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The Background and Development of East Germany's Two-Nation, Two-State Theory

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North Korea is reviving East Germany's failed two-nation theory more than 50 years after East Germany first advocated it in 1970. On December 30, 2023, during the 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party, Kim Jong-un stated that inter-Korean relations have been completely fixed into "the relations between two belligerent states, not the consanguineous or homogeneous ones anymore." In his policy speech to the Supreme People's Assembly on January 15, 2024, he ordered the removal of the concepts of "unification," "reconciliation," and "same ethnic group" from the Republic's national history and directed amendments to the constitution accordingly. This marks a shift from the one-nation, one-state concept to advocating a two-nation, two-state theory. In this context, we will examine how East Germany's policy against West Germany evolved as a unification strategy (theory of one-nation, one-state ⇒ one-nation, two-state theory ⇒ two-nation, two-state theory)

From the Theory of One-Nation, One-State, to One-Nation, Two-State, to Two-Nation (Das Zwei-Nationen-Konzept)

East Germany embedded the goal of socializing the entire Germany in its constitution when it was established. Article 1 of the 1949 Constitution of East Germany, “Germany is an indivisible democratic republic.” However, the uprising on June 17, 1953 by workers shook the legitimacy of East Germany’s regime, and in September 1953, during the 16th Party Central Committee meeting, First Secretary Walter Ulbricht stated, “In reality, there are two states in Germany.”

After the establishment of the West German government in 1949, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) participated in the government for the first time through a grand coalition with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1966. East Germany condemned this as a betrayal of the working class by the SPD. Subsequently, through a constitutional amendment in 1968, East Germany defined in Article 1 that “The German Democratic Republic is a socialist state of the German nation,” thus clarifying that while East Germany was a socialist state, West Germany was a capitalist state (one-nation, two-state).

In his government statement on October 28, 1969, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who had taken office earlier that month, declared, “Even though there are two states on German territory, they are not foreign to each other.” This marked the abandonment of West Germany’s longstanding claim to sole representation and recognized the de facto existence of a one-nation, two-state reality, while still refusing to grant East Germany legal recognition as a separate state under international law. In response, on January 19, 1970, East Germany’s First Secretary, Walter Ulbricht, countered in a press conference, stating that “the notion of a single German nation is a fiction, as no single nation exists between capitalists and workers, nor between monopolistic conglomerates and workers.” He asserted that East Germany was a socialist German national state (sozialistischer deutscher Nationalstaat).

The official propaganda of the new concept of the nation was initiated by Erich

Honecker, who became the new First Secretary (May 1971), from the 8th Party Congress in June 1971. In the report on the proceedings of the congress, Honecker stated that “unlike in West Germany, where the bourgeois nation continued to exist and the national issue was determined by irreconcilable class contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the working masses, East Germany had developed into a socialist German state and a socialist nation.” To support this two-nation theory, East Germany made an official move in October 1974 by amending the 1968 Constitution. The phrase “The German Democratic Republic is a socialist state of the German nation” in Article 1 was replaced with “The German Democratic Republic is a socialist state of workers and peasants,” and all references to “unification and nation” were removed from the constitution. Additionally, East Germany began to eliminate the terms ‘Deutsch’ and ‘Deutschland’ from everyday language.

Background of East Germany’s Radical Paradigm Shift to the Two-Nation Theory (Das Zwei-Nationen-Konzept)

The background of East Germany’s radical paradigm shift can be examined through the following four points:

Firstly, in the 1960s, it became clear to the East German Communist Party leadership that the defeat in the system competition meant that unification based on socialist ideology was no longer achievable. Secondly, a process leading to the Helsinki Accords in 1975 began in 1966, and the accords recognized the territorial and international order established after World War II. Consequently, there were calls in West Germany to abandon the claim to sole representation, and there were demands for recognition of East Germany as a state. Thirdly, in a government statement on October 28, 1969, Willy Brandt acknowledged the existence of two German states and accepted East Germany’s demands. While doing so, West Germany emphasized the unity of the nation to prevent the permanent division. In response, East Germany not only raised issues regarding the impossibility of unification but also questioned the continuity of national unity. Fourthly, policy changes regarding

the issue of nation in East Germany reflected the new emerging realities within East Germany. According to research, from the 1960s to the early 1980s, the majority of East German residents identified themselves with East Germany's society and state.

Conclusion

Through East Germany's two-nation theory, we can infer why North Korea has stated that the relationship between North and South Korea is "relations between two belligerent states, not the consanguineous or homogeneous ones." The first reason stems from East Germany's awakening from the fantasy of achieving a socialist revolution in West Germany by joining forces with the communists in the West. North Korea might have had a similar experience from South Korea. This is evident in Kim Jong-un's statement during the last Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee on December 30, where he mentioned "the principle of unification under a liberal democratic system... was maintained... although the South Korean government changed around 10 times... the heinous ambitions to overthrow our system and regime, regardless of whether they are advocating 'democracy' or 'conservatism,' have remained unchanged." The second reason lies in the backdrop of East Germany's emergence of the two-nation theory, which is the economic gap between North and South Korea, which forms the foundation for unification. The young leader of North Korea is acknowledging this reality and advocating for the two-state, two-nation theory. This can also be seen as a result of North Korea perceiving the maintenance of its regime as a more urgent and crucial task than the issue of the nation. ©KINU 2024

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