

**THE OFFICIAL CONCEPT OF THE NATION IN THE GDR:
THEORY VERSUS PRAGMATISM**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the attempts by the leadership of the GDR to devise a concept of the nation which suited their objectives regarding the future of the state and of Germany as a whole, from 1949 until 1989. A simple analysis of official pronouncements on the subject over the years reveals serious inconsistencies and dramatic U-turns. This thesis considers various factors which may have shaped the official line, including the influence of Bonn and Moscow, public opinion and personal convictions. In particular it examines the input of experts from academic institutions in order to answer the question of whether or not the official line on the nation had a clear theoretical basis, or was purely determined by pragmatic considerations.

In order to investigate what lay behind official policy, extensive use has been made of material from the SED's Central Party Archive, and interviews were conducted with leading theorists. In this way it was possible to gain a better understanding of the interaction between the political and theoretical aspects of the National Question in the former GDR.

The findings reveal that the official concept of the nation was primarily determined by pragmatic, or even opportunistic considerations, and was viewed by the SED leadership as a means to legitimise the GDR in the absence of alternative methods. Initially the intention was to reinforce the claim that the GDR was a model for a future united socialist Germany, but later a concept was fashioned to support the idea that it was an independent sovereign state, and in no way linked to the Federal Republic. However, the regime was heavily reliant on the skills of theorists to provide credible (Marxist-Leninist) justifications for policy changes, and to modify policies in order to make them more acceptable and therefore more effective as a means to legitimise the state.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Recent events in the former Eastern Bloc have shown that the key factor ensuring the stability of states and their systems is popular legitimacy. While an outside guardian, the threat of force from within and without, and even barbed wire and concrete can uphold a state artificially, they are no substitutes for legitimacy from below, and we now know what happens once these supports are withdrawn.

Three factors can be identified as vital if a state is to enjoy the total allegiance of its population, and a deficiency in any one of them may well have disastrous consequences. The first is democracy, that is to say, the right of all citizens to give or withhold their assent to their state's system and regime and to participate in the decision-making process. The denial of that right suggests a belief on the part of the regime that it would not get the approval of the population, if they were given the opportunity to voice their opinions.

The second factor is economic success, demonstrated by the fulfilment of what are perceived to be the minimum requirements for an acceptable standard of living, which will differ according to expectations. In the developed world, this will be based on material well-being, or more precisely, the ability of the state to satisfy demand for food, clothing, housing, transport and consumer durables - not just in terms of quantity, but of quality also.

The third essential factor is what we might describe as identification of the state with a defined group and its interests, which may be a nation or a class, but (in theory) not both. Sometimes states do represent more than one group, but this can easily lead to discrimination, internal rivalry, even civil war, and may result in the division of the state as occurred in Czechoslovakia and could happen in Belgium or Canada. By appearing to represent a nation and to protect national interests

from outside competition and threats, a regime can draw on the powerful forces of national sentiment, even nationalism, to gain support and therefore legitimacy for itself and the state. Where the interests of the state and the nation are successfully fused together, causing national and state-consciousness to become inseparable, an extremely resilient entity, a true nation-state will become established.

Alternatively, a genuine Marxist-Leninist regime should justify a socialist or communist state's right to exist on the basis of its social and economic system, that is to say, on the claim that the state represents the interests of the masses, since power is (theoretically) in the hands of the working class themselves. Clearly this claim is fundamentally incompatible with the claim to represent a group bound together by their nationality, regardless of class.

Once a state has secured the loyalty of its citizens, or popular legitimacy, it is likely to be recognised as legitimate by the international community, which in turn will further encourage popular acceptance of the legitimacy of the state.

The GDR was a state born illegitimate. Whereas many states are created in response to a claim to the right to political autonomy by an established nation, the GDR was founded not due to the will of its population, but as a result of the breakdown in relations between the wartime allies, and therefore seemed artificial and only likely to last as long as the rift between the allies continued, which more or less proved to be the case. Furthermore, its population was not originally a nation in its own right, but part of the broader German nation, which also included the population of the neighbouring Federal Republic, plus minorities elsewhere. Thus, right from the start, the ruling communist party, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), was faced with a serious legitimacy problem.

However, as we have seen, there were three ways to remedy the situation. The SED's attitude towards the first of these, namely

democracy, implies that they either had a very unusual understanding of the word, or simply failed to appreciate the importance of this factor for the legitimacy of the state, or maybe even both. The total dominance of the party was undemocratically imposed when the state was created, and was never put to the test of democracy. It is hard to believe that anyone was fooled by the facade of the block parties and sham elections. Therefore, we can hardly say that the SED failed to bring the GDR democratic legitimacy, since this was never their intention.

Turning to the second factor, namely economic success, particularly under the leadership of Erich Honecker, the SED was well aware of the beneficial effects of material well-being to enhance the image of the state, both in the eyes of its own population and of the outside world. However, there is no point in trying to use economic success to legitimise the state and its system if that success cannot be guaranteed.¹ While food and housing was cheap though basic, consumer durables were of poor quality and in short supply, and a 15 year wait was not unusual for a new car, (and only a *Trabbi* at that). People also had to tolerate the dowdy clothes which made them so easily distinguishable from their West German cousins during the reunification process - perhaps still even today. However, the ultimate contradiction was the fact that in the supposedly egalitarian GDR, luxury goods could be obtained in special shops with 'real money,' i.e. Deutschmarks, and were regularly available to the ruling elite.

What made matters worse was the fact that East Germans were fully aware of the shortcomings of the East German economy, thanks to West German television, with the exception of those in

¹ Harold James, A German Identity 1770-1990 (London, 1989), p.4.

² ~~According to his personal assistant, this was true of Politburo member Hermann Axen, who got a shock on a rare occasion when he entered shops in the 'real world' in East Berlin. Interview with Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 23 July 1993.~~

the Dresden area, who as a consequence became known as 'the clueless' (*die Ahnungslosen*). Naturally television included not only programmes, but also advertisements, and East Germans constructed an image in their minds of what they believed capitalism automatically delivered. Furthermore, there were naturally historic and emotional reasons why they compared their modest standard of living with that of the prosperous Federal Republic, and not with that of their 'inferior' socialist brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe, compared to whom they lived quite a comfortable life. In short, in spite of the over-optimistic claims and predictions of the SED, the socialist system in the GDR failed to deliver the goods, therefore the economy did not provide a means to compensate for the inherent lack of legitimacy of the state.

At the heart of the SED's claim that the GDR was a legitimate state, indeed, *the* legitimate German state at first, was a fundamental belief in the justice of the Marxist-Leninist system in a moral sense. Unfortunately, however, 'really existing socialism' in the GDR was very noticeably unjust. In practice, the ordinary people had very little freedom and control over their own lives, and due to the economic short-comings mentioned earlier, the leadership's claim that the socialist system was the best alternative was not borne out by the evidence. Furthermore, due to overt sovietisation, socialism seemed alien and under external control. Together these factors undermined the SED's claim that the GDR was legitimate by virtue of its socialist political and economic system.

Having chosen to base the legitimacy of the state on socialism, the SED should not have concerned itself with the nation and nationalism at all, since one either believes that people form communities based on their common nationality or their class identification, and that either national consciousness or class consciousness determines relations with others. However, due to the peculiar circumstances of the GDR, the SED could not ignore the question of nationhood, thus facing an additional problem which was not shared by the other Eastern Bloc regimes as they too attempted to take advantage of the beginning of a new era to establish socialism.

The main reason for this was the simple fact that the population of the GDR had previously been part of the broader German nation, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there was another state which claimed to be the one true German state, the Federal Republic, which threatened to undermine the similar claim made by the SED. As we shall see, the foundation of the GDR was originally perceived by the Party as the first step towards a unitary socialist Germany and not as an end in itself, and in order to make socialism appeal to all Germans, the SED had little choice but to make it seem synonymous with the national interest and indigenous to Germany. This confirms the fact that socialism alone was not sufficient to legitimise the state.

In spite of the fact that classical Marxism viewed nationalism as a device used by the bourgeoisie to weaken the class consciousness of the working class, the SED could justify its actions by pointing out that Marx and Lenin had condoned the manipulation of national sentiment as a means to advance the revolution, providing it was vanquished once that objective had been achieved.³ In fact, as we shall see, the leadership continued to make use of the vocabulary of nationalism even after they had abandoned its all-German aspirations, though from then on, it was portrayed as a form of nationalism unique to the GDR. Furthermore, it masqueraded as (socialist) patriotism, and was apparently acceptable because it was inextricably linked to proletarian internationalism, though in real terms, these two ideologies were mutually exclusive.

For these reasons, the SED did not resist temptation to use national sentiment to its own advantage. However, for several reasons, this strategy could either have been the fledgling state's salvation, or its ruin. Firstly, the SED faced a serious dilemma. On the one hand, by emphasising the nation, the SED might remind people that the political division of Germany was unnatural, reinforcing

³ Walker Connor, The Nation in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy (Princeton, 1984), pp.XIII, 7. On this subject in general, see also Klaus Motschmann, Sozialismus und Nation (Munich, 1979).

their desire to be reunited with the population of the Federal Republic, and the Party could not be certain that the GDR's political system would be the most popular model for a future united German state. This danger was exacerbated by the fact that the Federal Republic was larger, better endowed with natural resources and soon noticeably more prosperous. On the other hand, if the Party leadership claimed to represent a separate nation in the GDR, it could be accused of treachery, of abandoning the national cause of the German people and their right to self-determination. Furthermore, while there are several examples of firmly established states consisting of various peoples who have gradually developed a common or national identity, for example, the United States, it was unusual for one nation to be represented by two states. While a similar situation arose in Korea,⁴ there are still far more cases of states consisting of more than one nationality.

The second problem with appealing to national sentiment to legitimise the state was the fact that the SED was identified with a foreign power, namely the Soviet Union, hence the leadership's nationalist rhetoric sounded extremely hollow. Indeed, even before the GDR was established, the SED had already given up the 'particular German road to socialism,' in favour of the Soviet one. Therefore, the German Democratic Republic was not only not democratic - it also hardly seemed German.

Thirdly, the SED undermined its own arguments by attempting to appeal to national and class consciousness simultaneously. Indeed, the leadership never did satisfactorily resolve the problem of the role of nations under socialism, since the ideas behind nationalism and socialism are basically irreconcilable, but then nor did Marx, Engels or Lenin. Nevertheless, as we shall see, scholars in the GDR did try to do so.

⁴ See for example, Roland Bleiker, 'Global Systemic Change, Spatial Mediation and Unification Dynamics in Korea and Germany,' Asian Perspective 16 (1992): pp.70-79; Myoung-Kyu Kang and Helmut Wagner, Korea and Germany: Lessons in Division (Seoul, 1990); Steven W. Mosher, Korea in the 1990s: Prospects for Unification (New Brunswick, 1992).

Fourthly, the nation was not a new problem for the Germans, indeed both the GDR and the Federal Republic inherited a legacy of disagreement over the precise definition and character of the German nation which had been raging for centuries. The problem was naturally made worse by the recent example of extreme German nationalism, which made the subject taboo, when it really needed to be addressed.

In short, due to the unusual situation which had given birth to the GDR, what the SED desperately needed was 'a basic legitimising idea.'⁵ Neither democracy nor economic success was an option, and the socialist system and class identification alone could not fill the gap, partly due to the short-comings of the system, but also because people's class consciousness was undermined by their national consciousness. Therefore the Party had little alternative than to try to use the concept of the nation and nationalism to its own advantage, even if it was a gamble, since if it ignored the issue, and allowed the Federal Republic to seize the initiative, then it was sure to be the loser. How they went about this is the main subject of this thesis.

1) AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

As we shall see, if one were to examine statements by the SED leadership regarding the German nation at various points during the history of the GDR, one would immediately be struck by the contradictions and dramatic changes in policy that occurred over the years. The primary task of this thesis is to explore the rationale behind policy changes - sound theoretical arguments, or more sinister political motives. Only by doing so can we hope to make sense of the apparent inconsistency and illogicality of official policy.

From this starting point, other questions arise. Firstly, was policy regarding the nation carefully thought out and deliberate? Which

⁵ Harry Krisch, 'Official Nationalism,' in The GDR - a developed socialist society, ed. Lyman H. Legters (Boulder, Colorado, 1978), p.110.

individuals and bodies were involved? Who was ultimately responsible? Where did they get their ideas from?

Secondly, to what extent was policy influenced by external factors? Is there any evidence of interference from Moscow? To what extent was the SED's stance a response to the actions and statements of governments in Bonn, or did the Party attempt to keep one stage ahead? Which other events outside the SED's control affected policy?

Thirdly, which internal factors played a part? Did the regime endeavour to find out what the population thought about the state of the nation? If so, were their feelings taken into account? Or did the SED simply attempt to change them?

Fourthly, did the official line on the nation have a theoretical basis? If so, was it rooted in Marxist-Leninist theory? Were any other, non-Marxist theories taken into account? Did theoretical work determine official policy or vice versa? How could those who were academically qualified to tackle the subject get their ideas across? Were they listened to?

In order to answer these questions, both Party material and the work of East German scholars on the concept of the nation has been consulted. While our primary concern is to identify exactly why the SED's position regarding the German nation changed so dramatically, a major by-product of this study is a better understanding of the relationship between academia and the Party to be gained by contrasting academic work on the subject of the nation in the GDR with Party material. Finally, while it was not the author's intention to explain why the GDR collapsed, this examination of the SED's *Nationskonzepte* may unintentionally shed some light on the matter.

The hypothesis to be tested is that the SED always regarded the concept of the nation as a means to an end, hence it was consistently determined by political objectives, even opportunism. Even so, the Party relied on professional academics to provide

theoretical justifications for changes in policy, to fill in the details, and even to modify the official line when necessary. This was not due to a commitment to theoretical debate, but in order to make those changes more acceptable, and as a consequence, more effective as a means to achieve wider political objectives concerning the status of the GDR. Unfortunately, however, the leadership tended to change its position before a rationale for doing so had been worked out.

The fact that the regime went to such lengths to ensure that the scholarly community worked for it and not against it is an indication of the importance attached to 'science' or scholarship as a means to legitimise individual policies and to reinforce the scientific nature and validity of Marxism-Leninism in general. Clearly it could help the Party achieve its most important and long-standing objective, namely to legitimise a state that was not legitimate in itself, neither in the eyes of her own population, nor of the international community. However, as a result, both the SED's various official concepts of the nation and the theoretical explanations devised to support them sound distinctly contrived. They have little in common with western ideas of what constitutes a nation, and at times even contradict the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism. Since the state never was entirely accepted as legitimate, we can tentatively assume that even with scholarly backing, the SED's various concepts of the nation failed as a legitimising strategy.

2) TERMINOLOGY

In this thesis, the distinction is made between the influence of 'theory' and of 'pragmatism' on the official line regarding the nation. Here, 'pragmatism' is used to refer to the political factors and objectives, maybe even opportunism, which may have influenced the leadership of the SED, including both internal and external events and considerations. The term 'theory' denotes scholarly arguments, which were usually devised by East German academics, as opposed to members of the ruling elite. As in all societies, both capitalist and communist, the relationship between

the regime and 'its' experts was extremely complex. Not surprisingly, in the latter case, they had to operate within a Marxist-Leninist framework and within the practical constraints of the system, hence such work was by no means objective in a non-Marxist sense, hence it is impossible to draw a definite line between scholarship and propaganda in the GDR. Even so, theoretical material differed from the statements of the Party leadership, firstly because it was more detailed, and composed by those academically qualified to do so, and secondly because they had different motives to the leadership - personal motives as opposed to political ones, although this by no means cast them in the role of dissidents.

Throughout the thesis, those who were engaged in detailed consideration of the concept of the nation in the GDR are usually referred to as 'theorists,' because they were occupationally engaged in the provision of well-founded, theoretical justifications for changes in the official line on the subject. The individuals we are concerned with were historians, philosophers and social scientists, and were all members of the top state-run academic institutions of the GDR, such as the Academy of Sciences and Academy for Social Sciences, the primary function of which was not to encourage objective scholarship, but to serve the needs of the Party, both in the natural and social sciences. We could also refer to them as 'scholars' or 'academics,' indeed, they would call themselves '*Wissenschaftler*', but these terms are somewhat imprecise and fail to encapsulate the specific function of the individuals concerned. Furthermore, the direct translation of '*Wissenschaftler*,' namely 'scientist,' is avoided because in English usage it implies natural scientists only.

Some might call such people 'intellectuals,' but this term was also rejected for this dissertation, primarily because nowadays, it is often associated with dissident writers and thinkers, such as Vaclav Havel, as opposed to institutionalised scholars, who were Party members and were not so much opponents as collaborators with the regime. In the case of the GDR, they may privately have been critical of the leadership, but they were not necessarily

opposed to the socialist system. A second reason was that the precise definition of 'intellectual' and 'intelligentsia' in the broader Soviet and East European context has been disputed throughout the post-war period.⁶ Some people would define them as people who were occupationally involved in the production of ideas,⁷ while others would include all those who had completed higher education.⁸ Other people would define them as all those engaged in mental work (technical personnel, teachers, doctors, office employees, scientists, writers, etc.),⁹ while others still would identify several different types of intellectual, some amateurs and others professional.¹⁰ According to some of these definitions, the intelligentsia would include a significant proportion of the population, while according to others they would be a small elite group.

However, whether those who toed the Party line and did not, or could not, conduct their research freely should count as intellectuals at all is questionable.¹¹ Furthermore, if one were to exclude all those in nomenclatura positions, those remaining would be few in number, since, as we shall see, to challenge the official line and dominant ideology was extremely difficult and risky in all communist states. Therefore, although those who seriously contemplated the concept of the nation in the GDR would certainly qualify as 'intellectuals' according to definitions based on either occupation or education or both, the term is insufficiently precise and possibly misleading.

⁶ For a discussion of the debate see for example, Michael D. Kennedy, 'Eastern Europe's Lessons for Critical Intellectuals,' in Intellectuals and Politics. Social Theory in a changing world, ed. Charles C. Lemert (Newbury Park, London, New Delhi, 1991), pp.110-111, note 1; L.G. Churchward, The Soviet Intelligensia. An essay on the Social Structure and Roles of Soviet Intellectuals during the 1960s (London and Boston, 1973), pp.1-14; Vladimir Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power. The Post-Stalinist Era (London and New York, 1990), pp.IX-X.

⁷ Robert J. Brym, Intellectuals and Politics (London, 1980), p.12.

⁸ Hannelore Belitz-Demiriz and Dieter Voigt, Die Sozialstruktur der promovierten Intelligenz in der DDR und in der BRD 1950-1982 (Bochum, 1990), p.1; Churchward, The Soviet Intelligensia, p.6.

⁹ Churchward, The Soviet Intelligensia, p.3.

¹⁰ Kennedy, 'Eastern Europe's Lessons,' p.99.

¹¹ Kennedy, p.99.

Other possible terms were 'strategists,' though this was felt to imply participation in an overall plan and therefore not entirely appropriate, 'ideologues,' and 'academicians,'¹² the latter being reasonably fitting but rather unusual. In the end, it was decided that 'theorists' was the most appropriate term,¹³ because it best encapsulated their function in the East German system, though admittedly it is not ideal, particularly in the case of historians. Since the 'theorists' were by occupation scholars and academics, these terms are also used in the thesis where appropriate.

a) Scholarship under Marxist-Leninist Regimes

In order to be able to assess the influence of theoretical work on the Party line, it is necessary to understand the role of scholarship as perceived by ruling Marxist-Leninist parties. Although we are only concerned with the GDR, and with the subject area of the nation in particular, the situation was similar for all scholars, from natural scientists to historians and artists, and in all the states of the Soviet Bloc. Consequently we will take a brief look at the role of scholars, particularly in the Soviet Union, which served as a model for its satellites, and about which the most information is available.

According to Marxism-Leninism, the dominant ideology in any society inevitably influences scholarship, with the result that it serves the ruling class in that society. Where the dominant ideology is Marxism-Leninism, such influence is regarded as perfectly acceptable, even to be encouraged, because in theory, scholarship then serves the interests of the working class, though in practice, it serves the party claiming to represent them. Therefore, the claim that Marxist-Leninist scholarship is objective does not mean non-partisan, but socially just, according to class-

¹² The term used by Alexander Vucinich, The Soviet Academy of Sciences (Stanford, 1956), and by Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia.

¹³ Also the term used by Max Weinreich to mean 'those who supplied the academic formulae and scholarly backing,' in Hitler's Professors. The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People (New York, 1946), pp.239-240.

based criteria. According to Stalin, in socialist societies, scholars and intellectuals were not a separate class, but merely a social stratum, drawn from the people to serve the people.¹⁴ He added that although the 'old,' pre-revolutionary intelligentsia should be distrusted and challenged, because it had served landlords and capitalists, the 'new' intelligentsia was to be respected and assisted in the interest of the working class.¹⁵

In contrast, where the dominant ideology is capitalism, scholarship apparently serves a very different ruling class, namely big business and the owners of the means of production, therefore in such societies, ideological bias in scholarship should be condemned.

Ruling Communist parties in the Eastern Bloc quickly recognised the potential usefulness of loyal academics and intellectuals, particularly economists and those involved in military projects,¹⁶ both to help modernise society and to gain international prestige for the state. Therefore, scholarship was an important form of propaganda, providing a vast quantity of material of a higher quality than Party apparatchiks could produce themselves. Social scientists in particular were required to give 'scholarly publicity' to whatever the leadership wanted publicised.¹⁷ However, they could also pose a threat to the regime if they actively opposed it. Consequently, all kinds of intellectuals were encouraged to become members of their respective communist parties, to reduce the chances of this happening.¹⁸ Rigid academic structures with built-in control mechanisms were created, which brought rewards for those who conformed and disadvantages for those who did not.

¹⁴ Joseph Stalin, 'The Old and the New Intellegensia,' in The Intellectuals ed. George B. de Huszar (Illinois, 1960), p.407; Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, p.3. On the relationship between the working class and the intellegensia, see Günther Erbe, Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz in der DDR (Opladen, 1982).

¹⁵ Stalin, 'The Old and the New,' p.409.

¹⁶ Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.9.

¹⁷ Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.44.

¹⁸ Kennedy, 'Eastern Europe's Lessons,' p.99.

In order to be able to make a living as an academic of any discipline, individuals either had to be university lecturers or members of exclusive state-controlled academies, which monopolised resources for research - not that the situation is so different in capitalist societies today. It is important to comprehend the way in which academic life was institutionalised in states such as the GDR, in order to understand the tasks and constraints facing those who tackled the problem of the nation.

USSR

The Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union was the prototype for numerous smaller institutes and equivalent institutions in Moscow's satellite states, including the Academy of Sciences and Academy for Social Sciences of the GDR, where the individuals responsible for the most significant material on the concept of the nation in the GDR studied and worked. The Soviet Academy served as a model for their internal organisation, ~~and was recognised as the supreme authority on ideological matters,~~¹⁹ hence it warrants closer attention. According to Alexander Vucinich, 'To understand the dynamics of this institution is to understand the interplay of the political, social and cultural forces that have shaped the realities of Soviet science.'²⁰ (Here 'science' included all academic disciplines.) The Academy's 'basic social function' was 'to safeguard the *unity of science and ideology*.'²¹ It was ultimately answerable to the Council of Ministers and like any industry, what it was required to produce was laid down in a central plan. In short, 'the academy was intended to serve not as a forum for the free exchange of scholarly ideas, but as a government agency..... It is therefore clear that the Academy, with its institutionalised Party guidance, government authority and fictitious self-government, is a typical Soviet institution. It is also clear that science in the Soviet Union is actually "Party science" - as, indeed, it is frequently referred to in communist literature.'²²

¹⁹ Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.74.

²⁰ Alexander Vucinich, Empire of Knowledge. The Academy of Sciences of the USSR 1917-1970 (Berkeley and London, 1984), p.IX. Here the term 'science' includes social sciences, humanities etc.

²¹ Vucinich, Empire, p.1, my italics.

²² Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.35. Here Vucinich gives a detailed account of the structure of the Academy.

The Academy and its East European counterparts were a valuable resource for the Party leadership, but various mechanisms ensured that the solutions and theories produced were those acceptable to the party. They included strict criteria for membership, Party representatives in the administration, control of resources, actual or threatened censorship, and perks or punishments for members, depending on their performance. Such academies were not teaching institutions like the universities, though they did award doctorates and were intended to train an academic elite whose expertise could then be harnessed to provide the Party leadership with scholarly arguments in all subject areas.

Demonstrations of political loyalty were vital for a successful academic career and social advancement.²³ Party membership alone, though obligatory, was not sufficient. Instead it was necessary for candidates to have participated more actively, for example, by holding office in a Party organisation. Unfortunately this inevitably resulted in nomenclatura appointments, i.e. people accepted more due to their political track record than their academic achievements.²⁴ However, it should not be assumed that all were reluctant Party members. Indeed, many were convinced communists, though they may have hoped to make the system function better.

For scholars who were accepted by the prestigious state-run academies, there were numerous privileges, primarily in terms of financial and material resources for research, but also prestige, a comfortable lifestyle and opportunities to travel. Presumably self-interest and a desire to climb the academic career ladder persuaded the majority to conform. A small proportion may have hoped to gain influence and get closer to the decision-makers, in order to create a better GDR or Soviet Union, etc., but in order to do so, they had to abide by the rules, which inevitably encouraged conservatism.

²³ See Belitz-Demiriz and Voigt, Die Sozialstruktur, pp.466-473.

²⁴ Vucinich, Empire of Knowledge, p.364.

However, the disadvantages of being a member of the academic elite were also considerable. All areas of academic life were regulated at the highest level,²⁵ an indication of the importance attached to it. Members of the Academies were subject to numerous control mechanisms, designed to ensure that their work was ideologically acceptable and in no way contradicted the most recent declarations from the Party leadership. Middle-ranking functionaries tended to enforce these control mechanisms particularly rigidly, in order to gain the approval of their own bosses.²⁶

The advisory role of academics consisted less of helping the leadership reach decisions, and more of providing scholarly arguments to support what had already been decided. If expert opinions did not suit the leadership, they could always be replaced by others which did.²⁷ Challenging an opinion from on high, however absurd, was not advisable, and it was important to keep up to date with current Party thinking on a subject, in order to avoid accidentally contradicting it as a result of a sudden change in the Party's position.²⁸ The fact that central planners determined which subjects needed to be researched and which should take priority over others²⁹ and allocated resources accordingly made it difficult for scholars to undertake research in areas the leadership considered insignificant or which it preferred not to know about. Furthermore, the general reluctance of all communist regimes to hear bad news and to acknowledge that problems existed often made it difficult for academics to propose solutions that might actually help solve those problems. Finally, because the demands of the Party were time-consuming, scholars were left with little time to devote to projects of their own.³⁰

²⁵ Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, pp.130-134.

²⁶ A view supported by several East German theorists and Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.22.

²⁷ Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.21.

²⁸ See Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.68.

²⁹ See Vucinich, pp.35-36.

³⁰ Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, pp.130-134.

While controversial issues could be debated within institutions, there was a great difference between what could be discussed and what could be published,³¹ and there was always a danger that dissident views would be conveyed to the authorities. Since appointments had to be approved by the Party, there was considerable pressure to conform, and overtly political appointments no doubt caused resentment among those who took their work more seriously.

As mentioned earlier, those in the GDR concerned with the concept of the nation included philosophers, historians and social scientists - disciplines which for ideological reasons, were subject to particular restrictions under communism, more so than natural sciences, resulting in excessive caution and conservatism.³² The social sciences in particular were considered to be 'ideological' or 'class' sciences, because 'they reflect, embody and paraphrase the social myths of the dominant social class.'³³ According to one official Soviet writer, 'The work of our scholars - economists, philosophers, jurists - must clearly reveal the advantages of the socialist state and the socialist social system, depict the greatness of our culture and the remarkable qualities of our people, their love for work, fortitude, resourcefulness and heroism.'³⁴ However, the reality in most Eastern Bloc states was somewhat different: 'Economists could not plan and manage factories on the basis of false and incomplete statistics.... Writers were supposed to describe realistically non-existent socialism and celebrate an anti-social system.... Philosophers, instead of dialectical materialism, were obliged to handle subjective and idealistic Party dogmas and find proper sounding formulae for nonsense.' Therefore, at the

³¹ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993; interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

³² Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.119; Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.6.

³³ Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.66.

³⁴ According to A.V. Topchiev, cited in Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.67.

end of the day, a choice had to be made between truth and reality on the one hand, and cynicism and power on the other.³⁵

Similarly, historiography was not considered to be ideologically neutral, but part of the ideological struggle between materialism and idealism, and between scientific and unscientific thought, therefore it was right for historians to take sides.³⁶ In practice, however, 'Historians felt lost in the labyrinth of constantly changing Party lines about the past and present,'³⁷ and as a result risked contradicting the official line quite by accident, which could earn an individual the damning label of 'revisionist' or 'bourgeois,' which would have disastrous consequences for their career. In short, historiography in communist states was also a 'political' or 'social' science, because it was not only supposed to record, but also to mould society, and as a consequence, had an important propaganda function.³⁸

What effect did this system of constraints and rewards have on scholarship in the former Soviet Bloc in practice? Firstly, its effect on the daily lives of individual scholars was to create a climate of fear that conditioned them to practise self-censorship, in order to ensure work would be published. This led them to practise 'Ketman.' 'Ketman' has been defined as 'a political strategy of dualism, whereby individuals avow in public what the powerful want to hear, while in private maintaining a different, more genuine, perhaps creative, intellectual life.'³⁹ Particularly in the GDR, the Party's control mechanisms functioned very successfully, resulting in a high level of conformity. As a result, it could be said that, 'While the intellectual was guaranteed prominence in the new (post-war) order, and the prospects of becoming a full time intellectual improved, the distinction of the intellectual was

³⁵ Peter Hruby, Fools and Heroes: The Changing role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia (Oxford, 1980), pp.232-233.

³⁶ Andreas Dorpalen, German History in a Marxist Perspective (Detroit, 1985), p.46. On the role of the Marxist historian as both scholar and propagandist see pp.46-61.

³⁷ Hruby, Fools and Heroes, p.232.

³⁸ Dorpalen, German History, p.59.

³⁹ Kennedy, 'Eastern Europe's Lessons,' p.99. See also Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, pp.80-84.

undermined.'⁴⁰ By accepting the life of an intellectual as defined by the Party, they more or less sold their souls to it, and in effect, ceased to be true intellectuals at all. However, before accusing scholars of collaboration and cowardice, it should be remembered that those who were determined to have an academic career did not have very much choice, in view of the Party's control of appointments and resources, though as in any society, some carried favour with the authorities in return for rewards, while others did the minimum necessary for a quiet life.

Secondly, the nature of the academic system had a serious effect on the fruits of their labours. Scholars always had to ensure that their work displayed sufficient *partiinost*, or in the East German case, *Parteilichkeit*, in other words, Party bias. Indeed, it could be argued that Soviet and East European science in all its forms was hardly science at all, if what was meant by the term was objective research.⁴¹ The unfortunate result was the suppression of radical views, the perpetuation of mistakes and untruths, and serious limitations on the ability of academics to facilitate changes for the better. Vladimir Shlapentokh sums up the situation thus:

In a centralised society, where the political elite commands resources and where private support for intellectual activity assumes only very limited and illegal forms, intellectuals must co-operate with [the state] and accept the roles imposed on them by the state. That is, they are required to serve the political elite as makers of weapons, as ideologues, and as promoters of national prestige as musicians and artists. Those who accept these roles are handsomely rewarded by the authorities; those who do not face direct coercive means, which the state willingly uses against them. These two factors contribute to the readiness of intellectuals to collaborate with the state and to accept the resulting privileges.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kennedy, 'Eastern Europe's Lessons,' p.98.

⁴¹ See Vucinich, The Soviet Academy, p.45.

⁴² Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.4.

In other words, they would have been unwise to bite the hand that fed them. At the end of the day, scholars belonged not to the rulers but to the ruled in communist societies, and the relationship between the Party apparatus and academics was not an equal one. Even so, it was still a two-way relationship, and even the most authoritarian regimes relied on loyal scholars to help them achieve their goals. In spite of the constraints, those academics who maximised their opportunities, and who knew how best to exploit the system, were sometimes able to influence Party policy, or at least improve or modify it, providing the Party leadership could see how it might benefit from the work. Several channels of influence existed, for example, through active Party membership, participation in public meetings and debates at institutions and via their advisory role.⁴³ Their ability to do so was determined by their status, their political credentials, and the level of the Party apparatus they were hoping to influence.⁴⁴ In short, academics in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union did make a valid contribution. Simply to regard them as insignificant would be to ignore the importance attached to them by their leaders, highlighted by the efforts made to control them.

b) East German Theorists

In the GDR, detailed theoretical work on the concept of the nation was dominated by a very small number of individuals, who were all prominent members of the Party's top academic institutions, in particular, the Academy for Social Sciences (*Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED* or *AfG*), or the Academy of Sciences (*Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* or *AdW*, until 1970, known as the *Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften*). Like their Soviet counterparts, the primary purpose of these institutions was not to encourage independent thought, but to serve the needs of the Party, especially by providing the arguments that members of the leading elite were

⁴³ See Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, pp.122-123.

⁴⁴ Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, p.111. Churchward does rather underestimate the inequality in the relationship between the Party and its scholars.

not capable of formulating themselves, to add credibility to policies.

All academic institutions in the GDR were controlled by the Department of Sciences, and were ultimately the responsibility of Kurt Hager, the State Secretary for ideology and culture from 1955 until 1989. However, members were unlikely to encounter him personally, for between them stood the head of the Department of Sciences (*Abteilungsleiter*), Hannes Hörnig. All heads of departments had the power to ensure that material never landed on the desk of their boss in the Politburo. They were generally reluctant to pass on bad news, because the State secretary concerned would then have to admit to the rest of the Politburo that there was a problem in his area of responsibility, which would make the others ask why he had allowed such a thing to happen. Naturally the Politburo member concerned would then blame the head of department, hence it was easier for the latter not to pass on unwelcome information in the first place.⁴⁵

The Academy for Social Sciences (AfG) was attached to the Central Committee and its director from 1962 until 1989 was Otto Reinhold, who was himself a member of the Central Committee, and had the unenviable task of serving the interests of both scholarship and the Department of Sciences. While he did apparently attempt to improve the image and independence of the AfG,⁴⁶ like everyone else, he was constrained by the fear of antagonising his superiors that was so typical in the GDR.

According to the authoritative West German *DDR Handbuch*, the AfG's most important activities were the provision of theoretical justifications for the SED's policies, the implementation of the Central Research Plan for the Social Sciences, the education of the nomenclatura, especially the younger generation, cooperation with the AfG of the Soviet Union, and the production of propaganda and other publications, including textbooks for students and teachers.

⁴⁵ According to Helmut Meier, interview, Berlin, 28 May 1993.

⁴⁶ According to Alfred Kosing, interview, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

Members, who included sociologists, philosophers, and historians, were required to 'achieve sound knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, a good all-round education, and deep-rooted knowledge in a specialist area; to grasp the strategy and tactics of the Party scientifically; and to increase their willingness to realise the policies of the Party with all their personal strength and ability.'⁴⁷ The AfG had an impressive library where its members had privileged access to many leading western social science journals.

The selection of potential members was highly political and the final decision rested with the Department of Sciences and the personnel department of the central Party machinery. In addition to the necessary academic qualifications, candidates had to be Party members of at least five years' standing and have held positions of responsibility.

Historians at the Academy of Sciences (AdW) were affected by changes in the Party line on the nation, since they could hardly ignore the issue when writing the history of the state. With 24,000 staff, 18,000 of whom were directly involved in research,⁴⁸ the AdW was the largest research institution in the GDR, though only a tiny elite achieved the status of fellow or associated fellow, and naturally not for their academic brilliance alone.⁴⁹ The AdW was answerable to the Council of Ministers, and sub-divided into institutes, covering a very broad range of subject areas,⁵⁰ but functioned in a similar way to the AfG, hence its members were subject to the same constraints.

⁴⁷ Hartmut Zimmermann, ed., DDR-Handbuch, 3rd ed. (Cologne, 1985), pp.34-36.

⁴⁸ Birgit Gebhardt, 'Reform, Evaluation, Abwicklung. GDR Science in the process of unification: the example of the Academy of Sciences,' in Studies in GDR Culture and Society 11/12, eds. Margy Gerber and Roger Woods (Lanham/London, 1993), p.212. See also Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, pp.31-33.

⁴⁹ In 1981, there were 153 fellows and 76 visiting fellows. Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, p.32. It is worth noting that the most prominent theorist on the concept of the nation in the GDR, Prof. Alfred Kosing was one of the few who achieved the position of fellow of the AdW.

⁵⁰ See Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, pp.32-33.

The importance of history as an ideological weapon in the GDR was illustrated by the relatively large size of the Institute for History at the AdW, and there was also a history section at the AfG. As was the case with other disciplines, research was highly centralised to ensure it was in keeping with the political and social needs of the state.⁵¹ Paraphrasing Marx, East German functionaries reminded historians that their task was not merely to interpret the world, but to change it.⁵² They were to develop a version of history that was truly 'national' in the sense that the working class was accorded its due place in history, as opposed to the traditional approach, which concentrated on the actions of a tiny elite, such as wars and diplomacy,⁵³ and also to show how capitalist elites were the true enemies of the nation. Particularly from the late-1970s, their services were deemed very useful by the SED leadership in its campaign to legitimise the state, hence top historians were rewarded for their loyalty with elite privileges.⁵⁴

As was the case for their Soviet counterparts, East German scholars were constantly under pressure not to 'rock the boat' if they wanted to climb the academic career ladder and a quiet life. It was not the case that the privileges of seniority were particularly significant - though trips abroad were welcome, a salary increase was hardly a cause for celebration in a country with little to spend money on. It was more due to the fact that the penalties for non-conformism were high - ranging from harassment, unsuccessful visa applications, lack of research funding and difficulties in getting work published, to discrimination against one's children, for example, in their choice of career. Even though the full extent of surveillance in the GDR was not known until after the collapse of the state, they were aware that opinions that were out-of-step with the Party line would be reported, hence self-censorship was inevitable. As a

⁵¹ Dorpalen, German History, pp.49-51.

⁵² Ernst Engelberg, 'Über Gegenstand und Ziel,' cited in Dorpalen, p.54.

⁵³ Dorpalen, p.52.

⁵⁴ G. Iggers, Marxist Historiography in Transformation. New Orientations in recent East German History, trans. Bruce Little (New York and Oxford, 1991), p.8.

result of these collaborative acts, leading East German academics find themselves permanently unemployed in post-unification Germany.

In retrospect, the leading theorists on the nation in the GDR claim that the difference between their work and material that originated directly from the Party leadership was that their arguments were well thought out and theoretically justified, whereas official statements tended to be brief and motivated by expediency, with scant regard for the consequences. Even so, they were obliged to include familiar quotes from speeches by the First Secretary,⁵⁵ which somewhat blurred the distinction between Party material and works of scholarship. Though by no means dissidents, they now claim to have wanted a better GDR - a GDR which was accepted by its citizens and respected by the international community.⁵⁶ They claim to have been horrified by some of the crazier pronouncements on the nation from the leadership, which played into the hands of the Federal Republic, made the GDR a laughing stock on the international stage, and confused and alienated the population.

In view of the constraints of the system, their main problem was how to influence the leadership and how to propagate their ideas. Obviously this was true for all scholars, but all the more so because the national question had such important implications for the status of the GDR. The need for extreme caution, and the risks involved, discouraged individuals from tackling it. To suggest that the population did not share the Party line on any topic was particularly risky because it would be interpreted as criticism of those responsible for agitation and propaganda.⁵⁷ Thus self-censorship was not only practiced to avoid trouble, but also to ensure that the results of academic research did not simply disappear into a *Giftschrank*. (literally 'poison cupboard,' where 'dangerous' material was stored), due to excessive cautiousness on the part of a middle-ranking functionary, but did at least reach

⁵⁵ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993; interview with Walter Schmidt, Berlin, 3 June 1993.

⁵⁷ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

the desk of whoever had commissioned it or who might take notice of it within higher echelons of power.⁵⁸

In spite of the constraints, East German theorists who tackled the concept of the nation did have some room to manoeuvre, providing they obeyed the rules, for example, by producing standard text books, including the obligatory quotes, and by phrasing their ideas carefully so as not to appear to criticise the leadership. Instead criticism had to be directed towards the Federal Republic. They could initiate projects themselves, providing they conformed to the needs and interests of the leadership, but resources were very scarce for topics that were considered either taboo or simply irrelevant, which made research almost impossible. To suggest that the Party was wrong to let a topic drop would count as criticism of the leadership and give an individual a reputation for being a trouble-maker, hence it was not advisable. Even so, historians in particular have been criticised for not using opportunities to express themselves more freely.⁵⁹ Today they claim that there was a radical or critical message to their work if one read between the lines,⁶⁰ though it was usually so well hidden that no one outside their immediate circle of colleagues would be aware of it.

However, while the activities of the academies were controlled by the SED, it will become apparent from this thesis that the Party was considerably reliant on them to make up for the intellectual short-comings of the leading elite, especially when it was necessary to justify a dramatic or incomprehensible change in policy. It was often the case that theorists were given the task of filling in the details after a declaration of a change in the official line. However, there is evidence to suggest that they did have some influence, especially from the mid-1970s, when the Party line was modified, and their usefulness was increasingly recognised by the leadership in the 1980s.

⁵⁸ According to Helmut Meier, interview, Berlin, 5 May 1993.

⁵⁹ Iggers, Marxist Historiography, p.9.

⁶⁰ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

In short, theorists who elaborated on the concept of the nation in the GDR had to perform a delicate juggling act between four factors which all had to be taken into account. Firstly, the principles of Marxism-Leninism on the subject and ideas coming from the Soviet Union; secondly, the uniqueness of the East German situation, arising from the origins of the state; thirdly, the most recent expression of opinion on the subject from the Party leadership; and finally, their own personal convictions. Thus, in the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the results often sounded contrived.

Four individuals played a particularly significant role in the formulation of theory concerning the nation in the GDR, all of whom have been interviewed by the author. All held senior academic positions at top Party institutions, not only due to their academic achievements, but also their fulfilment of the requirements of the Party. Firstly and most importantly, Professor Alfred Kosing (born 1928), was a philosopher and a Party member since the late 1940s. Kosing achieved prominence in the fields of epistemology and historical materialism, though inevitably much of his early work was closer to propaganda than scholarship. He took up the subject of the nation more or less by accident, when he was required to rewrite a section on the nation in an elementary philosophy text-book. His work on the subject from the early 1960s until the mid-1970s established him as the leading theorist on the nation in the GDR, in particular, his book 'The Nation Past and Present,'⁶¹ published in 1976, (which he claims was written to clear up misconceptions arising from changes in the official line⁶²), which became the definitive work on the subject. Through a combination of academic ability and services to the Party, Kosing joined the elite group of fellows of the Academy of Sciences during the 1970s, and won the prestigious National Prize of the GDR in 1975. In the 1980s, he achieved the prestigious position of director of research at the AfG's Institute for Marxist-Leninist Philosophy. He was also on

⁶¹ Alfred Kosing, Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart (East Berlin, 1976).

⁶² Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

the editorial board of the journal *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*.

Secondly, Professor Walter Schmidt, (born 1930), was a historian, who eventually became a fellow of the Academy of Sciences in the 1980s and director of its prestigious Institute for Historical Research from 1984. A Party member since 1952, Schmidt played a leading role in debates on the historical roots of the nation and the effects of the political division of Germany on it. He collaborated with others including Kosing, and also won the National Prize. In the 1980s, he benefited from the regime's sudden interest in German history, and co-edited an important collection, 'Heritage and Tradition in the GDR' with Professor Helmut Meier in 1988.⁶³ The latter, also a historian, rose to become a deputy director of the Institute for the History of the German Workers' Movement at the AfG. From 1969 till 1984, he was responsible for research into historic consciousness as a component of national consciousness in the GDR and published widely on the subject.

Finally, Dr Jürgen Hofmann, (born 1943), was also originally a historian, and a protégé of Kosing and Schmidt, who supervised his dissertation on the concept of the nation in the early 1980s.⁶⁴ He also became a deputy director of the Institute for the History of the German Workers' Movement at the AfG, and published many articles on the nation, culminating in a book 'A New Germany it will be,'⁶⁵ only published in 1989, and the first major work since Kosing's book in 1976. He pursued the subject of the nation with much enthusiasm and set up a new interdisciplinary academic council for research into the subject in the late 1980s, and was also academic secretary of a working party to investigate the issue, chaired by Politburo member, Hermann Axen.

⁶³ Walter Schmidt and Helmut Meier, eds., Erbe und Tradition in der DDR. Die Diskussion der Historiker (East Berlin, 1988).

⁶⁴ Jürgen Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen deutschen Nation und zur Nationspolitik der SED' (Doctoral thesis, IfGA, East Berlin, 1983).

⁶⁵ Jürgen Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland soll es sein (East Berlin, 1989).

3) METHOD

In order to answer the questions raised earlier, a wide range of sources has been consulted, including Party documents, archive material, personal interviews and published work, in order to facilitate a thorough investigation of all the possible influences on policy regarding the nation, both political and theoretical. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that the author is inevitably writing from a non-German perspective, which may have influenced the result, though possibly for the better, since she does not have any emotional involvement with the topic or West German preconceptions regarding the German nation.

a) Party Material

Before describing the Party sources used, it is necessary to identify the key actors at the political level. As was the case in the Soviet Union,⁶⁶ power was in the hands of a very small elite in the GDR, hence those who influenced policy in any area were few in number and the official line on the nation was no exception. Indeed, being a philosophical matter, it was of little interest to most leading functionaries, who were more concerned with the practicalities of 'building socialism.' At the very top was the First or General Secretary, whose authority was unquestionable and who was answerable only to the occupant of the Kremlin. His pronouncements on the state of the nation formed the basis of party policy at any given time, though neither Ulbricht nor Honecker was sufficiently interested or intellectual to go beyond a superficial treatment of the subject. Consequently, this task was left to the Department of Sciences (*Abteilung Wissenschaften*), and in particular, to the State Secretary for ideology and culture, Kurt Hager. Hager (born 1912) had a reputation for being relatively bright and open-minded compared to other Politburo members.⁶⁷ However, he seemed to lack the courage to challenge Honecker's views, even though he must have recognised that they were

⁶⁶ Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.21.

⁶⁷ According to Helmut Meier, interview, Berlin, 28 May 1993, and Alfred Kosing, interview, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

reckless and unsubstantiated, and towards the end of the GDR's existence, his mind began to show the effects of old age. Nevertheless, due to the fact that he and his department were ultimately responsible for ideology and set the academic agenda, they played a significant role in the creation of a concept of the nation in the GDR.

Also involved were the Agitation and Propaganda Departments. Even after sciences and propaganda became two separate departments in 1956, they continued to work closely together, one department responsible for the production of propaganda material and the other for disseminating it. Until 1978, the State Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda was the relatively enlightened Werner Lamberz, but following his premature death, he was succeeded by the hard-liner, Joachim Herrmann.

Other members of the leading elite seemed to judge the significance of a topic according to how often the First Secretary addressed it, which in the case of the nation, was not very often once Honecker had assumed power. Only two individuals paid very much attention to the subject of their own initiative. The first was Albert Norden, a prominent functionary and professor of philosophy until his death in 1985, who took a hard-line Marxist-Leninist approach to the subject in several books and articles published during the 1970s. The second was Hermann Axen, (born 1916), State Secretary for International Affairs from 1966 until 1989, who also addressed the subject in the 1970s, and again during the belated revival of official interest in the issue in the late 1980s. His original motive seems to have been personal interest, followed later by a desire to carve out a niche for himself, particularly once Honecker had more or less taken over international affairs.

In order to establish the official line on the nation at any given time, one could start by consulting published documents such as the constitution and Party Programme, speeches by leading functionaries, the volumes of Party conference proceedings, or the *Dokumente der SED* series, which numbered 22 volumes by 1988.

These documents and collections were published in large print-runs by the state press, *Dietz Verlag*. They were cheap and widely distributed as an important component of Party propaganda, and one wonders who they thought read such mind-numbingly dull material. Even so, they are useful reference works for researchers wishing to find out the Party line in a nutshell, and they are frequently referred to in this thesis. However, due to the brevity of references to the nation, and sudden, unexplained changes in the Party's position from one document or Party Conference to the next, they only reveal the bare bones of Party policy on the subject. Such treatment speaks volumes about the leadership's attitude towards the problem of the nation, indicating a belief that it could be treated just like any other area of policy. Other published sources include articles written by leading functionaries for the Party's theoretical journal, *Einheit*, preparatory material for Party Conferences and Central Committee meetings, and occasional items from the ~~state-run~~^{Party} newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*.

Until 1989, only published material was available to researchers, hence it was impossible to establish precisely what the leadership meant by certain concepts, and why dramatic changes occurred. In order to do so, this thesis makes extensive use of the recently opened Central Party Archive of the SED in East Berlin, (*Zentrales Parteiarchiv* or ZPA), now incorporated into the *Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (SAPMO), and since 1993, taken over by the *Bundesarchiv*. By 1992-93, the majority of files had become accessible, and it was the intention of the author to examine all those of possible relevance, which was no easy task since the indices were extremely primitive. Consequently, it was necessary first to identify the periods when the issue of the nation was likely to be on the political agenda, and which individuals and departments were likely to be involved. Inevitably a great deal of material turned out not to be relevant, but the main intention was to ensure that nothing significant was missed.

Admittedly such archive material has its limitations. Firstly, due to the total dominance of a very small elite in the decision-making process, very little debate took place. Secondly, meetings were not fully minuted, hence files do not always contain everything one would expect. Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, the leadership tended either to turn a blind eye to bad news or received a version already modified by junior functionaries who were afraid to annoy them. Nevertheless, by examining the files not only of the Politburo and Central Committee, but also those of several departments and individual members of the leading elite, the author has endeavoured to conduct the best possible analysis of the official concept of the nation in the GDR, given the material available. As other researchers have noted, many of the gaps in the material can be filled if one takes into account the circumstances at the time and the position and intentions of the writer.⁶⁸ As a result, the thesis goes far deeper than was possible before the Central Party Archive became accessible.

The most relevant collections of files were as follows. Firstly the Politburo and Central Committee files. Since the collapse of the GDR, several members have admitted that the Politburo had long ceased to be a forum of debate on policy.⁶⁹ According to one insider, 'With this form of decision-making, democratic elements and genuine debate with experts were practically non-existent. The opinion of the General Secretary and his close circle decided everything.'⁷⁰ Even so, the Politburo files include much useful preparatory material, for example, on the subject of relations with Bonn, especially concerning the negotiation of the Basic Treaty, and Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic, and also in

⁶⁸ Stefan Wolle, 'Im Labyrinth der Akten. Die archivalische Hinterlassenschaft des SED-Staats,' in Deutschland - eine Nation - Doppelte Geschichte, ed. Werner Weidenfeld (Cologne, 1993), p.262. Wolle quite rightly points out that the more important a decision, and the higher the decision-making body involved, the briefer the records, and that in spite of kilometers of files which record trivia, many questions remain unanswered. (pp.259-260).

⁶⁹ As testified by Egon Krenz and Günther Schabowski. See Krenz, Wenn Mauern Fallen (Vienna, 1991); Schabowski, Das Politbüro. Ende eines Mythos. Eine Befragung (Hamburg, 1990).

⁷⁰ Manfred Uschner, Die zweite Etage. Funktionsweise eines Machtapparates (Berlin, 1993), p.73.

preparation for each Party Conference and Central Committee ^{plenum} meeting, including first drafts of speeches and documents. Rather less useful are the files of the Central Committee which soon became powerless to challenge the ruling elite, but the files do contain some unpublished reports and draft speeches.

Much more enlightening are the files from individual Politburo members and their departments, which include reports and letters which provide a more accurate picture of the situation. Particularly helpful were the files of Walter Ulbricht, especially relating to the drafting of a new constitution in 1968, and Hermann Axen, in connection with the belated investigation into the nation and national consciousness in the GDR which began in the late 1980s. The files from Kurt Hager's office and of the Department of Sciences are particularly relevant to this study, for example, on the subject of the Central Research Plan for the Social Sciences, on the composition of a new Party Programme, and for their reports on discussions at academic institutions.

Collections from the Departments of Agitation and Propaganda, the Agitation Commission, and from Werner Lamberz' office shed a considerable amount of light on the propagation of the official concept of the nation. Particularly useful are the results of surveys conducted by the reputable Institute for Public Opinion Research. The latter, founded in 1965, was attached to the Central Committee, but in practice an autonomous institution. Its methods were sound and its findings, not surprisingly, top secret. Its function was to monitor public opinion on a whole range of issues, from perceptions of German history to abortion, in order to identify areas where Party propaganda needed to be made more effective. Consequently, the results were sent to the Department of Agitation to be analysed. During the early 1970s, a particularly interesting period for this investigation, this was the responsibility of Hans Modrow, who later became leader of the GDR for the short period between the collapse of communist rule in 1989 and the first and only democratic election in 1990. Sadly the Institute for Public Opinion Research was abolished once Joachim Herrmann took charge of Agitation and Propaganda in

1978, on the grounds that the Party was responsible for the formation of public opinion.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, it was not possible to interview the key actors at the political level. Many have died, quite recently in the case of Albert Norden and Hermann Axen. Others, such as Kurt Hager and former prime minister, Willi Stoph, have withdrawn from society and are unavailable for interviews, and the late Erich Honecker was in prison at the time, not that he would have granted an interview. It is questionable whether interviewing those who remain would be a useful exercise anyway, since they are all extremely old and naturally bitter about the fate of the GDR since 1989, and which mirrors their own fate. Attempts to contact other important actors were in vain. Hans Modrow, proved impossible to reach due to his commitments in Bonn as a member of the German Parliament. The former head of the Department of Sciences, Hannes Hörnig, did not reply to requests for an interview.

However, it was possible to speak with two members of the ruling elite. Firstly, Alfred Neumann, (born 1909), a member of the Politburo from 1958 until the collapse of the GDR. With a genuine working-class background and only an elementary education, Neumann became a committed communist at an early age, which wrecked his chances of competing in the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. He became a dedicated anti-facist and fought in the Spanish Civil war, and suffered several periods of imprisonment due to his convictions. Although close to Ulbricht and primarily concerned with the economy, Neumann was marginalised by Honecker, and never held an important ministerial post. Now in his 80s, he is clearly bitter about the total obliteration of the GDR from the map of Europe, and has had to swap his villa and privileged lifestyle for oblivion and a tiny flat in East Berlin.

Secondly, the author spoke with Egon Krenz, (born 1931), the Politburo member responsible for youth and sport since 1983. Krenz was Honecker's 'crown prince,' though his period as General Secretary lasted only a matter of weeks and coincided with the

collapse of the Berlin Wall and of the state itself in 1989. Certainly no intellectual, Krenz was not able to shed very much light on the topic at hand, however. Also interviewed was Dr Manfred Uschner, (born 1937), personal assistant to State Secretary Hermann Axen from 1974 until 1989, and deputy-head of the Central Committee's Department for International Affairs. Uschner was an insider and expert on GDR foreign and defence policy, and a member of the unique joint working party on nuclear arms control composed of representatives of the SED and the West German SPD in the late 1980s. He was removed from his post in 1989 for his over enthusiasm for the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev.

b) Theoretical Material

In order to assess the influence of theoretical work on the official concept of the nation in the GDR, a good starting point was to read published work including journal articles and books from the state-run press. Numerous articles which appeared in the theoretical journal *Einheit* (1946-1989) are examined in this thesis, but it should always be born in mind that it was strictly editorially controlled by the Party. Due to their fear of political repercussions, the editors tended to cut and alter articles before they appeared, which made serious scholars reluctant to write for the journal. Alfred Kosing thought it ironic that the editor was Jörg Vorholzer, since '*Holzer*' means a person who chops down trees, and his editorial style was apparently reminiscent of one who left just a skinny trunk from a flourishing leafy tree. As a result, contributors had to tailor their ideas to match the most recent statement by the leadership in order to ensure they were accepted for publication. For this reason, and because nobody read it anyway, Kosing became reluctant to write for *Einheit*.⁷¹

Other written sources include articles in the slightly less partisan *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* and the in-house journal of the AfG, *Thematische Information und Dokumentation*,

⁷¹ Interviews with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 5 and 11 February 1993.

contributions to standard reference books,⁷² dissertations,⁷³ and papers commissioned by the SED which are to be found in the Party Archive. All these were subject to the general restrictions placed on scholarship in the GDR. As such, they form part of the material under investigation in this thesis and cannot be considered to be objective work on the subject of the nation in the GDR. In order to go beyond their officially sanctioned work, extensive interviews were conducted with the leading theorists on the subject who have been introduced earlier. Naturally material gained through personal interviews should be handled with caution, due to its subjective nature, the difficulty^{of} verifying information, and the tendency for individuals to try to justify their actions after the event.

c) Structure

This thesis is arranged chronologically in order to show just how dramatically the SED's position regarding the nation changed, and also to facilitate an examination of the political factors at play at any given time. The main body of the thesis is divided into four sections corresponding to four distinct phases of official policy regarding the nation. During each period, official statements on the subject of the nation provide the starting point, and there follows an in-depth examination of the motivation behind them, taking into consideration both political factors and theoretical influences.

Briefly, the first period, from the foundation of the GDR in 1949 until 1966 is a relatively straightforward period when the leadership of the SED expressed the belief that a unitary German nation continued to exist, in spite of its division into two states. The second, from 1967 until the autumn of 1970, is a transition period during which time differences of opinion regarding the state of the nation emerged within the Party leadership. During

⁷² For example, various editions of the Kleines politisches Wörterbuch published by Dietz Verlag.

⁷³ Several doctoral students were supervised by the leading theorists at Party institutions, hence their objectivity was limited, including Klaus-Uwe Koch, Wilfried Trompelt and Peter Rentsch.

the third period, December 1970 until 1975, the official line was that the unitary German nation no longer existed and a socialist nation was developing in the GDR. The final period, from the mid-1970s until the collapse of the GDR in 1989 saw a return to the idea of a socialist German nation in the GDR with renewed emphasis on its German heritage.

4) LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis attempts to make an important contribution to existing literature in both German and English on the concept of the nation in the GDR (which is reviewed below). This is achieved in three ways. Firstly, instead of just quoting official statements on the subject of the nation, this thesis explores what lay behind stated policy - pragmatism/opportunism, or genuine theoretical consideration; secondly, through its extensive use of primary sources only made available since the collapse of the GDR, which enabled this author to dig beneath the surface of Party propaganda and thus to identify the real motives of the leadership; thirdly, it is the first work to offer a complete treatment of the problem from the establishment of the GDR in 1949 until its remarkable collapse 40 years later, which enables the author to show that behind the superficial inconsistencies in the official line on the nation lay one constant objective, namely to legitimise the GDR. In addition, as the only work on the subject to date which acknowledges the role of theorists in the GDR, the thesis may also contribute to the wider debate concerning the role and influence of scholars on official policy in communist states.

It was not the intention of this author to examine the historical problem of the German nation in general, about which a great deal has already been written, and which has been adequately listed and reviewed elsewhere.⁷⁴ Instead, we will concentrate on

⁷⁴ See for example, Reiner Koenen, Nation und Nationalbewußtsein aus der Sicht der SED (Bochum, 1975), p.136-137; Gebhard Schweigler, Nationalbewußtsein in der BRD und in der DDR (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp.200-215. On the problem of the German nation in historical context see among others, James, A National Identity; C.S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past History, Holocaust and German National Identity (Cambridge M.A., 1988);

literature which addresses the concept of the nation in the GDR, a subject about which considerably less has been written, although it inevitably crops up in more general works about the East German state. In particular, Anglo-American scholars have paid very little attention to the subject, for reasons which remain unclear, though this reflects the fact that there were relatively few GDR specialists in total, compared with the number who studied either the Federal Republic or other countries in the Soviet Bloc. One reason may have been the general lack of information available until recently, which made it difficult to do more than just report what the SED leadership said regarding the nation, which was what most Western commentators did.

During the 1950s and 1960s, neither official statements from the SED, nor theoretical debate from within the GDR on the subject of the German nation attracted much attention from outside observers. This may have been because the issue was yet to become controversial in the GDR. Due to the lack of inside information, they could not have known that as early as 1967, the issue was causing unprecedented divisions within the ruling elite itself, and appear not to have recognised the signs that this was the case. However, Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, and Honecker's subsequent denial of the unity of the German nation in 1971, following the removal of Ulbricht, triggered off a sudden increase in interest in the SED's concept of the nation among West German GDR-watchers.⁷⁵

Most noteworthy was the work of the eminent *DDR-ologe*, Peter-Christian Ludz. Like other West German commentators, he accepted that the leadership of the GDR was using a class-based definition of the nation which did not correspond to West German

Eberhard Schulz, Die Deutsche Nation in Europa, Internationale und historische Dimensionen (Bonn, 1982); Helmuth Plessner, Die Verspätete Nation (Frankfurt, 1974).

⁷⁵ Articles from this period include Ilse Spittmann, 'Honecker und die nationale Frage,' Deutschland Archiv 5 (1972): pp.1-2; Jens Hacker, 'Der Begriff der Nation aus der Sicht der DDR,' Gegenwartskunde 4 (1972): pp.391-403; John Sturrels, 'Nationalism in the GDR,' Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 10 (1974): pp.23-37.

interpretations.⁷⁶ To his credit, Ludz acknowledged that the SED used whatever meaning of words such as 'nation' and '*Volk*' best suited their current political objectives, though he did not elaborate, and noted that Ulbricht had denied the unity of the German nation before Honecker in 1970.⁷⁷ However, the common claim in the early 1970s that in spite of *Abgrenzung*, the SED's principal objective remained a united socialist Germany⁷⁸ seems to have been incorrect, as highlighted by the new constitution of 1974. Admittedly functionaries and theorists expressed the view that things would be different if the political situation in the Federal Republic changed, but the vast majority of official statements and documents, and the actions of the Party leadership suggested that the SED had recognised that their earlier hopes regarding reunification were now unrealistic.

One longer work by Reiner Koenen concentrated on the nation and national consciousness from the point of view of the SED, but the result was merely a tedious compendium of quotes from journals such as *Einheit*. He neglected to examine important Party material such as speeches and documents, and gave no political background or explanation for the changes in the official line. Although *Einheit* was a Party organ, like others, the writer failed to distinguish between pure propaganda and more detailed theoretical material, or to consider the positions and motivations of those responsible for the material he examined. Furthermore, writing in 1974, he still claimed that the SED had all-German intentions,⁷⁹ although the evidence suggests that this was no longer the case, since by this stage, the Party's attention was firmly focused on the GDR.

⁷⁶ Peter-Christian Ludz, 'Zum Begriff der Nation in der Sicht der SED - Wandlungen und politische Bedeutung,' Deutschland Archiv 5 (1972): pp.17-27; Peter-Christian Ludz, 'The SED's Concept of the Nation: deviations and political meanings,' Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 13 (1977): pp.206-224. See also Dettmar Cramer, 'Einheitspartei und Nation,' Deutschland Archiv 5 (1972): p.460.

⁷⁷ Ludz, 'Zum Begriff,' pp.20, 26.

⁷⁸ For example, Ludz, 'Zum Begriff,' p.26; Cramer, 'Einheitspartei'; Dietmar Kreusel, Nation und Vaterland in der Militärpresse der DDR (Stuttgart-Degerloch, 1971).

⁷⁹ Koenen, Nation, pp.8, 147.

Rather better is a study which concentrated on the concepts of nationhood and fatherland portrayed in the East German military press, albeit only from the late 1950s until the late 1960s. Its author, Dietmar Kreusel, recognised that the SED was devising a concept of the nation to suit its political intentions, in particular, its *Deutschlandpolitik*, which at the time still aimed to achieve a united socialist German state, hence the SED's 'national concept' was part of the class struggle taking place on German soil. The writer believed that the Party's message was severely contradicted and undermined by its promotion of proletarian internationalism and friendship with the Soviet Union, and that it had little in common with the fundamental elements of Marxist-Leninist teaching.⁸⁰

A reduction in interest in the official concept of the nation in the GDR by western commentators for almost a decade from the late 1970s reflected the SED's neglect of the subject during that period. Instead the Party and its loyal scholars focused their attention on the GDR's relationship to German history, which aroused much interest in the West. While some writers continued to consider the actual effect of the long-standing division on the national consciousness of the population,⁸¹ analysis of the official concept of the nation in the GDR tended to feature only in general works about the German nation⁸² or as a chapter in basic books on the GDR.⁸³ Though by no means all bad, their brevity inevitably leads to a somewhat superficial treatment of the subject, mainly

⁸⁰ Kreusel, *Nation und Vaterland*, p.280.

⁸¹ For example, H. Rudolph, 'Wie sieht das Selbstverständnis der DDR-Gesellschaft aus?' in *Die Identität der Deutschen*, ed. Werner Weidenfeld (Munich and Vienna, 1983), pp.193-209; Antonia Grunenberg, 'Die gespaltene Identität,' in *Die Identität*, ed. Weidenfeld, pp.210-225.

