

The staged spectacle of Honecker vs. Moscow

by Rachel Douglas

After weeks of blowing hot and cold, dropping hints in the party press and launching rumors, East German leader Erich Honecker finally cancelled his scheduled visit to West Germany on Sept. 4. The visit had been the subject of much talk relating to the “crumbling Soviet Empire” and rumored hostility between East Germany and Moscow—and Bonn politicians and others in the West talked repeatedly of a looming rapprochement between the Germanies in connection with the trip.

The talk persisted, even when, only 10 days earlier, Honecker had launched his own blistering attack on supposed West German “revanchism,” in perfect echo of the Soviet line. It persisted as Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces massed on West German borders for the ongoing Shield-84 maneuvers, continuing the biggest display of deployed armed might in Eastern Europe in over 15 years. But one would think that the visit’s final cancellation would have put an end to this fruitless speculation in Bonn about the possibility of a separate peace with East Germany.

Instead, within minutes of the announcement by East Germany’s “Permanent Representative” in Bonn, leading West German politicians were stumbling over each other in a rush to agree with the East German allegation that Honecker’s trip was off because of “undignified and detrimental” public discussion of it in the Federal Republic. Appeasers of Moscow from both the “left” and the “right” promptly blamed not the Soviets or East Germans, but the West Germans themselves.

Social Democratic leaders Hans-Joachim Vogel and Willy Brandt blamed Christian Democratic parliamentary leader Alfred Dregger, who had said the Honecker visit was getting too much attention. They demanded that Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s government publicly explain to parliament what happened to stop Honecker from coming.

Vogel denounced Kohl’s failure to quash the “disruptive

maneuvers” of Dregger. Brandt found fault with “gossipy dilettantism” and underlying resistance within the ruling parties to improving relations with East Germany. The environmentalist Green Party accused Kohl and Dregger of “provoking the cancellation.”

In nearly the same words as the socialists and the greens, the conservative president of the state of Bavaria, Franz-Josef Strauss, said he was “sorry” Honecker would not come and added: “It was not without grounds that already several weeks ago, I warned repeatedly against detrimental and superfluous talk about Honecker’s visit.”

Behavior modification

This self-flagellation is all in the Soviet script, designed to kick West Germany into line with Soviet-written rules of conduct. Commentator Werner Kahl of the daily *Die Welt* broke the pattern Sept. 5, pointing out that the whole saga of Honecker’s visit was stage-managed from start to finish by the psychological manipulation experts of the Kremlin.

While Western diplomats and correspondents pored over the columns of *Pravda* and its East German counterpart, *Neues Deutschland*, every day for evidence of a feud between Moscow and East Berlin, Kahl observed, the special relationship of Erich Honecker and the Soviet military high command remained rock solid. The underlying reality of East Germany’s situation, distorted by the soap opera starring Honecker, is symbolized, he noted, by the imposing figure of Gen. Mikhail Zaitsev, commander of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany. Zaitsev never left Honecker’s side at the Leipzig Trade Fair last week, as he stopped in at the West German pavilion for an instant before hastening on to that of the U.S.S.R.

The West German politician who accepts the ludicrous East German line that the words of Dregger and others caused Honecker not to come is replicating the state of affairs that

exists in Finland: namely, that there are certain things one simply does not say about the Soviet Union. Thus Vogel declares that the "behavior" of Chancellor Kohl contributed to keeping Honecker away and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher intones that "responsible people on both sides must now *behave* in such a way as to avoid burdening relations. . . ."

Soviet attacks

While Honecker cancelled out, the Warsaw Pact went ahead with its display of raw military power in Eastern Europe. On Sept. 3, Shield-84 began in Czechoslovakia, including in the vicinity of West Germany's border. *Pravda* declared that this mobilization of more than 60,000 troops, on the heels of even bigger Soviet exercises in East Germany in July, was "necessitated" by West German behavior.

In an article on the simultaneously beginning Autumn Forge maneuvers of NATO, *Pravda* attacked the "provocational" role of West Germany in them, saying that the Federal Republic "has become the breeding ground of militaristic provocations on our [sic] continent." Autumn Forge, said *Pravda*, is taking place "provocatively close to East Germany," so that "the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries are forced to take countermeasures to protect their house from the dangerous outbursts of the militaristic adventurers."

On Sept. 1, *Pravda* attacked West Germany for planning to "liquidate" East Germany and warned that "war" would be the result. *Pravda's* Yevgenii Grigoryev asserted that Bonn is encouraging "revanchism" (claims on territory in the East bloc) and "pan-German views" and is "dreaming of the liquidation of the socialist German Democratic Republic." But, he warned, "attempts at revanchism, if they are carried out, will mean war."

Defense of Germany

Unlike the politicians, some military men have taken stock of the immediate Soviet threat. On Sept. 1, West German naval forces began exercises on the North Sea and the Baltic Sea coast, to rehearse "resistance against an assault carried out from the sea by the U.S.S.R.'s Baltic forces." West German Navy commander Vice-Admiral Ansgar Bethge took the occasion to voice concern about the growing Soviet power in the Baltic. He told the daily *Bildzeitung*, "The Soviet forces have gained the capability of landing about 5,000 men and 1,000 military vehicles including tanks on the Schleswig-Holstein coast in the first wave of assault. This is a huge threat to NATO's northern flank."

According to a report in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, NATO's Autumn Forge also takes into account actual Warsaw Pact military doctrine, including the massive use of chemical warfare measures and deployment of Spetsnaz (special forces) sabotage units. NATO commander Gen. Bernard Rogers on Sept. 3 called for renewed chemical weapons development, suspended by NATO since 1969.

Die Welt reported another important move by Rogers, the appointment of his West German deputy, Gen. Hans-Joachim Mack, to be in charge of nuclear planning for NATO. This is an unprecedented upgrading of the role of West Germany in NATO, since the British deputy to the Supreme Allied Commander has always had this job until now.

Die Welt commended the appointment as a "far-sighted and wise move," denoting "more integration, more trust. In other words, a better alliance—and thus in the final analysis greater security." General Mack's responsibilities will cover the entire range of nuclear weapons, from targetting to the preparation of an annual study of the nuclear needs of the NATO forces. Respecting nuclear targetting, General Mack will work in close coordination with the U.S. Strategic Air Command.

The reactions in Western Europe

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Sept. 4 described the reactions in Bonn to the decision by Erich Honecker, chief of state of the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) and general secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), to cancel his scheduled visit there. The term "Germany policy" (Deutschlandpolitik) refers to relations between East and West Germany.

[Christian Social Union Chairman Franz-Josef] Strauss: "It was not without foundation that I warned repeatedly several weeks ago against the harmful and excessive talk about Honecker's visit." Strauss maintained that he had "followed the entire development with attention and not without concern."

[Social Democratic Party chairman Willy] Brandt attributed the current situation to a "babbling dilettantism" and the "resistance concealed behind it on the part of some within the [Christian Democratic and Christian Social] Union parties to the continuation of Germany policy as it has hitherto been conducted." This, along with the deficiencies in the latest German-German negotiations, is the major reason that the previous principled agreement between government and opposition concerning Germany policy could be called into question, according to Brandt.

Minister of State Jenninger for the Federal government: "The government has taken cognizance of the decision of the G.D.R. It regrets this decision, particularly because the G.D.R. also thereby makes it known that it will not participate in the talks scheduled for this fall between the federal government and a number of leading politicians from the Warsaw Pact.

"The government cannot accept the G.D.R.'s allegation that the visit should be postponed because a public discussion

about the visit has been under way in the Federal Republic of Germany. . . . Otherwise, the preparations for the visit had progressed to the point that the length of the visit proposed by the G.D.R. and accepted by us could be considered realistic, and the visit, on this basis, could have gone ahead without friction. Discussions about a joint communiqué had furthermore shown that there were no basic insurmountable difficulties and that a number of significant common positions would have been possible.

"The federal government expects that the decision of the G.D.R. will not hinder the further development of relations between the two states in Germany, and that the dialogue desired by both sides, as well as cooperation in the interests of peace in Europe and of the people in divided Germany, may proceed."

