

Erich Honecker on the “Unity of Economic and Social Policy” (June 15–19, 1971)

Abstract

On taking over the leadership of the SED, Erich Honecker outlined his economic program in the new Five-Year Plan. The plan advanced existing efforts to encourage technological innovation but shifted priority to the production of more consumer goods, aiming to improve the standard of living in exchange for political loyalty.

Source

Report of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) at the VIII. Party Congress of the SED. Report by Erich Honecker, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED.

Comrades!
Honored Guests!

The Socialist Unity Party of Germany comes to its VIII. Party Congress with reports of good results in the buildup of socialism in the German Democratic Republic. Every comrade in our party, every citizen of our state can judge from personal experience that the path laid out by the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class is correct and successful. We know only one goal, which permeates all the policies of our party: to do everything possible for the good of the citizens, for the happiness of the people, for the interests of the working class and of all workers. That is the meaning of socialism. That is what we are working and fighting for.

[...]

Ever since socialist production conditions [*Produktionsverhältnisse*] triumphed in our country, we have worked comprehensively and from all angles to shape the developed socialist society [*die entwickelte sozialistische Gesellschaft*]. That is a great and wonderful task, which our party and our people are working toward with great zeal. To be sure, it will take some time, and much still needs to be done before we will be able to say: socialism in the German Democratic Republic is complete. For this to happen, productive capacity, socialist social relations, and the socialist consciousness of the people will need to be raised to a higher level. Every Five-Year Plan period, every party congress brings us closer to this goal. At this VIII. Party Congress, we have significant progress to report as well.

We have increased socialist property considerably, developed socialist production relations, and continued to strengthen the state power of the workers and the farmers. The conditions in our country, the relationships between people, their thinking and their actions, the intellectual and moral atmosphere—all of this is becoming more and more profoundly determined by the principles of socialism. This is a testimony to the achievements of the working class and to our party as the leader of the people. This makes us happy and proud.

How much drive, how much dogged effort, how much creative energy on the part of the workforce stands behind this declaration! We are aware of the greatness of the demands and the sometimes difficult circumstances under which this accomplishment was achieved. But five years of diligent work

have made our socialist fatherland stronger and more beautiful. The working class, the cooperative farmers, members of the intelligentsia, all segments of our population, all classes and social strata, the most diverse occupational groups, the numerous production collectives, women and men, young and old—all have made their contribution to this.

As you know, Lenin characterized the task of economic buildup as extraordinarily significant, because the global struggle is fought primarily on this field. “If we accomplish this task,” Lenin said, “then on the international level we will have clearly won, once and for all.” We have always let ourselves be guided by this insight and have focused the party’s efforts on it in particular.

Our national income rose during the past five years by more than 25 percent; in 1970 it already amounted to 108 billion marks. Once again, a great contribution was made by the working class, which, together with the socialist intelligentsia and other members of the workforce, increased the production of industrial goods by 37 percent. Today it takes our factories less than nine months to produce as much as they did in all of 1965.

[...]

As we now embark on the new Five-Year Plan, we not only have the good material results of our work in the last reporting period to lean on. We are also richer in knowledge and experience when it comes to taking full advantage of the economic laws of socialism.

[...]

The draft version of the directive says: “The main task of the Five-Year Plan is to further increase the material and cultural standard of living of our people on the basis of the rapid development of socialist production, increased effectiveness, scientific-technological progress, and higher work productivity.”

This statement characterizes the goal of our economic activity in its indissoluble connection to the preconditions that must be achieved for it. Through life experience, our people have learned the important lesson that our society can never consume more than has been produced. Doing a better job to satisfy the needs of the people means that great demands are initially made on the hard work, expert knowledge, and sense of responsibility of every one of us, no matter where we perform our duty in our great community.

The main task of the Five-Year Plan of 1971 to 1975 outlines an entire economic policy program. The aim corresponds to the basic economic law of socialism. For our society, the economy is the means to an end, the means to the ever-better satisfaction of the growing material and cultural needs of the working people.

Our party, of course, was also guided by this in the past. But with the further development of socialist society and its economic potential, the natural connection between production and the needs of the people can and must have an increasingly immediate effect. We are working toward this by means of the main task.

[...]

The socialist intensification of production is demanded by economic reason. And if we declare that to be the main path, then it means that it is not just any task but the primary task. It is not a matter for one but a matter for all. If everyone remembers that, then some tensions will decrease, some things will be tackled with less trouble and less wasted energy, and that is no small thing, comrades. We will move forward with greater speed and certainty.

In accordance with this direction, we have also determined the place of socialist rationalization within our economic policy. It will be given even greater emphasis as a top-priority political task with significance for all of society. We do not want to exhaust only one or another option to rationalize production but all of them—both great and small, in the entire national economy and at every workplace.

Trust in the sense of responsibility, the expert knowledge, the experience, and the creative riches of workers, scientists, and technicians; trust in the ability of the leaders of our combines [*Kombinate*] and factories [*Betriebe*] to take full advantage of such initiative, to promote and incorporate it—these tasks speak for rationalization. It opens up new space for socialist competition.

Rationalization brings a wide range of tasks for the socialist collectives and innovators. It places a new and greater demand on union work. In creative competition, the working people of our country will test and build up their skills; socialist attitudes will be formed anew and personalities will develop. In this struggle, the working class, as the leading force in our society, will grow in turn and all of its companions will as well.

Now, dear comrades, on to a few important issues that are part of our program for greater economic effectiveness. First, regarding our expectations with respect to the contribution made by science. These expectations are certainly great. Science and research have a decisive influence on the growth, structure, and performance of our national economy—all the more so since the revolution in science and technology is presently underway. As Marxist-Leninists, we respond to science as we do to other essential social realities and processes. We study its laws in depth and apply them in the interest of our people, in a manner appropriate to our socialist society. This makes it necessary to organically unite the scientific-technological revolution with the advantages of the socialist economic system and to develop, more extensively than ever before, the forms of confluence between science and production that are unique to socialism.

[...]

Comrades!

The task of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, as a Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, is to provide political leadership for social development in the German Democratic Republic on the basis of scientifically grounded strategies and tactics. The party awakens and fosters the initiative of all citizens for the continued flourishing of the socialist order.

In the twenty-five years since its founding, since Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl joined hands in a sign of unity, our party has been working aggressively, steadfastly, and successfully toward the fulfillment of this task. As a revolutionary party of the working class and of all working people, as a new type of party [*eine Partei neuen Typus*], it succeeded in accomplishing a truly historical achievement under complicated historical conditions, leading the way for all working people. The victory in the antifascist-democratic revolution, the building up of a firm foundation for socialism, and the successful shaping of the developed socialist society prove that our party will satisfy the objective prerequisites of our epoch. It is leading the people on the correct path. The goals of the revolutionary workers' movement as established by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and with them centuries old humanistic ideals, are gradually becoming reality.

[...]

Source: VIII. Parteitag der SED – Bericht des ZK, 15.–19. Juni 1971. Berichterstatter: 1. Sekretär des ZK der SED Erich Honecker; reprinted in Günter Benser, ed., *Dokumente zur Geschichte der SED*, vol. 3: 1971–1986. Berlin, 1986, pp. 7–33.

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