4.2.3 HANDOUT

LEIPZIG DBQ (DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION)

This question is based on the accompanying ten documents. It is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. Some of the documents have been edited to fit the purposes of the question. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

Historical Context:

The German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany) was officially formed on October 7, 1949 in the Soviet-occupied zone of post-World War II Germany and became a satellite state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Leipzig was the second largest city in East Germany. Many Germans were dissatisfied with the division of their country. Shortly thereafter, many East Germans flocked to West Germany, resulting in the East German government hastily constructing the Berlin Wall starting the night of August 13, 1961.The Berlin wall became the symbol of the political and ideological separation of East and West Germany.

Political activism against the government and meetings of such nature (including religious gatherings) were strictly forbidden in East Germany; however, churches had an agreement with the state whereby, at least in theory, they were allowed to continue practicing their faith unhindered. Although, the reality was quite different, as the regime desperately tried to quash the churches' influence, and succeeded in many ways. But internal public opposition strengthened and grew in the GDR. Since 1982, people had gathered at the St. Nicholas Church *(Nikolaikirche)* in downtown Leipzig every Monday evening to pray for peace as well as for personal and political freedom. Over time this practice spread to other churches in East Germany, and the tone of these prayer circles became increasingly political. It was during these Monday prayer sessions that people began to express not only their worries, but also suggested solutions and courses of action. The Monday prayers became a time during which all kinds of people assembled to express their desire for change. Grassroots organizations formed in opposition to the state — such initiatives were against the law. However, once organized, the people were bolstered by their sheer size and solidarity. These Monday prayer services at *Nikolaikirche* soon transformed into political protests in Leipzig's main square. After the prayer service, the people would gather and walk peacefully through the streets to the center of town holding lit candles.

By the fall of 1989, after the weakening of the communist grip on the Eastern Bloc, the demonstrations grew to an enormous size, with hundreds of thousands of protestors. The October 9, 1989 Monday prayer session at *Nikolaikirche* was an especially significant example of non-violent protests by the East German people. Within a few weeks, the Berlin Wall was taken down, and shortly thereafter Germany was reunified.

Task: Using the information from the documents and your knowledge of recent German history, write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs, and a conclusion on the following topic:

Discuss the events of October 9, 1989 in Leipzig and their significance to the collapse of the German Democratic Republic. Support your response with relevant facts, examples, and details from the documents. Be sure to include different viewpoints.

Document 1:

"While the leadership celebrated with torchlight parades, goose-stepping and military marches, the world witnessed the East German police and state security break up peaceful rallies with brutal violence" (Helmut Kohl, German Chancelor 1982-1998).

Document 2:

"We all need a free exchange of views about the continuing development of socialism in our country. Therefore, the public figures whose names are being read today promise all citizens that they will apply their full power and authority to advancing this dialogue, not only within the district of Leipzig, but also with our government" (Lange, et al., 1989).

Document 3:

"That day [October 9, 1989] Leipzig resembled an armed camp. According to later testimony from the riot police, officers had been told that morning that a peaceful outcome to the demonstrations was unlikely, and that they should prepare for possible acts of violence. Accordingly, they wore riot gear: helmets with visors and neck protection, shields, gas masks (tear gas had been acquired in large quantities), truncheons, and so-called RKWs [gas projectiles]; officers were armed with pistols, and dog teams were also deployed. On the courtyard of the VP [Volkspolizei or People's Police] District Authority, 'munitioned up' armored trucks stood ready, huge steel giants with bulldozing capacity; the drivers were armed with submachine guns and sixty shots of ammunition apiece. The police troop numbered three thousand men, twelve hundred of whom had been brought over from the Halle and Neubrandenburg districts" (German Historical Institute, 2011).