⁸² For example, James, *A German Identity*. James' two main arguments were firstly, the danger of an excessive focus on economics in the life of the nation, and secondly, the effects of Germany's place in the international system on her national development, (p.10).

⁸³ For example, Ulrich Scheuner, 'The Problem of the Nation and the GDR's relationship with the FRG,' in *GDR Foreign Policy*, eds. E. Schulz et al. (New York and London, 1982), pp.39-66; Krisch, 'Official Nationalism,' pp.103-131.

composed of familiar quotes from readily available sources, and sometimes featuring inaccuracies regarding who said what first.⁸⁴

Since reunification, few writers have so far made use of the SED archive to explore the Party's positions on the nation further. An exception is *Der Flop mit der DDR-Nation*, which describes the transformation of the SED's policy regarding the nation between 1966 ^{and} ~~to~~ 1971.⁸⁵ Over half of the book, written by two historians who were themselves members of the academic establishment in the GDR, comprises extracts from documents, and it is not clear precisely what the authors are arguing, although the title implies that basically, the SED got it wrong. They pay absolutely no attention to the theoretical level and only examine this particular five year period. Much more thorough is a paper by two other East German scholars, entitled 'The National Question in the SED's Policies at the end of the 1980s,' which is a good attempt to explain why the SED was suddenly interested in the nation in the late 1980s.⁸⁶ One final recent work worth mentioning is 'The Secret *Westpolitik* of the SED, 1960-1970: from a Pan-German Orientation to the Socialist Nation,' which examines the SED's attempts to infiltrate and destabilise the Federal Republic in the 1960s, during which time the Party's main objective changed from the formation of a unitary (socialist) German state to *Abgrenzung*.⁸⁷

Inevitably official policy regarding the nation does feature in general histories of the GDR, but they tend only to state the facts and do not advance any important theories or offer explanations. Consequently, most only appear where relevant in the main text of the thesis. For example, Sigrid Meuschel examines how the

⁸⁴ Particularly noticeable in Carl Pletsch, 'The "Socialist nation of the GDR" or the Asymmetry in Nation and Ideology between the two Germanies,' Comparative Studies in Society and History 21 (1979): p.326.

⁸⁵ Gerhard Naumann and Eckhard Trümpler, Der Flop mit der DDR-Nation 1971 (Berlin, 1991).

⁸⁶ Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan and Daniel Küchenmeister, 'Die nationale Frage in der Politik der SED am Ende der achtziger Jahre,' unpublished paper given to the author, Spring, 1993.

⁸⁷ Jochen Staadt, Die Geheime Westpolitik der SED, 1960-1970. Von der gesamtdeutschen Orientierung zur sozialistischen Nation (Berlin, 1993).

Party tried to balance *Abgrenzung* from, and co-operation with, the other German state, and how this was translated into claims to legitimacy and appeals to the population by propagandists and academics.⁸⁸ In a section on the SED's efforts to create an East German national identity, she acknowledges that it was the task of social scientists to conceive a theory and history for the nation that conformed both to accepted theories within the Eastern bloc and the specifics of the German situation.⁸⁹ She looks in particular at the work of Alfred Kosing,⁹⁰ but does not elaborate on the relationship between such individuals and the Party. Furthermore, it is not clear whether she believes that the Party's policy regarding the nation contributed to the legitimacy and stability of the GDR or not, which was, after all, the central issue under investigation.

German reunification has not surprisingly aroused great interest in the state of national consciousness in the two halves of Germany today, but we will not concern ourselves with the rapidly increasing amount of literature on the subject here, since we are only concerned with the period of the GDR's existence, and with the nation as a problem for the SED. Nevertheless, the events of 1989/90 may tell us something about the effectiveness of official policy regarding the nation, even without consulting empirical data, hence we will briefly consider this question in the final chapter.

5) WIDER IMPLICATIONS

The above discussion has highlighted the need for a thorough investigation into the motivation behind the official concept of the nation in the former GDR. This should not only be of interest to scholars of nations and nationalism. By examining the role of theorists in the process of policy formulation, it also serves as a good case study of the inter-relationship between the SED and 'its'

⁸⁸ Sigrid Meuschel, Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR. Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR (Frankfurt, 1992), p.273.

⁸⁹ Meuschel, Legitimation, p.280.

⁹⁰ Meuschel, pp.280-283.

scholars in the GDR, and as such, is an important addition to existing literature on the subject of scholarship under communist regimes. In particular, comparisons could be made with the function and degree of influence of their counterparts in the Soviet Union, on which the East German system was modelled. It is clear that it was not only the skills and knowledge of scientists involved in technological and military projects that were seen as potentially beneficial by communist regimes.⁹¹ Social scientists, historians, etc., were also viewed as a valuable resource, providing they worked for the state and not against it, hence leaders sought to ensure that such expertise was firmly under their control.

While it must be recognised that it is difficult to assess exactly how much influence academics had in communist states, we can assume that it diminished when power was in the hands of hardliners, and increased during periods of relative liberalisation.⁹² This is born out by the Soviet example. In the Stalinist era, scholars were denied a role in the policy-making process, and were merely called upon 'to provide elaborate support for officially prescribed interpretations. Conclusions already established were thus to be confirmed by research.... In short, Soviet social scientists served mainly as official ideologues.'⁹³ Following the death of Stalin, academics and intellectuals began to play an increasingly active and influential role in decision-making, though they only progressed from being propagandists to apologists, but were still expected to substantiate policies already made at higher levels.⁹⁴ During the post-Krushchev period, their influence even began to extend into foreign policy, due to the Kremlin's new, more pragmatic approach

⁹¹ The few examinations of the role of East German scholars in the establishment have tended to concentrate on the so-called 'scientific-technical' intelligentsia. Though they had to provide what the regime required, at least one commentator has recognised that the leadership was in fact reliant on the technical expertise of this group. See Erbe, Arbeiterklasse, p.210.

⁹² Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, p.280.

⁹³ Richard B. Remnek, Soviet Scholars and Soviet Foreign Policy. A Case Study of Soviet Foreign Policy towards India (Durham, North Carolina, 1975), forward, p.IX.

⁹⁴ Churchward, The Soviet Intellegensia, pp.108-109; Remnek, Soviet Scholars, p.292.

in this area.⁹⁵ In the most liberal period in the history of the Soviet Union - the Gorbachev era - the new approach resulted in the need for experts in all fields to find new solutions for old problems. However, during relatively liberal periods, scholarly activity was not encouraged simply due to benevolence on the part of the regime, but also because it was very much needed to modernise and improve the system.

In spite of the lack of periods of liberalisation in the GDR, and the SED's refusal to embrace *glasnost* and *perestroika*, several parallels are visible in the case of the concept of the nation in the GDR. As we shall see, political considerations, as opposed to existing theories initially determined policy, but like later Soviet leaders, the leadership of the SED eventually realised that for its increasingly pragmatic policies to be successful, it needed more detailed scholarly backing to support and justify its actions. As one commentator concludes,

On the one hand, the political elite supports the intellectuals as those necessary for the implementation of the elite's goals. On the other hand, the political elite sees the intellectuals as a group regularly in opposition to the current regime. The history of the USSR, as well as that of other socialist countries, exhibits cyclical oscillations in the attitudes of the elite towards the intellectuals - from harsh repression, to treatment of intellectuals as allies in the process of modernising society.⁹⁶

In short, by putting flesh onto the bare bones of policies which had been decided at the highest levels, scholars did have a vital role to play, which should not be underestimated, in spite of the constraints affecting their work and daily lives.

While we have concentrated on the situation in a communist state, it should be mentioned that political control over scholarship is not confined to communist systems. Though no-one would seriously suggest that scholars in capitalist societies face anything

⁹⁵ Remnek, p.VII, and p.294.

⁹⁶ Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, pp.28-29.

like the restrictions encountered by those in totalitarian states such as the former GDR and Soviet Union, through their control of financial resources, governments (and big business) are able to encourage types of research that they see as useful at the expense of others.⁹⁷ The current increase in commercially or government-sponsored research in Britain also raises serious questions concerning objectivity.

Perhaps the most interesting comparisons with the position of scholars in the former GDR are to be made with Nazi Germany. Members of the SED's academies were certainly not the first Germans to provide scholarly arguments to support the aims of the ruling party. While engineers and scientists provided the technical know-how to implement the Final Solution, philosophers, historians and other theorists 'supplied Nazism with ideological weapons'⁹⁸ in the form of scholarly arguments or 'intellectual rationalisations' to justify racist policies.

6) CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have attempted to give a brief introduction to one of the most controversial and potentially damaging problems facing the leadership of the GDR, namely what to do about the German nation. The nation was the key to the legitimacy of the state. Handled badly, it could completely undermine the GDR, but handled skillfully, it could be used to the SED's advantage. What was required was a convincing new *Nationskonzept*, around which a national consciousness would develop, and a new definition of the national interest, politically embodied by the GDR. However, this was easier said than done, partly due to the dynamics of nations in general, and partly due to the bizarre situation on German soil. Even so, the SED never gave up trying to reduce the GDR's legitimacy deficiency by appealing to national sentiment in

⁹⁷ Similar points are raised in Shlapentokh, Soviet Intellectuals, pp.4-5.

⁹⁸ Weinreich, Hitler's Professors, p.239. See also Wilhelm Röpke, 'National Socialism and Intellectuals,' in The Intellectuals, de Huszar, ed. pp.346-363; Alice Gallin, Midwives to Nazism. University Professors in Weimar Germany; Michael Burleigh, Germany turns Eastwards. A study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich (Cambridge, 1988).

various forms, even though this contradicted the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism.

However, even the most brilliantly conceived 'national idea,' enhanced by the arguments of top theorists, could not compensate for the absence of the other criteria which are required to legitimise a state, namely sound democratic credentials and a good economic track record. In retrospect we know that neither the SED's initial attempts to convince people that the GDR was the true representative of the entire German nation, nor the later claim that a new and separate nation had become established in the socialist German state was accepted by the majority of the population. The events of 1989/90 not only proved that the German national bond had not been entirely severed, but also that the Federal Republic was seen as the best representative of German national interests.

CHAPTER 2: THE UNITY OF THE NATION

In order to appreciate just how much official GDR policy regarding the nation changed, we shall begin with a brief examination of the SED's original line on the state of the German nation, firstly during the late 1940s and 1950s, and then during the period immediately after the construction of the Berlin Wall. Although this event did not mark a complete change in the official line, it was the catalyst for increased theoretical contemplation of the issue, once it was evident that reunification was not about to occur in the foreseeable future. We shall also take a brief look at the basis of the Party's *Deutschlandpolitik* which will facilitate a better understanding of the motivation behind the leadership's firm belief in the unity of the nation during the immediate post-war period.

1) FROM THE BIRTH OF THE STATE TO THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

During the late 1940s and 1950s, no important speech by a prominent party functionary failed to stress the unity of the German nation, and the SED's intention to preserve that unity.¹ Indeed, when the party was formed in 1946, it proclaimed itself to be 'the true national party of the German people,'² and the word 'national' was frequently included in the names of Party and state institutions, for example, 'National People's Army,' 'National Defence Committee,' 'National Front for a Democratic Germany' (the latter being the bloc of parties allied to the SED). Furthermore, the Party portrayed itself as the defender of national assets, such as culture,³ and attempted to associate both

¹ For example, Walter Ulbricht, 'Die Gegenwärtige Lage und die neuen Aufgaben der SED,' Einheit 7 (1952): p.756; ZK der SED, 'Die Gründung der SED - ein historischer Sieg des Marxismus-Leninismus,' Einheit 16 (1961): p.351.

² 'Manifest an das deutsche Volk,' 21 April 1946, Dokumente der SED, vol. 1, pp.27-28.

³ See 'Manifest an das deutsche Volk,' pp.27-28; and Franziska Rubens, 'Die Nation ist nicht zu zerstören!' Einheit 6 (1951): pp. 125-127.

it and the GDR with historical German figures such as Goethe,⁴ Beethoven⁵ and Schiller⁶ by means of lavish commemorations. It also claimed to be fighting to preserve the German language, which was apparently under attack from 'Anglo-American imperialists,' who were accused of attempting to create a linguistic divide between the two German states.⁷ In short, the SED was portrayed as a truly national party, which genuinely represented the national interest in the sense of the interests of the majority of the population, i.e. ordinary working people - not only in the GDR, but also in the Federal Republic, who it claimed to support in their 'liberation struggle' against the allied occupation forces.⁸ However, in practice, this equation of German national interests with those of the working class undermined the image of the SED as the Party of the entire German people on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

In contrast, West German politicians were portrayed as mere agents of foreign powers, who served the interests of the latter. Obviously this was ironic, coming from a party which was clearly under the thumb of a foreign power itself. Of West German politicians, President Wilhelm Pieck commented, 'These people who call themselves Germans, but in reality no longer are, are agents of enemy imperialist forces.'⁹ Furthermore, they were committing 'the worst form of betrayal of the national interests of the German people by their support for the policies of the Western powers.'¹⁰ When the Federal Republic was founded, the Politburo declared, 'The 7th September 1949 is a day of national shame and will go down in the history of the German people as a

⁴ See 'Unsere Aufgaben in Goethe-Jahr,' Dokumente der SED, vol. 2, pp.230-231.

⁵ See Dokumente der SED, vol. 3, pp.751, 757.

⁶ See Dokumente der SED, vol. 5, p.224.

⁷ See Joanna McKay, 'The SED's Interpretation of Marxist-Leninist Theory regarding the Nation; the Problem of Language,' in Contemporary Political Studies 1994, eds. Patrick Dunleavy and Jeffery Stanyer (Belfast, 1994), pp.973-984.

⁸ Ulbricht, 'Die gegenwärtige Lage,' p.736.

⁹ Wilhelm Pieck, Protokoll der 22. Tagung des Parteivorstandes der SED, 4. Oktober 1949. ZPA IV 2/1/72.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Pieck, Protokoll der 10. Tagung des Parteivorstandes der SED, 12-13. Mai 1948. ZPA IV 2/1/46.

day of humiliating betrayal for the German nation.'¹¹ It was the foundation of this 'imperialist West German state' which had made it necessary to found the GDR as a 'peaceful German state,'¹² with a 'truly German government.'¹³

Not only were the so-called 'Anglo-American imperialists' blamed for the political division of Germany, they were even accused of trying to destroy the German nation altogether. They were cast in the role of the 'enemy of the German nation' (*Feindbild*), and were accused of denying West Germans the right to self-determination, which in effect deprived the German nation as a whole of that right. Consequently, it was the duty of all German patriots to join in the campaign for 'national salvation' and 'the liberation of the nation from the clutches of imperialism,'¹⁴ led by the SED.

Such language sounds surprisingly nationalistic for a Marxist-Leninist party, especially in view of the fact that nationalism had acquired such a negative image due to its abuse by the Nazis. At first the SED took the view that 'We need not worry about parading our national policies because we then find ourselves in harmony with the masters of scientific socialism, with Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin.'¹⁵ However, it soon became usual for a distinction to be made between patriotism, which was encouraged, and nationalism, which was totally condemned. Correspondingly, true upholders of the unity of the nation were patriots as opposed to nationalists. In this way, the Party leadership aimed to take advantage of nationalism without appearing to do so, thus avoiding undesirable reminders of the Third Reich. Nationalism was denounced as chauvinist and aggressive, and a tool used by the bourgeoisie to gain the support of the masses for their own

¹¹ Dokumente der SED, vol. 2, p.338.

¹² Gerhard Kegel, 'Zur Deutschlandpolitik der beiden Deutschlands,' Einheit 23 (1968): p.737.

¹³ Bericht der Kommission zur Ausarbeitung der EntschlieÙung über die Nationale Front, 4 October 1949, ZPA IV 2/1/72.

¹⁴ Dokumente der SED, vol. 2, p.180.

¹⁵ Pieck, Protokoll der 10. Tagung des Parteivorstandes der SED. ZPA IV 2/1/46.

selfish interests, and to prepare them for war. This was apparently what the Nazis had done, taking advantage of Germans' typical Prussian submissiveness and deference to authority,¹⁶ submerging the class-consciousness of many workers under fascism.¹⁷ In contrast, patriotism (of the socialist variety) had only peaceful intentions and emphasised the need for active participation in the reconstruction of Germany and solidarity with one's fellow workers.¹⁸ The working class were described as the best patriots of all, because they furthered the interests of the nation as a whole, unlike capitalist owners and bosses who were driven by self-interest.¹⁹

It was also argued that unlike chauvinism or nationalism, socialist patriotism did not pose a threat to other nations because it was complemented by proletarian internationalism. Obviously there is a fundamental incompatibility between patriotism and internationalism, but the link was justified with the argument that people should admire the positive and progressive qualities of other nations as well as their own (and of the Soviet Union in particular).²⁰ However, the emphasis placed on proletarian internationalism, and the influence of Moscow, illustrated by the brutal crushing of the popular uprising in East Berlin in 1953 by Soviet tanks,²¹ severely weakened the SED's national, i.e. all-German, credentials.

Between socialist states, proletarian internationalism meant friendship, mutual assistance, co-operation and friendly competition and was therefore the exact opposite of nationalism

¹⁶ Walter Ulbricht, Whither Germany? (East Berlin, 1962), p.117.

¹⁷ Stefan Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte der DDR, 1st ed. (East Berlin, 1964), p.39.

¹⁸ Anton Ackermann, 'Der Kampf gegen den Nationalismus,' Einheit 5 (1950): p.492.

¹⁹ Rudi Wetzell, 'Was ist Patriotismus?' Einheit 8 (1953): p.314.

²⁰ Wetzell, p.317.

²¹ For an analysis, see Arnulf Baring, Der 17. Juni 1953 (Stuttgart, 1983); Meuschel, Legitimation, pp.116-122; Dietrich Staritz, Geschichte der DDR 1945-1985 (Frankfurt, 1985), pp.78-95. For an official East German account see Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 4th ed., pp.227-241.

and imperialist warmongering.²² It had nothing in common with cosmopolitanism, which apparently 'denies the love of one's home and fatherland. It is the ideological weapon of the current American world conquerors, through which they undermine the national consciousness of peoples....'²³ Proletarian internationalism applied not only to socialist states, but also to their citizens, who were required to demonstrate solidarity with workers in other states before loyalty to an ethnic or cultural group. Above all, this meant solidarity with the proletariat in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc states, and also with progressive liberation movements all over the world. During the 1970s, once the SED had declared the national bond between the two German states to be broken, working-class solidarity became the only acceptable link between the populations of the two German states.

Together socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism were important components of socialist consciousness, though in practice this was constantly undermined by German national consciousness. In the end, the Party's failure to make patriotism and internationalism seem compatible reflected the fact that they were trying to achieve two fundamentally incompatible aims, namely to both reunite and revolutionise Germany.

While there was no shortage of scholarly articles regarding the political aspects of the national question during this period, their authors had not yet begun to question the theoretical unity of the nation. They adhered to Stalin's definition of a nation, which dated back to 1913, and used it to support the official view that a unitary German nation continued to exist for as long as the Party leadership considered it desirable to do so. It stated, 'A nation is a stable community that has arisen historically on the basis of a common language, territory, economic system and psychological character, which is revealed in a common culture.'²⁴ However,

²² Committee for German Unity, GDR: 300 Questions, 300 Answers, (East Berlin, 1959), p.55.

²³ Wetzel, 'Was ist Patriotismus?' p.313.

²⁴ Josef Stalin, Der Marxismus und der nationale und koloniale Frage, 2nd ed. (East Berlin, 1952), p.327, cited in Koenen, Nation und Nationalbewußtsein, p.12.

already there appeared to be some confusion. Although Stalin had stated that all the above listed criteria needed to be present for a nation to exist, some East German commentators rejected the idea that Marxist-Leninist theory should be applied mechanically in every case,²⁵ in order to justify the adaptation of his definition to fit the unique circumstances of the GDR.

There are several reasons why so little theoretical attention was paid to the effect of political division on the German nation until the early 1960s. Perhaps the most obvious is that so soon after the war, the idea that the German nation might suddenly cease to exist due to the Cold War was unthinkable, and it was recognised that the people themselves had certainly not yet come to terms with the division.²⁶ Therefore, at this stage, the 'national question' remained a political question, that is to say, a question of what form a new post-war German state would take, or rather, what type of social and economic system it would have, and what its position would be within an increasingly divided Europe. However, by the beginning of the 1960s, there was a clear discrepancy between the SED's verbal adherence to the unity of the nation on the one hand, and their actions on the other. Furthermore, tangible differences were developing between the populations of the two German states due to their very different lifestyles and experiences. As a consequence, theorists in the GDR began to question both the validity of Stalin's basic definition of what constituted a nation in general, and the state of the German nation in particular.

A more likely reason for the lack of theoretical debate regarding the nation was the fact that the Party had no reason to encourage such a debate since the notion of a unitary German nation complemented their *Deutschlandpolitik* at the time, to which we shall now turn. Two factors played an important role here.

Firstly, since Moscow guaranteed both the continued existence of the GDR and the positions and prospects of the Party leadership,

²⁵ Rubens, 'Die Nation,' p.124.

²⁶ Rubens, p.125.

the *Deutschlandpolitik* of the latter had to conform to Soviet objectives in Europe. As a consequence, they faced not only the problem of how to make socialism appear compatible with German unity, but also how to represent German national interests (as they saw them), and the interests of Moscow simultaneously. In fact, Stalin had greeted the birth of the GDR as 'the foundation stone for a united, democratic, peace-loving Germany,'²⁷ and we now know that he saw communist control of Eastern Germany as the first step towards a communist united Germany, which would provide a starting point for the spread of communism throughout Western Europe.

However, originally the SED was not conceived as a Leninist or Soviet-style Party, but a German Marxist party with a programme 'corresponding to the interests of the German people and the peculiarities of the German economy, politics and culture,'²⁸ hence the original intention was not to impose a replica of the Soviet system on Germany. Indeed, the idea of a 'specific German road to socialism,' originally advocated by Anton Ackermann in 1946,²⁹ was supported by a large proportion of Party members. However, due the Yugoslav experience, from 1948, Moscow made it clear that there was only one road to socialism, namely the Soviet road, and Ackermann was forced to admit publicly that he had been wrong.³⁰

Secondly, there was the 'Ulbricht factor.' Walter Ulbricht quickly acquired such a firm grip on power that his opinion was inevitably the last word on any subject. As a veteran German communist, he saw the solution of the national question in the

²⁷ Quoted in Gottfried Zieger, Die Haltung von SED und DDR zur Einheit Deutschlands 1949-1987 (Cologne, 1988), p.13.

²⁸ Protokoll des Vereinigungsparteitages der SPD und KPD (East Berlin, 1946), p.12.

²⁹ Anton Ackermann, 'Gibt es einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus?' Einheit 1 (1946): pp.22-32. On the original nature of the SED, see Wolfgang Leonhard, Child of the Revolution (London and Glasgow, 1957), pp.350-357.

³⁰ Neues Deutschland, 24 September 1948.

socialist reorganisation of the nation,³¹ which had failed during the 1930s due to divisions within the workers' movement, hence the Nazis had not been prevented from gaining power.³² However, 1945 provided a fresh start and it was vital that this time, the workers' movement remained united. To lead a united socialist Germany was Ulbricht's dream, hence he constantly stressed the need to protect German interests and to defend the unity of the nation. Indeed, it seems that he really did believe that a united socialist Germany could be created, based on his belief that the working class in the Federal Republic could be won over to the SED's socialist cause,³³ and that the proletariat in both East and West Germany formed a national bond that could not be broken. Just nine months before the construction of the Berlin Wall, Ulbricht stated that in spite of its temporary division, the re-establishment of the unity of the nation was 'historically inevitable,' and described the view that two separate German nations could emerge as a 'false perspective.'³⁴

However, in spite of his convictions regarding the national question, Ulbricht remained a pragmatist first and foremost, resulting in contradictions between his words and deeds. Furthermore, he slavishly served Soviet interests, especially under Stalin, seeing himself as Moscow's right-hand man in Germany. One could almost say that he personally embodied the fundamental dilemma facing the SED, namely how to convince the population that it could simultaneously serve the national interest on the one hand, and Soviet interests, under the guise of proletarian internationalism, on the other.

³¹ This idea dated back to the KPD's 'Programmatic Statement on the National and Social Liberation of the German People' of 1930. Interview with Politburo member, Alfred Neumann, Berlin 7 April 1993 and 4 May 1993.

³² See Walter Schmidt, 'The Nation in German History,' in The National Question in Europe in Historical Context, eds. Mikulás Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1993), pp.165-166.

³³ ZPA IV 2/1/122 (ZK, 17-19 September 1953).

³⁴ Ulbricht to the Central Committee, December 1960, cited in Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, 3rd ed. vol. 2, p.924.

When the SED was formed in a forced merger of the KPD and SPD in the Soviet Zone, its leaders made it clear that their long-term objective was a united socialist Germany,³⁵ indeed, the defeat of Nazism and the subsequent need for a new kind of German state seemed to provide the ideal opportunity for them to realise this dream. Four years later, the manifesto of the newly formed bloc of parties, the 'National Front,' contained all the main aspects of the regime's early *Deutschlandpolitik*: the objective of a united, 'democratic' Germany; adherence to the unity of the nation; the portrayal of the GDR as the turning point for the whole of Germany; and the western allies' responsibility for its temporary division.³⁶ The first Prime Minister of the GDR, Otto Grotewohl, called the foundation of the GDR 'an expression of the fact that the democratic forces of our people are not willing to come to terms with the division of our fatherland or with the enslavement of the western parts of it.'³⁷ The first president, Wilhelm Pieck, declared, 'We will not rest until the portion of Germany which was illegally torn off and subjected to occupation law is united with the core of Germany, the GDR,'³⁸ and maintained that the GDR would never recognise the division of Germany.³⁹ Thus, far from destroying the unitary German state, the GDR was supposed to be 'the bastion of the national liberation struggle of the German people against imperialism.'⁴⁰ This was enshrined in the constitution of 1949, which described Germany as an indivisible, democratic republic, composed of *Länder*,⁴¹ though this was not to remain the case for long.

By portraying itself as the defender of the unity of the nation, the SED hoped to arouse support for its own conception of a future

³⁵ See Protokoll des Vereinigungsparteitages der SPD und KPD.

³⁶ Programm der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland, 15th February 1950, cited in Gebhard Diemer, ed. Kurze Chronik der deutschen Frage, (Munich, 1990), pp.179-180.

³⁷ Otto Grotewohl, 12 October 1949, quoted in Zieger, Die Haltung, p.11.

³⁸ Wilhelm Pieck, quoted in Dieter Blumenwitz, What is Germany? Exploring Germany's Status after World War Two (Bonn, 1989), p.36

³⁹ Wilhelm Pieck, quoted in DDR Handbuch, 2nd ed. (Cologne, 1975), p.265.

⁴⁰ Protokoll der Verhandlungen der 2. Parteikonferenz, p.32.

⁴¹ Constitution of the GDR, 7 October 1949, cited in Blumenwitz, What is Germany? p.125.

united German state, that is to say, a socialist German state, and at first, they seemed genuinely to believe that this goal was attainable. However, with the benefit of hindsight, we know that when a choice had to be made between a unitary German state with a multi-party system on the one hand, and securing socialism on at least one part of German soil on the other, the SED chose the latter. Until 1952, the pursuit of socialism was played down, the emphasis being placed on the need for an 'anti-fascist democratic order.' Although the commitment of most members of the the SED to anti-fascism was very genuine, both the early actions of its leaders, and soon their words too, suggested that the 'anti-fascist democratic order' was just a means to an end, namely to pave the way to socialism,⁴² albeit initially with a German face. Furthermore, in spite of the nationalist rhetoric, in practice, the Party leadership made little effort to prevent the division deepening, or to negotiate with the West, though naturally the onset of the Cold War limited the possibility of a settlement between the leaders of the two German states.

While the regime maintained that all the objectives of its *Deutschlandpolitik* were entirely compatible, in practice the pursuit of the more immediate goals within East Germany worked against the long-term goal of reunification. While it is possible that the Party leadership was simply being disingenuous regarding its true intentions, it seems more likely that at this stage, they were blinded by 'socialist idealism' and being unrealistic about the level of support for their objectives.

During the 1950s, the SED's *Deutschlandpolitik* was dealt three major blows. The first was the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949, and in retaliation, the Soviet Zone was transformed into the German Democratic Republic, marking the beginning of the SED's struggle to prove that the GDR was a legitimate sovereign state, even *the* one true German state - a struggle they continued to fight throughout the state's forty-year life-span, and one which they would eventually lose. As we have

⁴² See the records of the Second Party Conference, September 1947, *Dokumente der SED*, vol. 1, p.230.

already seen, this claim was based not solely on the alleged superiority of the socialist system, but also on the state's apparent embodiment of the interests of the German nation.

The second blow to the SED's all-German ambitions was Adenauer's willingness to join a West European Defence Community in 1952, which was a clear indication that the Federal Republic was firmly anchored in the Western alliance, and that the division of Europe, and therefore between the two German states, was deepening. In response, the SED declared 'building socialism' to be its primary concern, though the long-term goal remained German state-unity.⁴³ Indeed, Ulbricht argued, 'The construction of socialism in the GDR and in Berlin can only have a favourable effect on the struggle for a united, democratic, peace-loving and independent Germany.'⁴⁴ Clearly the leadership thought it better to build socialism in at least part of Germany, even if it delayed reunification, than to put the socialist system in the GDR at risk by trying to achieve too much too fast. Even so, in 1954, the ever hopeful Ulbricht still maintained that,

We want German unity because the Germans in the western part of our homeland are our brothers, because we love our fatherland, because we know that the restoration of German unity is an unavoidable aspect of the logic of history and cannot be overturned.⁴⁵

The declaration of the primacy of 'building socialism' concurred with the new Soviet twin-track strategy regarding Germany, introduced in response to Adenauer's rejection of the famous 'Stalin Note' in 1952, which was Moscow's final offer of a united,

⁴³ Ulbricht, 'Die gegenwärtige Lage,' p.750. See also 'The Grand Ideas of Socialism are becoming Reality in the GDR,' in Walter Ulbricht, On Questions of Socialist Construction in the GDR (Dresden, 1968). pp.202-234; Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 4th ed., p.210-227; Staritz, Geschichte der DDR, pp.73-77.

⁴⁴ Protokoll der Verhandlungen der 2. Parteikonferenz, p.38.

⁴⁵ Ulbricht, 4th Party Conference, March 1954, quoted in Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, 3rd ed., p.924

though neutral, Germany.⁴⁶ From this point, the immediate goal of the Kremlin was to strengthen the GDR as a means to increase its own influence in one part of Germany, in order to gain a foothold in the struggle for Germany as a whole.⁴⁷ Thus the apparently contradictory aims of recognition of the GDR on the one hand, and reunification on the other, were merely the short-term and long-term manifestations of Moscow's overall policy, to which the SED naturally had to adhere.

The third blow to the SED's hope of a united socialist Germany was the entry of the Federal Republic into NATO in May 1955. Shortly afterwards, the GDR was admitted into its communist equivalent, the Warsaw Pact, and a treaty was signed with the Soviet Union in September 1955, in which Moscow recognised the sovereignty of the GDR. Thus Moscow was simultaneously granting the GDR sovereignty, while also ensuring it would remain in the Soviet sphere of influence, thus placing severe limitations on that sovereignty. By the mid-1950s, the situation on German soil had developed into a microcosm of the Cold War, although the treaty signed with the Soviet Union still included the aim of German reunification.⁴⁸ From this point onwards, it seems that the construction of socialism, and also the recognition of the GDR as a sovereign state took precedence over reunification, and the phrase 'the two parts of Germany' was replaced by 'the two German states' in official parlance.⁴⁹ Although these objectives were still portrayed as compatible, recognition was eventually to become less of a means to an end than an end in itself.

As a consequence of this shift in priorities, the SED took up Khrushchev's 'two state thesis,' which spoke in terms of confederation as opposed to reunification, and demanded the

⁴⁶ For details, see Carola Stern, Ulbricht: a political Biography, (London, 1965), pp.182-184; Zieger, Die Haltung, pp.47-50; Motschmann, Sozialismus und Nation, pp.226-234.

⁴⁷ Zieger, Die Haltung, p.9.

⁴⁸ Diemer, Kurze Chronik, p.187.

⁴⁹ Otto Grotewohl, 26 September 1955, quoted in Ulrich Scheuner, 'The Problem of the nation and the GDR's relationship with the FRG,' in GDR Foreign Policy, eds. Eberhard Schulz et al. (New York, London, 1982), p.50.

preservation of the political and economic achievements of the GDR.⁵⁰ The assumption was that if socialism was firmly established in the GDR, in the event of a confederation, the SED would be in a position to exert influence westwards until power was in the hands of communists across Germany. It was even said that reunification would only take place via step-by-step rapprochement between the two German states,⁵¹ - a whole decade before Willy Brandt's administration advocated a similar idea to preserve the German national bond. In fact, towards the end of the 1950s, the SED proposed several confederation plans,⁵² all of which were dismissed by the government of the Federal Republic. Just how genuine these proposals were is hard to judge. By adhering to the ultimate goal of a unified state, while simultaneously strengthening the GDR, the SED was keeping its options open.

From the late 1950s, socialism began to penetrate not just the economic and political spheres, but also people's private lives. For example, an ideological campaign was waged ^{to} encourage socialist consciousness among the population, culminating in Ulbricht's 'Ten Commandments of Socialist Ethics and Morals,'⁵³ according to which, correct behaviour was that which furthered socialism, and incorrect behaviour was that which hindered it. In addition, writers and artists were called upon to contribute towards 'building socialism' by using 'art as a weapon' and adhering to the principles of socialist realism. Thus the seeds of a socialist consciousness were being sown that would one day be advocated as an alternative to German national consciousness. Such changes indicated that the regime was not prepared to compromise on socialism just to help bring about reunification. The erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 was the ultimate proof of this fact.

⁵⁰ Khrushchev in East Berlin, June 1955. Source: Diemer, Kurze Chronik, p.56. For an analysis, see Jens Hacker, 'Der Rechtsstatus Deutschlands aus der Sicht der DDR,' Ostrecht 13, (1974): pp.133.

⁵¹ Committee for German Unity, 300 Questions, p.5.

⁵² See for example ZPA IV/ 2/1/220; Committee for German Unity, GDR: 300 Questions, pp.45-48.

⁵³ For details see Hermann Weber, Kleine Geschichte, (Cologne, 1980), p.93.

Bearing in mind the above mentioned political factors, let us now return to the official line regarding the nation during this period. If, as the SED claimed, the GDR was the model for a future unitary German state, indeed, even if it was to be accepted in its own right, it needed to appear legitimate, both in the opinion of its citizens, and also of the outside world. While the leadership claimed legitimacy through democracy and the anti-fascist credentials of the GDR, especially compared with those of the Federal Republic, Ulbricht's main concern was that it should 'look democratic.'⁵⁴ In reality, the multi-party 'National Front' hardly concealed the SED's hegemony, hence the claim of legitimacy through democracy was hardly credible. Furthermore, the SED's economic policies failed to provide the legitimacy through prosperity which was to underpin the Federal Republic, especially in the eyes of its population. Finally, in spite of the SED's attempts to enhance the GDR's image by conducting diplomacy on behalf of the German nation, for example, by signing a treaty with Poland, recognising the Oder-Neisse Line as their common border,⁵⁵ the international community remained unconvinced.

The only remaining device which could potentially legitimise the GDR and its regime was nationalism. The equation of 'socialist' with 'national,' or 'German' was viewed by the leadership as the solution to the problem of how make the goals of building socialism and German reunification compatible. This was not just a tactic - as stated earlier, the leadership really did hope to introduce socialism nationwide. Consequently, they stressed the continued existence of the German nation and the importance of patriotism. Obviously there is a fundamental incompatibility between socialism and nationalism, but the latter was not an end in itself, but a device to achieve the former on a wider scale. However, the middle classes were unlikely to view a communist party as the best representative of their interests or those of the nation as a whole. Furthermore, in spite of the SED's nationalist rhetoric, the GDR's relationship with the Soviet Union undermined

⁵⁴ Stern, Ulbricht, p.100.

⁵⁵ For the official justification for this, see the declaration of the Party executive, 19 July 1950, Dokumente der SED, vol. 3, p.72.

both her claim to be an independent sovereign state and to be the true representative of the German nation. Thus, by 1960, popular legitimacy was clearly lacking and people were voting with their feet in their thousands, regarding the Federal Republic as the true, or at least the best German state. The increasing permanence of the GDR by the late 1950s was merely a result of the deepening division within Europe, and its right to exist depended on the continuation of the Cold War, a fact proved by its subsequent fate once the thaw began.

2) THE GERMAN NATION IN THE SHADOW OF THE WALL

a) The Political Dimension

Until the late 1960s, official Party documents still stated that in spite of the political division of Germany, the German nation continued to exist in some form. Furthermore, it was argued that the GDR remained the true political representative of that nation because there power was (theoretically at least) in the hands of the working class, hence the GDR was genuinely 'national' in a Marxist sense. However, a change in the precise meaning of words such as 'nation' and 'national' can be perceived from the beginning of the decade, with 'national' tending to be used to mean 'GDR-wide' as opposed to all-German, and being increasing used in connection with class-based arguments. Also a tendency to mix Marxist-Leninist and non-Marxist concepts often renders it difficult for us to grasp precisely what was meant by such terms, and no doubt caused confusion at the time, if indeed ordinary people paid attention to such things. At the end of the day, the SED was still trying to use a concept of the nation to support mutually exclusive objectives, namely to cement socialism and gain international recognition of the GDR on the one hand, and to demonstrate its German credentials and achieve reunification on the other (albeit not unconditionally).

The main reason for this continued adherence to the notion of a unitary German nation was because the long-term objectives of the Party's *Deutschlandpolitik* remained essentially the same, in

spite of the construction of the Berlin Wall. However, the Wall did signify a reordering of priorities, with increased emphasis on the need for international recognition and the further construction of socialism, which diminished the Party's chances of achieving its long-term objective of reunification. Also, we can assume that a decade of division had affected official perceptions of what could realistically be achieved.

The new Party Programme of 1963 concentrated on inner consolidation and completing the construction of socialism, which, it was believed, would strengthen the SED's position in the event of a confederation. While the hope of a 'democratic transformation' of the Federal Republic was put to one side, the Party's long-term objective remained to advance 'the socialist revolution and reconstruction' in the GDR in order that 'socialism might be victorious in one part of the country, thus establishing the basis for the future inevitable victory of socialism in all of the country.'⁵⁶ The Berlin Wall was supposed to have 'positive all-German implications' by protecting the foundations of a future united Germany (i.e. the GDR) from attacks by the 'enemies of the nation' (i.e. the West).⁵⁷ As the Party Programme stated, 'A new era in the history of the German people has begun - the era of socialism.... The future belongs to socialism - not only in the GDR but throughout Germany.'⁵⁸ Even so, patience was clearly required. As Ulbricht himself admitted, 'If we insist on a policy of all or nothing right now, we will certainly end up with nothing.'⁵⁹

The construction of the Wall proved that the regime was aware of the state's lack of popular legitimacy - after all, most states do not literally have to fence their citizens in to prevent mass defection. Reports of the views of scholars and students concerning the national question, which were monitored by the Department of

⁵⁶ Hermann Axen, 14th session of the Central Committee, December 1961, quoted in Melvin Croan, 'East Germany: a lesson in survival,' Problems of Communism 11 (1962): p.10.

⁵⁷ Motschmann, Sozialismus und Nation, pp.244-245.

⁵⁸ Programm der SED, Dokumente der SED, vol. 9, pp.171, 174.

⁵⁹ Neues Deutschland, 1 August 1963, cited in McAdams, East Germany and Détente. Building Authority after the Wall (Cambridge, 1985), p.59.

Sciences and reported to Ulbricht by the State Secretary, Kurt Hager, revealed that scholars believed 'the measures of 13th August 1961' (i.e. the construction of the Wall), had deepened the division of Germany. They were worried about the future of 'German scholarship' if collaboration with West German academics were no longer possible, and stressed the indivisibility of human knowledge. On a more general note, they accused the Party of stressing the differences between the two German states while ignoring what they had in common.⁶⁰

Such views were condemned by the Party for assuming that the relationship between scholars from both German states had nothing to do with class relationships or the ideological conflict between socialism and capitalism. However, it was acknowledged that generally, people did not accept the official explanation of why the Berlin Wall had been necessary. In addition, misunderstandings concerning 'the nature of the national question' (i.e. that it was a class conflict), had been highlighted by a dramatic increase in the number of applications to emigrate to the West since the end of 1961.⁶¹

In order to remedy the situation, a legitimacy campaign was launched, directed towards both the population of the GDR, and the international community, not least the West German government, who still referred to it as 'the so-called GDR' or 'the Soviet Zone,' or at best, 'the GDR' in bold inverted commas. The basis of the SED's claim that the GDR was the legitimate German state was that:

The socialist developments in the GDR correspond with all the needs of the German nation. They correspond with all the essential interests of the German people.... In all areas of politics and communal life, the GDR is the national and social alternative to the imperialism that rules West Germany.⁶²

⁶⁰ ZPA IV 2/2024/1 (Büro Hager).

⁶¹ ZPA IV 2/2024/1

⁶² Programm der SED, Dokumente der SED, vol. 9, p.208-209.

However, several factors continued to discredit these claims, including the obvious lack of democracy, overt Sovietisation, and the relatively weak economy compared with that of the Federal Republic. Unwilling to tackle the first two factors, and unable to deal with the third, the regime ~~sort~~^{sought} other ways to increase people's allegiance to the GDR. Although it could be argued that this was hardly necessary once people could no longer leave, the SED no doubt recognised that a sense of state-pride would encourage social participation and hard work, and also that it would enhance the claim to international recognition. Consequently, the regime actively sought to make socialism seem more appealing and more traditionally German, earning the GDR the title of 'Red Prussia.'⁶³

These efforts were accompanied by accusations that the Federal Republic was 'a false pretender to German nationality' because it was an imperialist state, while the GDR was 'the true heir to the throne.'⁶⁴ The former was apparently highly americanised and therefore incapable of representing the interests of the German nation. Its leaders were portrayed as mere puppets of the Western allies, and the SED made good use of any evidence of right-wing activity and revanchism, such as the rise of the neo-fascist National Democratic Party (NPD), and the dubious war-time records of politicians.

An integral part of the Party's legitimacy campaign was a more active attempt to nurture a form of 'GDR-consciousness,' officially known as 'socialist national consciousness.' A 'spontaneous national consciousness' was considered inadequate,⁶⁵ hence, like everything else in the GDR, 'socialist national consciousness' was designed according to the specifications and needs of the Party. Far from reflecting the actual feelings of the population, it concentrated on what ought to bind them together, namely 'a love

⁶³ Welles Hangen, 'New Perspectives behind the Wall,' Foreign Affairs 45 (1966): p.138.

⁶⁴ Neues Deutschland, 19 May 1962, quoted in McAdams, East Germany, p.35.

⁶⁵ Wolfgang Heise, 'Um die Zukunft der Nation,' Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 9 (1961): p.1036.

for the GDR and pride in the achievements of socialism.⁶⁶ In addition, it included more subjective and cultural and ethnic elements - an indication that the leadership realised that the rather objective notions of socialist patriotism and internationalism alone would not create a sense of total allegiance to the state.⁶⁷

'Socialist national consciousness' was portrayed as the first truly German consciousness in the history of the German people which had not been imposed or distorted by the ruling classes.⁶⁸ Apparently it had nothing in common with the bourgeois consciousness or '*Junker* bourgeois chauvinism' typical of the Federal Republic,⁶⁹ which was labelled 'anti-national,' because it was the consciousness of only a small proportion of the population, namely the bourgeoisie. The latter was also equated with German nationalism of the past, hence the claim that 'Any German wishing to demonstrate a fundamental change in German national consciousness would never choose to be a citizen of the FRG'⁷⁰ - not that East Germans had the choice from 1961. Furthermore, it was hoped that 'socialist national consciousness' would counteract the influence of the 'ideological attacks by western imperialism,'⁷¹ especially 'the anti-socialist propaganda broadcast from the Federal Republic and West Berlin,'⁷² which sought to discredit the GDR in the eyes of its own citizens.

As the 1960s progressed, the regime began to place more emphasis on socialist patriotism as opposed to proletarian internationalism. The intention was not only to encourage allegiance to the GDR as the only legitimate German state, in

⁶⁶ Programm der SED, Dokumente der SED, vol. 9. p.247.

⁶⁷ Noted by F. Kopp in 1962, in Die Wendung zur 'nationalen' Geschichtsbetrachtung in der sowjetischen Zone (Munich, 1962), pp.5-6, reviewed in Kreusel, Nation und Vaterland, p.278.

⁶⁸ Heinrich Homann, 'Der 8. Mai 1945 und die Entwicklung des Nationalbewußtseins in Deutschland,' Einheit 19 (1965): p.41.

⁶⁹ Heise, 'Um die Zukunft,' p.1036.

⁷⁰ Homann, 'Der 8. Mai,' pp.32, 39.

⁷¹ Lothar Berthold, 'Unser nationales Geschichtsbild,' Einheit 21 (1966): p.229.

⁷² Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 4th ed., p.531.

contrast to the inauthentic Federal Republic, but also to distinguish it from other Eastern bloc states, since the word 'German' was synonymous with successful and economically superior. This was mainly due to the SED's disapproval of the new Soviet leadership, and was manifested in the encouragement of pride in the state's not inconsiderable economic achievements, compared with her allies, and willingness to participate in increasing her economic success. Here the regime was reasonably successful, although this was mainly due to the fact that since people could no longer leave, they resigned themselves to improving their lot in the GDR.

To enhance the cultural dimension of 'socialist national consciousness' a *nationales Geschichtsbild* (meaning national view, version or interpretation of history), was devised with the help of historians. The intention was to prove that the true roots of the German nation were socialist, and that its destiny had finally been realised in the establishment of the GDR, thus supporting the Party's claim that the GDR was the only legitimate German state.⁷³ Discussion of an appropriate view of history for the GDR began in June 1962 with the publication of an important document entitled *Grundriß der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Outline of the History of the German Workers' Movement).⁷⁴ It had been drawn up by a commission chaired by Ulbricht himself, which was an indication of its significance, and was debated for ten months before being accepted by the Central Committee. Reports of discussion of the 'Outline' at academic institutions revealed much confusion concerning the national question. People frequently asked about the position of the West German ruling class in relation to the nation, and even questioned whether or not there was still one German nation. A report from the Institute for Marxism-Leninism conceded that such confusion showed that

⁷³ On the 'national view of history' see 'Grundriß der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung,' in Dokumente der SED, vol. 9, pp.401-594; Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 4th ed., pp.478-9; Stefan Dörnberg, 'Zum nationalen Geschichtsbild,' Einheit 18 (1963): p.148; Homann, 'Der 8. Mai,' p.31; Berthold, 'Unser nationales Geschichtsbild,' pp.225-231; Ernst Engelberg, 'Vom Werden des nationalen Geschichtsbildes der deutschen Arbeiterklasse,' Einheit 17 (1962): pp.110-121.

⁷⁴ Reprinted in Dokumente der SED, vol. 9, pp.401-594.

'many comrades have serious difficulties grasping the interrelationship between the national question and the class question in Germany since 1945,'⁷⁵ which was hardly surprising.

The 'national view of history' of the GDR was compared to the imperialist view of history of the FRG. The former was the 'scientific view of history of the working class,' therefore it alone 'was capable of forming the basis for a genuine national consciousness of all German patriots.'⁷⁶ According to leading East German historian, Stefan Dörnberg, 'The national view of history of the working class is the true view of history, the view of history of the whole German nation,' thus in the GDR, history was apparently becoming 'the common property of the whole people.'⁷⁷

The campaign to create a new 'national view of history' culminated in the publication of the officially sanctioned, eight volume *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* which was a chronicle of the development of the German working-class movement from its origins in the 19th century to the Sixth Party Conference of the SED in 1963.⁷⁸ Its overt aim was to demonstrate, 'a continuity in the development of the German workers' movement from its birth to the SED,'⁷⁹ and to describe how the Party had become 'the leading force of the German nation.'⁸⁰

This renewed interest in German history also led to commemorations of various historical German figures, including Goethe, Hegel and Feuerbach. Also, in Party propaganda, Stalin was replaced by German role models for the young to identify

⁷⁵ ZPA IV 2/2024/1

⁷⁶ Homann, 'Der 8. Mai,' p.31.

⁷⁷ Dörnberg, 'Zum nationalen Geschichtsbild', pp.152, 150.

⁷⁸ Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, 8 vols.(East Berlin, 1966). For a description of the content, see Koenen, Nation und Nationalbewußtsein, pp.82-105.

⁷⁹ Zimmermann, ed. DDR Handbuch, 3rd ed., p.52.

⁸⁰ Berthold, 'Unser nationales Geschichtsbild,' p.226.

with, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht,⁸¹ and the centre of East Berlin received a major face-lift to make it appear more traditionally German, which indeed it did in contrast to the flashy materialism of the *Kurfürstendamm* in West Berlin.⁸²

All in all, 'socialist national consciousness' was an odd combination of Marxist and non-Marxist aspects of popular consciousness, which reflected the Party's mutually exclusive political objectives. In the words of one western observer, the SED was trying to create 'a national mystique composed of classical German humanism, discipline, self-denial Prussian tradition, anti-nazism and socialist patriotism.'⁸³ However, once people had no choice but to make the best of things in the GDR, a unique GDR-consciousness did begin to develop, although it did not necessarily correspond to the official 'socialist national consciousness' devised by the party.

Naturally the same factors which reduced the GDR's popular legitimacy also reduced her standing internationally, in particular, the fact that she remained under Moscow's thumb⁸⁴ (in spite of the brief period of assertiveness within the Eastern Bloc in the mid-1960s), and the construction of the Berlin Wall hardly gave the outside world the impression that the state was stable and consolidated. Furthermore, all the efforts of the regime were further undermined by the fact that the Federal Republic had become accepted by the West as the only legitimate German state. Consequently, the Party stepped up its campaign to gain recognition of its equal status with the Federal Republic - a subconscious acceptance of the existence of two separate German states, and by implication, of the fact that that the Party's attempt to reunite Germany under socialism had failed. This was demonstrated by symbolic assertions of the GDR's sovereignty, for

⁸¹ For example, in the 'Nationales Dokument' of 1962. See Weber, Kleine Geschichte, p.111.

⁸² Hangen, 'New Perspectives,' p.138-9.

⁸³ Hangen, p.139.

⁸⁴ See Ilse Spittmann, 'Soviet Union and DDR,' Survey 61 (1966): p.165; Ludz, 'Zum Begriff,' p.19-20; Welles Hangen, The Muted Revolution (London, 1967), p.42; Hangen, 'New Perspectives,' p.144.

example, in 1964, new identity cards were issued, for the first time bearing the words 'citizen of the GDR,' and in 1965, a separate East German team was accepted by the International Olympic Committee to compete in the 1968 games.

In spite of the fact that legitimising the state now appeared to take precedence over reunification, official policy documents such as the Party Programme still mentioned the ultimate aim of a unified socialist German state, re-enforced by a firm belief in the continued unity of the nation. The 'National Document,' published in 1962, stated that 'the essential interests of the nation' could only be realised 'in a united German nation-state,' and described the GDR as the model for a future unitary Germany.⁸⁵ There were two prerequisites for reunification, namely the victory of socialism in the GDR and the defeat of West German militarism and imperialism by the working class and other democratic forces.⁸⁶ However, the erection of the Berlin Wall naturally raised questions about the SED's sincerity regarding the goal of German unity. Even so, there can be little doubt that Ulbricht himself still hoped to bring about a united socialist Germany.⁸⁷ For the time being, however, the best solution to the German Question was a relationship of peaceful co-existence based on the recognition of the equal status of the two German states.⁸⁸

However, from 1966, measures were introduced to limit contact between East and West Germans. For example, the regime imposed stricter rules governing visits by West Berliners to the GDR, banned participation by East German ministers in activities organised by the pan-German protestant church, the EKD, and terminated the regular dialogue between the SED and the West German SPD. This was the first indication that a change in the SED's *Deutschlandpolitik* was on the cards, which in turn would

⁸⁵ See Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 4th ed, p.476, and Diemer, Kurze Chronik, p.73.

⁸⁶ Dörnberg, Kurze Geschichte, 1st ed., p.451. In the 4th edition, published 5 years later in 1969, Dörnberg alleged that the first of these had been achieved.

⁸⁷ Ulbricht in a letter to Karl Jaspers, 1 June 1966, ZPA NL182/1306.

⁸⁸ Programm der SED, Dokumente des SED, vol. 9, p.204.

raise questions regarding the official line on the state of the German nation.

b) The Theoretical Dimension

From 1962, the concept of the nation began to receive theoretical attention, resulting in a marked increase in publications on the subject. There appear to have been several reasons for this. Firstly, after twelve years, the political and psychological divide between the two German states seemed to be widening, not narrowing, and not surprisingly, there was concern about the actual effect of this situation on the German nation as a cohesive entity. Secondly, a rethink was necessary in order to reconcile the Party's continued adherence to the unity of the nation, recently reaffirmed in the 'National Document,' with the construction of the Berlin Wall. Thirdly, the regime now seemed to be focusing on gaining the allegiance of the population of the GDR as opposed to the entire nation. Fourthly, prompted by Moscow, a general policy of destalinisation was being implemented, which was also applied to Stalinist teaching.

The results are interesting for various reasons. Firstly, they demonstrate just how difficult it was to reconcile and justify the different strands of the SED's *Deutschlandpolitik* theoretically. Secondly, while theorists could not openly challenge the Party line, there is evidence to suggest that their ideas were noted by the leadership. Thirdly, for the first time, the simple notion of a unitary German nation was no longer taken for granted.

Most significant was a new, more class-based definition of a nation developed by Alfred Kosing, a philosopher from the Academy for Social Sciences, who soon became the leading East German authority on the state of the German nation, and whose original theories are evident in later work by other scholars.⁸⁹ They were also taken up by the SED, firstly to prove that one

⁸⁹ See for example, Albert Norden, 'Arbeiterklasse und Nation,' Einheit 21 (1966): p.461; Karl Polak, 'Über fehlerhaften Auffassungen in Fragen unseres Kampfes um Frieden und nationale Wiedergeburt,' Einheit 17 (1962): p.121; Heise, 'Um die Zukunft,' p.1030.

German nation still existed, and later to prove that it did not. However, in the mid-1970s, he had to perform an act of *Selbstkritik* (self-criticism), admitting publicly that he had been wrong in the early 1960s, and accepting that there were indeed two separate nations of German soil.⁹⁰ This was a reflection of changes in the Party line, implemented for political reasons, as we shall see.

The spark which ignited the smouldering theoretical debate on the state of the nation was a book by the West German thinker, Karl Jaspers, in which he claimed that two separate German nations were developing, in the same way as the German and Austrian nations had done.⁹¹ Alfred Kosing totally rejected Jaspers' view and claimed, 'The current division of the nation into two states cannot lead to the formation of two nations. Instead it will eventually be overcome via the establishment of a united socialist nation.'⁹² Using a Marxist-Leninist, class-based concept of the nation, he set out to prove that a unitary German nation did still exist.

Kosing believed that a nation was defined first and foremost by class structures, and that it was neither a condition, nor a rigid structure, but developed and changed as part of a historical process. He challenged Stalin's basic definition of a nation because it implied that nations were 'class-neutral' (*Klassenindifferent*).⁹³ Furthermore, it omitted the class differences between nations, neglected the tradition of national struggle, which helped build national character, and failed to consider the relationship between different nations. Finally, as it stood, Stalin's definition could be used to prove that there was no longer a unitary German nation.⁹⁴ However, Kosing believed it

⁹⁰ Kosing, *Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, pp.101-105.

⁹¹ See Karl Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung* (Munich, 1960).

⁹² Alfred Kosing, 'Illusion und Wirklichkeit in der nationalen Frage,' *Einheit* 17 (1962): pp.19-20.

⁹³ Kosing, p.15. See also Peter-Alfons Steiniger, 'Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht im allgemeinen Völkerrecht der Gegenwart,' *Einheit* 21 (1966): p.1227.

⁹⁴ Steiniger, 'Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht,' pp.1226-1227.

was still valid if expanded upon to include more class-based elements, hence modified versions of it continued to feature in reference books even in the early 1970s.

Turning to the German case, Kosing argued that the national bond was maintained by the working class in both German states, who together constituted the German nation, which was, according to this argument, a socialist nation. Thus the 'fate of the German nation' was 'inextricably bound to the struggle of the working class for peace, democracy and socialism'⁹⁵ and he predicted that eventually, the German working class would be reunited within a unitary socialist German state.⁹⁶

If the working class formed the core of the German nation, it followed that the GDR, as a state of the working class, embodied 'the future of the German nation.'⁹⁷ hence it represented the national interest in a Marxist sense. In contrast, the Federal Republic was described as riddled with class conflict, like the former unitary German state prior to 1945, and according to Marxist-Leninist theory, its population could not possibly constitute a united nation. It failed to represent the true national interest because power was in the hands of a few, i.e. capitalists. Therefore, the West German working class formed a nation with the population of the GDR, and the latter state was their true fatherland.⁹⁸ In short, there were now apparently two German states, two German populations in the sense of *Staatsvölker*, but one German nation, albeit at two different levels of development.

Regarding the question of why the long-promised reunification of the two German states under socialism had still not taken place, the blame was laid firmly at the door of the so-called 'enemies of the nation', namely the Western allies and the government in Bonn.⁹⁹ According to Kosing, 'The most important aspect of the

⁹⁵ Kosing, 'Illusion,' p.21.

⁹⁶ Kosing, p.19.

⁹⁷ Kosing, p.14.

⁹⁸ Norden, 'Arbeiterklasse,' p.461.

⁹⁹ '15 Jahre DDR: Thesen der ideologischen Kommission beim Politbüro der ZK der SED zum 15. Jahrestag der Gründung der DDR,' *Einheit* 19 (1964): p.28.

national question is to deprive the enemies of the nation of power. This is the most vital matter for the German people, the most fundamental question for the German nation.'¹⁰⁰ In short, the way to achieve German reunification was 'via the victory of socialism in the GDR,' 'peaceful co-existence' and 'the elimination of the author of the division, namely imperialism.'¹⁰¹

To the non-Marxist observer, and with the benefit of hindsight, there appear to be many flaws in this class-based explanation of the state of the German nation. In particular, it is hard to ignore the fact that like the SED, theorists including Kosing mixed socialist ideas with nationalist arguments, and took advantage of the fact that something more than proletarian solidarity bound together the working class in both German states, such as ethnicity, tradition and culture. The position of the West German population also remained inadequately explained. On the one hand the 'bourgeois nation' in the Federal Republic was frequently referred to as class-divided, implying that it comprised both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, it was claimed that the former were in fact members of the socialist nation, which was politically represented by the GDR. It may have been more logical to refer to the West German *state* as class-divided, compared to the GDR, where everyone was supposed to live together in harmony. Furthermore, it tended to be assumed that everyone in the GDR was working-class. In the end, theorists were trying to justify the unjustifiable, namely verbal adherence to the nation on the one hand, and the implementation of measures which in reality deepened the division on the other. Thus it was becoming clear that a choice would have to be made between a socialist German state and a reunified German state.

¹⁰⁰ Kosing, 'Illusion,' p.21.

¹⁰¹ Kosing, p.20.

3) CONCLUSION

Was the SED's adherence to the unity of the German nation from the 1950s until the mid-1960s genuine? Did the professed aim of reunification demonstrate a lack of realism, or was it just plain hypocrisy to conceal separatist intentions? It seems that the leadership's adherence to the unity of the nation based on the unity of the German working class was genuine - after all, they did hope that a united socialist German state would be established one day, hence it was claimed that there was no contradiction between the goals of reunification and the construction of socialism. However, by the 1960s, the only way to achieve these aims was perceived to be by permanently establishing the GDR as a sovereign state - not (yet) as a separate entity, but as a model for a future united German state.¹⁰² But in practice of course, this worked against reunification, and the SED would eventually have to accept socialism in only part of Germany, or not at all.

In spite of the SED's claim to be the defender of the unity of the German nation, socialism in the GDR seemed neither German nor national, but Soviet, hence the state was not seen as the true representative of the German nation either by its population, or by the outside world beyond the Eastern Bloc. While the Party leadership seemed to be more realistic about what could be achieved in the 1960s, and recognised the significance of national consciousness, it was still being unrealistic in assuming that the masses would automatically be sympathetic to their socialist agenda for Germany, especially since Moscow was clearly setting that agenda. In the end, the idea of using nationalism and traditional Germanness to make socialism seem 'national' was seriously flawed, because it contradicted the basic principle that class determines the relationship between communities.

Although accurate data on public opinion in the GDR was no longer available, Western observers recognised that the construction of

¹⁰² Kreusel also agreed that the SED did not yet have separatist intentions. Kreusel, Nation und Vaterland, p.298.

the Berlin Wall marked a turning point in the population's relationship to their state,¹⁰³ and that a state consciousness unique to the GDR had begun to develop. However, it was not the 'socialist national consciousness' designed by the Party to support its political objectives, most notably because it did not include socialist internationalism. Instead real GDR-consciousness was based on the experiences unique to the population of that state, such as post-war reconstruction and solidarity in the face of hardship, although this did not mean total acceptance of the state and its political system, especially bearing in mind the lack of personal freedoms and the confusion caused by the Wall.¹⁰⁴ However, according to Western observers it was still little more than a 'self-consciousness' (*Selbstbewußtsein*),¹⁰⁵ or a 'tenuous state-consciousness' or 'unconscious state consciousness,' and remained very much a 'Teutonic consciousness,'¹⁰⁶ a fact which the regime exploited selectively.¹⁰⁷

Thus, assuming the population did still believe that after less than 20 years, one German nation did still exist, it seems unlikely that this conviction was based on the bond of the German working class, as the SED claimed, but on the kind of elements which featured in Stalin's original definition, such as shared traditions, culture, language and history. In spite of an embryonic state consciousness in the GDR, it is probable that German national consciousness in a non-Marxist sense, which transcended the border, was still stronger at this stage, and the regime was naive to believe that a new 'socialist national consciousness' could easily

103 Gebhard Ludwig Schweigler, National Consciousness in Divided Germany, (London and Beverley Hills, 1975), pp.119-120. Influenced by Karl Deutsch, Schweigler's is the most comprehensive attempt to assess national consciousness in the GDR, though he often accepts the non-scientific nature of his evidence and warns against reading too much into mere observations. See pp.106-132.

104 Hans Apel, DDR 1962 1964 1966 (West Berlin, 1967), pp.373, 401.

105 Theo Sommer, 'Kommunisten oder Deutsche?' in Reise in ein Fernes Land, eds. Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, Rudolph W. Leonhardt, Theo Sommer (Hamburg, 1964), pp.129, 104.

106 Hangen, The Muted Revolution, p.184.

107 Jean Edward Smith, 'The Red Prussianism of the GDR,' Political Science Quarterly 82 (1967): p. 380.

be fashioned to replace it. In short, the SED's adherence to the unity of the German nation actually undermined the legitimacy of the GDR, hence by the late 1960s, a rethink was necessary.

CHAPTER 3: THE UNITY OF THE NATION IN DOUBT

This chapter describes the process of change from a belief in the continued existence of one German nation by the leadership of the GDR, to its denial, during the years 1967 to 1970. The principal question it seeks to answer is why the SED dramatically changed course, in particular, to what extent policy was influenced by theory on the one hand, and pragmatism on the other. The first section examines the Seventh Party Conference in 1967 where two lines on the National Question began to emerge within the leadership. The campaign for recognition was starting to take precedence over reunification, and adherence to the unity of the nation was undermining this campaign, hence it was time to re-assess the situation. However, not all members of the leadership recognised this, which led to the emergence of two contradictory positions, which made it increasingly difficult for theorists to know what the official line was. The second section examines the new constitution's traditional approach to the nation, and the reasons behind it. The third section looks at what finally made even Ulbricht change his position regarding the nation, in particular, the challenge posed by Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. What emerges is that the eventual change in policy resulted from the need for a more pragmatic approach, and was not based on theoretical arguments or deeply held convictions.

1) TRADITIONALISTS VERSUS PRAGMATISTS WITHIN THE RULING ELITE

a) The Seventh Party Conference, 1967

At the Seventh Party Conference, for the first time, two distinct lines on the national question began to emerge within the SED's leading elite, that of the traditionalists, who adhered to the goal of reunification and the continued existence of one German nation, and that of the pragmatists or realists, who had given up that goal

and took a more GDR-centric view, which would eventually evolve into a claim that a separate socialist (German) nation had become established in the GDR.¹ Furthermore, the SED reaffirmed its commitment to the aim of a united socialist Germany, but also to the normalisation of relations between the two German states which would pave the way for mutual recognition. However, not all functionaries had decided which camp they were in, especially regarding such a sensitive and potentially explosive issue. Ulbricht himself combined aspects of the traditional line with a more pragmatic approach, resulting in noticeable contradictions. Only a few, for example Werner Lamberz, had totally adopted the new view, but they could not enforce it while Ulbricht remained in power. However, we should not automatically assume that the views expressed by functionaries were their genuine convictions, and should always consider their real objectives.

