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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
21 August 1961

OCI No. 3619/61

Copy No.

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: East German Local Elections of 17 September
1961

1. Offices to be filled: Local elections in East Germany have been scheduled for 17 September, the same day as the West German parliamentary elections. According to an ordinance published on 8 July by the East German Council of State, a total of 212,000 representatives will be elected to district, county, municipal, city borough, and communal assemblies throughout East Germany. These popularly elected bodies will in turn elect local governing councils.

2. Party participation: All political parties and mass organizations will participate in activities prior to the election, which will be supervised by the National Front of Democratic Germany. In practice, the local Socialist Unity party (SED) leadership designates candidates, and the National Front Committee in the electoral district formalizes this action. Each mass organization in the National Front (the Free German Trade Union Federation, Free German Youth, Culture League, and the Society for Sports and Technology, among others) will be represented on the ballot, as well as the SED and the Communist-controlled parties--the Christian Democratic Union, the Liberal Democratic party, the National Democratic party, and the Democratic Peasant party. The SED usually is allotted 30 percent of the candidates and the other parties 10 percent each, while the remaining 30 percent is assigned to the mass organizations, which in effect means to SED members representing these organizations.

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3. Procedures: On 6 July, the East German State Council adopted the following ordinances:

a. In accordance with the law of 3 April 1957 concerning election to local people's assemblies in the German Democratic Republic, local government elections are proclaimed for 1961.

b. The elections are to be implemented on the basis of the law of 3 April 1957 and the law adopted 6 July 1961 concerning changes in the former law.

c. Minister of the Interior Karl Maron will be the officer in charge of the elections.

SED politburo member Albert Norden said in an address to the 13th plenum of the SED central committee on 11 July that the movement for the fulfillment of the economic tasks and for the conclusion of a peace treaty will be in the center of the preparation for the elections.

Other major objectives of the intensive election campaign are to bring East German citizens into closer contact with local administrative government and to generate some feeling of identification with the regime and its policies, especially the conclusion of a peace treaty. Efforts in this latter direction so far this summer have shown a notable lack of success. The West German elections set for the same day also provide a compelling reason for the regime to make its own show of "democracy" and to obtain an overwhelming endorsement from the East German people.

4. Significant features:

a. The last local elections were held on 23 June 1957, the first in seven years. Of those eligible to vote, 97.17 percent did so, with

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National Front candidates receiving 99.52 percent of the vote. The regime took stringent measures to prevent any disturbances during the election period and placed all military and security forces on full alert.

b. According to the present electoral law, local elections were due four years after the last elections of June 1957. The postponement of the elections probably was due to the food and consumer goods shortages and the incipient crisis over Berlin. Despite extensive efforts by the régime to whip up enthusiasm, few people are taking the present election campaign (which is not yet in full swing) seriously because of the absence of genuine political debate. The single election list of party-approved candidates will give the voter no opportunity to express a choice, and everyone realizes that the outcome is already determined.

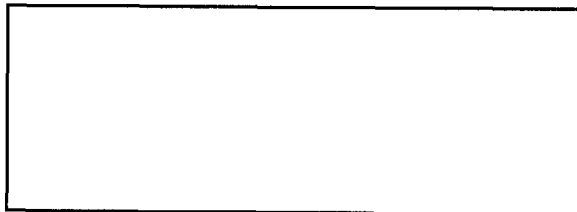
c. One of the significant aspects of the current election campaign is the obvious effort of regime propagandizers to elicit complaints from the general public and impose "self-criticism" on local functionaries, thereby spotlighting inefficient and unpopular officials who can be dismissed as a sop to the populace. The regime obviously is attempting to avoid its responsibility for the inadequate supplies of food and consumer goods and for the harsh enforcement of its directives by placing the blame on local officials.

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