

"The Cultural League at Ten" – Lead Article in *Neues Deutschland* (July 2, 1955)

Abstract

On the tenth anniversary of the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany, the SED's central organ *Neues Deutschland* celebrated the unity of the working class and the intelligentsia in the GDR. The political and social preeminence of the workers, in alliance with artists and scientists, had supposedly laid the foundations for the rebuilding of a democratic-humanistic, pan-German culture. That culture, however, was not autonomous; rather, it followed the strict directives of state cultural policy.

Source

Ten years ago, on July 4, 1945, to be exact, the founding meeting of the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany [*Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*] was held in the large broadcast hall in the radio broadcasting house on Berlin's Masurenallee. About 1,500 culture-creators from all over Berlin had come, and they enthusiastically approved the founding manifesto, which began with these words:

"The Cultural Association for the Democratic Renewal of Germany seeks to revive the great German culture, the pride of our fatherland, and to establish a new life of the German mind.

Nazism either buried the true German cultural values, those connected with the names of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and countless philosophers, artists, and scientists, or falsified them most disgracefully through its anti-human, utilitarian, and purpose-oriented doctrines. German culture became a tool of Hitler's criminal wars of conquest. [...]"

Since its founding, the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany has been a movement of intellectual renewal geared toward developing a progressive mindset in order to overcome the ideology of the old, imperialist Germany. Gathered around the founding manifesto were German artists and scientists who had survived the Fascist torture hells, who had returned home from emigration, who had, in inner emigration, remained decent people in the midst of a poisoned atmosphere of Fascist crimes, corruption, and swaggering. They belonged to the democratic parties that had just been authorized back then or had no party affiliation – representatives of various world views. They all agreed on one thing, however: a new democratic life had to be built; a new humanism had to be achieved.

A difficult, complicated, and protracted task had to be solved to turn Germany into a democratic country and to once again present our culture in a worthy manner within the culture of the world. The noblest values of German culture had to be returned to honor; the classics of poetry, music, the fine arts, and philosophy had to be brought back to life among the people. Progressive and liberal traditions of our German culture had to be revived; new values had to be brought into our progressive cultural legacy. Cultural ties with other nations, especially with the Soviet Union and our neighboring states, were reestablished, and the hearts and minds of our people were opened up to the beauty and grandeur of the national culture of others.

The education in democracy, truth, liberty, and peace was indissolubly linked with the work of

reconstruction, which led us out of misery and rubble and into the successes of our Five-Year Plan. In the process, the members of our intelligentsia became increasingly aware that all forces willing to engage in reconstruction had to begin the new life united and organized, and that the teachers also had to be learners more than ever before.

The fundamental precondition for the development of the Cultural League was the realization of the unity of the working class in the Eastern part of our fatherland, and the leading role of the party of the working class, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, in the democratic reconstruction and in the workers' and peasants' power. The strength of the working class, in alliance with the peasants, dispossessed the capitalists and large landowners, destroyed their economic power and with it their previously dominant ideological influence. The ideology of the working class became the prevailing ideology and allowed for the quick reorientation of the old intelligentsia as well.

Also of great importance to the development of the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany was the help of the Soviet Military Administration, whose commanders and cultural officers devoted the utmost attention to the questions of liberating German science and art from the dross of the old imperialist ideology.

Under these favorable conditions, large segments of the intelligentsia demonstrated their readiness to draw from the past the lesson that the intelligentsia has no prospects in the wake of capitalism. More and more the historical truth is asserting itself that the intelligentsia must join up with the working class, that it must participate in the rebuilding of our economy and our culture in friendly cooperation with the workers, the activists, and the renewers.

The Cultural League helped to develop these creative powers of the intelligentsia, to incorporate them into the great fight for peace and into the struggle for a unified, democratic Germany, to connect them ever more firmly with our workers' and peasants' state. It helped to develop a democratic consciousness of the state and a democratic patriotism. The Cultural League was able to bring together outstanding experts in their field with interested laypeople for useful joint research work, and to elevate the diffusion of scientific knowledge among the workers and peasants to respectable levels.

As of yet, not all members of our intelligentsia are united in the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany; the clash of academic and scholarly opinions, without which no development can move forward, is often still timid. There are still scientists and educators, physicians and artists, engineers and technicians who are honestly participating in the reconstruction, who are preserving their professional honor, who approve of our successes, but who nurse doubts about the power of the international solidarity of the working class, about the power of the camp of world peace. Among them are people who are still looking for and finding minor blemishes, and who, for that reason, still often succumb to the influences of the imperialist war camp.

It is the noblest task of the Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany, in keeping with its founding manifesto and its basic tasks, to fight for the preservation of peace, for democratic renewal, and for the national unity of Germany. Against the likes of Adenauer, who wishes to divide Germany even more deeply, the unity of our national culture is a bond that encompasses all Germans. Defending this unity against all influences of an imperialistic, decadent, subversive ideology must be a major concern of the Cultural League. The national duty of our culture-creators in the ranks of the Cultural League lies in carrying on the German cultural conversation in all segments of our fatherland, in supporting the progressive, humanistic culture-creators in the Western part of our fatherland, and in directing every conversation between Germans from the West and the East toward the goal of eliminating the Paris Treaties, preventing the rearmament and restoration of German militarism, and securing national unity on a democratic and peaceful foundation.

Likewise, it is the task of the Cultural League to bind our intelligentsia even more firmly to our workers' and peasants' state and to the building up of socialism. A new morality, a new humanism, the morality of peaceful relations between people and nations, of peaceful reconstruction and Socialist competition must be promoted. At the center of the further work of the Cultural League we must place this: striving for what is achievable in science and the arts, standing up for the creative life of working people, standing up for the defense of our German Democratic Republic, of the democratic and Socialist accomplishments of our working class, and of the working peasants and our creative intelligentsia.

If the Cultural League accomplishes these primary tasks, it will achieve further, significant successes in the service of our people.

Source: "The Cultural League at Ten" ["Zehn Jahre Kulturbund"], *Neues Deutschland*, no. 152, July 2, 1955; reprinted in E. Schubbe, ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED* [*Documents on the Artistic, Literary, and Cultural Politics of the SED*]. Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1972, pp. 382-384.

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