What is certain is that by the spring of 1967, the leadership had changed tactics on the national question, which would soon give rise to a reassessment of their goals. However, the more immediate result of the emergence of two lines was confusion within the Party and the population. In fact, the Seventh Party Conference was unique in that differences of opinion were actually visible - a rare occurrence in the history of the GDR.

At the 13th ^{plenum} ~~meeting~~ of the Central Committee in September 1966, in preparation for the Seventh Party Conference, Ulbricht defined the prerequisites required for reunification. Firstly 'revanchism and militarism' in West Germany had to be defeated, and secondly, the two German states had to normalise their relations on the basis of their equal status as sovereign states, and then gradually grow closer together. Ulbricht did not view recognition (*Anerkennung*) and drawing closer together (*Annäherung*) as mutually exclusive. According to his logic, recognition was a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence, which would facilitate cooperation, which could eventually lead to unification, once the

¹ Some writers argue that a change of position by the entire Politburo took place, led by Ulbricht himself, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Naumann and Trümpler, *Der Flop*, p.21.

'democratic transformation' of West Germany had taken place. By refusing to recognise the GDR, he argued, Bonn was hindering peaceful coexistence and the good relations necessary for a solution of the German question. This step-by-step approach gradually took over from the idea of starting with the formation of a confederation, although the latter was still mentioned in his New Year message for 1967.² However, Ulbricht did at last recognise that due to the situation in 'Germany,' and in Europe as a whole, one had to reckon with a '*längeren Nebeneinander*' i.e. with two German states existing side-by-side for a long time.³

As usual, all the speeches at the Party Conference received rapturous applause. Ulbricht repeated his commitment to reunification: 'A unity of the German nation under the leadership of imperialists is impossible, but we are whole-heartedly striving.... for unity under the leadership of the working class.' However, for the first time, he seemed to be distinguishing between short-term and long-term goals. The former were the normalisation of relations between the two states, the renunciation of violence, recognition of borders and peaceful coexistence, but the long-term goal remained reunification. He accused those who no longer believed it to be a possibility of playing into the hands of the very capitalists who he blamed for the division, and who feared a 'united, peace-loving, progressive, anti-imperialist German state,' adding, 'Our greatest pioneers, Marx, Engels and Karl Liebknecht were the best German patriots..... What imperialism has broken apart, the working class in both German states, in close alliance, will reunite.'⁴

Ulbricht made direct reference to the German nation which had been mishandled and dishonoured by the the *Großbourgeoisie* but was, nevertheless, still one German nation in his opinion. Pre-empting Brandt by two years, he explained, 'Today the nation essentially consists of the German people in two German states

² Neues Deutschland, 1 January 1967.

³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1178

⁴ Walter Ulbricht, Die gesellschaftliche Entwicklung der DDR bis zur Vollendung des Sozialismus (East Berlin, 1967), p.51.

which are independent of each other, the socialist GDR and the militaristic, imperialist West German Federal Republic.⁵

Although the view expressed by the First Secretary was officially accepted as the position of the SED, other members of the Politburo contributed to the Party Conference and its preparation, although there is no record of any heated debate. Erich Honecker, who was already gaining prominence, claimed, 'The SED is the only party in Germany with a complete concept for the social development and prospects for Germany as a whole. We are in the position to show the German people a way to a future of peace, socialist progress and democracy.' He also stressed the need for democratic transformation in West Germany if the reunification of Germany were to be possible.⁶ In retrospect it is surprising to hear Honecker using such all-German language as late as 1967. However, he seemed to avoid direct use of the term 'nation' and by the Party Conference itself, he had toned down his enthusiasm for reunification. In the report of the Central Committee (which was written by a commission under his chairmanship), the goals of peaceful coexistence and the normalisation of relations were stressed, but the question, 'What should the future unitary Germany look like?' was also raised.⁷

During the conference, however, Ulbricht's traditional line was somewhat contradicted by the more GDR-orientated view of a worker from East Berlin, Klaus Teschendorf. He repeated a phrase first used by students at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig,⁸ though it probably originated from the Party apparatus, 'We are bound in every way to our socialist GDR, but we are in no way bound to the imperialist West Germany..... However, through the many things we have in common, we are bound to the West German working class.'⁹ This was no spontaneous outburst, but the view held by several members of the leading elite, who did

⁵ Ulbricht, p.52.

⁶ ZPA IV 2/1/347

⁷ Bericht des Zentralkomitees, Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 7. Parteitags (East Berlin, 1967), p.20.

⁸ Neues Deutschland, 21 January, 1967.

⁹ Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 7. Parteitags, p.152.

not yet dare to question openly the official line according to Ulbricht.

b) The Political Background

Until 1966, the factors which had shaped the SED's position on the national question had remained pretty constant. Suddenly, however, new factors arose which certain members of the ruling elite could not ignore, especially the challenge posed by Bonn's new approach to inner-German relations. The SED leadership's confused and inconsistent response indicates that they were caught off-guard and were divided on the issue of how to reconcile long-held tenets with an effective response to the new *Ostpolitik*, as the Seventh Party Conference had shown. In particular, the traditional line on the unity of the nation seemed increasingly out of step with demands for recognition which were acquiring a distinctly separatist tone.

i) Developments in West Germany

The key to understanding the SED's policy regarding the nation during the late 1960s, was the leadership's dogged determination to acquire international recognition. Obviously the main obstacle was the existence of another state which also claimed to be the true home of the German nation, and it was the attempts by the Federal government to alter the status quo that finally forced the SED leadership to re-examine its position and to take a more pragmatic stance on the national question. Already Bonn seemed to be calling the shots, forcing the SED to respond. During 1966, there had been an exchange of views with the opposition Social Democrats, known as the 'national dialogue,' the initiative for which, according to East German accounts, came from the SED.¹⁰ But the SPD's line was not so very different from that of the CDU/CSU. Contrary to the SED's wishes, they refused to renounce the Federal Republic's '*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*' or the continued existence of Germany in the borders of 1937, and as a

¹⁰ See Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, pp.203-210.

consequence, there was little room for negotiation and the contact ceased.

The first turning point in relations between the two states, which would eventually lead to the Basic Treaty and the denial of a unitary German nation by the SED, was the entry of the SPD into the Grand Coalition in December 1966. Previously, the SED had laid the blame for the lack of progress in the national question firmly at the door of the CDU/CSU. Now the SPD, who the SED leadership could not so easily blame for the division, had a share of power, and individuals such as Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr demonstrated an interest in compromise and co-operation. Until this point, the German Question had been on hold, due to both sides' refusal to give any ground. Suddenly the SED was faced with the challenge of a new approach which was either a golden opportunity or a serious threat. The Party leadership appears to have interpreted it as the latter, hence they began to build a barricade of conditions for progress towards reunification, and stated that there would be no further rapprochement without recognition.

Since the SED leadership claimed that the national question was a question of class, it could hardly ignore the party that was the most credible representative of the West German working class. However, in spite of this fact, the SED put self-interest before pan-German class solidarity, choosing not to regard the SPD as an ally. Without first consulting Moscow,¹¹ Ulbricht criticised the party's entry into the coalition for ideological reasons, and specifically condemned its new *Ostpolitik*, due to the continued adherence to the claim to the sole right of representation of the German nation and the refusal to grant the GDR recognition.¹² According to Ulbricht, 'In view of joint policies by the SPD leadership and the CDU/CSU and West German monopoly capitalists, the process of *Annäherung* by the working class in both German states becomes

¹¹ Melvin Croan, 'The Development of GDR Political Relations with the USSR,' in GDR Foreign Policy, eds. Schulz et al., p.201.

¹² For details see N. Edwina Moreton, East Germany and the Warsaw Alliance: the Politics of Détente (Boulder, Colorado, 1978), pp.54-55, 67-68.

far more difficult and the division deeper. It can be proved that every condition for the reunification of both German states is lacking and that the FRG is neither capable of negotiation nor confederation.' Consequently, for the time being, the main aim could only be the preservation of peace.¹³ Here a shift in priorities can be perceived, together with the realisation that the situation might not change for a long time. Brandt sent an open letter to the Seventh Party Conference suggesting SPD-SED negotiations, but the SED leadership declined, on the grounds that Brandt had failed to recognise that the National Question was a class struggle, and because SPD functionaries and members needed to be 'cured of their nationalism.'¹⁴

Due to what they viewed as the SPD's betrayal of the working class, the SED leadership committed a rather petty act of revenge by referring to the SPD as 'SP' for a while, dropping the word *Deutschlands*. It is difficult to know exactly what this act was supposed to prove - maybe that the SPD was no longer worthy of Germany and that the SED was still the only true party of the entire German working class.

Rather more significant was the renaming of the State Secretariat for All-German Affairs, which became the State Secretariat for West German Affairs. Its tasks included the production of propaganda directed at the Federal Republic, monitoring the political situation there, and examining her policies towards the GDR. However, such activities, and the phrase 'all-German Affairs' in itself, had implied that a special link between the two states still existed and undermined the claim that they were independent of each other. The Secretary of State concerned, Joachim Herrmann - a hard-liner, totally opposed to any compromise with Bonn - blamed 'the new situation in West Germany' (i.e. the Grand Coalition) for the name change,¹⁵ and claimed that 'all-German' had come to mean different things to each German state: 'Unlike the ministry in Bonn, the State

¹³ ZPA IV A2/903/2

¹⁴ ZPA IV 2/1/356

¹⁵ ZPA IV A2/2028/122

Secretariat in Berlin does not use the word "all-German" as propagandist camouflage for a policy which stubbornly rejects negotiations and deepens the split in Germany through the acquisition of nuclear weapons.' Bonn's claim to sole representation of the nation apparently 'denies the existence of the GDR and therefore inevitably makes every all-German concept a farce and excludes any genuine all-German policies.'¹⁶ The name change was even sanctioned by Ulbricht himself, who stated, 'The term "all-German" has become redundant because the Kiesinger-Strauß government rejected the GDR's suggestions concerning the normalisation of relations between the two German states via governmental negotiations, and even the future formation of a confederation. Until further notice, it can only be a matter of creating a relationship of peaceful coexistence between the two German states.'¹⁷ If the phrase 'all-German' had become meaningless, then surely the unity of the German nation was in doubt and there could be no reunification? Such changes received much coverage in the West German media. *Die Welt* interpreted the new name as more appropriate to what it claimed was the Secretariat's true role, namely the infiltration of the Federal Republic.¹⁸

It should be noted, however, that policy on the national question by no means changed overnight, nor was the leadership united on how to deal with Bonn's advances. Even so, a response was necessary, which would initially require a change of priorities, and would eventually have consequences that would bring the existence of one German nation into doubt. An important catalyst was Kiesinger's governmental declaration on 13th December 1966, in which he had adhered to the aim of reunification and refused to recognise the GDR, but also expressed a willingness to intensify human, economic and cultural ties, and repeated the offer of a renunciation of force between the two German states. (The offers were repeated in April 1967 and eventually rejected by Willi Stoph after a further exchange of correspondence in September).

¹⁶ BArchP, D-2/2

¹⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1202

¹⁸ ZPA IV A2/2028/122

The SED leadership was suspicious of Kiesinger's motives. A report stated, 'It is clear that the enemy wants to accelerate his nationalistic pace in the German question. That can be concluded..... from the use of such concepts as "national substance," "national question," "primary national concern," etc.'¹⁹

The real bombshell dropped at the end of January 1967, when Rumania and the Federal Republic established diplomatic relations, 'thereby upsetting the "spheres of influence" theory and marking what was potentially a qualitatively new phase in the political development of the [Warsaw] Alliance.'²⁰ It marked the death of the Hallstein doctrine, indicating a chance for greater flexibility towards the GDR, and also challenged the so-called 'Ulbricht Doctrine,' whereby the GDR attempted to stop its allies establishing diplomatic relations with Bonn, so long as the latter refused to recognise the GDR.²¹ Even the leadership of the SED admitted that the development was 'a success for their [Bonn's] presumption to be the sole representative of the nation.'²² Ulbricht personally criticised Bucharest for interfering and for claiming that this action would speed up the reunification of Germany, adding, 'No one asked them to conduct such negotiations. It is nothing to do with them.'²³ Ceausescu probably did not think the German Question was anything to do with him either, but was more concerned with winning friends outside the Soviet Bloc to benefit his country and his own image.²⁴ The event marked the beginning of a period during which the German question, which had previously united the Eastern bloc countries, became 'an object of political bargaining.'²⁵

¹⁹ BArchP, D-2/37

²⁰ Moreton, East Germany, p.51.

²¹ Croan, 'The Development,' p.201.

²² ZPA J IV 2/2A/1211

²³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1211

²⁴ On Ceausescu's motives see Mark Almond, The Rise and Fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu (London, 1992), pp.103-104; Julian Hale, Ceausescu's Rumania, (London, 1971), p.48; Aurel Braun, Rumanian Foreign Policy since 1965 (New York, 1978).

²⁵ Moreton, East Germany, p.5.

In order to keep up with the FRG diplomatically, the GDR needed to gain recognition from members of the western alliance, and to achieve this she would have to prove her permanence and sovereignty, indeed her very legitimacy. Though they may have not realised or admitted it at the time, the leadership was setting off on the path that would eventually lead to an unavoidable choice between recognition and reunification. From the beginning of 1967, it became clear that the former was the leadership's most immediate goal. Since there was no way that Kiesinger's government would agree to recognition, and the SED would accept nothing less, little progress could be made, neither side got what they wanted, and the division appeared to be becoming permanent.

As recognition and the strengthening of the GDR both economically and internationally rose in importance, all-German objectives inevitably became secondary, in spite of rhetoric concerning the so-called national bond of the German working class. In a radio programme by the State Secretariat for West German Affairs entitled 'Answer from the GDR,' the question was posed of whether recognition would cement the division of Germany. The response was that the division was a result of Bonn's separatist efforts, the GDR was a reality, and since non-recognition had failed to overcome the division, there was no reason to suppose that recognition would deepen it.²⁶ The Secretariat viewed the West German media as a tool used by the enemy to infiltrate the GDR. The latter were apparently trying to prove that the two states belonged together and that there was a will for reunification, denying the alienation between the two, inventing common bonds, and trying to prevent the development of a separate state consciousness.²⁷ Consequently, East German propaganda would have to convey the opposite message if recognition was to be achieved. However, at this stage, the SED's propaganda regarding the National Question lacked sophistication and remained unconvincing.²⁸

²⁶ BArch P, D-2/16

²⁷ ZPA IV A2/2028/122

²⁸ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

ii) Soviet Influence

One constant factor which continued to shape policy, was the 'Soviet Factor,' since the German Question was never merely an issue between the two German states themselves, but remained a microcosm of the wider struggle between two political systems and military alliances. However, while the 'Soviet factor' was ever present, the priorities of Soviet foreign policy shifted, and the policies of the SED had to adjust accordingly. At this stage, Moscow's main aims were firstly, the formal sanctioning of the territorial status quo in Europe, and secondly to preserve the unity of the Eastern Bloc, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. Rumania had already stepped out of line and Czechoslovakia was about to, hence firmer Bloc discipline was imminent, including ensuring East German interests remained synonymous with those of the Soviet Union.²⁹

Towards the end of 1966, a declaration of the Warsaw Pact members had stated that the road to German reunification ran via détente, the growing together or *Annäherung* of both sovereign German states and agreements between them.³⁰ However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the new Soviet leadership favoured a change of course by Ulbricht regarding the German Question. In fact it was Moscow which first introduced the concept of *Abgrenzung* (or 'fencing off') between the two German states in a governmental declaration in January 1967.³¹ In March 1967, Brezhnev rather ambiguously stated that other countries wanted good, friendly relations with 'Germany,' providing it was a peace-loving, democratic Germany, but added that Bonn must recognise the GDR in its existing borders and fulfil the other conditions laid down by Ulbricht.³² But for economic reasons,

²⁹ Croan, 'The Development,' pp.200-201.

³⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1178

³¹ Neues Deutschland, 30 January 1967, cited by Klaus-Uwe Koch, 'Die Vaterlandsdiskussion am Vorabend des 7. Parteitags,' Thematische Information und Dokumentation 42 (1984): p.104.

³² ZPA IV 2/1/357. The remarks from March are omitted from Hofmann's officially sanctioned version of events. Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.218

some East European states wanted to keep their options open with Bonn. At a conference of World Communist Parties in February 1968, Honecker tried to generate solidarity against Bonn's *Ostpolitik* and criticised parties who allowed 'nationalistic tendencies' to interfere with their obligations to world socialism.³³

iii) Divergent Views among the Ruling Elite

The first time that challenges to the traditional Ulbricht-style line were visible was the so-called *Vaterlandsdiskussion* (fatherland discussion) in January 1967, a discussion among secretaries for agitation and propaganda from all over the country, which was followed by a major campaign among the population. It was initiated by Politburo members, Werner Lamberz and Hermann Axen, both of the emerging Honecker faction, and has been interpreted as an attempt to break with the policy of reunification via confederation behind Ulbricht's back.³⁴ The emphasis was on the '*nationalstaatliche Eigenständigkeit der DDR*,' ('the GDR as an independent nation-state'),³⁵ and the GDR as fatherland, as opposed to Germany as a whole. Axen, the Politburo member who was to become most involved with the issue of the nation, boldly stated, 'In these circumstances, one cannot speak of reunification..... To solve these basic problems, we can no longer tolerate all-German positions. "All-German" no longer fits in with our scene (*Landschaft*).' Axen also saw the normalisation of relations between the two German states as vital for European security, hence a special relationship should be rejected.³⁶ (Ironically in the mid-1980s Honecker more or less reversed this policy when he sought a *Verantwortungsgemeinschaft* or community of responsibility with the FRG).

In addition, the need for a unique GDR-consciousness based on the GDR's socialist system was recognised by Werner Lamberz,³⁷ who,

³³ McAdams, *East Germany and Détente*, p.79. See also Moreton, *East Germany*, pp.53-54.

³⁴ The view of Jürgen Hofmann, interview, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

³⁵ Koch, 'Die Vaterlandsdiskussion,' p.99.

³⁶ Koch, p.101.

³⁷ Koch, p.102.

by Politburo standards, was relatively young and in touch with reality. Although he did not go so far as to claim that a separate socialist German nation existed in the GDR, the implication was there. However, a report in *Neues Deutschland* stated, 'In our sovereign socialist republic, which is a whole historical epoch ahead of the western zones, we are building up the new socialist nation.'³⁸

Were they just adhering to the theoretical distinction between bourgeois and socialist nations of the 1960s or was the German nation once and for all divided? One East German academic later claimed that the *Vaterlandsdiskussion* was 'an essential step on the road to the national concept of the Eighth Party Conference,'³⁹ where Honecker publicly denied the existence of one German nation. This provokes speculation as to why the concept of the nation was not directly questioned at the Seventh Party Conference. Three possible reasons spring to mind. Firstly, the general confusion surrounding the whole issue of the future of 'Germany,' following the shock of the formation of a Grand Coalition in Bonn; secondly, Ulbricht's all-German aspirations, which could not be criticised openly; and thirdly, the risk of reinforcing Bonn's claim to sole representation of the nation.

Functionaries such as Lamberz were astute enough to mention that reunification would be possible, should the right circumstances arise, but added that it could take a very long time. This gave them the best of both worlds. It prevented criticism that they had been wrong about what was possible or had simply failed to achieve their goals. Also, even though they may have secretly abandoned the aim of reunification, it was not too obvious, hence they did not seem to be directly contradicting Ulbricht, but simply had different priorities. Meanwhile, they could concentrate on what they really wanted, namely to strengthen the GDR, both internally and internationally.

³⁸ *Neues Deutschland*, 30 January 1967, cited in Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p.217.

³⁹ Koch, 'Die Vaterlandsdiskussion,' p.104.

The fact that at the Seventh Party Conference, the new, more 'GDR-centric' line, with emphasis on the national question as a class question, was expressed not by a functionary, but by a worker added credibility to their stance. However, contrary to appearances, he was not representing a new feeling among the working population, since Teschendorf's speech was written by Politburo member, Paul Verner - a hard-liner regarding relations with the Federal Republic - who had especially selected him to speak, possibly because he was well educated for a worker. It was agreed in advance that the presidium of the Party Conference would express agreement with Teschendorf's speech, after pretending to discuss it,⁴⁰ but they also had to accept Ulbricht's speech, in spite of the fact that it was based on 'the illusion of the victorious working class.'⁴¹

Concern that Ulbricht might be willing to negotiate with Bonn also caused a rift within the leadership. Politburo member Alfred Neumann objected to negotiations with Kiesinger due to his Nazi past,⁴² and Albert Norden called the chancellor 'Goebbels' propagandist' and accused the current rulers of the Federal Republic of continuing German imperialism's policy of conquest, which had been started by Hitler.⁴³ Others, such as Lamberz and Axen, simply took a more realistic view of both the current situation and what could be achieved in the future. Whatever their reasons, all these dissenters recognised that the prerequisites for a united socialist Germany did not exist, and were not likely to in the near future, hence they took a more pragmatic line, concentrating on improving the GDR's status and the ultimate aim of recognition. Since they had given up thinking in all-German terms, it was logical that they would soon also question whether one could continue to speak of one German nation.

40 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1218

41 Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

42 Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 7 April 1993.

43 ZPA IV A2/2028/14

iv) Public Opinion

In preparation for the Party Conference, the Department of Agitation organised lectures all over the country to publicise the ideas of the *Vaterlandsdiskussion*. People raised questions which demonstrated considerable confusion regarding the German situation, for example, why is travel between the two Germanies restricted? Why is the state called the sovereign socialist GDR? What are the prerequisites for reunification? Would it not be better to work towards improved relations before recognition? What about the working class in West Germany?⁴⁴ What is the difference between the German Question and the National Question? Are there now two states, two populations, and also two nations?⁴⁵ Clearly clarification was required.

However, the level of acceptance of the GDR and its political system had increased considerably, as the results of research conducted by the ~~reputable~~ Institute for Public Opinion Research (IMF) show. In polls carried out in January and February 1967, respondents were asked 'Which social order does the future belong to in a united Germany?' 74.8% of respondents from Berlin said the socialist social order, 83.4% in Halle and 78.9% in Erfurt. Only about 5% chose the capitalist social order, though up to 16% could not give an answer to the question.⁴⁶ To the question 'What is possible in the development of *Deutschlandpolitik* in the near future?' an average of 6.2% said reunification; 2.9% confederation; 25.9% *Annäherung*; and 59.6% thought nothing was likely to change.⁴⁷ However, the overall picture was confused. On the one hand the majority of respondents questioned in the autumn of 1966 thought that young people had better opportunities in the GDR than in the Federal Republic, and saw Bonn's claim to sole representation of the nation as unjustified. On the other hand the

⁴⁴ ZPA IV A2/902/3

⁴⁵ BArchP, D-2/13

⁴⁶ ZPA IV/A2/902/31

⁴⁷ ZPA IV A2/902/31

majority thought that it was right and necessary to negotiate a confederation plan with the West German government.

Therefore it can be seen that at this stage, the SED still monitored popular opinion regarding the national question, though not with the intention of taking it into account, but in order to mould it to support the Party's political objectives. In spite of confusion regarding the state of the German nation, an embryonic 'GDR-consciousness' of some sort had begun to form by the late 1960s, and East Germans did have plenty to be proud of, such as the tangible signs that the GDR had become a well-established, modern state. The potential benefits for the legitimacy of the state that could be obtained by nurturing this 'GDR consciousness' were recognised by some leading functionaries, notably Werner Lamberz, who controlled agitation and propaganda.

v) Recognising Reality

While pressure from Bonn and opportunism were the most obvious reasons for the East German regime to begin reconsidering its position regarding the state of 'Germany,' there can be no doubt that after nearly 20 years of separate development, in both the political and personal spheres, the two German states had grown apart, hence a reassessment of possibilities for the future was only natural. A confederation had long since ceased to be an option because opposing social orders had become entrenched and were guaranteed by outside powers. The reality of the independent development of the two states, and the fact that a bond between their respective proletariats existed only in (Marxist) theory, inevitably raised questions about the continued existence of the unitary German nation. Certainly it is hard to imagine that the diminishing West German working class, who already enjoyed affluence and left the most undesirable jobs to *Gastarbeiter*, felt a sense of solidarity with their East German counterparts, if indeed one can call them that.

One sign that the regime was starting to assert the independence of the GDR and moving away from pan-German objectives was the

passing of a new citizenship law shortly before the Seventh Party Conference. According to surveys, this action provoked confusion among the population.⁴⁸ The Interior Ministry claimed it was justified due to 'the existence of the sovereign GDR and the development of new socialist relationships between the citizens of the GDR and their socialist state, as well as our consistent rejection of the West German government's presumption to sole representation.' In case anyone pointed out that this new law seemed incompatible with the constitution, the Ministry continued (somewhat unconvincingly): 'The stipulation in the constitution, "there is only one German citizenship" (*Staatsangehörigkeit*) relates to the area in which the constitution of the GDR is operative.'⁴⁹ It was also pointed out that a *de facto* East German citizenship had in fact existed since 1949 when the GDR was founded.

vi) Ulbricht's Personal Convictions

Clearly, by 1967, there were numerous reasons why the SED needed to rethink its Deutschlandpolitik, and as a result, its stance regarding the German nation. However, one other factor also remained constant, namely the personal influence of Ulbricht. The flaws in his arguments regarding the National Question were becoming increasingly obvious, as he attempted to adapt to a new situation without surrendering convictions and hopes he had held since the foundation of the GDR. In trying to explain them, we should not only examine the external influencing factors but also remember his own background. Ulbricht could recall the days of the KPD as a *Reichspartei*, and continued to speak of *Deutschland* when others no longer used the word. He still believed that the working class would reunite what 'imperialism' had divided, and no doubt dreamt of being leader of a united socialist German state. In spite of signs of diverging views on the National Question at the Seventh Party Conference, the drafting of a new constitution in the following year would show that he was still able to exert his authority, at least, so long as it pleased Moscow for him to do so.

⁴⁸ ZPA IV/A2/902/3

⁴⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1205

c) The Theoretical Level

The official line on the German nation was becoming increasingly anachronistic, and the Seventh Party Conference did little to remedy the situation. Though not directly involved in the preparations, philosophers and social scientists in particular had begun to discuss the effects of the political division on the German nation at academic institutions, even before the Party leadership had.⁵⁰ The fact that the leadership had not made up its mind actually encouraged discussion of various alternatives, which was no longer possible once Honecker declared that history had decided the national question in 1971.⁵¹ Until this point, Alfred Kosing's theory of one German nation at two separate stages of development dating back to 1962 had remained the standard view, as had the notion that the division of the nation into two states was undesirable and only temporary. The only topic for discussion during the mid-1960s had been the relationship of the Sorb minority in the GDR to the German nation.⁵²

In fact academia itself faced the same problem as the East German state. Just as the West German government was making a claim to sole representation of the German nation, West German academic institutions were also making a claim to sole representation of German knowledge, and tried to undermine their East German counterparts at international conferences. Consequently, academics from the GDR demanded equal status and tried to raise the international standing of their institutions, just ^{as} like the Party leadership was trying to do for the state itself. Contact with West German academic institutions which would not recognise the equal status of those from the GDR was severed.

Though the masses may have had more interesting and important things to do than to scrutinise Party documents, the ambiguous message of the Seventh Party conference regarding the National

⁵⁰ Interview with Walter Schmidt, Berlin, 3 June 1993.

⁵¹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

⁵² Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

Question was visible to scholars, who had a duty to take note of policy changes announced at such events. No doubt a student at the 'Karl Marx Party Training College' was speaking for many when he wrote 'In connection with Ulbricht's explanation of the German nation, the question arises again as to whether we can still speak of a unitary nation.'⁵³ His comments ended up in the files of the Propaganda Department, which took note of public uncertainties. Discussions of topical questions were also held at all academic institutions, even those specialising in subjects such as natural sciences, and divergent views were noted in reports to the Department of Sciences.

The State Secretariat for West German Affairs also had an academic commission, which included prominent scholars such as Otto Reinhold (rector of the Academy for Social Sciences), and the historian, Stefan Dörnberg. In 1967 it suggested that since the 'working class' was interpreted differently in each German state, maybe it was no longer possible to speak of a united German working class. It also questioned the appropriateness of terms such as 'unitary German culture' and 'German national literature.' The dilemma was how to avoid conjuring up incorrect and illusory concepts in the minds of the population, 'without handing over essential concepts to the enemy.'⁵⁴

Historians could hardly avoid the subject of the German nation, and at the time, were busy ~~occupied~~ writing a new 'History of the German People.' The project involved historians from universities and the Academy of Sciences (AdW), supervised by Kurt Hager, and had Ulbricht's personal approval. At the end of 1967, the AdW outlined the 'political and academic objectives' of the work. It was to be 'an extensive history of the German people on the basis of historic materialism' and was intended to help secure the 'socialist national consciousness' of the people of the GDR and to fill them with pride in their achievements. It was also supposed to reach the working class in West Germany to explain to them that their interests and those of the entire nation were best

⁵³ ZPA IV A2/903/2

⁵⁴ BArchP, D-2/67

served by the GDR. The foundation of the GDR was to be portrayed as the turning point in German history and the completion of socialism its high point so far. Her working-class population had learnt the lessons of German history in its entirety and thus represented the true interests of the German nation.⁵⁵

Hager's Department insisted that certain points be stressed which bore the hallmark of Ulbricht's approach to the National Question, for example, the idea that socialism would one day be victorious in West Germany and then the working class would reunite what imperialism had divided. Further work was necessary to show how the nation had arisen under feudalism, developed into a bourgeois nation under capitalism, and finally had been transformed into a socialist nation in the GDR. Some historians suggested the title should be simply 'German History,' but the Department of Sciences rejected this on the grounds that the true hero was 'the people,' and also because the work was distinct from bourgeois West German historiography.⁵⁶ Around the same time, historians began to debate the so-called 'basic national conception' (*nationale Grundkonzeption*), including which class, party and forces had harmed or benefited the nation most, though still based on the assumption that one German nation existed.⁵⁷

Published work on the nation was tricky due to the obligation to adhere to an official line that was becoming increasingly fragmented, hence relatively few books and articles on the subject appeared during the late 1960s. Shortly after the Seventh Party Conference, the first edition of the *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* appeared, which was the official directory of political terms in the GDR. The entry for 'nation' was composed by Alfred Kosing. Following the debate earlier in the decade, Stalin's original definition of a nation was now only applied to emerging nations in the early stages of their development and he was not credited for the definition.⁵⁸ The basis of Kosing's argument was that the

⁵⁵ ZPA NL182/1362

⁵⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1315

⁵⁷ Interview with Walter Schmidt, Berlin, 3 June 1993.

⁵⁸ Kleines politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed. (East Berlin, 1967), p.427.

character of a nation was determined by her ruling class, hence there were two types of nation. Socialist nations were apparently based on a socialist means of production and were characterised by the political and moral unity of the whole population, which made them more stable than bourgeois nations. The working class was the dominant force in a socialist nation, under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist Party. The relationship between various socialist nations was allegedly based on 'co-operation in solidarity, mutual support, friendship, and increasing closeness.' In contrast, bourgeois nations were based on a capitalist means of production and their dominant power was the bourgeoisie. Consequently they were divided into antagonistic classes and shaken by class struggles and social conflicts. Only through a socialist revolution could a bourgeois nation be transformed into a 'qualitatively higher type of national community, the socialist nation.'⁵⁹ However, the position of the working class in capitalist states remained rather unclear.

On the subject of the German nation in particular, the writer attempted to combine sound Marxist-Leninist arguments with the official line according to Ulbricht: 'The German nation currently consists of the populations of two states..... By completing the construction of a socialist society, the GDR represents the interests of the entire German nation.... and smooths the way into a socialist future for the whole nation.... The unification of the German nation can only be achieved via a long, not yet specifiable process of development.'⁶⁰ Since the interests of monopoly capitalism contradicted those of the nation, the democratic transformation of West Germany was still the precondition if the two German states were to reach an understanding, and it was made clear who was to blame for the current situation: 'The forceful expansionist policies of West German imperialism threaten the future and existence of the German nation.'⁶¹ Under 'National Question,' current objectives were outlined, namely strengthening the GDR

⁵⁹ Kleines politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., pp.427-428.

⁶⁰ Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., pp.428-429.

⁶¹ Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., pp.428-429.

and the normalisation of relations between the two German states on the basis of peaceful co-existence.⁶²

A philosophical description of the components of national consciousness in general followed, probably also penned by Kosing.⁶³ He adhered to the idea that since the character of a nation was determined by the class that ruled it, so was the character of national consciousness. Consequently, one could distinguish between socialist and bourgeois national consciousness in the same way that one could distinguish between socialist and bourgeois nations. The result seems to have more in common with socialist consciousness than what is generally understood by national consciousness. At the heart of this so-called 'socialist national consciousness' was 'the proletariat's claim to the capturing of political power, which at the same time means the final liberation of the entire nation from exploitation, repression, ignorance, lack of rights and war, and the renewal of the life of the nation.' Bourgeois national consciousness, on the other hand, amounted to nationalism.⁶⁴

Turning to the specific case of the GDR, the writer attempted to combine the idea of a unique 'socialist national consciousness' developing there, while at the same time maintaining the existence of one German nation. Thus the 'socialist national consciousness' was rooted in an awareness that:

- a) the anti-imperialist and socialist renewal of our nation which was necessary in our time has already been successful in the GDR; the GDR embodies the realisation of the national interests of our people;
- b) the solution of the German question can only take place under the leadership of the working class and her/his Marxist-Leninist Party;
- c) West German imperialism is the chief enemy of the German Nation;
- d) the completion of socialism does not only lie in the interest of the population of the GDR but is their best

⁶² Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., p.435.

⁶³ See Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., p.429.

⁶⁴ Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., p.429-30.

contribution to the conquest of imperialism and militarism in West Germany.⁶⁵

An entry for 'socialist national culture' in the same volume called the GDR the 'protector of both the cultural heritage and the current progressive democratic culture of the entire German people,' and claimed that the GDR's socialist national culture represented the 'future path of the culture of the entire German nation.'⁶⁶

Whether intentionally or not, many aspects of the entries for 'nation' and 'national consciousness' in the *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* seem to support the view of the realists within the Politbüro, implying that there was no longer a unitary German nation or one national consciousness, but instead a 'socialist German nation' and a 'bourgeois German nation' existing in separate states. Although the link to the West German working class was maintained, keeping open the possibility of reunification in the event of a socialist transformation of the Federal Republic, such all-German language sounded distinctly unrealistic, as did the objectives still advanced by Walter Ulbricht.

d) The Aftermath of the Seventh Party Conference

Following the acceptance of two approaches on the national question at the Seventh Party Conference, differences of opinion within the Party leadership intensified, especially between Ulbricht and the senior functionary Professor Albert Norden. In a letter to the latter, Ulbricht confirmed his ultimate objective: 'The West German Press claims I want socialism in Germany. That has been the goal of the progressive forces of the German working class since Karl Marx, is also contained in the programme of the Social Democrats and was clarified by Bebel.'⁶⁷ However, in December 1967 an article by Norden in *Neues Deutschland* challenged Ulbricht's line for the first time and raised doubts

⁶⁵ *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch*, 1st ed., p.429-30.

⁶⁶ *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch*, 1st ed., p.603

⁶⁷ Internes Parteiarchiv NL2/31

about the unity of the nation. Norden criticised Bonn's 'not a foreign country (*kein Ausland*) trick,' saying, 'For the Bonn propagandists who created the formula "*kein Ausland*" it is totally irrelevant that a person is a citizen of the GDR, because for those in power in the Bonn state, every person of German nationality is a native (*Inländer*)'. He called the formula 'a new disguise for Bonn's intensified annexation policies towards the socialist German peace-state,' and accused the 'German imperialists,' together with the Anglo-American occupation forces, of dividing Germany, creating a West German separatist state, and through its membership of NATO, of breaking up the German national bond for good. He thought it a bit much that those who had torn apart the nation, should call people who acknowledged the factual existence of the divide 'enemies of the German people.'⁶⁸ The article highlighted the fact that the idea of a unitary nation undermined the regime's claim to sovereignty and legitimacy.

In retaliation, Ulbricht commissioned an academic, Wolfram Neubert, to write a response, which appeared nine days later. Neubert argued that the reality of the German situation was that two states existed on German soil, but this did not mean that the German nation had ceased to exist. However, they were not merely 'two German constituent states' (*Gliedstaaten*) as Bonn claimed but two sovereign states, and this fact was of greater importance than the existence of one nation. With classic Ulbricht-style logic, he concluded, 'If equal status and mutual recognition of sovereignty are increasingly used as sensible and progressive principles between states of different nationalities, why shouldn't they also be valid, if not more so for inter-state contact within one nation?'⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning that after the Eighth Party Conference this article became such a source of embarrassment for Neubert that he left the Academy for Social Sciences.

A few symbolic changes took place in an attempt to reinforce the GDR's independence from the FRG, thus prioritising *Abgrenzung*

⁶⁸ Neues Deutschland, 19 December 1967.

⁶⁹ Neues Deutschland, 28 December 1967, p.4.

before *Annäherung*. For example, what until then had been the 'German Issuing Bank,' was renamed 'State Bank of the GDR' in December 1967, and the currency, previously the 'Mark of the German Issuing Bank,' became the 'Mark of the GDR.' This was apparently done so that 'the fact that we are dealing with the currency of our sovereign state of workers and farmers is clearly expressed.'⁷⁰ Around the same time, two separate German teams entered the winter Olympics in Grenoble and later the summer games in Mexico City. As the Department for Sport commented, 'This visibly underlined the existence of two German states and dealt a blow to Bonn's claim to sole representation of the nation. The team has justified the trust placed in it through politically aware behaviour and good sporting achievements, and in this way contributed to raising the profile of the GDR.'⁷¹

However, regular reports by the Agitation Department entitled 'Information about Questions, Arguments and Discussion among the Population,' highlighted the fact that the Party Conference had failed to clarify the national question.⁷² All-German opinions were viewed by the department with criticism, presumably due to the fact that individuals responsible for agitation, such as Lamberz, did not share Ulbricht's view. Much confusion surrounded inner-German relations, with both Ulbricht's traditional line and the new 'GDR-centric' line represented. On the one hand, according to a report, 'The conclusion of the Party Conference "What imperialism has broken up, the working class in both German states will reunite," is doubted. People are saying it will never happen.' Even the concept of 'Germany' was being questioned and people were asking whether one could even still speak of 'Germany' at all. On the other hand, people also said 'We should not exaggerate the danger from the West German side too much. How will we reach an understanding if both sides constantly stress negative aspects?' There was further evidence of confusion concerning the purpose of the exchange of correspondence with Kiesinger, with some East Germans

⁷⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1265

⁷¹ ZPA NL182/1179

⁷² ZPA IV A2/902/44

(mistakenly) believing the aim was to achieve reunification. But other people apparently thought it wrong to negotiate with a 'confirmed Nazi.' The role of the SPD was also unclear and people had noticed that Ulbricht had reverted to the full name SPD, while only 'SP' appeared in the press.

A poll conducted by the Institute for Public Opinion Research on the subject of the population's willingness to defend the GDR militarily led to the conclusion that 'Opinion regarding West Germany is contradictory.' When asked whether they would be prepared to shoot at soldiers of the *Bundeswehr* in the event of an attack by the Federal Republic, only about a third of respondents said they would. The accompanying commentary concluded, 'Obviously it can be seen from these figures..... that amongst the population the image of the enemy (*Feindbild*) is not clear enough, and that certain illusions still exist, for example, that "they are also Germans," and there is still the belief that members of the *Bundeswehr* cannot be equated with the government in Bonn or with West German imperialists.'⁷³ According to reports from June 1967, people did not understand why they could not freely travel to the Federal Republic. It is hard to believe that people really expressed the view, 'Let us just go over there. We want to propagate our example there,' as was claimed. More credible is the reports' admission that many people had not been taken in by propaganda and still believed that 'Everything is better in West Germany - an unemployed person there lives better than a worker here.'⁷⁴

Following the Party Conference external developments occurred which were obviously beyond the SED's control. Correspondence between the two German governments continued to be fruitless due to both sides' unwillingness to give any ground. The SED officially adhered to Ulbricht's line, i.e. that only the normalisation of relations between the two states would ensure peaceful coexistence, which was a prerequisite for *Annäherung*, which would eventually lead to reunification on the basis of what they

⁷³ ZPA IV A2/903/32

⁷⁴ ZPA IV A2/903/32

called democracy and socialism. In a letter to members of the CDU/CSU, the leadership alleged that the GDR had always acted in the interest of the nation and continued to deny any responsibility for the situation: 'Today the German nation would not be divided, and there would not be what is called the German question if presumptuous, imperialistic power-politicians had not put the nation on the line through bellicose adventures.'⁷⁵ The ambiguous use of the term 'nation' here is noteworthy. It could either be taken at face value, i.e. that the nation was irreversibly split in two, or that although it was divided for the time being, one nation still existed, which remained Ulbricht's interpretation. An earlier draft of the letter mentioned above contained the phrase 'the two German nation states' though this was queried.⁷⁶ The idea of one nation cropped up again in January 1968, when the Politburo drew up a treaty for the renunciation of force between the two German states, 'in order that an understanding.... in the interest of the future of the nation, could be encouraged.'⁷⁷

Contact between the two governments continued in the form of letters exchanged between Stoph and Kiesinger, but in spite of their claims to have the same goal, namely reunification, their understandings of the word, and how it should be achieved, were so totally irreconcilable that no progress could be made. The government in Bonn undermined the East German regime by referring to it as 'Pankow.' In March 1968, Ulbricht attacked Kiesinger's 'Report on the state of the Nation'. Somewhat mockingly he said, 'To wait 23 years after the end of the Second World War before a West German Government put the state of the German nation onto the political agenda for the first time - that shows their shortcomings. All the more so, since as early as 1946, the state of the nation stood at the centre of the programme of the KPD, later the SED, and also all other anti-fascist parties and organisations.' He added, 'In the end, it is a matter of peace or war, of the existence or non-existence of the nation.'⁷⁸ The speech

⁷⁵ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1232

⁷⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1228

⁷⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1273

⁷⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1283

was typical of Ulbricht, stressing both the need for the normalisation of relations and the goal of reunification. The claim to be acting in the interest of peace was often used to justify policies in the 1960s, and Bonn's refusal to normalise relations was portrayed as a danger to peace.⁷⁹ The SED seemed to want it both ways. On the one hand they accused Bonn of a lack of commitment to genuine all-German objectives by simply looking after their own interests and adhering to their claim to sole representation of the nation, while on the other hand denouncing all-German thinking among East Germans: 'Many academics, artists, etc., are not yet tuned in to the class struggle; all-German illusions have not yet been overcome.'⁸⁰

By now, however, it was clear to the SED leadership that the SPD was not going to lead a socialist transformation of the Federal Republic. But what about 'the historic mission of our GDR, as the first socialist state on German soil, to be the example and bastion for the liberation from imperialism and militarism of the whole of Germany'?⁸¹ What about the bond of the entire German working class? From this point, the emphasis was placed on the bond with the West German proletariat themselves, as opposed to their 'right-wing Social Democrat leaders.' The Central Committee wrote an open letter to the West German population, still using very pan-German language, but stating the usual prerequisites if the two states were to draw closer together, 'until the day when - under the leadership of the working class, in alliance with other workers - the whole German nation will show what Germans are capable of when they devote themselves totally to peace and social progress.'⁸² In December 1967, the State Secretariat for West German Affairs drew up suggestions for cooperation between the GDR and 'progressive forces' in the Federal Republic and it was claimed that a so-called *Annerkennungspartei*, a movement for recognition, was growing.⁸³

⁷⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1302

⁸⁰ BArchP, D-2/16

⁸¹ BArchP, D-2/67

⁸² ZPA J IV 2/2A/1281

⁸³ BArchP, D-2/2

Not surprisingly, the contradictions in the SED's proposals did not go unnoticed in the West. After Ulbricht's new year message for 1968, one West German journalist wrote:

With the formula "normalisation of relations between the two German states," the SED is making two totally irreconcilable demands. They are demanding recognition in accordance with international law, as though they are a foreign country in order to complete their consolidation and the final division of Germany. At the same time they do not want to be a foreign country, in order to use their status as a recognised independent state more energetically in an attempt to spread their power over the whole of Germany. Thus recognition is not the final goal for the SED, but a halfway-house..... The short term goal of the recognition of the GDR and the long-term goal of a united communist Germany are at present running side-by-side.⁸⁴

A report from the State Secretariat for West German affairs seems to confirm this in response to the question, 'What does the national mission of the GDR consist of?' The answer was at minimum peace and peaceful coexistence, and at maximum a socialist Germany.⁸⁵

2: THE 'SOCIALIST STATE OF THE GERMAN NATION'

a) The New Constitution of 1968

In 1968, the old anti-fascist constitution, dating back to 1949, was replaced by a new 'socialist' constitution. The latter was hailed by Ulbricht as the most democratic constitution Germany had ever had.⁸⁶ At the Seventh Party Conference, it was decided that a commission should draw up a draft version on behalf of the *Volkskammer*, taking into account suggestions from the population. That the commission was chaired by Ulbricht, was

⁸⁴ Renate Marbach, 'SED Nation,' Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 8 January 1968, in ZPA NL182/1312

⁸⁵ BArchP, D-2/2

⁸⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1275

reflected in the finished product. The commission examined other constitutions, including those of the former East German *Länder*, and looked at the work of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the subject. The leadership attempted to involve the population in the drafting of the constitution (for example, by holding discussion meetings and publishing articles in the press), and public interest was considerable. When the third constitution was ratified, a mere six years later, it was a different story.

In spite of diverging views within the ruling elite, which had emerged the previous year, the new constitution was a triumph for the traditionalist wing of the Party, and emphasised the aim of reunification and the unity of the German nation, based on the Marxist-Leninist belief in the unity of the German working class. Of relevance to this thesis are changes to the preamble and to articles one and eight. The new preamble began,

Impelled by the responsibility of showing the *entire German nation* the path into a future of peace and socialism - in view of the historic fact that imperialism.... has split Germany in order to construct West Germany as a base for imperialism and for the fight against socialism, which is contrary to the essential interests of the German nation - the people of the GDR have given themselves this socialist Constitution.....⁸⁷

Article 1 described the GDR as 'a *socialist state of the German nation*,' replacing the original clause which stated that Germany was an indivisible democratic republic, composed of *Länder*. However, it still maintained that there was only one German nationality. Article 8 contained the ultimate goal of reunification:

The establishment and cultivation of normal relations and cooperation between the two German states on the basis of equality are the national concern of the GDR. The GDR and its citizens are striving beyond that towards overcoming the division of Germany forced upon the German nation by imperialism, and towards

⁸⁷ Blumenwitz, What is Germany? pp.125-126, my italics.

the step-by-step rapprochement of the two German states until their unification on the basis of democracy and socialism.⁸⁸

Thus the constitution made it clear that adherence to the unity of the German nation remained official policy, in spite of its division into two states,⁸⁹ and appeared to demonstrate the pre-eminence of the traditional, all-German line over a more GDR-centric alternative.

The referendum on the constitution held in April 1968 could hardly be called impartial, but then referenda rarely are. The Party encouraged people to vote in favour with slogans such as 'Do you want peace? Then vote yes to the socialist constitution of the GDR!' or 'If you want your children to have a happy future, then say yes to the socialist constitution of the GDR!' The ballot paper was designed with a large circle labelled 'yes' in the centre, and a small one labelled 'no' in the bottom right hand corner.⁹⁰ The constitution was accepted by 94.49% of the electorate in the referendum,⁹¹ which the SED portrayed as a sign of democracy in the GDR, in contrast to the West German Basic Law, which had never been put to the people.⁹² The decisive yes-vote was also used to show that the GDR was consolidated compared to the Federal Republic, which was experiencing serious unrest in 1968.⁹³ The referendum was followed by a campaign to popularise the constitution, which aimed to emphasise the importance of the first socialist state of the German nation for peace and security, to demonstrate socialist democracy in action, and to highlight the aggressive role of the West German SPD.⁹⁴

The result was hailed as a socialist constitution for a sovereign socialist state which had become a permanent reality on the map

⁸⁸ Blumenwitz, pp.125-126, my italics.

⁸⁹ Confirmed by Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 4 May 1993.

⁹⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1287

⁹¹ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.223

⁹² Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 7 April 1993.

⁹³ Gerhard Kegel, 'Zur Deutschlandpolitik der beiden Deutschlands,' Einheit 23 (1968): pp.734-43.

⁹⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1296

of Europe.⁹⁵ In view of the fact that 19 years had passed since the first constitution was ratified, during which time the existence of two German states had more or less become an accepted feature of the status quo in Europe, many of the changes were perfectly justifiable and long overdue. As Ulbricht noted, the conditions of 1949 clearly had been overtaken,⁹⁶ and references to Germany as an indivisible republic contradicted the reality of the situation.

However, while the regime claimed that the GDR was a legitimate, sovereign state, its adherence to the long-term goal of reunification somewhat contradicted this, implying that the current situation was only temporary. Also apparent was the fundamental problem of the GDR as both a socialist state and as a German state, and the incompatibility between socialist objectives and German ones. The constitution of 1968 was the only one to combine all these elements, resulting in visible contradictions, and it was becoming clear that a choice would have to be made between socialism and a united Germany. In short, the constitution reflected the divergent aims of the SED's *Deutschlandpolitik*, and unresolved questions regarding the nature and future of the socialist German state.

Article 8 proved that overcoming the division remained official policy, at least so long as Ulbricht remained in charge. As he himself said, 'This article expresses our strong conviction that socialism will not make a detour around West Germany and that the day will come when West German workers and their allies, together with us, will tread the road towards a united socialist Germany.'⁹⁷ Although the constitution was designed to fit the current stage of development of the GDR, it also functioned as a model for a future united Germany under the appropriate conditions.⁹⁸ Unlike the realists among the ruling elite, Ulbricht could never be satisfied with total domination in only one zone of

⁹⁵ ZPA NL182/1105

⁹⁶ ZPA NL182/1106

⁹⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1275

⁹⁸ ZPA NL182/1106

Germany, although he would not compromise and accept anything less than the socialist transformation of the Federal Republic just to bring about reunification. However, it seems that even he recognised the fact that this was not likely in the near future, hence the primary aim for the time being was to attain equal status for both German states.⁹⁹

As a result, the constitution continued to challenge Bonn's claim to be the only true representative of the German nation: 'The draft constitution expresses a consciousness of the responsibility of the first socialist German state and its citizens to show the whole German nation the way to a future in peace, democracy, humanism and socialism.'¹⁰⁰ Any suggestion that there was a separate nation in the GDR would have played into Bonn's hands and given the impression that the leadership had surrendered the West German proletariat and any claim to be their rightful rulers. However, the leadership denied that it was making any claim on the Federal Republic, on the grounds that it would never interfere with the internal affairs of the West German state. It was up to the working class there to bring about a 'democratic transformation.'¹⁰¹

Even so, it could not be ignored that the regime had failed to achieve the reunification it had claimed was inevitable. To repel criticism, they denied responsibility for causing and maintaining the division, instead blaming it entirely on the so-called Anglo-American and West German imperialists. Apparently, their idea of reunification simply meant '*NATO über alles*,'¹⁰² and due to their actions, the phrase 'Germany is an indivisible republic' had to be removed from the preamble of the constitution 'against our wishes.'¹⁰³ That the new constitution would deepen the division and intensify tension was vehemently denied, indeed Bonn's failure to acknowledge reality, i.e. the existence of two sovereign German states, was portrayed as the main hindrance to

⁹⁹ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 4 May 1993.

¹⁰⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1275

¹⁰¹ ZPA IV 2/1/370

¹⁰² ZPA NL182/1107

¹⁰³ ZPA NL182/1106

détente.¹⁰⁴ In spite of the fact that the SED claimed to regret the existence of 'two independent states of the German nation, with opposing political and social orders,' they claimed it was a historical fact that Bonn had to acknowledge, as the new constitution of the GDR had.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the normalisation of relations in the interest of peaceful coexistence remained the most pressing goal for the time being, as Article 8 stated.

During public discussion of the draft constitution, some people had even gone as far as to suggest that an independent nation had evolved in the GDR. Ulbricht tackled the issue at a meeting in East Berlin entitled 'Yes indeed, there is a German nation!' which is worth looking at in detail. He explained,

Since the West German separatist state was formed and was detached from the German confederal state through the Paris Treaties, two states of the German nation exist..... Now the question is being asked in public, what does the common ground of the nation consist of? It consists of the language - but there are also already different nuances - and the common past of belonging to one state..... If the question is raised as to whether the German nation has a future, I reply, yes indeed, the German nation has a future - in the establishment of unity in one socialist Germany.¹⁰⁶

Ulbricht went on to address the concept of the 'socialist state of the German nation':

The assumption that the GDR is a socialist state of the German nation precisely grasps what is historically new in the development of the German nation. This formula contains the decisive historical progress that determines the present in one part of the nation and will determine the future of the whole nation..... Therefore the time has come to fix in the constitution that our republic is a socialist state of the German nation, the first state in the history of Germany that acts entirely in the interest of the nation. But at

¹⁰⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1275

¹⁰⁵ ZPA NL182/1106

¹⁰⁶ ZPA NL182/1107

the same time, these words bear in mind that an imperialist state of the German nation exists in the form of the West German Federal Republic, which is contrary to the national interest. Thus the assumption of the constitution expresses the current reality in the struggle between socialism and imperialism on German soil.¹⁰⁷

However, by this stage others wanted to take leave of the all-German orientation, not because they were against it in principle, but because it had become impractical.¹⁰⁸ Even so, it is doubtful that even Honecker would have openly challenged Ulbricht at the time,¹⁰⁹ hence there is little evidence to suggest that the more pragmatic members of the Politburo - those who had initiated the *Vaterlandsdiskussion* and left their mark on the Seventh Party Conference - had much influence on the new constitution. They could at least console themselves with the fact that the constitution clearly stated that reunification was conditional on the 'democratic transformation' of the Federal Republic, and it was implied that the preservation of the GDR's social and political system would not be sacrificed in order to achieve reunification. Sceptics such as Paul Verner continued to stress the well-used phrase that East Germans were in every way bound to the West German working class, but in no way bound to the imperialist regime in Bonn.¹¹⁰ Those who took the more GDR-centric view also knew that in 1968, there was little danger of Bonn giving any ground, and consequently little risk to the status quo. Generally, the line on the nation enshrined in the new constitution proved that Ulbricht was still not willing to abandon his dream of a united socialist Germany, and was still sufficiently powerful to get his own way. However, events would soon force him to change his mind, and challenge his very position of power.

107 ZPA NL182/1107

108 Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

109 Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 February 1993.

110 ZPA NL281/73

b) The Political Factors at Work

The new constitutional line on the nation seems like a regression to the days before the Seventh Party Conference, and out of step with other more pragmatic pronouncements of the period. Even so, there is no evidence to suggest that any member of the ruling elite disapproved of the phrase, 'socialist state of the German nation.'¹¹¹ The key factors were Ulbricht's personal convictions regarding the future of Germany, and his dominant role in the preparation of the constitution. Two other factors which appear to have helped shape the new constitution were the SED's need to win the allegiance of the population of the GDR, and to enhance the claim that it was a sovereign state.

Superficially at least, the Party tried to involve the population in the process of drafting the constitution, and it appears that they took considerable interest in the project, especially the sections on the future of Germany. In total, the Constitutional Commission received 10,237 suggestions from the public, which resulted in 118 changes.¹¹² However, the suggestions may well have been initiated by Party organisations, and such figures do not reveal the qualitative influence of the general public on the end result.

Even if an embryonic GDR-consciousness was developing, presumably the majority of the population did still consider reunification to be desirable. The Constitutional Commission stated that, 'The new socialist constitution's assertion that the GDR and its citizens are striving for the step-by-step *Annäherung* of both German states, until they unite on the basis of democracy and socialism, found broad support among the population.'¹¹³ For the leadership, this was fine, so long as people believed that socialism offered them a better chance in life than capitalism, that

¹¹¹ According to Alfred Kosing, interview, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

¹¹² ZPA NL182/1107. For an extensive examination of the submissions from the public, see Jürgen Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen deutschen Nation und zur Nationspolitik der SED,' (Doctoral thesis, IfGA, 1983).

¹¹³ ZPA NL182/1107

it guaranteed peace, and consequently, that the GDR provided the best model for a united German state. But according to reports, people continued to voice confusion regarding numerous issues such as how reunification could be achieved, the prospects for a confederation, whether the constitution deepened the division, the immediate future of German-German relations, and the question of the unity of the nation,¹¹⁴ which the leadership would have been foolish to ignore. Such doubts, many raised quite late in the propaganda campaign, prove that the ambiguous declarations of the leadership and its attempts to keep its options open failed to satisfy those who expected concrete answers.

During February and March 1968, shortly before the referendum, the Institute for Public Opinion Research undertook research into people's views on the draft constitution. Two questions are of particular relevance to this study. Firstly, 'Does Article 8 of the constitution express your concept of reunification?' In February, 80% of respondents said yes, in March 85%. According to the report, 'We can assume that an important reason for the agreement with Article 8 is to be found in the population's knowledge of the legitimacy of our social development and of the superiority and benefits of the socialist system.'¹¹⁵ A more likely explanation is that people approved of Article 8 because it supported reunification. Certainly the result of the next question suggests that, namely 'Which do you consider to be your fatherland, the GDR or all of Germany?' At first, 60% replied the latter, and later on in the campaign, 42% still did. It could hardly be denied that many people, especially the elderly, still retained 'all-German illusions.' Polls in March suggested that the message that the GDR provided the best model for a united Germany was getting through, but propaganda campaigns needed to stress the concept of the GDR as fatherland, and the state's 'historic mission.' It was noted that the IMF would have to continue to monitor public opinion in this area.

114 ZPA NL182/1107

115 ZPA IV A2/902/32

One question which appears to have originated from the public related to the name of the state. Among the submissions to the constitutional commission were suggestions to change the name to 'Socialist German Democratic Republic,'¹¹⁶ 'German Socialist Republic,' or 'Socialist Republic of Germany.'¹¹⁷ The commission considered the subject 'worthy of discussion,' but decided to retain 'German Democratic Republic' on the grounds that it had a 'good tradition, sounded honourable and was known worldwide, thanks to the patriotism of its citizens.' Furthermore, 'In every country and all corners of the earth... people recognise this name and know it is the name of the good, peace-loving, democratic, socialist Germany.' Also, democracy was claimed to lie at the heart of socialism, while 'bourgeois democracy' was a contradiction in terms, hence 'the name GDR is totally appropriate for a socialist state of the German nation.' Finally, 'In 1946, the SED was the only German party to propose a constitution for a unitary "GDR." Therefore the good name of our republic is even today an obligation for us and all good Germans.' In any case, 'Socialist German Democratic Republic' was considered to be too long.¹¹⁸

All in all, it seems likely that public opinion was being monitored in order to assess the level of popular acceptance of the official line on the nation, as laid down in the constitution, so that the SED could identify areas where propaganda needed to be improved. It would have been very unusual for the regime to have tailored its position to suit popular feeling.

The new socialist constitution was also designed to raise the GDR's international profile, in particular, to encourage the governments of other states to take up diplomatic relations with the GDR. The positive result of the referendum had apparently shown the world the legitimacy and sovereignty of the GDR, and that the only way to peace and security was via the normalisation of relations, which meant recognition and equal participation in global

¹¹⁶ ZPA NL182/1105

¹¹⁷ ZPA NL182/1107

¹¹⁸ ZPA NL182/1107

organisations.¹¹⁹ No doubt Moscow also wanted the international profile of its German ally raised to match that of America's German ally, the Federal Republic, and to enhance the status of the Warsaw Pact as a whole. We know that Brezhnev was sent a copy of the proposed constitution,¹²⁰ and there is no evidence to suggest that it did not meet with his approval.

c) Theoretical Input

While the constitutional commission did include some academics, they were heavily outnumbered by representatives from the Party, who ensured that the constitution was a totally political document, which not only sought to define the GDR, but also laid out its political objectives for the future. Both academics and constitutional lawyers could see that it contained both all-German concepts and evidence of *Abgrenzung*, but since the leadership was still keeping its options open and practising both, there was no way that these contradictions would be corrected. Alfred Kosing maintains that up to 1968, both politically and theoretically, the view prevailed that the unity of the nation should be preserved, and knew of no suggestion to delete reunification as a long-term objective.¹²¹ However, due to the lack of progress and the unlikelihood of a confederation, theorists began question the validity of a theory which had grown out of the Soviet Union's original plan for a neutral, demilitarised, unitary Germany. Furthermore, while Party functionaries had begun to think in terms of a much longer and more gradual process, even in the late 1960s, illusions continued regarding the prospects for social change in the Federal Republic.¹²²

Among the reports of discussion of the draft constitution there are also questions raised by the intelligentsia. Some suggested that the new constitution would cement the division and make it harder for the working class to reunite what the imperialists had

¹¹⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1296

¹²⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1265

¹²¹ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

¹²² Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

divided, as prophesied at the Seventh Party Conference. Also, not surprisingly, there was also confusion regarding *Annäherung* and *Abgrenzung*.¹²³ Generally, the public debate about the proposed constitution did provoke consideration of the German situation and the state of the nation, but theorists who openly criticised the official line, not because they did not share the desire to preserve the unity of the nation, but because it had become unrealistic, still risked being labelled disloyal and 'anti-national' and suffering the consequences, hence their ability to influence policy was limited.¹²⁴

d) The 20th Anniversary of the GDR

On the first anniversary of the referendum, the Agitation Department proclaimed 'The constitution raised the international authority of the GDR as a sovereign state which shows the whole German nation the way into the future.'¹²⁵ In October 1969, the SED and the people celebrated the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the GDR. Party propaganda stressed the achievements of the GDR and her claim to be a legitimate state, but still included all-German objectives. Officially, the intention was to strengthen the GDR, to fight against West German imperialism, and to demonstrate socialist internationalism and 'moral and political unity of the people of the GDR.'¹²⁶

Propaganda slogans devised for the anniversary included 'The SED and her allies are resolutely committed to a unitary democratic Germany,' 'Through the history of our people over many centuries, the GDR is the legitimate German state of peace, freedom, humanity and social justice,' and 'The GDR - homeland of the entire people. She is the socialist fatherland of us all.'¹²⁷ In preparation for the anniversary, the Agitation Commission instructed the editors of *Neues Deutschland* to emphasise 'so-called GDR-consciousness,' socialist internationalism as a practical

¹²³ ZPA NL182/1107

¹²⁴ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

¹²⁵ ZPA IV 2/2033/9

¹²⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1384

¹²⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1346

task, a Marxist-Leninist world view, and to expose the real enemy.¹²⁸

The resulting celebrations sounded extremely nationalistic, with plenty of references to 'Germany' and 'the Germans,' although peaceful coexistence was the immediate goal. Ulbricht proclaimed that the socialist German state was the conscience of the entire German nation.¹²⁹ However, the amount of attention paid to 'GDR-consciousness' and the GDR as fatherland suggested that the realists were reasserting their influence, possibly through Lamberz, who was in charge of propaganda until 19~~8~~8.

Afterwards, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was satisfied that the 20th anniversary had improved the worldwide image of the GDR as a secure, developed and dynamic socialist state, which had been reinforced by the demonstration of socialist patriotism and socialist state consciousness of the people.¹³⁰ Ulbricht made a great deal of the fact that the anniversary celebrations were attended by politicians and important persons from 84 countries, which he interpreted as a sign of the GDR's growing role in international life.¹³¹

Now that the GDR was officially a 'socialist state of the German nation,' exactly what this meant for relations between the two German states was unclear. The leadership continued to accuse Bonn of using all-German pretences, especially German culture, to disguise their claim to sole representation of the nation. To counteract this, Ulbricht wanted to step up the campaign to prove that the 'West German imperialists' had caused the division in the first place.¹³² He also launched a propaganda campaign with the aim of portraying West German nuclear policy as dicing with death and putting the future of the nation on the line.¹³³

128 ZPA IV 2/2106/6

129 ZPA IV A2/201/31

130 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1402

131 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1407

132 IPA NL2/32. This file, a unique, leather-bound volume on the circumstances of Ulbricht's removal, was especially compiled by Honecker in February 1989.

