

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Expensive dreams about the East

*The Leipzig Industrial Fair is launching a new phase in German-German relations.*

**T**he policy of the new Bonn government vis-à-vis Gorbachov and the Warsaw Pact is based on unfounded expectations and illusions. Assuming the withdrawal of medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe (the "zero option") is just a matter of time, the Bonn government believes that Gorbachov's reforms will, once freed from the "burden of the arms race," lead to a fundamental change in East-West relations for the better. Sooner or later, the Gorbachov reforms are expected to launch liberalization in the other Warsaw Pact countries.

It is believed in Bonn that this liberalization will make it easier for the two Germanys to come together again—up to the option of real reunification. It is also believed that Gorbachov's reforms mean a "historic chance" for West German industry to get a dominant share in the coming five-year plans for the Soviet economy as well as for the other Warsaw Pact member countries.

Provided with this fantastic belief-structure, Bonn's politicians are seeking any occasion to intensify contacts with the East German regime. More than ever before, Bonn is willing to sign preferential economic contracts with the East, hoping this will help to "build confidence." All of a sudden, the Warsaw Pact—of which the East German regime is an essential part—ceases to be a military pact hostile to the West, and begins to appear as an organization of potential "first-rate" business partners.

The East Germans are grabbing for

this "historic chance" themselves, to harvest favorable deals with the West Germans. Over several weeks, they have been sending signals—though very vague ones—to the government in Bonn that they were interested in "improved and intensified relations." In Bonn, these vague signals were evaluated as "significant changes" and proof for the thesis that Gorbachov's reforms would soften up the hard-line communists in East Germany.

The annual mid-March Leipzig Industrial Fair, always offering abundant opportunities for encounters on the highest level, gained a special weight this year. An unprecedented pilgrimage of ranking West German politicians occurred this time, culminating in three successive high-powered meetings with East German ruler Erich Honecker on March 15.

First, Bonn Economics Minister Martin Bangemann talked with Honecker, then Franz Josef Strauss, Bavarian state governor and leader of the Christian Social Union, and third, West Berlin's mayor Eberhard Diepgen.

Their meetings were topped by the special meeting arranged for March 16 between Lothar Späth, the Christian Democratic governor of the state of Baden-Württemberg, and Honecker. Lothar Späth, who is viewed as the most-likely successor to Bonn Chancellor Helmut Kohl, was given first-rate coverage in all East German media.

All four politicians were given the red carpet treatment by Honecker, who

proved to be master of skillful, propaganda targeted to Western politicians at a moment they subscribe to illusions rather than to the strategic reality of a global showdown between East and West. With the West Germans, this treatment apparently yielded results.

From his meeting with Honecker, Bangemann reported that the zero option was welcomed as "improving opportunity for development of German-German relations." He also said that Günter Mittag, the East German Politburo's chief economic expert, had promised him personally that German-German business contracts worth 1 billion deutschmarks would be signed at the Leipzig Industrial Fair this time.

Bangemann also discussed projects of electrifying and modernizing the railroad system in East Germany, of delivering West German technology for East German nuclear and conventional power plants. Furthermore, the option of supplying the East German economy with electricity from West Germany during periods of energy shortage, was discussed. As Bangemann reported, the East Germans had signaled interest in cooperation projects totaling investments of 5-9 billion deutschmarks. Who would finance that, was the question many in West Germany asked, when learning of these Leipzig discussions.

Some light on the financing aspect was shed by Bangemann. Two days after his Leipzig encounters, Bangemann told the press in Bonn that he could "not imagine that any current business contract with the German Democratic Republic would fail to find appropriate financing among the banks here"—meaning West German banks.

Apparently, Bonn's politicians are not only subscribing to illusions on East-West affairs, but are even so naive as to pay for their dreams.