

Walter Ulbricht: The Second Five-Year Plan and the Building Up of Socialism in the German Democratic Republic (1956)

Abstract

On the occasion of the Second Five-Year Plan of the GDR in 1956, SED party chairman Walter Ulbricht celebrated the successes of the state's cultural policy. As evidence of that success, he pointed to a culture budget that had continuously risen since 1951 and to the large number of cultural institutions (such as theaters, libraries, and culture clubs) in the GDR's cities and countryside. Ulbricht reaffirmed the function of "Socialist Realism" as an ideological guide for all artistic work in the GDR. The visual arts, literature, music, and film – all were to reflect social reality and serve the further build-up of Socialism.

Source

Report by Walter Ulbricht at the Third Party Conference of the SED, March 25-30, 1956

Great progress was undoubtedly made in the area of culture during the first Five-Year Plan. [...] In the first Five-Year Plan, the German Democratic Republic increased funding every year for national education, science, and art, while West Germany, under the banner of NATO politics, curtailed spending for cultural purposes. State expenditures for culture in the first Five-Year Plan came to 12.6 billion DM, of which

in year 1951 — 1.7 billion DM,
in year 1952 — 2.2 billion DM,
in year 1953 — 2.6 billion DM,
in year 1954 — 2.9 billion DM,
in year 1955 — 3.2 billion DM.

If one drives through the industrial regions and agricultural districts of our Republic, one sees today well over 1,100 houses of culture and club houses, one third of which are already found in the countryside at machine and tractor stations, state farms, and agricultural producers' cooperatives. The technical and artistic intelligentsia has more than 50 clubs of its own. The number of clubs and cultural spaces has grown to 17,428; there are 154 open-air theaters; 10,500 state and about 8,100 union libraries are available to readers. The number of theaters rose in the first Five-Year Plan from 77 to 88.

The flourishing of our national art is evident in the fact that currently about 800,000 working people are active in 25,000 ensembles, groups, and circles, whereby more than 15,000 of such groups exist in the national enterprises of industry and in the Socialist sector of agriculture.

There has also been a surge in our book production, which reached six books per inhabitant per year, while in West Germany it is currently only 2.5 books per capita per year. Likewise, the number of lectures to spread scientific knowledge is growing year by year. If the goal we set at the beginning of the Five-Year Plan was to overcome the cultural backwardness and cultural erosion left behind by the rule of the Fascist and militarist monopolists and the Junkers, and to develop a progressive German culture for our entire German fatherland, then we can speak today of historically significant successes in fulfilling this

task in city and countryside. With the radical Socialist change in our agriculture, we are bringing education, science, and art into the most remote village.

Five years ago, the artists in our German Democratic Republic still stood in the midst of a difficult struggle to overcome the legacy of bourgeois decadence, especially of formalism, which impeded our forward development toward a new realistic art, toward a Socialist art. Back then, literature was the only exception, because the realistic tradition of the anti-Fascist struggle was alive and strong in it.

As our Socialist society has taken shape and grown, there has been a turnaround in all areas of art. Our impetuously forward-moving life became the strongest teacher for the artists as well. They have increasingly realized that the cultural revolution in our Republic also demands from every artist an inner revolution, which will allow him to elevate himself and his artistic creations to the heights of the historical tasks involved in the building up of Socialism.

Some years ago, the party eliminated wrong-headed administrative methods, which had developed for a time in the collaboration between some functionaries and creators of art, and it made sure that discussions with artists about the content and form of a Socialist art are now being conducted carefully, patiently, persuasively, and with respect for the personhood of the artist. We welcome the honest efforts our writers and artists have made in the attempt to clarify problems. We welcome their ideological quarrels, which have become increasingly objective and deeper. After the fulfillment of the first Five-Year Plan, we can say that in all areas of art, even if still unevenly, Socialist Realism is establishing itself as the most progressive creative method of our time.

