

250

250

questions

answers

about the

GERMAN

DEMOCRATIC

REPUBLIC

250 QUESTIONS

250 ANSWERS

about the German Democratic Republic

**First English edition, based on the fourth revised and expanded
German Edition**

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COMMITTEE FOR GERMAN UNITY

Publisher's Preface

The English language edition of "250 Questions — 250 Answers about the German Democratic Republic" is a revised version of the 4th German edition of this book. Statistics and other particulars have been revised and brought up to the date of going to press. The publishers hope that this English edition will help to spread knowledge of the German Democratic Republic amongst English-speaking readers, and will bring understanding for the all-German question, the reunification of Germany.

FROM THE PREFACE TO THE FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD GERMAN EDITION

The speedy reunification of Germany is something desired by every German. It can, however, only be attained by reaching an understanding between the Germans in East and West. This understanding has been made more difficult by the mass of false information, lies and slanders spread by part of the press in West Germany and West Berlin about economic, political and cultural conditions in East Germany.

Who profits from these lies, such as the lies about alleged "starvation in the East Zone"? Such lies are of advantage only to those who profit from the partitioning of our homeland, those who are interested in maintaining their power and carrying out conquests, those who sow dissension in order to play off the East and the West against each other. Our people do not want dissension nor civil war. Our people need understanding and peace.

For understanding it is necessary to know the real facts about the situation. For this reason the publishers of this book have gathered together the questions most often asked by West Germans about life in the German Democratic Republic, and have answered these questions as exactly and as fully as possible.

All the answers are based upon the laws and regulations, the statistics and the facts of the daily life of citizens of the German Democratic Republic. All the persons, the factories and the institutions named actually exist and every reader can convince himself by correspondence of the truth of the answers given.

Berlin, January 1954

Committee for German Unity

FROM THE PREFACE TO THE FOURTH GERMAN EDITION

Since the publication of the first edition of this book only six months have passed. The fact that in this short period a fourth edition has become necessary shows the great popularity of this reference work in both parts of Germany.

The book has been particularly well received by West German readers, who had not yet had the opportunity to visit our Republic themselves and whose ideas about the Republic were often coloured by the lies and misinformation spread for years through press and radio by those opposed to a peaceful reunification of Germany. In this way this book has been able to play its part in bringing about understanding between the Germans.

The fourth edition has been expanded and revised. The main reason for the revision was the fact that in the intervening period the German Democratic Republic has made further great progress in the economic, political and cultural field. All details given in the fourth edition accord with the latest achievements.

In the six months since the first edition appeared great progress has been made in all fields of social life in the German Democratic Republic and these improvements bear witness to the effectiveness of the new course followed by our Government and the speed of our peaceful reconstruction.

Special thanks must be given to the numerous readers in East and West who have given valuable hints, criticisms and suggestions for the revision of the book. We shall be glad in future to receive questions and suggestions from our readers, and to take them into consideration as far as is possible.

Berlin, July 1954

Committee for German Unity

The German Democratic Republic

consists of the Eastern part of Germany. It is made up of 14 counties: Potsdam, Frankfurt/Oder, Cottbus (the province of Brandenburg); Neu-Brandenburg, Rostock, Schwerin (the province of Mecklenburg); Magdeburg, Halle (the province of Sachsen-Anhalt); Erfurt, Suhl, Gera (the province of Thuringia); Leipzig, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Dresden (the province of Saxony).

The German Democratic Republic has an area of 107,670 square kilometres. Its population (1946) was 17,200,000. The seat of Government of the German Democratic Republic is in the Democratic Sector of Berlin.

The German Democratic Republic was founded on October 7th 1949 on the territory of the former Soviet Occupation Zone as the basis for a united, peace-loving and independent Germany. The President of the German Democratic Republic is Wilhelm Pieck and the Prime Minister is Otto Grotewohl.

The State in the German Democratic Republic

1. How and why was the German Democratic Republic formed?

The signatories to the Potsdam Agreement guaranteed the establishment of the economic and political unity of Germany. Facts have shown, however, that from the very start the Government of the United States aimed at a partitioning of Germany.

