democratic road to socialism, then they would not have strengthened their relationship with the Soviet Union. It serves to show that the SED was in fact significantly dominated by the KPD, and these men chose to align themselves only more closely with the Soviet Union after their political upset and at a time of increasing tension between East and West. The elections of 1946 marked a turning point for the SED. It had now chosen to hold on to its socialism agenda and that choice had the effect of separating them from the people and making them dependent on the Soviet Union.

The relationship between the SED and the Soviet Union grew even stronger as relations among the Allies grew increasingly hostile. One of the main reasons for the tension between the Soviet Union and Western powers was President Harry Truman’s announcement in early 1947, later known as the Truman Doctrine, which seemed clearly directed at the Soviet Union.

The peoples of a number of countries of the world have recently had totalitarian regimes forced upon them against their will. The Government of the United States has made frequent protests against coercion and intimidation, in violation of the Yalta agreement, in Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria...At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is often not a free one...I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.⁵²

The Soviet Union was never directly named, but it was clear that President Truman was referring to its aggressive behavior in Eastern Europe and the East Mediterranean. In saying that the Yalta agreement had been violated, the United States was suggesting a

⁵¹Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 360.

⁵²President Harry Truman, “Truman Doctrine,” Address Before a Joint Session of Congress. Washington, District of Columbia. March 12, 1947. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp

new development in the relationship between the East and the West, one that recognized neither of the former Allies intended to carry out the agreements made during and after World War II, a fact that had been obvious to the Soviet Union for a while and now was becoming apparent to the United States. The subsequent announcement of the Marshall Plan in June 1947, to be put into effect in Germany starting in 1948, only intensified the hostilities. The Marshall Plan was initiated by the United States as a means of funding European recovery and encouraging democracy. It aimed to start economic growth in Europe so it could become a strong, prosperous, and democratic region. The Soviet Union took this generous measure by the United States as a reaction to its policies in the East. It saw the Marshall Plan as an effort to isolate and push the Soviet Union out of the joint work of the Allied powers in Germany.

The SED was equally appalled by the developments in the West. The Soviet Zone was not directly mentioned in the Truman Doctrine, but as a people occupied by the Soviet Union it felt included in the denunciations from the West. Though the two parts of Germany were theoretically still working together toward unification of Germany, the Soviet Zone could not help but feel attacked by the West Allies. In a heated response, Otto Grotewohl declared,

So far only the Soviet Union has consistently carried out these unanimous Allied decisions, while the Western Allies have moved farther and farther away from them... The punishment and expropriation of war criminals and active Nazis, the break up of the economic dictatorship and war policy of the big banks and monopoly firms, the implementation of land reform are the only possible bases for the final elimination of a catastrophic German policy and for the long overdue restoration of peace. If the Western occupying powers do not carry out these decisions... this will lead to the renewal of reactionary trends in Germany...⁵³

⁵³Otto Grotewohl, "Extracts from Speech by Otto Grotewohl, Joint Chairman of the Socialist Unity Party, at the Second German People's Congress," in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation, 1945-54* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 281.

This was simultaneously a defense of the policies being carried out in the Soviet Zone and an attack against the West. The West might think that the East was becoming totalitarian, but Grotewohl argued that the progress being made in the Soviet Zone of Germany was lasting. The reforms in the Soviet Zone might seem drastic, but they were necessary to completely eliminate the extremism perpetuated by the Nazi Party. These denunciations of actions carried out in either the Western Zone or the Eastern Zone signaled the worsening relationship between the two super powers.

Political scientist Zbigniew K. Brzezinski argued in 1960 that there was a standard pattern for development in the Soviet Bloc after World War II and that the reforms in the Soviet Zone of Germany fit his pattern quite well. Despite the individual characteristics defining each country, Brzezinski saw a series of stages in the consolidation of power in places of Soviet occupation. The first phase was relatively democratic with the old regime and its social allies eliminated because they were said to be Nazis/Fascists or collaborators. The new states were called People's Democracies. There were multiple parties participating in the political process and active encouragement of democratizing internal reforms. In the second stage, the bourgeois and peasant parties, the Church, and other centers of opposition to the Communist rule were gradually pushed out and opposition parties stifled or absorbed into Communist-dominated popular fronts. There was increasing control of the cultural arena and limits on intellectual freedom and by 1947-1948 the creation of a one-party system of government.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 8.

The political role of the Soviet Union in the People's Democracies increased during the development of the Soviet Bloc, increasing separation from the West and also increasing integration of the Bloc. In 1947, the Yugoslav Communist Party wanted more exchange of ideas to take place among the different parties of the Soviet Bloc. This exchange of knowledge would help bolster the strength of their party after a weak showing in national elections throughout the past year. From this request came the idea for the Cominform. In the small village of Szklarska Poreba, Poland the new international organization was inaugurated. The creation of the Cominform in September 1947 solidified the Soviet dominated countries. The establishment of the Cominform began to create more common patterns of development for the Communist parties in the Eastern countries. These countries moved closer to sovietization. Brezezinski argues that for Eastern European Communist parties the formation of the Cominform signaled the beginnings of the transformation to Stalinism.⁵⁵ In Germany we can see in the events of 1946 and early 1947 that it was beginning to move from the first stage of anti-fascist democratic politics, relatively open culture, and some openness in relations with Western Germany and the Western Allies toward a de facto one-party rule and isolation from the West. For the SED the possibility of a uniquely German path to socialism was eliminated and it too began to head down a road of sovietization.

The Soviet Zone of Germany was not directly linked to the Cominform, as it was not a sovereign country, but the organization had significance for the later creation of the German Democratic Republic in 1949. The Cominform's creation indicated that the kind of political developments that were taking place in the Soviet Zone of Germany were

⁵⁵Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, 59-62.

taking place not only there. Radical leanings to the left were taking place all across Eastern Europe. It was clearly a trend and therefore highlights the way the policies in East Germany sprang from its parent, the Soviet Union. The KPD continued to insist that Germany had an individual path to follow, one that passed through an antifascist, democratic stage. But the influence of the Soviet Union and the international Communist community proved stronger than the local communist vision. If Wolfgang Leonhard's memories are considered, the Soviet Union always dominated the relationship with the KPD and the transition to a more Soviet-style socialism was an easy consequence. This suggests that little coercion was involved in the process of bringing East Germany into the Soviet Bloc. At the same time, he suggests a genuine excitement about the creation of the SED and what it meant for Germany. It was a uniquely German political party, but it was soon subordinated to the Soviet Union. The relationship between the KPD and the Soviet Union is difficult to assess and a lot is left up to speculation. It seems safe to say, though, that East Germany quite early met the same fate as the other countries of the Soviet Bloc, and not just despite its interest in independent German development, but precisely because it was on the front lines of the Cold War and the Soviets deemed the region vital to its defense.

A year after the establishment of the Cominform in 1947 Walter Ulbricht declared that the SED represented a Party of a New Type. He said that by 1948 the SED was reconstructing itself to fit the demands of the working class. He claimed that the work done up until 1948 had been strong and benefitted Germany, but said there was still work to be done. He directly addressed the hostilities between the East and the West by declaring that in reconstruction plans for the Western Zones of Germany, "...the USA is

striving for the implementation of further aggressive designs.”⁵⁶ Conversely, he said that the Soviet Union was the only state that genuinely supported the struggle of the working class people and that stood for peace and free development of production. Therefore, he said, gaining the confidence and friendship of the Soviet Union was central to the stability of Germany and that led him to talk about the Party of a New Type, which clearly was meant to be a Leninist party. According to Ulbricht the new type of party “can only fulfill its tasks on the basis of democratic centralism, with unified party statutes, a unified party discipline and a unified party leadership, which mediates the line of party policy to the masses through its central newspaper.”⁵⁷ Unlike in the early years of occupation when such direct language was avoided by the KPD, with the political developments that had ensued over three and a half years since the end of the war, Ulbricht felt it necessary to use strong language, to openly declare East Germany’s alliance with the Soviet Union and to embrace the Soviet model.

By 1948, ties between East and West were breaking down and actions were taken that later led to the creation of distinctly different Germanies. The Marshall Plan was set to begin in 1948 and the United States said it would help inspire the democratic development of Germany. But the Marshall Plan and the vague plans by the United States to create a government for Germany led the Soviet Union to claim that the Potsdam Conference agreements had been broken. The Allied Control Council met for the last time in March 1948. During the meeting the Director of the Soviet Military Administration, Vasily Sokolovsky (1897-1968), accused the West of trying to force

⁵⁶Walter Ulbricht, “Party of a New Type: From an article September 1948,” in *On Questions of Socialist Reconstruction in Germany*, 159-170 (Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1968), 164.

⁵⁷Ulbricht, “Party of a New Type,” 166-167.

capitalism on the German people, which ran counter to agreements made at Potsdam, and he walked out. The Allied Control Council was in effect finished.⁵⁸ Unilateral currency reform on the part of the Western zones led the Soviets to blockade the land routes to the Allied Zones in Berlin in June 1948. Finally, in September 1949, the Western Zones of Germany were given independence through the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*; BRD), with its capital in Bonn. This action was followed rapidly by the announcement on October 7 of a German state in the Soviet Zone, the German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*; DDR).

The creation of the DDR meant that East Germany was now a sovereign state, and was leaving behind its status of occupation.⁵⁹ The announcement that East Germany was to become independent contained harsh attacks on West Germany and the Western powers that supported it:

...[O]n Friday the democratic Germany will take the first step towards the restoration of its sovereignty, independence, and freedom, while the undemocratic Germany at Bonn, the rump of Germany of the war-mongers and the dividers..., of the Hitlerian armaments magnates and large estate owners, continues in the hopeless perspective of enduring occupation and economic dependence.⁶⁰

The new German Democratic Republic put itself forward as the ideal Germany of the future. It did not think the West had held it up to the standards of the Potsdam Agreement laid out in August 1945. The Soviet Military Administration announced that it transferred

⁵⁸Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 125-126.

⁵⁹Administration for Information of the German Economic Commission, "Announcement of the Impending Establishment of the German Democratic Republic," in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 420.

⁶⁰Administration for Information of the German Economic Commission, "Announcement of the Impending Establishment of the German Democratic Republic," 420.

its power to the Provisional Government of the DDR.⁶¹ Though the German Democratic Republic claimed itself sovereign, in 1949 and in the future it would be subordinate to the Soviet Bloc. The Soviet Union still maintained a military presence in the DDR, and helped the SED remain in power. The declaration of the formation of the German Democratic Republic was the final stage in the evolution of the Soviet Zone of Germany from being dominated by one ideology to domination by another, from National Socialist ideology under the Third Reich to Marxist-Leninist ideology under the SED.

The political development of the Soviet Zone of Germany began as a seemingly genuine attempt to create an anti-fascist, democratic Germany, which became transformed into a process of sovietization. In the merger of the SPD and the KPD one can see the early beginnings of this transformation. The Communist members of the SED insisted that they ought to rule over the Soviet Zone and bring Germany to socialism by following a specifically German path, but they needed the power and the support of the Soviet Union to do so and thus needed to follow the orders of the Soviet representatives in Germany. The KPD's obvious reverence for the Soviet Union and their simultaneous scorn for the West narrowed their thinking and led them to follow closely the Soviet pattern of development. Both the German Communists and their Soviet Allies played a part in the Soviet Zone's political transformation from National Socialism into a socialist state and neither can be exempt from responsibility for what became of East Germany. The divergent and increasingly hostile relationship between the Soviet Union and the Western powers also contributed to the transformation of the East. The Allied Control

⁶¹ Marshal Zhukov, "Statement by General Chuikov, Supreme Chief of the Soviet Military Administration, on the Entry into force of the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic," in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 422.

Council was effective in the first years after the war in organizing reconstruction activity, but differing views about how development should proceed and breaches of the Potsdam Conference by both sides brought the Allied Control Council to an end. The increasing distance between East and West and the close relationship of East Germany leaders to the Soviet Union set the people of East Germany on a path away from their National Socialist past but toward a socialist future.

Chapter 2:

Purges of National Socialists

Before the war ended, the Allied powers discussed the necessity of de-Nazification at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. Then, at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allies gave specifics to the process of de-Nazification. The Allies agreed that it was central to rooting out the Nazi ideology from Germany. At first the Allies worked together to implement de-Nazification, but in practice, the East and the West began to diverge. The Soviet Union applied de-Nazification measures more rigorously than in the West. All high officials in society were purged from positions of power. After the start of de-Nazification the Soviet Military Administration of Germany began to transform the process into a more rehabilitative and integrative program. By this process, followers of the Nazi regime were to be assimilated back into society so that they could contribute to the development of a new Germany. The physical removal of former Nazis from postwar German society may have failed to root out many Nazi sympathizers and even a handful of leaders, but the process as a whole helped emphasize the need to reconstruct society. This was a process instituted by the Soviet Military Administration and carried out by German Communist cadres, which demonstrates the relationship between these two forces.

Germans were removed from office because of suspected affiliation with the Nazi Party or because of collaboration with the Nazis. The Allied Powers agreed on the concept of de-Nazification and also agreed on purges of the most active Nazi collaborators. They needed to “destroy the National Socialist Party and its affiliated and supervised organizations, to dissolve Nazi institutions, to ensure that they are not revived

in any form, and to prevent all Nazi and militarist activity or propaganda.”¹ Each zone had a different way of carrying out its initial purges. The United States and Great Britain mostly used questionnaires to assess a German’s Nazi past. The United States surveyed Germans ages eighteen and older, while the British only made Germans fill them out if they were employed or seeking to be employed. Internment camps were used to detain Nazis. Among the British, these internment camps held a bad reputation as torture camps for former Nazis. The other Western Allies felt it broke the moral standard they wanted to set.² The French were not as apt to use the questionnaires, but they were known to imprison former Nazis. The French wanted to “purify” the German people as opposed to what they considered the harshness of the term “denazify.” Historian Frederick Taylor believes that they wanted to impart their French republican rationalism on the German people.³ Finally the Soviets, the focus of this thesis, were were often considered the most aggressive of the occupying powers because of the level of force and aggression put into de-Nazification. They removed suspected Nazis from positions of power and asked questions later. A closer comparison between the approaches of the West and the East will serve to distinguish the severity of de-Nazification between the two sides.

The *Fragebogen* (questionnaire) was used most widely in the American sector. The Americans were reported to have handed out around 13 million *Fragebogen* to Germans eighteen years or older, including those whom the Americans deemed questionable and those Germans seeking employment. Many of the questions asked

¹J.V. Stalin, Harry S. Truman, C.R. Attlee, “Extracts from the Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 17 July-2 August 1945,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 43.

²Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 303-305.

³Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 316-317.

Germans to report their actions one or two decades previously, such as how they voted in the 1932 election, which not all remembered or wanted to remember.⁴ Until the Germans completed and returned their Fragebögen they were unable to work and unable to obtain ration tickets for food.⁵ In effect, they were in an American-induced purgatory. The American goal was simply to purge the German Nazi ideology from the political realm. Germans who were asked to fill out these questionnaires were usually removed from their jobs preemptively and could not return to their job until the questionnaire came back showing they were not true Nazis. This process could take months. This left many families without a proper income.⁶ The mixed goals of the Fragebögen highlight some of the problems that characterized the process of de-Nazification in the US zone.

In the Soviet Zone the Military Administration sought to eradicate all traces of Nazi power, as well as Nazi ideology. Taylor argues that the methods implemented in the West were bad, but those in the East were lethal.⁷ Once the Ulbricht group landed in Berlin in early May, the Soviet Union and the KPD worked together to oust Nazis from power and implant politically reliable Germans at the helm of all administrations.⁸ The Soviet Union was overall more aggressive in its purge of Nazis from power. Questionnaires were distributed, but the Soviets were more in the habit of physically removing people from positions of power without asking questions. The Soviets placed real and perceived Nazis in internment camps or Gulags, where conditions were

⁴Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of Allied Occupation* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 344-345.

⁵MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 348.

⁶Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 268.

⁷Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 323-324.

⁸MacDonogh, *After the Reich*, 348.

torturous.⁹ It was clear from the actions of the Russians in the first few months after the war that they were out for retribution against the Nazis.

Walter Ulbricht, Secretary of the German Communist Party, called on the German people to help the Soviet Union rebuild Germany by accepting their guilt. He said that through accepting their guilt, Germans could begin the process of uprooting Nazism from society. Only if the German people felt shame and genuine remorse for their actions could they have the courage to start down a road to democracy.¹⁰ Ulbricht advocated an aggressive approach to de-Nazification in the Soviet Zone, and supported a widespread purge throughout the zone to eliminate former Nazis from positions of power in May 1945, which required “the cleaning of administrative departments in each state and municipality...[and] the removal of all men involved in business and banking who are held responsible for the war and fascism...”¹¹ The German people could only endure if they “[created] a democratic administration and through the maintenance of open and friendly relations, for the Soviet Union especially, opened themselves up to other peoples.”¹² Ulbricht provided more direction for his group of Communist followers on the aim of de-Nazification and the hiring of anti-fascist Germans not previously in the government to administrative positions. The task of the KPD was “[to] tour the various districts of Berlin to try and pick out those democratic anti-fascists who are best suited to build up the new German regime.” Ulbricht sought men from a variety of political parties in order to create the anti-fascist, democratic administration he promoted. It was the goal

⁹Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 323.

¹⁰Walter Ulbricht, “The Program of the Anti-Fascist-Democratic Order.” *Whither Germany? Speeches and Essays on the National Question* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 118-119.

¹¹Walter Ulbricht, “Thesen über das Wesen des Hitlerfaschismus,” in *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: aus Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1963), 413-414

¹²Ulbricht, “Thesen über das Wesen des Hitlerfaschismus,” 414.

of the KPD to build German agencies for self-government in Berlin and an administration with a variety of political representatives would jump start this reconstruction effort.¹³

The KPD attempted to capitalize on the need for reconstruction of society by trying to take some control over Germany's de-Nazification process. In July 1945 it drafted, along with the other active political parties in the Soviet Zone, the *Richtlinien für die strengste Bestrafung der Naziverbrecher und Sühnemaßnahmen gegen aktivistische Nazis* (Guidelines for the strongest punishment of the Nazi criminals and sanctions against active Nazis) to provide more clarity about the de-Nazification process in Germany.¹⁴ In this document, Nazi criminals and Nazi supporters were held responsible for causing the war and for creating Fascist ideology. The KPD also proposed a program for the reeducation and rehabilitation of former Nazis in democratic ideals. Its definition of an active Nazi was in accordance with that determined by the Allied powers, but some of its sanctions for these active Nazis were unique, such as the removal of other job benefits, non-cash benefits, and cash benefits as well as the barring of the political right from becoming members in trade unions, trade associations or in the anti-fascist democratic parties.¹⁵ These guidelines in effect prevented active Nazis from taking part in society and from being able to receive anything from society in return. Germans were clearly interested in reconstructing society completely free of Nazis and the guidelines the anti-fascist bloc sets out show the height of their ambition for a thorough de-Nazification of society.

