

Report of the Central Party Control Commission of the SED on the Emergence and Goals of the “Harich Group” (March 26, 1957)

Abstract

In the 1950s, Communist intellectuals who did not follow the line of the SED came under increasing political pressure in the GDR. On December 1, 1956, Wolfgang Harich, a philosophy professor and chief editor at the *Aufbau Verlag*, was arrested along with his colleagues at the press. They were subsequently sentenced to long prison terms. Harich had advocated a liberal Socialism with anti-Stalinist traits and had called for reforms within the party. This report by the SED Party Control Commission branded his activities as counterrevolutionary.

Source

The party’s investigation of the emergence and development of the Harich Group uncovered chiefly the following three things:

1. Harich prepared his plans very carefully and systematically. In the beginning, he proceeded in a very cautious and clandestine manner. Only later did he become increasingly open.
2. The party organization of the *Aufbau Verlag* offered, in large majority, a favorable breeding ground for the emergence of a counterrevolutionary group, since the largest segment of party members there had reservations about the policies of the party.
3. There were sufficient clues that something hostile to the party was taking place around Harich in the *Aufbau Verlag*.

However, because of a gross failure of vigilance, these clues were not heeded. It would thus have been possible to unmask the Harich Group sooner.

The investigation revealed that the counterrevolutionary platform of Wolfgang Harich did not, of course, come like a bolt of lightning out of the blue, but that it had been systematically prepared since the XXth Party Congress and the 3rd Party Conference.

According to unanimous statements by those involved, at first, Harich came out chiefly with satirical remarks about various matters concerning party policy and the party leadership. The purpose of his ostensible jokes was evidently to gauge the extent to which individual members of the party organization would be suitable for participation in the group. If his ostensible jokes were challenged, which happened very rarely, however, Harich withdrew with the comment and said that he had merely made a bad joke. If they were not challenged, he knew that he could go further with this party member.

Even though Harich employed this method primarily in the first period, he still retained it until the end, since it offered him a good opportunity to estimate the extent to which the ground had been prepared for an open coming-out against the party.

Harich’s first open action that was accompanied by a stance that was fleshed out in some sense came at the end of June or beginning of July in a member meeting of the party organization. The statements about Harich’s comments at this party meeting are not entirely consistent. However, what emerges from

these statements is that he came out in this sense:

“The manifestations of the cult of personality that were condemned at the XXth Party Congress must not be seen as the fault of comrade Stalin.

Before World War II, the Soviet Union found itself in a very difficult position as a result of the imperialist encirclement and the aggression of Fascist Germany. The violation of Socialist legality was therefore a historical necessity.

The difficult situation of the Soviet Union and the historical necessities had led, invariably, so to speak, to an entire system of mistakes, as a result of which the Soviet system had become frozen in mistakes. Later, this system was extended to the people’s democracies, and the issue now was to overcome this flawed system.”

In this context, Harich also made certain remarks about changes that were necessary in the German Democratic Republic. For example, he spoke about dissolving the unprofitable agricultural production cooperatives, about promoting the middle class and dissolving the artisan cooperatives, about decentralizing the economy and the apparatus of the state. [...]

On the basis of the views expressed here by Harich, there was a far-reaching consensus with the opinions of the editors Just and Zöger of the *Sonntag*. Just, in particular, was of the opinion that it was absolutely necessary to carry out an analysis of the past, to discuss the mistakes of the past broadly, in order to look for the general error that caused all the other mistakes by the party.

Here, Just offered the following justification: “Until June 1953, the party made policy without the masses. In June 1953, this false policy was corrected by the new course. However, the party lacks the theoretical justification for this change. That is why the party has been working since 1953 without a theoretical foundation.”

Since Just also demanded a broad liberalization, his call for a new theoretical foundation was aimed against the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Harich, he saw someone who was both able and called to provide the new theoretical justification, that is, the revision of Marxism-Leninism. Zöger essentially agreed with these views.

Harich won over the party secretary, comrade Schubert, in the following way: in a personal conversation, he told him that the colleagues in the *Aufbau Verlag* were very skeptical toward him. The reason for that was his membership in and work for the party leadership of his former basic organization at Karl Marx University in Leipzig. As a member of the party leadership, he had participated in the expulsion of two students, that is, he had taken a hard line. It would therefore be better if he behaved differently in the *Aufbau Verlag*. Since comrade Schubert, like the majority of the other members of the party organization, already had reservations about the policy of the party at this time, Harich was able to promote the softening-up of comrade Schubert.

At some point later, he presented his views to comrade Schubert in a personal conversation. In the process, he expressed the following opinion as his starting point: “The foundation of our politics should be that one must not deepen the division of Germany. Hence, one should not be overly hasty in building up Socialism.”

This conversation took place at the end of July or the beginning of August. At this time, Harich was thus already advocating the view that the building up of Socialism was deepening the division of Germany. In addition, he told Schubert what he was specifically suggesting as the party’s policy. These suggestions involved, once again: the dissolution of the unprofitable agricultural production cooperatives, the dissolution of the artisan cooperatives, the promotion of the middle class, the decentralization of the

economy, and the dismantling of the state apparatus.

In the process, Harich also mentioned that it was necessary to change the party leadership. Schubert essentially agreed with Harich's views. [...]

Source: Dierk Hoffman, Karl-Heinz Schmidt, and Peter Skyba, eds., *Die DDR vor dem Mauerbau: Dokumente zur Geschichte des anderen deutschen Staates 1949–1961*. Munich: Piper, 1993, pp. 268–74.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Report of the Central Party Control Commission of the SED on the Emergence and Goals of the “Harich Group” (March 26, 1957), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4581>> [May 13, 2024].