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## ‘It Should Look Democratic . . . ’: The German Communists and the Birth of the SED

### THE ORIGINS OF POST-WAR KPD STRATEGY

When the Third Reich collapsed at the end of the Second World War, one organization swung into action in a bid to exploit the power vacuum and implement its plans for a new German society and state: the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Backed by the victorious Soviet Union, and guided by a resolute leadership that had survived the Nazi regime in exile,<sup>1</sup> the KPD resumed its activities in Germany before the fighting ceased. The first *émigré* KPD cadres to return to their country were flown from Moscow to a makeshift airfield near Berlin on 30 April 1945, the day of Hitler's suicide and two days before the city's fall. To the astonishment of most Germans, however, these cadres turned their attention not to the struggle for proletarian rule but to the building of bourgeois democratic administrations.<sup>2</sup> There was even

<sup>1</sup> After the arrest of the party chairman, Ernst Thälmann, in March 1933, the KPD's Politburo and Central Committee fled to Prague, before moving on to Paris at the end of the year. From January 1935 the KPD leadership was officially based in Moscow, while operating mainly from Prague and, between 1936 and 1939, from Paris. By 1940 most KPD leaders who had escaped the Nazis had arrived in the Soviet Union and joined the Moscow *émigrés*, who had taken over formal control of the party after the internment of the Paris-based leaders by the French authorities in September 1939. See Horst Duhnke, *Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945* (Cologne, 1972), 101–16, 183–9, 365–8. Hans-Albert Walter, 'Das Pariser KPD-Sekretariat, der deutsch-sowjetische Nichtangriffsvertrag und die Internierung deutscher Emigranten in Frankreich zu Beginn des Zweiten Weltkrieges', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (VfZG) 36/3 (1988), 483–528.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder* (paperback edn., Cologne, 1990), 411–44. 'Gruppe Ulbricht' in Berlin April bis Juni 1945: *Von den Vorbereitungen im Sommer 1944 bis zur Wiedegründung der KPD im Juni 1945. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. by Gerhard Keiderling (Berlin, 1993), 39–46.

greater surprise when, on 11 June 1945, a KPD *Aufruf* (appeal) formally rejected the idea of imposing a 'Soviet dictatorship' on Germany and called instead for the creation of a 'parliamentary democratic republic with all democratic rights and freedoms for the people'.<sup>3</sup>

The KPD's conversion from scourge to apparent champion of bourgeois democracy did not come out of the blue. Its origins lay in a major reversal of strategy performed in the mid-1930s, under the auspices of the Communist International (Comintern), by all communist parties in the Soviet fold. Signs that the newly installed Nazi regime was not the expected curtain-raiser for world revolution prompted some communists in 1934 to reject the 'ultra-leftist' approach that had guided them since the Comintern's 6th World Congress in 1928. The quest for a more flexible communist strategy was endorsed by the Comintern's Executive Committee (ECCI), whose members had finally woken up to the threat posed to the Soviet Union by a proliferation of right-wing regimes and the potential rise of a phalanx of militant capitalist states. Communist fears of a military attack on the motherland of the proletarian revolution had been fuelled by an unexpected rapprochement in January 1934 between Nazi Germany and Poland. With the ECCI's help, a pact was concluded in July 1934 between communists and socialists in France. Its success in preventing a right-wing regime in Paris inspired a new communist strategy that was subsequently promulgated as the official Comintern line, although the change was not formally announced but masked in criticism of the KPD.<sup>4</sup>

At the Comintern's 7th World Congress, in the summer of 1935, the German communist and ECCI member Wilhelm Pieck declared that his party had made a serious error in branding all other parties as fascist and denouncing the bourgeois Brüning government as a fascist dictatorship. Communists, he explained, had a stake in preserving 'every scrap of bourgeois democracy' so long as 'proletarian democracy' remained out of reach. A landmark speech by Georgi Dimitrov, the Comintern's secretary-general designate and the driving force behind the French experiment, left the delegates in no doubt that the final triumph of the

<sup>3</sup> *Dokumente zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Bewegung in Deutschland, Reihe 1945/1946*, Vol. 1, ed. by Günter Benser and Hans-Joachim Krusch (Munich, 1993), 231.

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Staritz, *Sozialismus*, 42–5. Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above 1928–1941* (New York, 1990), 341–2. Arnold Sywottek, *Deutsche Volksdemokratie: Studien zur politischen Konzeption der KPD 1935–1946* (Düsseldorf, 1971), 23–5, 39–40.

international proletariat would have to be postponed. The congress heard that, since the masses were obviously not ready for proletarian rule, communists must discard their radical antics and form alliances with non-communists in an effort to combat fascism while skilfully using these alliances to further the proletarian cause. Their aim must be to unite the workers in the face of the fascist threat and thus galvanize other likely opponents of fascism—such as the peasants, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals—so as to create a ‘broad-based anti-fascist popular front on the basis of the proletarian united front’.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of repeated prompting by the ECCI from the summer of 1934, the KPD was slow to adopt the new course, whose supporters were initially in a minority in the party’s exiled Politburo. Yet tight control by Moscow, a result of the party’s progressive ‘Bolshevization’ from the mid-1920s,<sup>6</sup> made it impossible for the KPD to ignore the ECCI’s demand for change. A Politburo meeting held at the ECCI’s request in January 1935 strengthened the hand of the proponents of change, Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, but the decisive shift in the KPD’s position took place after the Comintern’s 7th World Congress. At the so-called ‘Brussels Conference’, in October 1935, the KPD articulated the new line and removed its opponents from the Politburo and the Central Committee (ZK), so that the leadership of the party lay firmly with Pieck and Ulbricht.<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with Dimitrov’s instructions, the KPD’s new guidelines stressed the need for co-operation with the party’s main rival, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which was believed to have moved further to the left, and thus closer to the KPD, under the impact of Nazi oppression. The blanket vilification of social democrats as ‘social fascists’, the cornerstone of communist ultra-leftism, was to be abandoned in favour of a bid for a ‘united front’, to be based on a formal agreement between the two party leaderships. The new approach, as Pieck made clear, would not mean the end of KPD hostility to the SPD’s anti-revolutionary

<sup>5</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 39, 41. The congress took place in Moscow between 25 July and 20 August 1935. See Edward H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–1935* (London, 1982), 403–27. For details on the KPD delegates, see Wladislaw Hedeler, ‘Die deutschen Delegierten auf dem VII. Weltkongress der Kommunistischen Internationale 1937’, *IWK* 37/3 (2001), 370–83.

<sup>6</sup> Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966), 191–248.

<sup>7</sup> Horst Duhnke, *KPD*, 145–50. The conference was held in Kuntsevo, a town near Moscow, 3–15 October 1935. It was referred to as the ‘Brussels Conference’ for conspiratorial reasons. See *Die Brüsseler Konferenz der KPD (3.–15. Oktober 1935)*, ed. with an intro. by Klaus Mammach (Berlin, 1975), 20–1.

stance and 'reformism'. But neither would it be merely '[a cover for] the recruitment of social democratic workers into the KPD' and 'a pretext for the denunciation of social democratic leaders'.<sup>8</sup> There was to be no return to the notorious 'united-front-from-below' campaign which the KPD had waged intermittently during the 1920s and, fatally, at the time of Hitler's accession to power, in January 1933.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after the KPD had changed course, it became clear that the conditions for a united front did not exist. The KPD leaders concluded that they had not done enough to rid themselves of their sectarian image, and swiftly set out to formulate a more detailed anti-fascist platform in the hope of winning political allies. The result was a plan for a 'democratic republic', a distinctly moderate programme unveiled in 1936 and designed to reassure non-communists by ruling out the possibility of a direct transition to socialism. For the first time, there was no suggestion that the popular front would be a stepping-stone to proletarian rule. Instead, the alliance of 'the social democratic, communist, Catholic, and all other workers' with 'the working petty bourgeoisie, the peasants, and the intellectuals' was now seen as having an important role after Nazism's defeat as the nucleus of an anti-fascist coalition government with communist participation. The future regime, however, would not be a replica of the ill-fated Weimar Republic that had preceded the Third Reich. Rather, as Anton Ackermann explained in his 1937 programme for a 'democratic people's republic', its aim would be to 'advance democracy to such an extent as effectively to remove the privileges of the great capitalists...'. The hallmark of the new regime, as the KPD's 'Berne Conference' subsequently confirmed, would be a redistribution of power through far-reaching economic reforms. Centred upon the 'expropriation of the fascist trust capitalists' and a 'democratic land reform', the proposed measures were aimed at ensuring that political ascendancy in the new Germany rested with the workers and their allies in the popular front, and not with the country's old social *élites*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Pieck, *Der neue Weg zum gemeinsamen Kampf für den Sturz der Hitlerdiktatur: Referat und Schlußwort auf der Brüsseler Parteikonferenz der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands, Oktober 1935* (Berlin, 1954), 152–3.

<sup>9</sup> Conan Fischer, *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1991), 17–19, 65–9, 160–1. Andreas Dorpalen, 'SPD und KPD in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik', *VfZG* 31/1 (1983), 88–98.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Arnold Sywottek, *Volksdemokratie*, 62, 74, 90. The 'Berne Conference' was held in the French town of Draveil, south of Paris, 30 January–1 February 1939. As with the KPD's 'Brussels Conference', the name was chosen for conspiratorial reasons. See *Die Berner Konferenz der KPD (30. Januar–1. Februar 1939)*, ed. with an intro. by Klaus Mammach (Berlin, 1974), 11–12.

Notwithstanding its persistent popular-front rhetoric, the KPD was sliding back into sectarianism from around 1938 as evidence mounted that its alliance strategy had failed. Its overtures to the exiled SPD leadership in Prague, resulting in bilateral talks in November 1935, had foundered on social democratic suspicion that the communists' sudden enthusiasm for bourgeois democracy was but a tactical ploy. Meanwhile, negotiations with Paris-based *émigrés* on the establishment of a 'German Popular Front' had broken down amidst accusations from left-wing SPD breakaway groups that the KPD was betraying socialism and selling out to the bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup>

In the autumn of 1939, major changes in the international situation removed the rationale for the popular front—to prevent the emergence of an anti-Soviet coalition of states—and thus paved the way for communists to return openly to their pre-1935 line. On 23 and 28 August, a Nazi-Soviet non-aggression treaty was signed, incorporating a secret protocol that divided Poland between the two signatories, while giving Moscow a free hand against Finland, Bessarabia, and the Baltic states. On 1 September, Hitler's armies invaded Poland, triggering declarations of war from the Western powers committed to its defence, Britain and France, and raising the prospect of an internecine struggle between the Soviet Union's potential foes. For the next two years, the Comintern and the KPD, in slavish submission to Soviet diplomacy, treated the war as an internal affair among capitalist states, blaming Anglo-French 'imperialism' and its alleged tool, the SPD.<sup>12</sup>

Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, following German lightning victories in the Polish and French campaigns, prompted the ECCI to renew the injunctions of the 7th World Congress and give them a patriotic spin. Dimitrov banned the use of revolutionary slogans and called for the establishment of 'broad-based national liberation movements' in a bid for the support of the conservative sections of the bourgeoisie. The communist-led 'national fronts' which subsequently sprang up across German-occupied Eastern Europe were enjoined not to commit themselves to a specific

<sup>11</sup> Horst Duhnke, *KPD*, 163–82.

<sup>12</sup> Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–67* (London, 1968), 267–89. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, 'Der deutsch-sowjetische Grenz- und Freundschaftsvertrag vom 28. September 1939: Die deutschen Aufzeichnungen über die Verhandlungen zwischen Stalin, Molotov und Ribbentrop in Moskau', *VfZG* 39/3 (1991), 447–70. Jan Foitzik, 'Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands und der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt: Die Erklärung des Zentralkomitees zum 25. August 1939 im Wortlaut', *VfZG* 37/3 (1989), 499–514.

programme and urged to waste no time pondering over the nature of their country's post-war regime.<sup>13</sup>

After the rebuff of secret Soviet peace feelers, in the summer of 1943, Moscow took more concrete steps to further the development of a German anti-fascist front in the hope of overthrowing Hitler and thus ending the war. Earlier attempts by the exiled KPD leadership to undermine the German war effort through propaganda, culminating in December 1942 in a passionate call for a 'great national peace movement', had miserably failed to produce results. Interviews with German prisoners of war (POWs) had compounded the despair of the KPD *émigrés* by highlighting the strength of pro-Nazi feelings in Germany, also among the workers. Since then, however, dramatic changes in the military situation had created a more favourable climate for domestic opposition to the Nazi regime and raised communist hopes for an anti-Hitler coup. In February 1943, the *Wehrmacht* had suffered a catastrophic defeat at Stalingrad and forever lost the aura of invincibility. The Soviet Union's allies in the war against Hitler, Britain and the United States, had been advancing in Northern Africa and, through their strategic bombing campaign, carried the war to Germany. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, their leaders, Churchill and Roosevelt, had demanded the unconditional surrender of Germany and its Far Eastern ally, Japan, ruling out any possibility of a separate peace. After the *Wehrmacht's* failed summer offensive and defeat in the battle of Kursk, it was evident that both the military and the diplomatic initiative had finally slipped from Germany's grasp.<sup>14</sup>

In July 1943, a group of German POWs, supported by senior KPD members, founded the 'National Committee "Free Germany"' (NKFD), complemented in September by a 'German Officers' League', as a focus for anti-Nazi resistance within the *Wehrmacht* and a nucleus for a German national front. Eschewing any reference to the KPD and demanding no economic reforms beyond the expropriation of 'those responsible for the war as well as the war profiteers',<sup>15</sup> the NKFD's founding manifesto marked the high point of Soviet efforts to woo Germany's old social *élites*. However, unable to trigger an anti-Hitler coup, the NKFD quickly

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Staritz, *Die Gründung der DDR: Von der sowjetischen Besatzungsherrschaft zum sozialistischen Staat* (2nd edn., Munich, 1987), 67–8.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Fischer, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1941–1945* (Stuttgart, 1975), 17–27, 33–53. Andreas Hillgruber, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg 1939–1945: Kriegsziele und Strategie der großen Mächte* (3rd edn., Stuttgart, 1983), 88–105, 122–3.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, *Sozialismus*, 55.

forfeited Moscow's goodwill and, during the remainder of the war, became ever more patently an adjunct of the KPD.<sup>16</sup>

From late 1943, after the Moscow Conference of Allied Foreign Ministers (19–30 October) and the Teheran Conference of the Big Three (28 November–1 December), Soviet strategy was based on the assumption of Germany's complete military defeat and subsequent subjection to a joint Allied occupation regime. The prospect of a Soviet military presence in Germany after the end of the war marked an important change, not least because it opened up new opportunities for the KPD. It was against this background that Dimitrov, now head of the 'Department of International Information' of the Central Committee of the Soviet communist party, the CPSU(b), instructed the KPD leadership in January 1944 to turn its attention to the issue of Germany's post-war regime.<sup>17</sup>

On 6 February 1944, three weeks after the opening of inter-Allied negotiations on Germany's post-war treatment at the London-based European Advisory Commission (EAC),<sup>18</sup> the KPD's Politburo appointed a 'Work Commission' of twenty leading party figures to map out the KPD's future strategy in preparation for Hitler's fall. In eighteen sessions, held between 6 March and 21 August 1944, the commission heard presentations by party experts on a variety of issues, such as political leadership in post-war Germany, KPD economic policy, agricultural policy, the role of the intellectuals, and the future of the trade unions. Their conclusions were incorporated in late 1944 into the so-called 'Action Programme of the Bloc of Militant Democracy', a comprehensive programme for post-Nazi Germany which harked back to the KPD's earlier plans for a 'democratic republic'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Bodo Scheurig, *Freies Deutschland: Das Nationalkomitee und der Bund Deutscher Offiziere in der Sowjetunion 1943–1945* (Munich, 1960), 33–70. Paul Heider, 'Nationalkomitee "Freies Deutschland"—Antihitlerbündnis oder Koalition für ein demokratisches Deutschland?', *BzG* 35/4 (1993), 13–30. On the NKFD's transformation into a KPD tool, see Arnold Sywottek, *Volksdemokratie*, 123–47. Paul Heider, 'Gründung des Nationalkomitees "Freies Deutschland" und des Bundes Deutscher Offiziere—alleiniges Verdienst der KPD oder sowjetischer Entschluß?', *BzG* 34/3 (1992), 4–28. Jörg Morré, *Hinter den Kulissen des Nationalkomitees: Das Institut 99 in Moskau und die Deutschlandpolitik der UdSSR 1943–1946* (Munich, 2001), 179–86.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Fischer, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik*, 60–75, 83–4.