¹³Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C.M. Woodhouse (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 297.

¹⁴Wolfgang Meinicke. "Die Entnazifizierung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1948," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (1984): 971.

¹⁵Meinicke, "Die Entnazifizierung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1948," 971-972.

The Soviet Military Administration, however, refused to release the KPD guidelines to the public. Historian Timothy Vogt suggests a couple of reasons for this decision. The primary reason might have been that the development of these guidelines coincided with the completion of the Potsdam Agreement. If these two documents were released together, the Allied leadership might have thought that the Soviet Union was not following the jointly agreed on policies and was separating itself from the other Allies. Thus the Soviet Military Administration instructed the Germans to stay in line with the four power resolutions of the Allies. The other reason Vogt suggests as an explanation for the Soviet Military Administration's effort to delay the release of the Guidelines is that the Soviet Military Administration did not yet trust the KPD enough to let it organize and run its own de-Nazification process. The Soviet Military Administration was also not yet sufficiently organized to monitor processes if they let another party, the KPD, control them.¹⁶

The Soviets were searching for a workable policy. They didn't trust the KPD enough to assist them in carrying out de-Nazification. Instead, the Soviet Military Administration began to employ other methods to eradicate the Nazi presence in its zone and to identify who the former Nazis and collaborators. The Soviets required German adults to register with the Soviet Military Administration representative in their locality.¹⁷ The specifics of registration came through Order No. 42, issued on August 27, 1945. It stated that all former members of the German Army of the rank lieutenant and higher, all former members of the SS and SA, employees of the Gestapo and members of the

¹⁶Timothy Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany: Brandenburg 1945-1948* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 48-49.

¹⁷Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 58.

NSDAP had to register with the Soviet Military Command in their province without exception by September 25, 1945. Those who did not register by the due date or attempted to conceal their guilt were to be held responsible for their actions.¹⁸ Germans who registered were put to work by the Soviet Military Administration, conducting the physical labor in removal of rubble and reconstruction, or given other labor intensive jobs. Timothy Vogt sees the registration process as critical in two aspects. In the short term, registration was structurally necessary to find out who the Nazis were so it would be possible to purge those who had held responsible positions. In the long term, this allowed administrators of the de-Nazification process to distinguish active Nazis from potentially nominal Nazis, all of which contributed to the development of East Germany toward a society free of National Socialist influence.¹⁹

The registration of Nazis in each municipality was accompanied by expropriation of their property. Expropriation often took place at the local level, with individual activists seizing the property of businesses run by Nazis or even their personal property. In Brandenburg, a suspected Nazi had all the furniture in his apartment confiscated and it later appeared in the offices of the local KPD. Citizens were incensed that such confiscations were being used for personal gain.²⁰ On a larger scale, suspected Nazis were being completely displaced. Timothy Vogt mentions a case in the village of Breddin, where eleven families were ejected from their homes and forced to leave the district in which they lived. Situations such as theft of property and displacement became so frequent that the Soviet Military Administration issued Order No. 124 on October 30,

¹⁸Soviet Military Administration, "Befehl Nr. 42." in *Befehle des Oberstens Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland*. Sammelheft 1 (Berlin: SWA-Verlag, 1946), 17-18.

¹⁹Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 58.

²⁰Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 63.

1945 to try and control what was going on. The order provided criteria for what property could be confiscated and specifically mentioned that any property that belonged to “the German state and its central and local agencies; the functionaries of the National Socialist Party, its leading members and influential followers; the German military authorities and organizations; the societies, clubs, and associations prohibited and dissolved by the Soviet Military Command; the governments and nationals of the countries involved in the war on the side of Germany; and persons indicted by the Soviet Military Administration by special lists or in other ways.”²¹ These guidelines were meant to protect the small businesses and property owners subjected to harsh actions by local authorities and instead focused the attacks on those deemed real Nazis, though making this distinction proved difficult throughout the entire de-Nazification process.²²

Finally, the Allied Control Council in Berlin issued Directive 24 in January 1946 to establish order to the de-Nazification process. This was a joint decree of the Allies to help bring structure to the purges taking place across Germany. Directive 24 became central to the policy of de-Nazification. It ordered that:

All members of the Nazi party who have been more than nominal participants in its activities...be removed from public and semi-public office, and from positions of responsibility in important private undertakings. Such persons shall be replaced by persons who, by their political and moral qualities, are deemed capable of assisting in developing genuine democratic institutions.²³

But the language of Directive 24 was vague and gave each Allied power the opportunity to interpret the directive individually. There was no indication of how former Nazis

²¹General Marshal Zhukov, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 124: On the Confiscation and Provisional Sequestration of Certain Categories of Property,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 86.

²²Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 66.

²³Allied Control Council for Germany, “Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin,” in *Gazette of the Control Council for Germany Number 5*. Berlin. January 1946.

should be removed and no discussion of how they would, or if they would, be reintegrated back into society. It was also up to each individual zone to determine who was morally upright and who wanted to assist in the democratic development of society. The Allied Control Council distinguished between an “active” and a “nominal” Nazi. The general definition of a “more than nominal” or active Nazi was a person who had:

“held office and otherwise been active at any level from local to national in the party and its subordinate organizations or in organizations which further militaristic doctrines...authorized or participated affirmatively in any Nazi crimes, racial persecutions or discriminations...been avowed believers in Nazism or racial and militaristic creeds...or, voluntarily given substantial moral or material support or political assistance of any kind to the Nazi Party of Nazi officials and leaders.”²⁴

It was the job of each Allied Zone then to decide which Germans they considered active members of the Nazi Party and which ones they deemed nominal or non-threatening to the new Germany. The Allies agreed that if the person was “of such minor importance that the incumbent or appointee is not placed in a position to endanger Allied interests or commit acts hostile to Allied principles” then each Zone could decide who was an active Nazi and who was a nominal Nazi.²⁵ These two Allied directives gave structure to the definition of de-Nazification while still allowing the Soviet Union the freedom to carry out these measures as they wanted.

The Soviet Union initially did not favor Directive 24 because by this time its own practice was to forcibly remove people from their property and jobs, but they acquiesced to the Allied Control Council’s decision in an effort to remain in good favor with the

²⁴Allied Control Council for Germany, “Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin,” *Gazette of the Control Council for Germany Number 5*. Berlin. January 1946.

²⁵Allied Control Council for Germany, “Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin,” *Gazette of the Control Council for Germany Number 5*. Berlin. January 1946.

other powers. Directive 24 was the official approach to the de-Nazification process across Germany, but in practice the Soviet Military Administration utilized the vague language of Directive 24 to continue to carry out the removal of former Nazis on its own terms. It approached de-Nazification by creating commissions led by politically reliable Germans appointed by the Soviet Military Administration in 1946. Similar approaches were being taken by the other Allies powers, but the emphasis on political reliability was unique to the Soviet Zone.

These Soviet Zone commissions acted on the cases of the large number of Nazis and Nazi supporters who still held property or were low level officials in the public and semi-public institutions. Orders from the central administration controlled these commissions and applied evenly across the Zone. The commissions in the Soviet Zone dealt with all public and semi-public officials, but they only had power over issues of employment. Germans were reviewed case by case and decisions were made in accordance with Directive 24, including those Germans who had already been dismissed in the initial purges of 1945. The de-Nazification commission hearings sometimes gave people a second chance to prove their commitment to the new society, but most often it was merely a discussion which reinforced their past connection to the Nazi party.²⁶ The establishment of these de-Nazification commissions made the process of de-Nazification in the Soviet Zone appear more orderly because instead of the abrupt dismissals that had characterized the first months after the war, individual cases were reviewed and each was given equal consideration.

²⁶Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 85-87.

The de-Nazification commissions had the effect of standardizing the de-Nazification process, but the attitudes that Germans had developed during the early postwar period caused frustration for the commissioners. Richard Bessel speaks of the exhaustion of the German population after the war and about their apathy toward politics. He argues they had resigned themselves to their fate as an occupied people and became more concerned with their own personal trials and tribulations.²⁷ This political apathy showed up in the anti-fascist commission meetings when former Nazi Party members seemed willing to testify both to their past sins and the new way they had now embraced. It was a kind of passive compliance that Timothy Vogt suggests stemmed from general disillusionment with the de-Nazification process. Commissioners most often asked about the individual's commitment to the SED and the Soviet Union. A lack of enthusiasm for these two aspects of the Soviet Zone culture often led commissioners to suggest that the individual was still an active Nazi. While trying to uncover the extent to which Nazis and other German citizens were repentant, though, it became nearly impossible to determine whether petitioners actually believed what they said because it was clear that they knew what they were supposed to say.²⁸ It would have been unintelligent on the part of the accused to challenge the established political authority of the Soviet Military Administration and the SED. It was easier for the people to accept their placement in society by these de-Nazification commissions than to confront the commissions' powers or biases.

²⁷Richard Bessel, "Establishing Order in Postwar Eastern Germany," in *Postwar Reconstruction in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.

²⁸Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 229.

The following example from Vogt's book demonstrates the overt prompting of suspected Nazis in the de-Nazification commissions. Vogt uses interrogations of factory workers who had joined the Nazi Party in the 1940s to demonstrate this point. One such interrogation goes as follows:

Chairman: Have you attended political meetings?

Answer: I always attend them.

Chairman: What are the differences between the east and the west zones?

Answer: The reconstruction is moving forward here in a democratic way.

Chairman: Say it more precisely.

Answer: Production increases month by month.

Chairman: But there are other developments.

Answer: The workers are cared for.²⁹

Vogt continues after this quote to note the “current of superficiality” that ran through these interrogations. These interrogations were almost ritualistic in nature. They seem to prompt the person being interrogated toward the correct answer. This supports the argument that Germans being interrogated knew what to say. Therefore, it cannot be known whether these interrogations can be considered to have been effective in making Germans distance themselves from their Nazi past and become enthusiastic participants of a new socialist society. On the contrary, it seems apparent that Germans simply accepted their fate.

A key exception to the strict policies of de-Nazification was often seen in the treatment of children. They were deemed too young to be held accountable for their actions and therefore were not subject to interrogation by the de-Nazification commissions. In early 1947, as the de-Nazification process began to change, the SED representatives of the Soviet Zone *Länder* created a law saying that all children born after January 1, 1919, or “year one” of the Hitler youth generation, were not to be punished for

²⁹As quoted in Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 229.

their past affiliations and so were to be treated as equal citizens in all matters of social, economic, and political life. Most of this generation had participated as children in the *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) or the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) because enrollment in these groups was mandatory for youths. But though enrollment was mandatory, active participation was not. Therefore, the new laws explicitly did not apply to those who had been members of the SS or the SA, or higher functionaries of the Hitler Youth, those with a rank of Unterbannführer or higher and BDM functionaries of the rank Ringführerin or higher.³⁰ Having held these ranks indicated a high level of commitment to the organization that went beyond compulsory participation. Overall, the SED made the choice not to subject many children to the same punishments as the older generations of Germans because of the mandatory enrollment policy.

The de-Nazification commissions were effective in systematically removing former Nazis from society, but a level of uncertainty remained throughout the process. The commissioners could never know whether the individual under review was genuinely guilty for past actions. There was no telling how much remorse the German people felt, because of the apathy prevalent in society. Despite these built-in uncertainties, intensive measures to carry out Directive 24 probably arose from the Soviet Military Administration's urge to avenge the destructive acts of the German army in the Soviet Union during the war. The physical removal of suspected Nazis and the beginnings of reconstruction in German society allowed the Soviet Union to exert power over Germany, which was viewed as equivalent to what was taken away from the Russians by the German army during the war. Whether Germans felt a sense of guilt or not was

³⁰Alan McDougall, "A Duty to Forget? The 'Hitler Youth Generation' and the Transformation from Nazism to Communism in Postwar Germany, c. 1945-49," *German History* (2008): 30.

probably irrelevant to the Soviet leaders because they trusted so few Germans. Removing a large number of Germans thought to have dubious loyalties was preferred to allowing too many to be active in German society. Though the physical removal of people from society may seem harsh, it was deemed a necessary step in the larger efforts to rebuild Germany.

But soon, the Soviet Military Administration and the SED came to the realization that there were too many former Nazis to remove all of them physically from society and so began to transition from a policy of retribution to one of rehabilitation. Instead of purging individuals from positions in the German administration, the Soviet Military Administration began to think it was more important to show them a new path to democracy. Not everyone could be held responsible for the acts of the Nazi Party and there needed to be a certain level of trust in the German people. The Soviet Military Administration began to diverge from the Western Allies when they started the process of rehabilitation. It became a process of rehabilitation toward socialism. Through the implementation of the new orders to distinguish different levels of complicity with the Nazi party and methods to integrate different professions back into society, the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD started to reconstruct society in their image.

Many Germans argued they only learned of the atrocities committed by the Nazi Party once the war had ended. This claimed ignorance led many Germans to accept the accusation of “general responsibility,” although not all were willing to believe they were truly guilty.³¹ A German woman writing about the problems of surviving in Berlin in the weeks right after the fall of the Nazi regime described many of her fellow Germans. She

³¹Macdonogh, *After the Reich*, 340.

recounted how common it was for people to denounce Adolf Hitler and claim they never supported the party. Ultimately they had all “breathed what was in the air, and it affected all of us, even if we didn’t want it to.”³² As much as the German people wanted to distance themselves from the acts of the Nazi Party, their participation in the horrors of the Third Reich, active or passive could not be ignored. The reality of living under the Nazi regime was complex and there were many degrees of support, ranging from acquiescence to full collaboration. After the issuance of Allied Control Council Directive No. 24 and an influx of de-Nazification interrogations taken on by the commissions, the Allied powers worked to distinguish between “active” Nazis and “nominal” Nazis. Starting in 1947, the transition from aggressive de-Nazification measures to more rehabilitative measures began.

While Ulbricht advocated for an aggressive approach to be taken against Nazis, there were others in the SED who had a different approach to the responsibility of most of the German people for Nazi brutality and crime. A good example is Johannes Becher (1891-1953), who fundamentally disagreed with the idea of collective guilt all along. Becher fled to Moscow in 1935 where he was active in cultural affairs. After the end of the war he played a big role in the cultural development of the Soviet Zone, and was eventually appointed Minister of Culture for the DDR. His approach to de-Nazification stressed a cultural and social change in society that was less concerned with physical purges and condemnation of individuals than with a society-wide change of attitude. He believed that Hitler’s rule and the war had resulted in a “moral mass degeneracy” of the people and more than just the exclusion of Nazis from German society was necessary for

³²Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 168.

reform. He spoke of the danger of “superficial anti-fascism” and said that instead “conscious anti-imperialism” was needed. Becher argued that the “arousal of national hatred for the Nazis and German imperialism is the purifying thunderstorm required for a rebirth of Germany.”³³ In contrast to Ulbricht, who wanted to extirpate Nazis completely from German society, Becher advocated the slow assimilation of Nazis back into society after they were reeducated. He saw no need for the mass elimination of National Socialists from society.

A new effort to separate “active” from “nominal” Nazis came in a policy statement in August 1947 by the Soviet Military Administration, called Order 201. This jumpstarted the process of rehabilitation that Johannes Becher envisioned. It allowed the former “nominal” Nazis to “participate with the democratic strata of the people in the general endeavor to re-create a peaceful, democratic Germany.”³⁴ The Soviet Military Administration published Order 201 in the “*Tägliche Rundschau*,” the official newspaper of the Red Army in the Soviet Zone, and used the occasion to notify the people of the Eastern Zone how it intended to carry out these measures. The bulletin declared that “...great progress was made in the Soviet Zone of Occupation towards the cleansing of public offices...[and as a consequence] the basis of fascism, militarism, and reaction has been seriously shaken in the Soviet Zone of Occupation.”³⁵ Going beyond this triumphant note, the Soviet Military Administration elaborated on what should be done in

³³J.R. Becher, “Zur Frage der politische-moralischen Vernichtung des Faschismus,” in *Nach Hitler kommen wir*. Peter Erler, Horst Laude and Manfred Wilke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 1994), 339.

³⁴Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 97.

³⁵Soviet Military Administration, “Order No. 201: Directives for the Execution of Control Council Directives Nos. 24 and 38 on Denazification,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 234-235.

such a way as to suggest that the zone was entering into a new phase of de-Nazification.

A few of these measures were as follows:

The German administrative bodies and Denazification Commissions must take necessary measures for the acceleration of the execution and completion of denazification in the Soviet Zone of Germany...German juridical authorities must concentrate their attention on a speedy indictment of war criminals, of members of the criminal Nazi organizations and of leading personalities of the Hitler regime, and accelerate examination of their cases...The German administrative bodies will be entrusted with the removal, within three months, of all former active fascists and militarists from all public and semi-public posts...the German authorities must not confiscate or sequester property, or forcibly evict former fascists from their homes except on instructions from juridical or equivalent administrative bodies.³⁶

The language of Order 201 was not harsh and condemning of the German people, but rather it suggested that they should start to transition into a new phase of de-Nazification.

The acceleration of the de-Nazification process suggests one last push was being made to root out the Nazis before a more standardized procedure, and one that was slower, emerged. The de-Nazification commissions were asked to start finishing their work and local German authorities were asked to be a less aggressive force in the confiscation of property, both of which suggest a beginning of the end of de-Nazification efforts. Order 201 was the point of transition from severe purges to a program of integration into an anti-fascist, democratic society.

The announcement of Order 201 as well as the Soviet Military Administration's plans for its implementation show a transition in the Soviet relationship with the German people. The Soviet Military Administration delivered the order to the people, but the implementation of it lay in the hands of the newly elected German authorities. This transition was taking place across Germany, but emphasis in the Soviet Zone on political

³⁶Soviet Military Administration, "Order No. 201," 235

reliability set the process apart from that taking place in the West. The importance of political reliability in the de-Nazification commissions can be seen in the statement that “membership of [de-Nazification] commissions will be confined to persons who have in fact proved their democratic convictions and are thus able, by virtue of their moral and political qualities, to arrive at a just solution of the questions before them.”³⁷ The Soviet Military Administration was giving more authority to Germans as to the measures they could take in de-Nazification, but it is significant that the statement also emphasized that political reliability was a factor in what Germans would be appointed to carry out the de-Nazification process. While Order 201 introduced the beginning of a more lenient approach to the purging of Nazis, it also seemed to start fostering a tighter relationship with the SED and other politically reliable Germans.

The abandonment of formal de-Nazification efforts in the Soviet Zone came with the Soviet Military Administration’s Order No. 35 of February 1948, which called for the dissolution of the de-Nazification committees. This did not mean that the goal of reconstructing society had been met, but rather that the means to achieving it were officially changing.³⁸ Walter Ulbricht confirmed the end to the formal de-Nazification process in the Soviet Zone in June 1948 when he introduced his two year plan for East Germany, while still implying that there was work to be done. He declared that:

Capitalism has not yet been reformed but the decisive capitalist forces...were deprived of power. The state was not reformed, but a new, higher democratic order was established by the state order laid down in the provincial constitutions. The supreme power no longer serves to safeguard the exploitation of the people by the big capitalists and big landowners, but it is in the hands of the working class and the other progressive, democratic forces.³⁹

³⁷Soviet Military Administration, “Order No. 201,” 236.