The proud results of the first Five-Year Plan have created a good foundation for the second Five-Year Plan and for further successes of Socialist rebuilding. Those workers who were not yet convinced at the start of the first Five-Year Plan have by now been convinced by life itself. And with regard to opponents in West Germany: they are forced to acknowledge that they have suffered a defeat at the hands of the workers, the farmers, the intelligentsia, and the other working people of the German Democratic Republic. All of the opponents' measures of diversion and sabotage have proven useless. At the end of the first Five-Year Plan, representatives from all over the world, friends, neutral businesspeople, as well as enemies were able to convince themselves on the occasion of the Leipzig Fair that the policies of the German Democratic Republic and its planned economy have great prospects.

[...]

On the development of Socialist culture

The crucial cultural task in the second Five-Year Plan lies in developing a Socialist culture in the German Democratic Republic and transmitting it to the entire nation. The building up of Socialism demands that working people continuously raise their cultural level and acquire the most progressive insights afforded by technology and science in order to raise their labor productivity and to fully employ their creative powers in realizing the great goals of our second Five-Year Plan. Significant improvements must occur in fulfilling this fundamental task of developing Socialist culture through and for the people; in fact, a *fundamental change in cultural mass work* must occur. The Comrades in the Free German Trade Union Federation must ensure that *the houses of culture of the state-owned enterprises become real centers for the social and cultural life of all working people*, places of professional and ideological education, of artistic activity by the people, of entertainment and relaxation. The significant funds that our workers' and farmers' state is investing in these cultural houses and spaces should prompt the industrial unions and all responsible comrade cultural workers to wage an untiring battle for the positive utilization of these houses of culture, for the development of a rich cultural life within them.

As with the houses of culture, the *people's parks, the parks of culture and relaxation*, must also be turned

into genuine cultural centers. There, as well, a multitude of interesting forms of cultural work, such as exhibitions, lectures, film screenings, theater performances, poetry readings, concerts, sports competitions, new popular games, dances, and song recitals should be meaningfully combined with entertainment, relaxation, and fun, especially for young people. The development of Socialist cultural work must be especially promoted in the building of the combine “Black Pump.” Young people are to be given their own room in all houses of culture. The houses of culture and cultural spaces are to be used to further develop the great dialogue with young people. At the Youth Forums, the functionaries of the party, the state, and the unions should answer the questions of young people even more vigorously than before, to enlighten them about the tasks and prospects involved in the construction of Socialism. The houses of culture, youth facilities, and sports facilities must be put to better use to counsel young people on questions relating to vocational training and continuing professional education, to educate them to responsible collaboration in the state and the economy, and to create an interesting and joyful youth life of sports, hiking, and recreation.

Part of the change in the cultural mass work is that the utmost effort is devoted to making *art a matter of the entire nation*. This requires public discussions of literature and art, participation in shaping the program of movie theaters, visitor conferences in the theaters, the inclusion of broad circles of the population and permanent commissions in drawing up, implementing, and overseeing the cultural development plans in the counties and districts. The work of the German Concert Agency must not only expand quantitatively in the second Five-Year Plan, but it must also, and above all, raise its level considerably in order to unite, in its programs, artistic offerings with good entertainment in the Socialist spirit.

The *cultural transformation* that has begun in the countryside means creating a new, culturally rich, and more beautiful life in the villages as well. The center of cultural work in rural areas must be the house of culture at the machine and tractor station. In the course of the second Five-Year Plan, films must come to the villages twice a week, whereby performance venues, apparatuses, and the means of transportation should be continuously elevated to a higher technical level, and new performance venues should be created. Two construction models will be developed for the 75 new rural houses of culture to be built in the second half of our Five-Year Plan. Kindergartens, sewing rooms, and so on should be included in the plans. The creation of new itinerant theater groups in the districts of Neubrandenburg, Frankfurt (Oder), and Suhl will ensure that a growing number of performances will take place in the houses of culture and other performance venues in these rural areas. We believe it is practical for the Ministry of Culture and its organs in the districts and counties to assume responsibility for guiding the houses of culture and art in the countryside, especially at the machine and tractor stations.