<sup>18</sup> Hans-Günter Kowalski, 'Die "European Advisory Commission" als Instrument alliierter Deutschlandplanung 1943–1945', *VfZG* 19/3 (1971), 261–93. Joseph Foschepoth, 'Britische Deutschlandpolitik zwischen Jalta und Potsdam', *VfZG* 30/4 (1982), 677–9.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht: The Communist Reconstruction of East Germany 1945–46* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 12–18. The programme was produced in

Designed as a platform for a KPD-led alliance of all anti-Nazi individuals and groups (the so-called 'Bloc of Militant Democracy'), the Action Programme demanded the establishment of a 'democratic people's regime'. Its key proposition was that the stranglehold of 'fascist-imperialist monopoly capitalism' must be broken, in addition to the punishment of Nazis and war criminals, to prevent a repetition of the Weimar experience and achieve the thorough democratization of Germany forgone in 1918. To this end, Germany's old social *élites* must be purged from the government and the administrations, while their economic power base must be destroyed through expropriations. The intended beneficiaries of the proposed reforms—namely the expropriation of the big landowners and the nationalization of all war industries, banks, and utilities—were the German masses, whom the KPD was to approach as a champion of their respective political goals. Thus the peasantry was to be wooed with the creation of 'land funds' that would assuage 'the worst hunger for land', while the workers were promised better living conditions and greater social security. As for the numerous petty bourgeoisie, this group was to be courted with guarantees for the protection of bourgeois freedoms and the prospect of free elections as well as with promises of financial support for small private businesses.<sup>20</sup>

In adopting this programme, the KPD leadership acknowledged that proletarian revolution was no longer on the agenda and that, after the war, there would be no alternative to working from within a multi-party regime. Yet if this marked a watershed for an organization that had vowed five years earlier, in the autumn of 1939, 'to fight all forms of bourgeois dictatorship' in order not to 'bail out the rotten capitalist system again',<sup>21</sup> it did not mean that the KPD had abandoned its struggle for socialism. Rather, that struggle was now to be drawn out over several stages and be waged by more subtle means. This was made clear by Pieck, who, in a lecture given to fellow KPD *émigrés* on

four different drafts. The first three drafts were authored by Pieck and written in October 1944. A more detailed and carefully worded fourth draft was written by Ackermann at the end of 1944. See *'Nach Hitler kommen wir': Dokumente zur Programmatik der Moskauer KPD-Führung 1944/45 für Nachkriegsdeutschland*, ed. by Peter Erler, Horst Laude, and Manfred Wilke (Berlin, 1994), 89–99.

<sup>20</sup> "Aktionsprogramm des Blocks der kämpferischen Demokratie"—Maschinenschriftlicher 3. Entwurf o. D. (1944), *ibid.*, 265–9. "Aktionsprogramm des Blocks der kämpferischen Demokratie"—Maschinenschriftliche Abschrift des Entwurfs von Anton Ackermann von Ende 1944, *ibid.*, 290–303.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Arnold Sywottek, *Volksdemokratie*, 94.



18 October 1944, likened the Action Programme to the revolutionary programme recommended by Lenin in 1905. Quoting from Lenin's famous tract on the 'Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', Pieck described the Action Programme as

the entire list of minimum goals of our party, the list of those basic political and economic reforms that are both entirely feasible under the current social [and] economic conditions and absolutely essential for the next step forward, towards the establishment of socialism.

Communists would have to accept 'unconditionally' the bourgeois nature of the coming revolution, Pieck explained by quoting another passage of Lenin's tract. That way, they would be able to push the revolution ahead and use it 'for the further successful struggle of the proletariat for socialism'.<sup>22</sup>

#### STALIN, THE KPD, AND SOVIET PLANS FOR POST-NAZI GERMANY

The preparations made by the KPD leaders for the time after Hitler were inextricably intertwined with Soviet political, economic, and military goals. The KPD's line was effectively laid down in Moscow from the mid-1920s, when the Comintern was transformed into a Soviet tool. Initiated by Lenin's 'twenty-one conditions' of 1920, and proclaimed at the Comintern's 5th World Congress in 1924, this so-called 'Bolshevization' of the foreign communist parties reached its conclusion with the consolidation of Stalin's dictatorship in 1929. Thereafter, the KPD's relationship with Moscow was one of total subordination, with the party accepting that its first duty was to defend the Soviet Union against external threats. Although the KPD gained nominal independence in 1943 as a result of the Comintern's dissolution, the Kremlin retained its firm hold on the party via control of its exiled leadership, famously based in Moscow's 'Hotel Lux' since 1935.<sup>23</sup> As before, the linchpin of Soviet control was Georgi Dimitrov,

<sup>22</sup> '“Zum Aktionsprogramm der KPD”—Handschriftliche Disposition Wilhelm Piecks', *Nach Hitler*, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Edward H. Carr, *Twilight*, 5–6. Hermann Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus: Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1969), 294–318. 'Gruppe Ulbricht', 25–8. Norbert Podewin, *Walter Ulbricht: Eine neue Biographie* (Berlin, 1995), 129–36.

the Bulgarian-born former Comintern chief who now co-ordinated the work of the foreign communist parties as head of the CPSU(b)'s 'Department of International Information'. A person held by Stalin in high regard, Dimitrov supervised the drafting of the KPD's Action Programme, working, as ever, for the 'ideological purity and steel unity of the party and its unshakeable loyalty to the Soviet Union'.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, he could rely on the wholehearted support of the KPD's top brass—party chairman Wilhelm Pieck, Politburo members Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Florin, and Anton Ackermann, a 'candidate member' of the Politburo—all of whom had proved their unswerving loyalty to Moscow in a series of bloody purges culminating in the 'great terror' of 1936–8.<sup>25</sup>

Although few details have transpired about Soviet plans for the post-war world,<sup>26</sup> there can be little doubt that in the spring of 1945 the Kremlin had no appetite for exporting Bolshevism. After a monumental struggle that had cost it more than 20 million lives and nearly one-third of its national wealth, the Soviet Union desperately needed peace as a basis for its domestic reconstruction. Convinced that the outcome of the Teheran Conference gave them the right to hold on to their territorial gains under the Nazi–Soviet pact and install friendly governments in the neighbouring countries of Eastern Europe, Soviet officials had no interest in destabilizing Europe through proletarian revolts, all the more since they regarded socialism's short-term prospects abroad as poor.<sup>27</sup> Stalin, the Soviet dictator, had always been sceptical about the potential of the foreign communist parties, in stark contrast to his predecessor, Lenin. In the 1920s, he had famously revealed his contempt for proletarian internationalism by advocating 'socialism in one

<sup>24</sup> Franz Dahlem, *Erinnerungen*; Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Zentrales Parteiarchiv (SAPMO-BArch, ZPA), SGY 30/1078.

<sup>25</sup> On the KPD and the 'great terror', see Hermann Weber, 'Die deutschen Opfer Stalins', *DA* 22/4 (1989), 407–18. Hermann Weber, *Weiße Flecken in der Geschichte: Die KPD-Opfer der Stalinschen Säuberungen und ihre Rehabilitierung* (2nd edn., Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 13–35. Reinhard Müller, "'Wir kommen alle dran": Säuberungen unter den deutschen Politemigranten in der Sowjetunion (1934–1938)', *Terror: Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–1953*, ed. by Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert (Paderborn, 1998), 121–66.

<sup>26</sup> On the limited evidence that has emerged from the Soviet archives, see Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War*, 3–9. Gerhard Wettig, *Bereitschaft zu Einheit in Freiheit? Die sowjetische Deutschland-Politik 1945–1955* (Munich, 1999), 26–32.

<sup>27</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941–1945* (New York, 1979), 122–32.

country', allegedly remarking that the Comintern represented nothing and existed only because of Soviet support.<sup>28</sup>

The disbandment of the Comintern in May 1943, presumably motivated by Moscow's desire to facilitate the establishment of anti-fascist national fronts, was a measure of the dramatic decline of world revolution in the hierarchy of Soviet goals. Its implications were spelt out to the *émigré* leaders of the East European communist parties on the eve of their repatriation. In December 1944, the Czech communists were told that 'there must be no talk of establishing a Soviet regime in the CSR'.<sup>29</sup> A similar order tied the hands of the Bulgarian communists when they returned home. At a meeting of their party's Central Committee in March 1945, their chairman, Traicho Kostov, admitted that any attempt at imposing a Soviet regime on Bulgaria immediately after its liberation would have created 'enormous difficulties for us and the Soviet Union' and 'would not have been permitted by the Red Army's command'.<sup>30</sup> According to Milovan Djilas, the famous Yugoslav communist and aide to Tito, the communist partisan leader, Stalin did not allow Dimitrov to return to his native country in the footsteps of the Red Army for fear that he might push Bulgarian politics to the left too soon. The strength of Stalin's hostility to communist insurrectionism was highlighted in late 1944 by his refusal to support the communist-dominated ELAS resistance movement in its bid for power in Greece, a decision that paved the way for the suppression of the Greek rising by British troops.<sup>31</sup>

The main problem confronting Soviet officials at the end of the war was, without doubt, the question of what should be done with Germany. New research has strengthened the view that the Kremlin's policy towards the defeated enemy was not based on a fixed scheme but designed to offer Stalin maximum flexibility.<sup>32</sup> However, given the

<sup>28</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (London, 1991), 101–16. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (2nd edn., London, 1967), 391–2.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Karel Kaplan, 'Über den tschechoslowakischen Weg zum Sozialismus', *Ziele, Formen und Grenzen der 'besonderen' Wege zum Sozialismus: Zur Analyse der Transformationskonzepte europäischer kommunistischer Parteien in den Jahren zwischen 1944/45 und 1948*, ed. by Arbeitsbereich Geschichte und Politik der DDR am Institut für Sozialwissenschaft der Universität Mannheim (Mannheim, 1984), 92.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, 'Ein "besonderer deutscher Weg" zum Sozialismus?', *PolZG* B51–52/1982, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London, 1962), 107–8. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*, 516–17.

<sup>32</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 9–10.

enormous suffering endured by the Soviet Union during the struggle against Hitler, even a flexible approach to the German Question was bound to be guided by two overriding goals: reparations; and lasting security against a new German threat. Indeed, those two goals featured prominently in an early memorandum on Soviet post-war strategy, dated 10 January 1944 and drafted by I. M. Maisky, an assistant people's commissar for foreign affairs who had gained prominence earlier in the war as Soviet ambassador to London. Describing the cornerstones of Soviet foreign policy for 'the next 30–50 years', Maisky insisted that Germany must be 'rendered harmless for the said period' through a combination of different measures, including dismemberment, Allied occupation (for a period of 'about ten years'), disarmament, reparations, and re-education.<sup>33</sup>

Fears of renewed German aggression loomed large for a Soviet leadership convinced that the Germans were capable of shrugging off defeat and restoring their country's might. Stalin, in particular, had great respect for German industriousness and organizational skills. In August 1944, he advised Mikolajczyk, the head of the London-based Polish government-in-exile, that Germany was 'a strong country even though Hitler is weakening it', and he warned: 'The Germans will rise again.'<sup>34</sup> In the same vein, he told a delegation of Yugoslav communists in April 1945: '... they will recover, and very quickly. It is a highly developed industrial country with an extremely skilled and numerous working class and technical intelligentsia. Give them twelve to fifteen years and they'll be on their feet again.'<sup>35</sup>

The solution to the Soviet Union's predicament lay in strengthening the alliance with Britain and the United States. Its implications for the KPD had already been taken into account by the Work Commission in 1944. At the commission's opening meeting, on 6 March 1944, Florin defined the party's main task as: 'To continue to support the alliance between the three great powers and to refrain from any activity that might enable the reactionaries in the United States and [in] England to cause the break-up of this alliance.' There was no mistaking the kind of activity from which the KPD would have to refrain: 'If we decided

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir O. Pechatnov, 'The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain'; *CWIHP Working Paper No. 13* (July 1995), 2–3. See also Gerhard Wettig, *Bereitschaft*, 36–40.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Edward J. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy: A Pattern in Poland* (New York, 1958), 247.