³⁸Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 111.

³⁹Walter Ulbricht, “The Two Year Plan for the Restoration and Development of the Peace-time Economy,” *Questions on Socialist Reconstruction in the GDR* (Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1968), 128-129.

He acknowledged that full reform had not been realized, but he argued that the beginning elements of reform were in place. The capitalists had been deprived of power, which helped establish a new democratic order. Ulbricht's speech implied that the work of the Soviet Military Administration and the SED was not finished. Capitalists had been deprived of their power and now it was time to begin the process of developing socialism. This speech paved the way for the rehabilitative measures instituted by the SED and the Soviet Military Administration to fully take hold, because in the view of Ulbricht power was in the hands of the working class, it just needed to be harnessed.

The approach to de-Nazification in the Soviet Zone of Germany left room for rehabilitation of Nazi Party members, as can be seen in the handling of the nominal Nazi population. By the end of the de-Nazification purges in 1948 many East Germans were ready to participate in building the new German society. This was especially true among those Nazis who had been spared in the process of de-Nazification. Wolfgang Leonhard described the attitude of nominal Nazis towards the party line of the SED. He seemed to believe the excitement the Germans had for the SED's ideology. The willingness among nominal Nazis to join the ranks of the SED has been attributed by others to their relief at having been exempt from the de-Nazification purges, not necessarily their enthusiasm for the party itself.⁴⁰ People were willing to consider a new way of thinking about the future if they were not subjected to endless interrogation. This encouraged the spirit of working together to build a new, anti-fascist democracy rather than the spirit of condemnation that was perpetuated through the excessive use of purges. Though both aggressive and passive methods were used in Eastern Germany in the effort to denazify Germany, the new effort

⁴⁰Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 358.

directed at rebuilding the cities and rehabilitating the people was the prevailing spirit by 1948.

Short case studies of de-Nazification in certain professions that were purged more aggressively than others can give us insight into the overall structure of the program. As Frederick Taylor points out, the Soviet Military Administration believed that “the educational and legal systems were essential for the future control in the zone.” The educational system allowed access to the mind of the youth, while through the judicial system the people’s liberties as a whole could be controlled.⁴¹ The removal of judges from the court system right after World War II caused particular problems because the number of cases to be tried was at an all time high. The Allied Control Council issued Proclamation No. 3 to highlight the fundamentals of judicial reform. Even immediately after the war, German courts were responsible for all cases, both civil and criminal, unless it was “a case of such a nature as to compromise the security of the Allied Forces....” As to the complex question of judges who had served during the Nazi years, Proclamation No. 3 required that “...all former members of the Nazi Party who have been more than nominal participants in its activities and all other persons who have directly followed the punitive practices of the Hitler regime must be dismissed...”⁴² Such a severe standard meant that most judges throughout Germany were dismissed and as a result the personnel of the judicial systems were greatly changed. This allowed for the recreation of a new judicial staff under the guise of anti-fascist, democratic renewal.

⁴¹Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 327.

⁴²Allied Control Council, “Control Council Proclamation No. 3: Fundamental Principles of Judicial Reform,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation, 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 84.

While the Western Allies were removing a large portion of suspected Nazis from the judiciary, the Soviet Military created a huge gap in trained judges by removing all who had been associated with the Nazi party. Frederick Taylor uses the example of the British who, for example, ruled in October 1945 that 50 percent of the total number of appointees to the Legal Civil Service could remain employed as long as they proved they were not more than nominally active in the Nazi Party.⁴³ In contrast also to the West, all the dismissals made the Soviet Military Administration gave the judiciaries little to no possibility of returning to their post.⁴⁴ The Soviet Military Administration filled this gap by replacing established prosecutors and judges with *Volksrichter* (people's judges). These were proletarian candidates selected by the SED, who began their legal duties with as little as six months training.⁴⁵ The short legal training given to these men taught them the essentials of Criminal Law. This was based on the Soviet belief that justice could be utilized as a weapon of the State, which confirmed the Soviet Union's influence over their zone of occupation from the outset. Though the system of people's judges was by no means perfect, Timothy Vogt, in his close study of Brandenburg, says it was the most effective way to fill the serious shortage of capable judges in society.⁴⁶ The Soviets believed that if the German people were to move past their history of National Socialism, it was necessary for the judiciary to undergo radical changes that could only happen through a period of extensive purges.

⁴³ Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 265.

⁴⁴Herman Wentker, *Volksrichter in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1952: Eine Dokumentation* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997), 10.

⁴⁵Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 328.

⁴⁶J.P Nettle, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany, 1945-50* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 57-119.

Teachers during the Third Reich were subject to extensive purges because of the great opportunity they had to influence the minds of the younger generation. Teachers during the Nazi era had done much to indoctrinate youth in the fascist, racist ideology of the Nazi Party. Immediately after the war, teachers from the elementary level to the university level were subject to draconian de-Nazification measures because many of their members had embraced the Nazi ideals during the Third Reich.⁴⁷ The Soviet Military Administration imposed harsh measures, dismissing nearly 75 percent of teachers in 1945 and another 5 percent in 1946.⁴⁸ For comparison, the Western Zones put most of the German teaching staff through background checks and screenings, but eventually decided to rehire more of them than was done in the Soviet Zone. The Soviet Zone conducted few background checks and instead dismissed any teachers with Nazi affiliation outright.⁴⁹ Not only were the teachers removed from their positions, but they were also barred from being employed by other schools. Paul Wandel, the Director of Education for East Germany, decreed that education was of the utmost importance to the German people and therefore former members and supporters of the NSDAP could not be employed by any school.⁵⁰ The preparation of new teachers in the Soviet Zone and the logistics of the educational system will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4, but it is important to recognize the extent to which the Nazi era educational system was uprooted in the Soviet Zone. The physical removal of more than three quarters of the teaching staff

⁴⁷ Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 2.

⁴⁸ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.

⁴⁹ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 31.

⁵⁰ Charles Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 143.

demonstrated how seriously the Soviet Military Administration of East Germany took the de-Nazification efforts in education.

Removing such a significant percentage of the East German teaching staff from the school system left the Soviet Military Administration with the task of refilling their positions. John Rodden, a historian of East German education, says that at the end of the war the average age of the teachers in Eastern Germany was 52.5, with 22 percent of the teachers being over the age of 60.⁵¹ De-Nazification of the teaching staff quickly became a problem for the Soviet Military Administration because it had to replace so many teachers. As with the judicial system, it was necessary to take the reality of the situation in Germany into consideration when trying to reconstruct society. A system was introduced for quick, efficient training for the new teaching staff was instituted, but even so it could not produce the number of teachers needed in the schools, and so the Soviet Military Administration again and again had to make compromises. The de-Nazification effort was continually delayed by the sheer number of teachers that had to be replaced after the initial purge of the educational system. In 1947 the Soviets were forced to allow many former Nazis to remain employed because they were unable to train new teachers at a fast enough pace.⁵² Therefore, by 1947 the Soviet Military Administration started to shift its focus away from removing former Nazis to educating those corrupt Nazis in the teachings of anti-fascism.

The de-Nazification of the medical field was a delicate task because of the important role the maintenance of public health played in postwar Germany. The removal of doctors associated with the Nazi party was not as widespread as in the teaching

⁵¹Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 31.

⁵²Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 161.

profession because of the extensive training required to replace them. Patients who relied upon these doctors would have suffered as a consequence of their removal, so generally doctors were exempt from the de-Nazification process.⁵³ As with the other occupations, many physicians were members of the Nazi Party and the same was true of other medical personnel. One study estimates that between 65 and 80 percent of the doctors in the Soviet Zone at the end of the war were associated with the Nazi Party. Removing a large number of doctors from the medical field would have created a severe shortage of personnel. To make things worse, those who were not ousted from their positions often fled to the West in order to avoid their fate under the Soviet occupation. Facing an increasing shortage due to the health and safety issues in Germany, the Soviet Military Administration compromised in the de-Nazification of the medical field.⁵⁴ Most Nazis remained in their positions throughout the occupation period to help quell the health issues in Germany.

Timothy Vogt summarizes the Communist critique of fascism as following a line of reasoning that said “because Nazism was a product of long-term developments in Germany, de-Nazification would have to go beyond simply punishing the truly guilty and aim at complete social transformation.”⁵⁵ Though Walter Ulbricht and Johannes Becher viewed the de-Nazification process differently, both men believed in the supremacy of the KPD’s ideal and that there had to be a unique road to socialism for the German people. It was the responsibility of the KPD and each German state’s administration to rid themselves of any former Nazis. The Soviet Military Administration provided

⁵³Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 328.

⁵⁴Jessica Reinisch, *Perils of Peace: The Public Health Crisis in Occupied Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 237-241.

⁵⁵Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 28.

structural guidance, but the German people had to admit to their past and rid society of Nazis on their own. The physical removal of Nazis from power was the necessary beginning to a long-term change, but it was also necessary to rehabilitate the people and re-educate them to anti-fascist, democratic ideology, what eventually became socialist ideology. If the German people were to effectively rebuild they had to be encouraged to participate in society again, not consistently cut them down with harsh removals and property confiscations. The transition in the Soviet Zone from the work of purging Nazis to that of rehabilitating them was a critical point in the history of East Germany, because it shows the development of the Zone toward a socialist Germany allied with the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3:

Mass Organizations and their Role in Reeducation

The purging of Nazis from society and the work done to rebuild the education system were fundamental to reconstructive work in the Soviet Zone of Germany. The cleansing of society could only be done effectively though if Germany had a new foundation of political parties and organizations with which the German people could get involved. Reconstruction began as a grassroots effort on the part of Germans. The Soviet Military Administration was skeptical of such spontaneous initiatives on the part of Germans and it did not trust them. The Soviet rulers quickly acted to stabilize the Soviet Zone by reestablishing political parties and creating mass organizations that were centrally controlled and then stripped of authority. Children were arguably the most vulnerable in this new Germany, and therefore particular attention was paid to their development in the Soviet Zone of Germany. The memoirs of German children who remembered the Nazi years and then the postwar years show the true nature of these organizations. Such memoirs provide firsthand accounts of the thoughts and feelings of German youths and are invaluable in trying to understand the reconstruction of the Soviet Zone of Germany. Ultimately, the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD worked to attract Germans of all ages to these mass organizations, which promoted national unity in an anti-fascist democracy as a way for Germans to distance themselves from the National Socialist ideology. Even as the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD were encouraging new mass organizations they were simultaneously centralizing control over these organizations to bring them in line with the Communist Party.

Almost as soon as the war ended in May 1945, anti-fascist groups cropped up throughout Germany. The groups varied in size, depending on the town the anti-fascist group represented, but they all shared the same immediate goal of maintaining order and to helping to solve the pressing issues of the moment. They often called themselves anti-fascist committees. In Neukölln, a borough in Berlin, anti-Nazis established an anti-fascist group on May 8, 1945, the very day the Germans surrendered to the Allies in the West. By May 20 the organization had more than 600 members. It had set up five orphanages and cleared two sports stadiums of rubble.¹ Eilenburg, a small town near Leipzig, was said to have nine members. In the city of Leipzig itself, some thirty-eight local committees, with around 4,500 members in total, banded together in a city-wide anti-fascist committee.² These examples of the formation of anti-fascist committees demonstrate spontaneous German efforts to reconstruct cities after the devastation of war.

Similarly, workplace councils spontaneously reemerged after the fall of the Nazis and swiftly grew in popularity. Gareth Pritchard attributes their revival to a couple of factors. First and foremost, these councils had been popular in the 1920s and early 1930s until the Nazi Party suppressed their activity. After the war ended, anti-Nazi Germans revived these councils to help reorganize economic activity. It is understandable that reconstruction of the economy was of the utmost importance to working class people after the war. The second reason why Pritchard suggests workplace councils resumed work quickly was because during the last harsh months of the war workplaces had suffered greatly from bombing and other military destruction, losing buildings and

¹Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 153-154.

²Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53: From Antifascism to Stalinism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 32-35.

employees in great numbers. Workers saw little alternative but to immediately attempt to bring workplaces back into operation on their own initiative. It was necessary for their own survival.³

But there were some problems. Sometimes former Nazis tried to involve themselves in anti-fascist worker organizations, hoping that they would be able to evade the revenge seeking Red Army soldiers and German Communists looking to rid society of Nazis.⁴ However, committed antifascists and Communists who genuinely wanted reform quickly turned the former Nazis out into the streets in most cases, and generally the workplace councils strove for sincere economic change.⁵ Nonetheless, in the first crazy days and weeks after the war's end life in the Soviet Occupation Zone, and in the Western Zones, was disorganized. The Soviet Military Administration, which was just setting itself up shortly after the war, allowed these grassroots initiatives to thrive, thus there were various processes of reconstruction going on in the initial weeks right after the end of the war. Multiple agencies and social groups were active at once and each had its own agenda. This led to some conflicting opinions about how the reconstruction of Germany should actually take place.

The variety of organizations and the different goals of groups in the Soviet Zone was highlighted by different approaches taken by the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD to the workplace councils and the anti-fascist groups. The workplace councils were seen as potentially beneficial by both the Soviet Military Administration and the

³Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 39- 40.

⁴Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 40.

⁵Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 39-40.

newly returned German Communist leaders centered around Walter Ulbricht.⁶ Walter Ulbricht believed that these workplace councils had a central role to play in the process of reconstruction.⁷ The Soviet Military Administration also saw value in the workplace councils, but wanted to begin bringing them under Soviet influence early. Starting in August 1945, members of the KPD took roles in the work councils. Pressure was slowly put on these organizations to fall under the control of the larger *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union Federation, FDGB).⁸ In Order No. 2 of the Soviet Military Administration, discussed in Chapter 1, trade unions and other trade organizations were encouraged to revive. In allowing for the creation of such unions, the Soviet Military Administration now could have more control over the spontaneous activity taking over the Eastern Zone.

However, the situation with the anti-fascist grassroots groups was more complicated. Initially the Soviet Military Administration allowed the anti-fascist groups to function in the Soviet Zone, but some German communists were extremely suspicious of the groups and in some towns forcibly shut them down.⁹ The KPD's Ulbricht gave voice to these suspicious, claiming that some of the spontaneous anti-fascist organizations actually had been founded by Nazis who had gone underground and were seeking to disrupt the progress that the Soviet Military Administration and the German Communists were making toward the development of socialism.¹⁰ Thus, at first the KPD

⁶Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 43.

⁷Wayne Geerling and Gary Magee, "Piecework and the Sovietization of the East German Workplace," *Central European History* (2012), 721.

⁸Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 44-46.

⁹Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 36.

¹⁰Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C.M. Woodhouse (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 318.

leaders and the Soviet Military Administration were at odds. Historian Gareth Pritchard suggests that this resulted from miscommunication between the Soviet Military Administration and the German Communists. Soon the Soviet Military Administration also came to distrust these apparently independent initiatives and it started to impose restrictions on local anti-fascist groups and to put some pressure on them. By June 1945 the local anti-fascist groups began to dissolve and encourage their members to join one or another political party.¹¹ Then in July 1945 the Soviet Military Administration declared that independent anti-fascist groups would only be allowed to function if they made a formal request to do so and if part of their practice was to promote friendship with the Soviet Union. In practice, these rules pushed out independently run anti-fascist organizations fairly quickly, but the Soviet Military Administration seemed to see a value in the appearance of democracy in East Germany.

More liberal Communists such as Wolfgang Leonhard were skeptical of this restrictive policy. He believed it was contradictory to dissolve these anti-fascist organizations spontaneously created by Germans and then ask those same Germans to fight for the same democratic Germany under a Party-run organization. Leonhard says the policy was an effort by the Soviet Military Administration to draw the German people away from their Nazi past by immersing them in new organizations founded on Marxist-Leninist principles, but that it was done by restricting the people's freedoms to create a new Germany in their own image. However, despite his hesitations, in the end Leonhard went along. He said his Soviet training and also his faith that its policies were correct were too strong and prevented him from following his conscience and disobeying the

¹¹Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53*, 36-37.

orders to dissolve the anti-fascist organizations.¹² By closing down the spontaneous German-created anti-fascist organizations, the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD pushed people who wanted to oppose Nazism toward limited Communist-dominated, Soviet approved organizations. In effect, these forces acted to centralize anti-fascism and insist that they control what anti-fascist meant and how it was organized.

The announcement of Order No. 2 by the Soviet Military Administration in June 1945 allowed for political parties and other organizations that promoted democratic values to form. This order initiated the revival of political parties such as the KPD and the SPD and encouraged them to become more publicly active in the reconstruction of Germany.¹³ These organizations were to work against any remnants of fascism and simultaneously help create a foundation for democracy in the Soviet Zone. The Order stated that

The working population of the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany is to have the right to unite in free trade unions and organizations to protect the interests and rights of all working people. Trade union organizations and societies are to have the right to conclude collective agreements with employers and to form friendly societies and other institutions for mutual aid, as well as cultural, educational, and other institutes and organizations of enlightenment.¹⁴

Allowing the formation of trade unions and institutions helped promote the image of democracy in the Soviet Zone. This could be seen as an effort to prematurely create a German administration, but again the Soviet Military Administration was adamant that these organizations were solely for the purposes of aiding in the foundation of democracy. They were not self-administrations because activities of these organizations

¹²Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 318-319.

¹³For further discussion on Order No. 2 as it relates to political parties see Chapter 1.

¹⁴G.K. Zhukov, "Soviet Military Administration Order No. 2: Establishment of Anti-fascist Parties and Free Trade Unions in the Soviet Zone," in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 36.

were under the control of the Soviet Military Administration as long as the occupation period lasted.¹⁵

Trade unions were often closely associated with political parties in Weimar Germany, so it was not surprising that the *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union, FDGB) was founded in June 1945 alongside the new and revived political parties in the Soviet Zone. It replaced the single Nazi labor organization that had existed for twelve years, but the new FDGB was linked to the KPD. Its mission was to raise working class consciousness and workers' morale and to help undo the damage caused by the twelve-year Nazi war against labor. The FDGB called for improved conditions for workers and began to implement a system of social insurance. It concerned itself with matters such as holidays, labor, hygiene, and protection of the worker.¹⁶ The FDGB oversaw appointments and dismissals in factories, monitored prices, set wages, guarded against sabotage, and at times assisted in de-Nazification of the workplace.¹⁷ Membership in the FDGB was strong from the beginning and grew over time. It had a membership of roughly 2.2 million in 1946, which increased to 4.7 million by 1950.¹⁸ The steady rise in membership suggests that the working class depended on the FDGB, which only became stronger as East Germany developed.