In 1947 there was an economic union between the American and British zones of occupation, followed in 1948 by a separate currency reform in the three Western zones. The culmination of this development came on September 20th 1949, when the Western Powers completed the partitioning of Germany by constituting the West German separatist government. A situation was thus created which called for immediate measures on the part of the democratic parties and mass organisations. As a result the Provisional Government of the German Democratic Republic was established on October 7th 1949 and the Government was unanimously confirmed by the population in the elections held on October 15th 1950.

The political aims of the government of the German Democratic Republic are expressed in the Manifesto issued by the German People's Council on October 7th 1949 upon the formation of the German Democratic Republic: "The constitutionally formed Provisional German Government will devote its efforts to the fight for peace and the unity and sovereignty of Germany. It will be an important bulwark in the fight for the realisation of the programme of the National Front of Democratic Germany.

2. Why is the German Democratic Republic described as a workers' and peasants' state?

The German Democratic Republic is called a workers' and peasants' state since the working class, in alliance with the working peasants, have the power.

The working class, which creates great material values, is numerically the strongest class in the German Democratic Republic. Of the 6.1 million wage and salary earners more than 4.5 million are workers, and they form together with the

members of their families more than half the total population of the Republic. More than one million of the workers are employed in the 424 largest nationally owned factories employing more than a thousand workers.

Thus the workers play an extremely important part in the life of the German Democratic Republic and this is expressed in the leadership of the state too. In West Germany on the other hand the state power is to-day in the hands of the big capitalists and landowners, just as it was in the past.

This is shown by the following facts:

The majority of the ministers in the Government of the German Democratic Republic come from the working class and other working sections of the population. In the West German Government, on the other hand, thirteen of the eighteen Ministers are big capitalists, bankers and landowners, and not one is a worker or peasant. Six of the Ministers in West Germany were formerly leading nazi functionaries, or collaborated closely with the Hitlerites.

In the People's Chamber, the Parliament of the German Democratic Republic, 230 of the deputies are from the working class, 37 are peasants, 32 are craftsmen and 40 are intellectuals. In the West German Federal Parliament, on the other hand, incomplete statistics show 85 factory owners and big merchants, 51 big landowners, 85 leading employees of big business concerns and 138 members of the so called free professions who, in a capitalist society, mostly serve the capitalists. Only 3 per cent of the members — 15 deputies — are of working class origin and most of these are right wing trade union leaders who work closely together with big business.

In the German Democratic Republic the various other elected bodies in the counties, districts, towns and villages also show the leading role of the working class; 67 per cent of the members of these bodies come from the working class, 8.2 per cent are peasants and 6.9 per cent are craftsmen.

Thus it may be clearly seen that the working class in alliance with the other working sections of the population — peasants, craftsmen and intellectuals — control the state power. For the first time in the history of Germany a real people's state has been created, guaranteed by the fact that the workers and the peasants are the leading forces in the state. An administration has been built which from the very beginning guaranteed the interests of the working people and a democratic development in all fields of political, economic and cultural life.

3. What is the supreme authority in the German Democratic Republic?

The People's Chamber, the elected body is the supreme authority, the real central state organ. This demonstrates the fact that a real popular state exists in the German Democratic Republic. There is no body which possesses powers greater than those of the People's Chamber anywhere in the state.

The People's Chamber carries out the following duties:

- a) it lays down the principles of Government policy and the carrying out of these principles;
- b) confirms and supervises the Government and can recall it;
- c) lays down the principles to be followed by the administration and supervises the entire activity of the state machinery;
- d) performs legislative duties insofar as a plebiscite is not held;
- e) confirms the state budget, the economic plan, loans or state credits, and ratifies state treaties;
- f) issues amnesties;
- g) elects together with the Laenderkammer (Upper House of Parliament), the President of the Republic and can recall him with a two-thirds majority of both Houses;
- h) elects the members of the supreme court and the supreme legal authorities of the Republic and can recall them.

The People's Chamber can only be dissolved before the end of its four-year term by its own decision or as the result of a plebiscite.

The representative bodies in the counties, districts and Towns of the German Democratic Republic are bound by the decisions of the People's Chamber.

4. How does the People's Chamber carry out its tasks?

The People's Chamber is the supreme state body of the German Democratic Republic. The constitutionally defined rights and tasks outlined above help the People's Chamber to shape the social relations, to care for the material well being of the citizens and to ensure citizens their democratic rights. The People's Chamber works for the peaceful reunification of Germany and the conclusion of a peace treaty. In the field of foreign policy it works for peace and friendship with all nations and for the prevention of a new act of aggression.