<sup>35</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations*, 105–6.

today to give in to the requests made by some [of the German] prisoners of war and drew up a socialist action programme, we might through such a mistake enable the reactionaries to bring about the downfall of Roosevelt, which would also have negative consequences for us.<sup>36</sup> In an echo of Florin's remarks, the first *émigré* KPD cadres to return to their country in the spring of 1945 were told in their final briefings that any attempt to undermine the unity of the anti-Hitler alliance must be thoroughly squashed. With victory over Nazism to be followed by a prolonged period of joint Allied occupation, there would be no question of them establishing socialism in Germany. Rather, their task would be to complete the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1848 and actively oppose calls for the creation of a socialist regime.<sup>37</sup>

By that time, after the Yalta Conference (4–11 February 1945), Moscow's support for the principle of inter-Allied collaboration was growing, as communist hopes for a last-minute uprising against Hitler gave way to the conclusion that the Germans were not Nazism's innocent victims but willing accomplices in its crimes. Soviet disillusionment with the political instincts of the German people was echoed by Pieck when he subsequently urged his fellow comrades to acquaint themselves with the decisions of Yalta and 'their significance for the developments to come'. Its consequence was a major modification of the KPD's post-war programme, prompting Pieck, in March 1945, to describe the Action Programme as 'completely outdated'.<sup>38</sup> The new 'Guidelines for the Work of German Anti-Fascists in the Area of Germany Occupied by the Red Army', drawn up by Ulbricht and approved by Dimitrov on 5 April 1945, assumed that no central authority would exist upon Nazism's collapse and that political organizations would not be allowed for some time. In those circumstances, the *émigré* KPD cadres would have to build an anti-fascist regime from the ground up via communist-sponsored local administrations.<sup>39</sup>

Much as Soviet officials were eager to reap the potential benefits of continued inter-Allied collaboration, they were also aware of its inherent limitations. Their commitment to the wartime alliance was tempered by an implacable hostility to capitalism inspired by the teachings of Lenin and hardened by the prospect of Anglo-American

<sup>36</sup> "Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland bis zum Sturz Hitlers"—Handschriftliche Ausarbeitung Wilhelm Florins', *Nach Hitler*, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 398–404.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Alexander Fischer, *Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik*, 135, 138.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–53.

domination in Europe after Germany's defeat. Indeed, a new spectre was already stalking the Kremlin: a post-war Germany under pre-dominant Western control. Addressing the Work Commission on 6 March 1944, Florin warned:

Reactionary circles in England and in the United States are eager to bring Germany under their imperialist control. . . . They will try to persuade their governments to go to Germany with bacon and loans, [and] with low reparation demands in order to lure our people into a Western orientation, only to use it once again with the help of the German reactionaries against the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup>

Since then, the Kremlin's unease about the strategic goals of Britain and the United States had grown. By March 1945, the military situation in Europe had shifted dramatically. The Soviet winter offensives, which in the days of the Yalta Conference had reached the River Oder, less than 100 miles from Berlin, had become bogged down in fierce fighting in Silesia and Pomerania. On the Western front, by contrast, General Eisenhower's Anglo-American armies, which had landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944, had succeeded in crossing the Rhine after a string of military reverses and had finally begun to pour into Germany at high speed, a breakthrough which Stalin attributed to Western collusion with the German foe. At the same time, news of soundings by an SS-general, Karl Wolff, for a surrender of German forces in Italy had rekindled Stalin's concern over the possibility of a separate peace in the West and, after a bout of Soviet-Western recriminations, prompted him to speed up the Red Army's drive on Berlin. Soviet misgivings about Western intentions were compounded, after the *Wehrmacht's* unconditional surrender at Eisenhower's Reims headquarters on 7 May 1945, by British attempts to use the disgraced Dönitz government as a basis for future German central administrations, and by reports that some Wehrmacht units were being maintained as labour brigades under British command.<sup>41</sup>

On the whole, however, the international situation at the end of the war looked encouraging for Stalin and his lieutenants. At Teheran, they had secured Western acquiescence to their demand for the Curzon Line

<sup>40</sup> "Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland", *Nach Hitler*, 143–4.

<sup>41</sup> William O. McCagg, *Stalin Embattled 1943–1948* (Detroit, Mich., 1978), 52, 171. Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and his Era* (2nd edn., London, 1989), 611–12. Boris Meissner, *Rußland die Westmächte und Deutschland: Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik 1943–1953* (2nd edn., Hamburg, 1954), 56–9.

as the new Soviet–Polish frontier, gaining a free hand to move Poland westwards at Germany’s expense. Their victorious armies stood in the heart of Europe and had captured Berlin, viewed in Moscow as the main battleground for Germany’s political future.<sup>42</sup> The Allied zonal protocol, agreed at the EAC in September 1944 and confirmed at Yalta, assigned them supreme authority over the designated Eastern occupation zone (which incorporated the rich agricultural land to the east of the River Elbe) as well as the Eastern sector of Berlin, ensuring that 40 per cent of pre-1937 German territory (Germany minus Austria and the Sudetenland) and 36 per cent of the German population would end up under their control.<sup>43</sup>

The prospects for a further expansion of Soviet influence also looked favourable from Moscow’s point of view. A prolonged economic slump was predicted for the West European countries by Eugen Varga, the director of the Soviet ‘Institute of World Economics and World Politics’ and Stalin’s main economic adviser. His forecasts raised the hope that the policies of these countries might be pushed to the left by their own governments, expected to be composed of broad-based coalitions with communist participation. Indeed, in April 1944 the French communists had entered the exiled provisional government of General de Gaulle and received two cabinet posts, paving the way for their Italian comrades to join the government of Marshall Badoglio.<sup>44</sup> Stalin himself had mentioned the possibility of a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism within the framework of bourgeois democratic regimes. In a conversation with Tito in April 1945, he explained: ‘Today socialism is possible even under the English monarchy. Revolution is no longer necessary everywhere.’ A man who epitomized communism’s schizophrenic attitude towards capitalism at its most extreme, Stalin was deeply afraid of the West yet ultimately convinced that capitalism was doomed.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *Russia’s Road*, 122–32. Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten: Die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* (Munich, 1996), 33–47. Alexander Fischer, ‘“Antifaschistisch-demokratischer” Neubeginn 1945: Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik am Ende des “Dritten Reiches”’, *DA* 8/4 (1975), 363–4.

<sup>43</sup> Tony Sharp, *The Wartime Alliance and the Zonal Division of Germany* (Oxford, 1975), 56–119. Jochen Laufer, ‘Die UdSSR und die Zoneneinteilung Deutschlands (1943/44)’, *ZfG* 43/4 (1995), 324–31.

<sup>44</sup> William O. McCagg, *Stalin Embattled*, 31–2. Wilfried Loth, ‘Frankreichs Kommunisten und der Beginn des Kalten Krieges: Die Entlassung der kommunistischen Minister im Mai 1947’, *VfZG* 26/1 (1978), 12–24.

<sup>45</sup> Milovan Djilas, *Conversations*, 104. On Stalin’s schizophrenic attitude towards the West, see Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (London, 1991), 280. One of

There was a general feeling in Moscow that the Soviet Union would emerge from the war with added international weight as a result of being 'militarily the strongest power in the world' as well as a major economic force whose strength had increased 'disproportionately'. Florin, for one, was convinced that, after the war, the Soviet Union would be able to 'work for the triumph of the workers in many countries far more effectively than the Comintern [ever] could'.<sup>46</sup> These expectations were fuelled by the belief that the Soviet Union enjoyed great popularity among ordinary people in the West, and that anti-communist sentiments were confined to the West's reactionary social *élites*. Briefing the Work Commission on Soviet post-war strategy, Florin expressed the view that 'all honest people' in the West recognized the enormous debt which the world owed to the Soviet Union as a result of its heroic struggle against Nazism. He even claimed that this recognition was reflected in growing opposition to the 'reactionary circles in England and in the United States'.<sup>47</sup>

Hopes for a leftward shift in public opinion also existed with regard to Germany, where the successful expansion of Soviet influence depended heavily on the KPD. In his lecture of 6 March 1944, Florin reminded his fellow comrades that it was their duty to save Germany from being lured into a Western orientation:

We must prevent the German reactionaries from selling themselves to foreign imperialists, and [we must] prevent the reactionaries of the world from turning the collapsed imperialist Hitler-state that is Germany into a semi-colony controlled by Anglo-American trusts.

The challenge facing the KPD in this volatile situation would be to lay the foundations for a left-wing and, more importantly, pro-Soviet regime without antagonizing the Western Allies, in other words: 'to push the internal restructuring of Germany as far ahead as the international situation and the balance of power within Germany allows'. To this end, the KPD would have to transform itself from a radical

Stalin's successors, Khrushchev, has testified to the widespread belief among Soviet officials at the end of the war that 'Everyone would take the path from capitalism to socialism'. See *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, trans. and ed. by Jerrold L. Schecter with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov (Boston, Mass., 1990), 100.

<sup>46</sup> "Die Rolle der Sowjetunion und die nationale Frage in Deutschland"—Handschriftliche Notizen Wilhelm Piecks, *Nach Hitler*, 173. "Die Rolle der Sowjetunion und die nationale Frage der Deutschen"—Handschriftliche Ausarbeitung Wilhelm Florins', *ibid.*, 186.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 185. "Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland", *ibid.*, 141.



protest movement into a respectable ‘people’s party’ (*‘Volkspartei’*) and assume political leadership by splitting the German bourgeoisie, whose anti-Western wing was to be drawn into a communist-led ‘national front’. Florin was confident that this strategy would succeed. He insisted that the prospect of domination by Anglo-American capitalism was already dividing the German bourgeoisie, and he instructed his fellow comrades: ‘We must skilfully deepen this rift . . . without endangering the alliance between the three states.’<sup>48</sup>

### THE KPD’S RETURN TO THE GERMAN POLITICAL ARENA

The main vehicles for the KPD’s ambitions were three clandestine ‘Initiative Groups’ dispatched to Germany in the dying days of the war. The first of these groups, made up of ten hand-picked KPD *émigrés*, left Moscow for Berlin on 30 April 1945 under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht. The second group, headed by Anton Ackermann, departed for Saxony on the following day. On 6 May, a third group, led by Gustav Sobottka, set off for Mecklenburg and the towns on the Baltic coast. Attached to the three Red Army fronts (the 1st Belorussian front, the 1st Ukrainian front, and the 2nd Belorussian front), these groups entered their designated areas of operation alongside the victorious Soviet troops.<sup>49</sup> On arrival, they found a country in ruins and a society in a state of total collapse. Allied bombing had laid waste to most cities, while vast rural areas had been devastated by battle during the *Wehrmacht’s* retreat. All administration had broken down and such order as existed was the result of spontaneous measures taken by the local Red Army commanders to avert the threat of famine and disease. Adding to the chaos was the presence of millions of refugees from Germany’s Eastern territories who had fled westwards before the advancing Soviet troops. Assigned to the 7th Section of the ‘Main Political Administration of the Red Army’ (GlavPURKKA) and assisted by 70 fellow KPD *émigrés* as well as 300 members of the NKFD, the Initiative Groups immediately began to organize the first

<sup>48</sup> ‘“Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland”’, 143, 145, 158.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Spurensuche: Vierzig Jahre nach ‘Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder’* (Cologne, 1992), 87–147. Gerhard Keiderling, ‘Wir sind die Staatspartei: Die KPD-Bezirksorganisation Groß-Berlin April 1945—April 1946 (Berlin, 1997), 57–62.

clear-up and advise the Soviet authorities in the appointment of anti-fascist local administrations.<sup>50</sup>

In resuming their activities in Germany, the KPD leaders focused their efforts on Berlin, so as to gain a firm foothold where it was likely to matter most. Priority was given to the Western districts of the city to ensure that by the time these districts were to be handed over to the Western Allies, in accordance with the Yalta Agreement, the groundwork for the regime envisaged by the KPD would be firmly in place. Spearheading the KPD's onslaught on the German capital was Walter Ulbricht, the uncharismatic yet tireless former head of the KPD's Berlin-Brandenburg organization.<sup>51</sup> A stickler for detail who left nothing to chance, Ulbricht had risen from the party's ranks to become, in effect, the KPD's second-in-command and the right-hand man of Pieck, especially after the sudden death of Florin, in July 1944.<sup>52</sup>

The political void left behind by the Nazi regime ensured that Ulbricht's trail-blazing mission did not take long to produce results. By 9 May 1945, little more than a week after the arrival of the 'Ulbricht Group', mayors and local councils had been appointed in all districts of Berlin. On 19 May, a city council, the *Magistrat*, was formally installed. In the same fashion, new local administrations were established in the other areas of the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ) by the 'Ackermann' and 'Sobottka' groups. In keeping with their instructions as well as procedures throughout Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, the Initiative Groups went out of their way to give the new administrations an immaculate democratic appearance. While there was a rigorous purge of Nazis, the traditional structure of local government was retained and, more importantly, the participation of social democratic and bourgeois representatives actively sought. At the same time, however, great care was taken to ensure that the key posts were filled with loyal communists, many of whom were recent returnees from Soviet exile and specially

<sup>50</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 16–20, 252–4. John P. Nettle, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany* (London, 1951), 56–7. Jörg Morré, *Hinter den Kulissen*, 158–77. Michael Balfour and John Mair, *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria 1945–1946* (London, 1956), 117–23. Dieter Marc Schneider, 'Renaissance und Zerstörung der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone', *VfZG* 37/3 (1989), 457–97.

<sup>51</sup> Mario Frank, *Walter Ulbricht: Eine deutsche Biografie* (Berlin, 2001), 57–93. Carola Stern, *Ulbricht: Eine politische Biographie* (Cologne, 1964), 35–70.

<sup>52</sup> Ernst Wollweber, 'Aus Erinnerungen: Ein Portrait Walter Ulbrichts', *BzG* 32/3 (1990), 351–5. Florin had died in a Moscow hospital during a stomach operation. See 'Nach Hitler', 405.

trained for their new role.<sup>53</sup> The purpose of this approach was summed up most astutely by Ulbricht himself in his famous remark, recalled by Wolfgang Leonhard, a member of his Initiative Group, that ‘it should look democratic, but everything must be in our hands’.<sup>54</sup>

Ulbricht’s insistence on communist domination of the new administrations was complemented by his refusal to tolerate any political activity outside them. One of his first actions in Berlin was to order a crack-down on the independent ‘Anti-Fascist Committees’ which had sprung up in the final days of the war (ironically in response to the NKFD’s propaganda) and on the dozens of left-wing firebrands who had leaped into action believing their hour had come, many of them wearing ‘red armbands with the inscription “KPD”’.<sup>55</sup> Ulbricht’s approach reflected an awareness that, if the KPD’s strategy was to succeed, all challenges to the leading role claimed by the Initiative Groups had to be nipped in the bud, especially those coming from within the party itself. Indeed, the Work Commission had ruled that, upon their return to Germany, the ‘Muscovites’ must re-establish themselves as the KPD’s only legitimate leadership and rebuild the party’s shattered organization along strictly hierarchical lines.<sup>56</sup>

Added to this was the task of bringing the KPD’s rank and file into line with the party’s new orthodoxy. Because communists in Germany (who included 150,000–300,000 KPD members) had been largely cut off from their exiled leadership both before and during the war, many of them were not familiar with the popular front strategy, and those who were seldom appreciated its seeming support for bourgeois democracy. The resulting ideological confusion quickly convinced Ulbricht that the party’s membership would have to be retrained and that new members would have to be recruited to dilute the influence of intransigent hardliners. In a letter to Pieck, written on 17 May 1945, he explained: ‘We have to face up to the fact that the majority of our comrades is prone to

<sup>53</sup> Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht*, 23–32. ‘Gruppe Ulbricht’, 47–68.