Another mass youth organization, the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth) emerged in March 1946. In its history we can see another example of a mass

¹⁵Soviet Military Administration, "Befehl Nr. 2 des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland," in *Befehle des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland*. Sammelheft 1. (Berlin: Verlag der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland, 1946), 10.

¹⁶Frost, "Non-Communist Parties and Mass Organizations in the German Democratic Republic," 21-22.

¹⁷Geerling and Magee, "Piecework and the Sovietization of the East German Workplace," 721.

¹⁸Siegfried Mielke, *Internationales Gewerkschaftshandbuch* (Leverkusen: Leske Verlag and Budrich, 1982), 392.

organization that soon came to have close ties with the KPD and fit into the pattern of increasing centralization of social organizations. Youth organizations had a long history in German culture and this was why the creation of a single youth organization became so critical for the KPD. The *Wandervögel*, which began at the turn of the 20th century, was a non-political movement. It provided youths with a means of opposing a society that they believed had nothing to offer them. It gave youth a sense of independence and an opportunity to lead their lives independently from parents, homes, and teachers.¹⁹ After World War I, the Wandervögel movement adapted to the changing climate in Germany. Youth organizations focused more on discipline, and their structure became more hierarchical.²⁰ For many youths the Wandervögel and other youth groups led naturally to enthusiastic participation in Nazi Party organizations during the tumultuous period between the end of World War I and the rise to power of the Nazi Party in 1933.

The Nazi Youth organization Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*) was founded in 1922 and was a defining experience for many young men during the years of the Third Reich. A parallel organization for girls was the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*, BDM) created in mid 1920s. The lives of youths were full of uncertainty, and Michael Kater argues that many found the authoritarian nature of the Nazi regime and the Hitler youth organizations a point of attraction for them. It was an exciting opportunity for youth to be respected and have a sense of responsibility.²¹ Almost all German youths were active in the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls during the Nazi years. It is estimated that almost 8.7 million of the 8.87 million 10-18 year olds in the Third Reich

¹⁹Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

²⁰Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 11

²¹Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 1-3.

belonged to either the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls.²² The younger generation was clearly so dedicated to their role in the Third Reich that, not surprisingly, the fall of the Reich led to apathy and a widespread disinterest in politics throughout Germany. Richard Bessel argues that apathy was widespread among the youth because the war had taken such a toll on them.²³ The children of the war era were the most affected because they had been told by the Nazi Party that they would build the thousand year Reich. They had lived under the illusion that they were the superior race and with the end of the war they saw that this was false. With their illusions shattered and their homeland reduced to rubble, young Germans in both the Soviet Zone and the Western Zones tended to renounce all political activity. Many felt used and abandoned.

The FDJ was officially revived in March 1946 to give youths after the war an outlet to take part in society again while distancing themselves from the Nazi past.²⁴ The FDJ originated in 1936 as an amalgamation of the Communist Youth movement with two socialist youth groups. Its anti-Nazi underground status invited action by the Gestapo and soon it was forced into exile. It became the primary youth organization in the Soviet Zone of Germany. While its structure was similar to the Hitler Youth, its aims for its activity were divergent. In the announcement of the formation of the FDJ in March 1946, the Soviet Military Administration announced that the "...youth are given the possibility of free, democratic activity...in an appropriate organization" and that "the new organization allows no military or fascist activity to be exhibited whatsoever. It must serve the values

²² Alan McDougall, "A Duty to Forget? The 'Hitler Youth Generation' and the Transformation from Nazism to Communism in Postwar Germany, c. 1945-49," *German History* (2008): 28

²³ Richard Bessel, "Establishing Order in Post-war Eastern Germany," *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.

²⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 60.

of people's friendship and freedom..."²⁵ In the announcement of the aims of the FDJ, the organization distinctly set itself apart from the Hitler Youth. Its commitment to friendship and its insistence that it would not affiliate with militaristic acts seemed to be a direct comparison to the activity of the Hitler Youth. It emphasized freedom and a sense of unity in a fight against fascism, which gave promise to the future of an anti-fascist, democratic Germany.

The revival of the FDJ coincided with the unification of the KPD and the SPD into the SED and was part of the KPD's effort to solidify its leadership over Germans in the Soviet Zone. In reviving the FDJ, the SED sought to unify all youth organizations in "a single, nonpartisan youth group."²⁶ Erich Honecker, then the leader of the FDJ, later wrote that he firmly believed in the mission of the Communist Party to "establish an antifascist regime...with all democratic rights and freedoms for the people," and that he wanted to see these freedoms extended to the younger generation.²⁷ About the reestablishment of the FDJ, Honecker said it was, "an organization had been created in the ranks of which young people of different ideological perspectives, social background and occupation were united and which committed itself to social progress."²⁸ The FDJ included both boys and girls in its ranks. This organization brought the younger generation together and subtly taught the postwar youth of Germany the values of the Communist Party through the activities organized by FDJ leaders. The youths learned

²⁵Chefs der Sowjetischen Militäradministration, "Zulassung einer Jugendorganisation," in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands*, edited by Siegfried Baske and Marth Engelbert (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 22.

²⁶Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 157.

²⁷Erich Honecker, *From My Life*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), 124.

²⁸Honecker, *From My Life*, 139.

about working in a collective and about Marxist-Leninist ideology. From the outset the FDJ ensured that it kept its distance from politics.

We can see two phases in the early years of the FDJ – a “democratic phase,” from 1946 to early 1947, and a more regimented “socialist phase” from 1947 on. The early functions of the FDJ, in its “democratic phase,” were to organize leisure time activities for young people, such as hiking, sporting events, concerts and movies. It was a unisex organization which appealed to those youths who had not liked being separated from their counterparts through the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls.²⁹

Educational training and career opportunities were afforded to members of the FDJ, especially youths with working class backgrounds. It was an opportunity for youths to escape from the bleak life of Germany around them and to envision a better future for Germany. Such educational and social motives encouraged young people to begin to accept the Communist anti-fascist political program of the FDJ.³⁰ Establishing a level of comfort for the younger generation from the beginning seemed to draw in youth and to encourage them to believe that Communist Party ideology offered the right path for Germany. That young people took to this organization seemed to demonstrate that the initiatives of the Communists and Soviet Military Administration were working to use a mass organization to win over a portion of the population.

Alan McDougall argues that the FDJ appealed to youths because they could relate to it. It promised to maintain a lot of the structure they were so familiar with in the Hitler Youth but without the intensity of the Nazi organizations. Discipline and physical activity

²⁹McDougall, “A Duty to Forget?,” 37.

³⁰Alan McDougall, “Young Workers, the Free German Youth (FDJ) and the June 1953 Uprising,” in *Power and the People: A Social History of Central European Politics, 1945-1946* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 29.

were stressed in both organizations. “Militant language” used by the Nazis was simply transformed into a new war against fascism and channeled into the efforts of reconstruction after 1945. In the League of German Girls, Melita Maschmann was ready to serve Germany and make the German people great. In her memoir *Account Rendered*, she discusses her time in the League of German Girls and why she felt so devoted to its activity. She admits that she “believed [the National Socialists] when they said they would reunite the German nation...and overcome the consequences of the dictated peace of Versailles.”³¹ She remained committed to the League of German Girls and in 1933 was given the responsibility of supplying her local daily newspaper with information and reports about League activity. The authority she was given in the position was appealing to her and seems to be something she strove for throughout her time with the League of German Girls.³² It was this level of commitment and desire to help reconstruct Germany that the leaders of the FDJ wanted to emulate in their own organization.

Youth of the FDJ were similarly conscious of their duty and ready to help serve the Fatherland. The means were the same, but toward different ends. The FDJ’s promise of a democratic society was motivating enough for young people to devote themselves to this new youth organization. Simple aspects of the FDJ, such as the dedication to friendship and comradeship, drew in youths.³³ Debates about how to balance the negative influence of the Hitler Youth on all youths and how to utilize their leadership skills

³¹Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, trans. Abelard-Schuman (New York: Abelard Schuman. 1964), 16.

³²Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 16.

³³McDougall, “A Duty to Forget?,” 35-39.

without the Hitler Youth's militaristic aspect took place throughout the late 1940s.³⁴ The SED emphasized the positive components of comradeship and dedication in order to encourage former Hitler Youth members to get involved, but once youths entered the FDJ it became more restrictive and increasingly similar to the Hitler Youth.

The FDJ grew stricter in the beginning of 1947. One of the causes was a conflict about the Christian youth in the FDJ. A good way to understand this conflict is to look at the story of Manfred Klein, a Christian member of the FDJ, who grappled with his dual responsibility to his religion and to his membership in the FDJ. He had spent time in a Soviet prison camp during the war and while there he was encouraged to join the Communist party. Once he returned to Germany after the war, he was still deeply tied to the church and so joined the Christian Democratic Union in June 1945.³⁵ He spoke with KPD members, namely Erich Honecker, about involvement in youth organizations. Honecker seemed enthusiastic to have a Christian representative in the FDJ and promised Klein that "...for his cooperation, the Catholic youths would be trusted by the youth committees..."³⁶ Klein's interest in the FDJ and his membership in the CDU was not an issue for Honecker, as the FDJ was inclusive of girls and boys from different parts of society. But Klein's dual loyalty became problematic once the FDJ's ties to socialism grew stronger. In March 1947 Manfred Klein, along with 15 other Christian leaders in the

³⁴Mark Fenemore, "Saints and Devils: Youth in the SBZ/GDR, 1945-53," in *Power and the People: A Social History of Central European Politics, 1945-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 170.

³⁵Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 160.

³⁶Manfred Klein, *Jugend Zwischen den Diktaturen 1945/56* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1968), 27.

East, was arrested by the East German secret police. Klein was sentenced to work in a Soviet labor camp and remained there for nine years.³⁷

The leaders of the SED wanted to expand the range of its youth organization by providing an opportunity for small children to get involved. The Young Pioneers (*Junge Pioniere*) were established in December 1948 as a “Children’s Association of the FDJ.”³⁸

The Young Pioneers worked to ensure German children were raised to be studious, forward thinking, work-happy, industrious, democratic youths. The Pioneer organization prepared children for the next level of work and training that characterized membership in the FDJ. This preparation was echoed in the motto of the Young Pioneers, “Keines zu klein – Kämpfer zu sein” (No one too small to be a fighter). The motto reflected the more militant attitude that East German leaders took as they came closer to founding the German Democratic Republic. At the same time, the Young Pioneers were committed to instilling the ideals of friendship and community in children. The Young Pioneers expressed its allegiance to its parent organization, the FDJ, by asking the children to wear blue neckerchiefs symbolizing the blue of the FDJ flag. The neckerchief had three corners to represent “school-parents-Pioneer Organization” so that the children understood their priorities.³⁹ The creation of the Pioneer Organization was yet another step toward subordination of the German youth population under one ideology.

The reestablishment of the FDJ in 1946 and the subsequent creation of the Young Pioneers in 1948 reflect critical stages in the development of East German mass

³⁷ Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 160.

³⁸ Leonore Ansorg, *Kinder im Klassenkampf: Die Geschichte der Pionierorganisation von 1948 bis Ende der fünfziger Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 44.

³⁹ Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1949* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 117.

organizations. The FDJ was initially a non-political, leisure organization, but by the time the Young Pioneers were created it had become a structured organization aimed at centralizing the activity of the younger generation. The SED's intention was to separate youth from their Nazi past, but the similarities between the Hitler Youth and the FDJ are striking. The goal may have been to break youth from Nazi ideology, but ultimately the SED was utilizing the same means as the Nazis toward different ideological ends. The stories of FDJ members, such as Manfred Klein, and their eventual exclusion from the FDJ because of their religion and political party affiliation, demonstrate the increasing restrictions that were placed on youths in East Germany. The more years that passed after the end of World War II and the farther away the Soviet Union grew from the Western Allies, the closer the SED grew to the Soviet Union, and it became comfortable centralizing control over the people. This was an important trend in the history of the Soviet Zone of Occupation because it was one seen in many different spheres throughout society and in all countries in the Eastern Bloc. By the end of the 1940s, control over politics and mass organizations by the SED became even stronger. The close relationship between the Soviet Union and East Germany was visible, representing the ruptured relations between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

Historian Mary Fulbrook argues that mass organizations such as the Free German Trade Union, the Free German Youth, and the Young Pioneers were of strategic importance to the East German Communists because they were means for the SED to implement its social and economic policies. They could ensure worker and student discipline and exercise increasingly more control over the people. It became increasingly difficult for Germans to find jobs if they were not members of the FDGB. That by 1949

employment was in large measure dependent on being connected to the FDGB by 1949 demonstrates the SED's tight control over East Germany. By then, affiliation with the FDJ also helped students as they applied to University, again demonstrating the way the mass organizations helped to control the path to advancement. As Fulbrook so eloquently states, the FDGB "represented not the interests of the workers to the employer, but rather the interests of the party and the state to the workers."⁴⁰ Based on the number of people who eventually became members of the FDGB and the FDJ, it is clear that they were not deterred by those organizations' affiliation with the anti-fascist bloc and later the SED. If Germans wanted to move forward in society, often times there was no choice but to join one of these organizations.

The Soviet Military Administration maintained deep control over the mass organizations in East Germany and helped to drive the transition to a more centralized system. The shift away from a wide variety of independent mass organizations and parties to the more centralized system began in early 1946 and moved forward throughout the year. The leaders of trade unions, the governors of the provinces, and the chairs of the Central Administrations in the Soviet Zone began to meet to work through the problems Germany faced. The first meetings were called by the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1947 and continued until the formation of an official governmental body in 1948.⁴¹ The Soviet Military Administration created a German Economic Commission for its zone in February 1948. It intended to "enable the German democratic bodies to participate more actively in reconstruction and in the development of a peace

⁴⁰ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 59.

⁴¹ J.P. Nettl, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany 1945-50* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 132.

economy.”⁴² The Economic Commission had one chairman and two deputy chairmen overseeing its functioning. Each mass organization in the Soviet Zone had at least one representative, while bigger organizations such as the FDGB had three representatives. This Commission was under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Military Administration, but it had a permanent executive body comprised of German citizens that was in charge of issuing the decrees and instructions of the Soviet Military Administration.⁴³ The German Economic Commission centralized all mass organizations and political work in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and brought East Germany closer in line with the systems in place at the time in other countries in the Eastern bloc.

The power of the German Economic Commission only grew stronger as tensions between the East and the West rose. As reconstruction and development in the zone advanced, it was necessary for the Soviet Military Administration to “improve contacts between the German zonal administrative bodies and the population.”⁴⁴ Later in 1948, the number of members in the German Economic Commission was expanded from 36 members to 101. There were more representatives from each of the Länder in the Soviet Zone, who were elected into the position, and more representatives appointed by each political party and mass organization.⁴⁵ The SED was heavily represented on the Economic Commission because the other organizations that were part of the Commission

⁴²Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order Number 32: Composition and Powers of the German Economic Commission,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 279.

⁴³Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order Number 32: Composition and Powers of the German Economic Commission,” 279.

⁴⁴Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 183 Expanding the Economic Commission,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 345.

⁴⁵Soviet Military Administration, “Soviet Military Administration Order No. 183 Expanding the Economic Commission,” 345.

had many SED members in them. Not only was the Economic Commission centralizing the power of the political parties and the mass organizations, but it was asserting the dominance of the SED over the rest of East Germany.⁴⁶

In the fall of 1949, as the German Democratic Republic was about to be established, strong relations between the Soviet Union and East Germany became even clearer through the creation of Friendship societies. The German-Soviet Friendship Society (*Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*: GDSF) was initiated by Sergei Tiul'panov, the Director of the Propaganda Administration for the Soviet Military Administration in order to deepen the political relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ "Friendship" was a stock phrase for the SED throughout East Germany, as is seen in the FDJ and the Young Pioneers. To the SED the "Great Socialist Soviet Union was the model for and sole guarantor of the SED's notion of the Socialist Fatherland."⁴⁸ Friendship was to be extended to the Soviet Union and not just emphasized within East Germany. The GDSF saw its task as "spreading the truth about the Soviet Union, fighting every kind of slander and opposition...and through this... [securing] and [deepening] the friendship of the German people with the people of the Soviet Union."⁴⁹ The GDSF quickly grew into a mass organization because the SED and other German organizations gave priority to the GDSF in their daily activities.⁵⁰ The Soviet Military

⁴⁶Nettl, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany 1945-50*,133.

⁴⁷Norman A. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 416.

⁴⁸Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 144,168.

⁴⁹Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 416.

⁵⁰Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 417.

Administration, following directives from Moscow, dictated what the GDSF did and how it supported the Soviet Union's goals.

The German-Soviet Friendship Society seemed to be a different mass organization from some others studied in this chapter because it was not founded on economic values or strictly as a leisure organization strictly for children. It appears to have been founded to solidify a relationship between East Germany and the Soviet Union. The name itself directly linked the two countries, bonding them together as the Soviet Zone struggled to develop and find its own footing in the postwar world. This is also a unique organization because, unlike the FDJ, it was upfront in its connection with the Soviet Union. By 1949 there was no denying the relationship between East Germany and the Soviet Union, thereby making it political. Though indoctrination in Marxist-Leninist ideology may have been subtle in the first years of occupation, by the 1949 there was no discretion about the path of the Soviet zone toward socialism and a relationship with the Soviet Union.

By the time the German Democratic Republic was founded in October 1949, virtually no part of society could escape the influence of the SED. The whole of society was deeply penetrated by the rigid and centrally-controlled structure of the Party institutions and organizations, from work councils to the activities of the FDJ to the German-Soviet Friendship Society.⁵¹ In the early postwar years there were possibilities for the development of a genuine democracy because of the existence of a variety of political and social groups. The ability to explore new ideologies and activities pleased the German people, who had led such oppressed lives under the Third Reich. With

⁵¹Fullbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 131.

nonpartisan organizations calling for the people's participation, the German people began to distance themselves from their Nazi past and envision a new future. But then, with the formation of the SED and its increasing domination over these mass organizations, the hope for democracy diminished. Though the FDJ originated as a non-partisan leisure organization, it soon came under the National Front. Political parties would face this same fate. The National Front that officially formed in 1950 in effect took the place of the anti-fascist bloc in that was an alliance of political parties and mass organizations. It was under the influence of the SED and therefore was directly politically affiliated. The SED encouraged citizen participation in the activities of the new East Germany, but it was really mobilization of the masses to serve the purpose of the government. It was through the SED's efforts to mobilize and control the masses that Soviet-style socialism came to prevail in East Germany.

Chapter 4:

Reeducation of German Youth: The New Educational System

There were many gaps in the German educational system that needed to be addressed after World War II to ensure the proper functioning of schools. Most schools throughout the country were either completely destroyed or extremely damaged from bombings. The lack of physical buildings made it difficult to start school again soon after the war. Education was important because it was a direct link to influencing the younger generation. Students had been influenced by their Nazi era teachers and this work needed to be undone. The Allied powers agreed that the educational system needed to be reconstructed so as to rid German society of Nazi ideology. An all-Allied policy set out at Potsdam expressly stated that the educational system was to be “so controlled as completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas.”¹ Proceeding forward with this foundation for the establishment of a new educational system in Germany, the Allied powers began to reconstruct education. Studying early developments in the Soviet Zone of Germany helps to understand how socialist ideology was integrated into society.

