

'The Socialist-Communist merger in Germany' from Le Monde (23 April 1946)

Caption: On 23 April 1946, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the implications of the creation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) following the merger of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 23.04.1946, n° 415; 3e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La fusion socialo-communiste en Allemagne", p. 1.

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The Socialist-Communist merger in Germany

The merging of the Social Democrat and Communist Parties, which was recently announced in Berlin, had been expected for several weeks. The merger had been approved, in principle, by the leaders of the two parties. In the Russian zone, a referendum approved it. However, the Soviet military government prohibited the vote in its sector of Berlin. In the French, British and American sectors, 19 000 out of 23 000 voters voted against the merger. In the three Western zones of Germany, no polls were held.

This decision is, therefore, one taken by a minority under the initiative and the pressure of one of the four occupying powers. Will this decision be recognised by the other three? The British have already made it known that they would accept the new 'Socialist Unity' party only if it were supported by a vote in the regions that they occupy.

These discrepancies may well create a difficult, not to say confused, situation. In Berlin, all new political parties must be authorised by a unanimous decision by the inter-Allied 'Kommandantura'. How will the representatives of the Soviets and those of the Western powers come to an agreement?

Whichever side they take, it seems that 'Socialist Unity' will gain control of the Soviet sector of the capital: it has already taken over the offices and the newspaper of the Social Democrat Party, which will be banned in this sector. On the other hand, the Social Democrats have vowed to continue in the other sectors; premises have already been provided by the Occupation authorities, and a new newspaper has been founded. Their leader in the Western zones, Kurt Schumacher, speaking from Berlin, declared that yesterday's operation was not a real merger but a desertion to the Communist Party. The Communists, he said, did not want to join the Social Democrats, they want to take them over.

Mr Schumacher's opinion of Communism represents the view of those most opposed to the merger. West German Socialists are not all behind him. Some — how many is not known — in all likelihood support the merger. Others, without wanting to, remain advocates of collaboration with the Communists, as the vote on 31 March in Berlin has already shown: along with strong opposition to the merger, this vote, in a second question put to voters, showed a majority, albeit slightly smaller, in favour of such collaboration.

Yesterday's decision does not solve the problems concerning the relations between the two Marxist parties in Germany. The decision merely places the problem on a new level. When, after the defeat, the two parties resumed operations last year under the banner of denazification, anti-Fascism, and the reconstruction of Germany, it seemed as though the similarities in their programmes would have to bring them together. Was it wise to forget that the similarities were a result of circumstances, that profound discrepancies remained, and to claim that these would be eliminated by a stroke of a pen, by means of necessarily incomplete merger? This merger would be valid only if it had resulted from virtually total affiliation by members of both parties. As long as a not inconsiderable hostile minority remains in one or the other, this minority will remain an independent party.

For the time being, the only result of the merger will be to divide the Social Democrats in two. This division will benefit the Communists, who will be that much stronger. It will spark off political battles in Germany as well as opposition between the occupying powers.

Apparently, 27 Labour Party Members congratulated the Social Democrats who participated in the merger. Ernest Bevin's colleagues do not seem familiar with British policy, which is totally hostile towards the merger. If a 'Socialist Unity' that answered to Moscow won over all of Germany, the British would no longer be the masters of their zone, where most supporters of the workers' movement live. Just as the Labour Party has refused, to date, to welcome Communists into its fold, the government that represents it must combat support for the merger in Germany, for reasons of its own tactics and for the good of the nation.

When all is said and done, the merger is just one more reason to add to those, already too numerous, that put Great Britain at odds with the USSR in Germany and elsewhere.