<sup>54</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 440.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Rekonstruierte Notizen aus einem Bericht des Gen. Walter Ulbricht an Gen. Dimitroff vom 17. Mai 1945’, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>56</sup> Manfred Wilke, ‘Konzeptionen der KPD-Führung 1944/45 für das Parteiensystem der SBZ und der Beginn der Umsetzung’, *DA* 26/2 (1993), 254. On the leadership ambitions of the KPD’s Moscow *émigrés*, see also Peter Erler, ‘“Moskau-Kader” der KPD in der SBZ’, *Anatomie der Parteizentrale: Die KPD/SED auf dem Weg zur Macht*, ed. by Manfred Wilke (Berlin, 1998), 242–5. Peter Erler, ‘Heerschau und Einsatzplanung: Ein Dokument zur Kaderpolitik der SED aus dem Jahre 1944’, *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates: Beiträge und Analysen*, ed. by Klaus Schroeder (Berlin, 1994), 52–70.

sectarianism, and that we must change the membership of our party as soon as possible by admitting active anti-fascists who are now proving themselves through their work.<sup>57</sup> Such measures, of course, had to await the readmission of political parties on a formal basis, something the *émigré* KPD cadres had earlier been told not to expect for some time.<sup>58</sup> However, signs that the situation in Berlin was beginning to calm down, and that the members of other political parties were about to resume their work, soon brought the issue to a head. By late May 1945, several Red Army commanders had become convinced of the need to establish 'some kind of anti-fascist organization to guide the activities of the Germans towards the elimination of the ideology and legacy of fascism'. Pieck was informed that Ulbricht had 'raised the issue with Moscow', but had 'not yet received a reply'.<sup>59</sup>

Ulbricht's request struck a responsive chord with the Kremlin. On 26 May 1945, word came from Moscow 'that parties and trade union[s] are [now] permitted'. Ulbricht was told to prepare for the relaunch of the KPD and the readmission of other parties, such as the SPD and the old Centre Party (as an organization representing the bourgeoisie).<sup>60</sup> The Kremlin's sudden change of heart on the matter suggests that Stalin and his lieutenants had become more confident about their ability to see the KPD's programme through. They had initially feared that Nazism's hold on the German people might survive the Third Reich's collapse, but the absence of any underground Nazi activity seems to have laid those concerns to rest. The change may have come in response to a favourable report by A. I. Mikoyan, the Soviet Politburo member who had been touring Germany in the aftermath of its defeat, on the achievements of the Initiative Groups and the latest state of affairs in Berlin.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Walter Ulbricht, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, Vol. 2: 1933–1946, *Zusatzband* (Berlin, 1966), 205. For details on the KPD's membership figures, see Werner Müller, 'Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD)', *SBZ-Handbuch: Staatliche Verwaltungen, Parteien, gesellschaftliche Organisationen und ihre Führungskräfte in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands*, ed. by Martin Broszat and Hermann Weber (Munich, 1990), 441.

<sup>58</sup> In mid-May 1945 Ulbricht was still telling fellow communists 'that it would not be appropriate at this stage to commence with the establishment of the KPD'. 'Rekonstruierte Notizen aus einem Bericht des Gen. Walter Ulbricht an Gen. Dimitroff vom 17. Mai 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. See also, Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 402.

<sup>59</sup> 'Telegramm von der 1. Bjelorussischen Front', 26 May 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>60</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Fischer, 'Der Einfluß der SMAD auf das Parteiensystem in der SBZ am Beispiel der CDUD', *DA* 26/2 (1993), 266–7.

It was not until 4 June 1945, however, that the road to a formal communist bid for political leadership in post-Nazi Germany was finally cleared. On that day, the heads of the three Initiative Groups—Ulbricht, Ackermann, and Sobottka—secretly travelled to Moscow for a meeting with Stalin, who was joined by Molotov and Zhdanov. There, according to Pieck's private notes, the German comrades were told that their ZK must 'come out into the open' and issue a 'manifesto'. Its purpose would be to promote the KPD as the nucleus of a unified 'party of the workers' capable of enlisting support from other groups, such as the 'working peasants' and the 'intellectuals'. Confirming previous Soviet instructions, Stalin reminded the German comrades that their main task would be to guide the 'anti-fascist struggle' towards the 'completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution'.<sup>62</sup>

The Kremlin's decision to raise the stakes in the battle for long-term control over Germany appears to have been prompted by mounting concern over the policies of Britain and the United States. On 1 March 1945, Pieck had warned fellow comrades that the Western Allies would seek to create 'a counterweight against the growing influence of the S[oviet] U[nion]' by allowing 'reformist' SPD and trade union leaders in their zones 'to regain influence among the workers—at the expense of the communists'.<sup>63</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 12 April 1945, Soviet hopes for a common Allied policy towards post-war Germany had suffered a heavy blow through the death of President Roosevelt, whose pro-Soviet leanings had been regarded by communists as a safeguard against hostile American designs.<sup>64</sup> There was an uneasy feeling in Moscow that

<sup>62</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. See also, Jochen Laufer, '“Genossen, wie ist das Gesamtbild?”: Ackermann, Ulbricht und Sobottka in Moskau im Juni 1945', *DA* 29/3 (1996), 355–71. Most historians initially assumed that Pieck personally attended the meeting and that the notes represent a verbatim record of Stalin's remarks. (See Dietrich Staritz, 'Die SED, Stalin und die Gründung der DDR', 3–16. Rolf Badstübner, "“Beratungen”", 99–116. Manfred Wilke, "“Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben”: Entscheidung über die Zusammensetzung der Kader. Eine Niederschrift Piecks über ein Treffen Stalins mit der KPD-Führung', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 March 1991, 6.) However, there is strong evidence to suggest that Pieck, who still lived in Moscow at the time, was not present at the meeting, but was afterwards briefed about its proceedings by the leaders of the three Initiative Groups. (See Günter Benser, 'Quellenveröffentlichungen ja, doch so präzise wie möglich: Einwände gegen Interpretationen von Stalins Direktiven an KPD und SED', *Utopie kreativ* 11/1991, 101–7). For further details on this debate, see Heinrich Bodensieck, 'Wilhelm Piecks Moskauer Aufzeichnungen vom "4./6. 45": Ein Schlüssel-dokument für Stalins Deutschlandpolitik?', *Studien zur Geschichte der SBZ/DDR*, ed. by Alexander Fischer (Berlin, 1993), 38–41.

<sup>63</sup> "“Probleme des Kampfes für ein neues Deutschland”—Handschriftliche Disposition Wilhelm Piecks', *Nach Hitler*, 371.

<sup>64</sup> Robert H. McNeil, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (London, 1988), 250–1.

Soviet- and Western-occupied Germany might eventually drift apart. It was voiced by Stalin when, at his meeting with the heads of the three Initiative Groups, he hinted ominously: 'there will be 2 Germanies—notwithstanding the unity between the Allies'.<sup>65</sup>

Stalin's remark has been cited in support of the view that, as early as 1945, the division of Germany was a Soviet goal.<sup>66</sup> However, according to Pieck's notes, the Soviet dictator was referring to a 'prospect' rather than a plan.<sup>67</sup> Outlining his views on the German Question, Stalin explained that a 'plan for German dismemberment', providing for a 'division into North and South Germany' ('Rhineland—Bavaria with Austria'), had been proposed by Britain and the United States. His evident concern over Western efforts to create 'governments for Bavaria, Thuringia, Rhineland-Palatinate, [and the] Rhineland' suggests that he suspected the Western Allies of secretly carrying out the dismemberment plans discussed at Teheran in 1943, when Churchill and Roosevelt had proposed two different schemes for German dismemberment, both of which aimed at isolating Prussia and splitting up the remaining German territories into various smaller states in the North and South.<sup>68</sup> To counter the developments in the Western zones, Stalin ordered the creation of provincial governments in the East, and, in early July 1945, three *Länder* (Saxony, Mecklenburg, and Thuringia) as well as two provinces (Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg, both of which were converted into *Länder* in early 1947) were established in the SBZ, each headed by a German administration. However, the Soviet dictator stopped short of taking any decision likely to rule out German unity, advising the German comrades that it was 'not yet clear' whether a central German authority would eventually be created for the SBZ.<sup>69</sup>

Far from favouring such a solution, Stalin was evidently convinced that it would be both advantageous and feasible to establish a unified German state. To be sure, he himself had briefly toyed with the idea of German dismemberment and even proposed it to Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, who had visited him in Moscow in December 1941.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>66</sup> Manfred Wilke, '“Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben”', 6.

<sup>67</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>68</sup> *Teheran—Jalta—Potsdam: Die sowjetischen Protokolle von den Kriegskonferenzen der 'Großen Drei'*, ed. by Alexander Fischer (Cologne, 1968), 84–6.

<sup>69</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. On the establishment of the *Länder* in the SBZ, see Barbara Fait, 'Landesregierungen und -verwaltungen', *SBZ-Handbuch*, 73–9.

<sup>70</sup> Anthony Eden, *The Eden Memoirs*, Vol. 2: *The Reckoning* (London, 1965), 322–41.

Yet, since then, his enthusiasm for such an extreme solution had cooled. At his meeting with the heads of the three Initiative Groups, whom he told—somewhat disingenuously—that he had always opposed Western dismemberment plans, he insisted that there was no alternative to a united Germany, stressing that ‘German unity’ must be secured ‘through [a] unified KPD—[a] unified ZK—[a] unified party of the workers’.<sup>71</sup> His plans may have reflected the view, expressed to Churchill and Roosevelt at Teheran, that German dismemberment could not be maintained indefinitely in the face of the German people’s desire to reunite.<sup>72</sup> On the assumption that German national unity would eventually prevail, Stalin was bound to conclude that the best strategy for the Soviet Union would be to harness German patriotic sentiments by posing as a champion of the German people and its legitimate national aims. Soviet efforts to implement such a strategy were already under way. At Yalta, in early 1945, Soviet officials had strongly supported the principle of dismemberment, securing a reference to it in the Allied terms of surrender. But they had subsequently changed their position and effectively scuppered the inter-Allied ‘Dismemberment Commission’ set up at the conference by announcing, on 26 March 1945, that they did not regard the conference’s decision on German dismemberment as an obligatory plan.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, they had adopted a more conciliatory tone in their pronouncements on Germany’s future and ostentatiously silenced Ilya Ehrenburg, the most strident anti-German voice raised in the Soviet Union during the war.<sup>74</sup> In a victory address to the Soviet people delivered on 9 May 1945, a day after the holding of a second ceremony of surrender at the Red Army’s Berlin headquarters, Stalin himself had declared that the Soviet Union had ‘no intention to dismember or destroy Germany’.<sup>75</sup>

Converted by Ackermann into a formal *Aufruf*, and approved by Stalin at another meeting with the heads of the three Initiative Groups, this time in the presence of Pieck,<sup>76</sup> the KPD’s new programme as

<sup>71</sup> ‘Beratung am 4. 6. 1945’, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>72</sup> Heinrich Bodensieck, ‘Moskauer Aufzeichnungen’, 44.

<sup>73</sup> As an explanation for Moscow’s sudden about-turn, Lothar Kettenacker has suggested that, far from favouring German dismemberment, Soviet officials were interested in the idea only as a re-insurance against a separate peace in the West. See Lothar Kettenacker, *Krieg zur Friedenssicherung: Die Deutschlandplanung der britischen Regierung während des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen, 1989), 494–502.

<sup>74</sup> William O. McCagg, *Stalin Embattled*, 173–4. Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten*, 113–24, 155–67.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Boris Meissner, *Rußland*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Beratung am 4. 6. 1945’, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. Recalling the event, Pieck later noted: ‘7. 6./[meeting] with Stalin/completion of the *Aufruf*’, undated notes, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/23.

outlined by the Kremlin was finally issued on 11 June 1945 to mark the party's official return to the German political arena.<sup>77</sup> A few days before, on 5 June, the Allied commanders-in-chief had gathered in Berlin and assumed supreme authority in Germany, to be exercised individually, in their respective zones of occupation, and jointly, via the Allied Control Council (ACC) (whose decisions were to be unanimous), 'in matters affecting Germany as a whole'.<sup>78</sup> No sooner had the Allied control machinery been established than British and American troops began to pull out of their ceasefire positions inside the designated Soviet zone while preparing to take over their Berlin sectors from the Red Army, which, until then, had occupied the German capital on its own. On 11 July, an inter-Allied *Kommandatura* assumed control over the administration of Berlin following the arrival in the city of the British and American garrisons. Shortly afterwards, the EAC finally reached agreement on the zonal protocol, which had been amended to provide for the inclusion of France in the occupation regime, and on 30 July the first meeting of the quadripartite ACC was held in Berlin.<sup>79</sup> Throughout this period of transition, however, the Soviet Union had retained the initiative in shaping Germany's political future by becoming the first Allied power to readmit German political organizations.

Announced in the famous 'Order No. 2', on 10 June 1945, the readmission of political parties in Berlin and the SBZ came only one day after the establishment of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD).<sup>80</sup> Set up in accordance with inter-Allied agreements to assume the functions of military government previously exercised by the local Red Army commanders, the SMAD was the supreme Allied authority in the SBZ and the linchpin of Soviet control over Germany's post-war development. In the latter role, the SMAD was responsible for guiding the KPD towards attainment of its Soviet-ordained goals, not least by acting as a conduit for the Kremlin's instructions to the KPD leadership. Orders, often issued by Stalin himself, were relayed to the SMAD by wire

<sup>77</sup> The declaration was published in the first issue of the KPD's official newspaper, *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, on 13 June 1945, having been read out in the late hours of the previous day in a broadcast by Radio Berlin. See 'Nach Hitler', 123.

<sup>78</sup> *Documents on Germany under Occupation 1945–1954*, selected and ed. by Beate Ruhm v. Oppen (London, 1955), 29–37. See also Gunther Mai, *Der Alliierte Kontrollrat in Deutschland 1945–1948: Alliierte Einheit—deutsche Teilung?* (München, 1995), 40–9.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Sharp, *Alliance*, 165–203. Gunther Mai, 'Deutschlandpolitische Entscheidungen im Alliierten Kontrollrat 1945–1948', *Die deutsche Frage*, 29–38.