The Soviet Military Administration and the KPD dealt with issues in education in a number of ways. They removed an overwhelming number of teachers without question. This created large shortages of teachers and forced the Soviet Military Administration to create a system to replace them. Curricula were changed to focus more on the problems of capitalism and how it destroyed Germany rather than a genuine interpretation of

¹J.V. Stalin, Harry S. Truman, and C.R. Attlee, “Extracts from the Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 17 July-2 August 1945,” in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 43-44.

history. More working class German were admitted to University and given the opportunity to receive higher education. All of these changes were introduced gradually and caused the Western Allies concern. They did not agree with the Soviet Union's interpretation of history and this created a rift between East and West that added to the heightening tensions of the Cold War. By the end of the 1940s political affiliation was central to University admission and employment, thereby solidifying the educational system's role in the making of socialism.

Most, if not all, school buildings in certain parts of Germany were either severely damaged or destroyed in bombings carried out by the Allied powers. This posed a serious obstacle for the Allied powers as they tried to reconstruct. The Soviet Military Administration enlisted children and teachers to physically remove rubble and clear the schools. This physical removal of Nazi ideology also included tangible pieces of Nazism, namely fascist or militaristic images and texts. Teachers were to ensure that Nazi-era textbooks or lesson plans were not used and this was a huge job. For instance, when the Soviets entered the town of Mecklenburg in May 1945, the University was still running with a full library of Nazi era texts. No time was wasted in closing down the University and its library until more appropriate educational material was brought in.² This example shows that the Soviets took the task of eradicating Nazi ideology from the educational system very seriously. The new school system that the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD began to reconstruct took into consideration the long tradition of German education beginning in the 19th century.

²Norman A. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 441.

German educational tradition was rooted in the high culture of the 19th century. The *Gymnasium* arose from an interest in educating an elite group of students, mainly those of the upper class, on a classical curriculum of Latin and Greek. Students who were able to attend *Gymnasium* were guaranteed a path to university. The classical curriculum was significant because it led students to many important professions and ensured them a spot in the upper echelon of society. The *Realschulen* were schools that trained students for clerical or technical positions. Students were taught Latin, but the focus remained on non-classical subjects such as mathematics and the natural sciences. Those who finished *Realschule* took a graduation examination and received certification, though this did not entitle them to enroll in University. The *Oberrealschulen* taught no ancient languages. Instead students were taught English, French, math, science, German, history, geography and drawing. Besides the differences in curriculum at each of these schools, class remained the largest barrier in the educational system in 19th century Germany.³

At the end of World War I in 1918, the Weimar Republic was born and changed the nature of education for the German people. It sought to make a more democratic system open to all students regardless of class. The educational system in the Weimar Republic was reconstructed in order to combat the caste system of the 19th century German Empire. During Weimar, political parties of the left, such as the Social Democrats, sought to remove social barriers, create more equal career opportunities for all Germans, and to make Germany's educational system genuinely democratic.⁴ Reformist scholars wanted to encourage independent thinking through education and

³Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 24-31.

⁴Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*, 71.

move away from the more rigid methods used in the old Gymnasium. Students receiving such a distinguished education were often of a higher economic status, which is what led to many of the objections of the political left.⁵ Institutions such as the Realgymnasium, the Oberrealschule, and the Deutsche Oberrealschule were created to provide greater diversity in the educational opportunities afforded to students. With the rise to power of the Nazi Party in 1933, the educational system of the Weimar Republic was replaced with the racist, fascist ideology of the Nazi Party. The new educational system promoted by the Soviet Military Administration and their allies worked to eradicate such harmful thinking and promote a more inclusive environment, but at the expense of other values in the German tradition.

It was the recent, overwhelming Nazi experience that the Allied powers had to root out. National Socialist rule had exerted massive control and centralized power over the schools and their ideological content. The schools trained Germans to love and fight for the Fatherland. State intervention was heavy in the schools, and Gilmer Blackburn, historian of Nazi education, suggests this was so because the Nazis did not want to leave the children alone. This could lead them to dissenting thoughts about the Nazi Party.⁶ In the Nazi book *So Ward Das Reich* it is stated that

The education of National Socialists starts in childhood. The mother is in the National Socialist Women's Group, the Father in the SA....in the community school [the child] comes to know the Führer... Then he is ready for the Hitler Youth...there he sees the Führer and hears the words: 'For you, my young ones, you are the living Germany of the future, not an empty idea, no mere scheme. You are blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh, spirit of our spirit, you are our people continuing to live...'⁷

⁵Fritz K. Ringer, *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 34.

⁶Gilmer Blackburn, *Education in the Third Reich* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 101.

⁷Dietrich Klagges, *So Ward Das Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Mortiz Diesterweg, 1943), 195.

So Ward Das Reich emphasized for the German people the importance of their commitment to the Nazi Party and specifically what role they could play in the future of Germany. The educational system was central to indoctrinating youths to the idea that they were the foundation of German society. There was no sense of the individual, but rather they all focused on the whole. Everything was for the Fatherland.⁸ This intense nationalism swept the German nation and infiltrated many parts of society. As exhibited by *So Ward Das Reich*, the educational system was one such area.

Teachers were indoctrinated in Nazi ideology through the *Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund* (National Socialist Teachers' League). This organization was founded in 1927 and encouraged teachers to emphasize all the wonders of the German race and to advocate for the new life that the Nazi Party was creating.⁹ The Nazi Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service in April 1933 gave the Nazis legal authority to purge German civil servants hostile to the Nazi Party's aims and to appoint their own cadre of administrators. Article 2 of this law directly targeted members of the KPD or related organizations. It intended to purge those employed after November 9, 1918, the day on which German revolutionaries declared a Republic, who lacked proper training or other qualifications necessary to participate in the civil service.¹⁰ This was intended to create a politicized civil service, dedicated to the ideological aims of the Nazi Party. In creating a politicized corps of teachers under the Nazi Party, the educational system was consequently politicized as well. This process had to be undone by the Allied powers

⁸Blackburn, *Education in the Third Reich*, 94.

⁹Blackburn, *Education in the Third Reich*, 101.

¹⁰Charles Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 35-36.

through the de-Nazification efforts of 1945-1948. Instead of an indoctrination in Nazism, a new democratic ideology was promoted by the Allies.

In order to incorporate democratic ideals into the school system it was necessary to remove the teachers who had been members of or sympathized with the Nazi Party. Considering that the Soviet Union believed the educational system to be one of the most direct routes to the hearts and minds of the German youths, it is not surprising that the Soviet Military Administration took aggressive measures to root out the Nazi leadership in schools. The Soviet Military Administration removed 72 percent of Soviet Zone teachers in 1945 and another five percent in 1946. While the West was handing out questionnaires, the Soviet Military Administration physically removed teachers without question.¹¹ If the teachers were not being forcibly removed they fled West in order to avoid Soviet rule. Six major Universities in the Soviet Zone lost 75 percent of their professors.¹² These numbers were overwhelming and created major problems for the Soviet Military Administration as it tried to decide how to reconstruct. Plans were implemented soon after the war to get some schooling started while these large scale problems were addressed.

The Soviet Military Administration wanted schools in its zone to reopen in June 1945. This was an unrealistic expectation considering the damages sustained by school buildings during the war and the depleted corps of teachers that resulted from de-Nazification purges. Despite the inability to conduct formal school the Soviet Military Administration managed to create an interim program with a unique curriculum catering

¹¹John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.

¹²Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 443.

to postwar students. Instead of traditional courses that followed a structured state-sanctioned curriculum according to academic discipline, such as biology or German literature, students learned about current issues and problems facing Germany. This allowed students to begin to see the problems - physical, economic, moral, political - that Hitler and the Nazi Party brought upon Germany. The aim was to give children the sense that their country needed to move away from its dark past. Much of the school work was done outdoors, largely because of the lack of physical classrooms in which to conduct lessons. Songs, sports and group activity were of particular interest for the Soviet Zone because it continued a long German tradition and was something the occupiers had experience with in their own Soviet tradition. Using pieces of German tradition to restart the educational system was a powerful tool because it seemed to many Germans to be a way to preserve much of German culture while implementing a new curriculum for students. While Nazi-era supplies were being replaced, teachers were encouraged to bring songs, drawings, sports, outside activity, and games into the classrooms so that there would still be a degree of normalcy in the lives of the students.¹³

Along with efforts to disassociate the Germans in the Soviet Zone from the old Germany under the Nazi Party, the Soviet Military Administration mandated Russian language instruction for all students. Historian Charles Lansing suggests that such early insistence on Russian language instruction could stem from a deep Russian belief in the supremacy of its own culture or from a desire to connect with German students early. The Soviet Military Administration prohibited other foreign languages from being taught in

¹³Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 134-135.

the Summer of 1945 and the focus was solely placed on Russian.¹⁴ The study of Russian language quickly became an important aspect of the curricular development of the Soviet Zone. Whatever may be the case for the early introduction of Russian language instruction into the Soviet Zone, the development of such cultural influence over students early on in the occupation seems to foreshadow the lasting presence of the Soviet Union in the lives of the German people in the eastern sector.

The Soviet Military Administration saw the effects of its sweeping de-Nazification policies early on in the shortage of teachers throughout all of the Soviet Zone Länder. There was a desperate need for roughly 40,000 teachers. These shortages forced the Soviet Military Administration to institute three to four week crash courses which taught *Neulehrer* (new teachers) about basic pedagogy.¹⁵ Quickly the Soviet Military Administration realized these Neulehrer needed more, and better, training. The Neulehrer program was extended to three months and focused on the teaching of music and singing, the study of Russian, and the contemporary political issues that were being so heavily encouraged in the initial months after the war. This training was brief, as it was merely intended in the beginning to increase the number of teachers in the corps.¹⁶ In August 1945 Paul Wandel (1905-1995) gave shape to the standards for the teaching profession when he declared

Only those teachers can be employed who can guarantee that they will educate the youth according to the true democratic principles, free of Nazi and militaristic beliefs (*Gedankengänge*)...The goal is...to empower teachers to become, in this decisive epoch of our history, convinced pioneers (*bewusste Vorkämpfer*) for a political, spiritual, and moral democratic rejuvenation of our national life.¹⁷

¹⁴Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 134-136.

¹⁵Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 31.

¹⁶Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 154.

¹⁷Quoted in Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 153.

Wandel had been a committed Communist Party member since 1926 and, like many other Communist Party members, he had fled to the Soviet Union in 1933. He was a central KPD member in the development of the educational system in postwar East Germany. In regard to the Neulehrer program, Wandel believed that Neulehrer should be young, preferably female and prove themselves committed to democracy. Pedagogical abilities and the educational qualifications of the Neulehrer were of the utmost importance in establishing a corps of teachers.¹⁸ These basic specifications helped start the program that created Neulehrer for the new educational system in the Soviet Zone.

The Soviet Military Administration's *Deutsche Verwaltung für Volksbildung* [DVV] was founded in July 1945 and began to bring uniformity to the educational policies in the Soviet Zone.¹⁹ The first Director of Education for the DVV was Paul Wandel. He helped centralize the educational system in the course of the next five years. Fears of Communist influence over German life extended to the educational system and the centralized nature of the DVV. The Allies had agreed that "the administration of affairs in Germany should be directed towards the decentralization of the political structure and the development of local responsibility."²⁰ The Soviets countered that the DVV was not a form of German self-administration because it answered to the Soviet Military Administration. Anton Ackermann (1905-1973) defended the DVV and its aims for Germany. As a committed member of the KPD since 1926, he studied at the Lenin

¹⁸Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 153-154.

¹⁹Kurt Sontheimer and Wilhelm Bleek, *The Government and Politics of East Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 128.

²⁰J.V. Stalin. Harry S. Truman, C.R. Attlee, "Extracts from the Report on the Tripartite Conference of Berlin (Potsdam), 17 July-2 August 1945," in *Documents on Germany Under Occupation 1945-1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 44.

School in Moscow and also remained in exile in Moscow during the Nazi years. He was the editor of the German language newspaper in Moscow “*The Free Word*,” which is where his interest in the DVV may have stemmed from. Ackermann saw the creation of the DVV as “good for the development of the Eastern part of Germany and it had long-term significance for the whole of Germany.”²¹ He acknowledged that the West was worried about the domination of the Red Army in Germany, but emphasized that the DVV was looking to balance the centralization with self-administration. There would be enough room for the state and provincial administration to develop in their own way.²² Despite initial concerns from the West, the DVV continued as an agency for development of the educational sphere in the Soviet Zone.

The Soviet Military Administration issued Order No. 40 on August 25, 1945 to announce the reopening of schools on October 1, 1945. It demanded that the new schools offer “instruction and education free of Nazi, militaristic, racist and other reactionary theories.”²³ It forbade the use of books that had been printed during the Nazi years or promoted propaganda of Nazi, racist, or militaristic theory. Instead, books that were printed before 1933 were to be used and a list of such books had to be approved by the Soviet Military Administration prior to the October opening of school. The Order also required that the “Curriculum for each school be planned out and submitted to the Soviet Military Administration through the DVV by September 15, 1945.”²⁴ The DVV pointed

²¹Anton Ackermann, “Was wir von der Zentralverwaltung erwarten,” *Tägliche Rundschau*. September 25 1945.

²²Anton Ackermann, “Was wir von der Zentralverwaltung erwarten.”

²³Soviet Military Administration, “Über die Vorbereitung der Schulen zum Schulbetrieb: Befehl Nr. 40 der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung vom 25. August 1945,” in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands*, edited by (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 4.

²⁴Soviet Military Administration, “Über die Vorbereitung der Schulen zum Schulbetrieb: Befehl Nr. 40 der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung vom 25. August 1945,” 4.

out that in the Soviet Zone of Germany there was a strong corps of teachers who had worked in school earlier in Germany's history. The DVV was also setting up an apprentice training program, which "organized consistent democratic principles in education and in upbringing" and "revealed the reactionary path of Nazism, the fascist racial ideology, and the military character of the former German Reich."²⁵ Through Order No. 40 the Soviet Military Administration provided guidelines for the new schools that formed in fall of 1945 and also helped structure the new educational system and set it on a path toward what it called anti-fascist democracy.

The Soviet Military Administration dictated much of the initial work that was done to help set up the school system again. By getting involved with the educational system, the Soviet Military Administration could influence the future trajectory of education in the East. This urgency to rebuild a new, stronger educational system can be seen in the widespread purges of the teaching profession. Clearly the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD were interested in completely undoing the Nazi party, but at the same time this gave them the opportunity to install those teachers they believed were best fit to educate the future of Germany. The Neulehrer program demonstrates the interest of the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD in creating a strong, politically sound corps of teachers. This followed the other developments taking place across the Soviet Zone in that the Soviet Military Administration was working to build a solid foundation of politically reliable Germans. Organizations to help centralize activity in the Soviet Zone are seen in other spheres of society, but what is unique to the Soviet

²⁵ Marshal Zhukov, "Vorbereitung der deutschen Schulen für den Beginn des Unterrichts," in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands Dokumente 1*. (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 36.

Zone is how more upfront the educational system becomes in its relationship with the Soviet Union and its path toward the making of socialism.

By 1946 the Neulehrer program developed more structure and gave teachers a better sense for the school system they were entering. More experienced teachers coming out of anti-fascist schools in Moscow were “thrown into” to help to train these Neulehrer and get them into the new educational system. Neulehrer were assigned mentors, Altlehrer, who were established teachers and were trusted by the new German Administration. The Neulehrer were observed by the Altlehrer and vice versa. Both mentor and mentee discussed pedagogical issues and specific problems they were experiencing in the classroom. Beyond experiential learning, Neulehrer spent their mornings learning about pedagogical and methodological issues as well as listening to lectures on political topics strictly associated with the Marxist-Leninist ideology that was taught in the Soviet Zone school system. The afternoons were spent on teaching exercises and drills.²⁶ Through this new training system for new school teachers, the Soviet Zone was soon producing politicized teachers who were capable of influencing a young generation.

These politicized teachers and other politically reliable Germans were occupying positions of power in the new educational system. This caused concern among some Germans and, again, the West because by filling the administration with Communists, educational activity did not appear democratic. Wandel assuaged these concerns in July 1946 by stating that “The basic ideas of the new school laws and the new developments of the German schools are not inventions of our day and not contrived plans of [the

²⁶Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 154-155.

KPD]. We have certainly provided our opinion, but...our new school is founded on very old ideas.”²⁷ Though the educational system at this point appeared to be along a more direct path of socialist development, KPD functionaries were adamant that they were preserving a historically-based, uniquely German system.

The Law for the Democratization of the German School was established in May 1946 and set out some key points that defined the new democratic school. It emphasized the democratic nature of the new educational system and laid out a vision for the future of German education that was inclusive for all.

The creation of a new, free, democratic Germany – the only path to national rebirth and unity of our people – requires the fundamental democratization of German schools. The new democratic schools must be free of all elements of militarism, imperialism, and racism. They must be built so that all children, girls and boys...with no difference about the wealth of their parents, are guaranteed the same right to education...²⁸

The goal set out for the German democratic school was to teach students to be independent thinkers and responsible citizens who were competent and ready to put themselves at the service of all their people. Benita Blessing argues that the Law for the Democratization of the German School marked a real change. The pre-1945 German school system could never have been considered a place for youths to learn democracy and become free citizens who are aware of their responsibilities to society and confident in their own place because the power of the old class system was in place.²⁹ The Law for

²⁷ Paul Wandel, “Zur Demokratisierung der Schule,” in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands*. (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 36.

²⁸ Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung, “Gesetz zur Demokratisierung der deutschen Schule,” in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands*. (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 25.

²⁹ Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 26.

the Democratization of the German School highlighted the character of the educational system built in the Soviet Zone because of its focus on inclusion and the development of conscious German citizens. The structure of the educational system further supplemented these goals by working to standardize the system for students through the *Einheitsschule*.

The *Einheitsschule* was based on the understanding that the school was central to the construction of a German national consciousness.³⁰ The *Einheitsschule* consisted of a *Kindergarten*, *Grundschule* and then *Berufsschule* or *Oberschule*. The *Grundschule* was obligatory for all children. It prepared the basics of German, History, Geography, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Math and a foreign language. In the seventh or eighth year of *Grundschule* the students chose a second foreign language to study.³¹ Students were able to choose between a three-year part-time study at the *Berufsschule* or four years at the *Oberschule*. Part-time study at the *Berufsschule* combined school work with an apprenticeship, thereby preparing its students for a profession in East German society. In contrast, the *Oberschule* was four full years of study within which were three divisions for specialization: classics, modern languages, and mathematics/science. It was the *Oberschule* that prepared students for continued study at University. The *Einheitsschule* helped to abolish the access the privileged classes had to secondary education. According to the German Communists, the old school system had not been accessible to the working class, peasant, and even the lower middle class. This new educational system allowed the

³⁰Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom*, 37.

