

'The East German Government' from Le Monde (6 October 1949)

Caption: On 6 October 1949, commenting on the foundation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the French daily newspaper Le Monde explains the structure of the new State's government and considers Germany's political future.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 06.10.1949, n° 1461; 6e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Le Gouvernement de l'Allemagne orientale", p. 1.

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The East German Government

The creation of an East German Government, as a counterpart to Bonn, was announced a long time ago. The fact that it will not take place until the end of the week is no doubt because the Soviets wanted to leave the initiative to the West in order to make them responsible for the division of Germany.

The new Berlin-based Government will not be the result of free elections like the West German Government. It will be formed using the methods of the 'people's democracy', i.e. by means of puppet figures appointed by Moscow. The Congress and the People's Council will be the basis of this construction. Congress is made up of civil servants, delegates from political parties in the Soviet zone and delegates from mass organisations, such as peasants' or youth movements. The 400-member People's Council is the executive body of the Congress. It has drawn up a Constitution similar to the Weimar Constitution, it will proclaim the dawn of the East German state on Friday, it will fulfil the duties of a Parliament until elections are held.

Naturally, the unified Socialist-Communist Party — the instrument of the military government — will dictate the law in the new State. Its Secretary-General, Walter Ulbricht, who is regarded as the most influential man, will not be Prime Minister; that will be Otto Grotewohl. A Socialist, he was chosen as Co-Chairman of the Unity Party, with Wilhelm Pieck representing the Communist component. Mr Pieck is quite elderly and does not seem fit to govern. But it is possible to place a man with a Socialist background at the head of the government in order to camouflage to some extent the Communist direction that it is taking.

There will also be a dash of Christian Democrats and Liberals. A Christian, Georg Dertinger, will be in charge of internal affairs, while a Liberal, Hermann Kastner, will be elevated to the position of President of the Republic. Since these parties were successful during the last elections to be held in the Soviet area, their leaders are apparently deluding themselves about the role that they could play in the new State. They simply have to recall the recent history of 'people's democracies' to realise that they will quickly be eliminated.

The East German Government will claim to be the government of all Germany, since the Bonn Government was declared null, illegal and without any ties to the people. To justify this claim, certain members of the People's Council were chosen from the West. This clever move will not fool anyone. West Germany, which accounts for two thirds of all Germans and whose government was democratically elected, will not take seriously a minority government led by Moscow puppets.

If the imminent event establishes the division of Germany, we may also say that the two German States comprise two different and opposite points of departure for reunification. The Bonn-Republic will try to annexe East Germany, just as the Berlin Government will try to draw West Germany into the Soviet orbit.

That attempt has little chance of succeeding by peaceful means: as the totalitarian regime establishes itself in the East, as the Eastern State joins with the Moscow satellites, the West Germans will distance themselves from it. But that is when the USSR will play the peace-treaty and troop-withdrawal card. It can allow itself to withdraw its troops if a militarised 500 000-strong police force with allegiance to the Communist party rules in Berlin, Magdeburg and Dresden. This police force would go immediately to the West if the Western Allies left.

The West must prepare itself now for this critical period, which could occur next year. Even so, a peace treaty and troop withdrawal would be demagogic gestures sure to impress the Germans. We shall have to be prepared for them.