133 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1379

Meanwhile, Ulbricht's stated short-term goal remained the same, namely the normalisation of relations between the two German states as the first step towards rapprochement. Moscow approved of this strategy, so long as it strengthened the international position of the GDR, served the interests of the community of socialist states and the long-term objectives laid out at the Seventh Party Conference, and generally secured socialism on German soil, and providing the government of the Federal Republic reversed its revanchist and militaristic policies.¹³⁴

However, in spite of the all-German rhetoric, incidents between the two German states from the middle of 1968 until Autumn 1969 suggest a policy of *Abgrenzung* rather than *Annäherung*. The GDR increased restrictions on travel between the Federal Republic and West Berlin; a huge row erupted over the proposed election of the Federal President in West Berlin; and a separate union of East German protestant churches was founded, severing ties with their West German counterparts.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the presence of troops from the National People's Army during the crushing the Prague Spring increased the rift between the two states.¹³⁶ The Czechoslovak experiment proved that an alternative socialism would not be tolerated by Moscow. This fact, soon to be known worldwide as the Brezhnev doctrine, also applied to the GDR, as Ulbricht was to about find out during his final years in power.

In short, by October 1969, the seeds of change in the SED's *Deutschlandpolitik* and the official line on the nation had been sown - at the Seventh Party Conference to be precise. However, in order to germinate, a change in the external climate was required, followed by a change of gardener, if the shoots of a new approach were to thrive. That new climate began within a month of the 20th anniversary of the GDR.

¹³⁴ ZPA IV 2/2035/61

¹³⁵ For more details see Zieger, *Die Haltung*, pp.120-122.

¹³⁶ On Ulbricht's role, see Moreton, *East Germany*, pp.69-80; 'Die Haltung der SED im Konflikt mit Prag,' *Deutschland Archiv* 1 (1968): pp.620-646.

3: THE CHALLENGE OF BRANDT'S OSTPOLITIK

a) The SED's Initial Response to Brandt

In his governmental declaration of 28 October 1969, Brandt spoke of 'Two states of one nation,' and whether intentionally or not, effectively stole Ulbricht's argument. He declared his willingness to negotiate as equals, but ruled out full recognition because the two states existed under a kind of 'national umbrella' and could not be considered foreign to each other. As a result, a sudden change of tactics was necessary if the SED was to achieve its primary goal of recognition. However, although all the members of the ruling elite shared this goal, Ulbricht stood alone in believing that full recognition could lead to a relaxation of tension and *Annäherung*.¹³⁷ As a result, he still talked of 'the divided nation,' implying it could be reunited if the circumstances were right, whereas others now believed that it was time to concentrate on the future of the GDR. No doubt it pained Ulbricht to accept that the aim of a united socialist Germany had been just a dream, and to admit that socialism had not triumphed as he had predicted.

The SED's immediate response to Brandt's declaration was an increase in propaganda in support of recognition and the rejection of a special relationship between the two German states. The SED leadership claimed that in spite of his more flexible methods, Brandt was really just adhering to the principles of West German imperialism. They claimed that Bonn's claim to sole representation of the nation was still manifested in the use of *Deutschland* as an abbreviation for the Federal Republic, in the failure to recognise the citizenship of the GDR, in their adherence to the borders of the German Reich of 1937, the use of phrases such as 'inner-German travel' and 'inner-German affairs,' in the blocking of the GDR's membership of international organisations, and even in the *Deutsche Bundesbahn's* treatment of Germany in

¹³⁷ Neues Deutschland, 24 October 1969.

its entirety.¹³⁸ Reports in *Neues Deutschland* were far from positive: 'The West German Federal Republic established itself as a separatist, imperialist state, while the GDR has developed into the socialist state of the German nation. "Germany as a whole" in the borders of 1937 only exists in the Federal Republic's weather forecasts.'¹³⁹ Members of the Central Committee must have been taken aback by an assessment of the new administration which read, 'Several times in his government declaration, Brandt conjured up the *totally non-existent unity of the nation* in order to arouse national feelings yet again.' His demand for self-determination for all Germans was counteracted with the argument that the citizens of the GDR had already exercised that right, whereas the West Germans had been denied it through the Paris Treaties.¹⁴⁰

Erich Honecker was the first Politburo member to respond. He praised Brandt's acceptance of the existence of 'two German states within Germany' but still accused him of not really offering anything new (or rather, nothing of interest to the SED), on the grounds that in spite of the change of government, the Federal Republic was still a monopoly-capitalist state and still expansionist.¹⁴¹ Although he admitted that certain aspects of the declaration were worthy of consideration, Honecker suggested it would be better to concentrate on the objectives agreed at the Seventh Party Conference, namely on the all-round strengthening of the GDR and the campaign for international recognition, and to take a class-based view of the National Question. The SED's demands would remain unchanged, namely recognition of the GDR's sovereignty and equal status with the FRG.¹⁴² The prime minister, Willi Stoph commented that Brandt's recognition of the existence of two German states was a mere 20 years overdue, but

¹³⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1399

¹³⁹ *Neues Deutschland*, 9 November 1969.

¹⁴⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1399, my italics

¹⁴¹ Heinz Lippmann, *Honecker and the New Politics of Europe*, trans. Helen Sebba, (London, 1973), p.208.

¹⁴² IPA NL2/32

nevertheless, was a sign of progress. However, they would judge Brandt not on his words, but on his deeds.¹⁴³

Just how perturbed the SED leadership was by Brandt's approach is obvious from the amount of attention devoted to the subject at the twelfth meeting of the Central Committee in December 1969 and during its preparation. It is surprising that it took a month and a half for an official response by Ulbricht, but naturally it had to be agreed with the Soviet leadership first. In the first version of his speech to the Central Committee, Ulbricht accepted Brandt's idea of 'two states of one nation,' - a concept he had himself advocated during the 1960s - but added, 'That means the German nation is divided.' Whether the division was permanent or only temporary, he did not make clear, although he accused Brandt of using the fact that both states were of the same nation as an excuse to interfere in the GDR's internal affairs, which implied that he personally still believed in the existence of that nation. However, while the 'one nation' aspect was of primary importance to Brandt, it was the existence of two states that was stressed by Ulbricht. He also suggested that maybe the reason why the Federal Republic accepted the Paris Treaties was because she no longer saw herself as a state of the German nation, implying that the GDR was still the one true German state, and referred to the constitutional aim of overcoming the division.¹⁴⁴

The actual speech to the Central Committee was a mixture of familiar 'Ulbrichtisms' on the National Question, interspersed with new elements, in response to Brandt's governmental declaration. Ulbricht referred to the 'two very different states of the German nation,' and claimed that the fraternal relations between the SED and CPSU and the citizens of the two states were in accordance with the vital interests of the German nation, again implying that there was still only one. Furthermore,

As is written in our constitution, the GDR and its citizens are striving to overcome the division of

¹⁴³ Willi Stoph, Rostock, 12 November 1969. Cited in Deutschland Archiv 2 (1969), p.1327.

¹⁴⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1403

Germany, which was imposed by imperialism on the German nation, and for the step-by-step coming together of the two German states until their reunification on the basis of democratic socialism. That remains our clear national perspective. It was decided at the Seventh Conference of our party and is fully valid as before.¹⁴⁵

Though he denied any special relationship, Ulbricht undermined this somewhat by saying, 'Certainly there can be special features in a normal diplomatic relationship between the GDR and the West German Federal Republic.... for example, politicians can negotiate with each other in their own language, although already, the extensive penetration of Americanisms into West German usage sometimes makes it difficult for us to understand this linguistic mixture.' However, in the same speech, he went on to make ambiguous statements such as,

Herr Willy Brandt himself has spoken of the existence of two states of the German nation.... This means Herr Brandt also knows full well that the nation is divided..... Herr Brandt was realistic enough not to talk about the establishment of the unity of Germany. Apparently he also understands that with a Federal Republic under the leadership of monopoly capitalists..... the prerequisites for the unity of Germany are lacking.¹⁴⁶

Ulbricht also included a large portion of a speech made at a meeting of Warsaw Pact members in Moscow ten days earlier regarding 'the enigmatic area of the term "Germany".' He criticised the press of other countries for using the term 'Germany' in ways contrary to the SED's usage, for example, to refer to the Federal Republic alone, or as though a unitary state called Germany still existed. Furthermore,

In view of them having grown far apart, it is illusory to try to construct artificially a joint umbrella arching over the first German peace state, the GDR, and the

¹⁴⁵ ZPA IV 2/1/402

¹⁴⁶ ZPA IV 2/1/402

West German Federal Republic, which is ruled by militaristic and monopoly-capitalist forces, roughly in the sense of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation.¹⁴⁷

Interestingly, Ulbricht admitted that the bloc system in Europe determined the national question, not nation theories. Consequently, the 'solution to the German Question' was 'a regulated, peaceful existence next to each other on the basis of equality and mutual diplomatic recognition by the GDR and FRG.' Most importantly, he concluded, 'We regard the declaration by the government of the FRG regarding the existence of two German states as a step forward. It is *de facto* recognition of the GDR.'¹⁴⁸

A few days after the meeting of the Central Committee, Ulbricht sent a letter to the new Federal president, Gustav Heinemann, in which he proposed a treaty between the two states which would normalise their relations on the basis of equality, and suggested they apply to join the UN.¹⁴⁹ In his reply, Heinemann stated, 'The preservation of the unity of the German nation is our joint concern.'¹⁵⁰ Brandt rejected Ulbricht's proposal in January 1970, and suggested instead the exchange of mutual declarations renouncing the use of force, but the latter responded by demanding diplomatic recognition of the GDR by the Federal Republic as a prerequisite. In a press article shortly after the letter to Heinemann, Hermann Axen went further, describing Bonn's proclaimed desire to preserve the unity of the nation as the same old revanchist 'claim to sole representation,' and 'cynical demagogy' by those who had originally divided the nation and then deepened and cemented it. Furthermore, 'Nationalistic talk of so-called "inner-German relations" and the allegedly still existing "unity of the nation" aims to stir up nationalism and to serve the ideological-political preparation of plans for the subjugation of the GDR.'¹⁵¹ Clearly Axen realised that the

¹⁴⁷ ZPA IV 2/1/402

¹⁴⁸ ZPA IV 2/1/402

¹⁴⁹ For details of the treaty, see Europa Archiv 5 (1970): D. 191-3.

¹⁵⁰ Zieger, Die Haltung, p.125.

¹⁵¹ ZPA IV 2/2035/165

adherence to the unity of the German nation was undermining the GDR's claim to be a legitimate sovereign state.

What motivated the SED's response to Brandt's declaration? The SED's official line was that in spite of a new vocabulary and more flexible methods, Brandt still had the same old goals, namely to continue the Federal Republic's claim to sole representation of the nation, to undermine the GDR, and to represent the interests of NATO,¹⁵² but even so, it seems that his declaration in October 1969 deeply disturbed the leadership of the SED, and no doubt of the CPSU. Four factors can be identified which to varying degrees influenced the SED's reaction. However, these factors often worked against each other, hence inconsistencies in official policy continued. First and foremost, pragmatism, i.e. the need to refute anything that undermined the GDR's claim to be an independent sovereign state, even the unity of the nation if necessary; secondly, Moscow's refusal to allow Ulbricht to make concessions to Brandt, which clashed with the third factor, namely Ulbricht's reluctance to accept that his dream of a united socialist Germany would never come true; and fourthly, the interest generated by Brandt among the citizens of the GDR. Let us briefly examine each of these factors in turn.

After waging war against the CDU/CSU for 20 years, the SED leadership welcomed their exclusion from government at long last. They portrayed the SPD's victory as indicative of West Germans' desire for a change of course, including regarding the German Question.¹⁵³ However, following its participation in the Grand Coalition, the SPD was certainly not seen as an ally. Brandt's *Ostpolitik* put the SED on the defensive, in fact, throughout his first year in office, relations between the two states almost functioned like a tennis match, though Brandt was always serving and the SED receiving. His acceptance of the existence of two German states and proposals for an exchange of views on a non-discriminatory basis made it harder for the SED to decline talks, hence the latter stressed that the SPD was using new methods to

¹⁵² ZPA J IV 2/2A/1405

¹⁵³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1399

achieve the same objectives simply because the old ones had failed.¹⁵⁴

In reality, however, the time for utopianism and procrastination was over, and the leadership would soon have to choose between adherence to the unitary German nation and non-recognition of the GDR on the one hand, and a more pragmatic approach on the other, which necessitated the denial of the existence of one German nation to support the claim of sovereignty. Naturally the Party leadership was bound to reject any proposals which they believed undermined the GDR, although traditionalists like Ulbricht were reluctant to do anything that would completely rule out a unified socialist German state. Sadly records of discussion of this matter within the Politburo do not exist, but versions of speeches do, and they indicate uncertainty as to how to react to Brandt's ideas, and a sense that the leadership was being overtaken by events more quickly than it could formulate responses to them. It seems that this may well have been the turning point in the SED's policy on the German nation, or at very least, it forced them to set off on the road leading to an unavoidable choice between one German nation or two.

Naturally the leadership of the SED could not act without first consulting Moscow. At the Warsaw Pact meeting in December 1969, Brezhnev warned that Brandt was working in alliance with other NATO states which sought to undermine the socialist community, hence his motives were not to be trusted. Furthermore, Bonn had not really changed course:

'Their phrasing is really demagogic - it is temptingly presented in increasingly foggy forms, and nationalistic.... The imperialists are afraid - they see the GDR developing further and becoming permanent, and know that the longer this development goes on, the more secure the GDR becomes. Therefore they are determined to penetrate the GDR and the feelings and thoughts of its citizens.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Lippmann, Honecker, p.209.

¹⁵⁵ IPA NL2/32

Bonn was apparently trying to split the socialist block via separate treaties with individual states, but Brezhnev reminded his allies that they were all in it together, and added, 'The image of the GDR is the result of our joint policies,' as was the new attitude of the Federal Republic, or so he claimed.¹⁵⁶ This was a warning, in case Ulbricht was considering independent initiatives. Finally, according to the Soviet leader,

Imperialism has divided Germany and the German people. Brandt's government is now trying to put its hope in the national sentiment of the Germans via self-righteous suggestions of a national rapprochement. But there can be no return to the past. As our German friends again declared, the reunification of Germany is only possible on the basis of democracy and socialism.¹⁵⁷

After all that had been said, one wonders why Brezhnev even mentioned reunification, though he reinforced the fact that there could be no compromise here, or rather, that he would never allow it. At the same meeting, a suggestion from the Yugoslav delegation highlighted the ambiguity of the GDR's international position and the need for clarification. They suggested that at the European Economic Commission, the representatives of both German states would sit behind one sign bearing the word 'Germany.'¹⁵⁸

Ulbricht's reluctance to give up his dream remained an obstacle, though he too must have realised by this time that a more pragmatic approach was required if the GDR was to gain recognition. However, as mentioned earlier, by agreeing that there were two states of the German nation, Brandt had stolen Ulbricht's argument, thereby forcing the latter to look for a new one. At this stage, Ulbricht was attempting to keep his options open, hence his initial response was ambiguous, with frequent references to the divided German nation and the constitutional

¹⁵⁶ IPA NL2/32

¹⁵⁷ ZPA IV 2/1/402

¹⁵⁸ ZPA IV 2/1/402

aim of reunification, on condition that the 'democratic transformation' of the Federal Republic took place.

East Germans were all the more receptive to Brandt's statement following a winter of shortages and low morale, and not surprisingly, hoped that a better understanding between the two German states would lead to greater freedoms.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, the SED needed to take a firm line 'in order to put a damper on the détente-euphoria among the population.'¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, it has been said that the political stance of top functionaries was determined by how much their own department was affected by a measure, and by how much they knew, especially concerning the public mood, hence Honecker's immediate, firm response was probably due to the fact that he knew talks with the Federal Republic could lead to unrest, unrealistic hopes and the destruction of the SED's carefully cultivated *Feindbild*.¹⁶¹ A report on the results of the ideological training year (*Parteilehrjahr*) 1969/70 admitted that the Party had failed to find convincing arguments to counteract the 'changed methods of the imperialists' fight against socialism as expressed by the "new *Ostpolitik*".¹⁶² Clearly, even after 20 years, the independence and permanence of the GDR had not yet been established in the minds of the population, hence drastic measures would be required to sever the tie with the other German state for good.

b) Ulbricht's Rejection of the Unitary German Nation

On 19 January 1970, Ulbricht held a press conference in response to Brandt's recent 'Report on the State of the Nation.' For the first time, he unambiguously portrayed Brandt's adherence to the unity of the nation as unrealistic and even hypocritical, in view of his adherence to the Paris Treaties which had apparently cemented the division, and as a device to avoid the normalisation of relations. Furthermore, 'The West German chancellor refuted

¹⁵⁹ Lippmann, Honecker, pp.209, 213.

¹⁶⁰ Siegfried Kupper, 'Political Relations with the FRG,' in GDR Foreign Policy, eds. Schulz et al. p.297.

¹⁶¹ Lippmann, Honecker, pp.208-209.

¹⁶² ZPA J IV 2/2A/1440

his own rhetoric concerning the unity of the German nation, when he stated that there are two German states with opposing social orders, and when he justified integration into the western imperialist alliance system and expressly rejected a German nation-state.¹⁶³ Suddenly, Ulbricht seemed to have abandoned his own argument of the national bond of the German working class. He even claimed that it was not possible to defend a unity that had not existed for 20 years,¹⁶⁴ although that was what he personally had done until this point! Finally he questioned the Federal Republic's legitimacy as a German state, calling it merely 'a capitalist NATO state' and 'a state with limited national sovereignty.' From this point, the GDR was officially called the 'socialist German nation-state,' as opposed to the 'socialist state of the German nation.'¹⁶⁵

Ulbricht welcomed the fact that Brandt had recognised a great deal - the existence of two German states, the fact that their relations were bad or rather non-existent, the fact that it would not be possible to overcome the division for the foreseeable future, and that the western powers were not keen on the idea of a reunification anyway, and finally that two different social systems could not be merged. Nevertheless, he claimed it was regrettable that Brandt chose to 'avoid the consequences of this realisation,' i.e. that it was time for mutual recognition. However, true to form, he added, 'As our constitution says, we hope that the nation that was divided by imperialism, both German states and their citizens, will one day grow closer together on the basis of democracy and socialism, and maybe will find themselves together again.'¹⁶⁶ According to Ulbricht, 'Since the foundation of Bismarck's empire, the problem of the German nation..... has consisted of overcoming the feudal, militaristic, later monopoly-capitalist and anti-democratic state order.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Neues Deutschland, 20 January 1970. For more detail on the press conference see Deutschland Archiv 3 (1970): pp.187-195.

¹⁶⁴ Neues Deutschland, 20 January 1970.

¹⁶⁵ Neues Deutschland, 20 January 1970.

¹⁶⁶ Neues Deutschland, 20 January 1970.

¹⁶⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1416

What can we conclude from the press conference in January 1970? Clearly many of Ulbricht's comments were pretty radical for him and indicate that even he had felt obliged to reconsider his position following Brandt's declaration. He adopted a noticeably more pragmatic approach, putting the interests of the GDR first, although his tendency to refer to the possibility of *Annäherung* and the constitutional imperative of reunification indicated just how hard it was for him to give up hope entirely. That his arguments were not always convincing or well thought out, no doubt had something to do with the fact that he had to respond so promptly. The intention may also have been to warn other Eastern Bloc states of the dangers of Brandt's more conciliatory approach.¹⁶⁸ However, it must always be remembered that the GDR was never an independent actor on the international stage, as Ulbricht was about to find out.

Just what other members of the Politburo thought of Brandt's comments is hard to assess due to a lack of records and the fact that Ulbricht saw relations with Bonn as his own domain. Those close to Moscow, such as Honecker, had lost interest in the Federal Republic several years earlier, preferring to concentrate on consolidating socialism and securing international recognition of the GDR. According to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Otto Winzer, the question of the unity of the nation was insignificant: 'Mutual diplomatic recognition is an elementary condition for the establishment of relations between sovereign states. Whether they are nation-states, nationality-states or states whose population includes just part of a nation is entirely insignificant.'¹⁶⁹ Hermann Axen stressed that the national question was a question of class and added, 'German imperialism divided the German nation and as long as imperialism rules West Germany there cannot and will not be a unitary German nation,' hence the unity of Germany was not on the political agenda.¹⁷⁰ For Albert Norden, who had been reprimanded by Ulbricht for questioning the unity of the nation prematurely, it was the ideal

¹⁶⁸ Kupper, 'Political Relations,' p.297.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Otto Winzer to Joachim Herrmann, 16 February 1970, BArchP, D-2/59

¹⁷⁰ ZPA IV 2/2035/166

opportunity to voice his long-held view. He claimed that out of pure class interest, the West German monopoly-capitalists had destroyed the unity of the nation and therefore one could not preserve what no longer existed.

c) Erfurt and Kassel

Brandt suggested negotiations on the exchange of documents renouncing force to Willi Stoph, eventually resulting in the historic meeting in Erfurt on 19 March 1970, which aroused great interest among the town's population. Ulbricht claimed that the aim of the talks was to achieve normal, peaceful, diplomatic relations and to relax tension between the two states,¹⁷¹ though doubtless he personally still hoped this would eventually bring them closer together. The fact that the meeting took place at all was quite something, indeed it nearly did not, due to a row concerning Brandt's plan to travel via West Berlin.¹⁷²

Although many practical aspects of the relationship between the two states were also addressed in Erfurt, we shall concentrate on the issue of the German nation.¹⁷³ In the first version of his speech (which was naturally prepared before he had heard what Brandt had to say), Stoph stated, 'It would be groundless to talk about a "unity of the nation" which, through no fault of our own, has not existed for a long time.'¹⁷⁴ He seemed to be saying that the nation had been irrevocably torn apart by the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949, which contradicted the line which had been official policy until the previous year. In the revised version, he did not deny that the populations of both states were both German, but argued,

It is futile to try to disguise the refusal to establish diplomatic relations with the formula "we are still all Germans." The issue is not so simple. Since the

¹⁷¹ Neues Deutschland, 19 March 1970.

¹⁷² See Ilse Spittmann, 'Deutscher Gipfel in Erfurt,' Deutschland Archiv 3 (1970): pp.431-439.

¹⁷³ For details see Zieger, Die Haltung, pp.126-127.

¹⁷⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1425

beginning of the last century, there have always been Germans who stood on the side of progress, the working class and working people, and others who stood on the side of reaction and capitalism.¹⁷⁵

Nevertheless, he said the SED hoped for the victory of socialism everywhere, including in the Federal Republic, which could facilitate reunification, but this was not to be included in the negotiations on their relationship at Erfurt.¹⁷⁶ This does seem rather strange after he had denied that anything connected the two states, but may have been included at the insistence of Ulbricht.

Stoph prepared an answer to all the possible arguments that Brandt might use to evade the establishment of normal relations, most significantly, the existence of one German nation. But there were signs that his position and its consequences had not been sufficiently thought through. Though the unity of the nation was denied, for some reason they did not go one step further to talk of two German nations or two entirely separate nations. Instead, the result of the 'division of the nation' was 'two autonomous states with opposing social orders.'¹⁷⁷

Shortly before Erfurt, the press was instructed to emphasise that the recognition of the GDR and the maintenance of the status quo was in the interest of peace and security in Europe, that the national question was a question of class, and that West German imperialists were responsible for detaching the West German state from the 'German national union,' which in turn led to the 'liquidation of the German nation.'¹⁷⁸ These were strong words, with an air of finality that had not been present earlier, when propaganda had adhered to the line enshrined in the constitution. Even so, a day before the meeting in Erfurt, *Neues Deutschland*

¹⁷⁵ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1428

¹⁷⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1428

¹⁷⁷ ZPA IV 2/2033/10

¹⁷⁸ ZPA IV 2/2033/10

attempted to portray the SED's line as consistent.¹⁷⁹ The press was also told to underline the danger posed to peace and security in Europe by the West German government's 'aggressive and revanchist policies,'¹⁸⁰ and to emphasise that Erfurt had been the SED's initiative.¹⁸¹

After the meeting, Stoph concluded, 'There is no such state as Germany, therefore there can be no special or particular conditions in the relationship between our two states.'¹⁸² The Politburo discussed the problems arising from Erfurt in a closed session on 24 March 1970, but unfortunately there is no record of exactly what was said. The fact that Brandt was accompanied by the Minister for Inner-German Affairs and not the foreign minister was criticised by the leadership of the GDR as a sign that nothing had really changed.¹⁸³ While Brandt had regarded Erfurt as proof of 'the reality of the unity of the nation,' Axen believed it showed the reality that there was no unitary German nation, but instead two fundamentally different states which were independent of each other and sovereign.¹⁸⁴ Like others, he seemed to be confusing nation and state - evidence of the lack of theoretical consideration of the state of the German nation. Axen also viewed Erfurt not as a meeting of two German heads of government but 'the first meeting, at the insistence and initiative of the GDR, between the socialist GDR and the monopoly-capitalist Federal Republic and their leaders.'¹⁸⁵

A new set of guidelines for the press from the agitation department placed more emphasis on strengthening the GDR and the equation of the state and socialism with peace and security, and of the Federal Republic with revanchism and conflict. Brandt was to be portrayed as merely pursuing the same goals as the

¹⁷⁹ Neues Deutschland, 18 March 1970, cited in Spittmann, 'Deutscher Gipfel,' p.434.

¹⁸⁰ ZPA IV 2/2033/9

¹⁸¹ ZPA IV 2/2033/33

¹⁸² Europa Archiv 5 (1970): D.222.

¹⁸³ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.230

¹⁸⁴ ZPA IV 2/2035/166

¹⁸⁵ ZPA IV 2/2035/166

CDU/CSU before him, but with different methods. Peaceful coexistence rather than reunification seemed to be the main objective.¹⁸⁶ However, the problem of the enthusiasm of the crowd for Brandt had to be addressed. The Party claimed that the majority of the people on the streets were demonstrating in favour of the recognition of the GDR and supported the line of the Party leadership. West German journalists were accused of organising the demonstration of support for Brandt, and of encouraging a minority of 'hostile elements' to cause trouble, who were 'mainly young people who had not been sufficiently politically influenced by us.'¹⁸⁷

After Erfurt, few people would have expected much to come of the meeting in Kassel two months later, not even Stoph himself, who had already prepared a closing speech assuming that Bonn had refused to recognise the GDR.¹⁸⁸ (In fact Brandt produced a 20 point plan for the regulation of their relations on the basis of equality.¹⁸⁹) In his opening speech, Stoph declared that the destruction of the unity of the nation by imperialism could not be undone via 'conceptual constructions professing a fictitious continued existence of the unity of the nation' and he accused Bonn of 'misusing national feelings for non-peaceful purposes.' Furthermore, 'there will never be an "inner-German umbrella" through which NATO can enter the community of socialist states.'¹⁹⁰

The State Secretariat for West German Affairs prepared arguments to counteract those that they expected Brandt to make in Kassel. If he said that by rejecting a special relationship, the GDR was contradicting its own constitution in which it was described as a 'socialist state of the German nation,' Stoph was simply to respond that imperialism had destroyed the unity of the nation and that independent sovereign states now existed on German soil. He would point out that according to the constitution,

¹⁸⁶ ZPA IV 2/2033/33

¹⁸⁷ ZPA IV/2/1/409

¹⁸⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1441

¹⁸⁹ For details see Zieger, Die Haltung, pp. 128-129.

¹⁹⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1441

the unity of the nation would only be possible on the basis of socialism, hence to talk about the possibility of reunification would be totally unrealistic at this time. Therefore, it would be totally wrong for Bonn to try to use the constitution of the GDR to justify a special relationship between the two states.¹⁹¹ If Brandt argued that full diplomatic recognition was impossible due to the need to safeguard the unity of the nation, Stoph would reply that it was impossible to safeguard something that did not exist, and that due to their opposing social orders, the prerequisites for unification did not exist, hence peaceful coexistence was the best situation that could be hoped for.¹⁹² The counter-arguments were somewhat evasive, and Stoph also seemed to be using the division of Germany as a state, and the division of the unity of the nation interchangeably. But at least the SED's objectives and arguments were more compatible than they had been until this point.

After the meeting, the East German side blamed the inevitable lack of progress on Bonn's intransigence and used the presence of demonstrators in Kassel to show the Federal Republic in a poor light. In an assessment of the meeting by the Politburo, it was seen as ironic that those who had destroyed the unity of the nation and made West Germany a foreign country to the GDR should use the formula of one German nation. They now called the GDR the 'socialist German nation-state' on the grounds that she had learnt the lessons of history, implemented the Potsdam Protocol and was ruled by the working class, who had apparently freely chosen to tread the road to socialism. In contrast, the Federal Republic was merely an 'imperialist NATO-state.'¹⁹³ Brandt's use of 'the unity of the German nation' was labelled a sign of nationalism and expansionism, which showed that Bonn was still trying to keep open the possibility of assimilating the GDR into the Federal Republic (which was essentially true of course).¹⁹⁴

191 BArchP, D-2/186

192 BArchP, D-2/186

193 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1443

194 ZPA J IV 2/2A/1445

Kassel also dominated the 13th meeting of the Central Committee in June 1970. The above arguments concerning the motivation behind Brandt's concept of the 'unity of the German nation' were voiced by several leading functionaries, who had ^{fewer} less scruples about breaking with past positions than Ulbricht. Norden, a critic of the traditional approach, claimed Brandt's concept 'contradicted political and social reality,' and said that anyone who claimed that it corresponded to the position expressed in the constitution of the GDR obviously could not read, since it clearly stated that a unity would only be possible on the basis of democracy and socialism.¹⁹⁵ Stoph said that the concept falsified history and just aimed to deceive people, and that the unity of the nation had actually not existed since the foundation of the Federal Republic and the ratification of the Paris Treaties.¹⁹⁶

It should be remembered, however, that Ulbricht was personally very keen to negotiate with Brandt. In his speech to the Central Committee he concentrated on the undeniable existence of two German states, but made no mention of the nation. Ironically he claimed that Bonn's discrimination against the GDR and its citizens had 'constructed a barrier of hostility between the two German states, which was, so to speak, the cement with which the division was cemented'!¹⁹⁷ He attempted to play down features common to both states, such as language and culture, saying that 'one can no longer speak of a common German language - there is a huge difference between the traditional German language of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Marx and Engels, which is full of humanism, and language which has been contaminated by imperialism and manipulated by capitalism.'¹⁹⁸ He dismissed the significance of family ties with the argument that 'the two German states and their social orders are not related at all.' According to Ulbricht, decisive feelings were not those between relatives but feelings of hatred for imperialism, militarism, neo-nazism and the forces in the Federal Republic who had divided Germany and damaged the

195 ZPA IV 2/1/408

196 ZPA IV 2/1/408

197 ZPA IV 2/1/408

198 ZPA IV 2/1/408

GDR whenever they could.¹⁹⁹ He also refuted Bonn's demand for the right to self-determination for all Germans with the argument that the citizens of the GDR had already used that right when they accepted the new socialist constitution.²⁰⁰

d) Explaining the Dramatic U-turn

Little was achieved at Erfurt and Kassel because both sides arrived with different objectives regarding the nature of their relationship. The leadership of the SED admitted that the 'central issue' ('*Kernfrage*') was the full diplomatic recognition of the GDR by the Federal Republic,²⁰¹ and even Ulbricht publicly put the immediate goal of recognition before reunification, although later comments suggest that the latter remained in the back of his mind. At last the realisation that something would have to be given up seemed to be sinking in, at least to some members of the leading elite, and since Brandt based his argument for a special relationship which ruled out full diplomatic recognition on the fact that both states were of one nation, and could not consider the other foreign, it was this argument which had to be refuted. Even so, it was important that the SED was not seen as the inflexible party, or as endangering peace. However, their continuation of a policy of *Abgrenzung* was highlighted by the fact that from July 1970, all exports bore the words 'Made in the GDR,' as opposed to 'Made in Germany.'

In actual fact, direct negotiations were probably doomed from the start because the Soviet leadership was opposed to the idea on the grounds that they contradicted the policy of *Abgrenzung*. Those close to Moscow within the SED, such as Honecker, shared this view and thought nothing could be achieved in this way, although they were not able to say so openly while Ulbricht remained in power.²⁰² Consequently, Moscow insisted that Stoph should represent the GDR - officially on the grounds that Brandt was not

199 ZPA IV 2/1/408

200 ZPA IV 2/1/408

201 ZPA IV 2/2033/10

202 Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

the head of state, but no doubt also because they feared Ulbricht would try to find out how far Brandt would go towards a confederation and would give too much ground.²⁰³ However, Brezhnev, who wanted to emphasise the co-operation and unity of the SED and CPSU regarding the German question, regarded Erfurt as having at least achieved one thing, namely the acceptance of the existence of two German states by Brandt.²⁰⁴

It is widely believed that in the late 1960s, Ulbricht was beginning to overestimate his own importance within the Warsaw Pact, even in relation to the Kremlin.²⁰⁵ However, due to recent experience, Moscow was no longer prepared to allow its satellites the freedom to act without prior consultation. Consequently, a confrontation occurred between Brezhnev and Ulbricht just before the Warsaw Pact meeting in August 1970, where the former made it clear to the veteran leader of the GDR, whose days were already numbered, that the Brezhnev Doctrine did not only apply in Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev's aim was to cement the status quo in Europe, thus preserving the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, and Ulbricht's dream of German reunification simply no longer fitted in with this plan. The impact of this meeting is apparent from the change of tone in Ulbricht's letters and speeches afterwards, in particular, the increased emphasis on the GDR's allegiance to the Soviet Union.

In an exchange between Brezhnev and Honecker from July 1970, the Soviet line was clear: there could be no form of unity between the socialist GDR and the capitalist Federal Republic. According to Brezhnev, nothing favourable came out of Erfurt and Kassel because 'Brandt has different goals to us regarding the GDR.' No doubt the Soviet leader had Ulbricht in mind when he criticised 'a certain air of superiority among you towards other socialist countries.... also towards us,' and he warned against unilateral action on the part of the GDR:

²⁰³ Interviews with Afred Neumann, Berlin, 7 April 1993, and Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 23 July 1993.

²⁰⁴ IPA NL2/32

²⁰⁵ See Moreton, East Germany, p.5.

Erich - I'll be frank - never forget that without us, the Soviet Union, with our power and strength, the GDR would not exist. Without us there would be no GDR. The existence of the GDR is in accordance with our interests and those of all socialist states. She is the result of our victory over Hitler's Germany. Germany does not exist any more and it is better that way. There is the socialist GDR and the imperialist FRG. Why is there suddenly a problem?..... The enemy will try to drive a wedge between us, but will not be allowed to succeed.²⁰⁶

In August delegations from the SED and CPSU met to discuss the future of relations between the two German states and possible treaties with the Federal Republic. Brandt's concept of the unity of the nation was described as unrealistic: 'The destruction of the unity of the nation goes back to the military defeat of Hitler's Germany. It was finally laid down in the Federal Republic's Paris Treaties with the USA, Britain and France.'²⁰⁷ The key to policy was to be the sovereignty of the GDR, and Ulbricht had to agree that he would not behave in a conciliatory manner towards the Federal Republic,²⁰⁸ which meant abandoning his long-held hope of *Annäherung*, and agreed to cooperate fully with Moscow on the issue. It is alleged that during a tête-à-tête, Brezhnev warned Ulbricht that the GDR's economic ties to the Soviet Union would have to be strengthened if he wished to remain in office. Ulbricht had to accept this, but resented the attack on the GDR's freedom to manoeuvre, saying, 'During cooperation we want to develop as a genuine German state. We are not ^{Belorussia} ~~Byelorussia~~, we are not a province of the Soviet Union.'²⁰⁹ He is reported to have also said that although the CPSU had Lenin, his party and country had Marx and Engels.²¹⁰ Such comments were used by Honecker to lower Brezhnev's opinion of Ulbricht.

²⁰⁶ Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1992), vol. 1: Die Akte Honecker, p.281.

²⁰⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1460

²⁰⁸ Przybylski, *Tatort*, vol. 1, p.290.

²⁰⁹ Przybylski, *Tatort*, vol. 1, p.110.

²¹⁰ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

After three months of negotiations, Brandt visited Moscow in August, resulting in the signing of a treaty to normalise their relationship. In a separate 'Letter regarding German unity,' Bonn repeated that the treaty did not contradict the ultimate aim of German reunification.²¹¹ In the East German press, the treaty was officially hailed as a great success for the Soviet Union, and by accepting the inviolability of borders, including the one dividing the two German states, as laying the path for the normalisation of relations between the GDR and FRG.²¹²

Ulbricht must have felt insulted by his exclusion from the negotiations. In a letter from October 1970, Brezhnev warned him that Brandt's slogans such as the special character of relations between the two German states and the so-called unity of the nation were just an attempt to shake the social and economic foundations of the GDR, hence a consistent policy of *Abgrenzung* was the only answer to what he called 'the nationalistic and anti-communist tendencies of the policies of the FRG.'²¹³ Ulbricht had little choice but to agree to support the campaign to secure socialism in Europe and the GDR's permanent place in the socialist bloc, thus ending any chance of compromise with Brandt,²¹⁴ although he himself rarely used the term *Abgrenzung*.²¹⁵

Nevertheless, in November Ulbricht conceded 'there is nothing "inner-German" left.' Furthermore,

When Herr Brandt speaks of the German nation, he speaks of some sort of *fata morgana*, so to speak, that floats somewhere in the sky. When one asks him what this nation actually consists of in his opinion, he cannot offer a single argument, because there is no common economic area, but two separate social orders, opposed in principle; there is no common state, but instead two, which are principally opposed to each other; and there

²¹¹ See Dokumentation zur Ostpolitik der Bundesregierung (Leck, 1988), pp.13-20.

²¹² ZPA J IV 2/2A/1459

²¹³ IPA NL2/32

²¹⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1478

²¹⁵ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 7 April 1993.

is no longer a common culture, for this squalid, americanised West German culture cannot be described as German culture. That is merely what Brandt earlier called 'the blue sky over the Ruhr.' In place of 'the blue sky over the Ruhr,' he now calls it 'nation.'²¹⁶

The contrast to Ulbricht's proclamations just over a year earlier is striking. Although it is hard to believe that he had really changed his mind, it illustrates the fact that he was prepared to give up his convictions to enhance the legitimacy of the GDR as a sovereign state, and to save his own skin.

Just how much public opinion affected the Party line on the nation at this point is hard to judge. On the basis of opinion poll data and the reaction of the population of Erfurt to Brandt, the SED must have known that even though reunification was looking increasingly unlikely, most people still hoped for a closer relationship with the Federal Republic, which for them was not just another neighbouring state. Opinion polls conducted in the summer of 1970 showed that not everyone agreed that recognition was an essential prerequisite for an improvement in relations, nor were they convinced that socialism would triumph in West Germany, as the SED had always predicted.²¹⁷

e) Theoretical Input

It does not appear to be the case that the SED's reaction to Brandt's statements was the result of a theoretical examination of the situation. More likely was that the leadership suddenly had to cobble together a response without having time for serious analysis or discussion, and there is no evidence that those best able to do this were consulted. Indeed it was only after the Party had changed course that their services were required, once the Party recognised the need for a theoretical justification for the dramatic change in policy.

²¹⁶ IPA NL2/32

²¹⁷ ZPA IV A2/902/33

Albert Norden, who was not only a highly dogmatic functionary, but also a professor, now used a Marxist-Leninist argument to deny the unity of the nation, which was soon taken up by Honecker. Instead of Ulbricht's argument that the German nation was maintained by the working class in both German states, he argued,

'The content of the National Question is determined by which class rules the nation.... National policy, in the fullest sense, consists of the liberation and leadership of the working-class, which itself forms the socialist nation. That is the path that the GDR has trod. 'National' means hitting out against social and political reaction. When we annihilated the hostile imperialism in our own state, we solved the National Question.'²¹⁸

To refute the linguistic argument he said, 'Just because Messrs Flick, Abs and Siemens spoke German, are the workers supposed to form a nation with them?! Hitler and Himmler also spoke German and murdered hundreds of thousands of German speaking communists, Social Democrats and progressive members of the bourgeoisie.'²¹⁹ This association of 'good Germans' with the GDR, and 'bad Germans' with the Federal Republic was common.

On the whole, the uncertainty as to whether the line on the nation enshrined in the constitution was still valid, in the light of statements which appeared to contradict it, discouraged theorists from addressing the question of the German nation for fear of saying the wrong thing. Even the last Party Conference had failed to provide clear guidelines and the issue was not clarified until the Eighth Party Conference in 1971. Even so, academics continued to consider the problem of the nation among themselves. Indeed, as reunification on the SED's terms became increasingly unlikely, and the difference between the two halves of Germany became more apparent, many had begun to contemplate the effect this had on the German nation, and Brandt's acceptance of the existence of two German states further

²¹⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1425

²¹⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1425

encouraged such considerations. According to Kosing, they saw 'a new form of national community' emerging as a result of the increasingly obvious independence of the state, which many began to view as a potential nation in a Marxist sense.²²⁰

The only major work on the subject from this period identified four different kinds of nation using class-based criteria. Firstly, bourgeois nations arising in the pre-capitalist period such as Britain and France; secondly, socialist nations, namely the Soviet Union and the people's republics; thirdly, former colonies in Africa and Asia; and lastly, nations divided by imperialist powers allied with native reactionaries, such as the FRG, Korea and Vietnam.²²¹ Even so, the writer still claimed that the political division of Germany could be overcome in the event of the 'democratic transformation' of the Federal Republic.²²² Another article stuck firmly to the concept of one German people, whose true representative was the GDR, and rejected West German accusations that the GDR was 'un-German' or 'serving foreign interests.' Its authors claimed that the revolutionary German workers' movement had never made room for national nihilism or the denial of the values of the history of the German nation. They listed many great Germans - Engels, Müntzer, Kant, Fichte, Herder and Goethe, adding, 'Their ideas for a future fatherland for the Germans must remain our hope and vision.'²²³ In 1969, a new *Wörterbuch der Marxistisch-Leninistischen Soziologie* was produced which stated: 'The nation as a form of community is characterised by the economic collaboration of the population of large territories on the basis of the development of the internal market, via the particular historic traditions of the people, via a

²²⁰ Interview with Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

²²¹ Identified by E. Hühns in *Heimat - Vaterland - Nation* (East Berlin 1969), cited in Zimmermann, ed., *DDR Handbuch*, p.925.

²²² Hühns, *Heimat*, p.92, cited in Naumann and Trümpler, *Der Flop*, p.75.

²²³ Werner Horn and Siegfried Vietze, 'Die DDR - Krönung des Kampfes aller fortschrittlichen Kräfte des deutschen Volkes,' *Einheit* 24 (1969): pp.188-197.

common lifestyle and language, in other words via the culture of the people,'²²⁴ which was reminiscent of Stalin's definition.

Around this time, at the request of the Sciences Department, a study was produced by historians at the Academy for Social Sciences in preparation for a comprehensive new German history, and they inevitably questioned whether there was still one German nation. To deny its existence fitted in well with the concept of *Abgrenzung* favoured by the Honecker faction, but since the line contained in the constitution was still officially valid, the study was never published.²²⁵ On the whole, research on the subject of the nation was not encouraged at Party institutions at this point, neither by the 'Academic Committee for Research into Imperialism' at the Academy for Social Sciences, which had to co-operate with the Departments of Sciences, Propaganda, International Contacts, and the West Department,²²⁶ nor at the German Institute for Contemporary History, which just concentrated on 'West German imperialism,' in particular, on Bonn's manipulation of the right to self-determination and her attempts to stir up nationalism.²²⁷

In spite of the lack of publications directly addressing the subject of the nation at the end of the 1960s, prompted by the Party, academics started to consider national consciousness in the GDR. This was partly as a result of indications of an imminent change in official policy regarding the state of the German nation, and partly because after 20 years of separate development from the Federal Republic, an East German identity of some sort had inevitably evolved, based on pride in their own economic achievements, and nurtured by the increasing unlikelihood of reunification. Western

²²⁴ W. Eichhorn, Wörterbuch der Marxistisch-Leninistischen Soziologie, 1st ed. (East Berlin, 1969), p.305, cited in Koenen, Nation und Nationalbewußtsein, p.20.

²²⁵ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 28 May 1993.

²²⁶ ZPA J IV 2/3A/1847

²²⁷ BArchP, D-2/68

journalists continued to confirm this,²²⁸ but their assertions were only based on observation and not scientific.²²⁹

Although the leadership very rarely allowed public opinion to influence policy, they knew that visible popular support for the regime and its policies was good for the image of the GDR abroad and thus for the campaign for recognition. Some prominent members of the SED believed that more accurate information regarding popular consciousness would increase their ability to control it. But others preferred not to hear negative opinions. Nevertheless, from 1969, empirical research into 'GDR-consciousness,' in particular, consciousness of history was undertaken by researchers at the AfG, which continued until 1985. According to Professor Helmut Meier, who coordinated the project, it began while the line represented by Ulbricht was still valid. Questions asked included 'Should Germans shoot at Germans?' and 'Is the whole of Germany your fatherland or just the GDR?' The results showed that people no longer saw reunification as possible in the near future, which was interpreted negatively so long as Ulbricht's theory of the 'socialist state of the German nation' prevailed, but positively by those who wanted to abandon it and to emphasise the GDR as an independent entity.²³⁰

The Politburo acknowledged the contribution of the Institute for Public Opinion Research towards the leadership's ever increasing need for information about popular consciousness in the GDR.²³¹ Attention was also paid to the personality traits which were supposed to form part of GDR-consciousness, based on the socialist morality defined in the 1950s, and positive elements of the traditional German (and in particular, Prussian) character, such as

²²⁸ John Dornberg claimed that nationalism was real in the GDR and that people were proud of their achievements. See Dornberg, The Other Germany (Garden City, 1968), p.349; Andreas Kohlschütter saw a 'GDR state consciousness' rooted in the 'essentially German heart' of the GDR and a critical solidarity with the regime. See Kohlschütter, 'Sie sagen "Ja" zu ihrem Staat,' Die Zeit, 7 August 1970, pp.3-4..

²²⁹ For this reason, Ludz questioned the validity of such assumptions. Ludz, 'Zum Begriff,' p.21.

²³⁰ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

²³¹ ZPA J IV/2/3A/1784

hard work and obedience to authority, which obviously served the interests of the regime. In 1969, Alexander Abusch, a leading functionary in the SED's cultural institutions, wrote about the 'spiritual and moral face of the new person in our republic,' the key to which was 'pride in the GDR.' (*DDR-Stolz*).²³² Officially this pride was allegedly derived from the material achievements of the GDR, its modern industries and technology, and the knowledge that not just the factories and land belonged to them, the people, but also a whole wealth of academic, spiritual, cultural and artistic values. However, due to the link with socialist internationalism, nationalism and 'national narrow-mindedness' ~~was~~^{were} apparently alien to them.²³³

In an article entitled 'The Human Face of our Socialist Society,' Bernd Bittighöfer wrote of the aim to create 'all-round educated, and harmoniously developed socialist personalities.' This involved 'the ability for creative and productive physical and spiritual activity; a socialist political-moral position and consistency of thought and deed in all areas of life; ...and also aspirations for performance, health and physical fitness.' Two areas were identified where people could actively participate to strengthen their 'GDR-consciousness,' namely sport and culture. Though the writer denied that the development of socialist personalities merely aimed to produce an able labour force for the requirements of the scientific-technological revolution, the SED's intentions were clearly to strengthen the GDR economically and internationally to aid the campaign for recognition. He concluded, 'The most important characteristic of a socialist personality is the constant struggle to become more knowledgeable, clever and perfect, and in this way, more useful for socialist society.'²³⁴ Another writer also did not deny that the strengthening of national consciousness in the GDR had the overt intention of increasing productivity.²³⁵

²³² Alexander Abusch, 'Das geistig-moralische Antlitz des neuen Menschen in unserer Republik,' *Einheit* 24 (1969): pp.1085-6.

²³³ Abusch, pp.1085-6.

²³⁴ Bernd Bittighöfer, 'Das Menschenbild unserer sozialistischer Gemeinschaft', *Einheit* 24 (1969): p.419.

²³⁵ Dörnberg, *Kurze Geschichte*, 4th ed., pp.465-6, 481.

In conclusion it must be said that the state of the German nation required more theoretical attention. Even Brezhnev recognised this in a letter to Ulbricht in which he outlined the 'ideological task' ahead:

In this context, working out the National Question from a Marxist-Leninist position is of primary importance, in particular the basic principles concerning the establishment of the socialist human community, the forging of socialist patriotism and finally the formation of the socialist nation in the GDR.²³⁶

But before the task could be completed, one obstacle had to be removed, namely Ulbricht himself.

4) CONCLUSION

The period 1967-70 began with total adherence to the unity of the German nation as the official policy of the SED, and ended with its denial. In between was a transitional period when the traditional line overlapped with a more pragmatic, GDR-centric approach, manifested both by differences of opinion between functionaries, and inconsistent statements by individuals. This was most apparent at the Seventh Party Conference.

The key factor was the GDR's struggle for legitimacy which eventually forced the leadership to choose between the unity of the German nation and the chance for a united socialist Germany on the one hand, and international recognition as a sovereign socialist state on the other. Clearly no other government was going to recognise a state that appeared temporary or incomplete. Though the two German states had been growing apart for nearly two decades and the consequences of the division were already deeply ingrained, a catalyst was required to force the SED leadership to make the decision between unity and recognition.

²³⁶ IPA NL2/32

That catalyst was Brandt's notion of 'two states of one nation.' As a result, from January 1970, and not from the Eighth Party Conference in June 1971 as is often stated, pragmatism took precedence over the theory of the national bond of the German working class. Bonn had used the continued existence of the German nation to avoid full recognition of the GDR, hence the SED leadership had to deny this in order to gain the legitimacy and security they wanted so badly. No doubt several prominent members of the Politburo would have gladly set off on the pragmatic road earlier, but due to the power of the First Secretary and the desire to hang on to their own positions, they could not challenge the official line.

To varying degrees, four factors influenced how the concept of the nation functioned at the political level at the end of the 1960s: firstly and most importantly, the need for a pragmatic approach in the interest of the legitimacy of the GDR; secondly, the wishes of the Soviet leadership; thirdly, Ulbricht's ability to impose his personal view, most noticeable in the new constitution; and fourthly, (though to a lesser extent), public opinion. However, these factors were not always complementary. Ulbricht's long-held convictions often clashed with the more realistic views of the pragmatists, but ultimately he bowed to Soviet pressure and showed that he too could be pragmatic when the future of the GDR's socialist system, indeed, his own future, was at stake. The period provides a classic example of how the leadership of the GDR was not in control of its own destiny, but determined by both the wishes of Moscow and initiatives from Bonn. Interestingly later accounts from the GDR give the impression that the change in policy was initiated by Honecker at the Eighth Party conference.²³⁷

However, many of the arguments still seemed half-baked and the consequences of the demise of the unitary German nation had not yet been adequately thought through. This may have had something to do with the fact that at the political level, policy on

²³⁷ For example, Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, pp.246-247, though the author would have been well aware that this was not the case.

the nation did not have the benefit of the views of theorists, philosophers, historians, social scientists, etc. It was not that they did not wish to contribute, nor that they had nothing to offer. They were simply not asked and rarely able to initiate debate themselves. In short, by 1970, pragmatism, as opposed to either theoretical consideration, or the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, determined policy regarding the German nation. However, the last word on the subject was yet to be said.

CHAPTER 4: THE SOCIALIST NATION IN THE GDR

This chapter examines the dramatic changes in ^{the} SED's position on the German nation under the new leadership of Erich Honecker. It is divided into two sections: the first attempts to establish exactly why the SED declared that a purely socialist nation was developing in the GDR; and the second section examines the practical consequences of the new concept, which were taken to extremes, as we shall see. What emerges is that during the early 1970s, the leadership of the SED sought to legitimise the GDR as an independent sovereign state by denying the existence of a unitary German nation, and claiming that the GDR now possessed a nation of its own. However, they faced a dilemma as to whether that nation was a socialist *German* nation or simply a socialist nation. To accept that it remained a German nation, in spite of the increasingly permanent political division of Germany, preserved a link with the Federal Republic, and therefore undermined the legitimacy of the GDR. But to deny that it was German was hardly credible and could also have a negative effect by alienating the population. In spite of this risk, the SED initially chose the latter option.

In order to justify such a dramatic U-turn theoretically, the Party leadership required some convoluted arguments, and we now know that the theorists involved were sceptical about the idea of a non-German, socialist nation in the GDR. Nevertheless, it was their duty to make sense of the SED's radical new stance. However, the fact that it was later officially replaced by the concept of the 'socialist *German* nation' indicates that the leadership itself eventually recognised the lack of credibility of the socialist nation, and its shortcomings as a means to legitimise the state.

1) THE INVENTION OF A 'SOCIALIST NATION' IN THE GDR

a) The Beginning of the End for Ulbricht

The 14th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee was the first of four which dealt with the preparations for the Eighth Party Conference, which was originally scheduled for April 1971, but actually took place in June. It has been common knowledge since before the collapse of the GDR that the 14th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee was the beginning of the end for Ulbricht. More recently, it has emerged that this had less to do with his economic policies, as was widely believed, and more to do with his *Deutschlandpolitik*, in particular, its unacceptability to Moscow. Although Ulbricht was involved in the preparations, Erich Honecker was chairman of the commission responsible for the highly significant report of the Central Committee, which increased the rivalry between the leader and his heir apparent. In the section below, it will emerge that the issue of the nation was rapidly becoming a pawn in the power struggle within the SED, and as a result, Ulbricht had to sacrifice the idea of one German nation in order to buy time for himself, although, as it turned out, it was already too late.

Peter Przybylski interprets the fact that no guests were invited to the 14th ^{plenum} session as a sign that the discussion was going to be more frank than usual.¹⁴⁷ There, Ulbricht delivered a report on the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact states, (PCC), which had taken place nine days earlier. However, the Central Committee heard a revised version of his speech to the PCC, and even the latter did not hear the original version that he had presented to the Politburo only a few days before. Originally, Ulbricht had described how the GDR had tirelessly fought for the re-establishment of a unitary Germany during the first twelve years of its existence, and said it was grotesque that those who had apparently wrecked the former unitary nation and who had written it off via the Paris Treaties were trying to avoid the recognition of current realities. He had

¹⁴⁷ Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1992), vol. 2: Honecker, Mittag und Schalck-Golodkowski, p.26.

also rejected 'inner German relations' and the idea of a 'common German umbrella.'¹⁴⁸

Instead, the PCC heard him stress the sovereignty of the 'socialist German national state' and its right to join the UN, socialist solidarity with the CPSU and other sister parties, and his approval of the treaties Moscow and Warsaw had recently signed with Bonn. Large chunks referring to the 'former unitary German nation' had been removed from the speech. A concluding declaration gave assurance that the SED would continue a policy in the interest of international security and détente, that they would further strengthen the 'German state of workers and farmers' politically, economically, culturally and militarily, and that they would secure their membership of the community of socialist states, and totally fence themselves off from the imperialist FRG. Surprisingly, it was actually Brezhnev who referred to Bonn's attempt to create a 'national community of all Germans.'¹⁴⁹ In his report of the meeting to the Central Committee, Ulbricht again stressed these goals, especially socialist solidarity, but made no reference to the German nation, and only this non-controversial version was published in the 'Documents of the SED' series.¹⁵⁰

Exactly why references to the nation were removed, when on the surface they seemed in keeping with the new line, is open to speculation. Maybe it was thought that even to mention the 'former unitary nation' would undermine the emerging theory of two irreconcilable nations on German soil, one socialist and the other bourgeois, and would arouse fears among Warsaw Pact member-states that its re-establishment was still desirable. It is widely believed that Ulbricht clashed with Brezhnev at the meeting as a result of differences between the two men which had been growing for at least a month, particularly regarding a settlement over Berlin,¹⁵¹ and it is possible that the former came under pressure to stress the GDR's loyalty to the community of

¹⁴⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1481 (30 November 1970).

¹⁴⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1484 (8 December 1970).

¹⁵⁰ Dokumente der SED, 22 vols. (East Berlin, 1972), vol. 13, pp.71-75.

¹⁵¹ Moreton, East Germany, pp.169, 174.

socialist states. Maybe other leading functionaries wanted to distance him from the German Question altogether, in view of his past (and probably continuing) convictions. Clearly there were several influencing factors. However, it was not this speech that provoked active opposition to Ulbricht from within the Politburo, but his closing remarks at the end of the 14th ^{plenum} meeting of the Central Committee.

During the meeting, Erich Honecker reinforced the message that Bonn's adherence to phrases such as 'the so-called unity of the nation' and 'special inner-German relations' were merely ploys which aimed to upset the social and economic foundations of the GDR. He stressed that a process of *Abgrenzung* and not *Annäherung* (growing closer together) was taking place, and added that peaceful coexistence between states with opposing social orders and the non-conciliatory fight against bourgeois ideology were not incompatible, but were in fact two sides of the same coin.¹⁵² Here he was overtly demonstrating his allegiance to the Soviet line, since the concept of *Abgrenzung* had originally been dreamt up in Moscow.¹⁵³ However, in spite of tangible differences between the two German states by this stage, Honecker's claim that they were no closer than any two states with different political systems was hardly credible. Ironically he himself would later exploit the fact that a special bond did exist, particularly during the 1980s.

The report of the Politburo to the Central Committee reiterated the line taken by Honecker. It emphasised the character of the social order of a state as the decisive factor which determined her relationship with other states, and stated, 'The unity of the nation was destroyed as a result of the Second World War and above all by the division enforced afterwards by American and West German imperialists,' though the GDR was still described as the

¹⁵² Erich Honecker, Bericht über den Umtausch der Parteidokumente, 14. Tagung des ZK der SED, 9-11. Dez. 1970. Cited in Naumann and Trümpler, Der Flop, pp. 194-196.

¹⁵³ See chapter 2. Some commentators fail to recognise that *Abgrenzung* was not invented by the SED, for example, Naumann and Trümpler, Der Flop, pp 69-70.

'socialist German national state.' The Politburo pledged support for the West German communist party, the DKP, and expressed confidence that one day, the way to socialism would be opened in the Federal Republic.¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, this was omitted from the version of the speech published in *Neues Deutschland*,¹⁵⁵ presumably because it raised questions about what might follow if this occurred, and whether the SED had a closer bond with the DKP than with other communist parties. Even Günter Mittag's report on the economy repeated the now familiar message that a process of *Abgrenzung* was taking place.¹⁵⁶

In the discussion which followed it was clear that the Honecker faction was gaining the upper hand, and most speakers now expressed his 'GDR-centric' line and support for *Abgrenzung*, which complimented the campaign for recognition and the need to refute Bonn's claim that the GDR was less than an independent sovereign state. However, ambiguity remained as to whether *Abgrenzung* would occur automatically, or whether it had to be actively implemented, and various unanswered questions remained. Franz Dahlem spoke of a new sense of pride among the population that was 'genuine patriotism based on a national feeling that people sense as citizens of the GDR,' but was interrupted when he began to speak about solidarity with the West German working class.

Another speaker, Alois Bräutigam, recognised that,

Among sections of the population the view still exists that the two German states are growing closer together, and that through the treaty between the USSR and the FRG, better relations have been established between both German states, with the result that the security measures in the border region and restrictions on travel could be removed or reduced..... Therefore it is up to us to impress upon all citizens that there can be no reunification or rapprochement between the socialist GDR and

¹⁵⁴ ZPA IV 2/1/416 (11 December 1970)

¹⁵⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, 12 December 1970.

¹⁵⁶ ZPA IV 2/1/416

imperialist West Germany, but only diplomatic relations on the basis of equality and solidarity.¹⁵⁷

Another member, Hans-Joachim Hertwig, committed a *faux pas* which illustrated the difficulties arising from the new line when he unwittingly described the GDR as the 'country of birth' (*Geburtsland*) of Marx and Engels, which was changed to 'homeland' (*Heimatland*) in the published record of the proceedings.¹⁵⁸

The most significant aspect of the session was the reaction of the rest of the Politburo to Ulbricht's closing remarks. Suddenly it was not only Ulbricht's long-held convictions that were being overturned - he was now also fighting for his political life. On the subject of the German Question, his remarks coincided with those of the other main speakers, apart from his inclusion of a reference to the GDR's past efforts to achieve a confederation, and the absence of the word *Abgrenzung*, which no doubt failed to satisfy his opponents within the leadership. Now even he claimed that the Brandt/Stoph talks had led to a dead-end, due to Brandt's attempts to undermine the GDR via the concept of 'inner-German relations.'¹⁵⁹

However, it was the section concerning the economy which gave Politburo members an excuse to write to Ulbricht individually, urging him not to publish the version of the speech he had read to the Central Committee, on the grounds that it contradicted the report of the Politburo and recent utterances by Willi Stoph. This was an unprecedented occurrence and indicated that they all knew Ulbricht's days were numbered.¹⁶⁰ Honecker attacked Ulbricht for saying that economic co-operation with the Soviet Union was necessary because the GDR lacked raw materials, instead of saying it was an obligation of socialist

¹⁵⁷ ZPA IV 2/1/415

¹⁵⁸ ZPA IV 2/1/415

¹⁵⁹ ZPA IV 2/1/415

¹⁶⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1489 (15 December 1970)

internationalism.¹⁶¹ Also there can be little doubt that Honecker and his supporters were intentionally using Ulbricht's comments to further undermine the reputation of the latter in Moscow by questioning his commitment to the socialist community, and hinting that he might unilaterally attempt to negotiate with Bonn.

It seems that for these reasons, rather than for his economic policies themselves, Brezhnev approved Ulbricht's removal, which was engineered by Honecker and his faction including Stoph and Verner. There is no evidence to suggest that Ulbricht tried to resist pressure to withdraw his remarks on the economy, with the result that only an edited version, without the controversial section, appeared in the published record and in *Neues Deutschland*. Interestingly, Jürgen Hofmann's semi-official account of the evolution of the nation in the GDR, written in the late 1980s, only refers to Honecker's speech at the 14th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee, and makes no mention of Ulbricht at all,¹⁶² a sign that according to official history, Ulbricht had already been written off.

Less than a week later, at a meeting of the Commission for the preparation of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the SED, Ulbricht suddenly altered his position and for the first time, referred to *Abgrenzung* and criticised Bonn's attempts to approach the GDR via 'fictitious national common ground' (*fiktive nationale Gemeinsamkeit*). At last he seemed to recognise that if the unity of the nation no longer existed, there must be two separate nations, speaking of 'the process of evolution of a socialist nation' taking place in the GDR, and 'the old bourgeois German nation' that remained in the Federal Republic. However, his use of the adjective 'German' remained somewhat inconsistent.¹⁶³ Commentators have wondered what occurred that week to make

161 Vormerkung der SED-Führung über Gespräche mit Brezhnev in Moskau vom 20 August 1970. ZPA 41656, cited in Przybylski, *Tatort* vol. 2, p.348.

162 Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p.252.

163 Ulbricht, Sitzung der Kommission zur Vorbereitung des 25. Jahrestags der SED am 17. Dezember 1970, cited in Naumann and Trümpler, *Der Flop*, pp. 197-199.

Ulbricht suddenly speak in such finite terms, but are unable to provide an answer.¹⁶⁴

Politburo member Alfred Neumann does not accept that Ulbricht changed his mind regarding the nation, on the grounds that he, Ulbricht, had always maintained that there could be no unification of socialism and capitalism. In Neumann's opinion, he was a pragmatist, and had merely switched tactics to suit the changed circumstances, which now dictated that the GDR needed to gain equal status with the Federal Republic, in order to compete economically and politically. In his view, 'The National Question and the nation can only be the number one issue some of the time,... and in the second half of the 1960s, it was quite clear that the main concern was the recognition of the equal status of both German states at the international level. And when it is a matter of the recognition of both German states, one should not push the nation into the foreground.'¹⁶⁵ He claims that Bonn had done so in order to undermine the GDR, but denies (incorrectly) that Ulbricht ever used the term *Abgrenzung*, and he makes no mention of Ulbricht's feelings as a member of Germany's communist old guard. His explanation should be treated with caution due his unbending adherence to Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, his uncritical loyalty to Ulbricht, and the effects of the passage of time.

So how else can Ulbricht's new position be explained? The idea that if the unitary German nation no longer existed, there must be something else in its place, presumably two nations, seems logical, and one wonders why Ulbricht had not come to this conclusion earlier. Presumably this was because he did not want to admit that the division of Germany was irreversible. Certainly it would have been more characteristic for him to be motivated by pragmatic considerations than a genuine change of heart regarding the German nation, and his subsequent return to his previous stance after his removal from office supports this.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Naumann and Trümpler, *Der Flop*, p.72.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 4 May 1993.

¹⁶⁶ For example, at a Party conference in Berlin shortly after his removal from office, according to Helmut Meier, interview, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

Some commentators see the change as more to do with personal rivalry, i.e. Ulbricht wanted to knock the wind out of Honecker's sails and not be seen as an old has-been, merely expressing ideas that had been overtaken. But none of these reasons explain why he amended his stance *when* he did. The most likely explanation is that realising how fragile his position had become, Ulbricht had to toe the Soviet line in view of the controversy over his recent speech before the Central Committee.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, even he was prepared to correct a position that was clearly no longer tenable and to abandon a goal that could not be achieved, when it was politically necessary.

