

## 'Behind a crumbling façade' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (23 June 1953)

**Caption:** In its editorial of 23 June 1953, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the consequences of the workers' riot in East Berlin on 17 June.

**Source:** Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner ; Goldschagg, Edmund ; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Josef; Schwingenstein, August ; Herausgeber Friedmann, Werner. 23.06.1953, Nr. 142; 9. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Hinter einer brüchigen Fassade", p. 1.

**Copyright:** (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

**URL:**

[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/behind\\_a\\_crumbing\\_facade\\_from\\_the\\_suddeutsche\\_zeitung\\_23\\_june\\_1953-en-dcfde752-825c-4e52-b567-5b4e2d2781fb.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/behind_a_crumbing_facade_from_the_suddeutsche_zeitung_23_june_1953-en-dcfde752-825c-4e52-b567-5b4e2d2781fb.html)



**Last updated:** 06/07/2016

## Behind a crumbling façade

By Junius

The outbreak of despair over living conditions in the Soviet Zone, which had long since become intolerable, has already gone down in history. As time passes and the events of 17 June become more distant for the world at large, its astonishment as to how this was ever possible still continues to grow; for what happened was highly improbable. No one could ever have expected people who had been silenced and intimidated and subjected to every kind of oppression to choose such a course of action in order to proclaim their misery and distress, or that they would dare to do it without leadership, without prior organisation, unarmed and defenceless. This, however, is exactly what took place.

With every day that passes, however, distancing us from this 17 June, there is a growing realisation that this unusual event will still make history in one way or another. However, the German dictators in the Soviet Zone will be the least of the factors determining the precise way in which this will happen. The Ulbricht system has been destroyed by the revolt of the oppressed. It had long been condemned to perish, because a number of things had already begun to break down in the Soviet Zone, and they could no longer be repaired. The government had overdrawn the credit granted to it by Moscow. It was the Kremlin that forced it to declare its previous policy bankrupt and to promise a fresh start, before the outbreak of public anger had actually occurred.

While the functionaries of the SED were in the Baltic resort of Kühlungsborn, waiting for Soviet tanks to clear up the mess that they had made, their temporarily silenced organs lapsed into a doubly unfortunate turn of phrase. On the one hand, *Neues Deutschland* asserted in its now well-rehearsed style that there would be a change of direction; it has been easy in the past to talk of the danger of capitalist imperialism but hard to solve the problems of regulated supplies. Now, living conditions have to be improved in order to give no further cause for 'this kind of criticism'. The Soviet Zone has to be made into a centre of attraction for the West German people. On the other hand, however, the Ministerial Council demanded obdurately — in that old tone of voice which had always made the people's blood boil — the 'reinforcement of the power of the state' against foreign agents.

The Soviet Union does not need any reinforcement of the occupying power. It is strong enough. It has rapidly restored its authority, which had almost been thrown away by its German agents. There are numerous indications that, in exercising its power, it is not inclined to go beyond the degree it considers necessary, simply for the sake of a government that had been given its job to do and has only damaged Soviet interests. We should not be deceived by the fact that the official news agency TASS is initially in agreement with the stammerings of the SED about Fascist elements among the ranks of the workers and about Western agitators, who are alleged to be sabotaging supplies for the people. The Soviets know better than anyone why the breakdown in supplies came about. They would not be Communists if they did not recognise the defeat for which the SED is to blame and which arises from the fact that a government that calls for its support from the working class has to order shots to be fired at crowds of workers who were demonstrating. They would not be practitioners of *Realpolitik* if they remained insensitive to the incrimination which its intervention as an occupying power in favour of a failing government must inevitably involve.

The experience of the Berlin Blockade teaches us that the Soviets know how to bow to the force of the facts. The fact that they have to contend with at present is clearly revealed. The SED, an incorrectly chosen tool, has split in their hands. Mr Semionov is reputed long ago to have foreseen this kind of outcome as inevitable. He might therefore be able to feel that his verdict was confirmed by the events of 17 June. There is nothing to contradict that he actually does, not even the fact that, for the moment, he has to keep up a pretence. After all, Moscow must fear that it will lose face itself as a result of everything that the SED has brought about. However, the only important factor will be what is actually developing behind the crumbling façade. It seems that Mr Semionov does not need to change anything in his draft, the first features of which already became detectable when the SED Politburo confessed to its sins, even before the collapse of the Ulbricht system.

There is no doubt that the policies of the East, like those of the West, will be put to the test and, possibly, even reshaped by the events of 17 June. The manner in which this will make history depends on the Soviet Union and on the extent to which the West permits it to disengage from the incriminating actions of the SED regime without losing face. There is an obvious temptation to score points against the Soviets temporarily by dramatising what has happened and making exaggerated claims of heroism. However, it is better to resist this attractive prospect and to wait and see whether Moscow is interested in détente. If Moscow is given the opportunity to gain a moral victory over the SED, this will serve to reduce the tension. If the Soviets are denied this chance, the conflict will be exacerbated. To the same extent that the West gives the men in the Kremlin the feeling that every further step towards normalisation will be interpreted as weakness on their part, there is bound to be a reinforcement of their resistance. But what good would it now do to push the Soviets, perhaps against their will, onto the side of a played-out regime in their zone by talk of strength or weakness? What is more, this would be at the very moment when they could show whether or not they now consider it right to change horses in their own, very well understood interest.