

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

A genuine labor strike movement

A personal encounter with the core of the ongoing East German revolution against communism and socialism.

A fact-finding mission by an *EIR* team that toured Leipzig and several cities in Thuringia in mid-January, produced a deeper insight into the strike momentum that is building in East Germany. Crossing the border at Herleshausen and traveling on to Leipzig, we met a phenomenon that indicated how massively the SED regime lost political control of the factories. Again and again, we saw signs and banners posted at factory gates that denounced the SED, called for its replacement in the government in free elections, and attacked SED plans to rebuild the Stasi police-state apparatus under a new name.

We spotted many flags showing the German colors (black, red, and gold), without the SED hammer and sickle, hoisted at factory smokestacks, underlining the broad sentiment for German reunification.

Later, in Erfurt, Weimar, Jena, and other cities along the route to Leipzig, we learned more of the situation inside the factories and the general strike mood in individual discussions with workers. The erosion of its political control apparatus in the factories confronts the SED regime with a dual-power situation.

A skilled worker at the Polishing Machine plant in Leipzig reported that of 1,500 workers at that plant, only 300 of about 1,200 former SED party members are left. Most other plants report a ratio of 50-80% of workers having quit their SED party membership. This is also true with most of the military-related plants of the optics, electronics, micro-electronics, and metal-processing sectors. Even the

police, border troops, at least the lower ranks of the army, postal services, and rail sector are reporting a massive drain of SED members.

This overwhelming opposition to and desertion from the communist SED, is the fertile ground on which the strike movement is growing. The strikes are strictly non-violent, very disciplined, and well-organized. They are led by workers who in many cases were (involuntary) members of the SED and its factory groups until some weeks ago, who know the inside of the party power apparatus and have a good profile of whom to trust and to call on for mobilization.

The strikes are not launched by the mostly academic leaders of the main opposition groups, but a genuine labor phenomenon; the core of the strike movement consists of workers that are members, associated with, or consider themselves strong supporters of a specific opposition group on a regional or local level. The strikes are often pushed against the will of the hesitant leading spokesmen of the opposition, putting them on the line.

The communication infrastructure of the labor strike movement is well-developed, either on a plant-to-plant level within the same industrial combine, or between particular plants that belong to different combines locally, or even on a workbench-to-workbench level within one plant.

In some cases, as in the Heating Equipment Plant in Erfurt, the movement has developed such muscle that their plant can decouple from its combine and try to stand on its own feet, in cooperation with West German

suppliers over the border.

A thumbnail sketch of the density and discipline of the strikes in several cities that involved an estimated 3-4 million in public protest activities on Jan. 15 alone:

- Jena: 20,000 workers of the Zeiss Optics complex walk out into the center-city district in the morning, joined in by workers of other sectors, store clerks, policemen, and university students. Within half an hour, around 40,000 gather for a powerful protest march and rally lasting two hours.

- Weimar: Railway workers, all ambulance drivers and hospital personnel, policemen, and postal workers go on a warning strike; 20,000 workers are joined by students and store sales personnel, adding up to 40,000 protesters. The warning strike lasts 90 minutes. (This is continued with smaller strikes on Tuesday, Jan. 16, with a concluding rally involving 30,000 people).

- Erfurt: Virtually all 20,000 workers of the huge railway complex in this key transportation nexus stop work, joined by workers from the local micro-electronics plant. Within a very short time, up to 60,000 people are on a warning strike against the regime. Two hours later, everybody is back at work. More warning strikes through Jan. 16-17 mount into another big protest rally of at least 40,000 on Thursday, Jan. 18.

That same day, members of the police meet in Potsdam, near Berlin, to set up the first-ever independent police union; craft unions in Gera announce a tax boycott against the regime, and it is announced that numerous initiative groups in the country are debating setting up a free labor union federation, modeled on the Polish Solidarnosc. This is a genuine labor revolution, against the communists and socialists.