At the end of December 1970, Ulbricht sent drafts of material on the National Question to the Soviet Politburo, which approved it, saying, 'As we in Moscow understand it, the main aim of the proposed publication is a complete, *theoretically justified* orientation of Party activities regarding the development of the GDR as a sovereign socialist state and the people of the GDR as a *socialist nation*.'¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the actual material is not available, but this comment indicates the line desired by Moscow, which inevitably became the official line of the SED. It is worth noting that the importance of 'theoretical justification' was recognised from the start. The National Question had again become subordinate to other political objectives, to the extent that an individual's position regarding the nation had become an indicator of loyalty (or lack of it) to the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. Furthermore, since the issue had been determined by political considerations, it had nothing to do with the will of the population of the GDR.

b) Ulbricht Fights Back

¹⁶⁷ Naumann and Trümpler fail to recognise this factor in Der Flop.

¹⁶⁸ ~~According to Jürgen Hofmann, interview, Berlin, 5 February 1993.~~

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Politburo of the CPSU - unofficial translation for Honecker dated 21 January 1971. IPA NL2/31, my italics.

At the 15th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee on 28th January 1971, Ulbricht concentrated on domestic policy, in particular, his concepts of a 'developed social system of socialism' and the 'socialist human society,'¹⁷⁰ and advocated 'national solutions' to the GDR's problems.¹⁷¹ The occasion is widely seen as an attempt by Ulbricht to regain some lost ground and he certainly seemed more confident.¹⁷² He had begun 1971 with a New Year message in which he publicly stated that 'in the GDR, we are experiencing the birth of the socialist German nation.' Significantly, according to his understanding, this nation was firmly rooted in 'humanist and democratic German traditions,' unlike the Federal Republic, which had distanced itself from them and had been created to serve the purposes of American imperialism. He went on to list many people who he claimed had 'shaped our socialist German national state and its socialist national culture,' including Bach, Beethoven, Fichte, Kant, Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Thälmann, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, and Bertolt Brecht.¹⁷³

The main points of Ulbricht's speech to the Central Committee, were the campaign for recognition, and 'the development of the GDR into a socialist German national state, inextricably and forever bound to the Soviet Union and the community of socialist states, and its principled *Abgrenzung* from the imperialist NATO-state, the FRG.'¹⁷⁴ This description of the Federal Republic was often used to imply limited sovereignty and to negate the German link. He condemned Bonn's 'wishful thinking about "inner-German" relations, implying guardianship' (*vormundschaftliche gefärbten "innerdeutsche" Beziehungen*), and for the first time, stated that *Abgrenzung* had reached a point of no return.¹⁷⁵ Here his 'conversion' away from the idea of one nation existing in two states that would one day form a unity is apparent, but knowing the factors at work at the time, we can assume that he was being

¹⁷⁰ Ilse Spittmann, 'Warum Ulbricht stürzte,' Deutschland Archiv 4 (1971): p.568.

¹⁷¹ Moreton, East Germany, pp.177-178.

¹⁷² According to McAdams, East Germany, p.113.

¹⁷³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1488 (15 December 1970)

¹⁷⁴ ZPA IV 2/1/419 (28 January 1971)

¹⁷⁵ ZPA IV 2/1/419

pragmatic in the interest of recognition, although it must have been painful for him, in view of his previous grand designs for Germany as a whole. However, Ulbricht still used nationalistic language, in contrast to the class-based arguments put forward by Honecker, who re-emphasised the need to sever links with the Federal Republic and to strengthen them with the Soviet Union and other socialist states.¹⁷⁶

On 28th January 1971, Brandt issued another 'Report on the State of the Nation,' in which he pointed out that in spite of its rejection of a special relationship, the GDR was more involved with the Federal Republic than with any other state.¹⁷⁷ The fact that not only the population and media were preoccupied with the Federal Republic, but also that the Party still had special bodies such as the State Secretariat for West German Affairs, confirmed that the relationship was still far from ordinary. Quite justifiably, Brandt accused the SED leadership of wanting it both ways, distinguishing between the 'socialist nation' and the 'bourgeois nation,' but also using the phrases such as 'the remainder of the old bourgeois *German* nation' and the 'socialist *German* nation-state.' He added that the shared national basis was causing the leadership in East Berlin not to relax its view of the East-West conflict but to over-exaggerate it, and concluded, 'The nation is a question of consciousness and will. East Berlin's polemics against the nation are evidence of the existence of a consciousness and will that have also been preserved over there.'¹⁷⁸ Clearly there was plenty of truth in Brandt's comments, and some leading functionaries must have begun to realise how significant words such as 'nation,' 'national' and 'German' were.

plenums

An assessment of the last two ~~sessions~~ of the Central Committee by the Department of Sciences acknowledged that the problem of the nation had not yet been solved. It condemned West German manifestations of nationalism such as the celebrations of the

¹⁷⁶ ZPA IV 2/1/419

¹⁷⁷ Willy Brandt, Bericht zur Lage der Nation, 28 January 1971. Europa Archiv 26, (1971): pp.264-268.

¹⁷⁸ Brandt, Bericht, my italics

foundation of Bismarck's Reich in 1871 and Brandt's recent report on the state of the nation. It continued, 'The fact that today, in the heart of Europe, two autonomous states with opposing social orders exist, cannot be denied or concealed with nationalist phraseology.' Lenin's argument that the crucial factor of any national question was the nature of the social system(s), was used to show that 'there is no longer anything particularly national that characterises the relationship between the GDR and the FRG.' The assessment repeatedly stressed the need to get this message across to the population, especially to counteract West German attempts to convince them of the 'unity of the nation' and of 'national common ground.' For once the need to create something in its place was recognised: 'At the same time, we must make our citizens proud to live in the GDR and to take part in its formation. As Walter Ulbricht stated at the 15th ^{plenum} session, it is a matter of filling our people with socialist national consciousness and socialist patriotism for the socialist German nation-state.' But the problem of the West German proletariat remained. Adapting the famous phrase from three years earlier, the assessment concluded, 'As with the workers of other countries, we are bound to the working class of the FRG by the relationship of proletarian internationalism. However, this is no class-indifferent national relationship, but a relationship based on class.'¹⁷⁹

The department was aware that the population was still unsure about the state of the nation. Research into discussion among university students and academics revealed that people were still asking what a nation actually was, what the difference was between the phrase 'socialist state of the German nation' and 'socialist German national state' which superseded it, and whether 25 years was long enough to say that the German nation no longer existed.¹⁸⁰ Reports from local Party secretaries reinforced the assumption that people, including Party members, did not understand the dramatic change in official policy regarding the nation or why the GDR had to sever its ties with the Federal

¹⁷⁹ 'Die ideologischen Probleme bei den weiteren Auswertung der 14. und 15. Tagungen der ZK,' ZPA IV A2/904/13.

¹⁸⁰ ZPA IV A2/904/13

Republic.¹⁸¹ However, it was hardly surprising that the leadership's brief and sudden statements on the subject had not satisfied many citizens, and the issue clearly required far more detailed attention to make the change in policy comprehensible and acceptable.

Meanwhile, Ulbricht continued to prepare for the Eighth Party Conference on the assumption that he would still be First Secretary, and planned to emphasise the GDR's national achievements, as opposed to those of the Eastern Bloc as a whole.¹⁸² Preparatory material reveals that for the first time, more detail was paid to the question of the nation. A resolution drawn up by the commission Ulbricht chaired, assisted by Kurt Hager and the Department of Sciences, stressed 'changes in the world situation which have arisen from the clashes between the socialist and imperialist world systems since the Seventh Party Conference.' The resolution was to highlight the motives behind Bonn's talk of 'the continued unity of the nation' and 'special inner-German relations,' and to encourage support for the SED's current objectives, i.e. the strengthening of the international position of the GDR and her application to join the UN.¹⁸³ Consequently, it took the line,

'The bourgeois German nation, which formed in the process of the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and which was torn apart into capitalists and workers, and which existed within the framework of a unitary state from 1871-1945, no longer exists..... The GDR is the socialist German national state, where a *socialist nation* is developing, which embodies all democratic and humanist national traditions. In the FRG the bourgeois nation exists under the conditions of the ruling state-monopoly system.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Naumann and Trümpler, Der Flop, p.79.

¹⁸² Moreton, East Germany, p.183.

¹⁸³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1497 (5 February 1971)

¹⁸⁴ ZPA IV VIII/17, my italics. This section originated from a paper by the Strategic Working Party for Foreign policy and Overseas Trade, lead by Axen, entitled 'The FRG in the class conflict of our time.'

The same phrasing was used by Ulbricht in a speech at the 24th conference of the CPSU in March 1971, and again in April on the 25th anniversary of the formation of the SED.¹⁸⁵ However, in retrospect we know that 'socialist *German* nation state' would soon be amended. The question of national culture was also addressed: 'With the formation of its socialist German national culture, the social system of our GDR also sharply fences itself off from the Americanised philistinism (*Unkultur*) dominant in the imperialist social system of the FRG.' Furthermore, it was a 'fundamental cultural task.... to make socialist culture the culture of the entire population, in order to contribute significantly to the formation of the educated socialist nation.'¹⁸⁶

At the same time, a separate commission chaired by Honecker was preparing the Central Committee's report for the Party conference. The report emphasised the successful strengthening of the GDR since the previous conference and the bond of socialist internationalism. The issue of the nation was not addressed in early versions, but reference was made to 'the new socialist constitution - an expression of socialist reality and prospects,' in spite of the fact that the constitution still contained the aim of reunification. At a consultation meeting with the West German DKP and KPD, Honecker repeated his usual arguments against a 'common German umbrella' and unitary nation, and stated that the parties needed a clear 'class position' on the National Question. He welcomed their declaration which stated that 'the National Question in the FRG consists of the conquering of imperialism.' He hoped that the door to socialism would be opened for the Federal Republic, and in spite of the policy of *Abgrenzung*, offered 'international fraternal assistance,' but nothing more. Prophetically, he also promised that, 'At the Eighth Party Conference, we shall precisely formulate and justify everything from scratch, and shall answer the new questions that life poses.'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ ZPA NL182/798 and ZPA J IV 2/2A/1509 (15 April 1971)

¹⁸⁶ ZPA IV VIII/17

¹⁸⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1504 (16 March 1971)

Material now available proves that Ulbricht's revised vocabulary concerning the German Question was insufficient to save him, and that his past words and deeds had not been forgotten by his enemies and rivals. Just a week before the 15th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee, most of the Politburo were plotting against him. His independence of thought regarding relations between the two German states was used as the main reason why he should be removed before the eighth Party Conference:

Not only in domestic policy, but also in policy towards the FRG, Walter Ulbricht pursues his own personal line, to which he rigidly adheres. This constantly interferes with the reliable course of action that was co-ordinated by the CPSU and the SED, and the agreements struck regarding the FRG.... Also he transfers his exaggerated estimation of himself onto the GDR, which he increasingly tries to manoeuvre into a role of model and example: "After all, we, the GDR, are no Byelorussian Soviet Republic".¹⁸⁸

Two further reasons why he had to go were given a month later: 'a) Comrade Ulbricht has again and again raised questions and assessments which do not conform to the reality of the situation or our tasks and decisions; b) unfortunately his health and his physical state has become visibly worse.'¹⁸⁹ While there can be no doubt that Ulbricht was not in good health, indeed Alfred Neumann says this had been the case since 1968, especially due to arteriosclerosis, which caused him to need frequent holidays,¹⁹⁰ it seems that his rivals took advantage of this to exclude him, and in particular, to disassociate him from the German Question.¹⁹¹ Clearly by this stage, the real power was in the hands of those who put the interests not just of the GDR first, but also those of the Soviet Union, and who were happy to accept the destruction of the unitary German nation.

¹⁸⁸ Letter by the Politburo of the SED to Brezhnev, 21 January 1971, IPA NL2/32

¹⁸⁹ Przybylski, Tatort, vol. 1, p. 304.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 7 April 1993.

¹⁹¹ See Przybylski, Tatort vol. 2, p.32.

Unfortunately we do not know the precise course of events which led to Ulbricht's 'resignation' announced at the 16th ^{plenum} session of the Central Committee. His fall had certainly occurred very rapidly and came as a complete surprise to GDR-watchers in the Federal Republic and the United States.¹⁹² The most likely explanation is that opposition to his economic policies and *Deutschlandpolitik* had been growing within the Party's ruling elite for several months, but a change at the top would only occur once Moscow thought it necessary. However, during this period, Ulbricht's growing obsession with his own importance, his tendency to act autonomously with regard to relations with the Federal Republic, and his failure to acknowledge 'the major role the USSR had played as midwife to the GDR and guarantor of its security'¹⁹³ were causing the rapid erosion of support for him in the Kremlin. Ulbricht's defence of the interests of 'his' GDR was particularly unwelcome at a time when Brezhnev wanted to regain the Soviet Union's hegemony within the Eastern Bloc.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, there is no evidence that any leading members of the SED violently objected to his removal, since it was clear that his time was up, and that Honecker was now the favourite in Moscow.

It is widely accepted that the final straw was Ulbricht's assertion of the GDR's sovereignty, which threatened the speedy solution of the Berlin question that Brezhnev wanted.¹⁹⁵ The fact that his removal could not even wait until the Eighth Party Conference in June, which would have been kinder to the veteran First Secretary, is a sign of the urgency of a change at the top, though opinions differ as to precisely when the decision was made.¹⁹⁶ In

¹⁹² Melvin Croan, 'Meinungen zum Führungswechsel in der SED,' *Deutschland Archiv* 4 (1971): p.575.

¹⁹³ Lippmann, *Honecker*, p.221.

¹⁹⁴ Spittmann, 'Warum Ulbricht stürzte,' p.569.

¹⁹⁵ Moreton, Wettig and Lippmann agree. For a detailed analysis of the dispute over Berlin see Moreton, *East Germany*, pp.160-174, 179-193, and p.198, note 62; Gerhard Wettig, *Community and Conflict in the Socialist Camp*, (London, 1975), pp.82-114.

¹⁹⁶ Most commentators suggest dates in April following the 24th CPSU conference, for example, Spittmann opts for early April, (Spittmann, 'Warum Ulbricht stürzte,' p.568), while Moreton and Wettig believe the decision was only made towards the end of the month. (Moreton, *East Germany*, p.185; Wettig, *Community and Conflict*, p.94).

short, 'His [Ulbricht's] definition of the GDR's sovereignty on the one hand, and Soviet international interests on the other, clashed over the very issue that had given him the opportunity to begin moulding the GDR's identity: Berlin. And it was his definition of the GDR's needs that fell victim to the forces of change around him.'¹⁹⁷ Although Ulbricht's language had changed, he had failed to back up his words with deeds, and even though he had recently assured the CPSU, 'We have rejected a so-called "special German road to socialism",'¹⁹⁸ his rhetoric was unlikely to convince Moscow that its satellite was safe in his hands.

Once Ulbricht had gone, the Soviet leadership could 'embark on the next phase of its German and European policy with a new man at the helm in the GDR - a partner more agreeable than Walter Ulbricht.'¹⁹⁹ For Moscow, the German Question was a matter of strengthening the GDR with the aim of attaining equal status with the Federal Republic and continued *Abgrenzung*. A new agenda for the Eighth Party Conference had already been drawn up, on the assumption that Honecker would be First Secretary, and with a new orientation in domestic policy based on the Soviet model.²⁰⁰

c) 'History' settles the National Question

On 18 May 1971, Honecker addressed the CPSU, outlining his position on the German Question. Naturally it was the view favoured by Moscow, since as Brezhnev pointed out, the GDR was the child of their joint parentage. Honecker attacked Brandt's argument that 'we are still all Germans and still belong to one German nation,' and his attempts to persuade other states to delay recognising the GDR on the grounds that it might disturb the 'inner-German dialogue.' Bonn's motive was clear, he said: 'They want us to move closer towards the FRG as a sign of apparent "national common ground." They want to embrace the GDR in order to crush her. After all, Brandt has visited Nixon five times

¹⁹⁷ McAdams, East Germany, p.115.

¹⁹⁸ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1509 (15 April 1971)

¹⁹⁹ Lippmann, Honecker, p.224.

²⁰⁰ Spittmann, 'Warum Ulbricht stürzte,' p.569.

since his election as Chancellor and agreed his *Ostpolitik* there.' The most important goal was the GDR's entry into the UN, but he admitted that there was also work to be done at home: 'We will carry out active explanatory work among our population and will educate them in the spirit of class-based *Abgrenzung* from the FRG, whereby signs of negative tendencies both regarding the National Question and all-German illusions will not be tolerated.'²⁰¹

Throughout May and June, a commission was working on Honecker's report for the Party Conference. Politburo member Hermann Axen, a firm believer in a class-based definition of the nation, was responsible for the section on the National Question, according to his personal adviser, Manfred Uschner. Uschner says that Axen had urged Honecker to pay more attention to the National Question in order to fight off the advances of the enemy, i.e. Bonn,²⁰² but we can assume the basic concept of this section of the speech was agreed between them. However, early versions differ from the final draft. Honecker deleted the description of the national question as 'an extremely complicated problem,' preferring to say it had 'already been decided by history.' He also rejected Kurt Hager's suggestion to emphasise the 'bond with forces in the FRG who oppose the anti-national policies of the monopoly-capitalists.'²⁰³

On 1st June a draft of the full speech was presented to the Politburo, which contained an interesting section which did not feature in the final version:

'Therefore, two fundamentally different German nations exist on German soil, the developing socialist nation in the GDR, and the bourgeois nation in the FRG. They will no doubt exist beside each other for a long historical period. The world-wide historical process of transformation from capitalism to socialism will certainly not make a detour around the FRG in the long run. If sometime in the future the power of the

²⁰¹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1514 (20 May 1971)

²⁰² Interview with Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 21 July 1993.

²⁰³ ZPA IV VIII/123

monopoly-capitalists in the FRG is overthrown and the way to socialism is pursued, then a socialist nation under the leadership of the working class will also develop in West Germany. This would result in totally new historical conditions for the solution of the National Question on German soil.

It had also referred to the 'bourgeois *German* nation,' which, according to Lenin, actually consisted of two irreconcilable nations, the workers and their allies, and the monopoly-capitalists.²⁰⁴ By the 17th ^{plenum} meeting of the Central Committee on 10th June, these comments had been removed from the speech, and knowing the strength of Honecker's position at the time, we can assume that this conformed to his wishes, or rather to his wish to please Moscow. During the meeting his only reference to the National Question was that it should be examined according to its class content. The main objectives for the immediate future were 'the further formation of the developed socialist society in the GDR,' *Abgrenzung* towards the Federal Republic, and entry into the UN.²⁰⁵ Clearly it was felt that any mention of the possibility of a future change in the status quo would prejudice these aims. For the same reason, the adjective 'German' was used increasingly rarely.

The Eighth Party Conference was quite a contrast to the seventh. With power securely in the hands of Honecker and his immediate circle, there was now only one point of view regarding the National Question. By design, Honecker's style raised expectations that it was the beginning of a new era, with the emphasis placed on social policy and solidarity with the Soviet Union, though hopes of reform and liberalisation were soon to be dashed. The new First Secretary's speech provoked much interest in the West German media and among *DDR-ologen*, and is often incorrectly portrayed in secondary literature as the SED's first official rejection of the unity of the nation. He stated, 'All this talk in the West about the so-called unity of the German nation and the apparent special nature of relations between the German

²⁰⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1515 (1 June 1971), my italics.

²⁰⁵ ZPA IV 2/1/427 (10 June 1971)

Democratic Republic and the FRG, is obviously supposed to encourage those whose policies still aim to undermine the social and economic foundations of our republic.' Instead, Honecker wanted to strengthen the GDR, hence he claimed that the opposite was true, declaring, 'On the subject of the National Question - it has already been settled by history,' and 'Assessments of the national question must always be based on its class content.' Furthermore,

In contrast to the FRG, where the bourgeois nation continues to exist, and where the National Question is determined by the irreconcilable class contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the working masses..... a *socialist nation* is developing here in the German Democratic Republic, the socialist German state.²⁰⁶

The language used was significant, especially since the First Secretary's speech at the Party Conference was regarded by many as the definitive line in all policy areas, until it was superseded by the next one. However, many inconsistencies remained. On the one hand, the intentional use of 'German Democratic Republic' in full, compared with the abbreviation 'FRG,' implied that the GDR was the legitimate German state. On the other hand, from this point on, the term 'socialist nation' became the norm, as opposed to 'socialist German nation.' Again, only Brezhnev referred to 'Germany' and 'the German people.'²⁰⁷ On the whole, however, it was the socialist aspect of the GDR that was stressed, its 'socialist national culture' and permanent place in the community of socialist states, giving the impression that the division of Germany had reached an irreversible stage.

As we know, the unity of the nation had been questioned since 1969, but until this point the Party leadership had failed to state clearly what now existed in its place. One could interpret the switch to a 'socialist nation' either as a sign of new-found confidence, i.e. that the GDR itself was sufficiently legitimate to

²⁰⁶ Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VIII Parteitag der SED, 2 vols. (East Berlin, 1971), vol. 1, p.49, my italics.

²⁰⁷ Zieger, Die Haltung, p.136.

drop the adjective 'German,' or alternatively that it continued to undermine the GDR and therefore would have to be given up. The latter argument certainly sounds more convincing bearing in mind the situation in 1971. Jürgen Hofmann sees the conception of the socialist nation as an acknowledgement by the leadership that there was such a thing as the National Question which could not be ignored, and that *Abgrenzung* alone was not enough.²⁰⁸ However, the question of the nation was far more complex than the new leadership realised, not least due to its subjective elements, and differences of opinion regarding the definition of a nation, especially between Marxists and others. It would soon become clear that a few sentences were not sufficient to clear up the issue.

So how can this part of Honecker's speech be explained? Four important influences can be identified. Firstly, as McAdams has pointed out, Honecker had to do something drastic because the Federal Republic was getting dangerously close as a result of détente and Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.²⁰⁹ Until this point, official statements had been a confusing and often contradictory mixture of old tenets and new responses to Brandt, which needed clarification. It was blatantly obvious that the GDR had gained nothing, and maybe even undermined itself, by maintaining the idea of the unity of the German nation and the aim of reunification via the socialist transformation of the Federal Republic. Consequently, it was logical to believe that there might be more to gain by giving up this long-standing, but ultimately unobtainable goal, and now that the existence of two sovereign states had more or less been accepted, it made sense to reconsider the notion of a 'national umbrella' arching over them. Thus it was not the case that the leadership gave up the aim of reunification and a unitary nation because they no longer desired it, but because it had become unrealistic and incompatible with the more pressing objective of securing the permanence of the GDR.

Secondly, strengthening the GDR's international position with the ultimate aim of UN membership had become the SED's primary

²⁰⁸ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

²⁰⁹ McAdams, *East Germany*, pp.142-143.

objective. Although there is no evidence that the SED ever used the claim that a separate nation existed in the GDR to support its application for UN membership (using instead the indisputable existence of two independent states), failure to deny the unity of the German nation could have prejudiced their case. In a letter to the UN General Secretary, the Foreign Minister, Otto Winzer, stressed the GDR's commitment to the UN's aims regarding the preservation of peace: 'As one of the successor states of the former German Reich, the GDR sees preventing another war from ever breaking out on German soil as its great historical task.'²¹⁰

Thirdly, Honecker wanted to demonstrate his allegiance to the Soviet Union, particularly compared to his predecessor, who had become far too autonomous for Moscow's liking. As a result, he asserted the sovereignty of the GDR on the one hand, while at the same time subordinating it to Moscow on the other, as he had done at recent meetings of the Central Committee. It is unlikely that the Soviet leadership took much interest in the theoretical problem of the German nation, being more interested in cementing the status quo in Europe to preserve its sphere of influence. In fact, the introduction of the concept of the socialist nation may well have surprised the Soviet leadership,²¹¹ but since it served their interests, it should not have been unwelcome.

Fourthly, Honecker needed to promote himself as the man who would bring new policies and new success to the GDR. This must have been the reason why subsequent official accounts of the development of the nation in the GDR gave the impression that this was the turning point.²¹² However, it should be born in mind that the National Question was not of primary importance to him, indeed he personally believed that *Abgrenzung* alone was sufficient, and intended to concentrate on new social policies.

²¹⁰ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1519 (8 June 1971)

²¹¹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

²¹² For example, Hofmann, *Eine neues Deutschland*, p.250, although he is well aware that this was not the case: interview , Berlin, 11 May 1993.

Whether or not ^a fifth factor, namely public opinion influenced the new leadership's stance, is questionable. As we have seen, they were aware of popular confusion caused by different messages emanating from the Politburo, and of wide-spread enthusiasm for Brandt's new approach. But the leadership could hardly expect the population to turn their backs on their western neighbour, unless they were offered a credible alternative with which to identify, hence a replacement for the former unitary German nation was artificially created and called the socialist nation in the GDR. This concept was very much imposed from on high, more as an ideal desired by the regime, as opposed to being a reflection of the subjective feelings of the population. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the people would accept it, since one of Honecker's primary goals was to secure internal stability by making the GDR more appealing.

Therefore it can be seen that Honecker had good reasons for addressing the subject of the nation, but the question remains as to whether this was the right way to go about it. Leading theorists were shocked by the fact that a policy held for 25 years was given up in three sentences, without sufficient preparation or regard for the consequences, and merely stressing the political aspects, ignoring 'all the elements associated with the nation and everything national.'²¹³ However, such simplified and abrupt answers were typical of Honecker, especially since he could hardly be described as an intellectual.²¹⁴ Alfred Neumann, now able to say what he really thinks about Honecker, criticises the latter for having given up the fight regarding the National Question, and accuses him of misusing the concept of the socialist nation as it appears in the Communist Manifesto.²¹⁵

A leading West German commentator noted that the new leadership omitted factors which played a leading role in discussion of the nation in the Federal Republic, in particular the relationship between *Volk* and nation, and the geographical

²¹³ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

²¹⁴ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

²¹⁵ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 4 May 1993.

borders of the nation. He concluded that they were more or less using whatever meaning of words such as '*Volk*' and 'nation' they liked, in order to suit current policy objectives.²¹⁶ One further indication that the new line was half-baked was ambiguity regarding whether the socialist nation was fully developed or still developing, resulting in inconsistencies in official statements. The primary reason for these short-comings was the leadership's failure to seek advice from people who were qualified to comment on the state of the nation, which will be discussed below.

Ulbricht, now very much yesterday's man, was originally supposed to open the Party Conference. His draft speech echoed the tone of the new line, (although he still used the term 'socialist German national state'): 'The objective process of their [the two German states'] *Abgrenzung* from each other has reached the point of no return..... That the ruling classes of imperialism in the FRG carry the mark of Cain, of national treason, on their foreheads, while the working class of the GDR have taken the solution of the National Question into their own hands, belongs to real historical fact.'²¹⁷ However, the Politburo rejected the draft speech, and not only did the actual version not refer to the German question at all, but it was read by Hermann Axen, since Ulbricht was not even present. It seems that his successor wanted to exclude both him and all reminders of his policies on the nation. It has even been suggested that the former conspired with Ulbricht's doctors to prevent him attending the Party Conference.²¹⁸

d) Theoretical Considerations

The abrupt manner in which Honecker dealt with the question of the nation at the Eighth Party conference was a classic example of how the SED's elite tended to make a political declaration and only afterwards sought to find a theoretical justification for it with the help of theorists. Alfred Kosing, who was already well known for

²¹⁶ Ludz, 'Zum Begriff,' pp.21, 26.

²¹⁷ ZPA IV VIII/18

²¹⁸ Przybylski, *Tatort*, vol. 2, p.32.

his work on the nation²¹⁹ attributes this to Honecker's 'small-minded smugness' and his belief that he and his close associates knew best.²²⁰ While certain other members of the Politburo were slightly more open-minded in comparison, their own personal ambitions were sufficient to dissuade them from outright criticism of Honecker.

However, for several years, academics had privately begun to consider the effects of the division on the nation, but they could not openly challenge long-standing views until the leadership amended the official line,²²¹ and because the political agenda determined the research agenda, the topic inevitably remained inadequately researched. As a result, Honecker's declaration was entirely determined by pragmatism and raised more questions than it answered. Knowledgeable theorists such as Kosing thought this was not only a big mistake, but also an insult.²²² Since theorists were encouraged to address the question of the nation only after Honecker had declared that it had been decided by history, objective thought on the subject was inevitably restricted.

Little theoretical work on the nation dating back to the period immediately before the conference exists, and it is difficult to assess the impact of what was written on official thinking. In December 1970, the Politburo received a paper produced by the Institute for Marxist-Leninism, (IML), the leading institute for the social sciences at the time, for the centenary of the establishment of the German Reich in 1871. However, since it had been commissioned by the Department of Sciences, the paper could hardly be described as objective. The final version took a large step in the direction of a class-based line on the nation and may well have influenced Honecker. It stated, 'A nation is neither eternal nor immortal nor something mysterious. It is a product of history, and like everything else in history and society, is subject

²¹⁹ See Chapter 2.

²²⁰ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993; Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

²²¹ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 28 May 1993.

²²² Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin 11 February 1993.

to constant change and contradictory developments.'²²³ While it is common for nations to seek to establish a state of their own, this paper was one of several examples which reversed the argument, claiming that the existence of two sovereign states with different social orders, the GDR and the Federal Republic, proved the existence of two separate nations. It stated, 'Today there is no unitary German nation, but instead the socialist state, the GDR, which is inextricably bound to the community of socialist states, and the imperialist state, the FRG, which is bound to the inhuman imperialism of the USA and integrated into NATO.'²²⁴

In January 1971, a paper written by historians entitled 'The Development of the National Question in German History' was presented to the Politburo. Unfortunately, the actual paper is not on file, and even Jürgen Hofmann was unable to get hold of it, while writing his officially sanctioned account of the history of the national question in the GDR in the late 1980s.²²⁵ After discussion with the CPSU, Hannes Hörnig, director of the Department of Sciences, reported that the paper generally conformed to the view of both parties:

Our Soviet comrades are in agreement with the formulation that the socialist German nation is developing in the GDR. They recommend that this development should be even more strongly embedded in the international struggle, and that we should show that together with the all-round development of the socialist nation, the GDR is taking on and further developing all the progressive achievements and experiences of the German nation, so that the devaluation of national feeling or a slide into national nihilism can be avoided.²²⁶

However, the latter advice was soon ignored by Honecker, as was 'the task of presenting the joint interests of the workers of the GDR and the working class in West Germany in the struggle

²²³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1488

²²⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1488 (15 December 1970)

²²⁵ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

²²⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1500 (23 February 1971)

against West German imperialism.' The CPSU also recommended a more extensive and theoretically accurate portrayal of the 'development of the socialist German national state.'²²⁷ While some of these comments seemed to be a few years behind current statements of the leadership, notably in the continued use of the adjective 'German,' they indicate the SED's obligation to consult Moscow regarding the concept of the nation, and show that Moscow saw the National Question in Germany as merely one small part of the larger international conflict between socialism and capitalism.

An article for the Soviet journal 'Communist' defined the 'positive characteristics of the socialist nation' as 'socialist sovereignty, a socialist policy for peace, the political and moral unity of the people, the fraternal bond to the Soviet Union and friendship with socialist sister countries and with nation-states liberated from imperialism.'²²⁸ It seems unlikely that this detached, unemotional approach would persuade people to give up their identification with the traditional German nation, and the article recognised the difficult theoretical task ahead:

The solution of the National Question in the GDR demands that the SED and the socialist state creatively work through all the basic problems of the German people and the socialist nation. That includes the formation of the socialist social system, the economic and state system of socialism, the conflict with West German imperialism and with bourgeois ideologies in all areas, the examination of German history from the point of view of historical materialism, of socialist philosophy and the history of philosophy in Germany, of socialist education, socialist lifestyle, morality and ethics, of socialist architecture, literature and art.²²⁹

²²⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1500

²²⁸ 'Die Gründung des sozialistischen deutschen Nationalstaats und die Entwicklung der sozialistischen deutschen Nation,' Communist (1971), author unknown, located in ZPA NL 182/1362.

²²⁹ ZPA NL182/1362

In other words, the redefinition of the nation also made it necessary to redefine everything that could be considered national, which was no small task.

In summary, it must be said that at the Eighth Party Conference, the Honecker faction had applied a political solution to the theoretical and subjective problem of the nation, with no regard for the consequences. Honecker tried to deal with the nation as swiftly as possible so as to avoid controversy. However, while the vacuum left by the abandonment of the unitary German nation had been filled, it was hardly sufficient just to declare that the National Question had been decided by history, and that a socialist nation (no longer the socialist *German* nation), was developing in the GDR.

Not surprisingly, Honecker's drastic attempt to settle the national question for good confused the population, and horrified theorists who found that academic research was being determined, even hindered, by the needs of the Party. However, within a few years, the leadership evidently realised that the creation of a credible concept of the nation would require considerably more work, and called upon the services of East German philosophers, social scientists and historians to devise a theoretical framework and a 'national' consciousness and history for the socialist nation in the GDR.

2) THE SOCIALIST NATION IN THE GDR IN PRACTICE

While examining the SED's efforts to prove the existence of a socialist nation in the GDR, following the Eighth Party conference, we should bear in mind that it was not merely an end in itself, but a means to achieve other objectives, in particular, international recognition and ultimately membership of the UN. Honecker wanted to be rid of the national question once and for all, in order to concentrate on his new social policies and to achieve internal stability. However, since the concept of the socialist nation in the GDR was an objective or ideal desired by the leadership which

failed to take into account the subjective feelings of the people, it was unlikely that they would identify with it right from the start.

a) The 'De-Germanisation' of the GDR

Honecker's declaration of the development of a purely socialist nation in the GDR immediately raised the question of whether the state and its population were still German. Many functionaries tended to take the words of the First Secretary very literally, and as a consequence, a highly unsubtle purge of the words 'German' and 'Germany' was implemented. While certain name changes were justified, for example, in the case of institutions unique to the GDR, the schizophrenic application of this 'de-Germanisation' policy highlighted the fact that it was purely a political tactic with no credible argument behind it. As we shall see, this extreme form of *Abgrenzung* continued until 1975, when the distinction between nation and nationality was accepted.

In July 1971, the State Secretariat for West German ^{Affairs} ~~Questions~~ was abolished, presumably because it indicated that a relationship existed between the two states that was different to that between any other two states. In the Federal Republic, this was interpreted as a further indication of the SED's desire for *Abgrenzung* and a reflection of 'the consistent continuation along the road to a total separation of both parts of Germany pursued by the GDR.'²³⁰ In November 1971, the radio station *Deutschlandsender* was renamed 'Voice of the GDR.' In this case, the change was not just cosmetic, but coincided with a change of role. A report from the Central Committee's 'West Department' stated that in view of the GDR's total *Abgrenzung* from the FRG and the prospect of diplomatic relations between the two, it was no longer appropriate for the station to try to influence the West German population, although ideological work directed at the Federal Republic should not be given up altogether, since West German communists relied on it. It was also decided to cease production of publications which had dealt with internal developments in the Federal Republic for distribution there,

²³⁰ ZPA IV A2/2028/122

although material about the GDR would still be distributed.²³¹ Following criticism and ridicule from Bonn, the SED later attempted to justify these changes, arguing that, 'We did not replace the *Deutschlandsender* with the "Voice of the GDR" because the word "Germany" disturbed us. Like the termination of broadcasts by the forces' channel, this step was more an expression of the fact that we do not want to interfere in the internal affairs of the FRG.'²³² The following February, the television corporation '*Deutscher Fernsehfunk*' became '*Fernsehen der DDR*.'

In May 1972, Honecker himself suggested that the *Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (DAW) should be renamed to express 'the increased social standing of the academy in the GDR.' As a result, it became the *Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* (AdW) in September. This made sense since it was not a pan-German institution. The ruling council of the Academy stated, 'This new name is in accordance with the social developments of recent years.' According to a report of a plenary session of the academy, 'The discussion expressed the great duty towards socialist society that the Academy has taken on with its new name....'²³³ In some cases, the renaming of institutions was also an opportunity for 'de-Ulbrichtisation,' for example, the '*Deutsche Akademie der Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft Walter Ulbricht*,' dropped both the adjective 'German' and the name of the man it had originally honoured.²³⁴ In connection with this, academic manuscripts were even scrutinised before publication to check that the word 'Germany' did not crop up too often.²³⁵

The hard-line Interior Minister, Friedrich Dickel, decreed that on official forms and documents such as passports, etc., people should give their nationality as 'GDR,' which particularly enraged the Sorb minority. As was typical of the power structure in the GDR, those

²³¹ ZPA IV A2/2028/42

²³² ZPA IV 2/1/460 (12 October 1972)

²³³ ZPA IV B2/904/43

²³⁴ Krisch, 'Official Nationalism,' p. 116.

²³⁵ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

at middle levels tended to enforce the Party line particularly rigidly, always fearful of antagonising their superiors, hence they strictly implemented the ban on the word 'German.' Even the *Hotel Deutschland* in Leipzig was renamed *Interhotel Leipzig*. From January 1974 East German vehicles were obliged to carry the letters 'DDR' in place of 'D,' and from September^{new}, bank notes were inscribed with '*Mark der DDR*' in place of '*Mark der deutschen Notenbank.*'

Such policies confused and alienated the population, who wondered whether or not they were still German. They discredited the regime and reduced the level of popular support that was essential for the stability and success of the state. Furthermore, it handed the Federal Republic a great propaganda victory and reinforced the latter's claim to sole representation of the German nation, since the SED appeared to be rejecting German culture, literature, music, tradition etc. Finally, in spite of the political divide, the populations of the two German states were still related to each other, and not surprisingly considered themselves and their relatives 'over there' to share the same nationality, namely German, and to deny this fact laid the leadership open to ridicule. It was also hard to deny that the populations of the GDR and FRG both spoke German, although some people did claim that a *Sprachspaltung* had developed, though in practice, this seems to have been confined to political vocabulary.²³⁶ Consequently, the significance of the common language would simply have to be played down. All in all, it was clear that this extreme form of *Abgrenzung* would soon have to be modified.

All the major theorists concerned with the concept of the nation in the GDR found the policy of 'de-Germanisation' absurd. Alfred Kosing privately thought that the leadership was making itself a laughing stock, appearing to have completely lost touch with

²³⁶ See Elise Riesel, Der Stil der deutschen Alltagsrede (Moscow, 1964), p.7, cited in Erhard Hexelschneider and Erhard John, Kultur als einigendes Band? (East Berlin, 1984), p. 66; Schweigler, National Consciousness, pp. 46, 79; Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, vol. 2, pp. 1261-1265.

reality.²³⁷ So why did they do it? One could perhaps argue that the SED's apparent wish to sever its ties with the German nation was a sign that the leadership was now sufficiently confident to present the GDR purely as a socialist state, that no longer relied^{on} its German credentials to prove its legitimacy. However, the fact that it later reversed this policy and began to draw heavily on what were regarded as progressive elements of German history seems to disprove this theory. A more likely explanation is that the leadership was insecure and still saw 'Germanness,' that is to say, the 'Germanness' shared by both the GDR and the Federal Republic, as a threat to the legitimacy of the former, and a propaganda weapon for the latter.

In retrospect, we can see that the German connection clearly did undermine the GDR, but the leadership of the SED was naive to believe that the removal of words would be sufficient to break the subjective bond of German nationhood felt by the population. Evidently it was perceived by some members of the leadership as a quick solution, with no regard for the consequences. However, there was no question of changing the name of the state, (although usually only the abbreviated form 'DDR' was used in order to play down the adjective 'German'), nor of the Party, which was, after all, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, nor of the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. The inconsistent implementation of this policy proves they wanted to keep the historic link when it suited them. Furthermore, the fact that the word 'German,' still sometimes cropped up in speeches, especially with reference to 'the two German states,' revealed continuing uncertainties even among the leadership itself.

Unfortunately a decision by the ruling elite, explicitly ordering the deletion of the words 'German' and 'Germany' is not to be found, but we can be sure that the idea must have originated from Honecker's close circle and that it had his blessing. Also, we now know enough about how the Politburo functioned not to expect any debate, let alone disagreement with a policy suggested or at least approved by the First Secretary. Since Honecker was himself

²³⁷ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

born on West German soil, it is rather puzzling that he advocated a policy of 'de-Germanisation,' though it may have been an extreme demonstration of his commitment to socialist internationalism. The most likely explanation is that his reasons were purely political. The idea probably originated from leading functionaries who were naive enough to believe that a complicated issue involving the deep-rooted, subjective feelings of the population, could be solved with word games. Alfred Kosing does not believe Kurt Hager was responsible because he was too intelligent and is known to have derided it, saying 'We are not Zulus, we are still Germans.' Unfortunately he lacked the courage to challenge Honecker on the issue.²³⁸ Jürgen Hofmann suspects that it may have originated ^{with} Joachim Herrmann in the Propaganda Department, a close colleague of Honecker, and certainly no intellectual. Others may also have had reservations about it, but as usual, they were silenced by the ever present East German virtue of obedience to authority.²³⁹

b) Public Opinion and Propaganda

In the early 1970s, the Party leadership still took the trouble to monitor public opinion regarding the state of the nation, and more specifically, whether or not the population identified with the socialist nation in the GDR. As before, this was not because they wanted to incorporate the views of the population into the new concept but in order to identify areas where the Party's message was not getting across and where propaganda needed to be improved. Presumably if people did identify with the socialist nation, they would also accept the GDR as their nation-state and be more willing to help increase its prosperity and international standing, instead of looking westwards and dreaming of German reunification. During the negotiations with Bonn, which culminated in the Basic Treaty of 1972, this was particularly important, since there was a risk that people would interpret the negotiation process as a sign that the two states were growing together, whereas the regime saw it as proof that the two were

²³⁸ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

²³⁹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

now totally separate. Also, any indications of dissent might be noticed by the outside world, which could damage the SED's claim to legitimacy and thus discourage other states from recognising the GDR. A further reason why public opinion was monitored was that in the Politburo, agitation and propaganda was the responsibility of Werner Lamberz, who recognised that in order to produce successful propaganda, it was necessary to know what people actually thought. Unfortunately other leading functionaries preferred not to know, and as a result, the reputable Institute for Public Opinion Research (IMF) was immediately abolished following Lamberz' sudden death in 1978.

Information about popular opinion was gathered in several different ways. Firstly, secretaries from each administrative district or *Bezirk* would regularly send reports of views articulated by the public to the Agitation Department. Secondly, polls were undertaken by the IMF and also by the Academy for Social Sciences, which concentrated on historical consciousness among the population. Thirdly, discussion at academic institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences, was monitored and reported back to the Department of Sciences every month.

Research revealed a serious degree of incomprehension regarding the nation following the Eighth Party Conference. An opinion poll conducted by the IMF in workplaces in East Berlin in January 1972 asked respondents whether they would agree that the FRG was 'an imperialist foreign country' (*imperialistisches Ausland*) and that there was no longer a unitary German nation. 54.6% disagreed and only 31.6% agreed, while 13.8% could not give an answer. For some reason, only 37% disagreed and 49.1% agreed in the provinces, but even so, these were not the results that the leadership wanted to hear.²⁴⁰ Reports from the regions immediately after the Party Conference indicated that although many people accepted the existence of two German states, they failed to see how this affected the unitary German nation.²⁴¹ An assessment of 'the effectiveness of political and ideological work

²⁴⁰ ZPA 14350

²⁴¹ ZPA IV A2/902/158

to secure socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism in the consciousness of the workers' by the Academy of Sciences acknowledged that with regard to the National Question, people over-valued historic, linguistic, and cultural factors and failed to appreciate the significance of class.²⁴²

Another report stated that many Party members had not given sufficient thought to Honecker's answer to the National Question and therefore failed to understand it, which resulted in uncertainties such as whether one should speak of a divided German nation, what a nation actually was, and whether the struggle to unify Germany would be resumed. Some Party members were apparently addressing the question of whether a unitary nation still existed by simply applying Stalin's already discredited criteria, while ignoring so-called 'historic developments.'²⁴³ The opinion polls into historic consciousness conducted by the AfG revealed that even people who accepted the GDR as their fatherland failed to understand why the GDR needed to cut itself off from the Federal Republic.²⁴⁴

Such doubts were not confined to the working-class. Reports from the Humboldt University in East Berlin from 1971 confirmed that 'all-German illusions' persisted, particularly among non-Party members, who were always singled out in such reports.²⁴⁵ The following year, it was noted that while students generally no longer found the question of a unitary German nation relevant, they had difficulty giving a Marxist-Leninist explanation as to why this was so.²⁴⁶ In 1973, some students were still asking whether the common past shared by the two German states should be considered, while others thought that the discussion about the nation should cease until the opportunity arose to construct a unitary socialist German nation.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, a major investigation conducted for the Department of Sciences

²⁴² ZPA IV B2/904/13

²⁴³ IV A2/903/72

²⁴⁴ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1992.

²⁴⁵ ZPA IV B2/904/20

²⁴⁶ ZPA IV B2/904/20

²⁴⁷ ZPA IV B2/904/20

criticised the 'bourgeois ideas about the nation' which prevailed at the Academy of Sciences, apparently as a result of 'insufficient attention to the theory of Marxist-Leninist tradition.' It stated that emotions were getting in the way, and some academics were trying to work out a definition of a nation that was 'politically value-free,' hence they uncritically accepted the 'social-democratic motto. "We are all Germans."²⁴⁸ It was also noted that some academics and researchers at the Academy still adhered to a traditional bourgeois concept of the nation, while others mixed bourgeois and Marxist concepts, though it was hoped that these misconceptions could be dispelled. Several members were also raising awkward (though valid) questions such as why there were nations within socialism at all, and why it was necessary to discuss the topic, now that the Federal Republic had more or less recognised the GDR. Some scientists had even suggested that the socialist nation was just a temporary and functional concept, specifically designed to reinforce the SED's policy of *Abgrenzung*,²⁴⁹ which was basically true of course.

Research also revealed that the purge of the word 'German' had not altered the self-perception of the population as the regime had hoped. The virtual ban on the word was in fact more likely to turn people against the regime because they felt that their nationality was being taken away from them. This was especially true of the Sorbs, who were afraid of being forced to become simply 'citizens' of the GDR' along with everyone else. Also, people did not understand why the border to Poland was open, but not to the Federal Republic since they still believed 'We are all Germans.' Members of the Academy of Sciences wondered why the word 'Germany' was suddenly taboo, but also noticed how inconsistent the purge was.²⁵⁰ While many institutions were renamed, *Deutsche Post*, *Deutsche Reichsbahn* and *Neues Deutschland* remained unchanged, (though not for long in the case of the ~~former~~^{first of these}). Even the need to change the name of the Academy itself to *Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* was questioned by some

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(again, by non-Party members in particular), for 'there are still enough other areas where the word "German" occurs, such as "*Deutsche Reichsbahn*," etc., and one should observe tradition.' Students at the Humboldt University were continuing to ask questions such as 'What is a German?' The case of a group of students who were punished for singing the '*Deutschlandlied*,' '*Die alten Germanen*,' and '*Kurfürst Friedrich von der Pfalz*' during a party in a hall of residence illustrates just how far the 'de-Germanisation' campaign was taken. They were reported by an FDJ official, who claimed to have dutifully challenged them regarding the content of the songs.²⁵¹

One event that warrants attention due to its impact on popular opinion is the negotiation and eventual signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972, which defined the basis of the relationship between the two German states. The treaty was agreed after 60 meetings between the two sides and over a thousand hours of negotiation.²⁵² Exactly why the SED agreed to negotiate at all is open to speculation. Four reasons have been identified: firstly, the desire for international recognition and greater access to world markets; secondly, Soviet pressure; thirdly, ~~due to~~ increasing West German intrusions into the Eastern Bloc; and fourthly, as a result of an increase in the regime's confidence in the socialist mentality of East German citizens.²⁵³ With the signing of the Basic Treaty, the Federal Republic had almost recognised the GDR, but not quite, hence Honecker could claim that it more or less had, while Bonn could claim that a special relationship still existed. The SED's chief negotiator, Dr. Michael Kohl, adhered to the line on the National Question articulated by Honecker at the Eighth Party Conference as the basis for his arguments, and dismissed Bonn's attempts to take advantage of the SED's earlier pro-unification stance.²⁵⁴ While details of the negotiations and the resulting treaty have been adequately described elsewhere,²⁵⁵ the accompanying

251 ZPA IV B2/904/29

252 Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p. 277.

253 Identified by Pletsch, 'The Socialist Nation,' p.344.

254 Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p. 27.

255 For details see Kupper, 'Political Relations,' pp.298-308; Zieger, *Die Haltung*, pp. 141-158.

'Letter on German Unity' from the West German government warrants attention.

During negotiations, Honecker had stated clearly that the GDR would not sign a treaty which made reference to the nation or to reunification. Consequently, Bonn attached a letter which stated that the German question remained open, that the treaty did not amount to diplomatic recognition of the GDR as a foreign country, and that the question of citizenship had not been settled.²⁵⁶ As a result, the SED could later argue that, 'No mention is made of the unity of the nation or the unity of Germany or of Germany as a whole in the treaty, or in a supplementary document. That corresponds to historic fact and to the line that was formulated by the Eighth Party Conference.'²⁵⁷ The acceptance of permanent representations and not proper embassies was officially explained as 'in the interest of a constructive outcome of the negotiations' and it was stated that the undermining of their tasks as diplomatic missions would not be permitted.²⁵⁸ Whether the Basic Treaty amounted to recognition by the Federal Republic or not hardly mattered to Honecker, since for him it was a means to an end, namely to achieve his ultimate objectives - international recognition and membership of the UN. According to some commentators, it was sufficient to make Honecker temporarily relax his policy of *Abgrenzung*,²⁵⁹ although as we shall see, the new constitution of 1974 reverted to a separatist line.

Although the SED leadership interpreted the Basic Treaty as proof that the two German states were entirely separate from each other, research showed that many East Germans not surprisingly interpreted it as a sign of rapprochement between the two states, and hoped that it might lead to greater things. During the negotiations, the SED's continuation of a policy of *Abgrenzung* caused confusion, since it seemed to contradict the aim of

²⁵⁶ Diemer, ed. *Kurze Chronik*, p.91.

²⁵⁷ Werner Lamberz, 16 November 1972, ZPA 11527.

²⁵⁸ Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p. 282-283.

²⁵⁹ McAdams, *East Germany*, p.147; interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

improving relations.²⁶⁰ Indeed, polls revealed that even those who accepted that a unitary German nation no longer existed did not understand the need for *Abgrenzung* or for a stronger bond with the Soviet Union.²⁶¹ The opinion poll from January 1972 mentioned earlier asked respondents whether the GDR should be more accommodating towards the FRG, to which 67% of respondents from East Berlin said yes. Furthermore, nearly 40% of respondents disagreed with the statement, 'Nothing binds us to the imperialist FRG, but everything binds us to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.' Finally, 50% agreed with the statement, 'Both states are inhabited by Germans and there are many family ties. That gives the relationship between the GDR and FRG a special character and one cannot speak of such a strict demarcation as exists between other states with conflicting social orders.' (Meanwhile, 22% were in complete agreement with *Abgrenzung*, and 20% totally against). However, the same questions provoked less extreme responses in provincial areas.²⁶² For a regime with a low level of tolerance for dissent, such figures were pretty grave. The establishment of permanent representations as opposed to embassies was naturally interpreted as a sign that a special relationship between the two states still existed.²⁶³

Not surprisingly, most people were not interested in Marxist-Leninist arguments as to why there was no longer one German nation or a special relationship, or why *Abgrenzung* was a necessary aspect of the class struggle. They were more concerned with the practical consequences that directly affected them, for example, their inability to visit relatives 'over there.' Many had hoped that the Basic Treaty would bring freedom to travel to the Federal Republic, but were to be disappointed because the Party soon found ways to reduce contact between the populations of both states, such as the dramatic increase in the minimum amount of money West Germans had to exchange to visit the GDR in

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November 1973. Clearly the leadership had very different reasons for celebrating the ratification of the Treaty to the population of the GDR and the West German government. However, in spite of the SED's claims to the contrary, the practical measures and regulations that do not usually exist between two states proved that their relationship was still far from ordinary.

Research also revealed yet another hindrance to the SED's propaganda campaign, namely that most East Germans thought that Brandt was basically a good chap, in spite of the SED's attempts to convince them otherwise. A report entitled 'The Ideological-Political Situation at the Humboldt University' acknowledged 'widespread illusions about Brandt and his policies,' and that the Party organisation had not yet succeeded in convincing people that the conflict with the Federal Republic was a class-conflict.²⁶⁴ In a note to Honecker regarding the opinion poll mentioned earlier, Hans Modrow, then head of the Agitation Department, specifically referred to the population's failure to recognise what the SED claimed were Brandt's true intentions,²⁶⁵ hence Honecker must have been aware of popular feeling. In 1972, Modrow also wrote to Lamertz, pointing out that compared to the previous year, there had been a marked increase in the percentage of people giving the answers the regime did not want to ^{hear} regarding the German Question. He said that the influence of 'the enemy's arguments' was reflected in increased illusions about Brandt, with only about half of respondents 'correctly' assessing the role of Brandt and of *Abgrenzung*, and an increase in the number of people unable to give an answer to such questions, which was a sign of widespread confusion.²⁶⁶ However, these were not only the views of working-class people. Members of the Academy of Sciences had apparently expressed the view that the Basic Treaty 'functioned as a chamber for an imaginary German unity,' that the alleviation of personal restrictions would lead to

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rapprochement, and that it would no longer be appropriate to speak of two German nations.²⁶⁷

Thus, in spite of the fact that a certain GDR-consciousness had developed, the negotiations and resulting treaty revived ideas of one German nation which arched over the two states like a huge umbrella, with the result that 1973 marked the 'high point of illusion' regarding the German nation.²⁶⁸ Although the treaty did pave the way for international recognition of the GDR, which had apparently revived the 'state consciousness of the citizens of the GDR,'²⁶⁹ this was no replacement for national consciousness, and the susceptibility of East Germans to the attractions of the Federal Republic was obvious, as was the need to make the GDR more attractive to its citizens, and to create a stronger emotional bond between citizen and state.

Another event which provoked all-German sentiment during this period was the 1972 Olympic games in Munich. The regime no doubt saw it as an opportunity for the GDR to prove itself on the world stage, to strengthen patriotism at home and to outshine the Federal Republic. (Normally it was forbidden to raise the flag of the GDR in the FRG, but Bonn had to make the games an exception). The fact that there were now two separate teams from the GDR and Federal Republic would be a clear sign to the rest of the world that they were separate states, (and in the eyes of the SED, two separate nations). According to the 'West Department,' 'The class conflict has reached such an extent that it is in principle no different to the military level.'²⁷⁰ But did the population share this view? Apparently not, since the Agitation Commission noted as common the view, 'Whether GDR or FRG - we're keeping our fingers crossed for all Germans and will celebrate every one of their victories,' and the belief that since both states had good chances of winning medals, if they had a united team, Germany could win the most medals overall. The

²⁶⁷ ZPA IV B2/904/13

²⁶⁸ According to Lamberz, ZPA IV 2/2033/24

²⁶⁹ ZPA IV 2/2033/24

²⁷⁰ ZPA IV A2/1002/14

games also raised the sensitive issue of who would be permitted to travel to Munich.²⁷¹

In summary, we can draw two conclusions from these reports of public opinion from the early 1970s. Firstly, that there was widespread confusion regarding the state of the German nation in spite of Honecker's hope that the issue was over and done with, and secondly, that the leadership was aware of this. Archive material shows that Honecker himself received and read regular reports on public opinion from Hans Modrow, thus he was personally aware of the level of incomprehension on this issue.²⁷² Unfortunately, however, the material collected only made the regime try harder to promote its own version of the socialist nation in the GDR, as opposed to accepting the will of the people. It was clear that people still wanted to be part of the German nation, even if they had come to terms with living in a socialist state. The SED was wasting its time claiming that the unitary German nation no longer existed or that the nation in the GDR was no longer German, when the opposite message was emanating from the Federal Republic, to which the majority continued to be bound via family ties.

The attempt to 'de-Germanise' the GDR was a very crass and simplistic attempt to propagate the notion of a socialist nation. The SED also launched a major campaign to get the basic idea across to the masses, which indicates how important it was that the new concept was accepted. The Department of Propaganda was in charge, assisted by the Department of Sciences on so-called 'ideological and theoretical questions.' A report from the Department for Propaganda stated,

'Particularly in this area, extensive theoretical and ideological work must be undertaken so that every citizen completely understands the class content of the national question, its historic development, the objective process of *Abgrenzung* by the socialist GDR from the imperialist FRG, leading to the formation and

²⁷¹ ZPA IV 2/2106/20; also ZPA IV B2/904/29

²⁷² ZPA 14350

development of a socialist nation on the soil of the GDR as a result of a hard and unavoidable class struggle spanning several decades.²⁷³

The development of the socialist nation in the GDR within the community of socialist nations and states was also to be emphasised. In November 1972, a conference was held on the 'Tasks of Agitation and Propaganda for the further Implementation of the Resolutions of the Eighth Party Conference,' organised by Werner Lamberz. The conference is interesting because there, problems arising from the propagation of the socialist nation were admitted. It was recognised that the concept of the socialist nation needed to be better explained and that insufficient theoretical work had been produced. For the first time it was acknowledged that the main hindrance to the effectiveness of propaganda was West German television. Apparently, it led to a blurring of the 'friend-foe image,' to an underestimation of the dangers of West German imperialism, to illusions concerning the true intentions of the SPD, especially regarding détente, to the return of thoughts of the unity of the German nation, and to hopes of a better understanding between the two states,^{and} of freedom to travel to the Federal Republic which would pave the way to reunification. This was apparently confirmed by frequent comments such as 'Brandt will manage it - Brandt will bring us reunification.' It was also acknowledged that West German television provoked illusions about a special relationship between the two states, and incomprehension regarding the need for *Abgrenzung*, which was particularly prevalent amongst people watching sport, who tended to see victories for West German athletes as 'our victories,' because 'We are all still Germans.'²⁷⁴

To counteract such thoughts, propaganda was devised to encourage alternative views such as, 'The socialist GDR is my fatherland and its prosperity depends on me, but also offers me permanent social and political security,' 'The future belongs to

²⁷³ ZPA IV A2/903/5

²⁷⁴ ZPA 11533

socialism,' and 'Whoever stands on the side of the Soviet Union is always the historic victor.' Propaganda would also need to turn the agreements between the GDR and Federal Republic to the SED's advantage. According to Lamberz,

'Tourism, family visits and other regulations take place not because we have given away part of our sovereignty or the democratic character of our society for the benefit of something or other common to us. Rather, it is because the FRG has had to recognise our sovereignty and independent development as a socialist state.... Even if Hans from the Heckert factory in Karl-Marx-Stadt and Fritz von Conti from Hanover visit each other, that does not alter any power relationships. Hans works in and for socialism, while Fritz remains exploited until the day when the West German working class liberates itself.²⁷⁵

However, from the report, it is clear that the problem was not just that people were still thinking in all-German terms, but that they were not convinced that socialism best served their interests, particularly when they could see the alternative on their television screens.

Events were organised by local branches of the SED, where socialist patriotism, proletarian internationalism and the socialist nation were addressed, in an attempt to immunise the population against 'West German imperialism.' Honecker sent top functionaries to such gatherings to represent and justify his stance, for example, Hermann Axen gave an important speech entitled 'The Eighth Party Conference on the Socialist Nation in the GDR' at a so-called 'theoretical conference' organised by the SED in Berlin in June 1973. That two years had already passed since the conference suggests that it was taking a long time for the population to get the message. Axen, who always took an interest in the issue, used many familiar arguments, for example, that the socialist nation was united, whereas bourgeois nations were divided by internal class antagonisms, and that the National Question was a class question. (Communists, he claimed, had

²⁷⁵ ZPA 11533

never concealed the fact that the solution of the National Question was subordinate to the interests of the revolution and the interests of socialism). Obviously aware of the awkward question of ethnicity, Axen said that ethnic characteristics should not be underestimated, but did not determine the nature of a nation or its socio-economic class structure.²⁷⁶

It is clear from the speech that the SED wanted to create what Axen actually called 'GDR consciousness' and to arouse patriotism, in spite of their claim to despise nationalism. But talk of the need for 'love of our socialist fatherland' and 'willingness to defend our homeland' all sounded pretty nationalistic, substituting the word 'socialist' in place of 'German.' Indeed, Axen claimed that national nihilism and cosmopolitanism were just as alien to the Party as bourgeois nationalism, and concluded, 'The rebirth of peoples that has been achieved under socialism, the development and flourishing of socialist nations and nationalities, and their success in all fields, gives rise to an upturn of national consciousness and strengthens national pride and patriotism.' The message was that socialist nationalism or patriotism was acceptable, but not German nationalism, especially since the former was supposedly linked to proletarian internationalism. However, Axen did also use the phrase 'socialist German nation state,' and referred to 'the progressive traditions of German history as a whole,' which highlighted the contradictions in the SED's arguments.²⁷⁷

However, the amount of attention paid to the nation in official propaganda compared to other issues should not be overestimated. It was very much a subject that Honecker wanted to sweep under the carpet so that he could concentrate on economic and social consolidation. Indeed, many theorists thought that the regime paid too little attention to it and just gave simplistic answers, which encouraged confusion. However, we can assume that popular acceptance of the socialist nation was important because the regime sought popular legitimacy ^{and} internal

²⁷⁶ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1687 (28/9 May 1973)

²⁷⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1687

stability and realised that people would work harder to strengthen the state if they felt allegiance to it.

c) Official Justifications for the New Line

Many functionaries and Party members judged the importance of an issue according to how often the First Secretary addressed it. Honecker's references to the German nation were usually brief and without detail, suggesting a reluctance on his part to address the issue at all, presumably because by doing so, he would acknowledge the existence of a problem that had allegedly been settled. For Honecker, the National Question was a class question and he hoped that everything tied up with the nation could be converted into aspects of the class struggle. The policy of strict *Abgrenzung* from the Federal Republic seemed to have paid off, since only two years into his leadership, he could boast that 82 states had established diplomatic relations with the 'socialist state of workers and farmers,' the GDR. Only at the end of 1974 did Honecker recognise that his virtual silence on this difficult subject had not erased it from people's minds, but instead had nurtured incomprehension.

The rare occasions when Honecker mentioned the topic attracted much coverage by the West German media, for example, his speech during an inspection of troops in Rügen in January 1972. There he stated,

There is no unity between the socialist GDR and the imperialist FRG and there can never be a unity..... Constant talk about the 'unity of the nation' does not change this. Moreover, it is an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the GDR.... The FRG..... is a foreign country, and furthermore, ~~she~~ is an imperialist foreign country.²⁷⁸

At a consultation meeting with local functionaries and members of the Central Committee in January 1973, Honecker also addressed the issue, this time quite extensively, apparently in response to

²⁷⁸ Zeiger, Die Haltung, p.137.

Brandt's recent governmental declaration. Again Brandt had put Honecker on the defensive by stating that it was not normal for a border to divide members of the same people (*Volk*).

According to Honecker, Brandt was 'intentionally overlooking the fact that it was not a case of a border dividing members of the same people, but one between sovereign states that were independent of each other and which had different social systems.' That, for Honecker, was the decisive factor. He added, 'the German bourgeoisie has always spoken about the unity of the nation when pursuing aggressive objectives.' Furthermore,

'At the centre of this policy of *'Annäherung'* during the past few years, stood the notion of the German nation, which apparently exists unchanged. In fact there are two German nations, the socialist one, or as they occasionally say in the West German press, the "GDR-nation," and the capitalist nation in the FRG.²⁷⁹

It is noticeable that he did not object to the term 'GDR-nation,' presumably because it implied acceptance that there were now not just two separate states on German soil, but also two separate nations. However, the problem of finding a replacement for the adjective 'German' remained. 'East German,' which was commonplace in the West was never accepted by the SED. Although Honecker claimed that 'the German Question' no longer existed, on this occasion, he still referred to 'both German states' and even 'two German nations,' which highlights a problem that remained unsolved, namely what had happened to everything German, now that the German nation apparently no longer existed.

Honecker's next reference to the nation occurred during the ninth session of the Central Committee in May 1973. The very fact that he returned to the subject, albeit dismissively, suggests that contrary to his claims and wishes, it was still an issue. He accused Bonn of trying to use the recent Basic Treaty to its advantage. Yet again he seemed to be responding to Brandt's government, which had justifiably accused the SED of trying to run away from their

²⁷⁹ ZPA IV 2/1/471 (25 May 1973)

shared culture, history and language. However, he had clearly not formulated the arguments he used himself, but instead adopted those of other functionaries such as Axen and Norden, which are discussed below. On the subject of the common German language, he borrowed Norden's argument that just because citizens of Switzerland, Austria, the GDR and Federal Republic all spoke German, it did not necessarily follow that they all belonged to the same nation. He stressed that it was not language and culture that had drawn a border between the GDR and Federal Republic, but their different, even conflicting social and political structures, adding that 'the common language cannot magically change this reality. Apart from that, such things in common have not been equated with a joint state or a joint nation for a long time.'²⁸⁰ However, he did acknowledge the fact that East Germans had the option of tuning in to West German television and radio if they wished, resulting in the need for more home-grown counter-propaganda, together with an improvement in programme quality.

