

April 7, 1952
**Conversation between Joseph V. Stalin and SED
leadership**

Citation:

"Conversation between Joseph V. Stalin and SED leadership", April 7, 1952, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Dmitri Volkogonov Collection; according to Mikhail Narinsky (Moscow), a copy can be found in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow (AP RF), fond (f.) 45, opis' (op.) 1, delo (d.) 303, list (l.) 179.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111035>

Summary:

The second conversation between Stalin and the SED leadership during their trip to Moscow in April 1952. Stalin discusses the political and military situation in East Germany and asks about the status of economic development in the GDR. The SED delegation asks Stalin to approve the transfer of raw materials to East Germany.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Attended by: Comrades Molotov, Malenkov, Bulganin, and Semyonov (ACC) Comrade Stalin says that in their last conversation W. Pieck raised the issue of the prospects for German development in connection with the Soviet proposals on peace treaty and the policy of the Americans and the British in Germany. Comrade Stalin believes that regardless of what proposals we make on the German issue, the Western powers will not agree with them, and will not leave West Germany anyway. To think that we would be able to achieve a compromise or that the Americans would accept the draft of peace treaty would be a mistake. The Americans need an army in West Germany, so that they would be able to have all of Europe in their hands. They are saying that they keep the army there against us. In reality however, the mission of their army there is to control Europe. The Americans will pull West Germany into the Atlantic pact. They will create West German troops. Adenauer is in the Americans' pocket. All the former fascists and generals are there as well. In reality, an independent state is being created in Germany. And you too need to organize an independent state. The demarcation line between East and West Germany should be considered a border--and not just any border, but a dangerous one. We need to strengthen the defense of this border. The Germans will guard the first line of defense, and we will put Russian troops on the second line. Agents of Western countries are moving around the German Democratic Republic all too freely. They can decide to use some extreme measures and kill you or Comrade [Vasilii] Chuikov. This has to be taken into account. Therefore, we need strong border defenses. Then, continues Comrade Stalin, we want to revive the offices of military commandants. This is another good move against possible subversion. In addition, our troops should also have good protection. And you need it too; you will be stronger yourself. Comrade Stalin asks whether these proposals are acceptable. Comrade Pieck says that it is very important. Comrade Ulbricht expresses his agreement. He asks whether military commandants' offices would be reopened everywhere. Comrade Stalin responds that he does not know that. Comrade Chuikov wants to reopen military commandants' offices, and assigns 3 to 4 thousand military for this task. Comrade Pieck says that it is very important and necessary to do. Comrade Stalin says that we have examined the issue of arming the German police, and came to the conclusion that it should have Russian-made weapons. Currently the German police are armed with old German weapons, for which they do not have any German bullets. You should either revive the production of bullets, or we should sell you our weapons. Comrade Ulbricht says that he agrees with that. But would all kinds of weapons be sold? Beginning from the revolver, or beginning with the machine gun? Comrade Stalin says that all kinds of weapons [will be sold]. If your police are not armed, what kind of police is that? You have a right to have armed police. Comrade Chuikov says that in addition to the regular police, the GDR also has the "Barracked Police," i.e. the troops. He asked that it be given tanks and artillery. We agree with that. Think about it. Comrade Stalin says that he has two questions. Last time it was found that in the GDR, the ratio of workers' salary to the salary of engineering and technical personnel was 1:1.7. It is absolutely incorrect. It will doom your entire industry. Maybe you started from the assumption of what Marx and Engels said in the period of the Commune--that an engineer should not be paid more than a well-qualified worker. Maybe it was correct then, but it is absolutely incorrect now. The engineer is engaged in intellectual work. He must have an apartment, decent furniture; he should not be chasing a piece of bread. He should enjoy a standard of living appropriate for a person who is engaged in intellectual work. He has to have a library, comfort, so that he could sit down and read a book undisturbed, or write something. If you do not do it, not only will your old engineers leave, but even the young ones will run away. In our country, an engineer gets two to three times more than a worker and in some spheres even four times more. Academicians get 12 thousand rubles monthly. It is impossible to work and grow without it. Therefore, you should discard your old views on this issue. The technology has become so complex compared to the times of the Commune, that engineers, and even high-level workers, must study a lot to master this technology. An engineer must have an opportunity to constantly grow, read books, write—there can be no engineer without it. The same applies to the army. Marx and Engels believed that we needed a militia-based army. In our first years, we also thought that only a militia-based army was needed. Life has taught us that that was incorrect. Today, in order to defend the country, we need a modern army with various specialists. A militia-based army is good only in the situation where war is decided with the rifle. Today we should discard this old militia-based army. Today the army is not the

