

“The Crimes of West Berlin Provocateurs” (June 18, 1953)

Abstract

The day after the workers' uprising on June 17, 1953, the SED's central organ, *Neues Deutschland*, interpreted the unrest as “fascist” provocation planned and directed by West Germany – this view stood as the official interpretation of the day's events until the end of the GDR in 1989. Harsh punishment was announced for those involved: in the following months, more than 1,300 prison sentences were imposed. Purges were also carried out within the SED. The newspaper's assertion that the uprising was thwarted by resistance from within the civilian population is a patent falsehood. The SED was able to stay in power only through the intervention of the Soviet occupying power.

Source

Over the course of June 17, 1953, paid criminal elements from West Berlin tried to incite the population of the democratic sector to commit violent crimes against democratic facilities, companies, stores, commercial buildings, and the People's Police [*Volkspolizei*]. The West Berlin provocateurs roamed the streets, looting, robbing, and carrying out devious armed attacks on the People's Police and progressive-minded segments of the population. For example, the ruffians destroyed consumer stands in the central market hall on Alexanderplatz and tore down overhead trolley lines at the Oberbaumbrücke. Bandits destroyed the interior of the Berolinahaus on Alexanderplatz. They forced their way into an HO [*Handelsorganisation*] food store on Liebknechtstraße and into other stores and kiosks. They not only stole goods but subjected store and kiosk employees to extremely brutal treatment. The bandits demolished the HO and *Konsum* kiosks at Ludwig Jahn Sports Park and set fire to the Columbushaus on Potsdamer Platz. They even attacked the hospital of the People's Police, smashing windows in the women's ward.

The population distanced itself from the provocateurs and their criminal acts, and assisted the People's Police in arresting a large number of criminals, most of whom are West Berlin provocateurs from fascist organizations.

Source: “Die Verbrechen der Westberliner Provokateure”, *Neues Deutschland* (June 18, 1953); reprinted in Ernst Deuerlein, ed., *DDR*. Munich, 1966, p. 136-37.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: “The Crimes of West Berlin Provocateurs” (June 18, 1953), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-3008>> [October 25, 2024].