

**May 6, 1953**

**Memorandum from Lavrentiy Beria to the CPSU CC  
Presidium regarding Mass Defections from the GDR,  
6 May 1953**

**Citation:**

"Memorandum from Lavrentiy Beria to the CPSU CC Presidium regarding Mass Defections from the GDR, 6 May 1953", May 6, 1953, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SVRA file 3581, vol. 7; published as facsimile (in Russian) in David E. Murphy, Sergei Kondrashev, and George Bailey, "Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 157.  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/110409>

**Summary:**

Excerpt of a memorandum from Lavrentiy Beria to the CPSU CC Presidium regarding mass defections from the GDR. By early May 1953, declining conditions in the GDR finally started to draw the attention of the Soviet leadership. Lavrentiy Beria's 6 May report to the CPSU Presidium is one of the first high-level documents to reflect concerns about the situation, in particular the increased flight of farmers and small businessmen brought about by the forced socialization policy. Beria may have been prompted to submit this report by the discussion of the German issue at a CPSU Presidium meeting on 5 May.

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

CopyTop secretCopy #9.To the CPSU CC PRESIDUMAs is known, in recent days the press of the American-English bloc has raised a racket regarding the question of mass defections to West Germany by the inhabitants of the German Democratic Republic. The empowered representative of the USSR MVD in Germany submits the following information on this question:During the second half of 1952 and the first quarter of this year the number of defections to West Germany by inhabitants of the GDR has genuinely increased. According to data from the Central administration of the GDR national police, during the first half of 1952, 57,234 people defected to West Germany, during the second half of the year, 78,831 people defected, and during the first quarter of this year, 84,034 people defected. Among those who defected during the first quarter of this year, there were 1,836 members of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and 1,781 members of the Union of Free German Youth.According to available data, the increase in the number of defections to the West is explained not only by increased hostile propaganda among the GDR inhabitants carried out by West German organs, but also by the desire of various groups of peasants to avoid entering into agricultural industry cooperatives currently being organized, by fears among the small and middle-size private businessmen that their personal property and assets will be confiscated, by the desire among a number of youth to avoid serving in the GDR armed forces, and by the difficulties experienced in the GDR with regard to the supply food and merchandise available to the inhabitants. [...]L. BERIA "6" May 195344/B Witness: [signature]Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del', Ministry of Internal Affairs. This memorandum was sent to Malenkov, Molotov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov.