

# May Day Rally on Marx-Engels Square in East Berlin (May 1, 1955)

## Abstract

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The Federal Republic became integrated into the Western system of alliances when the Bonn-Paris Conventions took effect on May 5, 1955. The SED regime responded by assuming a confrontational posture during that year's May festivities and declaring May of 1955 "Battle May." For the first time, Factory Combat Groups figured prominently in marches in East Berlin and other GDR cities. According to the official SED party line, these combat groups were deployed to protect factories; in reality, however, they were paramilitary groups, and together with the Barracked People's Police [*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*], they were supposed to compensate for the lack of compulsory military service in the GDR.

Here, we see the VIP stand with Walter Ulbricht (left of center, with hat, saluting), Wilhelm Pieck (on Ulbricht's right), and the head of the "West"-KPD, Max Reimann (on Ulbricht's left). Behind the stand, a propaganda poster in the Socialist Realist style bears the words "Ready for work and the defense of the homeland." A farm woman (left), a soldier (middle), and a "worker" (right) embody the unity of labor – with the "worker" being represented in such a way that it is impossible to determine whether he is an industrial worker, an office worker, or member of the intelligentsia.

## Source

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Source: May Day Rally 1955 on Marx-Engels-Platz (as of 1994 Schloßplatz). On the podium: Walter Ulbricht (greeting), Wilhelm Pieck (next to him on the right), Max Reimann (on the left). Photo: Hildegard Dreyer.

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