In the field of home policy the People's Chamber has passed important legislation. Among the most important of these

are the Labour Law which ensures the workers the right of full codetermination, the proper treatment of working strength and the continual improvement of the material and cultural position of the workers and office employees; the Law on the Participation of Young People in the Construction of the German Democratic Republic and Help for Young People in Schools and at Work, Sport and Recreation; the Law on the Protection of Mothers and Children and the Rights of Women, which guarantees full equality for women in all fields of social life.

The importance and the effect of these Laws are described more fully in other sections of this book.

As part of its efforts to maintain peace, consolidate friendship with all nations and prevent a new act of aggression, the People's Chamber passed on December 15th 1950, the Law for the Protection of Peace. This law makes war propaganda and all propaganda for national or racial hatred into punishable offences as crimes against humanity.

In their struggle for the unity of Germany, the People's Chamber and the Government of the German Democratic Republic have constantly worked for an understanding between East and West Germany. Up until November 1954 the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic had passed a total of 54 different resolutions and declarations upon this question which is so vital for the German nation. A delegation was also sent to visit the West German Federal Parliament in an attempt to remove all obstacles to a joint discussion on the peaceful solution of the German question.

All these resolutions and declarations, including the three outlined in greater detail below, where either not replied to at all or were rejected. On September 15th 1951 the People's Chamber, acting on a Government proposal, sent an "Appeal to All Germans and all German Democratic Parties and Organisations" to the West German Parliament, proposing all-German discussions on the holding of all-German free elections to a National Assembly on the speeding-up of the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany. Laying this resolution before the People's Chamber, Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl, appealed to the members of the West German Parliament in these words: "If you accept our proposal, the unity of Germany on a democratic and peaceful basis will not be propaganda, but will become reality tomorrow."

In March 1952, the Government of the Soviet Union addressed to the three Western Powers a note on the question of preparing a peace treaty with Germany. On March 14th 1952,

the People's Chamber once again devoted its attention to the vital question confronting the German people and the question of securing the peace of Europe. Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl, in his Government declaration, stated that it was impossible to conclude a peace treaty with Germany without having restored German Unity. The People's Chamber addressed itself once more to the West German Parliament in a resolution declaring that in view of the declaration of the Government of the USSR it was time for the West German Parliament to call for the speedy conclusion of a peace treaty on the basis of the proposals of the Soviet Union.

On July 30th, 1953, the People's Chamber appealed once more to the German people, expressing the opinion that the calling of all-German discussions must be regarded as a precondition for the success of a Four Power Conference on the German question. The People's Chamber pointed out that the proposals for the reunification of Germany handed over personally to the Chairman of the West German Parliament in Bonn in autumn 1952 had not been answered.

The People's Chamber proposed that by August 1953 at the latest, an all-German meeting should be called to discuss the question of inner-German trade, traffic, the issuing of interzonal passes, and the preparation and holding of free all-German elections.

This declaration made it plain that these points should not be regarded as in any way conditions for such a meeting. The People's Chamber declared its readiness to discuss all proposals made by both sides without previous agreement on an Agenda.

From all these proposals it can be seen clearly that the People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic:

1. was always in favour of negotiations, is in favour of negotiations, and always will be in favour of negotiations;
2. regards an understanding between the Germans themselves as both necessary and possible;
3. does not and will not impose any prior conditions upon discussions between the two parts of Germany;
4. is ready at any time, and at the shortest notice, to negotiate upon all questions which could serve to bring closer together the two states in Germany;
5. is ready at any time, to negotiate also upon problems, which
 - a) have not been mentioned in the proposals of the People's Chamber or the Government of the German Democratic Republic,

- b) which are proposed by West Germany or upon which particular information is desired;
- c) regards all its proposals as contributions toward agreed all-German decisions.

5. Why does the People's Chamber reach its decisions unanimously?

Since the German Democratic Republic is a workers' and peasants' state in which there are no big capitalists, big landowners and bankers, there are no economic or political foundations for the representation of interests opposed to the construction plans of the overwhelming majority of the people. For this reason there are no mutually hostile parties with conflicting ideas about the basic policy of our government.

