The June 17th Holiday (June 11, 1963)

Abstract

A few days before the tenth anniversary of the failed June 17, 1953 uprising in the East, the government of the Federal Republic instituted a new national holiday. The idea was to remind West Germans of their Eastern compatriots' lack of freedom while reaffirming hopes for eventual reunification.

Source

Proclamation by the Federal President

The Federal President issued the following proclamation on June 11th, 1963, which I hereby make public:

June 17th marks the tenth anniversary of the day of the uprising in East Berlin and the Soviet-occupied zone; this uprising bore unequivocal witness, before the whole world, to the right of our entire people to freedom and self-determination. Although this attempt to cast off the chains of foreign despotism failed, the cry for justice and freedom has not faded away. It was and is heard and understood wherever human dignity and human rights are respected.

As free citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany, we are called upon to engage in self-reflection, and we are urgently reminded of our responsibility to our countrymen behind the Iron Curtain, and also of our duty to regain the unity of all Germans, a unity our people have been yearning for with burning desire ever since the collapse [in 1945].

We who have been allowed to live in a constitutional system after the Hitler dictatorship and have been able, as partners of the free world, to build the Federal Republic according to our vision of the world and humanity, are obligated before history and our conscience to stand up for those who are still subject to a criminal regime. They see in our democracy the refuge of a united Germany, on which they are placing their hopes. Words and gestures alone provide no help, assurances are not credible if they are not backed up by actions. Many signs of personal connection have built bridges of trust and optimism. – Every letter, every package, every trip, especially the mass visits on major holidays, contribute to this. But the affirmation of unity demands an even greater commitment, namely, the personal willingness of each individual to work with all possible strength of mind and heart against the tearing apart of our country and to deliberately consider in his or her soul the plight of our people.

Only an affirmation of this kind renders credible our protest against this screaming injustice and compels the realization that the world cannot find peace as long as the disastrous division of Germany continues. The integrity of our conviction will be measured by how we observe the Day of German Unity. This day must not be considered one of those holidays whose purpose is relaxation, recreation, or even pleasure. It is and remains a testimony to the choice of conscience against tyranny and inhumanity. Our steadfast and faithful remembrance of the sacrifice of June 17th, 1953, will emphatically affirm our demand for the restoration of a common fatherland.

On June 17th, we want to demonstrate to all those fighting for freedom and unity in Central [i.e. East] Germany and East Berlin that we have understood their sacrifice.

To give expression to this desire, our Federal Parliament has legally declared this day to be the "Day of German Unity," and the federal states have accorded it the status of a commemorative holiday. The task

now is to inspire every person to view the dignified and committed observance of this day as a very personal responsibility. The origin and meaning of this national uprising must be made clear especially to our young people. They need to realize that the events of June 17th must substantially shape their thoughts and actions. Through school festivities, in which parents' councils and teachers should participate, the younger generation must experience and come to understand that this exhortation is meant especially for them.

As a national day of commemoration, the "Day of German Unity" will become the symbol of our struggle for unity in peace and freedom. We are quite certain: what belongs together and used to be together will also come back together again.

I declare June 17th—the "Day of German Unity"—the "National Day of Remembrance of the German People."

Bonn, June 17th, 1963
Federal Minister of the Interior
Höcherl

Source: *Bundesgesetzblatt*, 1963, part I, no. 31 (June 24, 1963), pp. 397–98. Available online at: http://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl163031.pdf

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