

June 22, 1953

The Report to the SED Central Committee

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Summary:

The authors blamed "hostile forces", with direct support and under the leadership of American agencies and the peoples' enemy and the warmongers in Bonn, for having organized an attempt for a "fascist coup" in the GDR in the period from 16 June 1953 to 22 June 1953. The authors admitted, however, that the party had failed to mobilize broad segments of the working class for a unified and offensive appearance against the provocation and for suppression of the coup on the 17th and 18th.

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ANALYSIS OF THE PREPARATION, THE OUTBREAK AND THE SUPPRESSION OF THE 'FASCIST ADVENTURE' FROM 16.-22.6.53

I. Short Summary Estimate

In order to prevent the implementation of the "New Course" of the Party and Government and to counter the relaxation of the international situation, and in order to make Berlin and the German Democratic Republic the starting point of war in Europe, hostile forces, with direct support and under the leadership of American agencies and the peoples' enemy and the warmongers in Bonn, organized an attempt for a fascist coup in the GDR in the period from 16 June 1953 to 22 June 1953. Besides the long-standing efforts of their agencies and contacts in the GDR and their daily propaganda attacks by radio, leaflets and printed press, etc., [these hostile forces] increased their subversive activities following the death of Comrade Stalin and they especially attempted to shatter the confidence in the Soviet Union and in the correctness of their policy and to revive again the anti-Soviet feelings among the population. With the publication of the politburo communique of 9 June 1953, the enemies multiplied their subversive efforts and they succeeded in developing the opinion among broad segments of the workers that the communique was a sign of weakness or even bankruptcy of Party and Government, and in winning quite a few adherents for the demand for the punishment of the regime.

Supported by their spy centers existing in the GDR and by those groups of agents smuggled in during the uprising, and under the pretext of dissatisfaction among the population resulting from the mistakes of the Party and regime, they temporarily managed to engage broad segments of workers and employees, in particular in Berlin and Central Germany, for their criminal objectives. On 17 and 18 June 1953 it was frequently possible only after the intervention of Soviet units to reestablish law and order and to resume work. In a number of cases, strikes and demonstrations in some plants could be prevented by the decisive appearance of party members and officials in agreement, and, in part, workers' defense units were established.

Generally, however, the Party, which was completely taken by surprise by the provocation, failed to mobilize broad segments of the working class for a unified and offensive appearance against the provocation and for suppression of the coup on the 17th and 18th. Because the mass of plants already resumed work on the 19th, the strikes, especially in the construction industry, where many workers simply went home, continued until 22 June 1953.

II. Scope, Expansion, and Main Points of the Coup Attempt

1. The hostile action in Berlin as the Catalyst of the Actions in the Republic

The hostile action in Berlin began on 6/16 with the strike of the construction workers and their demonstration march to the "House of Ministries".

The rallying points were the construction sites: Friedrichshain Hospital and Stalinallee.

The strike and the ensuing provocations were finally organized during a steam ship cruise on 13 June 1953. Hostile organizers of the action on June 16th and 17th from the Greater Berlin construction sites, especially from the Stalinallee, participated in it. The Party and labor union organizations did not know anything about this. The agitation for the strike built on the dissatisfaction existing among the workers (schematic, administrative norm increase, bad organization of work, shortages in professional uniforms, tools, etc.).

The signal given on 6/15 for the planned strikes was underestimated by the Party and the union, and was not responded to with sufficient determination. Thus, on 6/16, developed the strike of the construction workers, beginning at the hospital construction site, and quickly spreading to other construction sites by the sending out of delegations and groups of provocateurs.

The hostile slogans: "Resignation of the Government", "General Strike", "Free Elections", (so-called "Berlin demands") were carried into the demonstration by West Berlin instigation groups which were coming in by large numbers; in many plants, however, the strike and the demonstrations on the 17th had already begun with these slogans. At the same time, the instigators organized delegations to the other plants which appealed to the workers' solidarity and called for the support of the strikers. The riots on Tuesday 6/16 by fascist rowdy groups on the Stalinallee, on the Alexanderplatz, and in front of the government buildings and the clashes between participants of party conventions [Parteiaktiv-tagungen] in Friedrichstadtpalast with these groups, at the intersection of Friedrichs Street--"Unter den Linden" and at the other places, were not recognized as signals for the prepared fascist riots on Wednesday [June 17], and their spreading throughout the Republic.

In a number of Berlin districts, certain plants operated as organizational centers of the strike. In Lichtenberg, it was "Fortschritt I," in Koepenich the dockyard and the cable-manufacturing plant, in Weissensee the plant "7 October," and in Treptow the EAW. These centers drew in the other plants into the movement, by sending delegations there and threatening the workers who were willing to keep on working.

In KWO [Kraftwerk ost], the strike emanated from the copper press shop. What elements took on the leadership in the action, is proven by an example from the H7 Koepenich, where the former SS-Obersturnmbannfuehrer Huelse stood out.

A part of the plants went on strike under the pressure of the fascist provocateurs. Thus, West Berlin provocateurs invaded the RFT Stern and terrorized the workers.

Already by 8:20 am on 17.6 [17 June], 8,000 demonstrators were in front of the House of Ministries, and broke through the barriers of the VP [Peoples' Police]. Because of the continuous incoming flow from the districts, the number grew to 25,000 by 8:40 am. By 10:45 am, parts of the VP were disarmed at the Potsdamer Platz. On the Marx-Engels Platz various figures revolted, calling for fascist violence. Nothing was done by even those participants in the demonstration, who had gone along in the belief that they had to put pressure behind their economic demands, to the burning of red flags, the raiding of HO-shops [state-owned Handels-Organisation shops--ed.], and the destruction of cars as well as the beating up of FDJ members [Free Democratic Youth--ed.]. The resolute action by the Soviet units suppressed the fascist provocation and brought the people off the streets. A part of the demonstrators realized the great danger for peace [that] had been caused by the fascist provocation. With the declaration of martial law, panic-buying, provoked by the enemy, began in all districts of Berlin.

While in almost all large plants, with few exceptions, at least a part of the workers had set down their work, the administrations continued to work. Serious occurrences only happened in the requisition office. Thus, for example, the entire requisition office in Friedrichshain went on strike on 6/17 and 6/18. The strike leadership consisted of seven workers. In the center district of the city, 121 people at the city council did not go to work on 6/18, 87 alone from the requisition office. In a number of plants, the workers refused to start working on 6/18, unless the arrested had been set free, and the Soviet tanks had been withdrawn. The resumption of work in many plants was made dependent on whether those plants were working again which had initiated the strike. This was particularly evident in Weissensee, in the plant "October 7"; this also became evident in the queries of a number of plants about the situation in the

Stalinallee.

[Ed. note: Additional sections of Part II of the report discuss events in other regions and cities of the GDR, outside Berlin, during the revolt. Part III covers statistical evidence on the strike's impact in various areas of the economy. Part IV examines the causes of the revolt, and the conduct of various organizations, classes, and government and party organs during the events.]