manufacture army, but the machine army. Therefore, we need people in the army who know machines. Comrade Stalin says that he heard that in the GDR well-qualified workers get only slightly more than the manual workers. Comrade Ulbricht says that they do get more, but the difference is not sufficient. Therefore, they plan to introduce pay rate charts. Comrade Stalin says that we went through the same experience in the first years of the Soviet government. Communes were organized on the plants, which brought together engineers and manual workers, who pulled all their money together and then divided it equally. It was stupid. White-collar workers did not have any incentive to raise their qualifications, while blue-collar workers did not have any incentive to grow to the level of white-collar workers. As a result, both categories lost. In the old time, some people were saying that such an approach was a proletarian, socialist one. But there is nothing socialist or proletarian about it. It is a simple peasant leveling of all. Any proletarian will tell you that if he gets more money, he would try to raise his skills, otherwise he will not. A skilled worker should be paid more than an unskilled worker, and an engineer—much more than a skilled worker. It should be done regardless of how much it costs. In our country, we did it 25 years ago, and that is the only reason why it works so well. Skilled workers have their prospects—many of them took exams to become engineers, and became good specialists. The peasant leveling of all should be buried. Comrade Stalin asks if the German leaders agree with this and adds that it is the genuine Marxist approach. Comrade Pieck says that is correct. Comrade Stalin says that he has a second question. He, Stalin, understands that the GDR has no collective farms at all, and the machine-rental stations serve only private peasant farms. Comrade Ulbricht confirms that and adds that they even prohibited organization of collective farms where the peasants wanted it, trying not to harm the movement for united Germany. Comrade Stalin says, why are you complaining about the kulaks. What kind of tactic is that—to complain? The kulaks should be encircled, and you should create collective farms around them. In our country, organization of collective farms was going on simultaneously with expropriation of the kulaks. You will not need to do it this way. Let your kulaks sit tight, leave them alone. But in addition to the kulaks, you have poor peasants in your villages, that live right next to the kulaks. They should be pulled into production cooperatives. How many peasant farms join a production cooperative—5, 10 or 15—that does not matter. What matters, is that they will be organized. Currently poor peasants do not have any machines, do not have enough seed, and do not have necessary knowledge and experience in the economy. That is why their harvest is so poor. In such a situation, poor peasants will ruin themselves and will join the ranks of the unemployed. However, if you organize small collective farms and show them how to manage their farms, then peasants would start thinking, what is better—to join collective farms or to live separately. Good experience was accumulated in Hungary, where they organized good collective farms, left their kulaks alone, and gave machines to their collective farms. They were trying to improve the collective farms' harvest. It would be wrong to think that the Hungarians are more capable than Germans. You should do the same. You should give production cooperatives some privileges, as it used to be in our country some time ago. You should sell them machines cheaper, help them with seed and advice. If you need instructors for organization of collective farms, we will give them to you. Of course, if the bloc of parties objects to it—that would be a different case. But the bloc will not object if the peasants want to organize production cooperation, and if you help your peasants to do it, what can be bad about it? You will see for yourself that peasants will visit those collective farms and watch how life will unfold in a new way. I noticed, said comrade Stalin, that you do not value peasants in your policy. This is an old social-democratic prejudice toward peasants. If that is true, you should put an end to this situation. Comrade Stalin asks German comrades, whether they need peasants. Whether they give them food products. If they need peasants, then it is necessary to have a base for union with the peasants. Comrade Pieck says that when the GDR implemented the land reform, the enemies were engaged in propaganda saying that we wanted to create collective farms. The peasants had a very strong prejudice against collective farms. Therefore, we were afraid to raise the issue of collective farms. Now we have peasant unions of mutual assistance and trade cooperation. This is what the principle of cooperation is all about. It is possible that now it would be expedient to raise this issue on a more extensive basis. Comrade Stalin says that they

