

# I.H.11

From the Cold War to the fall of the Berlin Wall

## The History of the GDR between 1949 and 1969 – Politics, Society and Crises

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Nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges entwickelten sich die beiden deutschen Staaten in unterschiedliche Richtungen. Während Westdeutschland ein regelrechtes „Wirtschaftswunder“ erreichte, blieb die DDR hinter den gesteckten Zielen zurück. Staatliche Repressalien in zahlreichen Lebensbereichen und Unterdrückung der freien Meinungsäußerung sorgten u. a. für eine massive Fluchtwelle, die den Mauerbau bedingte. Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden nun die ersten 20 Jahre der DDR-Geschichte behandelt.

### KOMPETENZPROFIL

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Klassenstufe:</b>         | 9/10                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Dauer:</b>                | 6 Unterrichtsstunden                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Kompetenzen:</b>          | Plakatanalyse, Steckbrief zu Ulbricht erstellen, Quelltext (erste Verfassung) analysieren, Sozial- und Wirtschaftspolitik in der DDR charakterisieren, Krisen und Konflikte der DDR untersuchen |
| <b>Thematische Bereiche:</b> | Wahlsystem DDR, Walter Ulbricht, Gesellschaft und Innenpolitik bis 1969, Volksaufstand, Mauerbau, Beat-Demo, Reaktionen auf Prager Frühling                                                     |
| <b>Medien:</b>               | Texte, Videoclip-Plakate                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Auf einen Blick

### 1. Stunde

|                  |                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Thema:</b>    | Gründung der DDR                                                                                                                |
| <b>M 1</b>       | The founding of the GDR in 1949 – concerns and hopes                                                                            |
| <b>M 2</b>       | The Founding of the GDR – The First Constitution (1949)                                                                         |
| <b>Inhalt:</b>   | Die Lernenden formulieren mögliche Sorgen und Hoffnungen der Menschen in Ostdeutschland und lernen die erste Verfassung kennen. |
| <b>Benötigt:</b> | internetfähige PCs oder Tablets zum Schauen des Videoclips                                                                      |

### 2. Stunde

|                  |                                                                                                                                |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Thema:</b>    | Wahlen, Repressionen und Diktator Ulbricht                                                                                     |
| <b>M 3</b>       | The First People's Chamber Election of 1950 – Describing election posters                                                      |
| <b>M 4</b>       | Voting systems and the surveillance state                                                                                      |
| <b>M 5</b>       | Who was Walter Ulbricht? A profile                                                                                             |
| <b>Inhalt:</b>   | Analyse von Plakaten zur Volkskammerwahl, Analyse des Wahlsystems und Vergleich zur Verfassung, Erstellung eines Steckbriefes. |
| <b>Benötigt:</b> | internetfähige PCs oder Tablets zur Steckbrief-Recherche                                                                       |

### 3. / 4. Stunde

|                  |                                                                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Thema:</b>    | Wichtige innen- und gesellschaftspolitische Entwicklungen bis 1969                 |
| <b>M 6</b>       | Placemat template                                                                  |
| <b>M 7</b>       | Developments (I) – Economic policy up to 1969                                      |
| <b>M 8</b>       | Developments (II) – Social policy in the GDR up to 1969                            |
| <b>M 9</b>       | Developments (III) – Socio-political developments up to 1969                       |
| <b>M 10</b>      | Developments (IV) – Dealing with the Federal Republic of Germany                   |
| <b>Inhalt:</b>   | Erstellen einer Placemat zu innenpolitischen Entwicklungen der DDR.                |
| <b>Benötigt:</b> | großformatig kopierte Placemat-Vorlage oder digitale Tools zur Placemat-Erstellung |

## 5. / 6. Stunde

**Thema:** Krisen und Konflikte bis 1969

**M 11** Crises and conflicts (I) – The popular uprising of 17 June 1953

**M 12** Crises and conflicts (II) – Mass exodus and the construction of the Wall

**M 13** Crises and conflicts (III) – The Leipzig Beat Demonstration of 1965

**M 14** Crises and conflicts (IV) – The Prague Spring and the GDR

**Inhalt:** Erstellen einer Placemat zu Krisen und Konflikten in der DDR.

## The founding of the GDR – The first Constitution (1949)

M 2

### Tasks

1. Read the extract from the first constitution of the GDR (1949).
2. Work in pairs. Summarise what the constitution says about the following topics:
  - general principles and rights of citizens (Art. 1–9)
  - the economy and expropriation (Art. 21–27)
  - elections and government (Art. 50–98)
3. Evaluate the articles from the constitution listed here.

