



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961
Announcement of the Impending Establishment of the German Democratic Republic
(October 7, 1949)

Shortly after the founding of a new state in West Germany, a second German state was established in East Germany with Soviet help: the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In October 1949, the German People's Council [*Deutscher Volksrat*] ratified the GDR constitution and constituted itself in Berlin as the Provisional People's Parliament [*Provisorische Volkskammer*]. On October 12, 1949, SED politician Otto Grotewohl was elected minister president and formed a government with all the parties represented in the People's Parliament. The Soviet military administration was replaced by a Control Commission that was to oversee adherence to the stipulations of the Potsdam Agreement and other allied treaties, though otherwise it officially allowed the GDR to assume sovereign status. Both German states denied the democratic legitimacy of the other.

The following article on the impending establishment of the GDR – “The German People Shapes its Own Fate” – appeared in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, a newspaper published by the Red Army in the Soviet Occupation Zone.

Berlin. 6 October. The Main Administration for Information of the German Economic Commission makes the following announcement:

The Constitution of the German Democratic Republic, discussed by the widest circles throughout the entire German population, adopted by the German People's Council, confirmed by the Third German People's Congress, will be the basis of the impending establishment of state and government. When the German People's Council has passed a resolution next Friday to reconstitute itself as the Provisional People's Parliament, this truly historic decision will introduce a new phase in German post-war development: Germany leaves a status of occupation and enters the status of sovereignty.

Does this annul the Potsdam Agreement? No: it is now being fulfilled— because it was precisely the intention of the Potsdam Agreement to give back its independence to a democratic Germany. Thus on 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 Germany of the war-mongers and the dividers (*Spalter*), of the Hitlerian armaments magnates and large estate owners, continues in the hopeless perspective of enduring occupation and economic dependence.

The members of the German People's Council, who were elected by secret ballot by over 2,000 delegates of the Third German People's Congress, have behind them the millions of affirmative votes of this year's elections for the People's Congress, and are thus backed by the broad majority of the population. When they assemble as the Provisional People's Parliament, the German people will know that their cause is in good hands. All further steps in the creation of state and government will follow automatically from the formation of the Provisional People's Parliament.

Under Article 92 of the Constitution the Minister President will be nominated by the strongest group (*Fraktion*) in the People's Parliament. He will form the government. Under this Article all parliamentary groups are to be represented in the government by Ministers or Under Secretaries of State in proportion to their strength.

Under Article 101 the President of the Republic will be elected by the People's Parliament and by the *Länder* Chamber in joint session. Article 93 lays it down that he will swear in the members of the government when they take up their offices.

The *Länder* Chamber is the representative body of the German *Länder*. Under Article 71 every *Land* will send to the *Länder* Chamber one delegate for every 500,000 inhabitants. These delegates will be elected by the *Landtage* in proportion to the strength of the group, according to Article 72.

The order of events in the process of the formation of government and state during this week and next will therefore be: formation of the People's Parliament and the *Länder* Chamber, election of the President of the State by both Chambers jointly, nomination of the Minister President and formation of the Cabinet, declaration of government policy and debate, and finally the vote of confidence.

The experience of everyday life proves to us that only active self-help can deliver us from calamity. The German people, too, have experienced this. They are about to free themselves from the national emergency by national self-help; they are on the path to independence, to freedom, and to peace.

Source: "Das deutsche Volk formt selbst sein Schicksal" ["The German People Shapes its Own Fate"], *Tägliche Rundschau* (October 7, 1949); reprinted in Beata Ruhm von Oppen, ed., *Documents on Germany under Occupation, 1945-1954*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 420-21. (With slight edits by GHI staff.)