<sup>80</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 20–4. Jan Foitzik, *Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD) 1945–1949: Struktur und Funktion* (Berlin, 1999), 97–114.



or telephone before being passed on to the German comrades at high-level bilateral meetings.<sup>81</sup> Following his return to Germany, on 1 July 1945, Pieck was a regular guest at the SMAD's headquarters in the Berlin borough of Karlshorst. The same was true for the tireless Ulbricht, who was especially anxious to ensure that all SMAD directives were faithfully carried out.<sup>82</sup> Strengthening the close collaboration between the German comrades and their Soviet minders at the SMAD was a history of mutual contacts reaching back to the height of the war. Thus the members of the SMAD's 'Department of Information' had been recruited mainly from the GlavPURKKA and many of them, including their influential head, Colonel S. I. Tiulpanov, had been closely acquainted with Pieck, Ulbricht, and Ackermann since their joint involvement in the founding of the NKFD.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, despite their lack of formal authority and dependence on Soviet backing, Pieck and his colleagues were not without means of influencing the SMAD. As members of the KPD's Moscow-trained élite, they enjoyed the trust of their Soviet counterparts, who often took them into their confidence and, it seems, treated them almost as equals. Pieck, in particular, commanded genuine respect in Karlshorst because of his charisma and former role within the Comintern.<sup>84</sup>

Soviet officials and their KPD allies were aware that the absence of anti-communist opposition encountered by the Initiative Groups was unlikely to endure and that more testing times lay ahead for the German communists. Pieck warned his colleagues on his return from Moscow that their struggle was far from won:

Nearly all the reactionaries, not just the utterly discredited Nazi bigwigs, have currently gone to ground, but they are unlikely to remain there for long. They

<sup>81</sup> Stefan Creuzberger, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsmacht und das politische System der SBZ* (Cologne, 1996), 40–1. Michael Kubina, 'Der Aufbau des zentralen Parteiapparates der KPD 1945–1946', *Anatomie der Parteizentrale*, 102–107. The SMAD was directly responsible to both the CPSU(b)'s Politburo and the Soviet government, the Council of People's Commissars. See Günter Benser, *Die KPD im Jahre der Befreiung: Vorbereitung und Aufbau der legalen Kommunistischen Massenpartei (Jahreswende 1944/1945 bis Herbst 1945)* (Berlin, 1985), 140–1.

<sup>82</sup> Franz Dahlem, *Erinnerungen*, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, SGY 30/1078. Wolfgang Leonhard, 'Der Anfang vom Ende aus betrachtet: Gespräch mit Wolfgang Leonhard', *LiLi Korrespondenz* 1991, 48–50.

<sup>83</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 322–27. See also Sergej I. Tiulpanov, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege: 1945–1949. Erinnerungen eines Offiziers der Sowjetarmee* (Berlin, 1986), 14–22, 42–3.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Erler, "'Moskau-Kader'", 234–35. Stefan Doernberg, 'Zum Zusammenwirken von SMAD und KPD bzw. SED', *Zum deutschen Neuanfang 1945–1949: Tatsachen—Probleme—Ereignisse—Irrwege. Die Arbeiterbewegung und die Entstehung der beiden deutschen Staaten*, ed. by Hans-Joachim Krusch (Bonn, 1993), 313–14.

know just as well as we [do] what is at stake in the coming weeks and months, namely who will be calling the shots in the new Germany . . . .<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, Florin had warned the members of the Work Commission that, after the end of the war, the reactionary German bourgeoisie would try to reassert itself 'under a new mask, regrouped and with new, untarnished leaders'.<sup>86</sup> Mindful of their ambitious agenda, the German comrades were determined not to waste any time in carrying out their programme in the SBZ, so as to bring about lasting political change in at least one part of Germany before the window of opportunity created by Nazism's collapse was to close.

The implementation of the land reform is a case in point. Identified in the Action Programme as one of the KPD's future priorities, and confirmed as such by Stalin on 4 June 1945,<sup>87</sup> the campaign against the *Junkers*, the large East-Elbian landowners, became the focus of the KPD's activities from August 1945, after the end of the Potsdam Conference of the Big Three. In September 1945, the communist-dominated *Land* and provincial administrations, starting with Saxony-Anhalt, issued formal decrees for a land reform. At the same time, the KPD's propaganda machine changed into top gear to generate public support for this measure and use it for the party's own good. Although the communists had apparently hoped for greater enthusiasm on the part of the peasants, their efforts were not in vain. During the next few weeks all private landowners with more than 100 hectares lost their land, which was then used to create some 500,000 new peasant farms.<sup>88</sup> Such was the determination of the *émigré* KPD cadres to change the balance of power in Germany that they ignored warnings by their own agricultural experts about the adverse effects an immediate land reform would have on the autumn harvest. Asked by V. S. Semenov, the highly influential political adviser to the Soviet

<sup>85</sup> Franz Dahlem, *Erinnerungen*, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, SGY 30/1078.

<sup>86</sup> "Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland", *'Nach Hitler'*, 148.

<sup>87</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>88</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 150–4. Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Problemdruck und Ressourcenverbrauch: Wirtschaftliche Auswirkungen der Bodenreform in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1952', *Wirtschaftliche Folgen des Krieges in der SBZ/DDR*, ed. by Christoph Buchheim (Baden-Baden, 1995), 298–302. Jochen Laufer, 'Die UdSSR und die Einleitung der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone', *'Junkerland in Bauernhand?' Durchführung, Auswirkungen und Stellenwert der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone*, ed. by Arnd Bauerkämper (Stuttgart, 1996), 21–35.

commander-in-chief,<sup>89</sup> what he thought about expert advice in favour of postponing the land reform, Pieck replied that such advice was ‘correct economically, but not from a political point of view’. He explained that too much was at stake to risk further delays, adding: ‘Time is short’.<sup>90</sup>

### KPD ‘BLOC POLITICS’ AND THE ROLE OF THE NON-COMMUNIST PARTIES

The KPD’s bid for political leadership in post-Nazi Germany enjoyed a propitious start. A SMAD official dispatched to Moscow from Berlin told Pieck on 26 June 1945, two weeks after the official re-establishment of the KPD, that the party’s *Aufruf* had been ‘well received’. A confidential KPD memorandum would later conclude: ‘When the *Aufruf* of the Central Committee of the KP[D] was published on 11 June 1945, it was enthusiastically received in all sections of Berlin’s population... Particularly strong was its impact on the Social Democratic Party.’<sup>91</sup> Eschewing any reference to socialism and calling for a collective effort to eradicate Nazism, restore decent living conditions, and complete the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1848, this declaration had been carefully phrased with a view to disarming all potential opponents of the KPD. Rather than being a party political programme in the usual sense, the *Aufruf* was a platform for the so-called ‘Bloc of Anti-Fascist Democratic Parties’ set up on 14 July 1945, after the founding under Soviet auspices of the SPD, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)—a new party for Protestants and Catholics whose aim was to replace the old Catholic Centre Party—and the small Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Stefan Kreuzberger, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsmacht*, 34–5.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Besprechung mit Semjonow vom 28. 8. 1945’, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Mitteilung von Oberstl. Selesnow’, 26 June 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. ‘ZK-Kaderabteilung: “Bericht über das Verhältnis KPD-SPD in Berlin”’, October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631.

<sup>92</sup> Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht*, 45–53. Frederike Sattler, ‘Bündnispolitik als politisch-organisatorisches Problem des zentralen Parteiapparates der KPD 1945/46’, *Anatomie der Parteizentrale*, 136–43. Gerhard Keiderling, ‘Scheimpluralismus und Blockparteien: Die KPD und die Gründung der Parteien in Berlin 1945’, *VfZG* 45/2 (1997), 273–94. Gerhard Papke, ‘Die Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und DDR 1945–1952’, *Bürgerliche Parteien in der SBZ/DDR: Zur Geschichte von CDU, LDP(D), DBD und NDPD 1945 bis 1953*, ed. by Jürgen Frölich (Cologne, 1994), 25–45. Manfred Agethen, ‘Die CDU in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1953’, *ibid.*, 47–72.

In restoring the party spectrum of the Weimar Republic, the communists were guided by the belief that Germany's traditional political *milieus* had survived the war and that, rather than hampering the re-establishment of the old parties, the KPD should seek to 'reduce their mass appeal'.<sup>93</sup> This was to be achieved by means of the Anti-Fascist Bloc, an embryonic legislative assembly in the popular-front mould which, operating as it did under a unanimity rule, ensured that no decisions could be taken against the KPD. Since none of the other parties dared to oppose the KPD for fear of being denounced as fascist, the Anti-Fascist Bloc effectively harnessed all parties to the communist transformation programme, thereby laying the groundwork for a communist-led German government based in Berlin. When the Potsdam Conference ended, in early August 1945, the prototype of such a government was already in place following the establishment in late July 1945 of eleven KPD-dominated German Central Administrations—for transport, information, energy, trade, industry, agriculture, finance, labour and social security, education, justice, and health. (Three more central administrations—for statistics, German refugees and internal affairs, and for sequestration and confiscation—were added between October 1945 and July 1946.)<sup>94</sup>

Soviet officials and their KPD allies were hoping that the reach of the new political institutions created in Berlin would not be confined to the SBZ.<sup>95</sup> In doing so, they were encouraged by the Potsdam Agreement, which closely followed a draft American proposal whose wording was compatible with the KPD's programme and, it seems, known to the Kremlin before the conference began.<sup>96</sup> Under the terms of this agreement, Germany was to be subject to complete demilitarization and denazification, while preparations were to be made 'for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis'. To this end, 'democratic political parties' were to be 'allowed and encouraged

<sup>93</sup> "Die Lage und die Aufgaben in Deutschland", *Nach Hitler*, 149.

<sup>94</sup> Bernd Niedbalski, 'Deutsche Zentralverwaltungen und Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission (DWK): Ansätze zur zentralen Wirtschaftsplanung in der SBZ 1945–1948', *VfZG* 33/3 (1985), 456–8.

<sup>95</sup> According to Tjulpanov, Soviet officials regarded the Anti-Fascist Bloc as 'an organ whose decisions were significant not only for the Soviet occupation zone, but for all zones'. Sergej I. Tjulpanow, 'Die Rolle der Sowjetischen Militäradministration im demokratischen Deutschland', *50 Jahre Triumph des Marxismus–Leninismus: Die Große Sozialistische Oktoberrevolution und die Entwicklung des Marxismus–Leninismus*, ed. by the Parteihochschule 'Karl Marx' beim ZK der SED (Berlin, 1967), 56. See also, Richard C. Raack, 'Stalin Plans his Post-war Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History* 28/1 (1993), 53–73.

<sup>96</sup> Rolf Badstübner, 'Zum Problem', 581.

throughout Germany', while the German economy was to be 'decentralized for the purpose of eliminating the present excessive concentration of economic power...'. Although the agreement made no reference to a central German government, it nevertheless provided for the creation of 'certain essential central German administrative departments' (in fields such as finance, transport, communications, foreign trade, and industry) which were to operate 'under the direction of the Control Council'.<sup>97</sup>

Since the communists thought that the Potsdam Agreement would hold and that it would constitute Germany's post-war political framework, it was not unreasonable for them to assume that in moving towards an anti-fascist regime, the Western zones would eventually follow Berlin's lead. Franz Dahlem, a member of the newly formed secretariat of the KPD's ZK and one of the five most senior KPD figures, was confident that such a development would take place.<sup>98</sup> Addressing a conference of KPD functionaries on 5 August 1945, he proclaimed: 'What we have now achieved in the area occupied by the Soviet Union will be extended across the whole of Germany.'<sup>99</sup>

Underpinning these hopes was the belief that, as the party most consistently opposed to the regime that had made Nazism possible, the KPD would find itself in a strong position throughout Germany. Speaking at a conference of KPD functionaries from Berlin on 25 June 1945, Ulbricht suggested that, after the experience of the Third Reich, 'millions of people' were at last realizing the enormous dangers inherent in the 'old imperialist approach'. He added that the KPD could also expect to benefit from the disastrous social consequences of Hitler's war, which had 'thrown middle-class men and women out of their normal way of life'.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Pieck had told fellow KPD *émigrés* in March 1945 that the collapse of the Third Reich was a 'great opportunity' for the KPD. One reason for this was that German society had changed dramatically since 1933, especially as a result of the bourgeoisie

<sup>97</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers. The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference) 1945*, Vol. II (Washington, DC, 1960), 1502–4.

<sup>98</sup> The other members of the Secretariat were Pieck, Ulbricht, Ackermann, and Paul Merker. However, Merker did not return from exile in Mexico until mid-1946, so that the Secretariat was composed of only four *de facto* members during the nine months of its existence. See *Dokumente zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Bewegung in Deutschland, Reihe 1945/1946*, Vol. 1, 24.

<sup>99</sup> 'Protokoll der Konferenz verantwortlicher Parteiarbeiter (Mecklenburgs) am 5. 8. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>100</sup> Walter Ulbricht, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, Vol. 2: 1933–1946 (Berlin, 1953), 439.

having been ruined financially and women having entered the workforce *en masse*. The most powerful agent of political change, however, would be the disillusionment of the masses, not only with Nazism but also with the representatives of the old Weimar regime:

Above all it will be the political experiences which the masses have had during that period [—] with the Hitler regime and the Nazi party, [but] also with the old bourgeois parties and [with] their leaders [—] that will strongly influence the political re-orientation of the masses and bring about [some] great surprises with regard to their party-political preferences.<sup>101</sup>

More specifically, there were hopes that the KPD would at last succeed in gaining the leadership of the working masses, the most progressive social class according to Marxist theory, by eclipsing its arch rival, the SPD. The idea of eliminating social democratic competition had been central to the communist popular-front strategy ever since its conception in the 1930s. Since then, however, the KPD's assumptions about the strength the SPD would be able to muster in post-Nazi Germany had undergone a dramatic change. Towards the end of the war, leading communists were openly questioning whether the SPD would be able to reconstitute itself as a proper mass organization. Florin, addressing the Work Commission on 10 April 1944, was in no doubt: 'We will be able', he confidently predicted, 'to prevent that.'<sup>102</sup> Stalin seems to have been of a similar mind. According to Pieck, he told the heads of the three Initiative Groups on 4 June 1945 that the SPD was 'extremely fragmented', with a majority of its members being 'in favour of [working class] unity'.<sup>103</sup>

The confusion surrounding the SPD's return to the German political arena strengthened the KPD leaders in their belief that the one-time leading workers' party would be an easy prey for a reconstructed KPD. Thus many social democrats were initially prepared to forgo the re-founding of their party in favour of the immediate creation of a unified workers' party through a merger with the KPD. It was only in response to the KPD's persistent rebuffs that a circle of senior social democrats in Berlin responded to the SMAD's 'Order No. 2' by constituting themselves as the SPD's *Zentralausschuß* (ZA) and releasing

<sup>101</sup> "Politischorganisatorische Probleme beim Wiederaufbau der Partei"—Handschriftliche Disposition Wilhelm Piecks', *Nach Hitler*, 377.

<sup>102</sup> "Alle illegalen Parteien und Gruppen sollen sich rasch in einem Kampfblock vereinigen."—Handschriftliche Ausarbeitung Wilhelm Florins', *ibid.*, 160.

