

The New Youth Program of the Communist Party (September 21, 1963)

Abstract

With its new youth program, the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* or SED) appealed to the idealism of young people who had been born in the GDR. The program experimented with the promise of allowing youths more freedom in choosing their own lifestyles, as long as they were committed to the general goal of building a socialist society.

Source

[...]

What is the Meaning of Our Lives?

Sooner or later every young person asks himself the question: “What is the meaning of my life?” Every young person wants to live happily. Most young people wish to assume a respected position among their fellow men. They dream of accomplishing something great. But whether these wishes come true depends not only on the young person himself but also on the era into which he was born, the social order in which he lives and works, the people with whom he lives, as well as the character of the country of which he is a citizen.

Today’s youth live in a time that is itself young, in the age of the transition from capitalism to socialism and to communism throughout the entire world. Everything is in transition in these days, weeks, months, years, and decades. The world of war, exploitation, competition, and corruptibility is continually losing ground, whereas the new world of peace, social justice, freedom, mutual assistance, and comradely cooperation is growing ever stronger. It is constantly gaining ground and overcoming its own growing pains with ever greater success. In the world of socialism and communism, the individual is becoming more and more the master of his own circumstances and is increasingly putting the forces of nature to work for him.

Right before the eyes of today’s young generation, and with their active participation, the transition of humanity from the realm of blind necessity into the realm of freedom—as predicted by Marx and Engels—is taking place!

[...]

To be the Anvil or the Hammer?

Today’s youth was born into a time not only of upheaval but also of decision. For peace, social security, social justice, humanity, and true freedom do not create themselves, even in our times; rather, they must be achieved anew each and every day. Of course, the world is developing naturally and inevitably towards socialism and communism. But this development will take place all the faster if each young person in the GDR does his work better and quicker today than yesterday, thus helping to force peaceful coexistence and to accelerate the great developments of our times.

[...]

No one can take this daily decision away from you: you must face it yourself.

And if your life is to have any meaning, you must choose socialism every day and every hour.

For these words by Goethe apply to your generation like no other: “You must rise and fall, you must be master and win, or serve and lose, grieve or triumph, be the anvil or the hammer.”

[...]

Has Youth Earned Our Confidence?

There are many older people in the GDR who trust the youth, understand them, and help them. But some older citizens of the GDR still feel uneasy about young people and somewhat mistrustful towards them. Although they know that our youth is different from the youth of West Germany, they believe that our girls and boys will not be able to meet the high demands that the comprehensive building of socialism places on them. Such skeptics judge our young workers and collective farmers, our young technicians, engineers, artists, and scientists by external appearances. They mostly concern themselves only superficially with the problems of the youth. They approach the youth with bureaucratic methods and are then surprised when working with young people is “complicated.” They are not familiar with Lenin’s remark that young people will come to socialism in a different way than their fathers. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany has nothing in common with all those who mistrust our youth. Our party operates on the premise that placing high demands on young people simultaneously shows the greatest confidence in them.

A lot is demanded of you, girls and boys of the German Democratic Republic: Buttressed by a more than a century-long tradition of the workers’ movement, and true to the advice and experiences of your fathers, you are asked to help build a state that represents the future of Germany, here in the GDR. By now it is clear to every independent-thinking young person that the future of all of Germany lies only in a socialist order.

Therefore, the girls and boys who work hard for the GDR today are also working for the entire nation!

We call upon all smart and industrious boys and girls [and say], do not let what your mothers and fathers have created in the GDR be dragged through the mud by anyone! Wherever it might still be fashionable to speak poorly of the GDR and its achievements, young people who hold their own accomplishments dear should always honor the truth and should meticulously distinguish the great achievements from the shortcomings that still exist.

[...]

How Do Young People Today Become Socialists?

Our youth is generally very hard-working and mentally capable from very early on. They are self-confident and strive for just standards that recognize nothing but fair achievements. This is why they themselves have a strong will to achieve; every individual wants to matter, wants to accomplish something that will not only earn him the respect and recognition of his friends and all of society, but will also bring our republic respect and recognition throughout the world. Our young people mature earlier and wish to be taken seriously earlier as well; they are critical and do not tolerate poor leaders, or only for a short time. They live their lives in a constant struggle to master the new challenges of production and to oppose the numerous hurdles that result from old habits and insufficient knowledge. They respect their elders, particularly when they serve as a role model and accomplish something. Age is owed respect! In order for our youth to appreciate their elders from the bottom of their hearts, the best of the older generation should tell [our] boys and girls more about the experiences of their struggle-filled lives. By virtue of our socialist order, which gives [our] youth all sorts of opportunities to develop their skills and to assume responsibility from early on, our young people have also forged their own experiences

and developed a strong will to shape their own education from an early age.

Every young person should know: Placing high demands on yourself is the prerequisite for creative activity. Given our societal conditions, every young person is mostly responsible for his own achievements, his own character traits, and his own behavior. Therefore, he seeks role models, people who encourage him to follow their example. Our girls and boys have a thirst for knowledge and are happy to learn from anyone who has something useful to teach them.

[...]

