



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

Appeal by the Preparatory Trade Union Committee for Greater Berlin (June 15, 1945)

In the summer of 1945, under signs of centralization, the reorganization of the unions began in the Soviet occupation zone. This decidedly political appeal by the Preparatory Trade Union Committee for Greater Berlin had the joint backing of Communist and Socialist workers' representatives and bourgeois unionists. It advocated the unity of the working class as an "anti-Fascist bulwark."

The tyranny of Hitler's fascism has been crushed by the Allied armies. Millions of dead and wounded, ruined cities, destroyed property, widows and orphans are an accusation. Hitler has proved the terrible truth of the boastful statement he made on seizing power: "Give me ten years and you will no longer recognize Germany." Hitler has violated his own nation by his barbarous racial theories and the campaign of destruction against other peoples.

The way to the abyss began even before 1933. The forces of democracy were split and too undecided to offer decisive resistance. The first of May 1933 was the blackest day in the history of the workers' movement. Hitler came to unlimited power.

[. . .]

The undersigned have formed a committee for the reconstruction of free, democratic trade unions for Greater Berlin. We are convinced that we express the will of the working population of Berlin when we declare that:

The new, free trade unions should bring together all previous tendencies and act as *a unified group fighting for the total eradication of fascism and for the creation of a new, democratic law for workers and employees*. Their task is primarily to assist in the rebirth of our people and the healing of the wounds which Hitler's infamous war has inflicted on the world. They are to assist in creating a democratic Germany which means to live in peace and freedom with other nations. They intend to assist in regaining the trust of other nations by sincere hard work in reconstruction and reparation for what has been destroyed in other countries.

The committee will draw up the trade union principles and agree them with the International Trade Union Committee. We propose that the workers and employees of Berlin should express their opinions on the following:

First Tasks of the Free Trade Unions:

(1) Determined struggle against the Nazi ideology and the poison of German militarism. Purging of active fascist elements in all positions in the city administration and in the enterprises.

(2) Direction of all efforts to ensure supplies for the population and to rebuild Berlin by hard work.

Speediest possible recommissioning of supply enterprises and workshops, energy supply and transport services in Greater Berlin.

(3) Representation of the workers and employees within the framework of the Occupying Authorities' regulations by the conclusion of wage agreements and the organization of industrial health and safety standards and working provisions.

Participation in the reconstruction of the economy and of social insurance with guarantees of democratic rights of participation for workers and employees.

(4) Education of the working population in the spirit of anti-fascism, and democratic progress, and education towards the recognition of their social position.

Cultivation of solidarity with workers of other countries and consolidation of friendship with other peoples.

Workers and Employees!

The Nazi tyranny is dead! It is now up to us to set to work on the reconstruction, despite all the difficulties. Once more, as after 1918, the fate of our country lies in our hands. This time we must not fail.

Let us show the world that, having learned from the past and conscious of its best trade union traditions, the united working population is of a mind to create an anti-fascist bulwark and that it is determined to turn its full efforts to the creation of a democratic Germany and to peaceful co-operation with other nations.

The Preparatory Trade Union Committee for Greater Berlin

Source: "Proclamation of the Founding of New Free Trade Unions" (June 15, 1945), in J. K. A. Thomaneck and J. Mellis, eds., *Politics, Society and Government in the German Democratic Republic: Basic Documents*. Oxford: Berg, 1989, pp. 145-47.