<sup>103</sup> 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

their founding declaration on 15 June 1945.<sup>104</sup> Its content, with its commitment to sweeping nationalization, convinced Ulbricht that 'the supporters of a strong anti-fascist bloc have decisive influence'. 'They are trying', he noted gleefully, 'to appear more radical than we.'<sup>105</sup> Further SPD appeals for an immediate amalgamation of the two parties met with a lukewarm response from the KPD, resulting only in a limited two-party arrangement, the so-called '*Aktionseinheit*' ('unity of action'), which involved regular bilateral meetings with the aim of preparing the ground for a future merger, and strongly favoured the more firmly established KPD.<sup>106</sup>

Communist hostility to the idea of an immediate merger has generally been attributed to tactical considerations. Thus historians have argued that, in the summer of 1945, the KPD leadership had yet to reassert its authority over the party's rank and file as well as recruit and train new cadres, so as to get the better of the more loosely organized SPD and dominate a future unified party. They have also suggested that it was in the KPD's interest to give the ZA more time to consolidate its leadership of the SPD throughout Germany to prevent that party from splitting when the final decision for unity would be made.<sup>107</sup> These considerations were indeed cited as the KPD's chief motives by Dahlem when he addressed KPD functionaries on 5 August 1945. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the KPD leaders were worried about their ability to control a merger in view of the greater numerical strength traditionally enjoyed by the SPD. Explaining why the KPD leadership had opted against the immediate creation of a unified workers' party, contrary to the wishes of 'many communists and social democrats in all parts of the country', Dahlem stressed that the KPD's reconstruction was still at an early stage. At the end of the war communists from different backgrounds had come together, 'comrades, who have remained stuck in the attitudes of 1932/33, which were condemned by comrades Dimitrov and Pieck at the 7th World

<sup>104</sup> Andreas Malycha, 'Der Zentrallausschuß der SPD und der gesellschaftliche Neubeginn im Nachkriegsdeutschland', *ZfG* 38/1 (1990), 584–7.

<sup>105</sup> 'Telegramm von Walter Ulbricht vom 19. Juni 1945' (to Pieck); SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629.

<sup>106</sup> Frederike Sattler, 'Bündnispolitik als politisch-organisatorisches Problem', 132–6. Manfred Teresiak, 'Vor 50 Jahren: Verschmelzung von KPD und SPD. Das Projekt Berlin', *DA* 29/2 (1996), 216–17.

<sup>107</sup> For an overview of this debate, see Dietrich Staritz, 'Zur Gründung der SED: Forschungsstand, Kontroversen, offene Fragen', *Einheitsfront—Einheitspartei: Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in Ost- und Westeuropa 1944–1948*, ed. by Dietrich Staritz and Hermann Weber (Cologne, 1989), 41–5.

Congress, and comrades who understand the policies of today', in particular 'those comrades who [have] returned from the Soviet Union [and] who [have] had the best insights'. As a result, the party had yet to be forged into a stable and ideologically coherent unit as a prerequisite for leading the united front of the workers. As for the KPD's main rival, Dahlem claimed that the SPD was in a 'pitiful state'. However, while he expressed the view that 'absorbing the left-wing social democrats would be easy', he gave a warning that such a move would fall short of eliminating the SPD because some social democrats were still advocating 'an anti-Soviet, anti-communist policy'.<sup>108</sup>

When these comments were made, in late summer 1945, the period of swift KPD victories ushered in by the arrival of the Initiative Groups was drawing to a close. A first stocktaking memorandum, drafted by Dahlem on 16 October, concluded that the KPD had firmly established itself as the dominant political force in the SBZ while the other parties had been 'hesitant' and 'passive', but warned: 'This phase of events is [now] over.'<sup>109</sup> Indeed, there were signs that an anti-communist backlash was under way. At a meeting with General F. E. Bokov, a leading member of the SMAD's Military Council who had titular responsibility for political developments in the SBZ,<sup>110</sup> Pieck complained about growing opposition to the KPD in Berlin: 'Difficulty—enemies are on the move.'<sup>111</sup> Dahlem believed that the KPD's opponents had been encouraged by the Western Allies, who were purging the administrations in their Berlin sectors of communist sympathizers and who were 'openly striving to annul and reverse the positions won by the workers during the first few months of Soviet occupation'.<sup>112</sup>

More alarmingly, there were signs that the KPD's campaign for working-class unity was losing momentum. Dahlem warned: '[Here] in Berlin we can see a hardening of the resistance within the united front among the middle-ranking SPD functionaries against closer co-operation with the KPD . . .'. While suggesting that this was partly due to recent events in other countries, such as the 'victory of the Labour Party'

<sup>108</sup> 'Protokoll der Konferenz verantwortlicher Parteiarbeiter (Mecklenburgs) am 5. 8. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>109</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>110</sup> Stefan Creuzberger, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsmacht*, 32–3. Jan Foitzik, *Sowjetische Militäradministration*, 114–17.

<sup>111</sup> 'Gespräch mit Bockow am 25. 9. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>112</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.



in the 1945 British general elections, he conceded that some developments in the SBZ were also to blame, in particular the 'current wave of popular dissatisfaction with the excesses of Red Army troops'.<sup>113</sup> The orgy of rape and pillage with which Soviet troops had celebrated their victory had created enormous resentment among the German population which more than offset the popularity the Red Army had gained in some areas by helping to restore food supplies and public order.<sup>114</sup> Adding to German bitterness, especially among the workers, was the mass dismantling of factories by Soviet reparations brigades that had begun immediately after the end of the fighting, in some cases affecting plants that had only just been restored to operation by the workers themselves.<sup>115</sup> As the party most closely associated with the occupying power, the KPD was automatically held responsible for unpopular Soviet actions, all the more since it was unwilling to criticize them in public. The conclusion drawn by many social democrats, according to Dahlem, was that the KPD had been disgraced by the behaviour of the Red Army and that the SPD would be well advised to enter future elections 'unburdened by too close a relationship with the KPD'.<sup>116</sup>

Another social democratic grievance was the preferential treatment accorded to the KPD by the SMAD. Although the Soviet military authorities had actively supported the re-founding of the SPD, in some cases ordering unity-minded social democrats who had joined the KPD to resign their membership and help in the re-establishment of their former party, it was clear that Soviet occupation policy was heavily biased in favour of the KPD. Not only was the SPD powerless to prevent the KPD from assuming the key posts in the new administrations but it was also forced to accept KPD leadership in the various anti-fascist mass organizations established during the summer of 1945. Of the five regional chairmen of the *Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (FDGB), the unified trade union organization, four were members of the KPD, while the Cultural League, an organization for intellectuals,

<sup>113</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAMPO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>114</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 69–140. Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten*, 143–54. Gerhard Keiderling, '“Als Befreier unsere Herzen zerbrachen”: Zu den Übergriffen der Sowjetarmee in Berlin 1945', *DA* 28/3 (1995), 234–43.

<sup>115</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians*, 178–83. Rainer Karlsch, '“Arbeiter, schützt Eure Betriebe!” Widerstand gegen Demontagen in der SBZ', *IWK* 30/3 (1994), 380–404. Rainer Karlsch, *Allein bezahlt? Die Reparationsleistungen der SBZ/DDR 1945–1953* (Berlin, 1993), 55–63.

<sup>116</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

had no social democratic founding members at all.<sup>117</sup> There was massive inequality in the allocation of transport and publishing facilities, with the KPD newspapers leading those of the other parties in everything from size of format to circulation.<sup>118</sup> The consequence was growing resentment among the SPD functionaries, summed up in their complaint: 'the KPD has pulled us over the barrel'.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile, the KPD's relationship with the bourgeois parties had also taken a turn for the worse. Dahlem commented: 'As a result of the growth in propaganda by the Western occupation authorities, and parallel to the hardening of relations between the KPD and the SPD in Berlin, grass roots co-operation with the bourgeois parties has also come to a halt.'<sup>120</sup> Much of the tension was the result of disagreements over the economic transformation initiated by the KPD, in particular over its cornerstone, the land reform. The bourgeois parties accepted the need for a land reform but were opposed to the sequestration of land without compensation, as demanded by the KPD. The dispute was eventually resolved in the KPD's favour through the intervention of the SMAD, whose pressure on the bourgeois parties led to the resignation of LDP chairman, Waldemar Koch, and the dismissal of Andreas Hermes and Walther Schreiber, the two joint leaders of the CDU, before the end of the year.<sup>121</sup>

Further problems for the KPD had arisen within the party itself. Since July 1945, the KPD had been holding weekly training sessions for all its members in an effort to acquaint the party's rank and file with the new communist line and eliminate latent sectarian deviations.<sup>122</sup> Yet the old communist stalwarts who had joined the KPD before 1933, and who still accounted for the majority of its members, were woefully slow to come round,<sup>123</sup> unable to make sense of a communist policy that

<sup>117</sup> Gerhard Keiderling, 'Wir sind die Staatspartei', 249–62. The FDGB's Mecklenburg organization was initially headed by a social democrat, but in November 1945 he, too, was replaced by a communist. See Werner Müller, 'Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB)', *SBZ-Handbuch*, 650.

<sup>118</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 495. Erich W. Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht* (Cologne, 1966), 88.

<sup>119</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Frederike Sattler, 'Bündnispolitik als politisch-organisatorisches Problem', 160–6. Alexander Fischer, 'Andreas Hermes und die gesamtdeutschen Anfänge der Union', *Die Ost-CDU: Beiträge zu ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung*, ed. by Michael Richter and Martin Rissmann (Cologne, 1995), 9–23. Manfred Koch, 'Blockpolitik und Parteiensystem in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1950', *PolZG* B37/1984, 8–9.

<sup>122</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 514–15.

<sup>123</sup> Erich W. Gniffke, *Jahre*, 36.

forbade the wearing of the red star and publicly advocated the ‘totally unfettered development of free trade and private entrepreneurial initiative’.<sup>124</sup> Dahlem was forced to conclude that the existing ‘lack of trust in the honesty’ of the KPD’s policies was fuelled, at least in part, by ‘the sectarianism which still exists in our party, which has not yet been overcome and which sometimes bursts forth’.<sup>125</sup>

Compounding the KPD’s difficulties were signs of growing assertiveness on the part of the ZA. The leading circle of social democrats in Berlin—formed around Otto Grotewohl, Erich Gniffke, Gustav Dahrendorf, and Max Fechner—had initially posed no threat to the KPD’s ambitions. Eager to distance itself from what was seen as the failed policies of the pre-1933 SPD, the ZA strongly supported the idea of working-class unity and at least three of its members—Fechner, Dahrendorf, and Gniffke—were known to share the KPD’s desire to move Germany towards an Eastern orientation.<sup>126</sup> Nor did the ZA carry much political weight at a time when, in the summer of 1945, the SPD was still lacking a coherent party organization upon which its authority might have been based. A few months later, however, the situation had changed. By early September 1945, the ZA had consolidated its leadership of the SPD in the SBZ, while its authority had been boosted by a massive increase in the party’s membership, which now exceeded that of the originally much faster growing KPD.<sup>127</sup> There were signs that the ZA was becoming increasingly unwilling to follow the KPD’s lead. An internal KPD memorandum on the development of

<sup>124</sup> *Dokumente zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Bewegung in Deutschland, Reihe 1945/1946*: Vol. 1, 231.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Zu den Organisationsberichten’, 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>126</sup> See Henry Krisch, *German Politics under Soviet Occupation* (New York, 1974), 61–71. For the claim that Fechner supported ‘an unequivocal orientation towards the policies of the S[oviet] U[nion]’, see ‘ZK-Kaderabteilung: “Bericht über das Verhältnis KPD-SPD in Berlin”’, October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631. Dahrendorf allegedly told a KPD member working for the *Magistrat* that to him and Gniffke there was ‘no alternative to a conscious orientation towards the East . . .’. See ‘Bericht über eine Unterredung mit Gustav Dahrendorf vom Zentralausschuß der SPD am 23. 9. 1945’, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631.

<sup>127</sup> Gerhard Keiderling, ‘*Wir sind die Staatspartei*’, 486–9. Frank Moraw, *Die Parole der ‘Einheit’ und die Sozialdemokratie: Zur parteiorganisatorischen und gesellschaftspolitischen Orientierung der SPD in der Periode der Illegalität und der ersten Phase der Nachkriegszeit 1933–1948* (Bonn, 1973), 80–92. By the end of October 1945, SPD membership in the Soviet zone stood at 302,400, compared with 248,900 for the KPD. See Werner Müller, ‘KPD’, 458. Werner Müller, ‘Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)’, *SBZ-Handbuch*; 479.

the SPD warned: 'The ideological development within the Social Democratic Party . . . is characterized by numerous vacillations.'<sup>128</sup>

### KPD-SPD FUSION IN THE SOVIET ZONE

In the autumn of 1945, the changes that had taken place in the relationship between the two parties gave rise to a new KPD policy towards the SPD. The turning-point was a speech by Otto Grotewohl, given on 14 September, which openly challenged the KPD's claim to political leadership in Germany by describing the SPD as a 'lens . . . that serves as a focus for the aspirations of the other parties and political persuasions in Germany'. Pieck, who was attending the SPD rally as a guest, responded by calling for the creation of a unified workers' party 'in order to complete the tasks which we have begun',<sup>129</sup> and two weeks later, on 28 September, the secretariat of the KPD's ZK took a formal decision to step up the unity campaign.<sup>130</sup> The KPD did not easily abandon its opposition to quick amalgamation. For most of the autumn, its prescriptions for working-class unity remained firmly rooted in the established framework of cross-party collaboration. However, new developments soon brought the issue of unity to a head. Foremost among them was another address by Grotewohl, which carried the ZA's bid for autonomy to new heights, promptly triggering a Soviet ban on its publication. Speaking on 11 November 1945, at a packed rally commemorating the failed revolution of 1918, Grotewohl insisted that organizational fusion was acceptable only at national level and after the proper establishment of the two parties on a nationwide basis, a condition that stood no chance of rapid fulfilment.<sup>131</sup>

The prospect of a long delay in the desired merger alarmed the KPD leaders, especially in view of the weakness of the Austrian communists,

<sup>128</sup> Untitled ZK memorandum, 17 November 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, *Gründung*, 113–14. See also Wolfgang Triebel, *Otto Grotewohls Weg in die Einheitspartei: Hintergründe und Zusammenhänge. Eine Betrachtung seines politischen Denkens und Handelns zwischen Mai 1945 und April 1946* (Berlin, 1993), 25–9.

<sup>130</sup> Hans-Joachim Krusch, 'Für eine neue Offensive: Zur Septemberberatung 1945 der KPD', *BzG* 22/3 (1980), 349–60.

