

Germany's future lies in freedom, not in reformed communism

by Rainer Apel

The reshuffle of the East German communist party leadership and the government on Nov. 7-8 spared the one person whose resignation from power mass protest rallies of several million people in many East German cities had called for in the first place: Egon Krenz stayed in the key power positions, did not step down, and even played the role of key arbiter behind the sweeping purge.

In his untouched triple function as secretary general of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) and chairman of both the state and the defense council, Krenz dismissed and appointed the new Politburo, having it voted in by the special SED Central Committee plenum in a matter of only two hours. This reshuffle, advertised as a "step toward reform," in reality strengthened the power position of Krenz at the top of the regime. He never left any doubt about the fact that he does not intend to abolish the leading role of the SED, nor give way to any other regime than communism. "I am a communist, first of all," he declared in Moscow on Nov. 1.

And in his address on East German television Nov. 3, Krenz said the "reforms," which were still to be defined, should proceed in strict concordance with the existing socialist system and not interfere with the needs of the military: "Our neighbors and allies in the Warsaw Treaty Organization are looking to, and count on us." Krenz didn't forget to stress, either, that "no defamation of officials in responsible functions will be tolerated." In other words: Criticize who never and whatever you want, just leave me and my policy alone.

For the people of East Germany, who are revolting against the regime and its 44-year reign, the way the shakeup proceeded was just another signal that with Krenz in power, none of the fundamentals of the SED's rule, its control of the state, the army, the economy, and the education system, will change.

Trust has run out

"This man just doesn't have the trust of the people," explained Sebastian Pflugbeil, an initiator of the New Forum opposition group in East Berlin, on Nov. 5, referring to the

broad expression of popular disgust at the protest rally of almost 1 million in East Berlin the day before.

The rally on Alexanderplatz Square, which featured prominent SED officials alongside opposition spokesmen, will go down in history as the biggest-ever public manifestation of anti-communist sentiments in the eastern part of Germany since it was made the Soviet Zone of Military Occupation in 1945.

Speakers for the opposition got the most tumultuous applause when calling for free elections, freedom of the press, of speech and political association, the abolition of political prosecution laws, and for economic-political reforms. Calls were issued also to dismiss the government, the Politburo, and to abolish the clause in the constitution of the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) that affirms the eternal leading role of the SED in the politics of the country.

Prominent SED party leaders taking part in the rally, in an effort to coopt the ferment by making it look like a cross-party event, met quite a different response: They were booed at, as the rage accumulated over more than 40 years against the regime spilled into the open.

Günter Schabowski, for example, Politburo member and chairman of the prestigious SED section of East Berlin, was met by continuous hissing, whistles, and cat-calls when he spoke on "the reform that came too late but has become irreversible now," but defended the party's leading role in that very same reform process.

Lt. Gen. Markus Wolf, the longtime head of the notorious foreign intelligence service, the Stasi, was met by the same expression of popular disgust, when he confessed in his speech that he was proud of having served the Stasi at its top for more than 30 years, defending his former colleagues at the Stasi against being made "scapegoats for everything." When he voiced the opinion that "reform and renewal are nothing new, hundreds of thousands of communists have fought for them before," the crowd booed.

But the rage of the crowd targeted not only the SED, but communism as such, including the Soviet Union as the main supporter of the regime. No "Gorbymania" could be observed on Alexanderplatz Square. Günter Schabowski

got a full dose of public fury, for example, when he began his speech by stating: "There's reason for optimism, because we have now a very close shoulder-to-shoulder relation between Krenz und Gorbachov." "Cut it out!" the crowd yelled. "Get lost!" Schabowski said he wanted to "use an old party slogan: Forward to ever new victories, together with our Soviet friends." Also this provoked a flood of jeers and whistles, forcing Schabowski to interrupt his speech for a minute.

"Even if Krenz granted free and fair elections, the people wouldn't believe him," opposition member Pflugbeil declared. "He is seen as a representative of the very same old regime that the people don't want to stay around any longer. Whatever Krenz does, it will be too little, and too late."