³¹Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung, "Gesetz zur Demokratisierung der deutschen Schulen," 25.

urban and rural working classes to overcome their long standing disadvantage and opened to them genuine opportunities for secondary and higher education.³²

Talking about the Soviet Zone, Alan Nothnagle describes its approach to education through the use of significant people in history and through textbooks as a type of indoctrination, and describes the way in which emphasis on Marxist-Leninist ideology remained strong throughout the existence of the DDR. He uses the word *Parteilichkeit*, which the SED defined as:

...a theoretical-methodological principle; it demands that one approach all questions of societal life from the standpoint of the interests of the working class, its struggle for peace, societal progress, and the establishment of Socialism and Communism.³³

Parteilichkeit was most often emphasized in the textbooks used by students in the Soviet Zone through examples such as the anti-fascist Communist leader Ernst Thälmann. The historical foundation of this new ideology was built into the educational system so that all of the reforms taking place in the Soviet Zone could be justified.³⁴ The rhetoric the schools directed at the youths was meant to condemn fascism as a party ideology bent on killing Communism. In school it was enough to know that fascism was wrong and the anti-fascists were right without being asked to consider why.³⁵ The Soviet Military Administration and the KPD worked to instill this idea throughout the new curriculum with a new approach to the history of Germany and the relationship between the Nazi Party and the Communists.

³² Arthur Hearden, *Education in the Two Germanies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976), 47-49.

³³ Alan L Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic 1945-1949* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 17.

³⁴ Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 148.

³⁵ Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 100.

The issue of curriculum, particularly how to teach German history, was one that affected all Allies. For the 1945-1946 school year all the Allied powers decided to suspend history education. This policy was adopted because the Nazi version of German history had been full of falsifications based on race theory and militarism. All traces of these approaches needed to be removed from history books and curricula. The lack of qualified teachers and the slow rate at which new teachers were being trained exacerbated this issue. To make effective change to the history curriculum required so much work that students could not be taught history until a completely new course was adopted. The Allied powers agreed on this suspension and the necessity to change the curriculum, but the leaders of the Soviet Union wanted to teach a different version of history than that accepted in the Western Zones. The curriculum promoted by the Soviet leaders and their German Communist cadres approached Nazism as representing the corruption of capitalism and thus in some sense blamed the economic system for leading Germany down an immoral path.³⁶ This motivated them to develop their own separate goals for history education in 1946, which was framed as a curriculum for all of Germany.

The DVV produced in July 1946 *Richtlinien für den Unterricht in Deutscher Geschichte* (Guidelines for the Curriculum of German History), written by Paul Wandel, which described how the Soviet Zone was going to correct the way history was taught by the Nazis. The new approach went beyond the study of National Socialism and Hitler's policy. The SED wanted to introduce Marxist-Leninist ideology into the entire curriculum, leading up to the condemnation of the monopoly of capitalism, which was presented as the reason for the downfall of Germany. The discussion about National

³⁶Gregory P. Wegner, "Germany's Past Contested: The Soviet-American Conflict in Berlin over History Curriculum Reform, 1945-48" *History of Education Quarterly* (1990): 5

Socialism in the Richtlinien centered around the argument that the Nazi Party was an “imperialist and capitalist Party that prepared and executed a war of conquest in the interest of monopoly capital.” There was no mention of the Holocaust in the Richtlinien, implying that this was an area that might be ignored.³⁷ The DVV sustained substantial criticism from the Western Zones, where educationists did not believe all the problems of Nazism were economically based. They believed that the Richtlinien were an oversimplification of history and that more factors needed to be considered in the downfall of German society under the Nazi Party.³⁸ Despite skepticism from the West, the DVV proceeded with its interpretation of German history. The Richtlinien were supplemented with discussions about how Germany should deal with reconstruction, again imposing a particular interpretation on what was to be taught in the classroom.

The DVV continued to try to instill its version of history in East Germany by facilitating discussion of prominent Communist leaders. The KPD created a cult around Marx and Engels and stressed their German origins to emphasize that Communism was authentically German. It also focused on German Communists who had been significant during the Hitler years. John Rodden, a historian of East German education, notes that German Communist heroes became “atheistic substitutes for saints” and were memorialized in East German culture and enshrined in the textbooks of the schools.³⁹ The socialist hero held in the highest esteem was Ernst Thälmann. He “[represented] the type of proletarian leader who [was]...always closely bound up with the thoughts and feelings

³⁷Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung, *Richtlinien für den Unterricht in Deutscher Geschichte* (Berlin: Volks und Wissen Verlag, 1946), 60.

³⁸Wegner, “Germany's Past Contested,” 7-8.

³⁹John Rodden, “Socialist Heroes in East German Schoolbooks,” *Global Society* (2009): 170.

of his class.”⁴⁰ Ernst Thälmann was spoken about with great reverence and was highlighted his significance in the struggle of the working class people was highlighted.

He was a relatable figure and therefore could be easily implanted into everyday life.

Wilhelm Pieck spoke particularly highly of Thälmann, as when he wrote that:

Ernst Thälmann was a genuine people’s revolutionary. He understood in the most popular way the question of the struggle against imperialism and militarism, for freedom and international understanding, for democracy and unity of the working class in the development of all people. So he joined in the international worker’s movement, in the development of international solidarity against the growing danger of a new imperialist war.⁴¹

Through such high praise of Communists from the past, the KPD emphasized the qualities they wanted to cultivate in the German people. Placing the focus on such “socialist heroes” opened the door for the steady infiltration of communist ideology into the school. Thus, the East German schools and curricula began to openly follow a path toward the making of socialism.

Joel Agee, the American born stepson of Communist Party member Bodo Uhse, spent part of his childhood in East Germany, and his memoir encapsulates all of the concerns surrounding the educational system that have been discussed thus far. Though his own educational career was rather tumultuous, he speaks of his and his younger step-brother Stefan’s early experience in the East German schools. He writes that “All East Germans were informed of what the Nazis had done” in a way that emphasized that Nazis had been repressive to all German workers and anti-fascists. Agee even discusses the visit of a former concentration camp inmate and how that particularly affected his younger

⁴⁰R. Groetz, *Ernst Thaelmann: The Leader of the German Workers* (New York: Workers Libraries, 1934), 14.

⁴¹Wilhelm Pieck, *Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1952), 488.

brother.⁴² This former concentration camp inmate represented the strong German man that the regime wanted to portray to all students. He had survived the concentration camps and he was able to tell students of his success now. The message seemed to be that the Nazis had tried to break him, but he had prevailed and in the same way the rest of Germany could break from its Nazi past and prevail as a leading nation in the world. The focus of his speech was less on the Nazi Party than on the future. It looked toward the possibilities of going ahead to socialism instead of back toward Nazism. Providing German students with a first hand account of the atrocities that took place in their country by their own people worked to deter them from Nazi ideology, and, it was hoped, would make them see the value of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Such institutional changes were taking place at the university level as well as at the primary school level. The university was particularly reconstructed to be more inclusive of working class students and giving them an opportunity to receive a quality education. Previously, Germany's educational system virtually excluded the working class from opportunities to further their studies. The Gymnasium had been open mainly to the children of the bourgeoisie and that gave only these students the best access to a university. In the reformed school system of the Soviet Zone the children of urban or rural workers and those persecuted by the Nazis were to be given priority to enter the university, while non-proletarians who had not been members of the Nazi party or associated organizations and members of the Hitler Youth were to be given the lowest priority for admission. Nominal Nazis, who were sorted out, or former officers could only be admitted to university after close individual examination. Former active Nazis and so-

⁴² Joel Agee, *Twelve Years: An American Boyhood in East Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 39.

called “enemies of democracy” were not to be admitted into any university.⁴³ These “affirmative action” quotas were introduced in order to end the reign of the bourgeoisie while also strengthening the working class.⁴⁴ This was an important goal for the new Germany, but as with the other areas of development in the Soviet Zone, change would come gradually.

There was an effort to open new programs at the universities catering to working class students. One such democratizing program was the *Arbeiter und Bauern Fakultäten* (Worker and Peasant Faculties) founded in 1947. These were created in order to give traditionally underrepresented groups the preparation necessary to go to university.⁴⁵ The implementation of this program showcased the shift away from condemnation of former Nazis and an interest in rehabilitating people and finding ways to privilege the working class. In 1949 the Arbeiter und Bauern Fakultäten became more directly political.⁴⁶ The DVV created guidelines for these Worker and Peasant Faculties in May 1949. A student in the program studied for three years, with a test at the end of each year and a cumulative test on the completion of the three years. The DVV organized a single curriculum for the Arbeiter und Bauern Fakultäten that applied to all programs in the Soviet Zone. The program was free and actually provided stipends for students based on their social status, their technical qualifications, and their activity in democratic reconstruction.⁴⁷ Such efforts to include the working class in universities demonstrates

⁴³David Childs. *The GDR: Moscow's German Ally* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 170.

⁴⁴Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 329.

⁴⁵John Connelly, “East German Higher Education Policies and Student Resistance, 1945-1948” *Central European History* (2016): 264.

⁴⁶Childs. *The GDR*. 170.

⁴⁷Deutschen Verwaltung für Volksbildung, “Richtlinien für die Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultäten (bisher Vorstudienabteilungen) an den Universitäten und Hochschulen der sowjetischen Besatzungszone

the shift that had taken place by 1949 toward socialism. It was about officially empowering the working classes and raising their class consciousness.

The curriculum at the University level changed for all students, not just those coming from the working class. In order to meet the serious needs in public health after the postwar rise of disease and also the shortage of medical personnel caused by the de-Nazification process, the science and medicine departments in postwar Universities were some of the earliest to be restructured after the war. By 1946, history and psychology departments were rebuilt. Russian language was required so it became necessary to train Germans to teach Russian and other Slavic languages. The hope was that by increasing the number of Germans who understood Russian, communication between the Soviets and Germans would increase. The transition toward more socialist tendencies in educational policy can be seen from 1947 onward, starting with new social science courses which were created for the purpose of training students to work in the new East German administration or to be teachers of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The SED also created the Scientific Research Institute for Social Science, later to be named the Institute for Social Sciences, which held lectures for students on Marxist-Leninist ideology. This seemed to signal a transition away from the errors of Nazism and a focus on the possibility of socialism in Germany.

After a few years the educational system became less concerned with past affiliation, just as the de-Nazification process became less concerned about the Nazi past of each of individual. By late 1946, 54 percent of new faculty belonged to the SED.⁴⁸ The

Deutschlands," in *Zwei Jahrzehnte Bildungspolitik in der Sowjetzone Deutschlands* (Hiedelberg: Quelle & Meyer Verlag, 1966), 114-115.

⁴⁸Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 46.

teaching profession ultimately became a mix of new teachers and former Nazi teachers who were regarded as nominal participants in the Nazi atrocities. Regardless of a teacher's past affiliation the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD now were more concerned with following Wandel's criteria for strong teachers to advance Marxist-Leninist ideology than with a teacher's possible Nazi past. In early 1947 it became a requirement that democratic schools in the Soviet Zone hire teachers who were willing to be "political [pioneers] of especially great activity."⁴⁹ Political affiliation with the SED would almost ensure a person a job in the new schools or other institutions in the Soviet Zone. As for the student body, political affiliation to the SED and/or political activity helped their chances of admissions to university level education, which in turn would help secure them a good job in the East German administration. The admission criteria for university sought out Germans of the working class, but by 1948 it became equally important to show a certain degree of support for the SED. This was particularly important for former Nazis because if they could demonstrate unflinching support for SED policy they could be admitted to University conditionally.⁵⁰ The SED's insistence on the significance of political party affiliation as it relates to work and university admissions demonstrates how the Soviet Zone headed toward a path to socialism divergent from the original Allied plans for Germany.

The educational system in the Soviet Zone of Germany was significantly shaped by the de-Nazification process and then was used throughout the late 1940s as a tool to teach children the wrongness of the Nazi Party and the rightness of Communist party

⁴⁹Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 162.

⁵⁰John Connelly, "East German Higher Education Policies and Student Resistance, 1945-1948," 266.

ideals. Such ideals were encouraged from the beginning through the teaching of Russian language and current events. There was an effort to maintain the character of German education as it had been founded since the 19th century. This gave the educational system a unique German quality despite the influence of the Soviet Military Administration over its functions. The importance of changing the educational system and using it as a tool to help rebuild Germany along an anti-fascist path was understood from the beginning. Though indoctrination in new ideas was slow in the beginning and rather subtle, the controlled versions of World War II history that were taught and the use of concentration camp survivors to give first-hand accounts of Nazi atrocities worked to solidify the negative image of the Nazi party. The effort to change the way students thought about the future of Germany was an ongoing challenge and one that was taken on at all levels of education from the beginning of the occupation in 1945.

Chapter 5:

Cultural Reeducation in the Soviet Zone

Culture was, and still is today, a central part of Germany identity. After World War II the KPD took it upon themselves to help reeducate the people about the greatness of Germany's culture. Much had been suppressed or forgotten during the Nazi years. If Germany was to rebuild itself into a strong nation again, the people had to rediscover the greatness of their culture from the past. As has been discussed throughout this thesis, efforts to rebuild Germany were often initially grassroots initiatives that were then taken over, centralized and controlled by the Party and the Soviet rulers. The same trend is seen in the development of the cultural sphere of Germany. The Soviet Military Administration and the KPD took the opportunity to help reshape German culture in their own image and proceeded to create institutions and administrations to oversee cultural development. In this chapter I will discuss the establishment of administrative departments by the Soviet Military Administration and German Communists that helped lay the foundation for cultural changes, but also were connected with the increasing regulation of German artists and cultural institutions. A growing number of restrictions led to the domination of Soviet style art in East Germany, which affected certain cultural institutions. While Germans were able to run their own institutions and administrations throughout the Soviet Zone of Occupation, the influence of the Soviet Union could never be avoided.

Culture was one of the many aspects of German life to see a spontaneous revival in May 1945. The *Reichskulturkammer* (Chamber of Culture) was revived in the Soviet sector of Berlin immediately after the war. Under the Nazi party the Reichskulturkammer

was used as a central cultural and propaganda administration. It regulated cultural developments, but this was an organization that was run by the intellectuals, not through laws or the police. The intellectuals worked independently in the Reichskulturkammer to create art for the public and the state only ensured that these artists remained in line with general Nazi cultural guidelines. The propaganda functions of the Reichskulturkammer are evident in the state's supervision of the artists and the regulation of the art that could be produced for the public. Membership in the Reichskulturkammer was required for all who contributed to the creation, reproduction, intellectual or technical preservation or sale of cultural goods. Though this was an institution for artists to carry out "public tasks," ultimately it was an extension of the Nazi Party organizational structure.¹ The Reichskulturkammer sustained a lot of damage during the final Battle of Berlin, but it was still functioning, as is demonstrated by its early reoccupation by Germans immediately after the war.

Elizabeth Dilthy was the first self-proclaimed occupant of the Reichskulturkammer after World War II. A woman with a strong Nazi past, she managed to survive only a few days in her position in the Reichskulturkammer by producing false Russian credentials. She was ousted by Klemens Herzberg, who also wanted a say in the development of the Reichskulturkammer. A Jew in Nazi Germany, he tried unsuccessfully to escape during the war and spent those years in hiding. He reemerged in May 1945 ready to rebuild. After discussing the importance of the Reichskulturkammer with the Soviet military, he was given instruction to seize the building from Dilthy. After questionable behavior on the part of Herzberg, the Russian military removed him from

¹Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 44-45.

power within a month of occupation and ran cultural operations on its own.² After the ousting of these two German leaders things settled down in the Reichskulturkammer and it served as a central cultural institution for about three months.

In those first months after the war the Reichskulturkammer was used as an institution where Berlin artists and intellectuals could gather. It acted as a club, a place to eat and a formal meeting space. Its files also held information on every German who had been permitted to engage in artistic, literary and journalistic activity in the Third Reich.³ Beyond its role as a cultural center, the Reichskulturkammer also acted as the center for the distribution of ration cards, which was of the utmost importance for starving Germans. Artists were given the first rations, meaning larger pieces of bread with more meat and vegetables. These larger rations were based on political logic. The intelligentsia and the artist community needed to be won over after the war, and providing for their immediate needs made it was more likely that they could be convinced to stay in the Soviet Zone. The Soviet Military Administration saw the power of having control of the cultural arena in Germany. Because of this realization, the Reichskulturkammer changed into a new institution that would be of more importance, the *Kulturbund* (Cultural Union).⁴

The Kulturbund was founded on July 3, 1945 by the Soviet Military Administration and KPD with the stated goal of bringing about the renewal of culture in the Soviet Zone of Occupation. The Kulturbund became a means to organize the

²Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 41-42.

³Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 41-42.

⁴ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 334.

intelligentsia around the anti-fascist, democratic principles being championed by the regime. In the view of the KPD leaders this would make it easier to bring the intelligentsia under Communist party control.⁵ Johannes Becher, a well-known German Expressionist poet who had spent the Nazi years in Moscow, was appointed the first head of the Kulturbund. Becher was a man who related well to the bourgeoisie and whom the bourgeoisie considered one of their own. Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that because of Becher's wide ranging connections, the bourgeoisie did not feel threatened by his leadership in postwar cultural politics. Instead they felt reassured that one of their own was working with the new rulers of Germany.⁶ His approach to de-Nazification was unique in that he believed in the rehabilitation of Nazis as opposed to their aggressive removal. His approach to the renewal of culture was similar. Becher was unusual because he did not seem interested in partisan politics or self-aggrandizement, but instead believed it was possible to follow a uniquely German path of culture that would lead to the triumph of antifascist, democratic values.⁷ In the "Manifest zur Gründung des 'Kulturbundes'," the founding document of the Kulturbund issued on July 4, 1945, Becher laid out the demands of the new organization. He admonished the intelligentsia for not trying hard enough to overthrow the power of the Third Reich in the past and laid out the tasks for the present and the future. He stated, "The Cultural Union for the Democratic Renewal of Germany places the highest of national duties on the intelligentsia: these men and women must come together with an honest, unfaltering will

⁵David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 86.

⁶Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 78.

