

# The Other Half of Germany

Unified Germany in Perspective

## How did the GDR come about? I



- ▶ Germany divided in occupation zones, Länder re-created by 1945
- ▶ Increasing tensions between East and West
- ▶ By 1947 Germany not longer ,a single unit', preparations for establishment of two separate states
- ▶ Soviet structures built in East Germany, fusion of SPD and KPD
- ▶ GDR formally established on October 7 1949

## How did the GDR come about? II



- ▶ Russians brought cadre of exiled German communists with them (Stalinist purgings)
- ▶ Russian high command closely involved (KPDSU)
- ▶ Imitation of soviet structure, however some adaptations to German situation (,multi-party system')
- ▶ Several phases (Ulbricht, Honecker)
  - ▶ 45-52
  - ▶ Uprising in 53, ,New Course' after Stalin's death but Ulbricht still at large
  - ▶ Honecker takes over in 1971 → ,reform'
  - ▶ Stagnation in the 1980s

## On what ideology was the GDR based?

### Marx: Communism

- ▶ Classless society
- ▶ “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”
- ▶ State “dying down of itself”
- ▶ The natural endpoint of history *after transitory capitalist stage* and “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”

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  - ▶ State “dying down of itself”
  - ▶ The natural endpoint of history *after transitory capitalist stage* and “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”
- ▶ Lenin: Marxism must be adopted to fit Russian situation
  - ▶ Masses (workers, peasants) lack proper “class consciousness” → leading role of elitist (cadre) party
  - ▶ Revolution requires extreme party discipline “freedom of discussion, unity of action” (“Democratic Centralism”)
- ▶ “Temporary” ban on factions within the party in 1921

## What was Stalinism?

- ▶ Stalin (1878-1953) further radicalised Lenin's policies
- ▶ General Secretary of Communist Party since 1922
- ▶ Break with near-capitalist "New Economy" in the late 1920s ("Great Turn")
- ▶ Assumed dictator-like powers in the early 1930s
  - ▶ "Purgings", criticism and self-criticism, show-trials
  - ▶ Extensive use of secret police (intensified class struggle, the enemy within)
  - ▶ Cult of Personality
  - ▶ Extensive use of propaganda
- ▶ Millions of victims (estimates vary wildly)
- ▶ Abandoned soon after Stalin's death, but lasting impression on communist leadership, structures etc.

## What did the political institutions of the GDR look like?

### Article 1 of the Constitution (1974)

*“Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist ein sozialistischer Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern. Sie ist die politische Organisation der Werktätigen in Stadt und Land unter Führung der Arbeiterklasse und ihrer marxistisch-leninistischen Partei.”*

## What did the political institutions of the GDR look like?

- ▶ GDR a “People’s republic”
- ▶ Centralised after 1952
- ▶ Formally, parliament, government etc. existed, but . . .
- ▶ All structures of the state linked/permeated with/by party structures
- ▶ Formally, a lot of (grass-root) democracy (soviets), but undermined by Democratic Centralism





*“Sie hat uns alles gegeben.  
Sonne und Wind und sie geizte nie.  
Wo sie war, war das Leben.  
Was wir sind, sind wir durch sie.  
Sie hat uns niemals verlassen.  
Fror auch die Welt, uns war warm.  
Uns schützt die Mutter der Massen.  
Uns trägt ihr mächtiger Arm.  
Die Partei, die Partei, die hat  
immer Recht!  
Und, Genossen, es bleibe dabei;  
Denn wer kämpft für das Recht,  
Der hat immer recht.” (Louis  
Fürnberg, 1950)*

## What mentalities did exist in the party? I

- ▶ Idealism
  - ▶ GDR promised clear cut with fascist, Prussian past → attractive for leftist intellectuals
  - ▶ Capitalist system *widely* seen as inefficient, unjust and linked to Nazism (CDU's Ahlener Programm)
- ▶ Paranoia
  - ▶ Soviet support for East German government wavering until 1952
  - ▶ Communists suspicious of own population (Nazism)
  - ▶ East-West migration starting in 45; 2.6 million people fled between 49-61
  - ▶ Much smaller and economically much weaker than West Germany (that spoke for Germany)
  - ▶ Fear of the “class enemy” (became institutionalised)

## What mentalities did exist in the party? II

- ▶ Paternalism
  - ▶ Probably many party members genuinely cared about welfare of the people
  - ▶ Appearance of public support
  - ▶ “Geborgenheit”, “trusting relationship” between people and party
  - ▶ But party willing to use almost any means of controlling the people – “authoritarian parent”
- ▶ Careerism
  - ▶ Party-membership necessary for (almost) any form of career
  - ▶ 2.3 million party members in a population of 17 millions

## How unified was the Unity Party?

- ▶ No *visible* splits in the party elite from mid-1950s until late 1980s
- ▶ Forced merger with SPD, purging of Social Democrats and Communists in the 50s
- ▶ Renewed support from Moscow for Ulbricht even after Stalin's death (1956)
- ▶ Smooth transition from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971, rise of a new generation in the late 1960s
- ▶ Honecker and his mates clung to power and turned blind eye on dire economic facts → gerontocracy out of touch with reality
- ▶ But no palace revolution occurred – what was really going on in the party?

## What forces did exist?

- ▶ “Volkspolizei”, a “normal” police, supported by volunteers
- ▶ “Kasernierte Volkspolizei” → “Nationale Volksarmee”
  - ▶ Conscription from the early 60s
  - ▶ Almost directly controlled by Russians
- ▶ “Staatsicherheitsdienst” (STASI, MfS) – the secret service, controlled since 1957 by Erich Mielke (“I love you all”)
- ▶ From the late 1950s on, all forces tied closely to the party



## What was the STASI?

- ▶ Responsible for “political crimes”, state within the state with own prisons etc. spying on virtually everything and everyone
- ▶ In the late 1980s, more than 80,000 *official* employees
- ▶ Plus between 110,000 and 180,000 informers (“IM”) → roughly 1 per 60 citizens (including children)
- ▶ Stasi infiltrated each and every dissident group
- ▶ Especially vicious techniques for destroying private lives
- ▶ Ongoing discussion if IM knew (or could have known) that they served the STASI
- ▶ At least one proven case of an IM marrying and then spying on his own wife

## What claims did state and party make?



- ▶ Communists' declared aim was to produce a "New Man"
  - ▶ Impact on education and science
  - ▶ High degree of "voluntary" membership in mass organisations
  - ▶ Marches, rallies etc.
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- ▶ Propaganda notwithstanding, mass of people had realistic view of East and West Germany
  - ▶ "Sozialistischer Gang" – Situation Normal, all Fucked Up
  - ▶ "Conformity and grumbling"

## What was the niche society?



- ▶ Difficult to assess what life was really like
- ▶ Memories of a tacit agreement
  - ▶ Regime got some degree of ritualistic support
  - ▶ People were left alone otherwise → retreat to private lives
  - ▶ Plus reasonable health care, child-care and housing were provided in return
- ▶ Consensus began to crumble in the 1980s
  - ▶ People knew about desolate economic situation
  - ▶ Change in the USSR
  - ▶ ...
- ▶ Yet the majority kept silent for fear of persecution



## Class questions

1. Why was it easier to achieve compliance in East Germany than in Poland?
2. Would “it” have been possible in other countries (UK, West Germany . . . )?
3. What are the likely mid- and long-term consequences of communist rule for Germany’s political culture?