### Excerpt from the first Constitution of the GDR (1949)

**„Art. 1.** Deutschland ist eine unteilbare demokratische Republik; sie baut sich auf den deutschen Ländern auf. [...] Es gibt nur eine deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit.

**Art. 3.** Alle Staatsgewalt geht vom Volke aus.

Jeder Bürger hat das Recht und die Pflicht zur Mitgestaltung in seiner Gemeinde, seinem Kreise, seinem Lande und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. [...]

**Art. 6.** Alle Bürger sind vor dem Gesetz gleichberechtigt. [...]

**Art. 7.** Mann und Frau sind gleichberechtigt. [...]

**Art. 9.** Alle Bürger haben das Recht [...] ihre Meinung frei und öffentlich zu äußern und sich zu diesem Zweck friedlich und unbewaffnet zu versammeln. Diese Freiheit wird durch kein Dienst- oder Arbeitsverhältnis beschränkt [...]. Eine Pressezensur findet nicht statt. [...]

**Art. 21.** Zur Sicherung der Lebensgrundlagen und zur Steigerung des Wohlstandes seiner Bürger stellt der Staat [...] den öffentlichen Wirtschaftsplan auf.

**Art. 24.** [...] Der private Großgrundbesitz, der mehr als 100 ha umfasst, ist aufgelöst und wird ohne Entschädigung aufgeteilt. [...]

**Art. 27.** Private wirtschaftliche Unternehmungen, die für die Vergesellschaftung geeignet sind, können durch Gesetz nach den für die Enteignung geltenden Bestimmungen in Gemeineigentum überführt werden.

**Art. 50.** Höchstes Organ der Republik ist die Volkskammer.

**Art. 51.** Die Volkskammer besteht aus den Abgeordneten des deutschen Volkes. Die Abgeordneten werden in allgemeiner, gleicher, unmittelbarer und geheimer Wahl nach den Grundsätzen des Verhältniswahlrechtes auf die Dauer von vier Jahren gewählt.

**Art. 91.** Die Regierung der Republik besteht aus dem Ministerpräsidenten und den Ministern.

**Art. 92.** Die stärkste Fraktion der Volkskammer benennt den Ministerpräsidenten; er bildet die Regierung. [...] Die Volkskammer bestätigt die Regierung und billigt das von ihr vorgelegte Programm. [...]

**Art. 98.** Der Ministerpräsident bestimmt die Richtlinien der Regierungspolitik nach Maßgabe der von der Volkskammer aufgestellten Grundsätze.“

Quelle: <https://www.verfassungen.de/ddr/verf49.htm>

**Hinweis**

In total, there were three constitutions in the GDR. The first dates from 1949, the second was drafted in 1968 and the third dates from 1974. The 1968 constitution fundamentally altered the first constitution, including its first article. For the first time, it stated that the GDR was a "socialist state." According to this, the GDR was led by the working class and the ruling party (SED).

The full text of the 1968 constitution can be found here:

<https://www.verfassungen.de/ddr/verf68-i.htm>

VORANSICHT

## M 4

## Voting systems and the surveillance state

## Tasks

1. Read the text. Explain why the elections were often described as “going through the motions”.
2. Explain whether and to what extent Article 9 of the Constitution and the role of the Stasi contradict one another.
3. Compare the conduct of the elections and the ballot paper with Article 51 of the 1949 GDR Constitution. Assess whether these were truly “secret elections”.

