

Submission to the Secretariat of the Central Council of the Free German Youth: Gang Activity among Young People in Berlin (December 4, 1959)

Abstract

At the end of 1959, the Central Council of the Free German Youth [*Freie Deutsche Jugend* or FDJ], the central youth organization in East Germany, spoke out against the increasing “rowdyism” and “gang activity” of East German young people, who were supposedly under the influence of Western rock ’n’ roll and other Western cultural influences, and who were being deliberately used by the West as troublemakers. The Central Council demanded that the FDJ take harsher local action against these young people.

Source

The Central Council of the Free German Youth, Division of Organization-Instructors

Re: Assessment of current gang activity and punishable acts directed against the state, with particular focus on participation, incitement, and perpetration by former fugitives from the Republic or recent arrivals.

The Secretariat decides:

1. The present report is noted.
2. The present report, including the conclusions, will be evaluated with the 1st and 2nd District Secretaries at the next meeting.
3. The Division of Organization-Instructors is tasked with overseeing and organizing the measures agreed upon.

A report is to be made to the Secretariat in the 2nd quarter of 1960.

Assessment of current gang activity and punishable acts directed against the state, with particular focus on participation, incitement, and perpetration by former fugitives from the Republic or recent arrivals.

I.

Recently there have been more and more reports that young people are ganging together, committing criminal acts, and violating the rules of Socialist communal life. In particular, they are committing crimes against the state, disrupting the public peace, committing thefts, property damage, indecent acts, and similar offenses.

The existing examples show that such gangs exist not only in large cities, but also in medium-sized and smaller cities and towns.

The starting point – i.e. gathering place – of the young people in question is not infrequently our youth club houses.

“Rock ’n’ roll fans” are most often encountered. Generally these are groups of 15–20 young people

(including girls!) between the ages of 16 and 21.

These gangs combine their “demands” for rock ’n’ roll with vicious incitement against our leading comrades Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, and Walter Ulbricht. They appear in various GDR cities with essentially the same provocative statements. The following are known to us at this time: “We want no Pieck and Grotewohl and Ulbricht, we want rock ’n’ roll;” “We don’t dance the Lipsi or to [the music of] Alo Koll, we’re for Bill Haley and dance rock ’n’ roll;” “We are warning you, another June 17 is coming;” “Down with the Communist pigs,” and the like.

They also move their meetings into the apartments of young people who belong to the “club.” The examples emphatically indicate that in no small number of cases, the leaders are young people who have left the GDR once or several times, or are recent arrivals. Moreover, it was determined that the organizers are located directly in West Berlin and West Germany and are directing things from there.

Arrested young people often make statements to the effect that they first wanted to pull off some “job” in order to leave the GDR and be considered a “political refugee.” They would then be given work and housing in West Berlin and West Germany more quickly.

Public engagement with these questions is not always successful.

In Frankfurt/Oder, for example, it took hard work to convince the parents of the arrested young people of their misdeeds. In the presence of their parents, the young people denied everything. Only after each was individually confronted with their parents did they admit to their actions.

In Pößneck, the incidents were addressed at a youth forum. One thousand people (especially young people) appeared. The forum did not lead to a clear distancing of the upper school students from these disgraceful acts. They merely discussed questions concerning music and did not want to grasp the connections.

The public is outraged about such incidents. However, it is not yet getting involved in social education. Here, in particular, we see omissions on the part of the state organs.

The statements by the young people who belong to these “clubs” are all geared toward recognizing rock ’n’ roll music; then they would also participate in the FDJ. They try, and in most cases they actually succeed, in having a discussion about music with FDJ functionaries. And in these situations they are also on the offensive.

Examples of gang activity in the territory of the GDR.

The material is not complete. The state organs have no statistical survey of gangs.

On November 27, 1959, at around 9:45 p.m., in Dresden, about eighty youths marched through the streets howling. They were coming from the youth club house Martin-Andersen-Nexö. They shouted “We want to have our emperor back;” “We don’t want Pieck and Grotewohl and Ulbricht, we want rock ’n’ roll;” “Shut your windows, there’s going to be shooting.” Some of the youths were previously convicted of participation in the Fascist putsch in 1953.

In Leipzig, a gang that was marching through the streets with the same slogans was broken up in the middle of the year.

In Erfurt, a crowd of young people were hooting and hollering in the streets. They harassed pedestrians, were rude to girls, and committed several rapes. They smashed windows and store fronts, overturned advertising pillars and broke flower-pots.