Somewhat defensively, Honecker counteracted Bonn's accusations that the SED was trying to run away from their shared history, culture and language with the argument, 'German history was.... always a history of class struggles.' Furthermore, 'Today, the GDR is the state that embodies the best traditions of German history, the peasants' uprising of the Middle ages, the struggle of the revolutionary democrats in 1848, the German workers' movement founded by Marx and Engels, Bebel and Liebknecht, and the heroic acts of the anti-fascist resistance fighters.'²⁸¹ Presumably this was to counteract the Federal Republic's claims to be the only legitimate German state to emerge from the Nazi period. Also, the Basic Treaty had made the position of the GDR more secure, so Honecker could now afford to refer to the past without undermining the GDR. He even used the phrase 'the two *German* states' several times, for example, 'Thus today there are two German states that embody the essential contradiction of our time, the essential contradiction between capital and workers, and

²⁸⁰ Erich Honecker, 'Zügig voran bei der weiteren Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des 8. Parteitages,' Reden und Aufsätze, 12 vols. (East Berlin, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 239-242.

²⁸¹ Honecker, 'Zügig voran,' p.241

between imperialism and socialism.'²⁸² Finally, he criticised the Chinese leadership for believing in the idea of a unitary German nation and the possibility of reunification, and accused them of collusion with Bonn.²⁸³ However, somewhat disingenuously he added, 'In which form the peoples of Europe arrange their co-existence once Western Europe, including the FRG, has travelled down the road to socialism, only time will tell.'²⁸⁴

Much to the annoyance of theorists on the subject of the nation, most members of the Politburo followed Honecker's lead and avoided the subject. Those closest to the First Secretary, such as Günther Mittag and Joachim Herrmann, were hardly intellectuals and tended to adopt a purely pragmatic approach to such issues, rather than trouble themselves with theories and justifications. However, there were exceptions, in particular, Kurt Hager, Hermann Axen and Albert Norden, who put some flesh onto the bare bones of the new official position, though their arguments often sound decidedly contrived. The sudden increase in attention to the subject was undoubtedly caused by renewed hopes among the masses that the two German states would grow closer together as a result of the Basic Treaty. Consequently, a further blurring of the already fuzzy line between propaganda and academic work occurred. However, while top functionaries could ignore the work of academics if they wished, the latter ignored the former at their peril. Even so, they all had to adhere to the basic line expressed at the most recent Party conference in order to safeguard their positions and future careers.

This was particularly true of the head of the Department of Sciences, Kurt Hager, who was certainly one of the more intelligent members of the ruling elite, but had previously supported Ulbricht's line on the nation. Hager played a significant role due to his overall control of academic institutions, and via the Department of Sciences' Central Research Plan and consultations with those responsible for elaborating upon and propagating the

²⁸² Honecker, 'Zügig voran,' p.241.

²⁸³ ZPA IV 2/1/473 (26 May 1973)

²⁸⁴ Honecker, 'Zügig voran,' p.241.

official line. However, Hager had apparently rather carelessly commented that Honecker was an intellectual lightweight, which was conveyed to the latter by a third party. After this indiscretion, Hager did not dare to challenge Honecker, even though he must have been aware that the idea of a purely socialist nation was being taken to ridiculous lengths. Certain academics found such cowardice unforgivable for a man of Hager's intelligence.²⁸⁵ However, his opinion of Honecker was not totally unfounded, hence the latter needed experienced, educated people like Hager to flesh out policies. Due to the power structure within the Department, Hager's deputies rigidly enforced the line to which he himself was obliged to adhere, which placed great restraints on the work of theorists, and resulted in the reproduction of the views and mistakes of the leadership.

In a speech on the tasks of social scientists following the conference, Hager was the first leading functionary to elaborate on the concept of the socialist nation. He claimed that far from being eternal and unchanging, nations were products of social developments and the class struggle. After all, as Marx, Engels and Lenin had stated, the socialist revolution would lead to the renewal of all forms of existence in human society. Hager went on to list the main characteristics of the socialist nation: state power in the hands of the working class and their allies; socialist means of production; socialist thinking and action; and the bond with the Soviet Union and other socialist states. The GDR was described as the 'socialist nation-state' that was sovereign and inviolable, and the only mention of the word 'German' was with reference to the Federal Republic's 'national demagoguery' and 'ideological subversion,' demonstrated by her attempts to spread rumours about the continued existence of a unitary German nation. The implications for academia were made clear:

'The Eighth Party conference of the SED orientates the theoretical and ideological work of social scientists towards a convincing debate with bourgeois nationalism. Next to anti-communism, nationalism is

²⁸⁵ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

the other main strand of the struggle by West German imperialism against socialism in the GDR.²⁸⁶

A draft version of a speech by Hager to functionaries in Brandenburg in September 1971 stated, 'It must not be forgotten that for Marxist-Leninists, the socialist nation is not the ultimate goal. The flourishing of socialist nations is logically accompanied by their growing closer together and in the long term will lead to their merging together.'²⁸⁷ This was a permanent dilemma for both functionaries and theorists, but the fact that it was removed from the final version suggests that Hager realised it would be going too far.

One prominent functionary who had been critical of Ulbricht's line on the nation for several years was Albert Norden. His ideas first appeared in a book entitled 'Questions in the Fight against Imperialism,' and subsequently cropped up in numerous speeches and articles made by himself and others, including Honecker. Norden adopted Marx and Engels' idea that by taking over the leadership of a nation, the proletariat would become the national class and therefore would itself constitute the nation. Correspondingly, since power was said to be in the hands of the working class in the GDR, they and their allies had created a socialist nation-state and themselves constituted the nation.²⁸⁸ He claimed that economic and social factors defined a nation, not the factors previously identified by Stalin, and in any case, the absence of a common German territory and common economy, the differences in the psychological and moral characteristics of the populations of the two states, in their lifestyle and way of thinking, and the lack of common contemporary culture disproved the claim that the unitary German nation still existed. Even a

²⁸⁶ Kurt Hager, 'Die entwickelte sozialistische Gesellschaft, Aufgaben der Gesellschaftswissenschaften nach dem 8. Parteitag,' Einheit 26 (1971): p. 1231.

²⁸⁷ ZPA IV A2/2024/55

²⁸⁸ Albert Norden, 'Zwei deutsche Nationalstaaten,' Deutschland Archiv 5 (1973): p. 417.

shared history apparently no longer united them, due to their different interpretations of it.²⁸⁹

Norden considered the idea that a common language was an indicator of nation, but dismissed it, since the members of several different countries spoke German.²⁹⁰ After all, no-one would suggest that all English or Spanish native speakers around the world should form one nation, so why should this be the case for all German native speakers? According to Norden,

'With reference to this argument of the common German language - it is well known that the Austrians also speak German, and the people in large parts of Switzerland, Luxembourg and Eastern France too. With this argument of a common language, one comes dangerously close to the greater German concept of Hitler, who justified his first annexations with the need for all German speaking people to belong together in one state. But the Russian speaking workers of Moscow, the English speaking miners of Scotland, the French speaking work force at Renault, and Italian farm labourers are a thousand times closer to us than the German speaking Messrs Siemens, Abs and Krupp.²⁹¹

~~Norden used the same argument on numerous occasions:~~

~~'Just because Messrs Flick, Abs and Siemens spoke German, are the workers supposed to form a nation with them? Hitler and Himmler also spoke German and murdered hundreds of thousands of German speaking communists, social democrats and progressive members of the bourgeoisie.'²⁹²~~

²⁸⁹ Albert Norden, Fragen des Kampfes gegen den Imperialismus, (East Berlin, 1972), pp. 22-23. Cited in Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, vol. 2, pp. 924-926.

²⁹⁰ Norden, Fragen des Kampfes, pp. 22-23.

²⁹¹ Albert Norden, Fragen des Kampfes gegen den Imperialismus, speech given at the Partei Hochschule 'Karl Marx,' July 1972, cited in Deutschland Archiv 4 (1972): p. 122. See also Norden, Fragen des Kampfes, p. 23.

~~²⁹² ZPA J IV 2A/1425 (3 March 1970)~~

While he did have a point, by insisting that nations could be defined in purely objective terms, Norden neglected the subjective aspects which continued to be a significant component of the national consciousness of the citizens of the GDR.

The question of the so-called ethnic factors and their relationship to social and economic factors was tackled by Hermann Axen, the Politburo member responsible for overseas affairs, in a mass-produced booklet entitled 'The Development of the Socialist Nation in the GDR,'²⁹³ which was based on his speech at the Party's theoretical conference mentioned earlier. Until the bitter end, Axen adhered to the line that he had written for Honecker's speech at the Eighth Party Conference, and only admitted that he might have got it slightly wrong after the 1989 revolution.²⁹⁴ In the booklet, Axen attempted to make use of classic works of Marxism-Leninism to support the SED's claim that a socialist nation was developing in the GDR, which at times sounds somewhat contrived. Here and on several other occasions, he argued that the solution of the National Question was subordinate to the interests of the revolution and of socialism: 'What we call "national" (*das Nationale*) does not stand above the class struggle - instead class relations and the class struggle determine the nature of the development of the nation and the national question.'²⁹⁵

His arguments were in stark contrast to those of the 1960s. The development of two separate nations was now portrayed as an inevitable consequence of the division of Germany into two states. Gone were the references to the bond of the working class on both sides of the inner-German border and their task of reuniting what imperialism had divided, since as far as the GDR was concerned, the National Question had been settled. In retrospect it seems ironic that Axen (and others) pointed to the Soviet Union as a shining example of how national problems could only be overcome via 'the solution of the social question by the working class,'²⁹⁶ in

²⁹³ Hermann Axen, Zur Entwicklung der Sozialistischen Nation in der DDR, (East Berlin, 1973) p.16.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 21 July 1993.

²⁹⁵ Axen, Zur Entwicklung, p. 18.

²⁹⁶ ZPA IV 2/2035/170 (Büro Axen)

view of the barbaric methods used to achieve this, and the fact that they ultimately failed, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union and recent ethnic conflicts show.

Turning to the question of so-called 'ethnic factors', Axen accused the West Germans of 'bourgeois nationalism' and 'neo-revanchism', manifested by their attempts to use these factors to prove that a unitary German nation still existed.²⁹⁷ These 'ethnic factors' included language, way of life, traditions, and customs, which originated long before the establishment of capitalist nations. He stressed that, 'The classic ^{writers} of Marxism-Leninism always understood "national" to be a dialectical unity of social, economic, class-based, historical and ethnic factors, but as a unity in which economic and social relations, and above all, class, takes priority.'²⁹⁸ Although he said Marxist-Leninists did not, indeed should not underestimate such ethnic factors, 'they do not determine the nature of the nation and its social, economic and class-based structure.'²⁹⁹

The common language was a particular problem, firstly because it was hard to deny (though some functionaries tried to), and secondly because it was considered important by Engels, Stalin and Lenin. Thus while Axen admitted that Lenin had attached great importance to 'the unity of language' as a prerequisite for the trade that would facilitate the victory of capitalism over feudalism, he had apparently always been aware of the primary role of social factors in the formation of nations.³⁰⁰ Like Norden, Axen also took advantage of the numerous examples of separate nations who shared a common language to support his argument that they did not automatically have to form a unitary nation, not even if they had similar economic and political systems:

The historic fact of the existence of the socialist GDR and the capitalist FRG differentiates these two German-speaking states according to class, and

²⁹⁷ Axen, Zur Entwicklung, p. 26.

²⁹⁸ Axen, p. 15.

²⁹⁹ Axen, p. 15.

³⁰⁰ Axen, p. 15.

therefore in a more principled way than is the case between the FRG and other German-speaking states, for example, between the FRG and Austria.³⁰¹

However, in case people did not accept the argument that ethnic factors did not determine nations, he added that they too would gradually evolve and change as a result of the political and social transformation in the GDR.³⁰² Finally Axen refuted Bonn's accusation that the socialist nation in the GDR was *geschichtslos*, or lacked a history, describing it as firmly rooted in the history of the German people, and by implication, legitimate.³⁰³ However, like other functionaries including Honecker, he was inconsistent in his use of the adjective 'German'.

Few other members of the Politburo attempted to clarify the concept of the socialist nation, since their leader clearly did not want it to become a high-profile issue. However, so long as Bonn used the alleged existence of the German nation to justify its refusal to recognise the GDR as a separate sovereign state, the subject could not be ignored. The most common arguments used can be summed up as follows: the unity of the German nation had not been written off at the Eighth Party Conference because it had already ceased to exist long before. Instead, a socialist nation was developing in the GDR, in stark contrast to the internally divided bourgeois nation in the Federal Republic. The National Question was portrayed as a 'class question', as Marx and Engels had claimed, but in reality, the class struggle in the Federal Republic, and what had previously been portrayed as the 'national task of the German working class', had been given up in favour of *Abgrenzung*, once the two had become incompatible. One could almost say that the leadership of the SED had abandoned the West German proletariat in favour of the interests of the GDR, in other words, they had put their own state before proletarian solidarity, and accepted the notion of a separate 'GDR-nation'. Consequently,

³⁰¹ Hermann Axen, 'Zwei Staaten - zwei Nationen; Deutsche Frage existiert nicht mehr.' Deutschland Archiv 5 (1973): p. 415; Axen, Zur Entwicklung, p.24.

³⁰² ZPA IV 2/2035/170

³⁰³ Helmut Meier, in a review of Hermann Axen's, 'Zur Entwicklung der Sozialistischen Nation in der DDR,' Einheit 28 (1973): p. 1378.

the West German working class was rarely mentioned, presumably to avoid complicating the issue with the idea of a unitary German proletariat. They themselves had to settle the as yet unresolved National Question there.³⁰⁴ In the GDR at least, the 'National Question, in the sense of the historic mission of the working class,' had apparently been resolved.³⁰⁵

Functionaries also argued that talk in Bonn about a unitary German nation was just an attempt to undermine the GDR as a sovereign state, to dissuade third states from recognising her, and to block her acceptance into the UN.³⁰⁶ According to *Neues Deutschland*,

In the FRG, demagogic, nationalistic propaganda is being conducted around the 'unity of the nation.' The conjuring up of 'common' traditions, the flogging to death of the unscientific concept of the 'unitary *Kulturnation*,' the call to mobilise all 'mental and spiritual forces' for the preservation of one nation, until a solution 'in freedom' is possible - these are all attempts to sustain the fiction of a unitary nation, to obscure the conflict between socialism and capitalism, to deny the the objective process of the development of a socialist nation in the GDR, and to win ideological influence over the workers in the GDR.³⁰⁷

Even if ethnic similarities did exist, a fact that could hardly be denied, it was emphasised that they paled into insignificance compared with 'objective' factors, such as social, economic and political factors, which, it was claimed, ultimately determined the character of a nation. All in all, the leadership left many questions unanswered. Though they had plenty of arguments to support the view that the unitary German nation no longer existed, they said little about the actual characteristics of the socialist nation in the GDR - that task was left to social scientists and philosophers.

³⁰⁴ ZPA NL281/85

³⁰⁵ 125th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, *Neues Deutschland*, 15 March 1973,

³⁰⁶ Hermann Axen, ZPA IV 2/2035/167

³⁰⁷ *Neues Deutschland*, 15 March 1973.

d) Scholarly Activity and the Socialist Nation

The case of the National Question demonstrates how the political agenda shaped the research agenda for academics in the GDR. In spite of the lack of theoretical debate before the Eighth Party conference, a few days afterwards, it was decided that the Department of Sciences should consult social scientists from Party institutions, the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* (AdW), and universities to discuss the 'tasks of the social sciences' arising from the conference.³⁰⁸ Such consultations highlight the fact that these institutions were seen by the Party leadership as having an important role to fulfil in the class struggle, as opposed to being centres for independent and objective scholarship. A month later, the Secretariat of the Politburo examined the implications of the conference for both theoretical research and for agitation and propaganda - areas which were closely linked in the GDR. The Department of Sciences and social science institutions were to be responsible for working out 'problems of the further evolution of the socialist nation in the GDR.' The Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Arts and artists' organisations were made responsible for 'the development of socialist national culture in the GDR as an objective process of *Abgrenzung* from the imperialist philistinism of the Federal Republic.'

A publication plan for theoretical articles evaluating the Eighth Party Conference in the central press organs addressed 'the class content of the National Question and the role of nationalism in the ideological subversion of imperialism.' The plan stated that in articles,

the nationalistic theories of the Federal Republic's imperialism - "inner-German relations" and the "unity of the nation" - are to be exposed, and the objective process of *Abgrenzung* that is taking place between the socialist GDR and the imperialist FRG, the class character of the National Question, the inevitable demise of the bourgeois nation and the rise of the

³⁰⁸ ZPA J IV 2/3A/2035 (25 June 1971)

socialist nation are to be worked out. Thereby it should be clearly expressed that between the GDR and the FRG, only relations of peaceful coexistence like those between sovereign states with different social orders are possible.³⁰⁹

The Department of Sciences' 'Central Research Plan for the Marxist-Leninist Social Sciences,' which was the result of consultation with the directors of the leading institutions and chairpersons of academic councils, appeared in January 1972. It stated that the task of social science research was 'to develop the theoretical content of the Eighth Party Conference and to make it usable in the work of the Party.' Consequently, views held earlier would have to be corrected. Though the debate with bourgeois imperialism, and in particular, the struggle against anti-communism and nationalism was encouraged, the amount of attention paid to such issues compared to others was not great, and there was no direct mention of the topic of the socialist nation. This omission is rather hard to explain. Maybe so soon after the Party conference the shortcomings of the over-simplified concept had not been fully realised. Or maybe Honecker's comment that history had decided the National Question had been taken quite literally.

Whatever the reasons, there were soon enough indicators to prove that this was not the case and that clarification was necessary. Theorists had believed for several years that it was necessary to consider the effects of the existence of two German states on the German nation and to offer the population something positive to counteract the negative effects of years of *Abgrenzung*. They resented the fact that they had not been consulted before major policy changes regarding the concept of the nation were announced, although it was not unusual for the leading elite only to make use of the enormous intellectual potential housed in the state academies after the announcement of a change of policy which then needed to be justified. Furthermore, at a major conference on socialism and the nation in Moscow in October

³⁰⁹ ZPA J IV 2/3A/2049 (28 July 1971)

1973, the East German delegation merely consisted of functionaries who had previously paid little attention to the topic.³¹⁰

From 1971, theorists suddenly had to explain why the nation in the GDR was just socialist and no longer German, although the author has the impression that none of them personally agreed with this. Even so, when Jürgen Hofmann examined the development of the concept of the nation in the GDR, he found no evidence of protest from intellectuals.³¹¹ It was this shift from 'socialist German nation' to simply 'socialist nation' that was the primary cause of incomprehension among the population at large, especially since the aim of a united socialist Germany, led by the working class, had been drummed into them for over 20 years.

However, several factors hindered scholars' ability to devise new theories freely and objectively. Firstly, there were the general control mechanisms described earlier which prevented deviation from the official line.

A second factor was the obligation to conform to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the latest ideas from the Soviet Union. However, in spite of the fact that Soviet material was required reading for East German academics in all subject areas,³¹² relatively few references to theoretical work on the nation by Soviet academics are to be found, and tend only to be concerned with Marxist-Leninist theory about nations in general.³¹³ This was presumably because the amount of ideas that East German theorists could borrow from their Soviet counterparts was limited, due to the fact that the GDR and the Soviet Union were attempting

³¹⁰ Papers from the conference were published in Sozialismus und Nation, (East Berlin, 1976).

³¹¹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

³¹² For example, the members of the AfG consulted P.N. Fedosseyev, Leninism and the National Question in the Current Circumstances (Moscow, 1972), (ZPA NL182/922), and Jürgen Hofmann mentions Bromlei and Kaltachtschjan. Interview with Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

³¹³ Kosing discusses many throughout Nation in Geschichte, for example, Burmistrowa, Kulitschenko, Bromlei, Kaltachtschjan, Gleserman, and Dschandildin.

nation-building under very different and unique circumstances, i.e. the population of the former was just part of the previously unitary German nation, while that of the latter consisted of many different ethnic nations. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that Soviet theorists were interested in the German case. Theorists at the Academy for Social Sciences did have access to western publications and, although they were obliged to criticise people like Karl Deutsch, they did also gain ideas from such material.³¹⁴

The case of Alfred Kosing is typical of the situation for theorists working in this area at the time. He claims that he returned to the subject of the nation in response to 'extraordinarily muddled conceptions within the political leadership,'³¹⁵ and although he would certainly claim today that he did question the validity of the official line, this is not immediately apparent from his work. Like others, he could not contradict the line represented by Honecker at the Eighth Party Conference without jeopardising his career prospects. However, unlike the brief pronouncements of the leadership, he tried to ensure that his arguments were well founded if rather contrived, due to the need to adapt Marxist-Leninist principles to the unique East German situation. It was not the concept of the socialist nation itself that he objected to, but the fact that it was declared before it had been thoroughly thought out and was overtly political and lacking in historical foundation.³¹⁶ Nevertheless, due to the control mechanisms that governed academic activity, Kosing and others were obliged to insert quotes by the First Secretary, even if they considered them to be simplistic, if not totally ridiculous.³¹⁷

Apart from the speeches by functionaries which have already been mentioned, little was published on the subject of the socialist nation until 1974. Presumably this was due to lack of encouragement from above and the sensitive nature of the

³¹⁴ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

³¹⁵ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

³¹⁶ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

³¹⁷ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

subject. However, in 1974, an influential article by Kosing and the historian, Walter Schmidt, appeared in the journal *Einheit*, entitled 'The Formation of the Socialist Nation in the GDR', which noticeably contradicted Kosing's article in the same journal in 1962, which was examined in the second chapter.

In 1962, he had argued that the unitary German nation still existed, but at two different levels of development, and criticised the West German Karl Jaspers for suggesting that two separate nations were forming in the same way as had occurred in Germany and Austria.³¹⁸ Now he and Schmidt were almost agreeing with Jaspers, though using Marxist-Leninist criteria, arguing that a socialist nation existed in the GDR, while the old bourgeois nation continued in the Federal Republic, and that the two were totally irreconcilable. This division of the nation was portrayed as 'the result of bitter class conflicts between socialism and imperialism during the decades since the Second World War.' Apparently, by forming 'an imperialist separatist state', Bonn was entirely responsible for tearing apart the unitary German state, which resulted in the destruction of the unity of the nation, whereas the SED had campaigned for an 'anti-fascist, united, democratic German republic' for a decade.³¹⁹

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the article is the description of the factors which apparently determined the substance and character of the socialist nation in the GDR: socialism; socialist conditions of production; political power in the hands of the working class (under the leadership of their Marxist-Leninist party); the authority of Marxist-Leninist ideology; and integration into the community of socialist states, led by the Soviet Union.³²⁰ The removal of class antagonism within the nation was supposed to lead to friendly co-operation for the

³¹⁸ Alfred Kosing, 'Illusion und Wirklichkeit in der nationalen Frage,' *Einheit* 17 (1962): pp. 15-22.

³¹⁹ Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt, 'On the Evolution of the Socialist Nation in the GDR,' in Arthur W. McCardle and A. Bruce Boenau, eds., East Germany: a new German Nation under Socialism? (Lanham and London, 1984), pp.4-5.

³²⁰ Kosing and Schmidt, 'On the Evolution,' p.13.

common good and the homogenisation of thought, desires, actions and goals, while at the same time a convergence of socialist nations would occur.³²¹

To those of us unaccustomed to Marxist-Leninist definitions of what constitutes a nation, many of the arguments used by Kosing and Schmidt sound somewhat contrived and to have little to do with what we understand by the word 'nation.' The question of the 'Germanness' of the GDR continued to be a problem, and the authors used the adjective 'German' rarely and somewhat inconsistently. While they did not totally ignore the awkward question of ethnicity, to dismiss it as relatively insignificant compared with social factors was hardly a satisfactory explanation. Although we may accept the claim that the 'social-psychological components of our national life' were changing as a result of 'new economic, social, political and ideological conditions,'³²² the assertion that 'ethnic components' were also changing was dubious, and clearly an attempt to counteract the idea of a *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* linking the two German states, which had been advocated by Brandt. Even so, the fact that Honecker himself had recently raised the question of a future all-German socialist nation, in the (unlikely) event of a socialist transformation of the Federal Republic somewhat contradicted this.³²³ It implied that there was still a link between the two states after all, though maybe the very improbability of such a revolution taking place meant he could make such a comment, knowing that there was no risk involved.

It was also unclear what stage the socialist nation in the GDR had reached - whether it was established or still developing, although the authors seemed to be implying the latter. Certainly later articles tried to paint a more credible and realistic picture, making it clear that a new nation could not be created overnight. Finally, exactly what was meant by the convergence of socialist nations was not explained. According to the authors, with the further

³²¹ Kosing and Schmidt, pp.8-9.

³²² Kosing and Schmidt, p.11.

³²³ Kosing and Schmidt, p.12.

development of mature socialism and its gradual transition to communism, the specific importance of the international element increased, without pushing aside or even eliminating 'the national element.'³²⁴

Kosing now justifies his U-turn with the argument that by the early 1970s, the situation had changed to an extent that he could not have foreseen in 1962, in particular the further integration of the two German states into hostile alliances, and their consolidation as states with conflicting political and economic systems. Furthermore, it seemed as though the division had become a permanent reality, which was not the case ten years earlier. He says he wanted to reflect on the state of the nation to the best of his ability, even if that meant admitting he had previously been wrong. He still criticises Jaspers' logic for looking backwards into the past instead of looking at the current and potential development of the nation. In spite of the subsequent reunification of Germany, for some reason, Kosing does not claim to have been right in the first place, but instead blames the inner contradictions and weaknesses of the social system for the collapse of the GDR.³²⁵ Close associates suspect that he gave up his original theory very reluctantly,³²⁶ which seems to support the hypothesis that Kosing and other theorists were obliged to devise a justification for the new official line, however implausible it was, and even if this meant retracting a previous position.

The second edition of the *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* was published in 1973, and Kosing's entry for 'nation' was considerably altered. Gone was the reference to 'the German nation that is currently composed of the populations of two states,' the GDR as the representative of the entire German nation, and how the division could be overcome.³²⁷ Instead, the new edition stated,

³²⁴ Kosing and Schmidt, p.14.

³²⁵ Interviews with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 5 February 1993 and 7 July 1993.

³²⁶ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

³²⁷ Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1st ed., p.428.

Since the socialist and the bourgeois nation are based on conflicting social, political, economic and ideological foundations, there can be no unity of the nation between the GDR and the FRG, instead only a relationship of peaceful coexistence, the prerequisite for which is the diplomatic recognition of the GDR. The claims of an apparently still existing 'unity of the German nation' are directed against the unavoidable diplomatic recognition of the GDR, and are in pursuit of the goal of the subjugation of the masses of the GDR to the rule of the imperialist forces of the FRG.³²⁸

Stalin's definition of the general characteristics of a nation was still used, namely a common economy, territory, language, culture and social psychology, although he was not credited for the definition, and certain specific references to the German situation were omitted.³²⁹

Thus we have seen that although the notion of a socialist nation in the GDR could not be challenged, theorists did their best to justify it, as the Party required of them. In a report on research at the Academy for Social Sciences in 1972, the Department of Sciences concluded,

The Marxist-Leninist theory of the National Question and its usage at the Eighth Party Conference was adopted and applied to the history of the German people. Work was centred on the Marxist-Leninist conceptions of the emergence and development of the bourgeois German nation, and the findings about the formation of the socialist nation in the GDR, which in principle were worked out at the Eighth Party conference. In addition, the most recent Soviet discussion on the problem of the nation was assessed. As a result, the inseparable connection between the formation and development of nations, and the class struggle of the working class and working strata was

³²⁸ Karl-Wilhelm Frick, 'Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch politisch revidiert,' Deutschland Archiv 6 (1973): p.756. Kosing's contribution to another reference book, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, 8th ed., 2 vols. (East Berlin, 1971), is almost identical. Cited in Koenen, Nation und Nationalbewußtsein, pp.18-19.

³²⁹ Koenen, p.18.

made clear, and it was proved that the formation and development of both bourgeois and socialist nations is always to be seen as governed by historic and world-wide processes.³³⁰

Over the next few years, the subject rarely featured in reports. An assessment of the fulfilment of the tasks of the Central Research Plan recognised that the Academy for Social Sciences had achieved new insight into 'the dialectic of "national" and "international" in the policies of the SED and in the history of the GDR' and into 'the historical development of the National Question and the formation and evolution of the socialist nation in the GDR.' Furthermore,

Much attention was paid to the portrayal of the historic tradition and international character of the GDR's socialist national culture as well as to its role in the formation of the socialist nation..... In the field of historic research, knowledge about the history of the SED and the GDR, about the formation of the socialist nation in the GDR, and about the historic consciousness of the working class and their farming comrades has been deepened, and arguments against bourgeois historical accounts strengthened.³³¹

The Central Research Plan for 1976-80, drawn up in 1974, did not mention the concept of the nation in the GDR specifically, but instead concentrated on 'the prospects for the political, economic, ideological and cultural development of the peoples and states of the socialist community, the formation and development of socialist nations, and their further growing together,' and the relationship between 'national and international elements.'³³² However, reports from specific disciplines showed how the new line on the nation had far reaching consequences for many other areas of East German academia. In its report for 1973, the Council for Linguistic Research stated, 'The linguistic processes resulting from the transformation of the bourgeois nation into the socialist

330 ZPA IV B2/904/90

331 ZPA IV B2/904/90

332 ZPA IV B2/904/67

nation were emphasised as a topical and new problem for linguistics in the GDR '333

e) The New Constitution of 1974

One of the most illuminating examples of Honecker's leadership style, compared to that of his predecessor, was the revision of the constitution in 1974, and, more specifically, the way in which it was done. As we saw in the previous chapter, the original constitution of 1949 was changed in 1968 after consultation with the population, followed by a referendum, and resulted in significant changes to the section on the nation. This time, the leadership's intention to change the constitution was announced at the twelfth session of the Central Committee in July 1974. It had been drawn up by Honecker and a few of his close colleagues, and was then presented for ratification by the *Volkskammer* as a *fait accompli*. No academics were consulted, and according to Alfred Neumann, even the majority of the Politburo simply received the finished article.³³⁴ The result was the ultimate example of the purge of references to the German nation, even the word 'German' itself. In Article 1, the GDR was no longer a 'socialist state of the German nation', but simply a 'socialist state of workers and farmers'. The aim of overcoming the division of Germany in Article 8 was completely removed. Finally, the new Article 6 stressed that the GDR was 'for ever and irrevocably bound to the Soviet Union '³³⁵

Officially these amendments were justified by the tangible changes which had taken place in the GDR since the beginning of the decade, and by changes in her 'international relationships '³³⁶ The most obvious reason, however, was that the old constitution clearly contradicted Honecker's stance at the Eighth Party Conference, and also earlier statements - indeed, one wonders why it was not altered earlier. It is likely that this precise

³³³ ZPA IV B2/904/115

³³⁴ Interview with Alfred Neumann, Berlin, 4 May 1993.

³³⁵ Zeiger, Die Haltung, p.188-189.

³³⁶ Hofmann Ein neues Deutschland p.263

moment was chosen to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the founding of the GDR.³³⁷ In an extremely brief speech to justify the change, Honecker merely expressed the need to bring the constitution in line with 'the life and the level of political and social development of our socialist state of workers and farmers, and with the basic ideological position of our people.' Although certain specific articles were mentioned, no reason was given for the dramatic change to Article 8, and the only time Honecker used the word 'nation' was with reference to the socialist nations drawing closer together. The emphasis was placed on the GDR as a developed socialist society, though Honecker did add that its people were continuing the 'revolutionary traditions of the German workers' movement.'³³⁸

Undoubtedly there were also other, unstated reasons, for example, to counteract the effects of increased personal contact between East and West Germans following the Basic Treaty, and as a response to the West German Federal Constitutional Court's ruling that the treaty did not violate the idea of one German nation and the aim of reunification enshrined in the Basic Law.³³⁹ While it made sense to bring the constitution in line with Honecker's stance, the removal of the word 'German' provided ammunition with which the West German government could attack the SED, and which reinforced its claim to the ^{sole} ~~sole~~ right of representation of the German nation. It accused the SED of 'abdication from the nation,' 'taking flight from German history,' and of making the GDR a 'socialist non-entity.'³⁴⁰ The West German minister for Inner-German Relations stated that a nation could neither be founded nor abolished simply via a specification in the constitution.³⁴¹

³³⁷ ZPA IV B2/904/13

³³⁸ Erich Honecker, 'Errungenschaften und tiefgreifende Veränderungen im Leben des Volkes müssen in der Verfassung Ausdruck finden,' Rede zur Begründung des Gesetzes zur Ergänzung und Änderung der Verfassung der DDR, 27 September 1974, Reden und Aufsätze (East Berlin, 1976), vol. 3, pp. 105-110.

³³⁹ Zieger, Die Haltung der SED, p.187.

³⁴⁰ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.265

³⁴¹ Zieger, Die Haltung der SED, p.188.

Unlike in 1968, the public had no opportunity to participate in the drafting of the constitution and, not surprisingly, they wondered why. One probable reason was that the leadership knew that they would not have supported the removal of all references to the German nation.³⁴² Certainly reports of public reaction to the change seem to support this theory, and show that the notion of a purely socialist nation in the GDR was still causing problems, especially since the SED's previous adherence to the unity of the German nation had not been totally forgotten.³⁴³ At the Academy of Sciences, members were raising questions such as: Is the division of Germany now permanent? Why are efforts being made to reunite Korea but not Germany? Is there no longer a German nation? Are we still Germans? Do the two states not still have a great deal in common? Does the formation of the socialist nation in the GDR negate German history in its entirety?³⁴⁴ These were all valid questions for which the SED had failed to provide satisfactory answers - a situation which would have to be remedied, if the Party was to achieve what it had set out to do by denying the unity of the nation.

3) CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen how the SED attempted to enhance the legitimacy of the GDR and its right to international recognition via the claim that the population constituted a nation in their own right, which was socialist and completely separate from the bourgeois nation in the Federal Republic. Thus the long-standing notion of the national bond of the German working class had finally been abandoned. Political objectives clearly determined the official line on the state of the nation during this period, and theory had to be adapted accordingly.

However, the extreme concept of the non-German socialist nation in the GDR was domestically untenable and reinforced the Federal Republic's claim to be the legitimate representative of the German

³⁴² Zieger, p.190.

³⁴³ ZPA IV B2/904/21

³⁴⁴ ZPA IV B2/904/13

nation. The fact that the SED reversed its policy of 'de-Germanisation' the following year indicates that even they eventually realised that the policy was destructive and had the opposite effect to what was intended. What was required was an argument that would both avoid accepting West German claims that one German nation still existed, and a loss of face for the leadership. However, as we shall see, the ruling elite did not manage to find a way out by itself.

CHAPTER 5: THE 'SOCIALIST GERMAN NATION' - FROM CONSOLIDATION TO CRISIS

Clearly the concept of a socialist nation in the GDR that was no longer German was a desperate attempt to prove that nothing linked the state with its western neighbour, and consequently that the GDR was a legitimate entity in itself. It is hardly surprising that such a bizarre and sudden change was greeted with dismay by the population and mocked by the West German government. In the first section of the following chapter, we shall see how the SED was provided with a solution, or rather an 'ideological loophole'¹ by theorists via the distinction between nation, nationality and citizenship. As a result, the concept of a socialist nation in the GDR was replaced by the more credible 'socialist *German* nation.' This appeared to be the most acceptable solution: the SED was satisfied because the 'socialist German nation' was still socialist, while the population was relieved to know that it was still German. Therefore the Party believed that a *Nationskonzept* had finally been found which really would serve to legitimise the state, and thought (for the second time) that the National Question had been settled once and for all.

In the second section of this chapter we shall examine the consequences of the new concept. Firstly, the leadership's efforts to prevent the reopening of debate on the subject, now that an acceptable solution had apparently been found, and the futile attempts of theorists to keep the issue alive. Secondly, the SED's re-evaluation of the state's relationship to German history, which had been made both possible and necessary by the acknowledgement of the Germanness of the GDR. However, it was not only the past which was to raise questions regarding the relationship between the two German states, and ultimately, regarding the state of the German nation, but also official and popular concern regarding world peace and the nuclear arms race during the 1980s, which was particularly relevant to them, being on the front line of the Cold War.

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, In Europe's Name (London, 1993), p.189.

The third section examines the sudden return of the nation to the political agenda in the late 1980s, and as a result, to the academic agenda. The issue had been simmering away beneath the surface during the early 1980s, and the advent of President Gorbachev to the Kremlin changed the SED's attitude towards socialist internationalism, though the final turning point appears to have been Honecker's highly symbolic official visit to the Federal Republic in 1987. The period is a classic example of how the SED attempted to suppress the problem of the German nation, while simultaneously attempting to use certain aspects to legitimise the GDR and for economic gain. It also shows that although the Party controlled academic work on the subject, it also relied on it to provide the arguments to back up policy. In reality, however, the SED had merely brushed the idea of the German nation under the carpet, where it continued to erode the legitimacy of the GDR, until the opportunity arose for it to resurface, due to events beyond the SED's control.

1) THE 'SOCIALIST GERMAN NATION' IN THE GDR

a) Nationality: German; Citizenship: GDR

At the 13th ^{plenum} ~~session~~ of the Central Committee in December 1974, Honecker first made the distinction between nation, nationality and citizenship, which finally put an end to the leadership's paranoia regarding the word 'German.' This has been interpreted as an attempt to distinguish the GDR from the Federal Republic without abandoning all of her heritage,² and as a sign of a more relaxed position on *Abgrenzung*, and of Honecker's more elastic stance on the subject compared with other functionaries such as Norden and Axen.³ However it is unlikely that Honecker himself devoted much attention to the subject, merely adopting the distinction because the denial of the Germanness of the GDR and its citizens was clearly untenable.

² McAdams, East Germany, p.146.

³ Fred Oldenburg, 'Blick zurück nach vorn. Zum 13. Plenum des Zentralkomitees,' Deutschland Archiv 8 (1975): p.2.

It is a little known fact that the distinction actually originated from the theorists, Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt. Though they favoured a class-based definition of a nation, they were outraged by the 'de-Germanisation' of what was, after all, still the German Democratic Republic, and took it upon themselves to work out a sensible concept of the socialist German nation. Here we have a good example of the major difference between Party propaganda, which merely stated what people were supposed to believe, and the work of academics, who, in spite of the control mechanisms governing their behaviour, genuinely wanted to devise credible theories to justify official policy. However, since they naturally wanted to retain their academic positions, they were careful not to contradict the stance of the Eighth Party Conference. Thus, Kosing and Schmidt did not seek to undermine the GDR but instead hoped it would become more acceptable to the population and more credible in the eyes of the wider world.

Their theory was first published in the in-house journal of the Academy for Social Sciences, and somehow came to the attention of Honecker. The basis of their carefully formulated argument was that people were first and foremost citizens of the GDR, but also possessed German nationality, apart from a small number of Sorb nationality. Since nations were defined by class, both German and Sorb citizens belonged to the socialist nation in the GDR. The article stated, 'The socialist nation in the GDR is without doubt of *German nationality*, and it goes without saying that ~~she~~^{it} encompasses those ethnic and social-psychological peculiarities that have arisen from the history of the German people, which goes back more than a thousand years. Due to specific historical circumstances, ~~she~~^{it} is forming on one part of the territory of the former unitary capitalist German nation.'⁴ This seems to be the first occasion where the distinction was made between nation and nationality, which at last put a stop to the controversy and craziness concerning the word 'German.' The authors also warned

⁴ Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt, 'Über die Dialektik von Internationalem und Nationalem,' Thematische Information und Dokumentation 32 (1974): p. 80, my italics.

against underestimating the strength of ethnic factors, including language, origin or background, customs, practices and traditions.

Stealing the theorists' argument, Honecker told the Central Committee, 'Our socialist state is called the German Democratic Republic because the vast majority of her citizens are of German nationality. Therefore, there is no cause for confusion when filling out the forms that are necessary now and then, for example for marriages and the reunion of families. The answer to such questions is simple, clear and unambiguous: citizenship: GDR; nationality: German.' After maintaining a policy of 'de-Germanisation' for several years, Honecker now claimed, 'As Germans we have a claim to German history in the same way that as Europeans, we have a claim to European history.' He added 'In contrast to the FRG, we represent the socialist Germany,' but made it clear that, 'In our socialist German state, there is naturally no place for 'excessive Germanness' (*Deuschtümelei*). He predicted that socialism would not make a detour around the Federal Republic, but did not go as far as to predict the eventual establishment of a united socialist Germany.⁵

Kosing and Schmidt were asked by Hermann Axen, (no doubt with Honecker's consent⁶) to write a popular version of their article for *Neues Deutschland*.⁷ Even though it was their idea, the obligation to quote the First Secretary's remarks from the recent session of the Central Committee gave the impression that he had devised the theory himself. On the awkward issue of ethnicity they stated,

Shared ethnic characteristics certainly do play an important role in the formation of nations, but it is not they which integrate the classes and strata of a population into a nation, but economic, social, political and ideological relationships.... This whole complexity of ethnic characteristics, traits and features of a population is described as 'nationality.' Therefore the

⁵ ZPA IV 2/1/495 (13th Central Committee session, December 1974)

⁶ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

⁷ Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt, 'Nation und Nationalität in der DDR,' *Neues Deutschland*, 15/16 Feb 1975, p.10.

concept of nationality is narrower than the concept of the nation, because it includes only one of the components of the nation, and what is more, not the most decisive. The concept of the nation is essentially more comprehensive because it includes the totality of socio-historic factors, together with ethnic ones.⁸

The authors even claimed that ethnic characteristics would change over time and develop socialist content with the consolidation of the socialist nation. On the relationship between national and international elements, the authors explained that the working class was an international class,

but in the first instance, ^{it} ~~she~~ must carry out ^{its} ~~her~~ campaign for liberation from exploitation and class-rule primarily within the perimeters of ^{its} ~~her~~ own nation against ^{its} ~~her~~ 'own' bourgeoisie.... with the aim of transforming ^{its} ~~her~~ own nation via a socialist revolution and the construction of a socialist society, to develop it into a socialist nation.⁹

According to Kosing, German nationality was to the socialist nation in the GDR, what Russian or Ukrainian nationality was to the Soviet socialist nation. While the socialist nation in the GDR was relatively young, its nationality had a history stretching back over 400 years.¹⁰

Although no precise data can be found on the level of acceptance of the distinction between nationality and citizenship, the new theory was generally well received, and people were relieved to know that they were still Germans, especially since many were hardly enthusiasts for a stronger bond with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact states, which Honecker always encouraged. The Sorb minority were also relieved to hear that they would not be forced to take on the same socialist nationality as the rest of the population of the GDR, thereby losing considerable minority rights that they had hitherto enjoyed in the areas of culture and

⁸ Kosing and Schmidt, p.10.

⁹ Kosing and Schmidt, p.10.

¹⁰ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

education. The distinction put an end to the crazy 'de-Germanisation' campaign which had done so much harm to the regime's credibility both at home and in the eyes of the world, and people could now use the word 'German' freely again, without fear of the consequences.

All the leading East German theorists on the subject of the nation approved of the leadership's acceptance of the GDR's German nationality, and it may have been no coincidence that Kosing and Schmidt were awarded the prestigious National Prize of the GDR in 1975. However, the obsession with theorising on the nation during the 1970s suggested that the populace had not yet accepted the official concept. According to information from the West German authorities, two-thirds of East Germans refused to label the Federal Republic a foreign nation.¹¹ At the end of the day, the SED could not win, since the German connection also undermined the legitimacy of the GDR. This was an inevitable result of an attempt to create a new nation artificially, while the memories, if not the reality, of its predecessor lived on.

In 1976, Kosing's book *Die Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart* ('The Nation in History and the Present') was published, which warrants particular attention because it remained the definitive account on the subject until Hofmann's *Ein neues Deutschland soll es sein* ('It will be a New Germany') appeared in 1989. At 306 pages, it was by far the most comprehensive work on the subject, and thus secured Kosing's position as the leading authority on the subject in the GDR. The book was an attempt to explain both general Marxist-Leninist nation theory and the unique case of what was now again called the socialist *German* nation in the GDR. It reflects its author's belief that such a complicated issue as the socialist German nation required a proper explanation, and could not simply be declared by the Party leadership like a new economic plan. However, it did not go unnoticed that Kosing had been a 'vehement advocate of Ulbricht's confederation plan' in 1962, but was now (at least publicly) a 'relentless champion of

¹¹ Ludz, 'The SED's Concept,' pp.214, 208.

Honecker's course of *Abgrenzung*.¹² This was presumably due to the fact that Kosing, a member of the Party since 1946, held a chair in Marxist-Leninist philosophy at the AfG and no doubt wanted to keep it.

Due to its length, it is not possible to analyse every point in detail, and much was an elaboration of ideas Kosing had recently introduced in theoretical journals.¹³ Kosing tackled the historic development of the socialist German nation, its class-character, the international dimension, the question of ethnicity, the distinction between nation and nationality, socialist national consciousness and prospects for the future. The basic hypothesis of the book was that according to a Marxist-Leninist definition of a nation, the two halves of the German nation had become so far apart, both socially and politically, and their international relationships so diametrically opposed, that two separate and irreconcilable nations now existed. Furthermore, these developments could not have been foreseen by the author, by the SED leadership, nor indeed by anyone during the early 1960s. While some people might argue that the subsequent reunification of Germany disproves Kosing's hypothesis, others would argue that the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the old and new *Bundesländer* and their populations actually proves him right.

Kosing acknowledged the fact that the SED had earlier sought the reunification of the nation in a unitary state, and admitted that in 1962, he himself had written that the division of Germany as a state would not lead to the establishment of two separate nations. His excuse for this dramatic U-turn was that historic development often changed circumstances, making previously realistic goals unrealistic, and making it necessary to reconsider theories, and sometimes even to correct them. After all, had not leading West German politicians altered their stance regarding the status of the

¹² Gunther Holzweißig, 'Der bestrittene Positionswechsel in der nationalen Frage,' Deutschland Archiv 9 (1976): p.1189.

¹³ For example, Alfred Kosing, 'Theoretische Probleme der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nation in der DDR,' Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 23 (1975): pp.237-261.

GDR as an independent state? He believed that the time would come when they would also have to accept the existence of an independent socialist German nation, which was a permanent member of the community of socialist nations.¹⁴

Kosing made it clear from the start that the idea that the GDR was not a German state was absurd, but aware of the consequences of negative comment about the regime, he carefully directed his criticism at Bonn's accusations that the SED was taking leave of the German nation, as opposed to the Party's actual policy, which had been precisely that.¹⁵ All the elements undeniably shared with West Germans, such as culture, language, etc., were conveniently explained as aspects of nationality, which was of secondary importance to social and economic factors. Stalin's definition was considered inadequate because it was merely a list of fixed characteristics and paid no attention to 'the social function and historic role of the nation.'¹⁶ Instead, Kosing concentrated on the work of Engels and Lenin in an attempt to prove that the 'classic ^{writers} of Marxism' had also distinguished between membership of a nation on the one hand, (which was socially determined), and of an ethnic community on the other, that is to say, between nation and nationality.¹⁷

According to Kosing, 'Ethnic factors, which have arisen from German history in its entirety, have joined forces with the qualitatively new social content of the nation. They alone cannot justify a national unity, although they are decisive for nationality, which should not be confused with nation.'¹⁸ However, according to Lenin, the common language had played a particularly important role long before the establishment of nations, as a facilitator of trade within a limited area, but had apparently been superseded by economic, social and political factors which currently determined nations.¹⁹ Kosing interpreted Engels' theory

¹⁴ Kosing, Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Berlin, 1976), pp.19-20.

¹⁵ Kosing, p.18.

¹⁶ Kosing, p. 39.

¹⁷ Kosing, pp. 169, 175.

¹⁸ Kosing, p.152.

¹⁹ Kosing, pp. 115-116.

that the borders of nations should be determined by 'language and sympathies' to mean that wherever possible, the borders of nations should coincide with the borders of nationality or ethnicity, but like Lenin, he stressed the primacy of social factors in the formation of nations.²⁰ He cited Engels' example of the inhabitants of Savoy, who opted to join the Italian nation instead of France, and also the case of the people of Alsace and Lorraine, who, in spite of their German nationality, chose to join the French nation for social and political reasons.²¹ All in all, Kosing's treatment of ethnicity was not entirely convincing, and his attempts to adapt the work of Engels and Lenin to fit the unique case of the GDR seems somewhat laboured. Furthermore he ignored the question of race or blood, and to this day, takes issue with the idea that ethnicity has anything to do with race.²² As has been noted elsewhere, he failed to explain adequately the relationship between the working class in the GDR and their counterparts in the Federal Republic, and whether or not two nations were developing there, one socialist and the other bourgeois.²³

On the subject of 'socialist national consciousness in the GDR,' Kosing wrote, 'The GDR represents the socialist Germany, in which the German past was practically, theoretically and morally evaluated.'²⁴ This socialist national consciousness was still based on socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism as before. It was portrayed as rooted in the social system of the socialist nation, with little mention of German aspects, which was in keeping with his class-based concept of the nation. Kosing criticised West German attempts to nurture an all-German consciousness, and, obviously aware of the dangers they posed, stated,

In view of such attempts to undermine the socialist community with the help of a flexible nationalism,

²⁰ Kosing, p.31.

²¹ Kosing, pp.169-171.

²² Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

²³ Ludz, 'The SED's Concept,' p.223.

²⁴ Kosing, Nation in Geschichte, p. 281.

extremely careful ideological work to deepen socialist German national consciousness, (which unites patriotism and internationalism, and knows neither national arrogance nor national nihilism), is a permanent task of the Marxist-Leninist Party, all social organisations and especially of educational institutions in the GDR.²⁵

He cited several western commentators who had identified a unique GDR-consciousness since the late 1960s, including Gebhard Schweigler, John Dornberg and Jean Edward Smith.²⁶

However, at the very end of the book, Kosing stated that, 'The question of whether in the future, when a socialist revolution has triumphed in the FRG and a socialist nation arisen, a unitary socialist German nation could again develop, cannot be positively or negatively answered from the present situation.'²⁷ This contradicted what he had argued throughout the book, although Honecker himself had dropped a similar hint in 1973,²⁸ and would do so again. Inevitably, Kosing's theories were 'designed to fashion a concept of the nation to suit the domestic functions of legitimacy and political stabilisation.'²⁹ In conclusion it must be said that he did his best to justify the almost unjustifiable, a task that most leading functionaries were either intellectually incapable of doing, or saw little need for. The result has been called 'a combination of historic materialism and communication theory.'³⁰ He had to perform a theoretical juggling act with Party statements, Marxist-Leninist principles and ideas of his own, and as a result, personified the dilemma between the interests of the Party and scholarship in the GDR (though he still claims to have

²⁵ Kosing, p. 283

²⁶ Kosing, p. 282. See chapter 2.

²⁷ Kosing, p. 305.

²⁸ Erich Honecker, 'Zügig voran bei der weiteren Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des 8. Parteitag,' Reden und Aufsätze, 12 vols. (East Berlin, 1975), vol. 2, p.241.

²⁹ Ludz, 'The SED's Concept,' p.216.

³⁰ Meuschel, Legitimation, pp.280-283. Meuschel summarises Kosing's main points but does not evaluate his arguments or elaborate on the constraints of the system.

declined privileges to avoid paying the price of further compromises.³¹⁾

b) The New Party Programme of 1976

By 1976, the Party Programme was thirteen years old, and both the Party's objectives and reality had dramatically changed. The fact that there were two, seemingly irreconcilable, German states had been confirmed by their full participation in the CSCE in 1975 and their acceptance of the Helsinki Final Act. Also that year, the SED had signed a Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, which according to Axen, 'strengthened the objective process of growing together among socialist nations, and the evolution of the socialist nation and irrevocability of the victory of socialism in the GDR.'³²

Clearly there was a need to bring the Party Programme in line with the Eighth Party Conference and with subsequent developments, indeed one wonders why this was not done earlier, especially since the issue was raised as early as July 1972.³³ According to Honecker, it had become necessary to revise the Party Programme because the GDR was entering a new phase of her social development,³⁴ hence a Commission was formed to draw up a proposal, not surprisingly chaired by the First Secretary himself. Input from the rest of the Politburo was apparently minimal. In contrast to the hurried, undemocratic way in which the new constitution had been rushed through in 1974, a draft was published in *Neues Deutschland*³⁵ and the population was invited to submit suggestions as to how it might be improved. The reasons for this remain unclear, although it implies a new feeling of confidence on the part of the regime. Party representatives visited work places and local organisations

³¹ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 July 1993.

³² Hermann Axen, 'Die Herausbildung der sozialistischen Nation in der DDR,' Probleme des Friedens und Sozialismus 3 (1976): p.291, cited in Meuschel, Legitimation, p.279.

³³ ZPA J IV 2/2A/1606 (4 July 1972)

³⁴ Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 9. Parteitages (East Berlin, 1976), p.32.

³⁵ Neues Deutschland, 14 January 1976.

to answer questions about the draft and naturally to propagate the Party line.³⁶

The Secretary for Agitation, Werner Lamberz, monitored public acceptance of concepts such as the socialist German nation. In an assessment of the role agitation and propaganda had played in realising the declarations of the Eighth Party Conference, he concluded that the 'state consciousness' of the citizens was now secure, and that a 'socialist national consciousness' was developing. He added that the international recognition of the GDR had increased citizens' pride in the GDR and their identification with it, and that it had been possible to dispel the idea of a unitary German nation, (which implies that this was not a natural process, but an actively implemented policy). However, Lamberz was realistic enough to recognise that due to a 'mass nationalistic campaign by the enemy,' illusions concerning the things common to both German states persisted. Also, more emphasis on the 'two irreconcilably conflicting class-lines in German history' was required 'to counteract imperialistic claims of a common German history.'³⁷ Public discussion of the proposed new Party Programme had highlighted the prevalence of what Lamberz called 'woolly ideas' regarding the socialist nation. Thus a clearer explanation its nature and future was necessary, even though it was apparently 'developing according to plan.' Ideological work needed to stress the idea that he claimed was at the heart of the Treaty with the Soviet Union, namely the drawing closer together of the socialist nations, and to counteract West German claims that the socialist nation was merely invented by the SED to form a basis for conflict between the GDR and the Federal Republic.³⁸

Of 1,695 submissions from the public to the Programme Commission, 38 related directly to the question of the nation, 30 of which were in some way incorporated into the finished item.³⁹

³⁶ Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung,' p.106.

³⁷ ZPA IV 2/2033/4

³⁸ ZPA IV 2/2033/1

³⁹ ZPA IV B2/2024/11. The submissions are examined in detail in Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung.' Hofmann now maintains that the number of

As was the case with the drafting of the new constitution in 1968, it seems unlikely that people responded of their own initiative, and more likely that local party organisations encouraged them to do so. From these, and from reports of public discussion, four particular problem areas connected to the concept of the socialist German nation were identified. Firstly, the sentence 'By taking power, the working class establishes itself as the nation' had caused confusion regarding the position of other social strata. Since the SED always portrayed the bourgeois nation in the Federal Republic as class-divided, it was understandable that they should want to portray the socialist nation in the GDR as free from all class antagonism, hence in the final version, the sentence was changed to 'By taking power, the working class created the decisive prerequisites for the formation of the socialist nation,' and other strata, such as intellectuals, were said to be allied to it.⁴⁰

Secondly, there was concern about the claim that the socialist nations were growing together, and some even asked whether this meant that the GDR would eventually become a republic of the Soviet Union.⁴¹ Also, the importance attached to socialist internationalism in propaganda not surprisingly made people wonder whether socialist patriotism was becoming less important.⁴² The leadership does not appear to have had an answer to this, but it seems inconceivable that even Soviet sympathisers such as Honecker himself would have supported a total merging of all the socialist nations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Thirdly, in spite of the distinction between nationality and citizenship, people still noticed inconsistencies in the use of the word 'German' in the names of institutions, etc. It was suggested that the SED should be renamed 'Communist Party of the GDR'

submissions was of little significance, since people could no longer be bothered to oppose the leadership. Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 5 February 1993.

⁴⁰ ZPA IV B2/2024/11

⁴¹ ZPA IV 2/2033/1

⁴² ZPA IV 2/2033/4

because 'as there is no such thing as "Germany," there cannot be a "Socialist Unity Party of Germany".'⁴³ However, this was rejected by the Programme Commission on the grounds that 'the name has arisen historically, therefore it would be politically incorrect to change it.'⁴⁴ The issue arose so often that a detailed article was published in *Neues Deutschland* to clarify the Party's stance:

Whoever has a good name does not want to lose it or give it up..... The name SED preserves the memory of a historic event in the history of the German workers' movement..... According to the meaning of the individual words, the name is totally appropriate. 'Socialist' is fitting because we are forming a developed socialist society. 'Unity Party' is correct because the SED is the united party of the working class in our land. 'Of Germany' is right, because our party represents the socialist Germany..... But our name does not only mean something to us - it also enjoys recognition and prestige far around the world..... The organ of the Central Committee also has precisely the right name: *Neues Deutschland*. It is the leading newspaper of the leading party in the socialist Germany, the GDR, and she is the new Germany in comparison to the FRG, the old Germany, which remains on the level of capitalism.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the suggestion that 'German Democratic Republic' should be renamed 'German Socialist Republic' was rejected because it too had apparently arisen historically and expressed the socialist character of the state. It was also suggested that 'socialist German nation' should be replaced by 'socialist nation of the GDR,' but this was dismissed, as were all examples of 'national nihilism,' which showed that the SED was keen to retain the benefits of national sentiment when it suited them. ⁴⁶

Finally, the goal of overcoming the division of the German nation which appeared in the 1963 programme was not surprisingly

⁴³ ZPA IV B2/2024/12

⁴⁴ ZPA IV B2/2024/11

⁴⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, 7/8 Feb 1976.

⁴⁶ ZPA IV B2/2024/11

questioned, and the Programme Commission decided that the objective had been overtaken by history.⁴⁷ However, since the proposal mentioned the inevitable transformation of all countries to socialism, some people assumed this included the Federal Republic and that a chance for reunification still existed.⁴⁸

Although academics were given the opportunity to contribute to the new Party Programme, their main task was to examine and explain the document once it had been accepted by the Party Conference.⁴⁹ Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt composed a proposal for the section on the socialist German nation, which Kosing felt was historically and theoretically justified and also politically tenable, but they were not members of the Programme Commission and their proposal was not used, although Kosing was pleased that the leadership had given up the incredible ideas of the early 1970s that were theoretically unfounded and entirely politically motivated.⁵⁰

The finished article incorporated the changes to the GDR's status and to the concept of the nation which had occurred during the 1970s. It was apparently based on the 'fundamental interrelationship between the revolutionary renewal of society and national remodelling and formative processes.'⁵¹ The socialist German nation was said to be historically rooted in the struggle of the German people for social progress over several centuries. Its 'Germanness' was accepted, as was the German nationality of the majority of the population, apart from the Sorb minority, although its permanent membership of the community of socialist states was emphasised. Furthermore, 'The SED is leading the process of the further development of the socialist nation in the GDR according to plan, which is flourishing on the social foundation of socialism and growing towards the other socialist nations.' A socialist national culture was said to be growing, which

⁴⁷ ZPA IV B2/2024/11

⁴⁸ ZPA IV 2/2033/1

⁴⁹ Das Parteiprogramm und die Wissenschaft. Sitzungsberichte der AdW (East Berlin, 1976), p.16.

⁵⁰ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 11 February 1993.

⁵¹ Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung,' p.117.

incorporated the progressive and humanist heritage of German history, and the achievements of world culture, in particular, those of the Soviet Union, as was a socialist national consciousness which consisted of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, organically bound together.⁵²

The Party Programme was accepted by the Ninth Party Conference in May 1976. There Honecker himself used the phrases 'socialist *German* nation' and 'two independent sovereign *German* states.' However with reference to the German question, he stated 'Nothing about it is open - history had her say a long time ago.'⁵³ And so it seemed at the time. The GDR had come a long way since the Eighth Party Conference, and people were beginning to come to terms with the socialist nation, now that they were sure that they it was still German. However, it still provided a link with the state on her western border, and however much the SED tried to deny it, the two German states were clearly not as foreign to each other as most states. For the time being, it seemed that the issue was closed, although Honecker's ambiguous remarks about the possibilities following the socialist transformation of the Federal Republic suggested otherwise. They were soon to crop up again, and increased contact with Bonn in the 1980s, suggested that he too accepted that a unique relationship did exist between the two states, and that there was more to be gained by recognising that fact.

2) PROBLEM SOLVED?

a) The Political Implications of the 'Socialist German Nation'

From the late 1970s, the leadership of the GDR rarely mentioned the question of the nation, an indication that the line represented in the new Party Programme of 1976 was the last word on the subject. Honecker himself said that terms such as 'nation' and

⁵² Programm der SED (East Berlin, 1976), pp. 56-57.

⁵³ Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 9. Parteitages (East Berlin, 1976), p.42, my italics.

'fatherland' had acquired new meanings through socialism.⁵⁴ Even so, after three decades, the legitimacy of the GDR still could not be taken for granted, especially since the absence of democracy and economic short-comings continued to undermine what legitimacy it did have. The state remained extremely susceptible to changes in its surroundings, both in relation to the Federal Republic and its allies in the Warsaw Pact, which could reopen the question of the GDR's *raison d'être*.

In 1980, Honecker's 'Gera demands'⁵⁵ for the normalisation of relations between the two German states, including the transformation of their respective Permanent Representations into proper embassies, and the recognition of GDR citizenship by the Federal Republic marked a hardening of the SED's attitude to German-German relations from 1980. They were repeated at the Tenth Party Conference in 1981, where he also claimed that the people of the GDR had formed a socialist German nation.' However, compared with the previous decade, his frequent use of the adjective 'German' was striking, (for example, 'the two German states' and 'German soil').⁵⁶ Only a few months earlier, he had aroused the attention of the West German media when he warned Bonn, 'One day socialism will knock on your door, and when the day comes when the workers of the Federal Republic set about the socialist transformation of the FRG, the question of the unification of the two German states will be a different matter.'⁵⁷

These apparent inconsistencies are hard to explain. While it has been suggested that Honecker's bizarre reference to unification was a sign that the SED still harboured all-German designs,⁵⁸ it seems more likely that Honecker was just being provocative or

⁵⁴ Erich Honecker, 'Die Aufgaben der Partei bei der weiteren Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des 9. Parteitages,' 17 February 1978, cited in Erich Honecker, Die Kulturpolitik unserer Partei wird erfolgreich verwirklicht (East Berlin, 1982), p.191.

⁵⁵ For details see Zieger, Die Haltung, pp.207-210; Garton Ash, In Europe's Name, p. 164; McAdams, East Germany, pp.170-172.

⁵⁶ Protokoll des 10. Parteitags der SED (East Berlin, 1981), pp. 28, 46.

⁵⁷ Neues Deutschland 16 February 1981, cited in DDR Handbuch ed. Zimmermann, vol.2, p. 926.

⁵⁸ Zieger, Die Haltung, p.211.

disingenuous towards the Federal Republic, especially since the warning was not repeated, whereas the uncompromising 'Gera demands' were. The fact that East Germans knew they had an automatic right to citizenship of the Federal Republic reinforced the notion that one German nation still existed and undermined the credibility of the proclaimed 'socialist German nation' in the GDR. Hence the leadership frequently accused Bonn of violating normal diplomatic practice by recognising the GDR as a state, but not the citizens of that state.

From the early 1980s, the tactical nuclear weapons debate made the link between the two German states even more difficult to ignore. It created a sense of a shared fate, but also a shared responsibility for peace, and led to a commitment to ensure that war would never again break out on German soil.⁵⁹ This implied that 'German soil' as a concept still meant something. Honecker himself spoke of the need for the two German states to form a 'coalition of sense' (*Koalition der Vernunft*)⁶⁰ in the interest of peace in general, and of the two German states in particular. Furthermore, the leadership had to confront the issue due to growing concern among the population regarding the nuclear threat, in particular the sudden increase in environmental groups and peace initiatives. Such organisations were unprecedented in the GDR, but were encouraged by the rise of the West German peace movement, visible on their television screens.⁶¹ The result was a considerable increase in contact between prominent representatives of the GDR and the Federal Republic, including a meeting between Honecker and Helmut Schmidt in 1981, which

⁵⁹ This idea was expressed by Schmidt and Honecker in 1981, and in a joint declaration by Kohl and Honecker on 12 March 1985. See Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, pp. 166, 170.

