



German History in Documents and Images

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Erich Honecker on the 40th Anniversary of the GDR (October 6, 1989)

Ignoring Gorbachev's calls for perestroika, the aging SED leader celebrates the achievements of socialism in his speech on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR. He dismisses the mass exodus and the growing opposition movement as capitalist slander and announces his resolve to hold to his hard-line course.

Today, the GDR is an outpost of peace and socialism in Europe. We will never forget this fact; this keeps us, and should also keep our enemies, from misjudgment.

Like the Soviet Union, which liberated us, and the People's Republic of China, which is also celebrating the 40th anniversary of its founding, the People's Republic of Poland, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and other socialist countries, the GDR will also cross the threshold into the year 2000 with the certainty that socialism is the future. Socialism is a young society, and yet it exerts a great influence on international developments. It has brought about significant social change and will continue to do so. Its existence gives hope, not only to our people, but to all of humankind. [. . .]

Just when the influential powers in the FRG sense the chance to annul the outcome of World War II and post-war developments through a coup, they have again had to realize that reality cannot be changed, that the GDR, on the western boundary of the socialist countries in Europe, remains firm as a dam against neo-Nazism and chauvinism. The GDR's solid position in the Warsaw Pact cannot be shaken.

It is no coincidence that our opponent is directing its slander against the GDR to a greater extent than ever before. Forty years of the GDR also means forty years since the defeat of German imperialism and militarism. Socialism on German soil is so intolerable to our opponent because it represents proof that the previously exploited masses can determine their fortune without capitalism. [. . .]

Life in our country and international events presently pose questions which demand clear answers from a firm position. Our position does not come from one of the scandal sheets of the FRG, nor from the radio or television there; it has not evolved out of dated doctrine, but rather from the creative application of Marxism-Leninism, from the interests of the working class and

all factory workers. In a word, our position is a policy based on the highest principle, namely, to do everything possible for the well-being of the people and a future in peace. Accordingly, we do not stop at the achievements we have made. Upon attaining something dependable, we leave behind that which is outdated and restrictive; we are progressing on our course of unified economic and social policy. In this spirit, we will also continue to develop socialist democracy in its many forms. Our aim is for citizens to participate more and more actively and concretely in the activities of the state. [. . .]

Forty years of the GDR mark a totally new chapter in the history of our people. At the same time, these forty years have impressed upon our consciousness the absolute necessity and also the preciousness of long-lasting peace. Never again shall war emanate from German soil; this declaration arises from a decisive lesson of the past. It has become our state policy. It has been the top priority behind all we have done up to now and all we will do in the future, so that the socialist GDR continues to thrive and the family of European peoples can live in safety and harmony. Our nation is reliably satisfying its responsibility at the center of the continent, at the division between the two major allied blocs. [. . .]

In sharp contrast to our politics stand the revanchist demands of FRG politicians, spurring concern and protest throughout the world. There is talk of the “reestablishment of the German Reich within the 1937 borders.” The post-war settlements are being questioned, the theory of the supposedly open German question is stated more loudly than it has been previously. The revival of the claim of sole representation, from the 1950s and 1960s, has culminated in a claim to so-called responsibility for all Germans. In this regard, there is obviously a considerable amount of common ground between revanchist politicians in Bonn and the increasingly strong neo-Nazis.

The emergence of neo-Nazis on the political stage in the FRG is food for thought. In light of the fact that attempts are being made to deny or downplay the existence of neo-Nazism, I would like to remind you that during the Nazi regime, two other comrades and I were turned over to the prison of Hitler’s personal guards for “treatment,” at the same time as the present head of the *Republikaner* was active there as an SS leader. There is no doubt that such elements of FRG politics which cause concern among the peoples of the world are in urgent need of reform.

The relentless, internationally coordinated slander campaign currently being led against the GDR aims to confuse the people and sow doubt regarding the strength and advantages of socialism. This can only serve to strengthen our resolve to continue in the future to do everything possible for a peaceful European house. The ability for states with different social orders to live and work together in such a house should be allowed to develop to the fullest. A solid foundation for this is provided in the final act of the Helsinki Conference as well as other CSCE documents. But we will not allow anyone to abuse these agreements for the purpose of destabilizing socialism. Strict respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and non-intervention in internal affairs are indispensable.

The GDR has paved its way with achievements serving to strengthen our people in the knowledge of their power and of the worth of all efforts to establish a new, humane, complete life. Socialism and peace are, and remain, key words for that which we have achieved up to now, as well as that which we will continue to accomplish. We tackle the task with vigor and confidence. In its fifth decade, the socialist workers' and peasants' state on German soil will continue to prove – through its actions for the good of its people and through its efforts for peace, security and international cooperation – that its founding in October of 1949 was a turning point in the history of the German people and of Europe. [. . .]

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