Writing in the conservative daily Die Welt on Sept. 5, commentator Werner Kahl dismisses the notion, circulating widely in the West, that Honecker was trying to buck Moscow—and particularly the Soviet military—by coming to Bonn.

While Western observers every morning put the commentary columns of *Pravda* and *Neues Deutschland* under the magnifying glass to determine whether the comrades of one of these party papers had abridged or eliminated any opinion of the other organ about the gigantic speculation about Erich Honecker, *Red Star* looked upon all of this ideological hoopla with seeming indifference. The official organ of the Kremlin military, on this spectacle apparently put on for the benefit of Western public opinion by the Politburo's psychological department, demonstrated the special relationship which exists between Erich Honecker and the generals of the Red Army.

The state chairman and SED general secretary, in the evaluation of diplomats from neutral countries stationed in East Berlin, has never had any reason to fear any conflict with the interests of the top Soviet military officials, who normally do not play their role on the stage of politics, but only behind the scenes. There is no doubt that the Red Army itself was and continues to be the absolute master of the situation in the G.D.R. . . .

Although he doesn't wear a uniform, the G.D.R. state chairman feels quite at home within the circle of the Kremlin generals. . . .

Soviet Marshal Ustinov, the chief representative of the military and armaments interests in the Kremlin leadership, knows . . . how to appreciate Honecker's role among the East Berlin comrades. Without grumbling, the SED Politburo this summer agreed to the higher prices Moscow was demanding for the stationing of the Red Army in the G.D.R.

Kosta Christitch, in Le Point, Sept. 5:

. . . All the rumors which have been circulating this summer on the factional struggle in the Kremlin will now persist, to explain the psychodrama around Honecker's trip. Rumors

which, in their apparent candor, were not altogether innocent, considering the composition of the fighting clans as they appeared in the West German press, which obligingly echoed them.

On the one hand, there were the eternal "hardliners," like Andrei Gromyko and Marshal Ustinov, firmly set against preventing any "rapprochement" between the two Germanies; and on the other, the no less traditional "liberals," represented—how could one doubt it?—by the youngest member of the Politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev. Between those two currents were the "Brezhnevites," with none other than Konstantin Chernenko at their head, presented as a realist, as all his predecessors from Stalin to Andropov had been held to be, by the rumor mills of their era. For indeed, the Soviets have long known how to use the West's naive hunger for information for their own disinformation purposes. The summer of 1984 was no exception. . . .

Never has a leader of an East bloc country sought to acquire autonomy by carrying out a foreign policy distinct from that of Moscow. On the contrary, it is by aligning themselves totally with the Kremlin's foreign policy that some—such as Janos Kadar in Hungary—have obtained a bit of maneuvering room for the internal development of their country. . . . East Germany has never deviated by one inch from the line desired by Moscow. All its efforts have, on the contrary, gone toward the full recognition of its state identity, thus confirming the division of Germany, and, as a consequence, of Europe. . . .

[Concerning Honecker's visit], the decision uniquely belonged to the will of the Soviets whether or not to penalize Federal Germany for its submissiveness to Ronald Reagan's America.

Jean Paul Picaper in Le Figaro, Sept. 5:

. . . The sceptical or ironical declaration of a man close to the Chancellor, Mr. Dregger, that "the future of Federal Germany does not depend upon the honor of a visit from Mr. Honecker," seems rather understated, compared to the ferocious and fantastical attacks by the Soviet press against Bonn since the beginning of the year, with the crescendo starting in July.

The "spirit of revanchism" attributed to Bonn, as well as the insinuation that the Federal Republic was seeking, through credits, to incorporate or liquidate the G.D.R. or even Austria, or the confusion which Moscow attempts to create between the principled right of Germans to a distant reunification and the alleged hegemonic views of the good-natured Bonn government, are only a few elements of a pandemonium which the West German government has had the politeness not to notice or only to refute in soft tones.

This gallery of horrors culminated in an article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* yesterday, describing a Federal Republic infested by gangs of fascist goons, full of bars where voices are shouting for the "Führer" and the call to conquest. . . .