Gathering Ideas and Ideals at the Source

By virtue of its achievements in production, its education, its love of the truth, and its sense of justice, today's younger generation, under the influence of socialist ethics and morality, feels drawn to socialism. But that does not mean that it arrives at socialism "automatically" and without any objections. It takes different paths to a scientific world view than the older generation.

It is the task of the older generation to help our youth realize that only socialism serves their interests. A love for quality work, precision learning, and the socialist Fatherland must grow within young people. This love should not be blind but rather, based on thorough knowledge of the laws that govern the development of human society. That's the only way for firm convictions to develop, convictions that can serve as a true compass even in difficult situations.

But it is precisely this important area of the work of persuasion that still remains in a mostly sorry state. At school and in meetings, our youth is often still badgered with superficialities, unsubstantiated claims, and superfluous catchphrases, instead of being encouraged and enabled to think independently and scientifically.

[...]

Learn—You must Assume Responsibility!

In order to adequately train the stewards of the next fifty years, the citizens of the future socialist Germany, higher demands must be placed on our socialist system of education. The level of instruction must be raised; it must correspond to the scientific level of the times. Namely, instruction in mathematics, the natural sciences, and foreign languages must provide students with a higher level of education than at present. But one can only learn better and more thoroughly if an exemplary [system of] order is installed in our schools.

[...]

Have the Courage to Exert Your Own Thinking

The comprehensive building of socialism in the GDR requires highly qualified specialists who can guide autonomously and scientifically, work creatively, lead the collective of people proficiently, and who are honest, modest, and enthusiastic. We do not need "bookworms" stuffed with theories and principles, but educated and driven people who do not shy away from reaching into the center of life, rooting out its problems, and solving them, regardless of whom they are dealing with. Our colleges and vocational schools have already trained many highly qualified and independent-thinking specialists in the last few years. But that is not enough.

We oppose the manifestations of schematism in the institutions, colleges, and universities, which impede real scientific achievements. We call upon all teaching staff to train young people to become independent-thinking socialists and not make good grades dependent upon commitment to a subjective

doctrine.

Higher demands in all areas, courses that encourage students to undertake independent work and research as well as a connection to socialist practice are the prerequisites for igniting in these young hearts and brains the promethean urge for new knowledge and the creative transformation of the world for the good of humankind. Fostering a scientific conscience means educating socialist people with a backbone, people who stand by their beliefs and fight for their plans, who do not shy away from conflict and do not avoid work. It is therefore time to end all manifestations of formalism in classes, examinations, and training programs. Curricula are not dogma, but rather instructions for autonomous learning and education.

[...]

Neither Patronize Them nor Leave Them to Their Own Devices

Thanks to the industrious labor of the working people, our youth today has more leisure time than the working youth of the past. However, the more space that leisure time occupies in the lives of young people, the more important it is for them to make meaningful use of it. Time is a very precious commodity. And it cannot be gotten back. Wasted time is a wasted life!

We appeal to all girls and boys:

Use your time wisely!

Wasted leisure time leads to boredom, apathy, weakness, cockiness, and tedium.

This is why we are calling on all parents, teachers, master craftsmen, and clubhouse directors, as well as officers of the Free German Youth, of the unions, and of the athletic clubs, to help young people, especially in residential areas, in innovative and effective ways so that they use their leisure time sensibly in their own interests and in the interest of society.

This help, however, should not consist of patronizing, finger-wagging, and administering. Young people cannot be forced to participate in cultural or athletic events if they have no interest in doing so. It is more a matter of stimulating and encouraging this interest and love, so that our boys and girls largely plan and spend their free time as they wish.

No amount of patronizing can lead our youth to spend their leisure time wisely, but one cannot leave them to their own devices either. The psychological war that is being waged against our republic from West Germany and West Berlin aims precisely at capturing our young people's interest in their leisure time. But leisure time is an important part of socialist life, so not a single hour of it should be given over to the class enemy. His influence is to be countered with even more interesting cultural and athletic events, lectures, debates, etc. This applies especially to the villages.

[...]

Recently, there has been much discussion regarding certain dance forms, brought on by the influence of Western non-culture [*Unkultur*], on the one hand, and by narrow-minded practices towards young people, on the other. The party's stance on these issues is and always has been clear and precise. We view dance as a legitimate expression of joie de vivre and zest for life. Some people have difficulty understanding the difference between a dance party and a political gathering. At a political gathering, political issues are debated with reason and passion. There, it is mainly the head that is active. At a dance party, it is a bit different. There, one certainly brings one's head along, but feelings and moods are expressed primarily through movement, rather than speeches.

No one intends to tell our youth that they can express their feelings and moods only to the rhythm of the waltz or tango. Whatever rhythm the young people choose is up to them; the main thing is that it remains rhythmic!

[...]

Source: "Kommuniqué des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der SED zu Problemen der Jugend in der DDR," *Neues Deutschland*, September 21, 1963. Republished with permission.

Translation: Allison Brown

Recommended Citation: The New Youth Program of the Communist Party (September 21, 1963), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-835>> [March 20, 2025].