<sup>131</sup> Markus Jodl, *Amboß oder Hammer? Otto Grotewohl. Eine politische Biographie* (Berlin, 1997), 118–19. Andreas Malycha, '“Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders!”: Rede Otto Grotewohls am 11. November 1945', *BzG* 34/2 (1992), 167–84.

who had won only 4 seats in their country's recent elections (as opposed to 76 seats for the social democrats). There were fears that the German communists might suffer a similar fate, captured in Pieck's reference to a 'danger—Austria'.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, as Wolfgang Leonhard recalls, it was after the Austrian *débâcle*, which had taken the KPD by complete surprise, that the great unity campaign began in Berlin.<sup>133</sup>

The KPD leaders were deeply unhappy about the prospect of a merger whose scope would be confined, at least initially, to the SBZ. Pondering on the dilemma faced by his party, Pieck jotted:

We want to work with all our hearts for [the achievement of working-class] unity throughout the country. [The] merger [must] not [take place] zonally, only throughout the entire Reich . . . only if this takes up too much time will we probably content ourselves for the time being with the achievement of [working-class] unity in only one part [of Germany] . . .<sup>134</sup>

In fact, the choice had already been made for the KPD by the apparently unstoppable rise of a fervently anti-communist SPD in Western Germany. That rise had begun during the summer of 1945 when, parallel to the establishment of the ZA, Kurt Schumacher's office in Hanover emerged as the unofficial headquarters of the fledgling (and still unlicensed) SPD in the Western zones.<sup>135</sup> In contrast to the KPD, which managed to unite all its party organizations behind the ZK by August 1945, the SPD was thus effectively split, with the ZA's authority being limited to the SBZ. Grotewohl's plan to turn a Berlin-led SPD into Germany's dominant political force was doomed when, at a conference in the Hanover suburb of Wennigsen in early October 1945, he agreed to a compromise which formally recognized the existence of two SPD leaderships until the time when a national party congress would be held.<sup>136</sup> What was more,

<sup>132</sup> 'Information von Walter Ulbricht über ein Gespräch mit Bockow, Tulpanow, Wolkow am 22. 12. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>133</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 525.

<sup>134</sup> Private notes by Wilhelm Pieck, December 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/639.

<sup>135</sup> Kurt Klotzbach, *Der Weg zur Staatspartei: Programmatik, praktische Politik und Organisation der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1945 bis 1965* (Berlin, 1982), 39–54. Ulla Plener, 'Kurt Schumacher und die Einheitspartei 1945/46', *BzG* 39/1 (1997), 8–13. Peter Mersburger, 'Kurt Schumacher und der Kommunismus', *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten nach Nationalsozialismus und Krieg: Zur historischen Einordnung der Zwangsvereinigung*, ed. by Bernd Faulenbach and Heinrich Potthoff (Essen, 1998), 69–81. Peter Merseburger, *Der schwierige Deutsche: Kurt Schumacher. Eine Biographie* (Stuttgart, 1996), 195–236.

<sup>136</sup> Lucio Caracciolo, 'Der Untergang der Sozialdemokratie in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone: Otto Grotewohl und die "Einheit der Arbeiterklasse" 1945/46', *VfGZ*

Schumacher's growing popularity and influence in the Western zones forced the ZA to adopt a more reserved attitude towards the KPD. As a result, there was a growing feeling among the KPD leaders that the ZA was drifting towards the right. An internal KPD memorandum warned

Leading exponents of social democracy such as Grotewohl, Fechner, and Dahrendorf, who prior to this conference . . . had reacted very positively to the question of unity-of-action between the socialist parties and [who] had also expressed their support for the closest possible co-operation with the Soviet Union, are refusing to give a clear answer after the conference.<sup>137</sup>

The KPD's response to this unexpected development was to call for a meeting of thirty representatives of both parties to discuss closer co-operation. Held on 20 and 21 December 1945, this 'Conference of the Sixty' paved the way for the demise of the SPD in the SBZ. On the first day of its proceedings the conference was close to failure when Grotewohl, speaking on behalf of the ZA, presented the KPD leaders with a catalogue of complaints. Yet Grotewohl's criticism was tempered by a firm commitment to working-class unity, and on the following day the SPD delegates, swayed by a mixture of communist blandishments and pressure, endorsed in principle a draft programme for amalgamation submitted by the KPD, creating the impression that KPD-SPD fusion was imminent in the SBZ.<sup>138</sup>

There has been some speculation among historians that the sudden intensification of the unity campaign was ordered by the SMAD, which was under instructions to assist the KPD in the establishment of working-class unity.<sup>139</sup> However, in bringing the issue of unity to a head at the December conference, the KPD seems to have overstepped the limits for action set by Karlshorst. When Ulbricht, known as the 'engine of the party',<sup>140</sup> met Bokov on 22 December 1945, he was told that the KPD must tread

36/2 (1988), 295–301. Andreas Malycha, 'Der Zentralausschuß, Kurt Schumacher und die Einheit der SPD', *BzG* 33/2 (1991), 182–93. Manfred Wilke, 'Schumachers sozialdemokratischer Führungsanspruch und die Gründung der SED', *Anatomie der Parteizentrale*, 213–28.

<sup>137</sup> Untitled ZK memorandum, 17 November 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631.

<sup>138</sup> Henry Krisch, *German Politics*, 128–44. Gerhard Keiderling, 'Wir sind die Staatspartei', 481–6. Albrecht Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit? Die Wiedergründung der SPD 1945/46* (Hanover, 1964), 205–32. *Einheitsdrang oder Zwangsvereinigung? Die Sechziger Konferenzen von KPD und SPD 1945 und 1946*, ed. with an intro. by Hans-Joachim Krusch and Andreas Malycha (Berlin, 1990), 19–22.

<sup>139</sup> See Dietrich Staritz, 'Zur Gründung', 46–7.

<sup>140</sup> Wladimir S. Semjonow, *Von Stalin bis Gorbatschow: Ein halbes Jahrhundert in diplomatischer Mission 1939–1991* (Berlin, 1995), 246.

more cautiously 'because of the [Western] Allies'. Similarly, Marshal G. K. Zhukov, the Soviet commander-in-chief and the head of the SMAD, told Pieck and Ulbricht on 26 December that he did not believe the time for a merger was ripe. There was unveiled criticism of the KPD's handling of the December conference when the KPD leaders were asked 'why' the question of a merger between the two workers' parties had been brought up and 'whether [an] agreement on this matter [had been reached] with M[oscow]'.<sup>141</sup>

If, in December 1945, the KPD leaders had been pressing for fusion without formal Soviet consent, they were soon given the green light. On 23 January 1946, the SMAD ordered that the 'merger between the two working class parties' be speeded up. The KPD leaders, who had been warned only four weeks before that a merger in four months' time would be 'premature', were now told that 1 May, Labour Day, would be an appropriate date for unification.<sup>142</sup> The SMAD's new line originated in Moscow, where Ulbricht travelled for further instructions at the end of the month. It was there that the fate of the Soviet-zone SPD was sealed when, at a meeting with Ulbricht on 6 February 1946, Stalin announced: 'merger approved—line correct'. The name of the new party was to be 'Socialist Unity Party of Germany'.<sup>143</sup>

Meanwhile, the unity campaign was entering its final phase with a concerted KPD–SMAD effort to bring about unity from below. On 1 February 1946, Pieck learned that the Red Army commanders had been instructed to enforce organizational fusion at local level.<sup>144</sup> In the following weeks, local SPD organizations were subjected to ceaseless harassment by the SMAD, while the KPD was organizing hundreds of joint KPD–SPD rallies demanding fusion at the earliest possible date.<sup>145</sup> The KPD's assumption had always been that support for unity was strongest

<sup>141</sup> 'Information von Walter Ulbricht über ein Gespräch mit Bockow, Tulpanow, Wolkow am 22. 12. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734. 'Besprechung am 26. 12. 45 in Babelsberg mit Marsch.', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/740.

<sup>142</sup> 'Besprechung am 23. 1. 1946 um 4 Uhr in Karlshorst bei Marsch. Bockow', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734. 'Information von Walter Ulbricht über ein Gespräch mit Bockow, Tjulpanow, Wolkow am 22. 12. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>143</sup> 'Bericht Walter Ulbrichts über eine Beratung bei Stalin am 6. 2. 1946 um 9 Uhr abends', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/631. Ulbricht left for Moscow on 28 January and returned to Berlin on 6 February 1946. See Pieck's diary entry: 'Aus dem Kalender 1946', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>144</sup> 'Besprechung am 1. 2. in Karlshorst bei Bockow', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>145</sup> Lucio Caracciolo, 'Der Untergang', 307–10. Andreas Malycha, 'Sozialdemokratie und sowjetische Besatzungsmacht', *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten*, 101–5.

at the SPD's grass roots. In his stocktaking memorandum of 16 October 1945, Dahlem had expressed the belief 'that the mass of both the social democratic factory workers and the ordinary social democratic members in the residential areas are in favour of [working-class] unity...'. Consequently, the KPD targeted its campaign at the SPD's rank and file, encouraged by the experience 'that at joint functionaries' meetings and in particular at joint members' meetings or educational evenings many SPD members embraced our ideological positions'.<sup>146</sup>

A central plank of the KPD's campaign was the party's struggle for control of the FDGB, described by Pieck as the 'most pressing issue apart from the land reform'.<sup>147</sup> Having failed in the summer of 1945 to secure total control of the trade unions, traditionally dominated by the SPD, the KPD now launched an intensive campaign for its trade-union policies, effectively turning the scheduled FDGB leadership elections into a referendum on working-class unity.<sup>148</sup> The road to unity was finally cleared, from the KPD's point of view, when a central FDGB conference for the SBZ (9–11 February 1946) passed a resolution in favour of fusion. Wolfgang Leonhard recalls being told by a jubilant fellow comrade that the die had been cast: 'The trade union conference has made the decision. The merger will take place on the evening of 22 April'.<sup>149</sup>

In this situation, and after two days of turbulent discussions as well as a highly controversial vote, the ZA finally passed a motion calling for KPD–SPD fusion to be consummated on Easter Sunday (22 April). The scene was thus set for the final act. In keeping with a prearranged schedule agreed on 26 February 1946 at a second Conference of the Sixty, separate KPD and SPD congresses were held in all provinces of the SBZ on 6 and 7 April 1946, followed on 19 and 20 April by separate party congresses for the entire zone, and, on 21 and 22 April, a unification congress which formally constituted the new party—the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, or SED—with a symbolic handshake between Pieck and Grotewohl.<sup>150</sup> The only cloud over the KPD's successful coup in the SBZ was the emergence of an autonomous

<sup>146</sup> 'Zu den Organisationsberichten', 16 October 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4072/209.

<sup>147</sup> 'Gespräch mit Bockow am 25. 9. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>148</sup> Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht*, 134–55. Gerhard Keiderling, 'Wir sind die Staatspartei', 249–56, 293–301.

<sup>149</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 531.

<sup>150</sup> Henry Krisch, *German Politics*, 174–99. Andreas Malycha, 'Sozialdemokraten und die Gründung der SPD: Gleichschaltung und Handlungsspielräume', *DA* 29/2 (1996), 205–9. Manfred Teresiak, 'Vor 50 Jahren', 222–6.



SPD in Berlin which constituted itself in the Western sectors, and, using the protection afforded by four-power rule, quickly extended its operations into the city's Eastern half (where it managed to exist side by side with the SED until 1961).<sup>151</sup>

### THE 'SPECIAL GERMAN ROAD TO SOCIALISM'

There is overwhelming evidence, now recognized even by former East German scholars, that the founding of the SED took place under extreme duress.<sup>152</sup> In 1961, Erich Ollenhauer, the then chairman of the SPD, estimated that between December 1945 and April 1946 at least 20,000 social democrats had become victims of the communist unity campaign by being harassed, imprisoned, or even killed.<sup>153</sup> However, there is little doubt that the KPD's bid for a socialist unity party, a goal first mentioned at the Berne Conference in 1939, was crucially assisted by a genuine desire for working-class unity on the part of the social democrats, many of whom believed that Hitler might have been stopped but for the schism of the German left. Indeed, it would seem that the attitude of the regional SPD chairmen, who, in early February 1946, threatened the ZA with rebellion in the event of it refusing to consummate fusion, owed less to communist pressure than to a belief in working-class unity as a socialist ideal.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Beatrix Bouvier, *Ausgeschaltet: Sozialdemokraten in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR 1945–1953* (Bonn, 1996), 62–8. Manfred Rexin, *Die SPD in Ost-Berlin 1946–1961* (2nd edn., Berlin, 1989), 2–3.

<sup>152</sup> Beatrix Bouvier, 'Die Zwangsvereinigung von SPD und KPD und die Folgen für die Sozialdemokratie', *Zwangsvereinigung? Zur Debatte über den Zusammenschluß von SPD und KPD 1946 in Ostdeutschland*, ed. by Johannes Klotz (Heilbronn, 1996), 30–9. Werner Müller, 'SED-Gründung unter Zwang—ein Streit ohne Ende? Plädoyer für den Begriff "Zwangsvereinigung"', *DA* 24/1 (1991), 52–8. Werner Müller, 'Die Gründung der SED—Alte Kontroversen und neue Positionen um die Zwangsvereinigung 1946', *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 1996*, ed. by Hermann Weber Egbert Jahn, and Günter Braun (Berlin, 1996), 163–80. Werner Müller, 'Die Gründung der SED. Zwangsvereinigung, Demokratieprinzip und gesamtdeutscher Anspruch', *PolZG* B16–17/1996, 12–21. For the East German perspective, see Wilfriede Otto, 'Druck und Demokratiedefizit im Vereinigungsprozeß', *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten*, 107–9. Hans-Joachim Krusch, 'Neuansatz und widersprüchliches Erbe: Zur KPD 1945/1946', *BZG* 33/5 (1991), 624–7. Günter Benser, *Zusammenschluß von KPD und SPD 1946: Erklärungsversuche jenseits von Jubel und Verdammnis* (Berlin, 1995), 21–6. Günter Benser, 'Der 50. Jahrestag der Vereinigung von KPD und SPD. Eine historisch-kritische Nachlese', *BzG* 39/2 (1997), 35–54.

<sup>153</sup> Werner Müller, 'Sozialdemokratische Politik unter sowjetischer Militärverwaltung: Chancen und Grenzen der SPD in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone zwischen Kriegsende und SED-Gründung', *JWK* 23/2 (1987), 199.

<sup>154</sup> Andreas Malycha, 'Sozialdemokraten und die Gründung der SED', 208–9.

In accepting the KPD's demands, the SPD leaders were driven by hopes that the future unity party would strongly reflect social democratic practices and values. Encouraged by the SPD's greater numerical strength at the time of unification,<sup>155</sup> leading social democrats like Fritz Schreiber believed that they could bring the new party under their control.<sup>156</sup> Fuelling their hopes was the attention they received from leading SMAD officials. In June 1945, Zhukov told the SPD leaders that in installing a democratic regime in Germany he would have to rely heavily on them, and not just on the KPD, 'because I know that you have the support of the masses'.<sup>157</sup> At another meeting with Zhukov, in early February 1946, Grotewohl, a gentle and popular character whom the SMAD always treated with great respect, was told that the SPD's organizational structures would be preserved in the new unity party and that Moscow was ready to withdraw Ulbricht, whose brusque manners and wooden rhetoric had done little to boost the KPD's popularity.<sup>158</sup> The offer implied that Grotewohl would become the head of the SED and, possibly, the chancellor of a future German *Reich*.

