

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The iron fist of Egon Krenz

Make no mistake: East Germany's new leader is committed to an early crackdown on the opposition.

When Egon Krenz, the new man at the top of East Germany's SED party regime, addressed the East German population on television, it was observed that during most of his speech, he formed a fist and banged on the podium in front of him.

The fist was the message. It was a warning to the mass protest movement of East Germany, that the new policy of "dialogue" the regime has offered, will not last for long.

Those in the opposition movement of East Germany who are less deluded and better informed, don't take Krenz's new offers of leniency toward protesters seriously. They are convinced that Krenz only wants to win time, that he won't grant substantial concessions, and will call off the dialogue abruptly at the earliest possible time.

And Krenz will probably have to move quickly. From Oct. 20-23, roughly 500,000 East Germans—300,000 in Leipzig alone—took to the streets of East German cities to protest against him. Signatures were gathered against his election as the new chief of the party, the state council, and the state defense council. Their banners called for a separation of powers.

The guns are already poised. During the days before his accession to power in East Berlin, Krenz, in his function as "national security chief" at the SED party Politburo, had already imposed quasi-martial law over all of East Germany.

In connection with security preparations for the 40th anniversary festivities of the SED regime on Oct. 7, the National Army (NVA), the armed mi-

litia of the *Kampfgruppen*, the riot squads of the police, and the state security apparatus (Stasi) were put on special alert and posted at strategic points within the cities, the railway and highway system, the supply routes to the key factories, the utilities, and all along the border with West Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

These emergency measures have remained in effect following the festivities. One of the founding members of the opposition New Forum group, Sebastian Pflugbeil, exposed the threatening reality in a newspaper interview Oct. 24: "An immense pressure is building up among the population," he said, "and the pressure will drive people to take to the streets if political changes don't occur soon.

"I find it quite irritating," he continued, "that there is an enormous degree of nervousness in the security forces. . . . They are still on a high alert, and soldiers are not allowed to leave the barracks. Rumors are also spread that protesters are planning to tear the [Berlin] Wall down.

"I'd find it much more comfortable," he added, "if there weren't that many army trucks with soldiers, light artillery pieces, and armored personnel carriers patrolling the city [East Berlin] every day."

Pflugbeil's observations were corroborated from other parts of East Germany. In the industrial south, in cities like Magdeburg, Dresden, and Chemnitz, the situation has grown especially tense, because the SED regime, and Egon Krenz himself in his television address, have called on workers to "stop taking to the streets

for protest, but rather, work more and harder for socialism."

Growing numbers of workers have begun to refuse to "work overtime for the party." This near-strike situation has put the transport sector in a critical state, together with the drain of truck drivers to the West, as refugees.

Taking their place in the truck cabins, NVA soldiers have been driving truckloads to East Berlin. They are given civilian dress, but the fact that a militarization of the transport sector is taking place, is difficult to camouflage.

On the regime's side, at an Oct. 25 press conference, Lt. Gen. Friedhelm Rausch, the police chief of East Berlin, declared that peaceful protest marches like the one of 12,000 the day before, were "under the control of militant elements . . . aimed against the state, its organs, and the security forces," and warned that protesters were out for confrontation and even planned to march towards the Brandenburg Gate, which directly abuts the Wall.

"Such things we cannot tolerate," warned the police chief. "If it happens again, we'll have no other option than restore law and order by the means available to us. . . . The street is not the place for dialogue."

Is it the place for police-state intervention, then? On Krenz's directives, Rausch ordered a bloody crackdown on protesters on Oct. 6-7. Several hundred were detained and deported, told to undress—women most of all—and were made to stand hands-up against a wall for hours, while they were repeatedly beaten with police clubs.

The scene—as the victims, among them also a few Western journalists, reported after their release—was reminiscent of film footage they saw before on television of the Chilean military coup in 1973, and of Beijing this past June.