## 1. Elections in the GDR

The first elections to the People's Chamber in the GDR took place on 15 October 1950. The election was organised by the National Front. The National Front was an organisation that brought together all the parties in the GDR and key organisations. The most important and largest party in the National Front was the SED: the “Socialist Unity Party of Germany.” There were other parties as well. They were also called “block parties.” However, they had virtually no power and generally followed the demands of the SED. In the GDR, voters were presented with a list of names issued by the National Front. People could either reject or accept this list. The list was considered accepted if one folded the ballot and dropped it into the ballot box. Anyone who wanted to reject the list had to either cross out each name individually or draw a large cross across the ballot. Voting booths were also available. However, anyone who used them risked being viewed as a suspicious person. Therefore, voters generally folded their ballots in public and dropped them into the ballot box. While voting was not mandatory, anyone who did not vote had to expect that “Election workers” – often from the Stasi – would ring doorbells and demand votes. Voter turnout was around 98%. Approval of the list was always over 99%.

## 2. Key politicians until 1969

The first (and only) President was Wilhelm Pieck (1950–1960). The first Prime Minister was Otto Grotewohl (until 1964). He was succeeded by Wilhelm Stoph (until 1973). However, the most important politician in the GDR until his removal in 1971 was Walter Ulbricht. Ulbricht had been Chairman of the SED (i.e., General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED) since July 1950. The party alone decided all matters of state. Thus, until his forced resignation in 1971, Ulbricht was the most powerful man in the state, as the party acted according to his directives.

## 3. The Ministry for State Security (MfS or Stasi)

The Ministry for State Security was founded in February 1950. It saw itself as an extension of the SED when it came to enforcing the party's interests. It served simultaneously as both an intelligence agency and a secret police force. In 1956, the Stasi employed approximately 16,000 full-time staff members who monitored activities within the state. Anyone who spoke out too loudly and too publicly against the regime faced severe punishment. In addition to the full-time employees, there were also numerous unofficial collaborators (IM). These were private citizens who spied on their immediate surroundings and reported suspicious or allegedly anti-state statements to the Stasi.

## Election system and the surveillance state (Ballot papers)

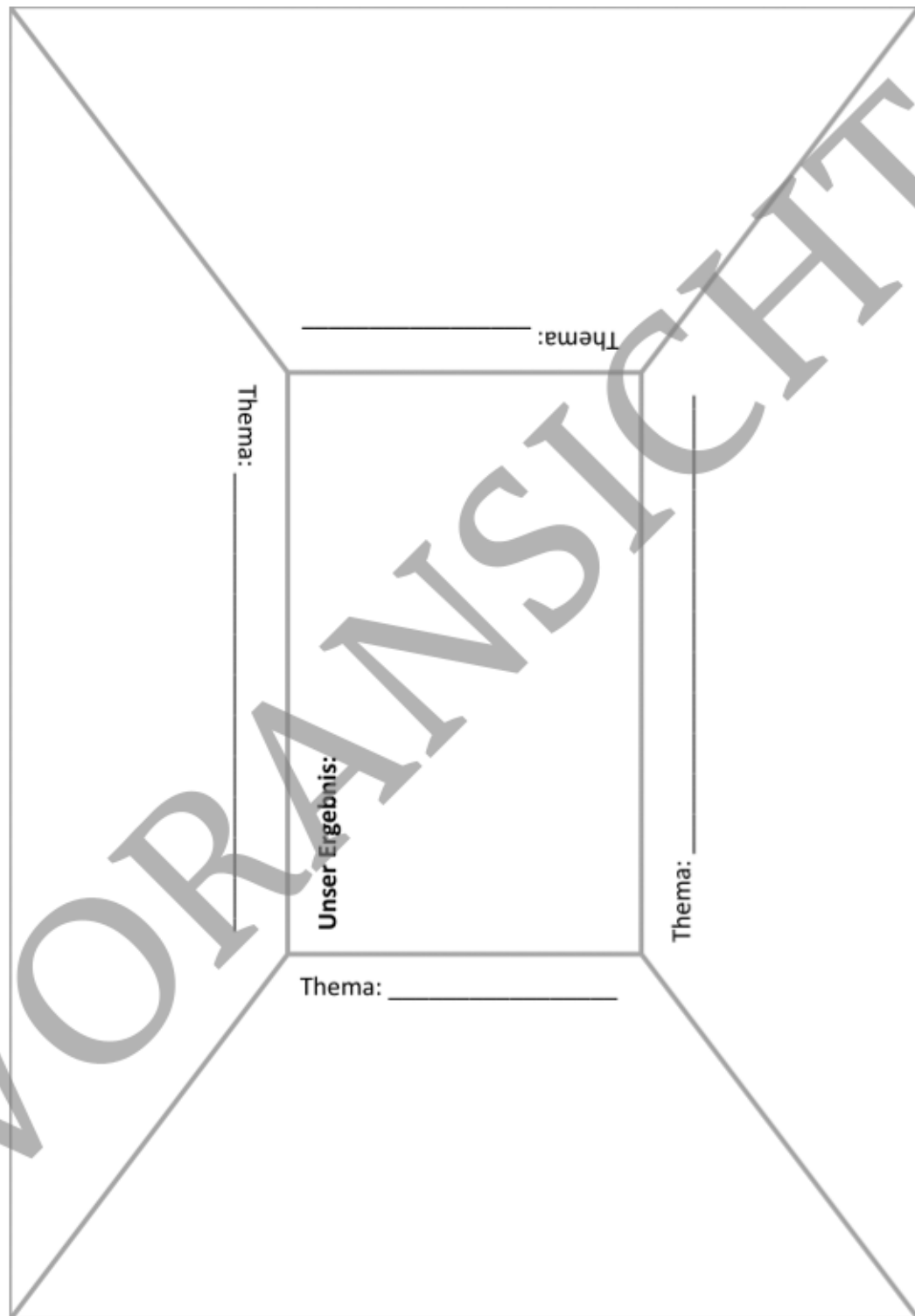
You can find the Ballot papers here: <https://raabe.click/Stimmzettel-DDR>

