



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

Communiqué on the Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic (June 11, 1953)

In June 1953, the government of the GDR adopted the “New Course” [*Neuer Kurs*], a policy introduced in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death. The government also proclaimed a political and economic liberalization. Mistakes in the previous policy were acknowledged and concessions were made to the population: the standard of living as a whole was to be improved, prices for certain foodstuffs and for public transportation would be lowered, and small businesses and farms would be returned to their private owners. This even applied to so-called *Republikflüchtige*, GDR citizens who had fled to the Federal Republic.

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At its meeting on 11 June 1953 the Council of Ministers decided on a number of measures which will correct the mistakes made by the Government and the organs of state administration in the most diverse fields. The measures now resolved on by the Council of Ministers initiate an improvement in the standard of living of the workers and the intelligentsia, of the farmers and artisans, and of the other strata of the middle class.

In his explanatory statement on the respective decrees and decisions, the Minister President took as his starting-point the various past measures which have proved to be mistaken. The Minister President ascribed these mistakes – for example, in the supply of ration cards, in measures for registration and collection, for tax collection, and other measures – to the fact that the budget had provided for considerable expenditure not envisaged in the Five-Year Plan. Moreover, tasks laid down for the next planning year were partly taken into the planning year 1953, and certain parts of the Five-Year Plan were transferred too soon from 1955 to 1952 or 1953 in order to expedite the development of heavy industry.

The Government had tried to master the situation thereby created and aggravated by arrears in last year's harvest and deliveries, by taking a number of measures which were shown by their effects to have been mistaken. “The instantaneous correction of the decrees in question,” declared the Minister President, “will lead to an improvement in the standard of living of our population and will strengthen and increase solidarity between the population and the Government. At the same time, such a policy corresponds to the basic interest of all German patriots to draw together and come to a closer understanding in the fight for the unity of Germany and for peace.”

In a thorough discussion in which the Deputy Ministers President Walter Ulbricht, Nuschke, Scholz, Loch, and Rau, the Ministers Steidle and Feldmann, the Chairman of the State Commission for Trade and Supply, Elli Schmidt, and Under Secretary of State Hafrang took

part, the mistakes made clear by the Minister President were acknowledged and the new decisions proposed by him approved by all. The Council of Ministers adopted these resolutions. These decisions will initiate a process that will be a way out of present straits. The coming period will see changes in the Five-Year Plan making possible a further improvement in the standard of living.

The Council of Ministers took the following decisions:

the restrictions on the issue of ration cards are to be lifted. As from 1 July 1953 these will once more be issued to all citizens of the German Democratic Republic and of the democratic sector of Greater Berlin.

HO prices for products containing sugar, such as sweetmeats, biscuits, pastries, as well as for artificial honey containing 10 percent of bee honey, will be reduced again to the level obtaining for these prices on 19 April 1953. The same applies to the price of preserves of all kinds, artificial honey, and fruit syrup. The price reductions will come into force on 15 June 1953.

Coercive measures for the collection of tax and social insurance arrears dating back to economic activities during the period up to the end of the year 1951 are to be suspended in the entire economy in the case of small, medium, and big farmers, artisans, retail and wholesale traders, and private industrial, building, and transport enterprises.

Artisans, retail and wholesale traders, and private industrial building and transport enterprises are to have their businesses restored to them on application. Short-term credits are to be granted.

Fare reductions amounting to 50 percent on workers' return tickets are to be extended to all persons entitled to them, irrespective of their income, with effect from 1 July 1953. Furthermore, fare reductions granted until 1 April 1953 to invalids, schoolchildren, students, apprentices, and allotment gardeners are to be reintroduced. Similarly the fare reductions on Sunday return tickets, shift workers' return tickets, and collective tickets, are to be restored with effect from 1 July 1953.

Cases of hardship in social insurance and social welfare will be relieved and payments will be brought back to their original level.

Agricultural units whose owners were forbidden by a decree of 19 February 1953 to work them any longer will be given back.

Persons who fled the German Democratic Republic and who return to its territory or to the democratic sector of Berlin will be given back their property. Those returning persons will have their full civic rights restored to them and will be reintegrated into economic and social life, according to their qualifications.

Farmers who left their farms because of difficulties in continuing to run them and fled the Republic can return to their farms. Where, in exceptional cases, it is impossible to give them back their agricultural property, they will get a fully equivalent substitute for it.

The Ministry of Justice and the Director of Public Prosecutions are to review all arrests, criminal proceedings, and sentences at once in order to remove hardships which may have occurred.

The Council of Ministers were informed of the agreements arrived at by the Minister President with the representatives of the Church and approved them.

Source: Communiqué on the Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic (June 11, 1953), *Neues Deutschland* (June 12, 1953); in Beata Ruhm von Oppen, ed., *Documents on Germany under Occupation, 1945-1954*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 588-90.