The great mutual interests of all sections of the population are the starting point for all decisions taken by the People's Chamber in the economic, political and cultural fields. The political parties and the most important mass organisations, which represent the particular interests of the various sections of the population, have joined together in the "Block of Anti-Fascist Democratic Parties and Mass Organisations" on the basis of their common struggle for peace, national unity and democracy.

All decisive problems of internal and external policy, which shall be expressed as Government policy or in the form of laws, are discussed at meetings of this block until unanimity is reached on the principles of such laws.

The draft law is then worked out by the Government, in which all fractions of the People's Chamber are represented, and is then presented to the People's Chamber for its decision. In the first reading of such a bill the various fractions generally propose various amendments, based in particular on suggestions received from the population.

The draft is then referred to the relevant Parliamentary Committee for final drafting. These committees include the Budget Committee, Economic Committee, Committee for Labour and Health, Agricultural Committee, Cultural Committee etc. The various fractions are represented in these committees proportional to their representation in the People's Chamber. Committee sessions are generally marked by lively discussions, which continue until the point under discussion is finally clarified. For this reason the second reading of the bill generally results in unanimous adoption by all deputies of the People's Chamber. The representatives of the various frac-

tions in their speeches emphasize the importance of the new law for the sections of the population which they represent or make suggestions for the way in which the law should be put into effect, suggestions which are heeded by the government and the population.

6. How is the People's Chamber elected?

The deputies of the People's Chamber are representatives of the German people, elected by general, equal, direct and secret ballot on the principle of proportional representation, for a period of four years.

The first People's Chamber was elected in the general democratic elections held in October 15th 1950. The various democratic forces, the political parties and the mass organisations of the German Democratic Republic, had worked out a joint programme of the National Front of Democratic Germany, which accorded with the national, democratic and social interests of the people. (For further details of this programme see the chapter "The political forces in the German Democratic Republic").

On October 17th 1954 elections were held for the new People's Chamber. From 12,086,987 electors a total of 11,889,817 (98.4 per cent) went to the polls. 11,807,497 (99.3 per cent) voted for the joint list of candidates of the National Front of Democratic Germany. A total of 82,320 (0.7 per cent) electors voted against the list or gave invalid votes.

7. Is the electoral system, which is used in the German Democratic Republic, a democratic one?

The electoral system used in the German Democratic Republic is the most democratic ever used in Germany. The persons elected are bound to give their electors regular reports on the work which they have done as their representatives. Before a new election they are particularly obliged to make such reports, so that the population have a chance to judge their work before they propose them once again for candidature. If the representative has not carried out his obligations to the satisfaction of the electors they can reject him, just as they are entitled to recall their representative at any time, if he should prove unsatisfactory.

After such reporting-back meetings, the parties and the mass organisations (trade unions, organisations of women and youth, cooperatives etc.) draw up the lists of candidates. These lists must be approved by special representatives selected by

the electors. After this each candidate must present himself to the electors and explain what he intends to do. At these meetings the electors can give the candidate special commissions and the candidate, after election, is bound to report on how he has carried out these commissions. The electors have the full right to reject any of the candidates selected and to name others.

The actual act of election at the polling booth is then in fact the formal confirmation given by the elector to the programme and the list of candidates, which he himself has helped to draw up. The candidates, if elected, are bound to report back to the elector and to carry out commissions given by the elector, and the electors can at any time recall these candidates. This system guarantees that the deputies elected are genuine representatives of the people.

8. How is the Government of the German Democratic Republic formed?

The strongest fraction in the People's Chamber selects the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister forms the government. The Constitution of the German Democratic Republic lays down that the Government must include representatives of all fractions in the People's Chamber with a strength of at least 40 deputies. The fractions are represented in the Government by Ministers and State Secretaries proportional to their strength.

The government is sworn in on the Constitution by the President of the Republic and is confirmed by the People's Chamber to which it is bound to report on its work. Through its various committees the People's Chamber supervises the activity of the government.

9. Is it possible to criticize a Minister?

Yes, this happens often. Shortcomings in the work of the state machinery are sharply criticized by the People's Chamber and the Ministries and Ministers responsible are exposed to criticism.

The newspapers of the German Democratic Republic publish every justified criticism without respect to the institution or the person criticized, but these criticisms should include suggestions as to how the work can be improved.

In the past, Ministries and State Secretariats have been reorganised and Ministers and State Secretaries have been