⁷Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1949*, 86.

for spiritual and cultural renewal along with a commitment to contribute all their energy to the cause...It demands a fundamental change and transformation of all areas of life and knowledge.”⁸ The name “Cultural Union for the Democratic Renewal of Germany” in itself implies a desire to have a distinctly German culture emerge from the postwar world.⁹

The construction of the Kulturbund and the overall success of cultural reeducation in the Soviet Zone relied upon the KPD’s efforts to make the German people believe in the greatness of their culture again. Alan Nothnagle refers to this as the “myth of Kultur.” The KPD asserted that Goethe, Schiller, Bach and Beethoven were in fact representatives of Germany rather than absolutely exceptional individuals.¹⁰ Walter Ulbricht made this point when he declared: “The rebirth of our people means acquiring the spiritual treasures of the great thinkers of our people again. Nazism has done everything possible to cut off Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Marx from our people. May our people now strengthen themselves on the works of our classical authors...”¹¹ The use of the words “our people” and the positive way in which he refers to these great writers emphasized that the German people were all a part of a great past culture. Nothnagle argues that by going back to cultural leaders before the 20th century the new rulers of Germany were attempting to inspire the people to recover their history and Kultur beyond the dark years of the Third Reich.¹²

⁸Johannes Becher, “Manifest zur Gründung des ‘Kulturbundes’,” *Deutsche Volkszeitung*. July 4 1945.

⁹Norman A. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 401-402.

¹⁰Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth: Historical Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic 1945-1949* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 40.

¹¹Walter Ulbricht, “What we Want,” in *Whither Germany?: Speeches and Essays on the National Question* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 23.

¹²Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 40.

The KPD needed the help of the old intelligentsia, facilitated by the Soviet Military Administration, to achieve this goal.¹³ Artists, writers, musicians, and any important person who contributed to the development of culture in Germany, many now in exile, were sought out. These men and women were praised, offered financial help, and treated as public celebrities who contributed to the great anti-fascist, democratic German culture that had existed outside Germany during the Nazi years. The problem was persuading these men and women to come back home. In June 1945 efforts were made to persuade Thomas Mann, then in the United States, to come back to Germany, but to no avail. There were efforts also to bring the more left-leaning Heinrich Mann, Thomas's brother, back from the United States, but poor health made it impossible for Heinrich to travel.¹⁴ All the while many intellectuals were leaving the East for the West in 1945. Yet many celebrated German artists chose to stay in the Soviet Zone. As long as they were friendly to the party, these members of the intelligentsia were compensated with salaries that far surpassed that of a worker. University professors could retain their positions and have significant influence over their institutions. Leftist intellectual Hans Mayer (1907-2001) from Tübingen was one professor to join the ranks of intellectuals in East Germany. An upper class Jew, he fled to Geneva, Switzerland in 1934 to escape the Nazi regime. In 1945 he returned to Germany, initially to the Western Zones, but several years later he accepted a position as a professor at the University of Leipzig in the East. In 1948

¹³Kurt Sontheimer and Wilhelm Bleek, *The Government and Politics of East Germany*, trans. Ursula Price (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 111.

¹⁴Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 460.

he began his new life in the Soviet Zone, where he was driven by taxi to and from the University in Leipzig every day, a luxury not afforded to most.¹⁵

The playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) also returned to the Soviet Zone of Germany. Having fled to Scandinavia during the Nazi years, eventually settling in Zurich and the United States for a time, he chose to return to the Soviet Zone in 1947 of his own accord. He was a communist sympathizer and his political background made it difficult for him to enter West Germany. The United States Military Administration denied Brecht an entry permit into the U.S sector, including the area of West Berlin. Being denied entry by the U.S Military Administration, and the fact that the East held the most important theaters in Germany, influenced Brecht's decision to reside in the Soviet Zone.¹⁶ Philip Glahn writes that Brecht chose to live in East Germany because, while the West was polite to him, the East was welcoming and seemed to need him. As the Soviet Zone became increasingly restrictive of the arts and what was acceptable, Brecht's relationship with the authorities became more tense. He proposed to the Berlin government in January 1949 the idea of creating a Berlin Ensemble theater company that would bring prominent actors to the city. The mayor of Berlin did not respond to him and only expressed skepticism toward the project as a whole. Glahn writes that Brecht felt he was met with a "less than enthusiastic response." Despite the hostility he may have felt from the SED, Brecht remained a proponent of life in the East and wrote to his friend Erwin Piscator to persuade him to move to East Berlin in February 1949. He says, "Food and housing are no problem here for our sort of people. You'd be just as well off as I am. And you'd be

¹⁵John Connelly, "Ulbricht and the Intellectuals" *Contemporary European History* (1997): 337.

¹⁶Philip Glahn, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 189-190.

really welcome. You're badly needed."¹⁷ Eventually, the Berlin Ensemble received approval in April 1949 from the SED, but one can only speculate about why the initial reaction toward Brecht and his cultural ideas was hostile.¹⁸ His presence in the Soviet Zone and the plays he wrote and mounted there helped the KPD achieve its goals for the development of cultural life in Germany.

The second line of KPD and Soviet effort was to democratize culture and to get the working class to participate in the cultural renewal as well. Johannes Becher was skilled in relating to German intellectuals, but it was Wilhelm Pieck (1876-1960), a leader of the KPD, who best related to the working class. He began his career in the late 19th century as a carpenter and initially joined the Social Democratic Party. He joined the KPD after a stint in prison and then in exile during World War I for his vocal opposition to the war. In 1933 Pieck went into exile once again in Paris and then in Moscow in 1935. He returned to Germany in 1945 and became co-chairman of the SED and eventual President of the German Democratic Republic in 1949. Pieck championed the idea of a unique German path to cultural renewal for the purposes of destroying the corrupt intellectual and moral identity of Nazism.¹⁹ He declared that it was necessary "to clean away all fascist and reactionary debris from cultural life, to withdraw from libraries and museums all those demons of racial fanaticism, the glorification of reactionary Prussianism and the patriotism and militarism that the corrupt Nazi ideology was built on."²⁰ He included all the people in the cultural plan for Germany, not just the

¹⁷Bertolt Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht Letters*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Routledge, YEAR), 458.

¹⁸Glahn, *Bertolt Brecht*, 192.

¹⁹Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Occupied Germany*, 81.

²⁰Wilhelm Pieck, "Um die Erneuerung der deutschen Kultur," in *Unsere kultur-politische Sendung* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Weg, 1946), 14.

intelligentsia. He insisted that this was necessary because without the people the renewal would not be successful.

All structures of antifascism and democratic power, no matter which Party or religious denomination they represent, whether worker or intellectual, whether peasant or craftsman, must come together and bring a strong, efficient unity to all cultural groups. Only on this platform of unity and spirit will true cultural life be realized in a real, rewarding way.²¹

Pieck said that the Kulturbund should pursue this mission of unity and progress toward a more genuine cultural life in order to encourage people to participate in society. It would help the people believe that society could be built in their own image.

Despite these attempts by the KPD to rebuild German cultural life, the Soviet Military Administration was uneasy and tried to establish its own control over the cultural arena. It created a Propaganda and Censorship Department by Order No. 29 in August 29. This allowed the Soviet Military Administration to establish an official basis for shaping the cultural renewal and also to control the spontaneous work taking place. It conducted and monitored propaganda among the German people via film, radio and print media and also censored cultural material.²² The Propaganda Department helped field questions regarding the democratization of Germany and all questions about running political parties, and more broadly all political work among the German population. According to Norman Naimark, it was the largest office under the Soviet Military Administration, with 1,500 Soviet employees. The sheer size of the Propaganda Department suggests the influence it had over the Soviet Zone and demonstrates the important role of the cultural sphere in Soviet eyes. It was run by Sergei Tiul'panov

²¹Pieck, "Um die Erneuerung der deutschen Kultur," 15.

²²Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 322.

(1901-1987), who was an up and coming figure in the Soviet Union. He had been in charge of a program to win the support of German prisoners of war throughout World War II, but he was also known for his familiarity with the German language and German culture. He was a strong supporter of the KPD/SED and particularly of Walter Ulbricht. This close relationship with German culture, and the KPD, helped the Propaganda Department as it sought to influence and even gain control over the masses. Tiul'panov's work was central to securing the KPD's image in the Soviet Zone in the late 1940s.²³

The creation of a department for propaganda and information was not a radical idea for the Soviet Military Administration. Similar developments were taking place in the Western sectors of Germany in the summer of 1945. The Psychological Warfare Department of the United States Military Administration was issuing directives about censorship and propaganda from the beginning of May 1945. Its Directive No. 1 for the Propaganda Policy of Overt Allied Information Services was intended to reeducate Germans through the presentation of irrefutable facts about the extent to Germany's war guilt. The difference between the United States efforts and those of the Soviet Union lay in their methods and approaches. In the words of David Pike, "the Americans were clearly aware that...information should be skillfully packaged and disseminated in order to avoid alienating the Germans with 'overt' allied Propaganda."²⁴ If the propaganda was obvious, then the work of the Americans would have the opposite effect on the German population. The Americans did not want the Germans to transfer their animosity toward the Nazi party onto the United States Military Administration. The Soviet Military

²³Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 322-323.

²⁴David Pike, "Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany," *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe 1944-1949*, edited by Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 219.

Administration, on the other hand, openly used the word propaganda and used overt publicity to try to transform the public. It was not until 1946 that the Soviet Military Administration changed the name of the department to Information Directorate instead of Propaganda and Censorship. David Pike argues that they believed “information” sat better with the German people.²⁵

On September 4, 1945, the Soviet Military Administration issued Order No. 51. It intended to remove all Nazi influence from the cultural sphere while simultaneously introducing true democratic art. For the Soviet Military Administration this included the introduction of Soviet art. This order setting out Soviet goals for art had three main components:

- 1) Complete liberation of art from all Nazi, racist, militaristic and other reactionary ideas and tendencies
- 2) Active use of art in the struggle against fascism and for the reeducation of the German people in the meaning of true democracy
- 3) The introduction of Russian art into the [German] art world²⁶

Cultural institutions in Germany had to register with the Soviet Military Administration in order to be recognized in the Soviet Zone. These institutions included theaters and music ensembles as well as acting troupes and individual musicians. Art exhibitions could not be displayed without proper registration with the Soviet officials.²⁷ This put restrictions on any attempts to revive or continue German artistic institutions in the Soviet Zone. While the creation of the Propaganda Department by the Soviet Military Administration preceded Order No. 51 by roughly two months, the order synthesized the

²⁵David Pike, “Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany,” 220-221.

²⁶Soviet Military Administration, “Über die Wiedererrichtung und die Tätigkeit der Kunstinstitute in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschland,” in *Befehle des Oberstens Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland*. Sammelheft 1. (Berlin: SWA-Verlag, 1946), 39.

²⁷Soviet Military Administration, “Über die Wiedererrichtung und die Tätigkeit der Kunstinstitute in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschland,” 39.

Department's mission into a simple statement. It addressed issues of implementation, delegated tasks to both the Soviet and German Administrations, and gave responsibilities to local authorities and provincial administrations.²⁸ Such strict regulation of cultural life in the Soviet Zone of Germany was meant to ensure that the radical ideology of the Nazi Party was completely eradicated from the public mind, and also to allow the Soviet Military Administration to begin work to establish a new ideology.

Parallel to the calls for Germany to recognize the greatness of German culture, we can see clear signs immediately after the war of the Soviet Union's belief immediately after the war in the supremacy of its own culture and particularly the doctrine of socialist realism in the arts. Socialist Realism came into use after the revolutionary period when society was trying to remake itself in the great drive for social construction at the beginning of the 1930s. Instead of art and literature that promoted the values and used the artistic style of the pre-revolutionary world, there was a need for a culture that promoted the new socialist ideal. As C. Vaughn James argues, it was no longer necessary to make history; that had been done throughout the course of the revolutions. It was now time to interpret history, and this could be done through socialist realism, which would help build a relationship between the artist and the process of building a new society.²⁹ The aim of socialist realism was to assist the people and the Communist party to create a new society, a better type of man, and a more perfect world. The experience of the working class and its struggle to achieve socialism was a main theme of socialist realist art. After World War II, the Soviet Union brought this cultural influence to its occupation zones in

²⁸Pike, "Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany," 230-231.

²⁹C. Vaughn James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theories* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 88.

Eastern Europe, and especially to Germany, where the style was already familiar because of similarities to Nazi art.

The Red Army had taken over the radio stations in May 1945 because radio was the quickest way to reach the people after the war. The radio station in Berlin, Radio Berlin, was quickly put in the hands of German Communists, with Hans Mahle, the youngest member of the Ulbricht Group, appointed to head the station. He attested that there was no organization in the occupation of Radio Berlin, just that it was used to promote the new order. Mahle tried to balance maintaining new programming for the new Germany with some of the old ways of Radio Berlin so as not to make the station seem like an overtly Communist institution.³⁰ The majority of Mahle's staff were non-Communists, particularly Social Democrats, which helped to promote an anti-fascist, democratic image.³¹ While the administration of Radio Berlin seemed diverse in political allegiance, in reality the station, like all radio in the Soviet Zone, was pro-Soviet and pro-Communist from the outset. Mahle, head of Radio Berlin in 1945, himself was subject to Soviet censorship of what he told the people. Historian Nicholas Schlosser suggests that for the Russians, radio acted as a mirror for the masses while they were still developing a democratic self-understanding, but that mirror had a strong prescriptive character. The people needed guidance after the tumultuous twelve year Nazi Reich, and radio served as the leader. While radio programs did not praise communism outright, they often spoke highly of the Red Army and the Soviet Union.³² Radio offered a subtle way of trying to

³⁰Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 109.

³¹Nicholas J. Schlosser, *Cold War on the Airwaves: The Radio Propaganda War against East Germany* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2013), 15-16.

³²Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 177-179.

influence the masses and to encourage them to believe in the rightness of the Soviet Union's ideology.

Historians can get a good insight into the character of radio broadcasts in Berlin from Victor Klemperer's detailed diary. Klemperer was a German man born as a Jew who later in his life converted to Protestantism. He was a professor who was removed from his job when the Nazi Party took power in Germany. He provided detailed diary accounts of his time during the Third Reich and the postwar period and they have provided invaluable information to historians and others studying German history. His account of what was being broadcast less than a month after German surrender shows heavy emphasis on the Red Army. In an entry for June 17, 1945, Klemperer writes that all he heard on the radio was in Russian, which he describes as a colorful language used to present Russian-centered news. The presentation made the news about the eradication of Nazis exciting and appealing to the audience, as it did with the news about Nazi atrocities, about the Red Army's capture of fleeing Nazis, and about police interrogations.³³ All of this news had a rousing anti-Nazi tone and depicted the Red Army as heroes in the fight against fascism.

Other media outlets were controlled quickly by the Soviet Military Administration and trusted Communists in the months after occupation. In August 1945 the Soviet Military Administration issued Order No. 19, which called for "all leaders of official printing presses...to register with their local Soviet Military Administration Commander no later than August 10." Additionally it stated that "leaders of the printing presses and publishing houses who do not register with the Soviet Military Administration by August

³³Victor Klemperer, *Und so ist alles schwankend* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 9-10.

10 will face the strongest punishment.”³⁴ Order No. 19 also issued the the following statement: “Only newspapers, books, magazines, posters, fliers, announcements and party literature that has been granted a license by the Soviet Military Administration will be allowed to publish.”³⁵ David Pike argues that though these measures may seem extreme, it was the way in which the Soviet Military Administration chose to link the control of publishing houses and printed material to a governing structure.³⁶ Publishing houses were of particular interest to the Soviet Military Administration because of the role books could play in the reeducation of the German people. They were a way to expose ordinary German people to a consistently democratic worldview.³⁷ Regulation of the publishing companies was a means to ensure there would be no Nazi propaganda and also to shape the nature of education and the new German society being built.

Reconstruction of the film industry was a priority because film was an especially effective medium for propaganda. The Soviet Union immediately confiscated most film equipment as a part of the reparations it claimed as recompense for German acts of destruction in the Soviet Union during the war, thereby limiting the ability of the German film industry from the start. A *Filmaktiv* (Film council) met in October 1945 to discuss the reorganization of the film industry in light of the lack of physical equipment and minimal funds in Germany. The Filmaktiv created the *Deutsche Film AG* (German Film Company – DEFA), but had to accept the condition that it be entirely dependent upon the

³⁴Soviet Military Administration, “Befehl No. 19 des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland,” in *Befehle des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland*. Sammelheft 1. (Berlin: SWA-Verlag, 1946), 16-17.

³⁵Soviet Military Administration, “Befehl No. 19,” 16-17.

³⁶Pike, “Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany,” 224.

³⁷Pike, “Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany,” 227.

Soviet Military Administration and the DVV for financial support. This gave the Soviet Military Administration the power to implant politically reliable men in positions of power and thus to dominate the film industry from the beginning.³⁸ One of these reliable men was Alfred Lindemann. As a member of the Filmaktiv, he became dedicated to the KPD and its crusade to rebuild the film industry. He was placed on the board of DEFA and therefore had more influence over the films being produced for the German people. Lindemann was eventually removed from power over suspected corruption of DEFA finances. With Lindemann in charge or another politically reliable German in charge, the Russians could supervise and manage the finances of DEFA, while the German Communists could be trusted with the technicalities and the industry's artistic development.³⁹ This was a powerful and dynamic structure that contributed to the strong film propaganda output by DEFA throughout the 1940s.

In February 1946 an article by one of the KPD leaders implied that German art was to be Sovietized and that for the immediate future there would be an impending infusion of socialist realist art. Although the term socialist realism was never used outright. Anton Ackermann imagined socialist realism influencing Germany, and the Soviet aesthetic underlay all conceptions of democratic art for the new Germany.⁴⁰ In his article he praised the Soviet Union while recognizing the German people's desire for their own unique art that reflected their culture. He used pointed language to reinforce the KPD's cultural policy of anti-fascism and democracy, mostly by referring to Germany's

³⁸Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in East German Cinema 1949-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28.

³⁹Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 132-134.

⁴⁰David Pike, "Cultural Politics in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1946," *Journal of Contemporary History* (1989): 107.

disastrous past. He said the Nazis had used art as a way to oppress society and project the Thousand Year Reich that Hitler envisioned. But never again would art be used to strangle the freedom of the people.⁴¹ Instead Ackermann put forth a notion of the role of art drawn from Soviet society when he declared: “We see our ideal in an art that is socialist in content and realist in form.”⁴² This kind of art provided the people with a vision for the future, but it indicated that the future of Germany lay in socialism. Ackermann’s article suggests that socialist realist art was always the goal in the back of the KPD’s mind. Like other areas of society at the beginning of the occupation, even if the KPD had a vision for how society looked in the future, its leaders knew that the German people were not prepared for an immediate change. This is probably why Ackermann implied that a transition was to take place slowly and not outright.

Film was significant to the cultural restructuring of society because, like radio, it offered a direct link to the people. In December 1945, the Soviet Military Administration brought the process of showing films under the Propaganda Administration. Though there was still resistance against any inundation of German society with Soviet film, this move by the Soviet Military Administration to control films signaled a tightening of control over cultural reeducation.⁴³ In 1946 the film *Die Mörder Sind Unter Uns* (The Murderers are Among Us) debuted. Its anti-fascist message was apparent in the plot, in which a German man returns home from war and has to develop new sources of strength to fight in a different way for Germany by seeking vengeance for the time he spent in the military

⁴¹Pike, “Cultural Politics in Soviet Occupied Germany, 1945-1946,” 111.