⁶⁰ See Honecker's report to the 9th session of the Central Committee, November 1984. Honecker, *Reden und Aufsätze*, vol. 10, p.366. Hermann Axen claimed that Honecker had coined the phrase himself at an international academic conference on 'Karl Marx in our time' in East Berlin, in April 1983. Hermann Axen, 'Sozialistische Klassenstandpunkt und Menscheninteressen - friedliches Koexistenz heute,' *Einheit* 44 (1989): p.45.

⁶¹ See John Sandford, 'The GDR and the German Question: the unofficial debate in the peace movement,' in *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 7, ed. Margy Gerber (Lanham, New York, and London, 1987), pp.221-236.

inevitably raised hopes regarding détente. During the early 1980s, various subjects were discussed on many separate occasions by numerous officials from both sides, including credit for the GDR, the inner-German border, humanitarian questions and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe.⁶²

Such contacts highlighted the fact that the relationship between the two German states was far from normal, although their reasons for entering into dialogue were completely different. The SED denied the unity of the nation to support its claim that the GDR was an independent sovereign state. Bonn, on the other hand, almost recognised the GDR as a means to improve relations, which it hoped would preserve the national bond.⁶³ Honecker was happy to take advantage of Bonn's willingness to pay substantial amounts of money to the GDR in order to achieve this, though he insisted that the German Question was closed for good. Ironically, it was the veteran GDR-hater, Franz-Josef Strauß, who negotiated an increased credit limit for the GDR in 1983. His apparently contradictory actions so outraged a handful of right-wing CSU politicians that they left to form a new party, the *Republikaner*.

Honecker seemed to believe that the 'GDR-nation' was sufficiently secure and socialist that its Germanness was now no longer a threat, but an asset. In 1983, he demanded a Europe without nuclear weapons 'in the name of the German people,'⁶⁴ and in 1984, addressed the population as Germans, as opposed to 'Citizens of the GDR.'⁶⁵ And not only were they Germans - the leadership seemed intent on proving that they were the best Germans, for example, in 1983, a headline in *Neues Deutschland*

⁶² The content of the dialogue has been documented elsewhere, for example, Zieger, *Die Haltung*, pp.214-219; Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, Meuschel, *Legitimation*, pp.292-294. For a populist East German version, see Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, pp.289-294.

⁶³ Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, p.163.

⁶⁴ *Neues Deutschland*, 10 October 1983, cited in *DDR Handbuch*, ed. Zimmermann, p. 926.

⁶⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, 8 October 1984, cited by F. Trommler, 'The Creation of History and the Refusal of the Past in the GDR,' in *Coping with the past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, eds. K. Harms, L.R. Reuter, V. Dürr (London and Wisconsin, 1990), p.79.

proudly proclaimed 'First German in space is a citizen of the GDR!'⁶⁶ This apparent reversion to 'national argumentation' reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s has been interpreted as a means for a more offensive *Deutschlandpolitik*, made possible by new circumstances which were more favourable for the GDR.⁶⁷ At the end of the day, it is most likely that the leadership of the GDR was well aware that the relationship between the two German states was inevitably abnormal, and therefore decided to exploit the situation for the GDR's financial gain, in return for fairly minor humanitarian concessions. The instability in neighbouring Poland at the beginning of the decade may have also encouraged the SED to prioritise patriotism as opposed to internationalism. Until this point, the regime had tirelessly stressed the need for solidarity with the working classes in other Eastern Bloc states, but it was a different matter when those workers were striking and organising to demand better conditions, and were on the GDR's doorstep.

b) Academic Implications

The early 1980s were characterised by a constant battle between theorists, who believed that it was dangerous to neglect the problem of the nation, and their superiors, who did not wish to antagonise the leadership by raising awkward questions. The Politburo had not expressly stated that the issue should be avoided, but their silence was sufficient to make minor functionaries fearful of the consequences if they raised it. Therefore, to keep the subject alive, members of the Academy for Social Sciences tried to win the support of its director, Otto Reinhold, who was a member of the Central Committee. Though he may have been sympathetic to their cause, his deputies posed a major obstacle between Reinhold and scholars at the institution, though he in turn had to conform to the wishes of the head of the Department of Sciences, Kurt Hager.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Neues Deutschland, 26 August 1983.

⁶⁷ Zimmermann, ed., DDR Handbuch, p. 926.

⁶⁸ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

Academics knew that the way to guarantee the future of research was to ensure that the subject featured in the 'Central Research Plan for the Social Sciences.' Fortunately for them, the Propaganda Department suggested that the plan for 1981-86 should contain more material on socialist patriotism, socialist national consciousness and on 'the establishment and development of the socialist nation, and the conflict with counter-revolutionary theories such as the "openness of the German question" and the "continued existence of the unity of the German nation".'⁶⁹ This implies that the Department was aware that the message regarding the 'socialist German nation' had not yet got through. As a result, a new field of research (*Forschungsbereich*) on 'The Socialist Nation and History' was established at the Academy for Social Sciences, which facilitated new research. The initiative had originally come from theorists themselves, but official permission was always required before such a body could be formed.

The campaign to keep the nation alive as a subject for academic discourse was taken up by Jürgen Hofmann, a younger member of the Academy for Social Sciences, who eventually succeeded Alfred Kosing as the leading authority on the nation in the GDR. In 1983, he completed a doctoral thesis on the evolution of the 'socialist German nation' and the national policies of the SED, supervised by the very individuals who had been responsible for elaborating on the SED's line on the nation, Kosing and Schmidt. The same year, an academic committee was formed by individuals with an interest in the problem of the nation, chaired by Hofmann. Such committees had to be adopted by a state-run academic institution and required the approval of its senior directors, which could take a long time. In this case, official permission was only granted due to Politburo member Hermann Axen's personal interest in the subject. Some of its members had hoped for such a committee after the dramatic Eighth Party Conference in 1971, but as usual, it was impossible to get permission to address a topic that the leadership considered settled. However, even after its formation, the future of the committee was always uncertain due to the

⁶⁹ ZPA IV B2/904/67

sensitivity of the topic, and it was dissolved twice by its members' superiors, which led to the withdrawal of financial and human resources. Kosing and Hofmann had hoped that the formation of the committee would enable them to conduct empirical research into the level of acceptance of the concept of the 'socialist German nation,' but permission was refused.⁷⁰

In spite of the lack of encouragement, behind the scenes, some theorists continued to address the subject, although little appeared outside academic circles after the publication of the Party Programme in 1976 until the end of the 1980s, shortly before the end of the GDR itself. Due to these difficulties, others turned their attention to less controversial subjects, in particular, those currently favoured by the leadership such as the reinterpretation of German history. During this period, only one article devoted to the 'socialist German nation' appeared in the journal *Einheit*,⁷¹ and one short book addressed the subject.⁷² However, several articles did appear in the Academy for Social Science's own journal,⁷³ and handful of doctoral dissertations were produced.⁷⁴

A group from the Academy, which included all the big names on the subject of the nation - Kosing, Schmidt, Hofmann and Meier - produced a paper with the cumbersome title 'Problems in the Development of the Socialist German Nation and in the Conflict with new Tendencies towards Bourgeois Nationalism in the Imperialist Policies and Ideology of the FRG,' which was sent to Kurt Hager shortly before the Tenth Party Conference in 1981.

⁷⁰ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993; interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

⁷¹ Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt, 'Geburt und Gedeihen der sozialistischen deutschen Nation,' *Einheit* 34 (1979): pp.1068-1075.

⁷² Gerhard Riege and Hans-Jürgen Kulke, Nationalität Deutsch, Staatsbürgerschaft DDR (East Berlin, 1979).

⁷³ For example, Dietmar Säuberlich, 'Das Problem der Nation in der Strategie und Taktik der SED in der ersten Hälfte der 60er Jahre,' Thematische Information und Dokumentation 48 (1985); G. Benser, 'Sozialistische Nation und Nationspolitik in der Geschichte der DDR,' Thematische Information und Dokumentation 47 (1984).

⁷⁴ For example, Hofmann, 'Studien zur Entwicklung' and theses by Peter Rentsch, Wilfried Trompelt and Marianne Braumann.

They also produced a paper during preparations for the Eleventh Party Conference in 1986, in which they expressed the opinion that ignoring the issue of the nation would lead to uncertainty. However, because of this comment, it never reached the upper echelons of power - even Axen never received it - and Hofmann believes it was locked away because the deputy director of the institution feared the consequences of passing on material that could be interpreted as criticism of those responsible for agitation and propaganda.⁷⁵

All these pieces of work contained similar ideas, partly because the same individuals (or students under their supervision) were responsible for them. Naturally the basic line had already been defined and accepted into Party documents, leaving little room for variation, and absolutely none for criticism. Leading theorists were reasonably happy with the Party's current stance (since they had helped to modify it in the mid-1970s), though most felt that certain qualifications were required, and attempted to slip them into their work.

After 30 years, with no sign of the long promised socialist revolution of the FRG, it was difficult to ignore the fact that the 'socialist German nation' was only developing in one part of the territory previously occupied by the unitary German nation. This contradicted the notion that the transformation of bourgeois nations into socialist nations was natural and inevitable, and the idea of a national bond linking the proletariat in both German states that was particularly prevalent in the 1960s. Though theorists now accepted the reality of the situation,⁷⁶ it was never adequately explained, presumably because it could be seen as a failure on the part of the SED to achieve its original aims. Indeed

⁷⁵ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, 1 March 1993 and 11 May 1993; interview with Helmut Meier, 28 May 1993, Berlin.

⁷⁶ 'Probleme der Entwicklung der sozialistischen deutschen Nation und der Auseinandersetzung mit neuen Tendenzen des bürgerlichen Nationalismus in der Politik und Ideologie des Imperialismus in der BRD - Studie,' (AfG/IfGA, 1980), in ZPA IV B2/2024/4. This paper was produced by a collective consisting of all the main theorists on the subject, Walter Schmidt, Alfred Kosing, Jürgen Hofmann, Helmut Meier and Alfred Loesdau, and was labelled confidential.

one theorist claims he was instructed not to mention how long the Party had struggled to preserve the unity of the nation in an article.⁷⁷ Instead, so-called West German imperialists and their allies were blamed for the continuation of the 'bourgeois German nation' in the FRG, and in this way, history had resolved the National Question.⁷⁸

Theorists were pleased that the regime had finally accepted that the socialist nation in the GDR was German, having denied this fact for several years, which they believed had had a damaging effect on national consciousness. However, they still maintained that ethnic factors determined a person's nationality, not which nation they belonged to, which was a matter of class. Consequently, peaceful co-existence, not 'national common ground' (*nationale Gemeinsamkeiten*) was the basis of the relationship between the two German states.⁷⁹ On the one hand, it was claimed that in the GDR, socialism had merged with German ethnicity, resulting in the formation of a 'socialist German nation,' which was becoming increasingly distinct from the 'bourgeois German nation' in the FRG. On the other hand, the assertion was also made that customs, traditions, life-styles, etc., had been affected by socialism, hence 'in the reality of our socialist nation, the concept "German" is acquiring a richer content, bearing the hallmark of socialism.'⁸⁰ However, theorists admitted: 'The fact that both in the case of the socialist nation in the GDR and the capitalist nation in the FRG, we are dealing with German nations makes the objective process of embedding ethnic elements into the structure of the socialist nation more difficult.'⁸¹ Consequently, it would be useful to find out just how strongly German ethnic elements and socialist elements had become bound together, and to assess the impact of customs and events unique to the GDR on national consciousness,

⁷⁷ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 11 May 1993.

⁷⁸ Kosing and Schmidt, 'Geburt und Gedeihen,' p.1069; 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.20.

⁷⁹ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.22.

⁸⁰ Kosing and Schmidt, 'Geburt und Gedeihen,' p.1074.

⁸¹ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.30.

such as anniversary celebrations and secular replacements for marriage and confirmation ceremonies.⁸²

The most important innovation in academic work on the concept of the nation in the GDR during the early 1980s was the recognition of the fact that the evolution of the nation was a long process, and that the distinction should be made between the foundation (*Konstituierung*) and consolidation (*Konsolidierung*) of the nation.⁸³ It was argued that the foundation of the 'socialist German nation' had occurred with the establishment of the GDR as a state of workers and farmers in 1949. However, the process of consolidation was not yet complete, though it had been accelerated by the international recognition of the GDR's status as a sovereign socialist German nation-state.⁸⁴ Theorists accepted that the process would only be completed several generations later, and that it was hindered by the presence of a bourgeois German nation next door,⁸⁵ though it was noted that in the case of Austria, the nation was very quickly consolidated.⁸⁶

Here, as usual, theorists were taking a more realistic view than functionaries, who for political reasons, had often stated that a socialist nation had already developed in the GDR. But it also provided a convenient explanation for the weaknesses of the 'socialist German nation' which would apparently be resolved in time. In fact, as Jürgen Hofmann admits, the socialist nation was more of a goal or vision, than a description of the current situation.⁸⁷ However, it was assumed that the goal would be achieved, regardless of whether or not it was shared by the population.

Five elements were identified as necessary for the completion of this process. Firstly the securing and further development of a

82 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.33.

83 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.29.

84 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.30.

85 Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.300; Schmidt, 'The National Question,' p.169.

86 Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

87 Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

socialist society in the GDR; secondly, the merging of socialist and ethnic German elements; thirdly the strengthening of national consciousness; fourthly (and rather paradoxically), ever closer relations with other socialist nations; and finally, further fencing off from the Federal Republic and continued attempts to discredit Bonn's concept of the unitary German nation.⁸⁸

Theorists believed that of these, the most important task was to ensure that the population of the GDR perceived itself as a separate nation, especially in view of the state's unique and vulnerable position. Without a 'socialist German national consciousness,' the 'socialist German nation' was incomplete.

However, this was something the leadership was reluctant to admit. In spite of all the rhetoric about the 'socialist German nation,' and the claim that 'Contempt for what is national (*das Nationale*) is just as alien to us as chauvinism towards other peoples and those of a different skin colour,'⁸⁹ national consciousness was still defined as socialist patriotism, allied to proletarian internationalism. Although Honecker talked about 'national pride,' '*das nationale Selbstverständnis des Volkes der DDR*,' (in essence, how the people of the GDR saw themselves), and 'the national honour of our socialist fatherland,'⁹⁰ to him, 'national' was synonymous with socialist or GDR-wide, and failed to provide an emotional alternative to 'German.'

Theorists were particularly concerned about the lack of empirical data on national consciousness, but permission to undertake empirical research was hard to obtain. Until the mid-1980s, historians at the Academy for Social Sciences, led by Professor Helmut Meier, investigated historical consciousness among the population, including the level of knowledge of German history, its significance for national consciousness and allegiance to the state, and for perceptions of the Federal Republic. While this research was officially sanctioned, there remained the problem of how to

⁸⁸ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.33.

⁸⁹ Beschluß des Politbüros, 18 May 1977, *Einheit* 33 (1978): p.782.

⁹⁰ 17 February 1978. Honecker, *Die Kulturpolitik*, pp. 192-193.

make the leadership take notice of the findings.⁹¹ The Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig continued to monitor the views of young people, in particular, students, but again, the results were not sufficiently favourable for publication, and the leadership preferred not to know the truth.

Furthermore, it was around this time that the *Institut für Meinungsforschung* (IMF) was abolished following the death of Werner Lamberz, who was one of the few Politburo members to recognise its importance. Joachim Herrmann, Lamberz' successor, disbanded it, arguing that it had fulfilled its purpose, and anyway, 'We form public opinion ourselves.'⁹² No doubt the real reason was that the findings rarely corresponded to what the leadership wanted to hear. Even though the findings showed that two-thirds of the population identified with the socialist nation in the GDR, this was nowhere near enough to satisfy the Party leadership.⁹³ All the prominent theorists on the subject were outraged by the dissolution of the IMF, after all, how could the national consciousness of the population be strengthened if no-one knew how strong it was already? Alfred Kosing claims to have personally tried to persuade the director of the institute, Lene Berg, to go directly to Honecker and to ask him to save it, but says she lacked the courage to do so.⁹⁴

However, it was obvious that some form of state consciousness had developed in the GDR, as even western commentators acknowledged, and by the 1970s, the number of people who claimed that the GDR was their fatherland, as opposed to the whole of Germany, had doubled compared to the late 1960s.⁹⁵ But it remained a rather vulnerable and unsentimental *Leistungsbewußtsein*, dependent on a reasonable level of material comfort, which could not be guaranteed. It lacked the necessary

⁹¹ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993. See also Braumann, 'Zum Zusammenhang.'

⁹² Interview with Alfred Kosing, 3 March 1993; interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993; interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

⁹³ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

⁹⁴ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

⁹⁵ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.34.

emotional ties that national consciousness usually implies, and merely existed alongside German ethnic consciousness, failing to rival or incorporate it. Theorists believed that what was required was the transformation of the socialist German nation from a '*Nation an sich*' into a '*Nation für sich*,' as Marx himself had recognised.⁹⁶ The importance attached to national consciousness suggests that they may well have been influenced by the work of western scholars such as Karl Deutsch, which they had access to at the Academy for Social Sciences. However, they criticised 'bourgeois ideologues' who attempted to prove the existence of a nation based exclusively on national consciousness.⁹⁷

Factors which were believed to have a positive effect on national consciousness were a high quality of life, both materially and spiritually, and the GDR's success on the international stage, including diplomatic recognition of the state, its policies apparently in the interest of peace, and sporting achievements. However, Bonn's 'ideological subversion' and campaign to preserve the unity of the nation, family ties and visitors from the Federal Republic were perceived as having a negative effect on the development of a national consciousness unique to the GDR.⁹⁸

In short, the main points that theorists were trying to impress upon the leadership was that the nation was a living and developing organism, which required constant attention and should not be dropped from political and research agendas. Furthermore, effective propaganda was only possible if the current level of acceptance of the socialist German nation was known. The problem was that on the whole, the leadership did not want to hear suggestions which implied that there was a problem, or more often than not, minor functionaries assumed that they did not, and intercepted material before it could reach the decision-makers. All the leading theorists on the concept of the nation in the GDR complain of the frustration of wanting to

⁹⁶ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.35; also Schmidt, 'The Nation in German History,' p.170.

⁹⁷ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.299.

⁹⁸ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.29.

help but not being listened to. However, a major development was the leadership's new interest in the GDR's relationship to German history, which was an attempt to dispel the charge that the 'socialist German nation' was rootless and therefore illegitimate, and was seen as a way to strengthen national consciousness among the population. By telling the story of the socialist revolution on German soil, from its origins in the days of feudalism till its ultimate triumph in the GDR, it was believed that the 'national pride' of the population as citizens of the GDR would be strengthened.

c) The GDR: 'Heir to Everything Progressive in the History of the German People'

The new Party Programme of 1976 not only acknowledged that the socialist nation in the GDR was German, but also emphasised that its 'socialist national culture' was 'duty bound to the rich heritage that was created during the entire history of the German people.' The SED itself was 'the inheritor of everything progressive in the history of the German people.'⁹⁹ Thus the GDR was no longer to be portrayed as a complete break with the German past, but as its high point, the ultimate achievement of the German people, (or at least some of them). While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine all the books, articles, rehabilitations and celebrations which resulted, a task which has already been undertaken by numerous other western scholars,¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Programm der SED (East Berlin, 1976), pp. 52, 5.

¹⁰⁰ An extensive literature exists both in English and in German, of which only a selection is included here. For example, Wolfgang Büscher, 'Geschichte als Denk- und Spielraum. Die DDR Historiker im Lutherjahr,' Studies in GDR Culture and Society 4, ed. Margy Gerber (Lanham and London, 1984), pp.243-253; I.R. Mitchell, 'The Changing Image of Prussia in the GDR,' German Life and Letters 37 (1983); Meuschel, Legitimation, pp.285-291; Jan Herman Brinks, Die DDR Geschichtswissenschaft auf dem Weg zur deutschen Einheit (Frankfurt and New York, 1992); Gert-Joachim Glaessner, 'Sozialistische Neohistorismus?' in Die DDR in der Ära Honecker, ed. Glaessner (Opladen, 1988); G. Iggers, Marxist Historiography in Transformation. New Orientations in recent East German History (New York and Oxford, 1991); Günther Heydemann, Geschichtswissenschaft im Geteilten Deutschland (Frankfurt, 1980); Hasko Hüning, 'Geschichtswissenschaft zwischen Fachhistorik und

it is important to understand why this occurred and how it was then used to enhance the image of the 'socialist German nation.' Five factors can be identified which appear to have facilitated the re-assessment of German history.

Firstly, it appears that at long last, the SED accepted the commonly held view that a nation should have a 'national biography'¹⁰¹ or 'historic personality.'¹⁰² Until this point, the SED had based its concept of the nation on an idealised version of the present, which did not match the reality of the situation in the GDR, and on a utopian vision of the future, which few believed the regime could deliver, indeed, a small circle within the ruling elite itself knew that they could not. Thus the leadership had a good pragmatic reason to focus on the past. Furthermore, 'History was of vital importance in East Germany in attempts to represent (and hence legitimise) the present as the inevitable culmination of the past, the goal towards which all of German history had been tending.'¹⁰³

West German governments had constantly accused the SED of 'taking leave of German history' to re-enforce the Federal Republic's own claim to be the only legitimate successor of the former unitary German state and the sole representative of the German nation. Thus by reclaiming German history, the SED aimed to prove not only that the GDR was German and historically

Geschichtsphilosophie?' in Die DDR in der Ära Honecker, ed. Glaessner, pp.574-588; Dorpalen, German History.

¹⁰¹ On the relationship between nations and history see Mary Fulbrook, 'Introduction: States, Nations and the development of Europe,' National Histories and European History ed. Mary Fulbrook (London, 1993), pp.1-20; Teich and Porter, The National Question; Anthony D. Smith, National Identity (London, 1991), pp.160-165; Eric Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge, 1993); Leonard Krieger, 'Germany,' in National Consciousness, History and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe ed. Orest Ranum (Baltimore and London, 1975), pp.67-97; F. Hertz, Nationality in History and Politics (London, 1944); Manfred Hättich, Nationalbewußtsein und Staatsbewußtsein (Mainz, 1966), pp.20-23.

¹⁰² Shoup, 'The National Question,' p.124; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London and New York, 1983), p.124.

¹⁰³ Mary Fulbrook, The Fontana History of Germany 1918-1990. The Divided Nation (London, 1991), p.300.

legitimate, but that it was more so than the Federal Republic, which was reminiscent of its stance during the 1950s.

Secondly, the SED had finally accepted the fact that the population of the GDR and the FRG shared the same nationality. Since it was claimed that this did not mean that the unitary German nation still existed, it seems that the leadership believed they could safely take advantage of selected aspects of German nationality such as German history, without undermining the claim that a socialist nation existed in the GDR. This would have been unthinkable in the days of strict *Abgrenzung*, when the Party rejected everything shared by the two German states in an attempt to prove the legitimacy of the GDR and therefore its right to international recognition.

Thirdly, the regime may well have been motivated by a desire to distinguish the GDR from other members of the Warsaw Pact, particularly during the unrest in Poland in the early 1980s, to deter people from copying their socialist brothers and sisters there. Later in the decade, even the Soviet model would be played down in favour of GDR-style socialism in an attempt to avoid reform.

Fourthly, even though the Institute for Public Opinion Research had been abolished, the Party could still assess the public mood on the basis of the applications of those wishing to emigrate to the west and on reports of the *Stasi*. Information regarding the unofficial peace movement in the 1980s must have given an indication of the strength of all-German feeling aroused by the nuclear debate. However, this can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the regime may have recognised that the 'socialist German nation,' and therefore the GDR, lacked legitimacy, and identified its ambivalent relationship with the German past as both a cause, and a potential solution. They also realised that people have a natural desire to discover and learn about their ancestors. And if the population still believed in their German roots, it would be better for the SED to give them what they wanted by proving the German roots of the socialist nation in the

GDR, than for them to keep looking westwards in search of their heritage. An alternative view is that the regime believed that the GDR was now sufficiently secure that there was no longer any need to worry about being German and about the impact of German history. The only other option was to ignore the GDR's German roots, but the SED had already tried that in the 1970s, apparently with only limited success.

While it is difficult to establish which of these was the true scenario on the evidence available, it is possible that the regime believed that while popular allegiance to the GDR needed to be strengthened, a sufficiently firm foundation of GDR-consciousness already existed which could be further enhanced by a revival of interest in German history. However, later events, such as Honecker's sentimental behaviour while in the Federal Republic in 1987, and the SED's sudden panic about the German nation in the late 1980s, suggest a considerable degree of uncertainty regarding the validity of the 'socialist German nation' on the part of top functionaries, which, in view of the artificiality of the concept, is hardly surprising. What is certain, however, is that the leadership clearly believed that the advantages of linking the GDR to its German past outweighed the disadvantages, as the lavishness of the subsequent celebrations and architectural renovations showed.

Finally, it appears that there was considerable enthusiasm for a more comprehensive examination of German history from historians themselves.¹⁰⁴ In a confidential study by leading theorists and historians from two state academies on the 'Problems with the Development of the Socialist German Nation,' which was sent to Kurt Hager in 1980, the authors expressed the view that the GDR was very much rooted in German history and stressed the need to increase research and education regarding 'the historical roots, genesis, nature and historical role of socialist German national consciousness' as a means to strengthen people's

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Kosing, (interview, Berlin, 3 March 1993), Walter Schmidt (interview, Berlin, 3 June 1993), and Helmut Meier (interview, Berlin, 15 March 1993) all claim that this was the case.

identification with the 'socialist German nation,' and by implication, with the GDR itself. Interestingly, they warned against over-emphasising regional histories, such as Prussian history, which could fragment 'national' consciousness in the GDR. The fact that the study also paid considerable attention to the 'new trends of bourgeois nationalism' practised by the 'imperialist FRG' highlighted the reactive nature of GDR policy on the nation, which was evident throughout the lifetime of the state.¹⁰⁵

Until this point, the history of the GDR was very much that of the German workers' movement and only included 'progressive' figures, such as Thomas Müntzer, Ernst Thälmann, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. More controversial characters had been left for the Federal Republic. This fitted the SED's claim to be continuing progressive and revolutionary German traditions, while the Federal Republic was the continuation of the imperialistic and militaristic strand of German history. It also supported the claim that there were now two separate states and two separate nations on German soil with nothing in common. However, due to the tragic course of German history, particularly in the last century, this meant that the SED was giving away a rather larger chunk of history than the parts it wanted to keep. Until this point, historians in the GDR had portrayed figures and events very much in black and white, either as totally good or totally bad, with no shades of grey, and without mention of the positive results of events considered essentially bad. This obviously limited the range of subjects historians could write about, and encouraged them to stick to 'safe topics' for fear of the consequences of tackling more controversial events, or of being labelled 'bourgeois' and thus ostracised from the community of professional academics.

In 1978, a declaration from the Politburo stated:

The encouragement of citizens' pride in their socialist fatherland, their consciousness of the flourishing of the socialist German nation, its historic development and

¹⁰⁵ 'Probleme der Entwicklung,' p.36.

achievements, and its great prospects is a political task of the utmost importance. It is the logical result of class struggles and the greatest achievement of the workers in the entire history of the German people. The more this socialist national consciousness develops, the more it also functions as the impetus for *active participation in the strengthening and defence of the GDR*, and for the growing together of the socialist nations.¹⁰⁶

Thus the true intentions of the party were obvious. However, in the SED's defence, it could be argued that:

'Any cursory glance at education policies and controversies in quite different regimes, democratic as well as non-democratic, will reveal the key political importance of history in promoting a certain version of the nation's historical mission, its national myths about its past and its role and identity in the present.'¹⁰⁷

The new task of historians at state institutions such as the Academy of Science's Institute for History, the Academy for Social Sciences and the Institute for Marxism-Leninism (IML) was to portray 'the whole of German history as the national history of the GDR,' though a significant distinction was made by historians between 'heritage' (*Erbe*), which was shared by both German states and included both good and bad episodes, and 'tradition,' which referred only to aspects considered to be progressive, and which were supposedly only continued by the GDR. This idea appears to originate from an article by Horst Bartel in 1981,¹⁰⁸ and it soon became standard practice for East German historians to make the distinction. By paying attention to both the good and the bad strands of German history, the GDR could be shown to be the climax of the progressive strand, the triumph of good over evil, whereas the Federal Republic was portrayed as continuing the mistakes and injustices of the past.

¹⁰⁶ 'Beschuß des Politbüros über die weitere Aufgaben der politischen Massenarbeit der Partei,' *Einheit* 33 (1978): p.1227, my italics.

¹⁰⁷ Fulbrook, 'States, nations,' p.8.

¹⁰⁸ Horst Bartel, 'Historische Erbe und Tradition,' *Einheit* 34 (1981), pp. 272-278.

Although subjects that were not officially considered to be a part of the history of the GDR had been discussed within academic institutions, their publication was impossible, hence historians had tended to avoid them. However, from the late 1970s, they were able to address periods and events which the SED had previously disowned, which appears to have been appreciated after the limitations of the previous decade. However, the objectivity of East German historians should not be over-estimated, since they always had to perform a balancing act between serious scholarship on the one hand, and *Parteilichkeit* on the other, and were well aware of the editorial powers of their superiors. While they may have wished for a better, more credible GDR, they never had the intention of destabilising it.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, many were leading historians of the GDR who had not got where they were on merit alone. The overt aim of new text books and biographies was to form 'an important basis for a broad *Geschichtspropaganda* which will have an effect on the masses.'¹¹⁰

The publication of the *Grundriß der deutschen Geschichte* in 1979 provoked a sudden flood of books and articles which for the first time covered events and personalities other than the workers' movement and the class struggle in Germany.¹¹¹ Until this point, German history had been divided into two traditions: firstly, the authoritarian aspects of Prussian history which had culminated in the Third Reich and which were apparently continued by the Federal Republic; and secondly, the traditions of the peasant wars, the revolution of 1848, the KPD of the Weimar Republic and the anti-facist resistance which supposedly lived on in the GDR.¹¹² As a result of this uncharacteristic, non-Marxist treatment of Prussian military heroes, who were commemorated not only by

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Walter Schmidt, Berlin, 3 June 1993.

¹¹⁰ Hofmann, *Ein neues Deutschland*, p.298.

¹¹¹ Major biographical works appeared, for example, Ingrid Mittenzwei, *Friedrich II von Preußen. Eine Biographie* (East Berlin, 1979); K-H. Börner, *Wilhelm I: Deutscher Kaiser und König von Preußen. Eine Biographie* (East Berlin, 1984); E. Engelberg, *Bismarck: Urpreusse und Reichsgründer* (East Berlin, 1975). An official account was even published in English: H. Heitzer, *GDR. A Historical Outline* (Dresden, 1981).

¹¹² Iggers, *Marxist Historiography*, p.11

the written word, but also with monuments and exhibitions, the GDR was again labelled 'Red Prussia.'

Although articles in the theoretical journal *'Einheit'* belonged to the grey area between serious scholarship and propaganda, tending more towards one or the other, depending on the author's profession and status, an analysis of the contents of the journal from the late 1970s till the mid-1980s indicates the extent to which German history took priority over other subjects. In 1978 and 1979 it was one of the most frequently addressed topics, particularly in connection with the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the GDR, and was even the subject of a special edition. It is hardly necessary to examine each article, since they tended all to be based on the same arguments and written by the same few individuals such as Walter Schmidt and Horst Bartel, and were reproduced in other journals.

A typical example was Bartel's 'Historical Heritage and Tradition,' which attempted to explain the new line on German history and its significance for the socialist nation in the GDR. However, it also unintentionally highlighted the many paradoxes of the new stance. The writer claimed that the existence of a socialist nation in the GDR was becoming increasingly noticeable, which both allowed for, and called for 'a more comprehensive, richer, and more creatively critical relationship to everything that our people and humankind have achieved during their entire history.' It was apparently for this reason that the leadership of the Party and state had recently devoted particular attention to 'questions of heritage and tradition.'¹¹³ Why this should now be the case and not before was not addressed. Bartel recognised the need to uncover the roots of the 'socialist German nation,' which were buried deep in the past, the need to publicise them, and to make them relevant to the present and the future. This would involve 'facing the entire inheritance of German history with all its contradictions, and developing, preserving and continuing the whole wealth of traditions of the GDR.'¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Bartel, 'Historische Erbe,' p.272.

¹¹⁴ Bartel, p.272.

Though it could not be denied that German history was common to both states, the East German approach to it was contrasted with that of the Federal Republic:

In their hatred for socialism and for the flourishing of the socialist German nation, and without scruples, the ideologues of imperialism and social reformism in the FRG falsify history. They try to pass the GDR off as something without a history, and ignore her indissoluble rootedness in German history. They deny the objective historical role of the GDR as the legitimate heir to everything progressive in German history. ¹¹⁵

Clearly the writer was aware of potential 'all-German illusions' that might arise, hence he concluded,

The GDR's view of history and tradition is the result of partisan academic analysis of German history. It is diametrically opposed to the FRG's conception of history and tradition. Between the GDR and FRG there exists neither a shared relationship with the past, nor some sort of historical 'all-German ^{parentheses} brackets' around them. As Kurt Hager explained, 'in this respect, the German Question is not open. The GDR stands in the line of continuity of everything progressive, humanistic and revolutionary in earlier German history. The ruling exploitative class in the FRG has no right to refer to the traditions of those forces and movements, who were always attacked, suppressed and often assassinated by that same exploitative class, in order to legitimise its policies.' ¹¹⁶

Another article compared ^{the} East and West German militarism^y, and attempted to portray the former as 'heir to all the progressive military traditions of the German people,' and serving the interests of peace.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Bartel, p.273.

¹¹⁶ Bartel, p.278. See also Kurt Hager, Die Gesellschaftswissenschaften vor neuen Aufgaben, (East Berlin, 1981).

¹¹⁷ Horst Kühne, 'Die NVA: Legitimer Erbe aller progressiven militärischen Traditionen des deutschen Volkes,' Einheit 36 (1981): p.156.

In short, while accepting its German history, warts and all, negative or controversial episodes were contrasted with a positive image of the GDR in order to make the establishment of the state seem like a great triumph over the reaction, imperialism and militarism of the past, which had apparently not been achieved by the Federal Republic.

The 30th anniversary of the GDR in October 1979 was a demonstration of the SED's enthusiasm for the idea that the 'socialist German nation' was firmly rooted in German history in its entirety. The event bore the hallmark of Werner Lamberz,¹¹⁸ the State Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda, who recognised the potential of the state's German roots to transform a rather colourless GDR-state consciousness into a more emotive national consciousness, which in turn would reinforce the legitimacy of the state, both domestically and internationally. Lamberz had coordinated the preparations until his death in 1978. However, the SED appeared to want it both ways: 'Our socialist state embodies the continuation of everything good in German history, while at the same time embodying a radical break with everything reactionary.'¹¹⁹

A particularly striking aspect of the regime's new enthusiasm for German history was Honecker's personal interest in the subject. Whether this had anything to do with the fact that he was himself born on West German soil is debatable, though it would have been out of character for him to have put sentiment before 'the class struggle.' On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the GDR, Honecker used language reminiscent of Walter Ulbricht, even calling the state 'the new, socialist Germany.' The foundation of the GDR was proclaimed as 'the turning point in the history of the German people and of Europe,' and 'the beginning of the triumphal march of socialism in the *country of birth* of Marx and Engels!'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ According to Helmut Meier, interview, Berlin 15 March 1993.

¹¹⁹ 'Aufruf zum 30. Jahrestag der DDR,' *Einheit* 34 (1979): p.637.

¹²⁰ Erich Honecker, 'Der Siegeszug des Sozialismus auf deutschem Boden,' *Einheit* 34 (1979): pp.899-900, my italics.

He now also accepted that socialist national consciousness would be strengthened 'when we uphold and tend the progressive historical traditions of the entire history of the German people.'¹²¹ In short, Honecker seemed to have reverted to the argument that the GDR was *the* legitimate German state, but the problem remained that the Federal Republic made this claim too.

Although he had previously been denounced for subservience to the princes, Martin Luther was the key figure in the SED's campaign to provide the 'socialist German nation' with a history, and subsequently to legitimise the GDR. The intention was both to win over the population, particularly Christians, who were becoming increasingly involved in the peace movement, and also to enhance the international reputation of the GDR and its leader. Honecker personally set up the Martin Luther Committee in 1980, calling the GDR the state that was realising 'the ideals of the best sons of the German people.'¹²² The celebration of the quinqu^ecentary of Luther's birth in 1983 almost became a competition between the two German states as they both attempted to claim Luther for their own, though the GDR had a distinct advantage in that the most important historical sites of the reformation were on her territory. Suddenly the Federal Republic's claim to German history in its entirety was under threat. Helmut Kohl called the lavish celebrations in the GDR 'a subtle attempt by the SED to use Luther to bind the concept of nation with that of socialism, as if there were a direct line of continuity from Frederick the Great to Erich Honecker,'¹²³ which was precisely what the Party was trying to do. The SED's explanation for its new, more favourable portrayal of Luther was that 'the working class now exercises power, and has a wider view

¹²¹ Erich Honecker, 'Die Aufgaben der Partei bei der weiteren Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des 9. Parteitages,' 17 February 1978, cited in Honecker, Die Kulturpolitik, p.192.

¹²² Erich Honecker, 'Martin Luther und unsere Zeit,' 13 June 1980, cited in Honecker, Die Kulturpolitik, p.257.

¹²³ Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamts der Bundesregierung, 28 June 1983, p. 637, cited in R.F. Goekel, 'The Luther Anniversary in East Germany,' World Politics 37 (1984): p.125.

of the past than the working class which was in the midst of the struggle for power.'¹²⁴

Honecker was challenged on this total reversal of official opinion regarding figures such as Luther and Clausewitz in an interview with Robert Maxwell in 1980. The latter pointed out that Luther had previously been reviled in the GDR for betraying the peasants' uprising, and Clausewitz had been a firm supporter of the monarchy. Honecker explained,

It could be said that the world of ideas of Marx and Engels would be unimaginable without the creative examination of all the intellectual values that humanity had produced up to that point.... When we acknowledge the historic achievements of Martin Luther and Carl von Clausewitz, that is quite in keeping with the traditions of Marx, Engels, Lenin, the German workers' movement and our history since 1945. However, we in no way ignore the limitations of these and other personalities of German history, their negative traits, their contradictory behaviour, or the historic tragedy in which they became entangled. An understanding of the objective, factual course and entire dialectic of history conforms with our view of the world. A view of the greatness and limitations of prominent personalities in history is a part of that.¹²⁵

Asked whether or not there was an element of risk involved when both the GDR and FRG celebrated the same national heroes, Honecker replied,

'In our opinion it is not a question of risk, but one of our basic position regarding German history.' Apparently Lenin had claimed that one could not be a communist without analysing all human knowledge, of which communism was a result. In any case, he continued, 'our approach to history and the past is quite different to that of the Federal Republic..... We cannot possibly run the risk of celebrating the same national heroes as the FRG since you will search in

¹²⁴ Goekel, 'The Luther Anniversary,' p.128.

¹²⁵ Erich Honecker, Aus meinem Leben (East Berlin, 1981), p.436.

vain for institutions bearing the names of Nazi greats in our country.' Finally, when asked whether the breakthrough had occurred with the publication of a major biography of Frederick the Great, Honecker denied that this had been a breakthrough, claiming instead that it was 'the result of our position regarding our heritage.'¹²⁶

Thus, Honecker left many questions unanswered, most noticeably why this treatment of German history, which was suddenly regarded as correct and necessary, had not been undertaken before.

To what extent was the rooting of the 'socialist German nation' in German history in its entirety a good idea? Obviously there were some advantages to be gained, and at the same time, some risks, but little had been gained by the denial of the German roots of the state and its population during the previous decade. Since there was no longer an institute which monitored public opinion, no precise data on the resonance among the population exists, so we can only speculate. Research into historic consciousness was conducted by historians at the Academy for Social Sciences until 1984, but even if the results were available, they may well have been 'improved' to make them more palatable to the authorities.¹²⁷

On the positive side, it did provide the GDR with the 'national biography' and 'historic personality,' which until now had been seriously lacking, and gave people a similar opportunity to consider and celebrate their historical roots as their West German cousins. Presumably this reduced the resentment and confusion caused by denying people their heritage, which may have led some to view the Federal Republic as the true German state. Furthermore, it was hoped that it would enhance the concept of

¹²⁶ Honecker, p.437.

¹²⁷ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993. For an 'improved' account, see also Braumann, 'Zum Zusammenhang.' For a West German view see Johannes Kuppe, 'Geschichtsbewußtsein in der DDR,' in Geschichtsbewußtsein der Deutschen. Materialien zur Spurensuche eine Nation ed. Werner Weidenfeld (Cologne, 1987), pp.175-177.

the 'socialist German nation,' and put an end to its rivalry with the historical ethnic German nation. Thus the SED was effectively saying that identification with both the GDR and the ethnic German nation was no longer incompatible, which was reminiscent of Johann Gottfried Herder, who had stated that the idea of the German *Volk* was compatible with loyalty to the Prussian or Bavarian state.¹²⁸ All this completely contradicted the view that ethnicity was insignificant compared to class, the view advocated during the 1970s, and highlighted the political motivation behind changes in policy regarding the nation.

However, the danger was that the population would be reminded of things they shared with West Germans, and it seems more logical that this would be the case, thus reinforcing the national bond, and even a latent desire for reunification. Furthermore, the SED's use of historical figures such as Luther for political ends was not very subtle, and was in sharp contrast to their previous position. However, it was probably better for the Party to offer its own version of events than to let Bonn get away with influencing the citizens of the GDR via West German television, and to be seen to have 'taken leave of history' as it appeared. After all, the GDR could hardly be the greatest achievement in the history of the German people if it bore no relationship to that history.

Ultimately, the intended effects of the GDR's new relationship with its past were bound to be limited, because the Party was trying to prove something illogical, and that a substantial proportion of the population did not believe, namely that there were two separate German nations, one socialist, the other bourgeois, with certain things in common, such as history, but nothing of real significance, because their social and political systems determined their relationship, or lack of one. Even so, by accepting that the GDR was a German state, as was the Federal Republic, the SED really had little choice but to address the issue of the state's relationship to its history. The episode highlighted the fact that in spite of the regime's claims that the GDR was an independent, sovereign state, with a (socialist) nation of its own, the ethnic German nation

¹²⁸ Fulbrook, 'States, nations,' p.6.

continued to threaten the legitimacy of the GDR. While it had retained certain rather old-fashioned German traits which had been diluted by Americanisation and cosmopolitanism in the Federal Republic, the GDR could never be the 'best' German state when the yardsticks were economic success and liberal democracy. Thus the existence of the Federal Republic continued to challenge the GDR's *raison d'être*, while the reverse was never the case. Meanwhile, the leadership was about to be attacked on a second front, with the beginning of a new era in Moscow, which we now know marked the beginning of the end for the socialist German state.

3) THE SUDDEN RETURN OF THE NATION TO THE POLITICAL AGENDA

In the early and mid-1980s, the SED had stubbornly adhered to the line that the nation was not negotiable, in spite of tangible links between the two German states, which had been highlighted by the peace issue. While a considerable amount of attention had been paid to German history, theorists had little success in their attempts to keep the 'socialist German nation' alive as a subject for debate, and it was not mentioned at all at the Eleventh Party Conference in April 1986. Suddenly however, in 1988, an internal working party on 'the question of the nation,' chaired by a member of the Politburo, was established, followed a year later by an 'Interdisciplinary Academic Committee for Research on the Nation' at the Academy for Social Sciences and a flood of articles addressing the topic. This officially sanctioned interest was in stark contrast to the leadership's indifference to the issue for over a decade, and as before, it was no accident, as we shall see. It proves not only that the problem of the nation still threatened to destroy the GDR, but also that the leadership believed it could be the state's salvation if handled correctly.

Three reasons for the return of the subject to the political agenda can be identified: firstly, Gorbachev's reforms and the challenge posed to the status quo in Europe; secondly, Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic in 1987; and thirdly, internal

problems.¹²⁹ While the German component of the 'socialist German nation' had always raised doubts about the legitimacy of the GDR, both when it was emphasised and when it was denied, now even its socialist character, until now taken for granted by the leadership, was becoming a liability, due to unwelcome changes within the socialist bloc and the increasingly obvious economic crisis at home. But it was its socialist aspects which differentiated the 'socialist German nation' from the 'bourgeois German nation' in the Federal Republic, indeed it was the only real justification for the existence of the GDR at all. In short, the very foundations on which the GDR-nation had been constructed, socialism and Germanness, were both being eroded by forces beyond the SED's control, hence a response was unavoidable, though ultimately in vain.

a) The Challenge of Perestroika and Glasnost

The SED disapproved of both Gorbachev's internal reforms and his ideas for the future of Europe. The concept of a 'common European home' was particularly worrying, firstly, because it raised questions about the sovereignty of the states concerned, and secondly because it implied that Moscow was questioning the status quo in Europe, including the existing solution to the German Question. As the only guarantor of the future of the GDR, it was feared that Gorbachev would be willing to do a deal with the West against the wishes of the SED leadership.¹³⁰ Thus the latter maintained that the 'common European home' as merely a mechanism for security and peace-keeping, comprised of sovereign states, which would always have a socialist wing and a capitalist wing.¹³¹

¹²⁹ This question has already been briefly addressed in a paper by Stephan and Küchenmeister, entitled 'Die nationale Frage in der Politik der SED am Ende der 80er Jahre,' (1993), from whom the author received a copy in advance of publication. They argue that the subject was revived due to the economic situation and as a response to Gorbachev's idea of a 'common European home.'

¹³⁰ On Gorbachev's rethink of Soviet German policy, see Mike Dennis, Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl (London and New York, 1992), p.23.

¹³¹ Jürgen Hofmann and Gerhard Basler, 'Zwei deutsche Staaten und Nationen im europäischen Haus,' Einheit 44 (1989): p.171.

However, the one aspect of Gorbachev's approach that the leadership did approve of was the idea that each socialist state was free to determine its own brand of socialism, and that what was right for the Soviet Union would not necessarily be right for others.¹³² Gennardy Gerasimov called this the 'Sinatra doctrine,' i.e. doing it 'my way.'¹³³ For 15 years, Honecker, an ardent believer in proletarian internationalism, had proclaimed that 'To learn from the Soviet Union, is to learn to win,' and that the Soviet model was the only model. But that was in the days of the communist old guard, with whom Honecker felt akin. Now he was keen to take up Gorbachev's offer of socialism à la carte, on the grounds that 'The development of socialism in individual states must be in keeping with national conditions.'¹³⁴ Precisely what these were is unclear, but the intention was to avoid reform. As Kurt Hager put it: 'Just because your neighbour puts up new wallpaper in his flat, would you feel obliged to put up new wallpaper in your own flat?'¹³⁵

Another problem was the impact of the charismatic Gorbachev on the East German population. His popularity was demonstrated during the 750th anniversary of Berlin, celebrated on both sides of the Wall in June 1987, when a large group of young people gathered near the Brandenburg Gate, shouting 'We want Gorbachev' and 'The wall must go.'¹³⁶ By stressing the national before the international, the Party hoped to dissuade people from turning eastwards for hope, just as they had looked westwards until this point. This strategy was also perceived as a means to distance the state from other socialist countries, particularly Poland, in order to reduce the risk of unrest spreading to the GDR, which had worried the leadership since the beginning of the

¹³² 27th Conference of the CPSU, March 1986, cited in Barbara von Ow, 'Der Vogel in Moscows Käfig,' in Konrad Löw, ed., Beharrung und Wandel: Die DDR und die Reformen von Michail Gorbatschow (Berlin, 1990), p.10.

¹³³ The Guardian, 26 October 1989, p.8, cited in Garton Ash, In Europe's Name, p.4.

¹³⁴ ZPA IV 2/1/685, 18 August 1988 (Honecker in conversation with Oskar Lafontaine)

¹³⁵ Neues Deutschland, 10 April 1987.

¹³⁶ Zieger, Die Haltung, p.233.

decade. Just to play down the events would not be sufficient because, as Honecker himself acknowledged with unusual candor: 'All negative occurrences in socialist countries immediately enter the GDR via West German television. The West is not happy with the calm in the GDR. We must tackle the problem ideologically.'¹³⁷ Therefore, in spite of verbal adherence to the principle of socialist internationalism, in practice, the SED took full advantage of the opportunity to take a more nationalistic stance, resulting in the rather poorly thought out concept of 'Socialism in the colours of the GDR.'

The phrase had been introduced by Honecker at the seventh ~~session~~^{plenum} of the Central Committee in 1988, and was often heard during the final year of the GDR's existence. There he admitted, 'Developments in the socialist world are more varied than many people previously believed.'¹³⁸ (himself included). The concept was not his own invention, but borrowed from the leader of the French communist Party, Georges Marchais. Ironically, the SED had criticised him during the mid-1970s for his advocacy of 'socialism in French colours.' Honecker was probably persuaded to adopt a similar idea by his personal adviser and script-writer, Frank-Joachim Herrmann, who in his eyes could do no wrong, but who failed to impress others.¹³⁹ The concept was also reminiscent of Anton Ackermann's idea of a 'German road to socialism' dating back to 1946. However, whereas the latter intended to keep out Stalinism, the new version was more of 'a phrase to repel reform.... in which reality and fiction became increasingly blurred.'¹⁴⁰

Though the motivation behind the concept is obvious, just what these so-called 'colours' were is rather less so. Far from being anything likely to arouse emotion and a specifically East German national consciousness, they were simply described in terms of

¹³⁷ ZPA IV 2/2039/64. Report of a speech between Erich Honecker and W. Medwedjew, 24 August 1988.

¹³⁸ ZPA IV 2/1/692.

¹³⁹ Alfred Kosing certainly has a very low opinion of him. Interview with Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

¹⁴⁰ Meuschel, Legitimation, p.304.

the tangible achievements of the state, such as 'a highly developed work and production culture, a working class that has matured over several generations, a relatively high standard of general education, the development of science and technology..... social security, full employment, the solution of the housing problem, and complete equality for women,' combined with the traditions and experiences of the German workers' movement.¹⁴¹ As Kurt Hager rather dishonestly explained, 'When we speak of "Socialism in the colours of the GDR," what we mean is that we have gone our own unmistakable way, that we have adapted Marxism-Leninism to fit our conditions, and that here, socialism bears the hallmark of characteristics that conform to our traditions, preconditions, experiences and possibilities.'¹⁴² Responding to criticism from the West, one writer concluded,

'When we talk about establishing socialism in the colours of the GDR, the intention is not to fence ourselves off from other socialist countries, as some people west of the Elbe have implied, but actively to introduce our own unmistakable contribution for the greatest benefit of all in the community of socialist states, entirely in the sense of the unity between socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism. In this way, the colour red, and the red banner of the working class, always was, is and remains vital and imperative for the political identity of the GDR.'¹⁴³

The transparency of the notion of 'socialism in the colours of the GDR,' helps us to understand the reasons for the revival of interest in the concept of the nation. However, whether or not it was a good idea is debatable. The word 'colours' was somewhat inappropriate, and could have put the idea of the German *schwarz-rot-gold* into people's minds, with its all-German connotations. While theorists on the nation believed that the unique characteristics of the GDR should be emphasised, including

¹⁴¹ Bruno Mahlow, 'Patriotismus und Internationalismus in der Politik der SED,' *Einheit* 44 (1989): pp.548-549. The concept was the special topic for the sixth edition of the journal that year.

¹⁴² Kurt Hager, 'Die Geschichte und das Verständnis unserer Zeit,' *Einheit* 44 (1989): p.599. Here Hager listed what he considered these 'colours' to be.

¹⁴³ Mahlow, 'Patriotismus,' p.549.

its Germanness, they remained unconvinced of the validity of this particular concept due to its emphasis on concrete achievements, or rather, alleged achievements, while neglecting the subjective feelings of the population.¹⁴⁴ It was an attempt to arouse a state consciousness divorced from (German) nationalism. The very next year it became clear that even in 'the colours of the GDR,' it was socialism that was the problem, and soon there was no socialism and no GDR, and only the colours *schwarz-rot-gold* remained.

b) Kohl Throws Down the Gauntlet

As we have seen, during the 1980s, the National Question had been simmering in the background for several years. According to the last ^{SED} leader of the GDR, Egon Krenz, what finally caused the pot to boil over was Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic in September 1987, which was highly symbolic for both sides. During talks the West German side re-opened the question of the nation, forcing it back onto the political agenda, after several years during which it had lurked just beneath the surface due to the peace issue.¹⁴⁵ The main reason why the Party finally accepted that rather than simply to ignore the issue, it would be better to go on the offensive, was the fact that contact with the Federal Republic was now not only unavoidable, but vital for the survival of the GDR itself.

There were two reasons for this. The first was the belief that if the two German states did not actively strive to prevent a nuclear war, they would be the victims or even the cause of it, which had brought them together in the form of a 'coalition of good sense' in the early 1980s, as mentioned earlier. As Honecker himself pointed out, 'Neither can have their peace by themselves.'¹⁴⁶ The high point of this coalition was a historic paper, jointly produced by representatives of the SED and the West German SPD, entitled 'The Conflict between Ideologies and Common Security.' It

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993; interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Egon Krenz, Berlin, 15 July 1993.

¹⁴⁶ Literally 'Keiner kann seinen Frieden allein haben.' Die Zeit, 11 September 1987.

aroused much interest within intellectual circles on both sides of the divide, and was referred to in the GDR as 'the new thinking,' since it questioned the notion that only socialism could guarantee peace. However, it sent a confused message to the masses, who had been led to believe that the SPD were imperialists just like the CDU/CSU, and because talk about 'no more wars on German soil' suggested that 'German soil' still meant something. The paper did not mark a shift in policy on the nation, but had arisen out of necessity, like the 'coalition of good sense.' Even so, the fact that it was produced at all was quite remarkable. Unfortunately the 'new thinking' was short-lived and although the paper was published in *Neues Deutschland* in 1987, it was then quickly and intentionally forgotten by the Party leadership before it could have very much impact beyond Party and academic circles.¹⁴⁷

The second reason for more contact was that those in the highest echelons of power in the GDR knew that it was economically bankrupt, and that ironically, only financial assistance from the very state that disputed its right to exist could bail it out, and thus guarantee its continued existence in some form.¹⁴⁸ This would inevitably lead to increased contact and co-operation between the two states, but there seemed to be a shortage of alternatives, especially at a time when the Party leadership was playing down its commitment to the socialist bloc.

We now know that a very select group within the ruling elite, led by the head of 'Commercial Co-ordination,' (*KoKo*), Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, had been contemplating greater economic reliance on the FRG and even a future confederation if it was the only means of salvaging something of the GDR.¹⁴⁹ This obviously put the 'developed socialist society' in doubt, which had been the essential framework within which the 'socialist German nation' had evolved.¹⁵⁰ But, as mentioned earlier, without socialism, there would be no 'socialist German nation,' and no justification

¹⁴⁷ Meuschel, *Legitimation*, p.300.

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Schalk-Golodkowski in *Die Zeit*, 11 January 1991, p.11.

¹⁴⁹ Schalk in *Die Zeit*, 11 January 1991. He claims to have discussed the idea with West German politicians Gerhard Schürer and Siegfried Wenzel.

¹⁵⁰ Stephan and Küchenmeister, 'Die nationale Frage,' pp.3-4.

for a separate socialist German state. The theorist, Jürgen Hofmann now believes that this unavoidable official contact was the reason why the leadership hoped the masses would forget about the National Question in the early 1980s. The functionaries concerned thought it would be better suddenly to produce a new trump card. Any on-going ideological reflection of the question would make the task of explaining a dramatic change in the official line more complicated.¹⁵¹ This again highlights the fact that the leadership saw the concept of the nation as something that could just be altered to suit the political and economic requirements of the moment.

Official contact with Bonn had both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, it enhanced the image of the GDR as a state of equal status to the Federal Republic and a more important actor than other 'inferior' members of the socialist bloc. But on the other hand, in spite of the fact that the two states did not have a shared present, they did have a shared past, and a joint responsibility for the future, which inevitably revived the National Question. The SED had pronounced it dead many years earlier, but in reality it was only sleeping, and unbeknown to all, would soon reawaken.

Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic was an odd demonstration of what linked the two German states and what divided them, with Bonn naturally stressing the former and the SED the latter. The SED portrayed the visit as the ultimate indication that the GDR was a separate sovereign state from the Federal Republic, demonstrated by the fact that Honecker was to receive the same treatment and honours as the head of any other foreign country. Furthermore it was to be a sign of the two states' commitment to peace. Beforehand, Hermann Axen called the visit 'one of the strongest blows against revanchism in history.' Apparently, the first blow was the foundation of the GDR in 1949, the second was the erection of the so-called 'protective wall' in 1961, the third was the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972, followed by the admission of the GDR into the UN. Honecker's visit would constitute the fourth blow. It was billed as the boldest

¹⁵¹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

demonstration of the fact that two German states now existed, whose relationship could only be one of peaceful coexistence.¹⁵²

In his after-dinner speech in Bonn, Honecker adhered to the line that socialism and capitalism, and by implication, the GDR and the Federal Republic, were as difficult to combine as fire and water.¹⁵³ In contrast, Kohl expressed Bonn's commitment to the unity of the German nation, and the continued openness of the German Question. He referred to 'both states within Germany,' and stressed his hope that the division could be overcome peacefully. The Federal President, Richard von Weizsäcker had welcomed Honecker 'as leader of the GDR, but also as a German among Germans, in the sense of a history under which he [Honecker], had suffered as a German.'¹⁵⁴ The joint communiqué issued by both heads of state emphasised the equality and independence of both states and concentrated on the further development of 'normal, good-neighbourly relations in accordance with the Basic Treaty,' while at the same time acknowledging that there were still differences of opinion, including regarding the National Question.¹⁵⁵

Afterwards, the SED portrayed the visit as a great victory, and as Bonn's acknowledgement that the GDR was a sovereign state, just like any other. Much was made of the use of protocol as was normal practice during an official visit by a foreign head of state, such as the raising of the East German flag and the sound of her national anthem on West German territory. These symbolic acts were portrayed as a sign of Bonn's recognition of the GDR's sovereignty and equal status, and of the normal character of their relationship in accordance with international law. They apparently highlighted the discrepancy between the 'all-German illusions' featured in the Basic Law, and the reality of the

¹⁵² ZPA J IV 2/2A/3045, (report by Axen of a discussion with the CPSU, 4 August 1987).

¹⁵³ Erich Honecker, Reden und Aufsätze, 12 vols., (East Berlin, 1988), vol. 12, p.518.

¹⁵⁴ ZPA J IV 2/2A/3054, (report to the Politburo on Honecker's official visit to the FRG).

¹⁵⁵ Neues Deutschland, 7 September 1987.

situation.¹⁵⁶ According to the East German side, Kohl's references to the 'unity of the nation' would do nothing to change this,¹⁵⁷ and it was the need to secure peace, not some sort of 'national bond' that formed the basis for the relationship between the two German states.¹⁵⁸ However, the attention paid to the continuing problem of the nation suggested that Honecker had been considerably unnerved by Kohl's references to it, especially since it was clear that the GDR literally could not afford to fence itself off from its western relation.

How much truth was there in the SED's claims regarding the visit? While it was true that Honecker was superficially treated like any other visiting head of state, many of the gestures were purely symbolic, and while not insignificant and considered acts of treason by some West German conservatives, they could not hide the fact that the relationship was still far from normal. Furthermore, it was somewhat ironic that the SED attached so much importance to the sovereignty of the GDR, when as a member of the socialist bloc, it had only very limited sovereignty, especially in foreign policy. Due to their common German past, the range of subjects discussed went far beyond those discussed by two states who just happened to be neighbours. It included undeniable matters of common interest, such as peace and environmental protection, but also voluntary co-operation in many areas, indicating both parties' willingness to increase contact - not just at a governmental level but also between citizens. Topics discussed included communications, travel arrangements, cultural exchanges, sporting events, Berlin, AIDS research and town-twinning.¹⁵⁹ According to the West German interpretation, all the agreements that resulted from the visit were a sign that the two states were still linked by a national bond, and were seen as a means to preserve it.

¹⁵⁶ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.291.

¹⁵⁷ ZPA J IV 2/2A/3054, (report to the Politburo on Honecker's official visit to the FRG).

¹⁵⁸ Hofmann, Ein neues Deutschland, p.292.

¹⁵⁹ ZPA J IV 2/2A/3054.

While it goes without saying that economic motives lay behind Honecker's willingness to co-operate, the opportunity only existed due to the national connection, regardless of whether or not the SED acknowledged it as such. Furthermore, his nostalgic visit to his birthplace in the Saarland totally discredited the claim that nothing linked the two German states.¹⁶⁰ There he must have been aware that the relationship between the two states was special, in spite of all the rhetoric to the contrary. Therefore, for the first time, the leadership appeared to recognise that it was pointless, even destructive, to deny the national bond, when it could be put to good use to benefit the GDR. This realisation finally ended the Party's policy of silence on the nation and gave the green light for renewed discussion on the subject.

c) Domestic Concerns

The intention of Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic was not just to prove the legitimacy of the GDR to the West German government and on the international stage. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate to the East Germans that their state was just as legitimate as the Federal Republic, and that it was making an active contribution towards peace. It was hoped that this would strengthen their pride in the GDR as an alternative to ethnic German consciousness. This was urgently required to counteract the effects of potentially threatening events now occurring on both sides of the state, and to discourage domestic unrest, which had become organised in the form of the unofficial peace movement, and was further encouraged by Gorbachev's more flexible attitude.

But there was also another reason why the regime needed to win the allegiance of the population, namely the fact that the economic basis on which the 'socialist German nation' was founded was in

¹⁶⁰ For western descriptions of the visit see Anne McElvoy, The Saddled Cow, East Germany's Life and Legacy (London and Boston, 1992), pp. 87-88; Die Zeit, 11 September 1987, pp.1,3; Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, A History of West Germany, 2 vols., (Oxford and Cambridge M.A., 1989), vol.2: Democracy and its Discontents 1963-88, pp. 489-490.

crisis.¹⁶¹ Patriotism became all the more vital for the economic strengthening of the GDR, but the economic situation was so serious that the existing *Leistungsbewußtsein* or pride in economic achievements could be shattered at any time. With two of the GDR's most essential characteristics, namely her Germanness and her commitment to the socialist bloc, already risky as means to enhance GDR-consciousness, now even the economic and social system could no longer be relied on as a source of national pride. As a result, a rapid rethink of the concept of the nation in the GDR was unavoidable.

d) Theorists Hear the Call

In February 1988 an internal working party, chaired by Hermann Axen, was set up to address 'the question of the nation,' which had not been officially debated since the publication of the Party Programme in 1976. All those theorists who had previously been involved with the topic were literally called upon to participate, whether they liked it or not, though most were willing, viewing it as an opportunity to reactivate discussion on the subject after their futile attempts at the beginning of the decade. The 15 members included Alfred Kosing, Walter Schmidt, and Jürgen Hofmann, other social scientists and historians, and representatives from the Department of Sciences and Ministry for Foreign Affairs.¹⁶²

Honecker sanctioned the formation of the working party, which in itself showed that the subject needed to be taken seriously, for reasons already explained. However, exactly how interested he really was is debatable. Some commentators claim he took a personal interest in the group's activities,¹⁶³ but insiders say the project was very much Axen's own initiative, and that Honecker may have had an ulterior motive for giving the group his blessing. Axen's personal adviser, Manfred Uschner, claims that his boss, who was officially responsible for foreign affairs, had been

¹⁶¹ For details, see Dennis, Social and Economic Modernization, pp.27-50.

¹⁶² ZPA IV 2/2035/16 (Büro Axen)

¹⁶³ Stephan and Küchenmeister, 'Die nationale Frage,' p.3.

'shunted into a siding' by Honecker, who had more or less taken over foreign policy. Therefore he needed to carve out a new niche for himself, and offered to tackle the problem of the nation in the light of Bonn's challenge. This offer was accepted by Honecker, not least because it would give Axen something to do and thus serve as a consolation prize for excluding him from foreign affairs.¹⁶⁴ The topic provided an ideal opportunity for Axen to re-assert himself, not only because it had been in urgent need of attention since Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic, but also because his interest in the subject dated back to the early 1970s.

However, there is no evidence that any other members of the Politburo were interested in the subject. Though Axen sent them copies of the paper produced by the working party, according to Krenz, it was never formally discussed, because it was still a sensitive issue and the others did not want to be bothered with it,¹⁶⁵ presumably believing that if the problem was not discussed, it would cease to exist. A special double edition of the Party journal *Einheit* to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the GDR in October 1989 included articles by many leading functionaries, but only Hermann Axen even mentioned the word nation.¹⁶⁶ Others, including Honecker, chose to emphasise the concept of 'Socialism in the colours of the GDR,' which was a poor substitute for a real national identity, especially since the short-comings of socialism were becoming apparent not only in the case of the GDR, but in the Eastern bloc as a whole.

