

German Democratic Republic (1949–1990)

On 11 October 1949, the 'provisional Volkskammer', formed from the German People's Council ([Deutscher Volksrat](#)), appointed [Wilhelm Pieck](#) to the position of President and [Otto Grotewohl](#) as Prime Minister of the GDR government (elections to the [Volkskammer](#) were first held on 15 October 1950 using a single list system). The real centre of political power, however, was the SED [Politbüro](#), which retained control of all important parliamentary and governmental initiatives and decisions. The greatest personal influence on the shape of power relations in the GDR's early years was exerted by SED General Secretary [Walter Ulbricht](#), appointed in July 1950. Decision-making within the SED leadership was in accordance with the principle of [democratic centralism](#), and this was strictly enforced for all subordinate party and state organizations. In line with this, the politically unimportant states (Länder) were dissolved in the GDR in July 1952, and replaced with 14 districts (Bezirke) which, along with their 217 constituent counties (Kreise), were dominated by their associated SED organizations. In practice, the most important means of implementing the party line was the SED's [cadre policy](#), whereby all important state and social positions were filled by those meeting the party's specific eligibility criteria.

With the first [Five-Year Plan](#) in 1951, Soviet-style central planning of the economy was introduced. In the following year, the first people-owned enterprises ([Volkseigene Betriebe](#), VEB) and agricultural production cooperative ([Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft](#), LPG) were formed. At the same time, the SED increased its pressure on all those, both within and outside the party, who did not conform to party guidelines by criminalizing opposition. In aid of this, surveillance, along with the provision of incriminating material, was carried out by the Ministry for State Security ([Ministerium für Staatssicherheit](#) or 'Stasi'), which was founded in 1950 and served as the 'shield and sword' of the party until the end of the GDR.

The GDR did face some opposition over the four decades of its existence. Prior to 1989, however, only one mass uprising against the SED regime occurred, arising from protests against increased performance targets for factory workers. The raised [work norms](#) were intended primarily to help offset the increased military spending prompted by the rearmament of both German states in the wake of the [Korean War](#) and the mounting East–West conflict. Following the defeat of the uprising of [17 June 1953](#) by Soviet troops and tanks, the number of escapees to the West grew significantly, posing a threat to the GDR's economic existence until the construction of the [Berlin Wall](#) in 1961. Once the possibility of escape was removed, the SED regime had the opportunity to push ahead with the construction of the socialist society. The majority of East Germans were obliged to adapt to the situation and come to terms with the system.

Original

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https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschichte_Deutschlands#Deutsche_Demokratische_Republik_.281949.E2.80.931990.29