

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Crackdown feared in East Germany

*Increasing emigration unmasks the increasingly grim reality of life in the Kremlin's German model state.*

‘China today—G.D.R. tomorrow?’—this question was posed on leaflets distributed by opposition figures in the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) after the massacre in Beijing. The question was rightly posed, because the East German regime, which has been in firm control of the Kremlin's German model state since 1945, maintains the closest ties also to the regime in Beijing. German Communists have always played a leading role of support to China's Communists, from the time of the 1920s' Comintern assistance to Mao Zedong to this day.

Today's Communists of the East German SED party hailed the Chinese “crackdown on the counterrevolutionary rebellion,” in telegrams to the regime in Beijing. East Germany's “parliament” went out of its way June 7, passing a resolution in support of Beijing.

The state security apparatus and the secret police in East Germany also acted promptly against opponents who denounced the Beijing massacre. Hundreds were arrested in East Berlin and other cities, and interrogated for 18 hours straight. Many were sentenced to high fines.

The SED regime's posture; news of the labor strikes in the Soviet Union; rumors about a crackdown to occur soon in the three Baltic states, in Poland, and Czechoslovakia; and the hostile coverage in the SED-controlled media about protest and reform developments in other East bloc countries—these factors have led many in East Germany to the conclusion: Let's get out of here before it is too late!

Older folk still recall the buildup of tensions before the bloody crack-

down of June 17, 1953, when the SED regime had the same kind of Soviet tanks roll over protesting workers as those that crushed the movement on Tiananmen Square. They recall that the situation looked similar before the Berlin Wall was erected on Aug. 13, 1961.

Both legal emigration and the flow of refugees from East to West Germany have soared since May 1989. In April, about 5,000 East Germans emigrated legally to West Germany, in May already it was 9,000, in June 10,000, and in July 11,700. At the same time, hundreds—largely young couples and families—took the high risk of leaving East Germany illegally, entering the West through Hungary and Austria as refugees.

All in all, close to 60,000 came to West Germany in the first seven months of 1989—almost double the figure of last year's total. About 100,000 are expected to arrive in the West, legally or illegally, by the end of this year.

The situation is dramatically highlighted also by the fact that more than 400 East Germans took refuge in West Germany's diplomatic missions in East Berlin, Prague, and Budapest. Faced with this flood of refugees, but also with threats from the SED regime about “severe repercussions on the German-German relations,” the West German government decided on Aug. 8 to close the mission in East Berlin to all public traffic for the time being.

In 1984, the mission was closed for two months under similar circumstances.

The East Berlin regime agreed at that time to negotiate an increased emigration quota in talks with West Ger-

many, in order to have a controllable safety valve for the growing opposition. Easier access to credit lines and trade preferences for the SED in the West were the price paid by the West German government for this concession.

The situation was kept under SED control only for about three years, however, not least because of the fact that the rise of “Gorbachov the reformer” led to illusions not only in the West German media (television can be received in much of East Germany as well), but also among the East German opposition.

The situation changed in the course of 1988. The trip of SED leader Erich Honecker to West Germany in September 1987—the first time in the history of postwar German partition—created short-lived false expectations for reforms and improvements in the East. The deep disappointment spreading in the ensuing months, led to a new increase in emigration.

Out of a total population of 16.8 million in East Germany, close to 1 million, many among them skilled workers, engineers, craftsmen, and other categories of highly qualified workers, have applied for exit visas. They are mostly average Germans fed up with the SED regime because of the bad food supply situation.

Unlike most West Germans, most of these emigrants and refugees from the East who are orienting towards western values, do not share the illusion that the East German communists are acting against the Kremlin's policy. The SED's siding openly with Beijing immediately after the massacre on Tiananmen Square did not occur against, but with the consent of Moscow. The Kremlin needs the SED to keep control of Moscow's satellites in Eastern Europe, as a reliable ally for the imminent crackdown.