Trashy Western literature was confiscated from them by the hundredweight.

Fourteen youths were put on trial.

The leader of this gang was eighteen year-old Peter T [...], who had twice left the Republic illegally.

In Magdeburg-Süd there was a gang of youths that “glorified” the king of rock ‘n’ roll, Presley.

The organizer and brain behind the operation was a girl from Wiesbaden.

Such groups of “Presley worshippers” are also found in cities like Gera, Pößneck, Saalfeld, Lobenstein, Erfurt, Jena, Greiz, Bitterfeld, Frankfurt/Oder, Mühlhausen, Leipzig, Berlin, and Weimar. [...]

What conclusions can be drawn:

1. Gang activity and the formation of cliques in the GDR (alongside the already known influence of trashy literature and RIAS[1] or other Western stations) are the direct and indirect influence of individuals who returned or migrated from West Germany to the GDR or whose residence is in West Berlin or West Germany.
2. A number of individuals are working on behalf of West German and foreign secret services, especially among the youth, to prevail upon young people to leave the GDR. They were smuggled into the GDR for this purpose.
3. Young people, once the West has been described to them in tempting colors and once their natural desire for adventure has been taken advantage of, are exploited for crimes against our state. Since young people in the GDR are increasingly familiar with the actual political and economic conditions in West Germany, they are led to believe that all doors are open to them as political refugees. However, only a person who has “pulled off a political job” can be a political refugee.

Here, the opponent is relying chiefly on youths up to age 20, 21, who are mentally and politically retarded and are work shirkers or have no orderly family situation.

4. Individuals, especially young people, who move to the GDR spread the ways of life they were taught in the Adenauer state and find approval and support for their activities from a portion of the young people in the GDR. They are also able to exert their influence, especially because our organization and other social forces are not doing enough to lead the immigrants to the new life in our Socialist state. That, in turn, is one reason why a fairly large number of them leave the GDR again or commit a crime. [...]

IV.

The leadership of the FDJ is responding very inadequately to manifestations of this kind. It would appear that they are content because this is, after all, only a relatively small segment of the youth in the GDR. This attitude reflects a serious negligence toward these issues. They clearly have not yet recognized that the enemy is trying, precisely by way of manifestations of rowdiness in the GDR, to defame and slander our Socialist system. Only rarely does the leadership of the organization provide information about such incidents. In many cases, the leaders of the FDJ know nothing at all about them. Collaboration with the relevant local organs is inadequate and is not infrequently seen as an annoyance with it comes to these questions.

The strength of the youth itself must be mustered against such manifestations in the GDR in order to combat them effectively and to incorporate these young people into the building up of Socialism.

The following conclusions must be drawn from the current situation:

1. The Secretariat of the Central Council refers emphatically to the recommendation of July 1, 1959, on the formation of order groups, which was sent to all district and county authorities.

Where there are manifestations of cliques and gang formations, order groups must be immediately set up.

The Section Organizational-Instructors will conduct an exchange of experiences in the order groups in the first quarter of 1960.

2. The decision by the Secretariat of the Central Council of August 12, 1959, about the work with returnees and recent arrivals must be made the topic of one of the upcoming meetings of the Secretariat in the districts and counties.

3. The district leadership of the Free German Youth will report on the situation in their districts in a brief report by January 10, 1960. To that end, they shall draw especially on help from the *Volkspolizei* [People's Police], the prosecutor, and the sections Interior and National Education of the councils.

4. Arrangements should be made with the central state offices for the film "You are not Alone" to be screened in the GDR once again. A broad discussion about this film should be laid out in the organization's press.

Responsible: Section Organizational Instructors.

5. All administrations will inspect the youth clubs and other youth installations to determine which circles of the youth are coming and going.

The film "You are not Alone" is to be screened and discussed in all youth club houses.

6. In January 1960, the Section Organizational-Instructors will present the Secretariat a detailed plan of measures extending over a longer period of time. Prior to that, the plan is to be deliberated with the relevant state agencies.

7. The Secretariat of the Central Council recommends especially to the prosecutor general, the HVdVP [Central Administration of the *Volkspolizei*], the Ministry of National Education, and the Ministry of the Interior, to take measures that will make it possible to quickly recognize and intervene in such manifestations.

NOTES

[1] RIAS: Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor [Radio in the American Sector].

Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/16/230, vol. 8, III 10 (Familien-, Jugend- und Altenpolitik); reprinted in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*. Bd. 8: 1949–1961: *Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004, no. 8/208.

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