The development of Socialist culture means that *greater ideological-artistic demands will be placed on the work of our writers and artists*.

Our art, our artists receive strong creative impulses from our life and from the bold perspectives of our second Socialist Five-Year Plan. The workers, the working farmers, and the intelligentsia hope for, and expect, new works of art that are worthy of this great era in the building up of Socialism. The hopes that our people are directing at the work of our writers and artists, the involvement of our working people in the creation of new works of art and in public discussions about them, express the new relationship of our people to the artists: *Their work is recognized as vital to our society; their work is becoming a matter of interest for our entire nation, as never before in the history of Germany*. That is why we believe that the importance of the Fourth Congress of German Writers lies in the fact that our writers, after an ideological quarrel, arrived at a full realization of their historical task, to create a national Socialist literature in Germany.

This principled orientation of the Fourth Congress of German Writers applies to all areas of art, whereby,

of course, its discussion about artistic issues cannot be mechanically transferred to the various arts, but must be adjusted to their peculiarities. Our working people expect works of a high artistic level, works that will contribute, above all, to deepening the patriotic and Socialist consciousness of our nation, and to inspiring our workers, working farmers, and intelligentsia to great deeds in building our new, truly humanistic society, and to defending our workers' and farmers' state.

The question of mastership is of such great importance because the world-changing ideas of Socialism in all areas of art can have a profound, activating effect on people only through real works of art and through masterful artistic interpretation. In this sense, our working people do not expect bland and conflict-free works from our literature, cinematic art, music, and visual arts in the second Five-Year Plan, but artistic creations in which the great thoughts and feelings of the new heroes of our society, the deep conflicts of the present and the overcoming of them, the battle against the impeding capitalist and petty bourgeois thinking, and the *struggle for the higher morality of Socialism* are dealt with convincingly.

High demands on literature and art correspond with the nature of our Socialist society and Socialist culture. Our working people are hoping that *the close union between art and life* will bring them new popular and folk songs, as well as works that meet their natural need for good entertainment. Our cinematic art, which has produced first-rate international achievements with the Thälmann film and other films, is still suffering from a completely uneven level of artistry. The average film production of DEFA, which rose from eight in 1953 to eighteen in 1955, and which will rise from twenty in 1956 to thirty-two in 1960, must attain, along with outstanding achievements, a higher average ideological-artistic quality as well. More so than before, we need films about the past and present of the German workers' movement, but, at long last, we need good comedies as well. One should help remedy the lack of screenplays with prize competitions. In the technical area, during the second Five-Year Plan, our cinematic art must transition rapidly in shooting and playback technology to anamorphic wide-screen processes and stereophony, which means that 600 movie theaters and 100 important houses of culture in our Republic and in greater Berlin have to be switched over to this, the most modern technology. In the area of television broadcasting, the highest technical level must be achieved and color television must be developed.

The nature of Socialist art is determined by the fact that its entire riches, everything good and beautiful produced by literature, art, and science, belong to the entire nation. This has never before existed in Germany, and it is possible with us because the Socialist reformation of our economy provided the solid material foundation for this new development of culture. The power of Socialist culture rests on this basis and on the further unfolding of all creative energies of our workers, working farmers, and workers of the mind. The new, richer cultural life in city and countryside that is growing up in the second Five-Year Plan shows the entire German people, shows all of Germany, the beautiful prospects of the path of democracy and Socialism.

Source: "Report by Walter Ulbricht at the Third Party Conference of the SED, March 25-30, 1956" ["Referat Walter Ulbrichts auf der 3. Partei-Konferenz der SED, 25. bis 30. März 1956"], *Neues Deutschland*, no. 73, March 25, 1956; 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. 428-32.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Walter Ulbricht: The Second Five-Year Plan and the Building Up of Socialism in the German Democratic Republic (1956), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-4580>> [July 02, 2025].