## M 6

### Placemat template

#### Tasks

1. Enter your results from the individual work into one of the four outer fields.
2. Enter the results from the group work phase into the central box.
3. Present your placemat.



The diagram shows a large square divided into four outer trapezoidal sections and a central square. Each of the four outer sections contains the label 'Thema:' followed by a horizontal line for text entry. The central square contains the label 'Unser Ergebnis:' followed by a horizontal line for text entry. A large, diagonal watermark reading 'VORANSICHT' is overlaid across the entire diagram.

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## Crises and conflicts (I) – The popular uprising of 17 June 1953

M 11

### Tasks

1. Read the text and summarise the events of the popular uprising in the GDR.
2. Write your findings on your section of the placemat.
3. In the centre of the placemat, discuss how crises and conflicts were dealt with in the GDR, and compare this with how protests are handled in Germany today.

### Background

In July 1952, the SED announced the “Systematic Construction of Socialism.” Among other things, this involved prioritising heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods production. The generally strained supply situation for the population worsened. To compensate for this shortage, the party decided in May 1953 to increase working hours by 10% whilst keeping wages the same. Initial discontent began to be voiced. In the Soviet Union, the dire situation of the GDR population was recognised. Consequently, instructions came from Moscow for a political rethink in the GDR – a “New Course” was to be adopted. Ulbricht announced this on 11 June 1953. Numerous repressive measures were withdrawn. However, the increase in work quotas remained in place, much to the annoyance of the working class.

### History

On 15 and 16 June, the first protests against the government broke out at major construction sites in Berlin. Workers in particular felt betrayed by the regime. The walk-outs spread relatively quickly across the whole of the GDR. On 17 June 1953, increasing numbers of people took to the streets and strikes were called at large factories. By then, the issue was no longer just the (now-withdrawn) work quotas, but also about a fairer distribution of food and free elections. An estimated 100,000 demonstrators gathered in Berlin; across the whole of the GDR, the figure may have been as high as 1.5 million. The SED lost control of events and asked Moscow for help. On the evening of 17 June, the uprising was finally and bloodily crushed by Soviet tanks.



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### Consequences

The uprising claimed up to 125 lives, though figures vary. Around 15,000 people were arrested by the Stasi, and over 1,500 were sentenced. The situation for the population subsequently improved slightly: wages rose, the food industry received increased support, and goods were offered at reduced prices. SED propaganda blamed West German “provocateurs” for the events – a blatant lie. The FRG hailed the GDR population’s desire for freedom and dedicated a public holiday to the uprising, which remained in place until 1990.