

**DOCUMENT No. 28: Radio Telegram from Vladimir Semyonov  
Providing Situation Report to Vyacheslav Molotov and Nikolai Bulganin,  
17 June 1953, as of 2:00 p.m. CET**

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*After previously conveying images of a widening military confrontation, Semyonov's telegram to Bulganin in the early afternoon of 17 June seeks to assure Moscow that after the termination of inter-sector tram traffic, the declaration of martial law, and the intervention of Soviet troops the situation is "becoming normal." But Semyonov has to admit that his strategic decision to put the GDR police in charge of restoring order, grounded in his apparent misjudgment of the SED regime's strength, proved mistaken. Confronted with the GDR authorities' failure to stop the demonstrations, the Soviets are forced to deploy their own troops. Semyonov also grossly underestimates the extent of the unrest throughout the GDR.*

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*Telephonogram by VCh*

From Berlin

To Comrade V. M. Molotov  
To Comrade N. A. Bulganin

17 June 1953

We report on the situation in Berlin and the GDR at 2 p.m. Berlin time.<sup>83</sup>

The office building of the GDR government [House of Ministries], which was attacked by demonstrators, has been liberated after the arrival of tanks. The demonstrators were also repulsed from the SED Central Committee building and the Police Presidium building. The German police and our troops opened fire on the demonstrators at the Police Presidium building. We do not have information on dead and wounded.

In the districts of Alexanderplatz and Pankow, demonstrators built barriers and roadblocks. The provocateurs organized a pogrom of the bookstore "The International Book." In some government buildings and shops, windows were smashed.

Until our troops took active measures to settle the unrest, the demonstrators succeeded in overcoming resistance by the German People's Police and the Garrisoned People's Police, who in general did not hold them off. With the start of active intervention by our troops, the situation in Berlin began to normalize. Demonstrators dispersed after the appearance of Soviet tanks.

At 12:00 p.m., U-Bahn and S-Bahn traffic stopped as per our instruction in order to impede the arrival of provocateurs from West Berlin.

At 1:00 p.m., martial law was declared in Berlin.

In the past hours one can see in Berlin a certain decline in disturbances. Various worker groups have left the demonstrations and gone back to work or home.

The situation in the GDR is gradually becoming normal once again.

The most serious situation is in the city of Görlitz on the German-Polish border where a mob of 30,000 destroyed SED offices, the prison, and the buildings of the security service and district committee. A reinforced armor battalion with tanks was deployed to Görlitz.

<sup>83</sup> Distributed in 14 copies to: Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, Voroshilov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Saburov, Pervukhin, Vyshinskii, Gromyko, Pushkin, Grigoryan. Classification: Secret.

In Magdeburg, provocateurs set the SED Municipal Committee building and the prison on fire and had a shoot-out with GDR State Security troops. Soviet troops were deployed to the city. Disturbances reached a significant scale in Halle. Some 1,000 workers from the Leuna and Buna factories, most of whom were intoxicated, overwhelmed the police protection in the factories.

In Berlin some 70 people were arrested.

Soviet troops operating in the GDR and troops of the People's Police and Garrisoned Police detachments were given the order to use their weapons if necessary to arrest and punish the instigators of the unrest.

We will report on further developments.

*Semyonov*

*Source:* AVP RF, f. 06, op. 12a, pap. 51, d. 300. Translated by Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie.