

East German poster collection political series C0169

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1943-2009



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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

C0169

Unit ID

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Unit Date

1943-2009

Language

German

Abstract

This series contains posters relating to political persons, events, and organizations from the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. The series contains 652 posters of various sizes. The posters range in size from 99.5 x 69.5 cm to 40 x 29.25 cm. The average poster size is 57 x 81 cm.

Creator

Hill, Thomas

Extent

652 posters

Physical Location

Map Case 2.3-3.1, 10.5, 20.1-20.2

Repository

George Mason University. Libraries. Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There may be restrictions on reproduction. Please contact the Special Collections Research Center for more information.

Acquisition Information

Purchased from Thomas Hill in 2009.

Processing Information

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Historical Information

On October 7, 1949, following the partition of Germany at the end of World War II, the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) was formed under the governance of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). The SED had been formed from two previous political parties, the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). In 1955, the Soviet Occupation Zone was officially declared to be a sovereign state. Under the SED, the infrastructure, industrial plants, and public property were all nationalized. Additionally, all political parties and mass organizations were controlled under an umbrella organization known as the Nationale Front (NF).

Initially, the SED was led by Wilhelm Pieck, who served as the first and only president of the DDR from 1949 to 1960. After 1950, the actual power in the DDR was held by Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the SED. During this beginning period of the DDR's history, the new state's economy was severely weakened by war reparations to the USSR. This problem was exacerbated by the heavy emigration to the West that was induced by the increased poverty caused by the war reparations. In response to the emigration problem, the DDR closed the Inner German border in the 1950s. On the night of August 12, 1961, East German soldiers began construction on the Berlin Wall.

From 1949 until the 1970s, West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) considered the DDR to be an illegally constituted state. It was only in 1971, under Chancellor Willy Brandt, that West Germany established normal relations with the DDR. That same year, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev deposed Walter Ulbricht as the DDR head of state. Ulbricht's policies were experimenting with liberal reform, so Ulbricht was replaced by Erich Honecker, who increased government controls on the population.

In 1989, public outrage over local government elections led to large amounts of illegal emigration from the DDR. In August, Hungary unsealed its border and lifted restrictions, leading to over 13,000 people leaving the DDR to the West via Hungary. In October, public demonstrations led to Erich Honecker's resignation. His replacement, Egon Krenz, was slightly more moderate. On November 9, 1989, sections of the Berlin Wall were opened. The governing party of the DDR soon resigned and attempts to establish a democratic DDR were overwhelmed by calls for reunification with West Germany. Later that year, the 2 + 4 Talks were held

between the two Germanys, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the USSR. The five original East German states, which were abolished in 1952, were reestablished, and conditions for reunification were agreed upon. On October 3, 1990, the five East German states officially joined the Federal Republic of Germany.

Scope and Content

This series contains posters relating to political persons, events, and organizations from the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. The series contains 652 posters of various sizes. The posters range in size from 99.5 x 69.5 cm to 40 x 29.25 cm. The average poster size is 57 x 81 cm.

Common political figures present within the series are Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Ernst Thälmann, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Liebknecht. These people are generally depicted by portrait photographs or illustrations. The majority of the portrait posters are in commemoration of former political leaders and communist figures, although there are some that are campaign posters for contemporary politicians. The series also contains posters from political organizations such as the Feier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB), the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), the Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, and the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ). Also contained in the series are posters expressing solidarity with various revolutionary movements around the world, mostly focusing on Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central America. The posters are associated with events such as the elections of 1990, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Soviet Seven Year agricultural plans, and the anniversaries of the births of noted communist figures. Graffiti from the Berlin Wall is also a popular subject. The majority of poster images are photographs with text, although there are also illustrations and some abstract art with political text.

Related Material

The East German poster collection contains other series, including the [art exhibitions series](#), [performing arts series](#), [culture and science series](#), and [film series](#).

In 2021, GMU Professor Samuel Huneke led the completion of the [East German Poster Database](#), a project funded by a Fenwick Fellowship. The posters from each of the East German poster collection series can be searched in this database.

Keywords

War posters -- Germany (East)
Protest movements
Political posters -- Germany (East)
Checkpoint Charlie, Berlin, Germany, 1961-1989
Berlin Wall, Berlin, Germany, 1961-1989
Germany (East) -- Politics and government
Germany -- History -- Unification, 1990
Germany -- History -- 1945-1990
Posters
Political posters
Vereinigte Linke (Organization)
Unabhängiger Frauenverband der DDR
Germany. Bundestag
Freie Deutsche Jugend
Demokratischer Aufbruch (Political party)
Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Germany : East)
Alternative Liste (Political party)
Luxemburg, Rosa, 1871-1919
Thälmann, Ernst, 1886-1944
Marx, Karl, 1818-1883
Liebknecht, Karl, 1871-1919
Lenin, Vladimir Il'ich, 1870-1924
Grosser, Hubert, 1954-
Billhardt, Thomas

Germany (East). Volkskammer
Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft
Grünen (Political party)
Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland
National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (Germany : East)
Nationale Front der DDR
Neues Forum (Political party)
Republikaner (Political party)
Solidaritätskomitee der DDR
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD der DDR

Arrangement

Arranged by subject and a numbering system.

Description of Subordinate Components

Series 1: Political Posters

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/33671

Unit Date 1943-2009

Scope and Contents note

See the External Documents note for a poster inventory with brief descriptions.