need to create production cooperatives in the villages, and to call them as such. That would be only positive. You would receive firm support among the peasants. In Hungary it worked very well. And you could have done it long ago. Against any propaganda, you should present your own counter-propaganda and not just sit silently. You can say that poor peasants want to join production cooperatives and that the government is helping them to do it. Comrade Pieck says that that would be good. Comrade Stalin notes that they should provide privileges for cooperatives, sell them machines cheaper and help them with seeds for the first two years, and then they will become stronger. Is it possible? Comrade Ulbricht says that it is possible. That would improve our situation in the village. Comrade Stalin says, of course, you will have your own base in the village. Do not force anybody to join, if they want to, good. If they do not, do not force them. Peasants will join production cooperatives voluntarily. You could send good people from the city unemployed to organize such cooperatives in the village. Comrade Stalin says that in the Soviet Union, we were able to get rid of unemployment for two reasons; first of all, because we expanded the production and, secondly, because peasants settled on the land. It used to be that every year between 23 to 25 million hungry peasants would come from villages to Russian cities and undermine the price for labor force. Now we do not experience it any more, because the peasants are interested in working in the villages. Today we do not have unemployment in the USSR, and our problem is that we do not have enough workers. We mobilize young peasants and send them to work in the industry. This is how we defeated unemployment from both ends. Do not economize on assistance to collective farms; it will pay back later. Then gradually you will have a union of workers and peasants, and it is difficult for workers to stand alone without peasants. You need help on the part of the peasants. Comrade Ulbricht says that that would also have its consequences. So far in the GDR we were saying that we stand for democratic Germany, and did not carry out a number of measures that we would need to implement in the process of development in the direction of socialism. We also have never said that we were moving toward socialism. Comrade Stalin says that this was correct. Comrade Ulbricht asks whether we should continue this tactic after the deep split of Germany? Comrade Stalin says that even now they should not shout about socialism. But production cooperatives represent little pieces of socialism. Enterprises owned by people also mean socialism. Comrade Ulbricht says that so far we have never spoken about it, and did not point out that people's enterprises were socialist. We disguised the social relations that emerged in the GDR to some extent. Comrade Stalin says that this mask helped you not to scare the middle class of West Germany. However, if you did not have that mask, then maybe you would have been able to pull the lowest strata of the population to your side. The workers would be glad if they found out that you nationalized the industry. Otherwise, they would say that you have the same government as the one in Bonn. One can say that the GDR has a public nationalized industry, whereas separatist capitalists--millionaires who own the industries--represent West Germany. You have to maneuver here; on the one hand, you should not scare the middle class away. But at the same time, you should not offend the workers of the West. We are selling you our joint-stock enterprises. It would be important for the German workers to know that by doing so we increased the scope of nationalized industry. Workers would be very glad to hear that. Of course, you need to maneuver and to disguise it in your relations with the middle class. If you say that you have state industry, it means that enterprises are in the hands of all the people and not in the hands of robber barons-capitalists. However, you should know for yourself that this is socialist production. Production cooperatives in the village are also little pieces of socialism. You should not make noise about it. When production cooperatives function well, all the peasants will see the benefits and the strength of cooperatives, and after that peasants will turn to the workers. But for now, you should not shout about it, because collective farms are not in your pocket yet. In my opinion, you should begin to do it. Although two states are being currently created in Germany, you should not shout about socialism at this point. You should not call these farms collective farms, but call them production cooperatives. Comrade Pieck says that the issue of production cooperation should be seriously discussed and clarified for the party. Comrade Stalin says, to begin with, you should build several collective farms and then discuss it in the party. Right now you do not have any material for such discussion. Laughing, Comrade Stalin notes that the deed comes