The academic members of the working party had several reasons not to expect it to achieve very much.¹⁶⁷ Though they had been called upon for their expertise, this was in order that it could be put to good use to serve the Party. While Axen was apparently

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 23 July 1993; Manfred Uschner, Die Zweite Etage. Funktionsweise eines Machtapparates (Berlin, 1993), p.60.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Egon Krenz, Berlin, 15 July 1993.

¹⁶⁶ Hermann Axen, 'Die DDR - fest verankert in der neuen sozialistischen Welt,' *Einheit* 44 (1989): pp.814-815.

¹⁶⁷ Alfred Kosing was under no illusions about what could be achieved. Interview with Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993.

less dogmatic than other members of the leading elite, he too was totally out of touch with real life in the GDR, and was hardly young and dynamic. Ideologically, he still basically adhered to the class-based definition of the nation, dating back to the Eighth Party Conference in 1971, which he had helped to formulate. Furthermore, he was afraid to rock the boat by confronting Honecker with unfavourable findings or appearing to criticise those closest to him due to an inferiority complex, and his reliance on elite privilege for health provision for his ailing wife.¹⁶⁸ While it was possible to have a reasonably frank discussion within the working party, for the reasons mentioned above, the reports that were passed on to the Central Committee were inevitably modified.¹⁶⁹

During its first meeting in February 1988, the working party recognised that the SED's increased contact with Bonn during the early 1980s had led to uncertainties regarding the state of the nation, and made people question the validity of the line expressed in Party documents. This was not only true of the masses, but also of Party functionaries and propagandists.¹⁷⁰ Therefore plans were made for a new offensive with two main components - an increase in academic work on the subject at Party institutions, and more effective propaganda to enhance people's 'national self-perception' (*nationales Selbstverständnis*) as citizens of the GDR.¹⁷¹

To achieve the former, it was proposed to establish a new field of research into the nation at the Academy for Social Sciences, and to ensure the topic was addressed in the Department of Sciences' 'Central Research Plan for the Social Sciences' for 1991-1995. Subjects identified as in need of attention included the relationship between the 'socialist German nation' and the 'capitalist German nation, (an unusual admission that there was a problem), and their historic 'community of responsibility'

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Manfred Uschner, Berlin, 23 July 1993.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

¹⁷⁰ ZPA IV 2/2035/16. This meeting took place on 3 February 1988.

¹⁷¹ ZPA IV 2/2035/16

(*Verantwortungsgemeinschaft*), and also the dialectic between national and European elements in the light of the concept of the 'common European home.' Clearly the SED was on the defensive and being forced to react to developments in its relationship with the Federal Republic on the one hand, and in Moscow's foreign policy on the other.

To improve the population's identification with the socialist German nation, an extensive list of journal and newspaper articles was planned, particularly to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the GDR in October 1989. Responsibility for the production of these articles was shared by institutions such as the Academy for Social Sciences and the Institute for Marxism-Leninism, and the Propaganda Department. The intention was to ensure that the population not only understood that the unitary German nation no longer existed, but also who was responsible for the division, (i.e. 'West German imperialists'). It was hoped that this would dispel illusions that the two German states were growing closer together again, which, it was admitted, had arisen as a result of the increased contact between their leaders. Furthermore, the question of the nation was to be included in foundation courses in Marxism-Leninism and addressed in the forthcoming ideological indoctrination programme or *Parteilehrjahr* in preparation for the next Party Conference.¹⁷²

A detailed paper was produced by academic members of the working party in the spring of 1988, entitled 'Questions regarding the Development of the Socialist Nation in the GDR and the Debate with Contemporary Nationalism in the FRG.'¹⁷³ The precise purpose of the paper is unclear. According to Jürgen Hofmann, who was the group's 'academic secretary,' there were several points that the authors particularly wanted to get across: the importance of national consciousness, the significance of all-German elements for the 'socialist German nation,' the fact that the development of a nation was a long process, and finally that

¹⁷² ZPA IV 2/2035/16

¹⁷³ 'Studie: Fragen der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nation in der DDR und der Auseinandersetzung mit dem gegenwärtigen Nationalismus in der BRD,' (AfG/IfGA, February 1988). ZPA IV 2/2035/16

the issue was far too complex to be dealt with in a couple of sentences, as the Party leadership had tried to do in the early 1970s. However, these points needed to be phrased carefully so as not to appear too critical.¹⁷⁴ Theorists also wanted to find out whether or not a national consciousness unique to the GDR had evolved. With thousands of citizens applying for permission to leave for the Federal Republic, the evidence suggested otherwise.

In spite of constraints, the actual paper was relatively realistic and the theorists managed to include most of their main points. Unlike published work, which described the nation that the Party desired, as though it was already a reality, it highlighted several problem areas: firstly, the need to formulate better arguments to ensure the masses understood the concept of the 'socialist German nation'; and secondly, the need to counteract West German claims regarding the unity of the nation and 'the openness of the German question.' Proletarian internationalism was mentioned, although for the first time, the point was made that while socialist nations were growing closer together economically, it did not follow that national distinctions would merge or that national structures would dissolve.¹⁷⁵

The paper was sent to Honecker by Axen with a letter stating that it was time to expand on the line expressed at the Eighth Party Conference in 1971 and in the Party Programme, because a large proportion of the population was too young to remember the SED's alleged struggle on behalf of the entire German people for a 'united, peace-loving, democratic Germany' and a unitary socialist German nation. It was also necessary to ensure that the history of the GDR and the SED was portrayed in a professional and coherent manner. Axen added that the working-party sought the First Secretary's approval and that it would adhere to the line he had taken in his recent after-dinner speech in Bonn.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

¹⁷⁵ ZPA IV 2/2035/16

¹⁷⁶ ZPA IV 2/2035/16

The second, and, as it turned out, last meeting of the working party in September 1988, concentrated on the state of 'socialist national consciousness' in the GDR, and how theoretical work on the subject of the nation could be encouraged. At last empirical research was planned in order to identify the most common misunderstandings. Obviously this was not just out of interest, but also to make it easier to devise effective propaganda to correct them. The intention was to collect data on popular opinion by examining letters to the press and applications by those wishing to leave the country, and by conducting a proper opinion poll. In this way they hoped to establish which factors furthered the development of a national consciousness unique to the GDR and which hindered it. Factors to be taken into consideration included German history and culture, family ties, ethnic and linguistic factors, the foreign policy of the GDR, and last but not least, the effects of Bonn's claim that the unitary German nation still existed. They also intended to establish whether the population understood how the 'revolutionary transformation' of the GDR had radically changed the foundations of the nation, whether they identified with the socialist system and were proud of its achievements, and whether they were prepared to defend it militarily if necessary. Research in the early 1980s had apparently shown that the population had failed to grasp the SED's explanation as to why Germany was divided. A better understanding of the Party's earlier efforts to preserve the unity of the nation (which had been played down since the 1970s), was also felt to be necessary to justify her present stance on the National Question.¹⁷⁷

Unfortunately, it took a long time for any proposal to be put into practice in the GDR, since nothing could be done without official permission at various levels. Furthermore the members of the working party could not have known just how little time they, and the state itself, had left. A questionnaire on national consciousness was drawn up and later reworked by both Axen and the Department of Sciences before the latter approved it in April 1989. Then it had to be registered with the Central

¹⁷⁷ ZPA IV 2/2035/16

Authority for Statistics, which only gave the green light for it in September 1989,¹⁷⁸ by which time it was already the beginning of the end for the GDR, and events answered many of the questions before they could even be asked. This is indeed a shame, since many of the questions invited answers that the leadership usually chose not to hear. The results were to be confidential and it was Axen and Kurt Hager who would decide what was to be done with them. Their response when confronted with the truth would have been interesting.

The questions concerned the respondents' levels of agreement with the official concept of the 'socialist German nation' and the factors which determine nations in general, and with the SED's account of how Germany came to be divided. They were also to be asked whether they believed the German Question was still open, and for their opinion of the Federal Republic and its people, and of the GDR's relationship with the Soviet Union. Other questions included what made them proud to be citizens of the GDR, what they understood by national culture and '*Heimat*,' what aspects of history most interested them, and even their views on the considerable efforts made to preserve Sorb culture.¹⁷⁹ Although the poll was never conducted, the fact that it was permitted at all can be interpreted as an indication that the leadership had finally recognised the seriousness of the threat posed by the revival of the National Question to the legitimacy of the GDR. The fact that such questions needed to be asked showed how insecure the leadership still was regarding the level of popular acceptance of the 'socialist German nation.'

The working party also agreed that the problem of the nation required more theoretical attention. The best way to guarantee this was to set up an officially recognised committee at a Party institution, hence it was proposed that an 'Interdisciplinary Academic Committee for Research on the Nation' at the Academy for Social Sciences, and a new field of research into the 'socialist German nation' at the Institute for the History of the Workers'

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

¹⁷⁹ ZPA IV 2/2035/16

Movement (IfGA) should be established. The Secretariat of the Central Committee agreed in December 1988, on the grounds that 'The needs of social development and ideological work call for the continuous, long-term formulation and propagation of the creative position of the SED regarding the development of the socialist nation in the GDR,' though no extra funding was to be made available. This was apparently all the more pressing due to the recent increase in international interest in the 'so-called German question' and its role in the long-term strategies of the West German government.¹⁸⁰

Due to its unusual interdisciplinary nature, the new academic committee was greeted with enthusiasm by those who had been trying for years to keep the nation alive as a subject for research and debate. Along with several familiar names, such as the chair, Jürgen Hofmann, it included experts on the Sorb community and Korea.¹⁸¹ The first meeting in May 1989 was also attended by Hermann Axen and Otto Reinhold, the director of the Academy of Sciences - an indication of its importance. Hofmann claims that the committee was far more academic than the working party, which had been formed with the specific purpose of producing more effective propaganda.¹⁸² However, while the discussion may have been freer and more intellectual, the possibilities should not be overestimated. The usual constraints on Party institutions applied, and the leadership had not permitted the committee simply out of kindness. In retrospect one almost feels sorry for those who had struggled for so long to establish such a body, and then when they finally achieved their goal, it was too late. By the summer of 1989, there was little point in theorising about how long the consolidation of the 'socialist German nation' would take when the opposite process was happening on the streets of Leipzig and East Berlin.

A flood of publications on the subject of the nation followed in 1988 and 1989, in accordance with the plan drawn up by the

¹⁸⁰ ZPA J IV 2/3A/4668

¹⁸¹ For a full list of participants see Stephan and Küchenmeister, 'Die nationale Frage,' footnote 36.

¹⁸² Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin, 1 March 1993.

working party. The fact that both specialist journals and the popular press were targeted highlighted the intention of reaching as many sections of the population as possible. Most of the articles were written by members of the interdisciplinary committee and/or the working party. Even the veteran theorist, Alfred Kosing, was called upon to address the subject for the first time since the beginning of the decade in a lengthy piece written in the Spring of 1988. But by the time it was published in the Autumn of 1989,¹⁸³ it had already become embarrassingly irrelevant due to events on the streets and state borders. Kosing argued that just because people were critical of the GDR, they did not necessarily want to abolish it all together. Instead they were demonstrating that they were not indifferent to the state, and may even have become quite attached to it. Likewise, he argued, their criticism was not necessarily a rejection of the existence of a separate 'socialist German nation.'¹⁸⁴ But even if it had not been their original intention, they soon began to do just that.

The writers still could not contradict the position on the socialist German nation contained in the Party Programme, which remained official policy. Even so, the material produced was more realistic in tone, and drew on the ideas and problems that had been outlined in the paper produced for the working party. Though the Marxist-Leninist theory that nations were primarily determined by social factors was still maintained, this view was somewhat modified, even contradicted by increased emphasis on non-Marxist aspects of nations. Consequently it was argued that the establishment of two separate states with incompatible social orders had led to the development of two completely separate nations,¹⁸⁵ and that increased contact between them was not an indication that the German Question was still open,¹⁸⁶ but merely

¹⁸³ Alfred Kosing, 'Sozialistische Gesellschaft und Sozialistische Nation in der DDR,' Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 37 (1989): pp.913-924. He also produced several populist pieces for Neues Deutschland.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 3 March 1993; interview with Walter Schmidt, Berlin, 3 June 1993.

¹⁸⁵ Jürgen Hofmann, 'Zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen deutschen Nation in der DDR,' Einheit 43 (1988): p.738.

¹⁸⁶ See for example Klaus-Uwe Koch, 'Warum es keine offene deutsche Frage gibt,' Einheit 44 (1989): p.274; Otto Reinhold, 'Zur

a device to secure peace.¹⁸⁷ Considerable attention was also paid to subjective factors such as national consciousness and identity,¹⁸⁸ and the fact that the GDR was a product of German history in its entirety.¹⁸⁹ In addition to this, more was made of the SED's earlier attempts to preserve the unity of the nation for as long as this remained a realistic goal, and as usual, its inability to do so was entirely blamed on 'West German imperialism.'¹⁹⁰

One writer pointed out that the SED's 'clear position on the nation' at the Eighth Party Conference in 1971 had helped to achieve the treaties and subsequent international recognition of the GDR,¹⁹¹ (which had been the intention of course). In private, however, all the leading theorists thought Honecker's sudden declaration of a purely socialist nation in the GDR had been absurd, and they now stressed that the development of a nation was a lengthy process. This process of consolidation could apparently be accelerated not just by the strengthening of a 'socialist German national consciousness' in the GDR, but also by 'intensifying and mastering the scientific-technical revolution,'¹⁹² which was evidently floundering. However, just how long this process was supposed to take, and how one would know when it was complete was not explained.

Undoubtedly the most significant publication resulting from the renewal of interest in the nation was Jürgen Hofmann's *Ein neues*

Gesellschaftskonzeption der SED,' *Einheit* 44 (1989): p.486; Hager, 'Die Geschichte,' pp. 601-602.

¹⁸⁷ Basler and Hofmann, 'Zwei deutsche Staaten,' p.175.

¹⁸⁸ Hofmann, 'Zur Entwicklung,' p.741; Kosing, 'Sozialistische Gesellschaft,' p.920.

¹⁸⁹ Kosing 'Sozialistische Gesellschaft,' p.913. The excitement over the reassessment of German history had died down by this stage, and the claim that the GDR was rooted in German history in its entirety was commonplace. However, historians continued to discuss the idea among themselves, which resulted in the publication of Helmut Meier and Walter Schmidt, eds., *Erbe und Tradition in der DDR. Die Diskussion der Historiker*, (East Berlin, 1988).

¹⁹⁰ Hofmann, 'Zur Entwicklung,' pp.736, 738; Jürgen Hofmann, 'Solange es eine Chance für die Einheit gab,' *Berliner Zeitung*, 24 June 1989; Kosing, 'Sozialistische Gesellschaft,' p.914; Hager, 'Die Geschichte,' p.601.

¹⁹¹ Hofmann, 'Zur Entwicklung,' p.739.

¹⁹² Hofmann, p.741.

Deutschland soll es sein, the first major work on the subject since Kosing's famous 'The Nation in History and in the Present' dating back to 1976. Mass-produced as a paperback, with a coloured cover which was very modern-looking by GDR standards, the book served the requirements of the Party before those of serious scholarship. Hofmann himself had difficulty getting permission for the title because the rector of the Academy for Social Sciences thought it might cause too much trouble, but the latter was overruled by Hermann Axen who allowed it.¹⁹³

In 1988, the revised fifth edition of the official *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* appeared. As before, the entry for 'nation' appears to have been penned by Alfred Kosing, though since the first edition in 1967, it had grown from four columns to eight. The basic line was still that of the Party Programme, with considerable detail on the relative insignificance of nationality in the development of nations, compared with social factors. According to the writer, 'The unitary German nation is a thing of the past. The socialist German nation and the capitalist German nation have a common history in the past, it is true, but no common present or future.' However, this was all somewhat contradicted by the lines, 'The question of whether at a later date, when the working class of the FRG, together with all working people, has won the socialist transformation of society and the capitalist nation, a unitary socialist German nation can arise, remains unanswerable at present.'¹⁹⁴ This appears to indicate that although the German Question was officially settled, the dream of a united socialist Germany had not entirely faded away, however unlikely it was to materialise.

One further indication that the short-comings of the 'socialist German nation' were a matter of concern for the leadership was that the subject was on the agenda for the Twelfth Party Conference, scheduled for May 1990. This was highly significant because apart from featuring in the Party Programme, the

¹⁹³ Interview with Jürgen Hofmann, Berlin 11 May 1993.

¹⁹⁴ Entry for 'Nation,' Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch vol. 8, (East Berlin, 1988), pp.648-652.

problem had not been directly addressed at a Party Conference since 1971. Members of Axen's working party were commissioned by the Department of Sciences to produce analytical material in preparation for it. However, individuals such as Hofmann and Meier were aware that radical new ideas could not be included if the papers were ever to end up in the hands of those with influence.¹⁹⁵ Papers were to address the development of the 'socialist German nation,' 'national peculiarities' unique to the 'developed socialist society' in the GDR, and the preservation of heritage and tradition. The usual arguments of the period were repeated, together with the need to sustain the attack on Bonn's 'all-German' doctrines, and to conduct more empirical research on the subject.¹⁹⁶

From this we can conclude that for the first time in nearly 20 years, the nation would almost certainly have been addressed at the next Party Conference, which is further evidence of the leadership's concern about the issue, following Honecker's visit to Bonn in 1987. This assumption is supported by the amount of attention paid to the subject during the 1989/90 *Parteilehrjahr*, although at this stage, there had been no suggestion to radically alter the official line. Instead, propagandists were instructed to emphasise the stance on the nation expressed in the Party Programme and at the Eighth Party Conference, although in reality, the former had superseded the latter due to the acceptance that the socialist nation in the GDR was German. The undeniable existence of two German states and nations and their significance for the balance of power in Europe was also to be stressed.¹⁹⁷ Official contacts with the Federal Republic were to be portrayed as purely in the interest of peace, as opposed to being a result of any special relationship, and people were to be reminded of the fact that that socialism and capitalism were as difficult to

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Helmut Meier, Berlin, 15 March 1993.

¹⁹⁶ ZPA IV 2/2035/4

¹⁹⁷ 'Guidelines for Propagandists,' *Parteilehrjahr der SED, Studien- und Seminarhinweise zur Entstehung und Entwicklung der DDR unter Führung der SED* (East Berlin, 1989), p.102.

combine as fire and water, as Honecker had stated in Bonn in 1987.¹⁹⁸

4) CONCLUSION

While a small group of functionaries and theorists contemplated how to improve the concept of the nation in order to make it more effective as a device to legitimise the GDR, other delegitimising factors continued to gnaw away at the foundations of the state, in particular, the deepening economic crisis, which was far worse than even many top functionaries realised, and the brutal methods employed by the regime to suppress dissent. Whereas economic shortcomings and the lack of democracy were nothing new, during the 1980s, the SED faced two additional problems in its attempts to legitimise the state and its system. Firstly, since Gorbachev had become installed in the Kremlin, even Soviet citizens seemed to be enjoying a period of relative openness, at least compared with the 'socialism in the colours of the GDR' endured by East Germans. Secondly, there had been a marked increase in interest in the shared past and the common, yet uncertain future of the two German states, both at an official and a popular level.

Although the SED had denied that the German Question was still open, for economic reasons, it was forced to take advantage of Bonn's continued belief in the German national bond in the form of credit from the Federal Republic, which simultaneously sustained and undermined the GDR. The reinterpretation of history also showed how the Party was willing to make U-turns, and to take advantage of the German roots of the state when there was more to be gained than was the case by denying them.

The concept of the 'socialist German nation,' originally conceived by theorists, had proved to be the most acceptable option, certainly more so than the purely 'socialist nation' of the early 1970s, even if it was rather a contradiction in terms. It was the ultimate example of how theorists had to produce work in

¹⁹⁸ Studien- und Seminarhinweise, pp.97-99.

accordance with the current needs of the Party, but also how the latter relied on them to solve its ideological dilemmas.

But before conclusions about the state and future of the 'socialist German nation' could be drawn, the ailing GDR was suddenly released into the international community by its guardian, and left at the mercy of highly contagious capitalism, and what was more, capitalism with a German face. And without socialism, all that would apparently remain of the 'socialist German nation' would be a German nation, without a justification for a state of its own. 1989 proved that the SED had attempted to legitimise the GDR by manipulating the very element which continued to undermine it, namely the nation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In the course of this thesis it has been shown that the concept of the nation advocated by the ruling communist party in the GDR, the SED, underwent several major transformations over the years, hence the Party leadership could justifiably be accused of inconsistency. However, what did remain constant was the underlying motivation behind official policy regarding the nation, namely the need to counteract the negative effects on the legitimacy of the GDR which arose from the lack of democracy and freedom, economic shortcomings, and overt sovietisation. Consequently, pragmatic or opportunist considerations took precedence over widely held theories concerning nations, even over the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, and most noticeably, over the feelings of the population. While the Party leadership always determined the basic *Nationskonzept*, the details were then filled in by theorists, including social scientists, historians and philosophers. This was no easy task due to dramatic changes in the Party line, due to the need to conform to Marxist-Leninist principles (or at least to appear to do so), and due to the uniqueness of the German situation.

However, because the state was engaged in 'an unusual national competition,'¹ using nationalism to legitimise the GDR was a risky strategy. If it failed, it could have completely the opposite effect and serve to reinforce the German national bond. In retrospect, it appears that rightly or wrongly, the population continued to believe that one German nation did still exist, and that its best political representative was not the socialist GDR, but the Federal Republic. While it would be naive to claim that this belief was the primary cause of the collapse of the GDR, (a subject we shall return to later), unlike other Eastern Bloc states, such as Poland and Hungary, it ensured that the state itself could no longer exist, following the collapse of communism.

¹ Ernst Plock, East German-West German Relations and the Fall of the GDR (Boulder, Colorado, 1993), p.127.

1) THE FOUR PHASES OF THE OFFICIAL LINE

As we have seen, the SED's attempts to use various concepts of the nation and national sentiment to legitimise an otherwise illegitimate state can be divided into four phases. The first begins with the transformation of the Soviet Occupied Zone into the GDR in 1949. The GDR was described by the ruling party as the one true state of the German people, since power was (in theory) in the hands of the working class, and was somewhat idealistically portrayed as the basis or model for a future united socialist Germany. So soon after the war, the continued existence of the German nation was not yet in doubt, and during this period, the party proclaimed itself to be the defender of the unity of the German nation, and accused 'Western imperialists' of trying to destroy it, in order to support the assertion that the GDR was the only legitimate representative of the entire German nation. However, the Federal Republic was also making a similar claim, with several obvious advantages, such as western economic aid and a democratic political system.

By the beginning of the 1960s, it was clear that the SED had overestimated the appeal of the GDR - not just to the citizens of the other German state, but also to its own population, and in spite of the leadership's all-German words, its deeds, in particular the building of the Berlin Wall, appeared to cement the division between the two German states. Consequently, the SED needed an argument to prove that socialism and national unity were compatible. The result, originally devised not by the Party leadership, but by a leading theorist, Professor Alfred Kosing, was that the nation was at two different stages of development in the two German states - united in the GDR, but class-divided in the Federal Republic. Furthermore, in spite of the political division, it was claimed that the national bond was preserved by the unity of the German working class in both German states, who together constituted the nation. Using this argument, the SED could still portray itself as a national party with national, i.e. all-German objectives, and that the GDR was the model for a unified socialist

German state, though 'national' was used to mean 'of the entire German working class.'

By the late 1960s, it had become increasingly obvious that the SED's vision of a united socialist Germany was unlikely to be realised, hence a reconsideration of what could realistically be achieved became necessary. During the second identifiable period, from 1967 until 1970, a contradictory dual policy evolved, consisting of continued official adherence to the notion of a unitary German nation on the one hand, and an escalation of the campaign for the recognition of the GDR as a sovereign state on the other, manifested by strict *Abgrenzung* or 'fencing off' from the Federal Republic. In fact, within the Politburo itself, two conflicting views on the national question were emerging, with several members advocating a more 'GDR-centric line,' which emphasised the independent development of the GDR as 'our socialist fatherland,' as opposed to the traditional all-German view. This raised doubts concerning the unity of the German nation. However, with the ageing Ulbricht still at the helm, the GDR remained the 'socialist state of the German nation,' as enshrined in the new constitution of 1968, and he continued to hope that the working class in the two German states would reunite what 'imperialism' had apparently torn apart.

Obviously this professed belief in the unity of the German nation and the inevitability of reunification undermined the GDR's claim to be an independent sovereign state, and it became clear that a choice would soon have to be made between reunification and recognition. The final catalyst for change was Chancellor Willy Brandt's new approach to relations with the GDR, based on the notion that there were 'two states of one nation,' that nation being sustained by a 'feeling of belonging together' shared by the populations of both German states. Because Brandt would not grant full recognition of the GDR as a foreign country for this reason, it became apparent that the SED would have to prove his 'two states of one nation' idea wrong, if they were to achieve their primary objective of recognition of the sovereignty and legitimacy of the GDR. The fact that both Brandt and his ideas were so

warmly received by the East German population made clarification of the SED's position regarding the state of the nation a matter of urgency.

The most dramatic period in the history of the official concept of the nation runs from 1970 until 1974. At the Eighth Party Conference in 1971, the new General Secretary of the SED, Erich Honecker, declared that a *socialist* nation was developing in the GDR and that the national question had been decided by 'history.' The reasons behind this total reversal of a policy officially held for 20 years were complex. In fact, contrary to popular belief, the turning point had occurred earlier, and it was actually Ulbricht who had first denied the unity of the German nation. That this so obviously contradicted his previous position suggests that Ulbricht was merely being pragmatic and trying to discredit Brandt's argument not only to support the SED's primary political objective of international recognition of the GDR, but also to reassert his own position. But for him it was too late, and we now know that Ulbricht's stance on the national question was the main reason why he was replaced in 1971.

By claiming that the population of the GDR now constituted a nation in itself, Honecker intended to reinforce the claim that it was a permanent, independent sovereign state. Furthermore, the 'GDR-nation' was merely described as socialist and no longer German, which was reflected in the revised constitution of 1974. This was clearly a desperate attempt to prove that the GDR was a complete and legitimate entity in its own right, following the SED's failure to defeat the Federal Republic's rival claim to be the sole legitimate German state and to bring about reunification as a socialist Germany. However, the idea of a socialist nation in the GDR was an artificial concept, devised for political purposes, with no theoretical basis and no consideration of the subjective feelings of the population.

However, the Party soon realised that the question could not be solved in a few sentences, and that a more detailed explanation of the concept would be required, if it were to be comprehensible

and credible to the population. Consequently, theorists and even some leading functionaries devised complex arguments which aimed to prove that nations were determined by class, and a major propaganda campaign was waged to get the message across to the population via public meetings and official publications. Carefully selected quotes from classic works of Marxism-Leninism were adapted to fit the SED's arguments and the East German situation. Awkward characteristics shared with the population of the Federal Republic, such as language, culture and traditions, were defined as ethnic factors, which were apparently of secondary importance, and therefore not decisive in the formation of nations.

By clearing up the problems arising from the earlier contradictory policy of adherence to the unity of the German nation, while simultaneously claiming that the GDR was a legitimate sovereign state in its own right, the SED was now effectively undermining the legitimacy of the GDR in another way, namely by denying its roots and appearing to deny people their national identity. This caused much confusion among the population and provoked ridicule in the West.

A way out of this dilemma was provided by theorists, who first made the distinction between nation, nationality and citizenship in 1975, marking the beginning of the fourth and final period, which ended with the demise of the state. They argued that according to class-based criteria, a socialist nation did indeed exist in the GDR, but this did not alter the fact that the majority of the population were of German nationality. Thus while the population were citizens of the GDR and therefore members of the socialist nation, their nationality remained German or occasionally Sorb. As a result, ethnic factors shared with West Germans could be classed as aspects of nationality, and therefore of secondary importance to the nation, which was determined by class. Honecker himself accepted this distinction and from 1976, the phrase '*socialist German nation in the GDR*' became official. This was a classic example of the leadership's inability to formulate policy on the nation effectively without the assistance of theorists, although due

to the constraints of the system, the latter could not actually contradict the basic Party line.

Following the SED's acceptance of the distinction between nation, nationality and citizenship, the subject disappeared from the political agenda. The Party gave up its paranoid fear of all things German, which led to a major reassessment of German history and a re-evaluation of the GDR's traditional roots. Theorists believed that due to the state's volatile position and the unstoppable flow of West German influence, it would be foolish to let the issue drop, but their concerns fell on deaf ears.

In 1987, the leadership suddenly renewed its interest in the nation in response to external events, which proved that the national question had not been resolved after all. Since the early 1980s, the issue had been quietly simmering due to the nuclear debate, which had highlighted the unique and dangerous position common to both German states, their shared fate in the event of a nuclear conflict, and their subsequent responsibility to preserve peace. However, the event which finally brought the issue to the boil was Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic in 1987. In addition, the leadership's desire to distance itself from Gorbachev led to the reassertion of the independence, and even the Germanness of the GDR. The SED suddenly called on theorists who had previously worked on the subject to take a fresh look at the 'socialist German nation' and national consciousness in the GDR.

However, by this stage, it was too late. The SED had failed to recognise that the key to successful nation-building was democracy and prosperity. Had they been able to provide these supports, then maybe a more viable 'GDR-nation' could have developed over a long period of time, but it was only the separate economic and political system that had justified the existence of a second German state in the first place, and the Cold War that had maintained it, as its rapid demise from November 1989 appears to indicate.

2) THE PARADOXES OF OFFICIAL NATIONALISM IN THE GDR

It could be argued that the SED attempted to legitimise the East German state and its system by utilising the very factor that was most likely to raise questions about its right to exist, namely the nation and national consciousness. This immediately raises two important points. Firstly, although many states struggle to gain international recognition, few have to go to such lengths to gain the allegiance of their own population - indeed, few have to literally fence them in, in order to prevent mass defection. In particular, the SED's desperate efforts to create a separate nation in the GDR from 1970 indicate that the leadership knew that the GDR lacked legitimacy - after all, while it is common for governments to encourage nationalism to gain support for costly, often controversial undertakings, such as wars, there is a big difference between stirring up the latent nationalism felt by the members of an established nation, and attempting to prove the existence of a nation which even its alleged members dispute. Furthermore, by its very nature, nationalism should be a popular movement, from the bottom up, as opposed to something imposed from above like any other government policy, or at least a combination of the two. However, as we have seen, the GDR was in a particularly vulnerable position, hence the SED could not draw on the usual sources of legitimacy.

Originally doubts regarding her legitimacy stemmed from the way in which the state and its political system came into being, in particular, the absence of democratic elections and the role of the Soviet Union. For similar reasons, other regimes in the Communist Bloc also attempted to combine socialism with the vocabulary of nationalism to gain the allegiance of the population. For example, leaders such as Mao discovered that appealing on behalf of 'the nation' was a means of achieving the homogeneity that their highly centralised, totalitarian systems required.² Similar tactics were also employed by Ceausescu in R^omania. However, while all

² P. Shoup, 'The National Question and the Political Systems of Eastern Europe,' in Eastern Europe in the 1970s, eds. S. Sinanian, I. Deak, P-C. Ludz (London and New York, 1972), p.124.

the Warsaw Pact states suffered from the delegitimising effects of economic shortcomings, particularly shortages of consumer goods and fresh foods, the SED had to face the additional problem that East Germans could look longingly into the well-stocked shop windows of the West via West German television. The latter played a paradoxical role in the story of the GDR. In the long-term, it undermined the state by showing East Germans that the grass was greener on the other side of the border, but it also satisfied a demand that the SED could not meet and improved the quality of life for ordinary East Germans, and showed some of the negative aspects of capitalist society such as crime, hence the regime gave up the practice of dispatching members of the Free German Youth to turn round west-facing TV aerials very early on.³

In the end, neither the political and economic system, nor the Berlin Wall and death strips could change the fact that they shared a language, culture and history stretching back for several centuries with the population of the larger, more prosperous German state. Finally, and most poignantly, those who were labelled the enemy, and from whom they were parted were not just their countrymen and women, but also blood relations

Secondly, in theory, the SED should not have been concerned with the (ethnic) nation and nationalism at all, since there is a fundamental incompatibility between socialism and nationalism, and one either believes that human populations are arranged according to class, or according to nationality, and that their relationships with others are determined accordingly. Even the most acceptable solution, the 'socialist German nation in the GDR' was a contradiction in terms. In practice however, the SED and its loyal theorists tended to pick and choose only the aspects of Marxist-Leninist theory regarding the nation that fitted current objectives, and the arguments of the latter often sounded distinctly contrived. For example, earlier emphasis on the unity of

³ A bibliography on the role of West German television in the GDR can be found in Roland Bleiker, Nonviolent Struggle and the Revolution in East Germany (Cambridge M.A., 1993), pp.50-51

the German working class was soon dropped once the SED began to assert the legitimacy of the GDR as a complete state in its own right, and during the 1970s, the importance of factors such as language in the formation of nations had to be explained away by theorists, in spite of the fact that it was considered to be an important factor according to classic Marxist-Leninist teaching.⁴

In order to harness nationalism for their own purposes, the SED tried two strategies. Firstly, they tried to make 'national' synonymous with 'of the entire German working class' and therefore compatible with 'socialist.' This was most visible during the first decade of the GDR's existence, when the SED used the word 'national' extensively in order to support its objective of a united socialist Germany. The second strategy was to rename what was essentially nationalism 'patriotism.' The encouragement of the latter was justified on the grounds that it was 'socialist patriotism,' which was inextricably linked to proletarian internationalism. This prevented it from becoming chauvinism or imperialism, as was the case with 'bourgeois nationalism.' However, far from being two sides of the same coin, as was claimed, the two clearly contradicted each other, and in practice, the SED's obsessive emphasis on the need for friendship and solidarity with the Soviet Union greatly undermined its claim to represent the nation. Furthermore, the SED maintained that all the socialist states were growing together, but just how far this would go was never adequately explained.

Although communist states claimed to have solved the 'national question,' the case of the GDR epitomises the conflict between class solidarity and national loyalty that Marx and Engels themselves failed to resolve. Though faced with the opposite problem, being states trying to integrate many different nationalities, the fate of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia highlights how both Marxist-Leninist theorists and regimes greatly underestimated the power of ethnic nationalism. As one notable scholar of

⁴ For more detail on this issue, see Joanna McKay, 'The SED's Concept of the Nation: the Problem of Language,' in P. Dunleavy and J. Stanyer, eds., Contemporary Political Studies. Proceedings of the Political Studies Association's Annual Conference, 2 vols. (Belfast, 1994), vol. 2, pp.973-986.

nationalism has concluded, 'When communism and nationalism have been wedded in the popular mind, communist movements have found broad acceptance. When communism and nationalism have been perceived as at odds, such movements have tended to be spurned.'⁵ Thus, while in theory it would be preferable for communist regimes to kill off nationalism, if this was not possible, it would be better to appeal to it and therefore to seem 'national.'⁶

3) THE CONCEPT OF THE NATION IN WEST GERMANY

While it is not the intention of this thesis to examine how successive West German governments handled the question of the nation, a brief look at the subject highlights the contrasting ways in which leaders of the two German states tackled the same problem. Both states constituted only part of the geographical area and population of the former German Reich. However, as mentioned earlier, the Federal Republic did have several advantages from the start, namely by being larger, by recovering from the war quicker, thanks to Marshall Aid, and by gaining international recognition as 'Germany,' even from former enemies. These factors helped successive West German governments to pursue a far more subtle and consistent policy regarding the German nation than their East German counterparts.

The continued existence of one German nation was enshrined in the Basic Law, along with a commitment to the ultimate goal of reunification. The Federal Republic confidently claimed to be the sole legitimate representative of the nation, and this was accepted by the majority of the West German population, by the 'free world' and apparently even by a large proportion of the citizens of the GDR. By clearly stating the official position regarding the state of the German nation and then quietly, but resolutely, adhering to it, Bonn was able to minimise doubt and controversy regarding the issue, and could concentrate on making the Federal Republic a

⁵ Connor, The National Question, p.584.

⁶ P. Shoup, 'The National Question,' p.123.

country people were happy to live in and to identify with.⁷ In contrast, the SED's numerous policy changes encouraged confusion and reduced the credibility of the Party's arguments. Although Willy Brandt's acceptance of 'two states of one nation' appeared to conservative West German politicians to challenge these assumptions, which had been taken for granted for 20 years, it did not fundamentally alter the Federal Republic's own status, and the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that it did not contravene the Basic Law.

Unlike in the GDR, there was no active policy designed to create a separate West German nation. Instead, a specific West German identity or *Selbstverständnis* gradually evolved of its own accord. Far from being based on ethnic nationalism and chauvinism, which had been discredited by the experience of the recent past, this new, specifically *West* German identity was primarily based on allegiance to the democratic constitution and economic prosperity (which gave rise to the terms *Verfassungspatriotismus* and *Deutschmarkpatriotismus*).

The nationalist element of this West German identity was also tempered by the fact that it was firmly tied to a wider European consciousness and a commitment to closer integration among the members of the European Union. Indeed, since reunification, Helmut Kohl himself has sought to allay fears of an enlarged, dominant Germany among her Eastern and Western neighbours by stressing his government's desire for a 'European Germany' as opposed to a 'German Europe.'

However, while German nationalism of the pre-1945 variety was not encouraged, identification with the Federal Republic did not actually preclude identification with the ethnic or historical German nation. Indeed, the recent increase in racially motivated attacks and rowdy celebrations of Hitler's birthday, and the electoral success of parties with an overtly nationalist programme,

⁷ For a bibliography on this subject see Hans-Joachim Veen and Carsten Zelle, 'National Identity and Political Priorities in Eastern and Western Germany,' *German Politics* 4 (1985): p.25, note 3.

show that a disturbingly large minority do hold right-wing or nationalist views. Generally, however, they seem to be either disgruntled youths, in particular, under-achievers, who remain on the fringe of prosperous West German society, or elderly traditionalists. Furthermore, before making assumptions about the rise of German nationalism, it should be noted that support for right-wing views is on the increase elsewhere in Europe.

Fortunately, most people in the old *Länder* appear to have willingly identified with West German affluence and with the peace-loving, democratic character of the Bonn-state. However, they did not cease to view themselves as Germans in an ethnic and historical sense, and although one can speak of a unique West German identity, it does not appear to have been the case that a unique *West German nation* was evolving as an alternative to the traditional German nation. Instead, traditional German elements and new characteristics arising from the post-war experience became fused together. Thus, what was actually meant in the Federal Republic by 'German' was considerably transformed over the years, to such an extent that already by the end of the 1960s, observers commented that the GDR was more traditionally German than the Federal Republic.⁸ Also, content with their lot, at least in a material sense, West Germans had less reason to concern themselves with the national question than East Germans, and the existence of a second, albeit communist, German state did not alter their own self-perception.

Presumably, however, as the chances for reunification receded, whether or not the populations of the two very different states, which called themselves German, still constituted one nation became rather irrelevant. Although difficult to prove, it is possible that West Germans of the post-war generation realised that the divide between the two German states was more than superficial. Many viewed the citizens of the GDR in the same way that the latter viewed Poles and Russians, i.e. as profoundly

⁸ A view supported by West Germany's senior representative in Bonn's diplomatic mission in East Berlin during the 1980s, Günther Gaus. See Gaus, Wo Deutschland liegt (Munich, 1986).

different and even inferior, and their enthusiasm for their eastern cousins from 1989 was either half-hearted or extremely short-lived, as they were soon to find out. These attitudes may have been a result of anti-communist propaganda in the West, or of observations during visits to the GDR, or it may have simply been the case that younger West Germans were indifferent to the GDR, which to them was just another member of the Eastern Bloc, whose citizens happened to speak German.

In short, the existence of the GDR was not nearly so much of a problem for West Germans as the existence of the Federal Republic was for East Germans and their rulers. Furthermore, the new concept of 'Germanness' that had developed in the Federal Republic seemed unaffected by events in the GDR, and much to the disgust of many East Germans, this has remained the case, in spite of the reunification of the two German states, which says something about the resilience and level of acceptance of this West German concept.

However, in spite of the fact that the West Germans do not seem to have had a problem being both Germans and citizens of the Federal Republic (unlike their East German counterparts), this did not mean that they had answered all the questions regarding what it meant to be German, some of which stemmed from the need to come to terms with the Nazi era, while others had concerned intellectuals for centuries. This was most clearly illustrated by the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, which was essentially a bitter disagreement between conservative historians, who maintained that the Germans were not uniquely evil, and therefore had no reason to be ashamed of their national identity, and liberals, who regarded this as white-washing or justifying the Nazi period.⁹

⁹ Mary Fulbrook, 'Nation-state and political culture in divided Germany 1945-90,' in The State of Germany, ed. John Breuilly (London and New York, 1993), p.127. For more detail on the *Historikerstreit* see among others, Richard J. Evans, In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the attempt to escape from the Nazi Past (London, 1989); Christian Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity (Cambridge, M.A., 1986); Thomas Herz, 'Der Historikerstreit,' in Aufbruch in die Neunziger, ed. Christian W. Thomsen (Cologne, 1991), pp.358-382; James

4) THE COLLAPSE OF THE GDR

Although this is not the place for a detailed account of the collapse of the GDR and subsequent reunification of Germany, which can be found elsewhere,¹⁰ the events of 1989/90 do tell us something about the impact, or rather the ineffectiveness of the SED's strategies regarding the nation, even without consulting data on public opinion, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. East German enthusiasm for reunification was clearly an indication of their rejection of the system and the dictatorship of the SED, and shows that both the SED's initial attempts to convince them that the GDR was the best model for a future unitary German state, and later claims that it was in itself legitimate and an entirely separate entity from the Federal Republic, had not been accepted. It is tempting to assume that the East German population was motivated by the conviction that they and the citizens of the Federal Republic constituted one nation, and that they had rejected their state precisely for this reason. However, before jumping to such a conclusion, we must remember two important factors. Firstly, the collapse of the GDR occurred as a result of changes in the international situation, which began outside the GDR. Secondly, in retrospect, the experiences of the first five years in the life of a reunified Germany have shown that the division of Germany went far deeper than its superficial manifestations, such as the Berlin Wall. However, only via the removal of the real wall could the Germans on both sides find out just how solid the psychological wall dividing them had become.

Let us briefly consider the first of these factors. The collapse of the GDR was part of a process sweeping across the entire Eastern Bloc. For 40 years, Bloc cohesion had been maintained via a combination of Soviet strength and internal pressure to conform.

Knowlton and Truett Cates, Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust (New Jersey, 1993).

¹⁰ For a useful bibliography see Bleiker, Nonviolent Struggle, pp.44-45, or Jonathan Osmond, ed. German Reunification: a Reference Guide (London, 1992).

However, rather like a set of Christmas tree lights, the individual members relied on the power supply from Moscow, and as we have seen, it was a case of 'one out, all out.' Although the fall of the Berlin Wall was without doubt the most remarkable and symbolic single event in the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe, both heralding an acceleration in the pace of change and signalling the irreversibility of it, the beginning of the end of the GDR actually started in Hungary, where the Iron Curtain was first breached on the border with Austria, providing East Germans with an escape route to the Federal Republic. Ultimately of course, the origins of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe can be traced back to the Kremlin, starting with Gorbachev's replacement of the Brezhnev doctrine with the so-called 'Sinatra doctrine.' This culminated in the absence of Soviet intervention in the event of popular unrest in most of the Eastern Bloc states, which left them to fend for themselves and to face the challenge of the West alone. By his inaction, Gorbachev was effectively switching off the life support machine which had sustained communism in Eastern Europe for 40 years.¹¹

There can be no doubt that the main reasons why thousands of people demonstrated on the streets of East German cities in the Autumn of 1989 were similar to those of their counterparts in other Eastern Bloc states, namely to demand basic rights such as democracy and freedom of movement, which they had hitherto been denied. Indeed, it is questionable whether the first demonstrations had anything to do with German nationalism at all,¹² and initially the demand was for a new German Democratic Republic which lived up to its name.

¹¹ For more detail on Gorbachev's role, see E. Kuhn, Gorbatschow und die Deutsche Einheit (Bonn, 1993), especially the chapter 'Gorbatschow als Ziehvater der DDR-Revolution.'

¹² On this question see among others, John Breuilly, 'Nationalism and German Reunification,' in The State Of Germany ed. Breuilly, pp.224-238; David M. Keithly, The Collapse of East German Communism (Westport and London, 1992), pp.41-58; Karl-Rudolf Korte, Die Chance genutzt? Die Politik zur Einheit Deutschlands (Frankfurt and New York, 1994), pp.82-88. In Plock, East-German West-German Relations, pp.93-123, the author looks at the strength of all-German consciousness in both German states, but does not consult primary data.

What they certainly were rejecting was the SED-state and everything associated with it, in particular, the lack of personal and political freedom, economic short-comings and of course, the *Stasi*.¹³ In the event, the 18 year old leadership of Erich Honecker, and even the Berlin Wall itself, crumbled far more quickly than anyone inside or outside the country would have believed possible, and more remarkably still, without bloodshed. However, the new found freedom to enter the West also meant freedom to window-shop, which not surprisingly generated a desire to possess the goods they were seeing at first hand for the very first time. Furthermore, the revelations which followed the end of the SED-dictatorship, concerning the extent of surveillance, of elite privileges and of the economic crisis, showed people that there had been a lot more wrong with the GDR than they had realised. This provided the yeast which gave rise to the belief that the GDR was irreformable, and that reunification with the Federal Republic was the only solution.¹⁴ And once the idea of reunification had surfaced, there was no way that it could be submerged again.

In view of the fact that the GDR had so many short comings, and of the speed with which the two 40 year old German states became one, it seems appropriate to ask not only why the GDR collapsed, but also why it had lasted for so long. Indeed, it appeared to outsiders that East Germans had become relatively content with their lot, which compared favourably with that of their socialist neighbours, not least thanks to credit and preferential treatment from Bonn, which sought to preserve the national bond and to undermine the GDR, but in this way actually helped sustain it. Honest GDR-watchers admit that they did not foresee what was coming. Four factors which upheld the GDR for 40 years can be identified, namely the Cold War, elite cohesion,

¹³ That reunification was not an issue during the early days of the revolution is born out by empirical research conducted by former members of the Academy for Social Sciences in Detlef Eckert, Jürgen Hofmann and Helmut Meier, Zwischen Anschluß und Ankunft. Identitätskonflikte und Identitätssuche der Ostdeutschen auf dem Weg zum Bundesbürger (Potsdam, 1992), pp.7-8.

¹⁴ Eckert et al., Zwischen Anschluß, p.10.

the incorporation or expulsion of dissent, and a minimal satisfaction of needs. However, once the first three of these had disappeared, the socialist German state was doomed.¹⁵ From then on, two elements dominated the course of events, namely popular feeling and the policies of the West German government, although the latter ^{were} ~~was~~ soon leading the former.¹⁶

5) OFFICIAL VERSUS UNOFFICIAL GDR-CONSCIOUSNESS

Accepting the fact that the population rejected the East German state in its undemocratic, communist form, the question arises as to whether they were also rejecting the notion of a specific East German national identity, believing instead that they were still simply Germans. Although we cannot know precisely what they were thinking as the foundations of their state collapsed around them, or how important national sentiment was compared with other issues, the rejection of the state was an indication that all the SED's efforts to legitimise it had failed, including their claims regarding the nation. The leadership's various *Nationskonzepte*, especially the invention of a purely 'socialist nation' in the GDR, had merely been ideals or goals, to be achieved like economic targets. In fact, during the 1970s, when severing the German national bond became the SED's primary objective, their nation-building strategies could be more accurately described as 'nation-destroying.'¹⁷ Furthermore, to deny the unity of the German nation was one thing. Explaining what now existed in its place proved rather more difficult for the Party leadership.

As a consequence, many of the Party's arguments regarding the nation were seriously flawed, which greatly reduced their effectiveness as tools to legitimise the state. They can be criticised on five counts. Firstly, the Party leadership mixed mutually exclusive concepts, namely Marxist-Leninist arguments on the one hand, and traditional elements associated with the

¹⁵ Fulbrook, 'Nation-state,' p.170.

¹⁶ Breuille, 'Nationalism,' p.228.

¹⁷ Walker Connor, 'Nation-Building or nation-destroying?' World Politics 24 (1972): p.336.

historic or ethnic German nation on the other, in order to construct the kind of nation it wanted the population to identify with. Then, as we have seen, theorists were called upon to provide credible arguments which aimed to enhance and expand upon the official line. Secondly, the Party's ideas regarding the nation concentrated on objective factors, and the power of subjective elements and emotional ties was seriously underestimated. Thirdly, the question of ethnicity, blood and family ties was never adequately dealt with. Fourthly, the official 'GDR-nation' was virtually synonymous with a state which remained so unloved, and while a certain state consciousness was developing, it was based on shared experiences, many of which were negative, and therefore could not easily be transformed into a positive national consciousness to replace German national consciousness. Finally, as Johann Gottfried Herder had argued, the development of nations is essentially a natural process, not a policy imposed from above,¹⁸ a factor which the SED either failed to recognise or chose to ignore.

In normal circumstances, these short-comings might not have mattered so much, but the circumstances which had given birth to the GDR and which sustained it were far from normal. As a consequence, even though from 1961 until 1989 the majority of the population could not choose which German state to live in, they could make a mental choice between two political systems, two life-styles and even two contrasting views regarding the state of the German nation, and once they were given the opportunity to choose, they immediately opted for the West German model, though many may regret that decision now.

In spite of, or maybe even because of the SED's attempts to convince the East Germans that regardless of their ethnic background, what really mattered were their socialist values and membership of the international working class, it appears that even the post-war generation still regarded themselves as Germans first and foremost, since 'If not German, then what are

¹⁸ See Isiah Berlin, Vico and Herder (London, 1976), pp. ~~80~~ 53-4.

we?'¹⁹ Significantly, the SED never did find a suitable replacement for the emotive adjective 'German.' After all, one could hardly refer to something as '*DDRsch.*' While the notion of a 'socialist German nation,' introduced in the mid-1970s, had been the 'least worst' concept for all concerned, since it acknowledged the German nationality of the majority of the citizens of the GDR, all the things the population wanted to be rid of - the lack of political and personal freedom, and economic short-comings - were associated with the word 'socialist,' while their opposites - democracy, freedom of movement and prosperity - were associated with the word 'German,' or more specifically, with 'West German.'

In reality, the GDR was still quite German in an old-fashioned, Prussian sense, and had an everyday culture that was very different from the materialistic, universal American culture to be found in the Federal Republic. In fact, in the 1980s, the SED seemed to be winning the battle to prove which state was the most German in a traditional sense. This sense of Germanness was also manifested in a sense of superiority towards their socialist neighbours, demonstrated both by ordinary East Germans, and by their leaders, in spite of all the rhetoric concerning proletarian internationalism. However, to the regime's credit, there was no attempt to 'Germanise' the Sorb minority, who numbered approximately 100,000 around the river Lausitz. On the contrary, the Party went to great lengths to preserve their language and culture, maybe even beyond the call of duty, since the ability to speak *Sorbisch* was not much use to a young person in the GDR. This commitment may have been for propaganda purposes, i.e. to demonstrate how well the GDR treated minority groups, but probably originally arose from a genuine desire to make amends for the Nazis' treatment of minorities.

Even if the population of the GDR did not embrace the official national identity prescribed for them by the SED, it is widely

¹⁹ A point made by Gerbard Schweigler in 'Whatever happened to Germany?' in The Foreign Policy of West Germany, eds. Krippendorff and Rittberger (1980), cited in Plock, East-German West-German Relations, p.127.

believed that an unofficial GDR-consciousness had become established, and the difficult process of reconciliation between the populations of the two German states appears to confirm this.²⁰ While it was impossible for western researchers to acquire accurate data on national consciousness in the former GDR, even in the late 1960s, non-German observers in particular recognised a *Selbstverständnis* or self-perception peculiar to the East Germans.²¹

Rather than being based on the principles which had been ceaselessly advocated by the SED, in particular, socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, in reality, GDR-consciousness appears to have been based on the experience of day-to-day life in the GDR and solidarity in the face of hardship, combined with traditional Prussian values. However, while it did not correspond to the official version of GDR-consciousness advocated by the regime, it corresponded even less to the West German consciousness now firmly established in the Federal Republic. Furthermore, while West German culture may have seemed desirable from a distance, East Germans remained ignorant of many of the negative aspects of a competitive capitalist society.

The Federal Republic was still constitutionally committed to the establishment of one state for the entire German nation, although unofficially, it had long been accepted that this goal was probably

²⁰ Numerous post-unification books address the complicated subject of East German identity today, for example, Werner Weidenfeld, ed., Deutschland - Eine Nation, Doppelte Geschichte (Cologne, 1993); Erwin K. Scheuch, Wie Deutsch sind die Deutschen? Eine Nation wandelt ihr Gesicht (Bergisch Gladbach, 1991); Christian Meier, Die Nation, die keine sein will (Munich and Vienna, 1991); Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, Die Deutschen - Profil einer Nation (Stuttgart, 1991); Veen and Zelle, 'National Identity,' pp. 1-26, especially note 3, p.25.

²¹ The best attempt to assess national consciousness in the GDR was Gebhard Ludwig Schweigler's National Consciousness in Divided Germany (London and Beverley Hills, 1975). Schweigler, a pupil of Karl Deutsch, accepted the limitations of his data but nevertheless believed that the question was no longer whether or not one German nation still existed, but whether or not it could be resurrected. Only with difficulty, he believed, since the answer to the German question appeared to be 'two Germanies, not one.' Schweigler, National consciousness, pp.277-281. For other views from the period, see Apel, DDR 1962; Hangen, The Muted Revolution; Smith, Germany beyond the Wall; Dornberg, The Other Germany.

unobtainable. Thus, although it would be an exaggeration to say that West German governments actively pursued policies designed to bring about reunification, indeed Adenauer was often accused of having abandoned the East Germans in favour of integration into the West, and Brandt's *Ostpolitik* was seen as treachery by many conservatives, the consistent attempts by Bonn to preserve the national bond at a personal level, for example, by automatically giving citizens from the GDR West German passports, were clearly effective east of the Elbe.

Then, through no effort on their own part, the opportunity for reunification was simply handed to Bonn, or more specifically to Helmut Kohl. The latter had more or less been pronounced politically dead, but was suddenly presented with the chance to join Adenauer and even Bismarck as one of the key figures in the making of modern Germany.

Having gained political freedom, the East Germans then wanted what they believed was a major by-product of western-style democracy, namely prosperity, and Kohl wasted no time in telling them that this too could be theirs. Thus on the grounds that the citizens of both German states still constituted one nation, he offered the dazed, politically naive population of the GDR an easy way to achieve their objectives and reinforced his message by giving them each 100 Deutschmarks. He succeeded in equating the Federal Republic with all the positive things East Germans desired, and to which they believed that they, as Germans, also had a right, hence they willingly accepted his offer, as demonstrated in the elections of 1990. Thus right from the start, the citizens of the GDR were given a financial incentive to identify themselves purely and simply as Germans, akin to the population of the old Federal Republic, and to abandon their specific East German identity.

In short, it seems that reunification was 'not so much a nationalist idea as a route for East Germans to an imagined world of prosperity and freedom,' which was soon condemned by intellectuals on both sides of the divide as 'Deutschmark

patriotism.'²² So long as there was no chance of reunification, the issue had lain dormant. However, by offering unlimited supplies of consumer goods and exotic fruits in the name of the unitary German nation, Kohl reawakened the latent sense of German nationalism in the citizens of the GDR. They believed that the Germans still constituted one nation because he said so, and because at that point in time, they wanted to believe it. Thus, although it was not German nationalism which originally brought East Germans onto the streets in 1989, being German did still mean something, and more importantly, in people's minds, it was associated with success, material well-being and 'freedom,' which West German politicians were then able to play on. Indeed, it has been suggested that the change in the slogan 'We are the people' to 'We are one people' originated not from the East German demonstrators themselves, but was introduced, or at least encouraged, by the West German government.²³

In retrospect, we can see a number of further reasons why we should not automatically jump to the conclusion that the reunification of the two German states was an indication that the German national bond had been unaffected by the political division. Firstly, while Kohl managed to convince the newly liberated East Germans that the populations of the two German states still belonged together, his attempts to encourage West Germans to share that feeling appear to have been considerably less successful. Secondly, the practical hardships encountered by the East Germans themselves in the form of unemployment, high prices, West German prejudice, and the loss of previous certainties, both good and bad, have led to disappointment and disorientation. They have now recognised that there was more to the GDR than its corrupt political system and lack of freedom to travel abroad,²⁴ and want the West Germans to know that. Indeed, the post-unification experience seems to have reinforced their identity as East Germans, manifested in nostalgia for the past

²² Breuilly, 'Nationalism,' p.231.

²³ Author's interview with Alfred Kosing, Berlin, 7 July 1993.

²⁴ Eckert et al, Zwischen Anschluß, p.37. On East German attitudes during the immediate post-reunification period, see the section 'Ossi - oder neue Gräben nach der Mauer,' pp.28-35.

(*Ostalgie*) and increased support for the PDS, who are seen as the only voice the East Germans have in the Bundestag. Furthermore, the experience of the last five years also highlights the fact that economic factors do matter, and that although class does not determine nations, as the SED and Marxism-Leninism claimed, it does affect relationships within nations. Thus many may now be reconsidering their earlier assumption that the German national bond remained intact. Few in either part of Germany would still say '*Wir sind ein Volk*,' indeed some would probably deny ever having said it.

Some East German researchers have concluded that in the GDR, attitudes towards the national question were both very varied and often contradictory, and that neither the notion of the unbroken unity of the nation, nor the policy of *Abgrenzung* found total acceptance during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ However, in the end, the desire on the part of East Germans for reunification as a means to achieve freedom, democracy and prosperity immediately was so strong that they chose to overlook what differentiated the populations of the two German states. They overestimated both what they had in common, and West German solidarity towards them, and believed what they wanted to believe (during the euphoric days of the revolution at least), namely that the Germans still constituted one nation. ~~However,~~ John Breuilly sums up the situation thus: 'Nationality as a latent sense of identity inherited from the existence of a nation-state between 1871 and 1945, as a commitment by the Federal Republic to the GDR, and as a fixation on the Federal Republic shared by many GDR citizens is turning out to be something very different from nationality as actual habits and values and ways of living together.'²⁶

Therefore, the conflict East Germans experienced between their official citizenship and their subjective identity in the GDR may not have been resolved in the new enlarged Federal Republic. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to expect two communities to

²⁵ Eckert et al, p.11.

²⁶ Breuilly, 'Nationalism,' p.235.

recover from 40 years of separation overnight, as Willy Brandt recognised when he said, 'What belongs together is now *growing* together.'²⁷ Nevertheless, it seems highly unlikely that they would want to go their separate ways again, not least because they did not choose to in the first place.

6) THE EAST GERMAN EXPERIENCE AND NATION-THEORY

Having looked at what the collapse of the GDR can tell us about the level of acceptance of the Party line regarding the nation, and about the illegitimacy of the state, let us now briefly consider what it can tell us about nations generally. Firstly, it shows that nations neither appear nor disappear overnight, but develop gradually, (a fact often ignored by the SED, though recognised by theorists). Therefore, while it would be extremely difficult to prove that a fully-fledged national identity had become established in the GDR, it is certainly true that a certain cultural, even political identity not shared by the West Germans had developed. Furthermore, the example of Austria shows that in certain circumstances, it is possible for two separate civic-territorial nations to evolve out of one ethnic-genealogical nation,²⁸ which gradually acquire cultural characteristics of their own, and it is conceivable that a separate nation could have eventually evolved in the GDR in the same way. The key factors appear to be generational change and the passage of time, (though for particular reasons, this occurred unusually rapidly in the Austrian case).

However, precisely when the point of no return has been reached is very difficult to establish.²⁹ If we accept Anthony Smith's general definition of a nation as being 'a named human population

²⁷ Willy Brandt, Was Zusammengehört... (Bonn, 1993), p.36.

²⁸ These two types of nation have been identified by ^{the} eminent scholar of nations and nationalism, Anthony D. Smith. See Smith, National Identity (London, 1991).

²⁹ According to Walker Connor, four factors contribute to the problem: nationhood is a mass, not an elite phenomenon; it is a process; the process may not necessarily achieve nationhood; and it is not tangible or measurable. Connor, 'When is a nation?' Ethnic and Racial Studies 13 (1990): p.92.

sharing a historic territory, common myths and historic memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all its members,'³⁰ it appears that we can neither say that two separate nations had evolved on German soil, nor that the unitary German nation continued to exist unchanged. In view of the events of 1989/90, we must conclude that the embryonic nation in the GDR had not reached the point of no return, and that its citizens still believed that the German national bond had not been severed beyond repair, and that they and the West Germans continued to have more in common than not, although they may actually have been wrong in this respect.

This brings us to our second point about nations, namely that they are defined by a combination of objective and subjective criteria. If one believes that objective criteria alone define nations, one could argue that two separate nations existed on German soil. If on the other hand, one is of the opinion that nations are primarily defined according to subjective criteria, then the most important factor in the German case was what Brandt had called 'a feeling of belonging together' (*Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*). With the benefit of hindsight, the German experience appears to confirm that nations are defined by both objective, tangible factors on the one hand, and subjective elements, or national consciousness on the other. However, objective factors change more quickly than subjective ones, a process which can also be encouraged artificially, and this was the case during the 40 year separation experienced by the two German states. But because subjective elements change very slowly, they had not yet reached the point where one could talk of two completely separate and irreconcilable national consciousnesses, hence the German national bond had not quite been broken forever, although this might have occurred in time.

The theory of a discrepancy between the nation, which in objective terms, had become deeply divided after 40 years, and a subjective national consciousness, that is to say, a consciousness of being German, which had not yet been totally eroded, is supported

³⁰ Smith, National Identity, p.43.

by the evidence of the past five years, and today one could talk of a difference between the unity of the nation in theory and the disunity of the nation in practice. Consequently, reunification has proved very problematic at a personal level. While the East Germans wanted to believe that the Germans were still one nation, (and that this was sufficient to guarantee them material happiness), in objective terms, the populations of the two German states had become very different. While the two Germanies have been called 'twin states,'³¹ this requires qualification, since they were certainly fraternal, and not identical twins, and raised by different foster parents, grew up to be extremely dissimilar.

The third point we can make about nations in general is that national identity is by definition something positive. It implies a sense of pride in the nation and a feeling that there is something to be gained by being a member of that nation. The citizens of the GDR clearly had good (economic) reasons to identify themselves as Germans first and foremost, and at the time of reunification at least, had no desire to defend their East German identity, although recent experiences appear to have changed this. Had the GDR become more successful in satisfying the needs and desires of its people, within a few generations, it is possible that the situation would have been different.

A fourth point about nations is that it is highly desirable for the borders of a nation to coincide with those of a state. Even though the two German states became well established and apparently permanent, the memory of the unitary German nation-state of the past lived on, and continued to be seen as natural, even though, in real terms, it was not.³² In a genuine nation-state, of which there are very few, attributes of the nation and the state become fused, and eventually a fusion of national and state consciousness also occurs, resulting in a highly resilient entity. The case of the GDR shows what happens when nation and state do not coincide, and when two states compete for the loyalties of one people, namely that the most successful state wins.

³¹ Fulbrook, 'Nation-state,' p.196.

³² Breuilly, 'Nationalism,' p.229.

As was discussed in the first chapter, most regimes have three devices at their disposal to enhance the legitimacy of the state, namely democracy, economic success, and by successfully appealing to a sense of nationalism. However, a deficiency in any of these three may have the opposite effect and may well undermine the state. Unwilling or unable to offer the first two of these factors, the SED attempted to make use of the third device, albeit in several different forms over the years. However, in the absence of the first two factors, and due to the vulnerable position of the GDR, this strategy proved inadequate to legitimise a state that was essentially illegitimate, and proved that it is very difficult to create a nation from scratch without popular support.

In the end, the Party's various positions regarding the nation were not accepted by the population, in spite of the efforts of those whose task it was to make them credible. Not only was it too soon for a GDR-nationality to replace the Germanness which continued to link the two German states - the Federal Republic also scored more highly on the other criteria, namely democracy and economic success. Had the GDR been able to match these achievements, then maybe it could have survived, particularly once those who preserved the ethnic national bond had died out, and once the word 'German' had lost its significance. But as a copy of the Federal Republic, the GDR would have lacked a *raison d'être*. As Otto Reinhold, the rector of the Academy for Social Sciences and a member of the Central Committee, conceded in the summer of 1989:

The GDR is only conceivable as an anti-fascist and socialist alternative to the FRG. What justification would a capitalist GDR have next to a capitalist Federal Republic?³³

³³ ZPA IV 2/1/699. See also A. James McAdams, Germany Divided. From the Wall to Reunification (Princeton, 1993), p.194.

In other words, in the absence of two artificially imposed, ideologically incompatible political systems on German soil, all that would remain would be one people and one nation.

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