

East Germans, in Revolt Against Reds Two Years Ago, May Get Guns

Berlin (UPI)—Two years ago today East Germany erupted in a revolt that rocked the Soviet satellite empire. Yet today the Soviet zone regime is preparing to transform its 120,000-man para-military police force into a full-fledged national army, and is talking of putting guns into the hands of East German workers.

Does this mean the Russians are confident they have crushed the spirit of the June, 1953, uprising?

Western observers are not so sure. They believe embers of the revolt still burn beneath the surface but are kept from breaking out by police repression and by the presence of 350,000 Soviet occupation troops.

The June 17 revolt was the first mass uprising of workers against Communism ever recorded. It stands in many ways as one of the most amazing events of the cold war. It was entirely unexpected by East and West alike, and perhaps marked a turning point in postwar history.

The revolt began in East Berlin early in the morning of June 16 when workers on the Stalinallee housing project dropped their tools and marched on Communist government buildings in protest against the raising of work norms.

Thousands of East Berliners joined the protest march, and

then its character began to change.

Instead of shouting only against the work norms the demonstrators began to clamor for a general strike, free elections, resignation of the Communist government, freedom of speech, abolition of the militarized "people's police" and release of all political prisoners.

Stunned Communist authorities watched the revolt gather impetus. They frantically promised the rebels speedy relief measures but by then it was too late.

Next day the revolt spread throughout East Berlin and East Germany. Government buildings were sacked, police barracks burned, Communist banners destroyed.

Two motorized divisions of Soviet troops were moved into East Berlin shortly before noon and martial law was declared. But to the world's amazement the East Germans fought back.

They fought Soviet tanks with stones and their bare hands. They defied machine guns. West Berliners gathered along the sector border to watch the incredible sight.

Soviet T34 tanks gradually forced the workers back until Soviet troops commanded every corner. Patrols sealed off the city borders, and by nightfall the revolt in the city had been broken.

In the east zone of Germany, however, the revolt went on, inspired by radio reports of the uprising in Berlin. Again, Soviet troops had to use tanks and machine guns to quell the defiant workers.

No one knows exactly how many were killed in street fighting, shot by Soviet firing squads or sent to concentration camps. Eight are known to have been killed in East Berlin alone, and West German government officials estimate 42 were sentenced to death immediately after the uprising. Thousands were arrested.

Now, only two years later, the Communists are talking of putting guns in the hands of this same restless populace.

They have concluded a seven-nation military alliance in Warsaw and announced the imminent creation of an East German army. They have warned east zone youths to prepare for two or three years of military service and are forming "fighting groups" among factory workers for "armed defense" of East Germany.

But Western observers wonder just how far the Soviets dare to go. Perhaps significant was the first appearance of the workers' "fighting groups" at the May Day rally in East Berlin this year. None of the fighters carried any weapons.

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