

'Is an East German state the answer?' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (4 October 1949)


Caption: Three days before the creation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the leader writer of the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung reflects on the position of the Soviet Union and comments on a protest note from the East European States issued on 2 October 1949.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Dr. Schöningh, Franz Josef; Schwingenstein, August. 04.10.1949, Nr. 125; 5. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Oststaat als Antwort?", auteur:Junius , p. 1.

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Is an East German state the answer?

On 2 October, not only in Moscow, Budapest and Warsaw, but also in renegade Belgrade and in many capital cities in the Western world, the masses, with torches and military bands, marched 'for peace'. These remote-controlled demonstrations seemed like a deliberately multiplied echo of the shouts of the People's Congress that, on this day, contributed a little towards changing the face of our globe by cheering, in full view of the Emperor's Palace in Peiping [Beijing], the new Head of State and Government of the Red Chinese Republic, Mao Zedong. But even without that echo of the 'peace day', the ultimate completion of the change of scenery in Asia would not have gone unnoticed. This had already been taken care of by the Soviet Union's Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr Gromyko, who, on the very same day, informed the diplomatic plenipotentiaries of the three Western powers in Moscow that the Soviet Union had decided to recognise the Chinese Central Government.

Mr Gromyko was particularly busy on that second day in October. He handed to the plenipotentiaries of the United States, Great Britain and France a note setting out the Soviet Union's protest against the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn. It remains to be seen if the *New York Times* was right in concluding last week that the Soviet Union's latest moves in south-eastern Europe against the so-called conspiracy of Tito's supporters were nothing but a diversionary tactic aimed at concealing the main thrust of its policy which targets Asia and, after the fall of China, especially Iran and India. At all events, the time seems to have come for Moscow to define the wider field of its actions.

The protest against the German Federal Republic came as no surprise, only surprisingly late. The Western Allies' decision to begin the reconstruction of a German state within their own occupation zones, at their own risk and on their own responsibility and without any further consideration of the often inscrutable wishes of the Soviets, was not taken at the beginning of attempts at disruption and attrition, it was an answer thereto. It stemmed from bitter experience that a longer wait would not only have entailed the continuance of a dubious state of complete unpredictability but also, and above all, a slow and uncontrollable diminution of any vital energy remaining in the West. Even if the conclusion drawn from the split which has occurred is painful and the attempt to create a state in western Germany nothing to become excited about, the realisation eventually prevailed that the West, especially for the sake of the people in Berlin and central Germany, could no longer with impunity delay in mobilising its remaining resources and strength.

The Soviet Union's immediate reaction to this was caused by the inevitability of the power structure left over from the Second World War. No sooner had the Western Allies set out their intentions in the London Recommendations that resulted in the creation of the Federal Republic, than Molotov gathered the Foreign Ministers of the Eastern bloc states in Warsaw to protest against what was taking place in West Germany. The protest note of 2 October is, in fact, nothing more than a consistent interpretation of the Warsaw Communiqué which, at that time and with reference to the Potsdam Agreement, had already strongly rejected any consolidation of state structures in West Germany. In between, over a period of more than a year, there had been an unbroken stream of threats and demonstrations intended to deter and encourage at the same time.

It is difficult to assess whether the Soviets really thought that they could prevent the constitution of the Federal Republic. At all events, this fait accompli, as they pointed out themselves in their note, put them in a 'completely new position'. After the Bundestag had been constituted, West Germans were confronted by the daunting question of how the Soviets would react. The degree of importance that they attached to it had already become clear when Stalin, in an interview requested by himself, had personally demanded the shelving of all preparations for a West German state as one of the conditions for the striking of a balance between West and East. A very strong reaction to Bonn was therefore to be expected.

If we now analyse the actual substance of this note, launched from a cloud of insecurity, we cannot avoid the impression that the Soviet Union, with its stubborn reference to the Potsdam Agreement, is mainly focusing on two objections: firstly against the exclusion of the West German industry from the Russian reparations programme and, secondly, against its own exclusion from the Ruhr Authority. The delay in its answer may be put down to the fact that the Soviets themselves, based on their bad experiences with the German

Socialist Unity Party, doubted whether the People's Council, the *Volksrat*, so eagerly demanded by Ulbricht, Ebert and Eisler, could actually be an appropriate basis for the establishment of an East German Government. However, above all, they know that the East German state was far more attractive, useful and valuable as a perpetual threat than it can ever be in reality. They may be reluctant to give up the threat as long as they have very little guarantee that, of the two German states, having overcome the tragedy of the division, it would actually be the Eastern part that proved to be the 'core state'.