Mistrust of Krenz is heightened by the fact that he is not taking any part in the "dialogue with the people" which he promised, that he chooses to speak only over television and radio, and that he is staying holed-up in his closely guarded compound outside of East Berlin.

The reaction to the television address on Nov. 3 which Krenz used to announce "changes," speaks for itself: 50,000 refugees left for the West in the following five days. One refugee interviewed on West German television Nov. 5, voiced what both the refugees and those who are still staying in the G.D.R. think: "Krenz? Either he goes, or the whole people will flee the country." The crisis of confidence among the East Germans is complete: No Krenz, no Gorbachov either, will turn things around.

The crisis of confidence in the regime has created a policy vacuum in the country, with the SED leadership and the various opposition groups in a race against time, to devise solutions to the country's problems. Unlike Poland, where Solidarnosc developed over years into an institution that could govern the country, the East German opposition is not prepared for that task. Spokesmen for the New Forum said in radio interviews on Nov. 8 that they find themselves faced with developments proceeding at a much faster pace than anyone could have anticipated. The opposition groups do not have the qualified people required to define the needed reforms and fill the vacuum of competence left by the communists. The leaders of the New Forum, for example, are largely artists and intellectuals, with little contact to labor and little practical administrative experience.

Kohl on the reunification of Germany

This basic point was also addressed in the "State of the German Nation" speech which Chancellor Helmut Kohl gave to the West German parliament in Bonn on Nov. 8. The address reflected the strong anti-communist ferment injected into German and international politics by the refugees, and the mass protest of millions of East Germans, most of all the rally of 1 million in East Berlin on Nov. 4.

"The events of the last few days in East Germany," said Kohl, "the escape of tens of thousands of predominantly

young people from the G.D.R. to the free part of Germany, have shown to the eyes of the world that the division of our country is unnatural, that walls and barbed wire cannot endure. . . . We have less reason than ever to be resigned to the long-term division of Germany into two states.

"Free self-determination for all Germans was, is, and will be the cornerstone of our Germany policy. . . . Our compatriots who are taking to the streets day by day to call for freedom and democracy, they are proof of a longing for peace that has not ceased even after 40 years of living in a dictatorship.

"Even if we are only at the beginning of a broader development and nobody can predict or underestimate the risks of a failure and the dangers stemming from that, still there is a live perspective for a profound change in all of Europe, for an all-European order of peace, for a Europe based on freedom and self-determination."

Thanking U.S. President George Bush and especially French President Francois Mitterrand for their recent statements backing a reunification of Germany, Kohl said, "Without a deep attachment to the community of values of free peoples, we could not have gained the confidence of our Western partners, who have always supported us in our efforts to create a German policy.

"The aim of our policy," Kohl went on to say, "must be to contribute to a development in East Germany which matches the wishes of the people there; in other words, to help them achieve freedom and self-determination.

"For us in the Federal Republic, it is an obvious national duty to demand from our neighbors and from our partners in the world the right of all Germans to decide for themselves. No one in the East or the West can ignore a vote of all the Germans in favor of the unity of their country."

As for the current situation in East Germany, Kohl said: "The political leadership there is not freely elected, and that is why our compatriots cannot identify with that state; the SED must agree to renounce its monopoly on power, allow independent parties and pledge to hold free elections.

"The people in the G.D.R. will not be satisfied with a simple reshuffling of the leadership and the resignation of some leaders. . . . The new secretary general of the SED will have to allow himself to be measured by whether he really opens the way to thoroughgoing reforms in the state, society, and economy.

"Cosmetic adjustments won't suffice. We don't want to stabilize a state of affairs that has turned unbearable. But we are committed to comprehensive assistance, on the condition that an in-depth reform of the political and economic system in the G.D.R. are defined in unmistakable terms."

Under conditions of such thoroughgoing reforms, Kohl said, his government is "committed to a new dimension of economic assistance" to the G.D.R, to "help improve the quality of life of our German compatriots, and achieve freedom for them."