⁴²Anton Ackermann, “Unsere kulturpolitische Sendung,” in *Unsere kultur-politische Sendung* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Weg, 1946), 45.

⁴³Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 28.

under Nazi officers.⁴⁴ This message was intended to strengthen the anti-fascist spirit in the Soviet Zone and sought to inculcate that spirit in all viewers throughout Germany. This desire to portray a strong Germany had to balance its expression with the Soviet Military Administration's demands to display Russian strength. The Soviets understood film as a form of propaganda, and socialist realism could be used to transform the people's thoughts on reality and encouraged socialist realism in that it was a "strong weapon for portraying the past and the future as it was supposed to be rather than as it actually was." But the German people were strongly opposed to contemporary films with a socialist-realist message because they wanted to avoid the realistic depictions of war despite the overall positive message.⁴⁵ Film could serve as a form of education in that it could instill in the German people a love for noble values and what was right after the war.

In January 1947, Allied Command Order BK/o (47)16 was issued and it stated that political organizations in each of the four sectors of Berlin needed to be individually approved. This ensured that political power was still squarely under the control of the Allied Powers. This put the Kulturbund at the center of an Allied conflict because while the Americans considered it a political organization, the Soviets believed it was a cultural organization. If it were a political organization, then it would need to file for a license with the Soviet Military Administration. But by Soviet standards the Kulturbund was a cultural organization and therefore should be left unlicensed.⁴⁶ Order BK/o (47)16 was released around the same time as the Truman Doctrine. This order was asking that

⁴⁴Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 26.

⁴⁵Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 419-421.

⁴⁶Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 98.

political influence to be kept in check, while President Truman was generally acknowledging the wide spread of Communist influence over the Eastern Bloc. These two actions together made a statement about the relationship between the East and the West in 1947. Suspicions were clearly running deeper and hostilities were growing more tense. The Allies had been willing to cooperate with one another, but with Order BK/o (47)16 a limit to this cooperation was defined.

In an attempt to demonstrate to the West its democratic tendencies, the Soviet Military Administration approved the SED's plan to call the First German Writer's Congress in Berlin from October 4-8 1947. The SED leaders tried to use this opportunity to influence Western intellectuals and display their own cultural legitimacy to the rest of the world. Tensions were high between the East the West politically, so this was an opportunity to ease cultural relations. The East German men arranging the writer's Congress were Alexander Abusch, a Communist functionary, and Günther Weisenborn, an anti-fascist poet. Both were members of the Kulturbund, which was still non-partisan, and emphasized the German humanist tradition as the Congress's foundation. The Congress was presented as offering a possibility for a lasting coalition between liberals and communists. The Kulturbund envisioned the development of an organization of writers whose unity would provide an alternative to the political hostilities mounting in Germany. It was now imperative to convince those in the West of the legitimacy of the groups in the Soviet Zone.⁴⁷ Andreas Agocs argues that the SED's call for the Writer's Congress was a hoax from the beginning. While cultural renewal was touted as a unifying

⁴⁷ Andreas Agocs, "Divisive Unity: The Politics of Cultural Nationalism during the First German Writer's Congress of October 1947," *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 58-59.

theme in the first years after the war, by 1947 invoking classical German culture was being used as a pillar for Germany's division.⁴⁸ It was a show to keep the West appeased for a time, but ultimately opinions were unchanged and German Communists backed by the Soviets continued to move forward in their efforts to communize East Germany.

In another area of the arts, a people's theater movement was established in Berlin in May 1947, at least partly as a protest against what were seen as regime efforts to control the arts. There was general dissatisfaction with the Soviet Military Administration's hold over cultural affairs during the occupation so it was hoped that these people's theaters would give the people more influence over the reconstruction of cultural life. This movement also reflected a weakness in the actual work of the Soviet Military Administration. It had worked so hard to attract the intellectuals in East German society that it had failed to appeal to the masses. If Germans were going to the theater, it was the intellectuals, not the general public. In order to ensure that the masses were properly included, mass organizations such as the Kulturbund and the Free German Trade Union were in charge of leading these People's Theaters and helping in the cultural reeducation of the people. Beyond that, it was hoped that these Peoples' Theaters would lead the entire cultural movement in the Soviet Zone. If nothing else, the people hoped that these theaters would spark the revitalization of the theater system in Berlin, which had been lacking structure and direction after the destruction of war. Fritz Erpenbeck, a prominent author and member of the SED, led the crusade to make the People's Theaters popular with the people. He argued that "the majority of people, especially the youths, still do not register the historical meaning of Germany's liberation from Hitler's

⁴⁸ Agocs, "Divisive Unity," 71.

ideology. This is clouding the view of the present and the future.”⁴⁹ In fact, these people’s theaters never amounted to much in the Soviet Zone of Germany, but the attempt to independently control the cultural political processes shows a desire to help reconstruct Germany in a new image.

The People’s Theater initiative did not last long, despite attempts to use their vision for the future cultural development of Germany. The Soviet Military Administration was not supportive of independently founded German attempts to create a unique culture. It insisted that no performances debuted without the approval of the Soviet Military Administration. It began to establish *Kunstbeiräte* (artistic councils) to enforce their cultural initiatives. Through the DVV, these artistic councils promoted the vision of the Soviet Military Administration. These councils were meant to ensure that theater was directly enhancing the democratic renewal of Germany as defined by the Soviet Military Administration. They paid attention to young talent and censored any art with Nazi or militaristic tendencies.⁵⁰ The creation of the artistic councils and other organizations centralized control over these German-founded organizations. This tighter system still allowed for the cultural development of the Soviet Zone, but there were now more restrictions. These restrictions continued the repression of democratic and spontaneous German cultural expression in the Soviet Zone and sent warning signs to the Western powers about the current trajectory of East Germany’s growth.

The propaganda being produced in the Soviet Zone was too overwhelming for the Western powers to ignore any longer. The film industry was clearly producing work in a

⁴⁹Fritz Erpenbeck, “Neues Theater im neuen Deutschland,” *Neues Deutschland*. 22 April 1947. Microfilm.

⁵⁰Pike, “Censorship in Soviet Occupied Germany,” 234.

style of socialist realism and other media outlets, such as newspapers, were reporting just as much on the Soviet Union as they were on the developments within Germany. By October 1947, the West aired its distrust of Soviet aims by suggesting that the Kulturbund was being misused and opposed the East's use of politically tainted cultural figures for lectures and events of the Kulturbund. The West wanted to use the Kulturbund to combat this growing influence and implant a more open vision of democratic ideals. Instead the Kulturbund was forced to file itself as a political institution under the Western Allied administration or cease to be recognized as a legitimate organization by the West. Since the Soviet Union viewed the Kulturbund as a genuine cultural organization, it did not comply with Western demands and therefore the West withdrew recognition from the Kulturbund in November 1947.⁵¹ The Western Military Administrations proceeded to denounce the Kulturbund and closed down the organization's activity in the Western sections of Berlin. Conflict over the Kulturbund heightened the tensions between East and West, but in the Soviet Zone it had the separate effect of drawing German leaders in the Soviet Zone into greater acceptance of the idea of following the socialist path of the Soviet Union.

Throughout 1948 the German people remained resistant to the new cultural ideal being implanted from above by the leaders in Soviet Zone. To combat this steady resistance, the SED started to be more forceful in exerting its influence throughout the different cultural industries. By the end of 1948 almost all key positions in the DEFA were filled by Communists.⁵² There was still uncertainty among the party's cultural

⁵¹Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 96-99.

⁵²Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 28.

leaders about how to use art to reeducate society, which caused many sudden radical shifts to take place in the film industry. Increasingly the goal came to be inculcating Marxist-Leninist ideology rather than anti-fascist ideology. By 1948 films were made to celebrate the new order and sought to raise the audience's political consciousness. These films followed the socialist realist line of art that was standard in the Soviet Union and that fact demonstrated the increasingly close relationship developing between East Germany and the Soviet Union.⁵³ The Soviet Military Administration exerted its control over German film by demanding that Soviet films be censored in their original Russian form and then be checked again once they had been translated into German. Anton Ackermann, alone among the German Communist leaders, believed that the people needed to see real Soviet art.⁵⁴ By the end of 1948, this tumultuous period of defining German film revealed that there had been a transition from Germany's National Socialist past to its Socialist future.

In August 1949, just months before the formation of the German Democratic Republic, the leaders of the Eastern Zone organized a 200th anniversary celebration of the birth of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Not only was he one of Germany's most revered writers, but he was best known for the work he did in Weimar, an East German city. This was meant by the SED leaders as a demonstration for the West that Communists cared more about high culture than capitalists. The KPD members believed they were the real German patriots and they demonstrated their loyalty through an elaborate celebration. Involving as many citizens as possible was central to the success of this celebration as it

⁵³Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 28.

⁵⁴Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 422-423.

also would show the West the strength of the democracy that could be found in the East.⁵⁵ The Goethe celebration was also intended to make the SED look better to East Germans by emphasizing the SED's dedication to German culture and its preservation. The SED was using Goethe as a figurehead to suggest an identity of Marxist-Leninist thinking and the broad and humane vision of the great German thinker..⁵⁶ All these themes were combined in a cultural festival for Goethe, but one through which the SED tried to burnish its own image.

Another example of the way the SED leaders tried to burnish their image was their decision to stage a youth festival in March 1949, five months before the Goethe bicentennial celebration. The youth festival was led by the FDJ and stressed to youth in the Soviet Zone the great importance of the impending Goethe anniversary. This festival provided more cultural exposure for youth and sought to provide an alternative to the pop culture of the West.⁵⁷ Cultural activities were popular for youths in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries, but the Goethe celebration was a special opportunity to present to them lessons about the struggle for peace and democracy. FDJ leader Erich Honecker spoke at this event and in his memoir says that the FDJ was intentionally put in charge of this event so that it could lead the charge in youth cultural education.⁵⁸ Otto Grotewohl also spoke and urged German youth to face the problems of the future, not run away from them. According to Grotewohl, it was the youth's time to triumph over the grief and poverty that their history had left them. They had the chance to use their hands

⁵⁵Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, 324.

⁵⁶Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 64.

⁵⁷Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 64.

⁵⁸Erich Honecker, *From My Life* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), 177

and their heads to bring peace and progress to their Fatherland.⁵⁹ Through these cultural events, the SED showed the younger generation that it highly valued youth and wanted to help the younger generation avoid the errors of the Nazi past. These propaganda events were popular within East Germany and the SED hoped they would bring German youth and the German people closer to Marxism-Leninism. In fact, they tended to cut off East German youth from contemporary culture and helped to make Western pop culture a much sought after underground commodity.

Large scale cultural events were especially popular in the Eastern Zone because they offered the chance to mobilize masses of people and suggest the existence of a community of Germans all dedicated to the same cause. It cannot be denied that these festivals were extravagant affairs. Communist mass events were seen as “the climax of nationwide propaganda campaigns” and thus were given special attention. Masses of singing and chanting people could not be ignored because they made everything seem possible and inevitable. But many of these citizens, like those participating in mass organizations, may have been a part of the cultural festivities or they felt they had to do it only because it seemed the correct thing to do. Nothnagle argues that there was no reason for the people to challenge the SED’s authority in these moments because the price for dissent was very high. Thousands of German people were all acting in the same way and, at least in that moment, many may have believed in the same vision for Germany. Not to attend and not to partake in the celebration meant to ignore their community.⁶⁰ This was how the SED tried to draw the people onto a socialist path for Germany. They used

⁵⁹ Otto Grotewohl, “Amboß oder Hammer,” in *Über Politik, Geschichte, und Kultur: Reden und Schriften 1945-1961* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1979), 127.

⁶⁰ Nothnagle, *Building of the East German Myth*, 64.

propaganda to make the people believe in the SED vision and told them that, if they all believed in the same ideals, then they could not be wrong.

Cultural rejuvenation in the Soviet Zone of Germany was enthusiastically undertaken by the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD from the first months after World War II. With the restructuring of the political landscape and the educational system, the development of cultural life added another facet of society that needed attention after the corruption of the Nazi Party. Despite the enthusiasm of the German people for starting reconstruction on their own, the Soviet Military Administration proved unwilling to trust the Eastern Zone on matters of German culture in the same way it had with the other spontaneous efforts of the people. The Kulturbund was a democratic organization created to appeal to all German zones of occupation and was meant to inspire the rebirth of cultural life. The eventual inception of Kunstbeiräte to oversee the theater movement indicated a centralization of power over the Soviet Zone. The Western Allies' increasing skepticism about the activities of the Soviet Military Administration reflected the heightened tensions across Germany. The eventual decision by the West to denounce the Kulturbund was one more step in the ideological and political wall separating the West from the East. The intentions of the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD to Sovietize eastern Germany became more overt after this rejection of the symbolism of unity through the Kulturbund. The chasm between East and West continued to widen until the creation of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949.

Conclusion

The formation of the German Democratic Republic in October 1949 stemmed from a variety of factors, which eventually came together to forge one end. From the beginning the Soviet Union was interested in instituting Communism in Germany so it would be a state sympathetic to the Soviet Union. Within a few years the Soviets decided that the only way they could be sure of this outcome was to have a German state ruled by Communists. Though the Soviet Union held to convictions of the supremacy of its own society and culture, it was willing to cooperate with the other Allied Powers in the initial months after World War II to work toward a unified and sovereign Germany. Among the key actions of the Potsdam meeting of the Big Three was the decision to carry out a wide ranging process of de-Nazification and the creation of the Allied Control Council. The Allied Control Council's work to standardize the de-Nazification process and give it more organization demonstrated the collective effort of the Allies. It was in the implementation in the various zones that divisions between East and West grew. The leaders of the Eastern Zone were aggressive in carrying out de-Nazification purges of many people from their positions in society, and in their transition to a more rehabilitative society the Soviet Military Administration and the KPD favored those who could prove commitment to their Party line. They spoke of an anti-fascist democracy, but they meant something different than the anti-Nazi society the West wanted to build. Where the West was interested in rooting out specific people, the East wanted to root out the whole ideology and whole groups of people who represented it. This led to vastly different visions of how to construct the future Germany, and an increasingly separate

path was seen in the development of intellectual, social and cultural institutions in the East.

In the East the number of suspected Nazis removed from power was greater than the number of people available to replace them. This caused widespread shortages in many critical professions, such as teaching, law, and medicine. Therefore, the Soviet Military Administration started modifying its policies in order to be more lenient about the purging of Nazis. Changes were necessary in order to allow them to find people to fill positions in those key professions and other institutions. In addition, along with being more lenient about the removal of Nazis, the Soviet Military Administration was simultaneously encouraging and almost requiring the participation of Communists in these institutions and organizations. Certain mass organizations such as the Free German Trade Union and the Free German Youth started out as organizations to help spur reconstruction, but eventually became large central institutions for the working class and children. Is it striking that these two organizations also closely mimicked organizations found in the Soviet Union. This in itself demonstrated close ties to the Soviet Union, which were tough to break. The educational system underwent a transformation in its teaching staff and its curriculum. The introduction of Neulehrer into a new school system provided staff, but these young teachers were undertrained, and increasingly their make-up training emphasized Marxist-Leninist ideology. The educational system was centralized and the curriculum standardized, focusing on current events and recent history before the Nazi takeover, and requiring Russian language study at all levels. This inevitably skewed the perception of students as they learned about the postwar world. Finally, the cultural sphere underwent a reconstruction similar to that in the educational

system. It was taken over by politically reliable people as early as 1945 and the influence of these KPD and SPD members continued to grow throughout the 1940s. The Sovietizing socialist influence permeated society more and more, and it was this trend that accelerated the split between East and West and the creation of two Germanies.

Wolfgang Leonhard, that unusually liberal Communist who was part of the Moscow contingent of East German Communists, broke with the KPD in 1948 and fled to Yugoslavia and eventually the United States. The story of Wolfgang Leonhard is helpful in studying the origins of the German Democratic Republic because it provides a perspective that few other sources are able to provide on the thoughts and motives of the KPD and how they saw the Soviet Union and its policies. Though his account reflects his frustrations with and anger against the Party that he defected from, it is still useful in trying to understand overall developments, which is why he is featured so often throughout this thesis. He is used as an example of how disingenuous support of the KPD may actually have been. Leonhard supported the KPD aims as the Ulbricht group arrived in Berlin in May 1945, but by 1948 a series of disappointing KPD actions led him to lose faith in the Party. He tells of developments taking place throughout the Eastern Bloc, which inevitably included East Germany. After the Party declared in 1948 that there could be no uniquely German road to Socialism, he decided to quit. In denouncing the idea of a unique road to German socialism, the KPD completely aligned itself with the aims of the Soviet Union. The tightening of Soviet control over East Germany that Leonhard saw during the 1946 elections became a reality in 1948. There was now a seemingly unbreakable bond with the Soviet Union. If members of the KPD were

suspicious of the aims of the Party, we can infer that some of that suspicion was shared by the majority of the East German population.

The repressive control of the Soviet Union over the entire Eastern Bloc and particularly East Germany increased, and the Iron Curtain created an air of mystery around life in the East. Later developments such as the creation of the Berlin Wall in 1961 served to physically divide East and West and provided even more context for the mystery of the East. It is only since the collapse of the DDR in 1989 that more information has become available about life in East Germany. The writing of Leonhard provides insight about how it was in the beginning, but so much was censored and repressed during the forty-year history of East Germany that it was hard, and still is hard, to really know what was going on inside. The general impression was of a grey and repressed society ruled by bureaucratic Communists, subservient to and totally dependent on Moscow and a powerful secret police (the Stasi, *Staatssicherheitsdienst*) that seduced the worst and the best into informing on their friends and neighbors. In large measure, this view has been confirmed by what we have learned since the fall of the DDR. The 2006 film *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Lives of Others) chronicles the life of an East Berlin secret agent who conducts surveillance on a writer and his lover. It illustrates the darkness of a society that is repressed by the all pervasive presence of the secret police and informants. Neighbors were spying on one another and there was no sense of real security or privacy. Throughout the movie the difficulties of being an informant are highlighted as the reality of the restrictions of the German state come to be realized by all the characters. Modern films such as these try to provide some insight into the lives of

those under Communist rule, but even today there will still be mysteries and questions that cannot be fully answered.

After 1949 there were changes in SED leadership as well as changes in Soviet leadership that led to changed relations between the Eastern Bloc and its Soviet parent. This change of relations eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Berlin today still reflects the divisions that were present in German society for 40 years, but it has seen enormous growth as a city as has Germany collectively as one country. The study of East Germany is still important, even in an age beyond the termination of its existence. It is important to understand how relations between countries reached the point of seemingly no return as they did in 1949. In studying history people can see overarching patterns and use them to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Though the creation of the German Democratic Republic is an event that happened 76 years ago, it can still be used as a case study for the future.

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