

August 1953

SOVIET ZONE OF GERMANY

Twelve hours of freedom

The report which we print below summarises the events which took place on 17 June in Görlitz, a town of 120,000 inhabitants in the Soviet Zone of Germany. It is based on a longer and hitherto unpublished report prepared by the German trade union federation, DGB.

It shows clearly that the revolt against the Communist puppet Government was a genuine working class and trade union movement, which was suppressed only by the intervention of Soviet tanks and troops.

* * * * *

On 17 June at 7 a.m. the morning shift started work as usual in the big Iowa Wagon Works. "What the Berlin building workers did we can do too", shouted one of the workers to his mates in No. 2 shop. The word spread like wildfire and the whole shift downed tools and streamed out into the factory yard. The Communist Factory Police were pushed aside, the doors flung open, and three thousand workers set out to liberate the town.

The march went from factory to factory. It was joined by the workers of an optical instrument factory, an engineering works and a clothing factory. The deputy Mayor and Communist member of parliament, Sommer, was surprised on his morning walk and manhandled by the demonstrators. By ten o'clock there were 15,000 men on the march. Other sections of the population followed: handicraftsmen and tradesmen, who shut up their shops and joined in, doctors and shop assistants from the Communist stores, even the cook from the official Communist hotel. On all sides the cries were heard: "We want free and secret elections", "Set the political prisoners free", "Lower the norms", "We want to be free".

Towards 11 a.m. the demonstrators came up against their first obstacle: a Ministry of the Interior recruiting office for the People's Police on the Lower Market. The police on duty had barricaded themselves in. Some young workers climbed up and broke in through windows on the first floor. They parleyed with the police and persuaded them not to shoot. They also wanted to know the whereabouts of the most-hated man in Görlitz - the Communist Mayor, Ehrlich. According to the police, he had already left by car. The crowd was not satisfied and decided to see for itself.

Demonstrators stormed the Town Hall. They broke into the chambers of the Mayor and the Communist committee room. Files, documents and registers were flung out of the windows, as well as pictures of the Communist leaders, Pieck, Grotewohl and Ulbricht. The crowd danced and trampled on them with great gusto. The next call was at the headquarters of the Communist Youth, where again no resistance was met. A girl in the blue uniform of the Communist Youth even opened the door and joined in the smashing of plaster busts of Communist notables and the destruction of posters, flags and other propaganda material. Meanwhile, electricians had succeeded in connecting up a microphone with the town's loudspeaker installation. Thus it was possible for speakers to address the crowd of more than 30,000 which had gathered on the main square.

The next bastion to be stormed was the prison where political suspects were held for questioning. As the warders refused to open the cells, welders were fetched from the Lova Works to cut through the bars with oxy-acetylene flames. Over 120 prisoners were set free, mostly farmers who had not fulfilled their compulsory delivery quotas to the State. While all this was going on, an emergency squad of people's police arrived on the scene. Their lorries were immediately surrounded by a solid wall of threatening workers, calling on them to throw away their arms and go home. After a few moment's hesitation, they dropped their revolvers and carbines one after the other, tore off their uniform jackets and melted into the crowd. No-one attempted to lay hands on them. In the meantime the loudspeakers were working full blast; one after another spoke a worker, a handicraftsman, an innkeeper, an architect and a clerk. The shortest speech was made by one worker: "Brothers, this is the finest moment of my life. Eight long years they have lied and deceived us. Now it's finished. The Communists have made a mess of things. Let them get out. Down with Moscow and Pankow" (the seat of the East German Government).

The revolt reached its climax in the afternoon. The Mayor was found. He had to go before the microphone and announce his resignation, whereupon he received a drubbing. The house of the District Secretary of the Communist Party, Weiehold, was stormed and the Red Dictator of GÖrlitz dragged out. While he was being beaten black and blue, two Red Army men on guard at the entrance to the nearby Soviet Army headquarters watched the proceedings with obvious glee. Communist party documents were strewn all over the street, and another Red Army man, who went in to see what was happening, himself took down a large-size picture of Stalin from the wall and handed it over to the crowd, who promptly trampled on it.

Finally, the women's prison was stormed and 400 prisoners released, including many elderly women imprisoned for rationing offences.

About five o'clock in the afternoon the first sign of official reaction from the Soviet authorities was seen. An armoured reconnaissance car drove slowly through the main square. It was greeted with cat-calls and cries of "Russki, go home". The officer in the open observation turret watched all this with barely concealed anxiety. His orders were obviously just to observe what was going on.

The "reconquest" of GÖrlitz began at about 7 p.m., as Russian armoured vehicles and troop carriers filled with people's police moved in. Windows rattled as these were followed by 10 heavy T-34 tanks. The loudspeakers announced that the Red Army had taken over control. The streets slowly cleared, for the GÖrlitz workers realised that unarmed men are helpless in front of tanks. People's police, stiffened with Russian shock troops, were posted at all factories, at the Town Hall, the prisons and all public buildings.

As night settled down over GÖrlitz, its Communist rulers again ventured out in their saloon cars, and under the protection of Soviet troops started filling once more the prisons which had been emptied during the day. House doors were broken in and suspected leaders hauled out of bed.

But the spirit of the workers was not broken. At a secret meeting of workers held the next day one worker spoke as follows: "Yesterday we learned for the first time that we are not alone. Since June 17 we know that we are strong, invincible even, if we stand together against this system of hunger, terror and repression. We shall never forget those twelve hours of freedom during the difficult weeks and months which are in store for all of us".

Minister for Sabotage

Ernst Wollweber, the man who was appointed Secretary of State for Navigation in the East German Communist Government on 26 June, is a past master in the arts of sabotage and espionage. A Communist deputy in the Reichstag before Hitler, he emigrated to Copenhagen in 1933. He spent the next few years organising political strikes and sabotage groups in Scandinavian ports. With the outbreak of war he transferred his activities to Sweden, where he was arrested in 1940 and sentenced to a term of imprisonment for sabotage. He was released, however, in 1942 in an exchange of prisoners with Russia, where he remained until the end of the war.

Since the war he has held nominal posts in the Communist puppet Government in the Soviet Zone of Germany. His real job, however, has remained sabotage. He was the organiser of a school for saboteurs, destined for wrecking activities in democratic countries, which operates in Mecklenburg and he remains the chief lecturer there.

SPAIN

Arrests of trade unionists in Basque Country

Widespread arrests of trade unionists in the Basque regions of Guipuzcoa and Biscay by the Franco police took place towards the end of June, according to reports reaching the organisation of Basque trade unions in exile affiliated to the ICFTU. The total number of those arrested has been variously reported as 60 to 15. Among those whose arrest is definitely confirmed is Manuel Robles-Arangiz, a well-known figure in international trade union circles, a former President of the Basque trade unions and a member of the Spanish Republican Parliament. He was arrested in Bilbao. Those arrested in Guipuzcoa include three veteran Basque trade unionists now over 60 years old - Lasa, Ubillos and Tolaretxipi.

So far it is not known exactly what accusations are being levelled against the arrested men. It can only be assumed that they will be charged with activities directed against the Franco dictatorship regime.