before the word. Comrade Ulbricht asks, what experience did the countries of people's democracy have? Would it be more expedient to start creating production cooperatives after the harvesting is completed? Comrade Stalin says that usually peasants build during the winter. You could talk with peasants about creating production cooperatives after the harvest is over. Comrade Pieck says that workers ask us, what is the social regime of the GDR? Is this socialism? Up to this point, we avoided answering this question, but the workers remained unsatisfied. Comrade Stalin says that you should say to your workers: We have just entered socialism. This is not full socialism yet, because you have a lot of private capitalists. But this is the beginning of socialism, a little piece of socialism, and a road to socialism. You should show that you are closer to the workers than Adenauer's government. Comrade Stalin asks, what organ is higher in your country--the Secretariat or the Politburo? Comrade Pieck responds that they did not have much clarity on this issue in the SED, although, according to the Charter of the SED, the Politburo is above the Secretariat. We had a conversation with comrade Pegov from the CPSU CC, and he explained their methods of work to us very well, and made it very clear. In addition, we talked with Kuznetsov, Romanov, and Mikhailov on the issues of military education in preparation of young people for the draft. Comrade Stalin says that you probably would need instructors for building collective farms. You could request instructors from Hungary or Poland. Comrade Malenkov notes that they would carry more authority for German peasants than the Soviet people. Comrade Stalin says that we will give you one or two instructors, but you should not engage in expropriation simultaneously with collectivization. You can leave your kulaks alone for the time being. Comrade Ulbricht responds that we do not need to touch them at the present time, because when production cooperatives are starting to organize, a part of kulaks will immediately escape to the West. Comrade Stalin asks, what is bad about that? You will take their land. In Poland, part of the kulaks sold their lands and now engage in carrier's trade. Comrade Stalin asks whether the GDR has any state farms? Comrade Ulbricht responds affirmatively and adds that state farms cover approximately 5% of all cultivated land in the GDR. Comrade Stalin asks whether they work well. Comrade Ulbricht says that they do not work very well. Comrade Semyonov gives a reference that the productivity of people's farms in the GDR is considerably better than the productivity of peasants' fields, however, people's farms are, as a rule, unprofitable and receive subsidies from the state. Comrade Stalin says that some people's farms could be transferred to peasants if they do not work well. In our country, in the Soviet Union, initially we experienced difficulties in setting up the work of state farms. Then we transferred part of state farms to the peasants, and the farms became profitable. In order to provide for workers of the state farms, we decided to give them plots of land and they began to work better and settled on the land permanently. Comrade Stalin asks whether the German comrades received the rolling mill? Comrade Grotewohl responds that the money to buy the mill was transferred, but so far they cannot say anything definite about the purchase of the mill. Comrade Stalin asks whether they hope to receive the mill? Comrade Grotewohl responds affirmatively and says that they issued appropriate orders. Comrade Stalin notes that in the Soviet Union they make such mills and all necessary equipment for them, however, the plants are overloaded with orders. Comrade Stalin asks whether they found iron-ore in the new locations in the GDR. Comrade Ulbricht responds that the GDR only has poor ore, which contains only 20% of iron. Comrade Stalin says that it should be mixed with good ore. Before the war, the Germans did not refuse even the ore containing only 5% of iron. Comrade Ulbricht says that they built special low mines for such poor ore. Comrade Stalin says that such ore should be mixed with good ore. The Poles take our ore from Kryvoi Rog and mix 50% of it with their own poor ore. The Germans took our ore even under Hitler. Recently we discovered good ore in Siberia that contains 60% of iron. But that layer is located very far from railroads. Comrade Ulbricht says that they have one more request. We have already informed you that we would like to develop a program of the Communist Party of West Germany. We will try to speed up the development of this program and to publish it before the KPD is prohibited. We are asking if comrade Stalin and the Politburo of the CPSU CC could look at our draft and help us in developing that program. Comrade Stalin gives his approval. Comrade Grotewohl says that they completely agree with Comrade Stalin's opinion in his evaluation of the situation in West Germany, and the policy of the United States. He,

Grotewohl, would like to ask whether Comrade Stalin believes that at the present time we should introduce changes in our arguments to the official position of the GDR government on the issue of revival of German unity. Comrade Stalin answers negatively. You should continue propaganda of German unity in the future. It has a great importance for the education of the people in Western Germany. Now it is a weapon in your hands and you should always hold it in your hands. We should also continue to make proposals regarding German unity in order to expose the Americans. Comrade Grotewohl asks Comrade Stalin about additional sales of 8,000 tons of long-fiber cotton to the GDR. Comrade Stalin gives his approval, and proposes to talk about it with Comrade Malenkov.