It is true that in pressing for unity the KPD made a number of concessions to the SPD. In doing so, the party followed instructions from Pieck, who had told the Work Commission in April 1944: 'We must do our bit to create a social democracy [*sic*] that will co-operate with us. . . . We must be prepared to accept the greatest compromises if this ensures a common front in public and demonstrates the unity of the working class.'<sup>159</sup> The draft SED programme approved by the second Conference of the Sixty, the so-called 'Principles and Aims of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany', abandoned the communist principle of 'democratic centralism' (whereby the party was controlled from the top) in favour of the 'members' right to democratic determination'. The new party was to be led by a Central Secretariat (ZS) elected by an executive council, or *Parteivorstand* (PV)—the ZS being,

<sup>155</sup> In April 1946, SPD membership in the Soviet zone and Berlin stood at 695,400, as against 624,600 for the KPD. See Werner Müller, 'KPD', 459. Werner Müller, 'SPD', 480.

<sup>156</sup> Fritz Schreiber was the chief secretary of the SPD's ZA and one of the two secretaries of the SED's ZS from April 1946 until his defection to the West in June 1948. See Lucio Caracciolo, 'Der Untergang', 314. <sup>157</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 289.

<sup>158</sup> Lucio Caracciolo, 'Grotewohls Positionen im Vereinigungsprozeß (1945–1946)', *Einheitsfront—Einheitspartei*, 78–82. Fred Stempel, 'Erinnerung an Otto Grotewohl: Zu dessen 100. Geburtstag am 11. März 1994', *Utopie kreativ* 3/1994, 156–7.

<sup>159</sup> "Strategie und Taktik der Machtübernahme", *Nach Hitler*, 168.

according to Dahlem, 'the permanent operational leadership of the party in the period between the meetings of the *Parteivorstand*'<sup>160</sup>—rather than by a Politburo and a ZK, as the KPD's top decision-making bodies had traditionally been called. Finally, there was to be total equality between communists and social democrats, with all party appointments to be made on the basis of strict parity.<sup>161</sup>

Wavering social democrats could draw further encouragement from the KPD's efforts to prove its political independence and rid itself of its old image as a Soviet tool. The KPD's draft resolution for the first Conference of the Sixty described the future unity party as an 'independent' political force whose task would be 'to develop its policies and tactics in accordance with the interests of the German workers and the particular circumstances in Germany'. Distinguishing between a minimum and a maximum goal—respectively 'the completion of Germany's democratic renewal on the basis of an anti-fascist democratic republic' and 'the establishment of socialism through the exercise of political power by the working class in accordance with the teachings of consistent Marxism'—the document emphasized that, in pursuing its policies, the Socialist Unity Party would follow a 'special German road'.<sup>162</sup> The promotion of this special-road thesis peaked at the same time as the KPD's unity campaign with a widely noted article by Ackermann, 'Is there a Special German Road to Socialism?', published in February 1946 in the first issue of the SED's party journal, *Einheit*, in time for the FDGB congress held in Berlin.<sup>163</sup> Ackermann's key assertion was that, according to Marxist-Leninist theory, revolutionary violence was not a prerequisite for the transition to socialism. Rather, such a transition would be 'possible on relatively peaceful lines, if the bourgeois class cannot make use of the militaristic and bureaucratic apparatus of the state...'<sup>164</sup> the implication being that such a unique situation existed in Germany in the aftermath of the war.

<sup>160</sup> Second meeting of the PV, 14/15 May 1946, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, DY 30/IV 2/1/2.

<sup>161</sup> Erich W. Gniffke, *Jahre*, 148–9.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, 'Ein "besonderer deutscher Weg"', 24.

<sup>163</sup> Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946–1973: Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester, 1999), 9–10. Gerd Dietrich, 'Ein Mitbürger der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft. Anton Ackermann', *BzG* 33/1 (1991), 109–13. Jürgen Hofmann, 'Die SED—eine Partei neuer Art? Visionen und Illusionen des Anton Ackermann', *Zwangsvereinigung*, 65–75.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, 'Ein "besonderer deutscher Weg"', 25.

The extraordinary effort made by the KPD in casting itself as a reformed party has given rise to the assertion that the special-road thesis was not merely a tactical ploy aimed at making unification more palatable for wavering social democrats.<sup>165</sup> There is indeed evidence to suggest that hopes for German independence from Moscow inspired not only the social democrats but also many KPD leaders. One of them was undoubtedly Ackermann himself, whom Wolfgang Leonhard had never seen happier than during those weeks. His enthusiasm for a more democratic communist approach was such that he even supported Fechner's proposal to hold an SPD membership ballot on the issue of unification.<sup>166</sup> In his quest for a distinctly German communist policy, Ackermann was supported by Pieck, a lifelong stranger to Russian culture, who did not speak the language and who was evidently glad to be back in Germany. In a letter to Ulbricht, written on 22 May 1945, Pieck had expressed the hope that the KPD would have a 'truly German' communist newspaper, an indication that hopes for a 'truly German' communist policy were never far from his mind.<sup>167</sup>

However, it is misleading to suggest, as Wilfried Loth does, 'that the communists were indeed thinking of a Western-type democracy when talking about "the establishment of an anti-fascist democratic republic"'.<sup>168</sup> Rather, their support for bourgeois democratic methods was conditional upon the realization of their overriding aim: to gain political hegemony in Germany. Underpinning it were delusions about the KPD's popularity in post-war Germany which were all the more remarkable in view of the party's patent weakness in the Weimar Republic, when its share of the votes in *Reichstag* elections had never exceeded 16.9 per cent. Thus Pieck could write in September 1945: '[The] workers and labourers understand, that Hitler [has led] to disaster; but [they] also [understand] that [the] S[oviet] U[nion]—stands for strong growth and [good] prospects for G[ermany]—[which can be enjoyed] via closer links to [the] S[oviet] U[nion]'.<sup>169</sup> It was for that reason that the KPD leaders believed they could afford the luxury of

<sup>165</sup> Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind*, 32.

<sup>166</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, 'Der Anfang', 48–50. Fred Oldenburg, *Konflikt und Konfliktregelung in der Parteiführung der SED 1945/46–1972* (Cologne, 1972), 11–12.

<sup>167</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 501. Heinrich Bodenseick, 'Moskauer Aufzeichnungen', 30, 49. 'Interview mit S. F. am 21. März 1974', '... die SPD aber aufgehört hat zu existieren': *Sozialdemokraten unter sowjetischer Besatzung*, ed. by Beatrix W. Bouvier and Horst-Peter Schulz (Bonn, 1991), 63.

<sup>168</sup> Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> 'Gespräch mit Bockow am 25. 9. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

a bourgeois democratic approach. Criticism of the KPD's new line from hard-line party members, Pieck wrote in December 1945, was simply the result of '[a] failure to understand our policy', a policy that was not 'opportunism'—the communist term for deviations from the Marxist–Leninist faith—but 'revol[utionary] policy in the best possible sense—for [the] creation of [a] proletarian regime'.<sup>170</sup>

Consequently, the KPD's commitment to bourgeois democratic principles ended where bourgeois democracy is commonly understood to begin—in the face of political dissent. Nor was communist mistrust of all non-communists confined to Ulbricht, who, in January 1946, secretly urged his fellow comrades to vote only for fellow communists in the forthcoming FDGB leadership elections (in breach of a promise of parity previously given to the SPD).<sup>171</sup> Like Ulbricht, Pieck was in no doubt about who was to blame for the Third Reich, when, after a meeting with Bokov in September 1945, he jotted: 'Hitler [came] to power because of [the] division [of the working class]—social d[emocrats]—[are] to blame.'<sup>172</sup> In the same vein, he told the last conference of the KPD's Berlin organization on 13 April 1946 that the KPD was the only party always to have pursued the right policies, and he vowed that its main strengths would be carried on in the new unity party, 'in particular our Marxist–Leninist training' and the 'discipline' inherent in a 'militant party' ('*Kampfpartei*').<sup>173</sup>

Convinced that theirs was the only party guided by 'a scientific theory that has correctly predicted the course of history',<sup>174</sup> the KPD leaders had no difficulty in concluding that their opponents must be 'enemies of democracy'. Consequently, they opposed the holding of a membership ballot on amalgamation—as demanded by the SPD's Berlin organization on 1 March 1946—when they realized that it was unlikely to produce the desired result. 'No ballot', Pieck jotted after a meeting with Bokov, 'because [it has been] sabotaged by [the] advocates of division (*Spalter*)'. He added that the KPD must take a firmer line towards the opponents of unity, something the party was now in a position to do as a result of being 'no longer in opposition'.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Private notes by Wilhelm Pieck, December 1945, SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/639.

<sup>171</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 529–30.

<sup>172</sup> 'Gespräch mit Bockow am 25. 9. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734.

<sup>173</sup> Quoted in Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (3rd edn., Munich, 1989), 130.

<sup>174</sup> Walter Ulbricht, *Zur Geschichte*, Vol. 2: *Zusatzband*, 283.

<sup>175</sup> 'Besprechung bei Bockow o. D. [March 1946]', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/734. The ballot was eventually held on 31 March 1946, but voting in the Eastern sector of Berlin was immediately stopped by the SMAD. In the Western sectors, 82 per cent of

Similarly, Ackermann, the KPD's strongest champion of democracy, had made it clear in his article that under no circumstances could socialism be established in Germany via the ballot-box alone. The reason for this was the reactionary disposition of the representatives of the bourgeoisie, who, when facing political defeat, would always resort to repression 'to break the back of the socialist workers' movement'.<sup>176</sup>

Nor is there any evidence to suggest that in violating the basic tenets of bourgeois democracy the KPD was defying Soviet instructions. It is clear from Leonhard's account that the Kremlin fully endorsed the special-German-road thesis, in the same way as it approved of the promotion of 'special' Polish, Czech, and Bulgarian roads by the communist parties of those countries.<sup>177</sup> The fact that the Soviet military authorities tolerated the independent anti-fascist committees during the first few weeks of occupation has led to their abolition being blamed exclusively on the Initiative Groups, and in particular on Ulbricht.<sup>178</sup> However, their disbandment was approved by none other than Stalin himself at his meeting with the KPD leaders on 4 June 1945. Similarly, Soviet officials went out of their way to limit inter-party competition by serving notice, on 11 June 1945, that 'only the known, large, former democratic anti-fascist parties' would be allowed to register in Berlin. In August 1945, they forced the veteran social democrat Hermann Brill, a former inmate of the Buchenwald concentration camp and a co-author of the famous 'Buchenwald Manifesto', to wind up his 'League of Democratic Socialists', a radical socialist unity party launched in Thuringia while that province was under American control.<sup>179</sup>

the balloted members rejected a motion calling for immediate KPD-SPD fusion, although 64 per cent were in favour of mutual collaboration. See Norbert Podewin and Manfred Teresiak, 'Brüder, in eins nun die Hände...': *Das Für und Wider um die Einheitspartei in Berlin* (Berlin, 1996), 141-4. Alexandr Haritonow, 'Freiwilliger Zwang: Die SMAD und die Verschmelzung von KPD und SPD in Berlin', *DA* 29/3 (1996), 407-18.

<sup>176</sup> Quoted in Dietrich Staritz, 'Ein "besonderer deutscher Weg"', 25.

<sup>177</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard, *Revolution*, 546-8.

<sup>178</sup> Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind*, 28, 42.

<sup>179</sup> Citing Stalin's instructions to the leaders of the Initiative Groups, Pieck noted: 'Establishment of anti-fascist committees not useful either...'; 'Beratung am 4. 6. 1945', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/629. See also, Stefan Creuzberger, 'Die Liquidierung antifaschistischer Organisationen in Berlin: Ein sowjetisches Dokument', *DA* 26/11 (1993), 1266-79. On Hermann Brill's political activities in Thuringia, see Manfred Overesch, *Hermann Brill in Thüringen 1895-1946: Ein Kämpfer gegen Hitler und Ulbricht* (Bonn, 1992), 339-62.

In installing a pro-Soviet regime in its occupation zone, the Kremlin was clearly not prepared to accept the risk of a loss of control which the establishment of a proper democratic system would have entailed. As one Soviet general explained to a social democrat in early 1946, victory over Nazism had provided the Soviet Union with a unique opportunity 'to exert influence, not only politically, but also militarily, in the area [of Germany] in which we now live'.<sup>180</sup> It was therefore important that the leading political party in the SBZ was kept under strict Soviet control. Indeed, the hegemony of the Moscow *émigrés* within the KPD was never in doubt. Of the 16 signatories of the KPD's *Aufruf*, 13 (who together constituted the party's provisional ZK) had spent the war in the Soviet Union, the main exception being Franz Dahlem, who had been liberated in May 1945 from the Mauthausen concentration camp. Their firm hold on the KPD was assured via control of the party's chief organ, the Secretariat of the ZK, whose legitimacy during the nine months of its existence was never confirmed by a vote.<sup>181</sup> Nor was their influence diminished as a result of the merger with the SPD. The 7 social democratic members of the SED's ZS were all eclipsed by their communist counterparts with whom they shared their portfolios and whose seasoned professionalism and superior political skills they were unable to match.<sup>182</sup> Few of them were held in respect by their communist peers, and some were treated with open disdain. Gniffke recalls

<sup>180</sup> 'Diskussion mit den Zeitzeugen Willy Boepple, Fritz Borges, Kurt Borges, Julius Bredenbeck, Hans Hermsdorf, Dieter Rieke, Josef Schölmerich, Adam Wolfram', *Einheitsfront-Einheitspartei*, 206.

<sup>181</sup> Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, 72–3. Hans-Joachim Krusch, 'Neuansatz', 624–5.

<sup>182</sup> Werner Müller, 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)', *SBZ-Handbuch*, 485–6. The seating arrangement of the ZS (showing the seven pairs of ex-KPD and ex-SPD functionaries as well their place in the SED's hierarchy) was as follows:

Otto Grotewohl (SPD)	Wilhelm Pieck (KPD)
Walter Ulbricht (KPD)	Erich Gniffke (SPD)
Max Fechner (SPD)	Franz Dahlem (KPD)
Paul Merker (KPD)	Otto Meier (SPD)
Helmut Lehmann (SPD)	Anton Ackermann (KPD)
Hermann Matern (KPD)	August Karsten (SPD)
Käthe Kern (SPD)	Elli Schmidt (KPD)

that Fechner, who shared his portfolio with Ulbricht, found himself completely ignored.<sup>183</sup> As events were to show, the veteran communist Hermann Matern was right when he told the last conference of the KPD's Saxony organization on 6 April 1946 that the SED would be 'an improved version' (*eine Weiterentwicklung*) of the KPD.<sup>184</sup>

See 'Sitzordnung des Zentralsekretariats der SED im Jahre 1947 im Arbeitszimmer des Parteivorsitzenden Wilhelm Pieck', SAPMO-BArch, ZPA, NY 4036/655.

<sup>183</sup> Erich W. Gniffke, *Jahre*, 181–2.

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, 130.