

Address given by Otto Grotewohl (Berlin, 30 May 1946)

Caption: On 30 May 1946, Otto Grotewohl, Chairman of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), delivers a speech on Radio Moscow in which he sets out the SED's duties.

Source: GROTEWOHL, Otto. Im Kampf um die einige Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Reden und Aufsätze. Auswahl aus den Jahren 1945-1953. Band I: 1945-1949. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1954. 568 S. p. 21-23.

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After the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party merged this year at the Easter Party Conference in Berlin, the newly founded Socialist Unity Party of Germany produced a manifesto to address the German people and, especially, to address the German working class.

A large number of serious problems are awaiting solution by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, but there are two important questions that stand out among these which must be resolved in the near future: the question of the referendum in the State of Saxony and the holding of local elections, which are expected to take place in September of this year.

It is not for their own benefit that the Soviet occupation authorities in Germany have requisitioned and expropriated a large number of factories belonging to war criminals and active supporters of Fascist war policies. They have placed these factories at the disposal of the German people. Now the people have to decide what is to happen to these factories.

The anti-Fascist democratic parties have met under the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany in order to launch a joint campaign and urgently request that the regional administration of Saxony should fix the date for a referendum at 30 June 1946. The workforce has welcomed the decision of the Soviet Military Administration as an act of particular magnanimity. In order to ensure that the nation may work in peace and continue its democratic development, they will approach the task of preparing the factories of the Nazis and war criminals for transfer into the hands of the people with energy and initiative.

In this ballot, it will be the task of the people themselves to ensure that these factories are put into service to meet the needs of the people.

The referendum is the declaration of belief in securing peace; the referendum is a step forward in the struggle against militarism and imperialism.

It is essential that the disputed factories pass into the hands of the people, because the previous owners of these factories were war criminals who were responsible for plunging Germany into poverty and misery as a result of two world wars. These criminals should not be allowed to keep their wealth, since they have brought countless air raid victims, prisoners of war, millions of homeless people, women and children into untold misery. Some of the factories, especially the small ones, which pose no threat to peace, should be put up for sale to craftsmen and small businesses. The profits from the sale of these factories should be used for the care and support of air raid victims, returnees, resettled persons, widows and orphans. This gives an opportunity to the public to take part of its fate into its own hands. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany is leading this campaign because it knows that this is a step that will serve peace and prepare the way for a better, more pleasant future for the workers of Germany.

The local elections that are expected to take place in September 1946 will give the Socialist Unity Party of Germany an opportunity to develop its strengths in an election process for the first time.

The mayors of every town and village will first address the people and report on the achievements to date in the reconstruction work in local self-government. The work was often difficult and seemed to be hopeless. In most of the administrative bodies, the war and its effects had destroyed everything; where that was not the case, the Nazi bandits had rendered the administration completely incapable of operating by destroying all the files and offices in the very last days of the war.

Everywhere where the people have laboriously worked their way up out of the rubble of the cities, out of the ruins, step by step, it was thanks to the initiative of the occupying power, to the absolute dedication of the anti-Fascists under the leadership of the workers. In the election, the public will give their verdict on this one year of arduous reconstruction work, and, at the same time, the people will have to determine who should carry out future communal reconstruction work and how this work is to be done. In this matter, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany has total confidence in the persuasive power of the Socialist idea.

In this election campaign, it will above all address the needs and demands of working women and of young people. There has been a shift in the composition of the population in Germany as a result of the war, with the result that, at present, there are approximately one hundred and seventy women for every one hundred men. As a result of this, women are of paramount importance for the outcome of the election.

We shall present the voters with practical initiatives, tangible measures and a well-thought-out election manifesto in order to gain their trust. The confidence of the workers, indeed of the entire nation in our party, is increasing day by day, and the strength of our organisation and the growing alliance between workers and working farmers will create the preconditions for the victorious outcome of this election campaign.