Document 4:

My dear people, I have the impression that people here, on this day, want to change our society for good. There is a pressure to succeed: Today we must be the victors, now or never. But do we want to win at any price, even with blood and tears? I think enough blood has already been spilled in the last few days. God will help us! The reforms that we seek will come if we allow the spirit of peace, calm and tolerance to enter us. For anyone who kneels before God, words of peace become a drive to action. Is there any greater charge that we could be given than to be peacemakers in our city? Everybody who takes part in this service has the duty to be an instrument of peace. The spirit of peace must go out beyond these walls. Take great care that you are not rude to police officers. Be careful that you don't sing songs or chant slogans which could provoke the authorities. Take the stone out of your clenched fists. Our help and protection are in the Lord alone" (Gotthard Wendel, pastor, St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, Germany on October 9. 1989).

Document 5:

Full-time officers and informers used conspiratorial flats and buildings for their meetings. Mainly concentrated in the city centre, isolated premises in the suburbs of Leipzig were also used . All in all, the Leipzig district contained more than 600 conspiratorial flats and buildings, whose usage for this purpose was of course kept top secret" (Stasi Museum Leipzig, 2011).

Document 6:

"There's an amusing story amid all the tension. The pastor at the Nikolaikirche, Christian Führer, walked into the church at 2:30 P.M. to find the nave full with over a thousand people. He recognized at once who they were, and was amused. These were party officials and Stasi members who had been told to fill the pews of the Nikolaikirche where, according to their sources, criminals and troublemakers (the Germans call these Rowdies) were banding together to stage a counterrevolution. Pastor Führer wanted them to know that he knew exactly who they were, so he addressed his impromptu congregation: 'The Nikolaikirche is open to everybody, and it really means just that, with no exception. You are most welcome. I'm just a little surprised that you are already here at 2:30 P.M., when the working proletariat can only come after 4 o'clock, which is why we have the prayers at 5 P.M.. But still, you are very welcome. But you will of course understand that we are keeping the gallery closed, so that a few of the working population, and a few Christians, can get into the church.' … And so the party officials and secret police sat quietly in their pews and waited for the Rowdies to storm the church" (Davie, 2002).

Document 7:

"More than 2,000 people leaving the church were welcomed by tens of thousands waiting outside with candles in their hands – an unforgettable moment. Two hands are necessary to carry a candle and to protect it from extinguishing so that you can not carry stones or clubs at the same time. The miracle occurred. … [The] spirit of non-violence seized the masses and became a material, peaceful power.

Troops, (military) brigade groups and the police were drawn in, became engaged in conversations, then withdrew. […] There were no winners and no defeated, nobody triumphed over the other, nobody lost […] face. There was just a tremendous feeling of relief. […] There were thousands in the churches. Hundreds of thousands in the streets around the city center. But: Not a single shattered shop window. This was the incredible experience of the power of on violence" (Führer, 2011).

Document 8:

"Horst Sindermann, who was a member of the Central Committee of the GDR, said before his death: 'We had planned everything. We were prepared for everything. But not for candles and prayers'" (Sindermann as quoted in Führer, 2011).

Document 9:

"The wall will remain so long as the conditions that led to its erection are not changed. It will be standing even in 50 and even in 100 years, if the necessary conditions are not removed" (Erich Honecker, East German head of state, 1971-1989).

Document 10:

"October 9, 1989, was a Monday and thus a day of peace prayers and demonstrations in Leipzig. But this Monday was different. Party leadership and security forces were more nervous than ever. Again and again during the day we received alarming news: schools and preschools in Leipzig were closed, and hospitals were stocking up their blood banks.

But more people than ever met that evening in the streets of Leipzig. They held prayer vigils in the churches and then they went, some arm in arm or holding hands, into the street. The SED leadership was initially intent on confrontation. Seventy thousand demonstrators were met by eight thousand members of the People's Police, the National People's Army, and the Ministry for State Security, supported by five thousand so-called social forces from the party and state apparatus. [. . .] Finally the liberating news arrived: The citizens of Leipzig were in the streets and demonstrating unchallenged. Not one shot had been fired. Much later, it was learned that [the authorities in Leipzig] had decided not to use force against the demonstrators. Egon Krenz, who went on to claim that he had prevented the Politburo from using force, only endorsed that decision later" (Marianne Birthler, human rights advocate and German politician for Alliance '90/ The Greens party).

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