



Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961
From the Resolution of the First Party Conference of the SED (January 28, 1949)

On January 28, 1949, the first party conference of the SED advocated the further development of the SED into a Leninist-Stalinist cadre party with centralized leadership by a Politburo and strict party discipline. The formal equality that had previously existed between KPD and SPD functionaries no longer applied. In its political goals and ideological orientation, the SED was to follow the Soviet model without reservations.

[...]

IV. The Development of the SED into a “new type of party”

1. The huge tasks facing the working people of Germany make it necessary to make up for the great historical failure of the German workers’ movement and to develop the SED into a new type of party.

The merger of the KPD and the SPD to form the Socialist Unity Party of Germany was the most significant occurrence in the recent history of the German workers’ movement. The union has proved of value – this is evidenced by the successes in the democratic development of the Eastern Zone. This is also evidenced by the ideological unity and cohesiveness of the party, which were achieved during the nearly three years since unification.

It must be stated self-critically that the struggle for ideological clarity within the party after the unification was not carried on actively enough. In particular, the important step towards ideological clarification taken by the second party assembly was not sufficiently analysed within the party as a whole. There were also serious weaknesses in the ideological struggle which encouraged certain elements to undertake attempts to turn the SED into an opportunistic party of the western type. These attempts were assisted by the class enemy using its Schumacher agency to send spies and agents into the ranks of our party with the task of creating anti-Soviet and nationalistic tendencies and attitudes within the SED.

The danger thus raised was averted when the party committee at its 11th assembly in June 1948 took a decisive turn and linked the task of developing the SED into a party of the new type to the acceptance of the Two-Year-Plan. This work was continued in the 12th and 13th assemblies of the party committee and in particular the question of the ideological struggle was

brought to the forefront of party activity. It has been shown by the party discussion which followed the 13th assembly, in which a series of fundamental questions were settled (our relationship to the Soviet Union, to Marxism-Leninism, the path to socialism, the false theory of a special German path, the degeneration of the Yugoslavian leadership, the alliance with the farming population, the role of the party, the importance and aims of work in factory groups, etc.), that the party has already achieved a high theoretical standard and far-reaching ideological unity. The differences in opinion which were resolved showed that the previous ideological difference between communists and social democrats has largely disappeared and that the party has many new members who belonged to neither of the old parties. Party discussion and practical party work have proved that the hitherto obtaining parity principle in filling all major positions has outlived its usefulness and has become an impediment to the effective deployment of members.

The party discussion has also made clear that we are on the way to becoming a party of the new type, that is a campaigning Marxist-Leninist party.

[2.] The characteristics of a party of the new type are:

The Marxist-Leninist party is the conscious vanguard of the working class. That is, it must be a workers' party which primarily has in its ranks the best elements of the working class, who are constantly heightening their class consciousness. The party can only fulfil its role as the vanguard of the proletariat if it has mastered Marxist-Leninist theory, which gives it insight into the laws of development of society. Therefore the first task in the development of the SED into a party of the new type is the political and ideological education of the membership and particularly of the office-bearers in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.

The role of the party as vanguard of the working class is realized in the day-to-day strategic guidance of party activity. This makes it possible to direct all aspects of party activity in the areas of government, economy, and cultural life. To achieve this it is necessary to form a collective strategic party leadership by electing a Political Bureau (Politbüro).

[. . .]

The Marxist-Leninist party is founded on the principle of democratic centralism. This means strictest adherence to the principle that leading bodies and officers are subject to election and that those elected are accountable to the membership. This internal party democracy is the basis for the tight party discipline which arises from members' socialist consciousness. Party resolutions are binding on all party members, particularly for those party members active in parliaments, governments, administrative bodies, and in the leadership of the mass organizations.

Democratic centralism means the development of criticism and self-criticism within the party and supervision to ensure that resolutions are rigorously carried out by the leadership and by members.

Toleration of factions and groupings within the party is not consistent with its Marxist-Leninist character.

The Marxist-Leninist party is strengthened by the struggle against opportunism. The working class is not a closed group. The spirit of opportunism is constantly being imported into it by bourgeois elements and calls forth uncertainty and vacillation in its ranks. Therefore the remorseless struggle against all opportunistic influences is an indispensable precondition for strengthening the party's campaigning power.

The highest class vigilance is the absolute duty of every party member. It is also necessary to prevent the infiltration of spies and agents of the secret services and of Schumacher's Eastern Bureau into the party and the democratic bodies.

The Marxist-Leninist party is permeated with the spirit of internationalism. This internationalism determines its place in the worldwide conflict between the war propagandists and the forces of peace, between reaction and progress, between capitalism and socialism. In this struggle the Marxist-Leninist party is firmly allied with the forces of peace and democracy, side by side with the People's Democracies and the revolutionary workers' parties all over the world. It recognizes the leading role of the CPSU(B) in the struggle against imperialism and declares it to be the duty of all working people to support the socialist Soviet Union with all their might.

Source: "From the Resolution of the 1st Party Conference: the SED becomes a 'party of the new type'" (January 28, 1949), in J. K. A. Thomanek and James Mellis, eds., *Politics, Society and Government in the German Democratic Republic: Basic Documents*. Oxford: Berg, 1989, pp. 47-49. [Please note: the first two paragraphs of the text reproduced here were omitted from the Thomanek and Mellis translation and translated by GHI staff.]