

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

East Germany enters a new era

A seven-party, non-communist coalition government is taking office in East Berlin.

On April 12, the East German Parliament voted in the first head of a non-communist government in 45 years. Prime Minister Lothar de Maiziere, the party chairman of the Christian Democrats, which came out strongest in the March 18 elections with 48% of the vote, leads a grand coalition that controls 301 out of 400 seats in the parliament.

The new government consists of the three parties (CDU, DSU, DA) of the conservative Alliance for Germany, the three parties of the Liberal Alliance (LDP, FDP, DFP), and the Social Democrats (SPD), the second-largest party which garnered 21% of the vote on March 18. The seven parties share in a cabinet of 23 ministries, of which the Alliance has 13, the SPD 7, the Liberals 3.

It took almost four weeks of hard bargaining after the March 18 elections before the coalition deal was sealed on April 11. Some issues in dispute between the CDU and the SPD have been set aside as "unresolved" in order to form the government without further delay. Prime Minister de Maiziere, for example, favors membership in the Atlantic Alliance, but his foreign minister, transition SPD chairman Markus Meckel (chairman Ibrahim Boehme resigned shortly after the elections) is opposed—he emphasizes Soviet security concerns.

The CDU also wants to dismantle the big, but inefficient state-run industrial and farm cooperatives, to create a potential for a strong sector of productive small- and mid-size firms. The SPD wants to keep the cooperatives and offer workers company shares.

This momentary freeze of disputes leaves room for potential conflicts which may break out when the respective sister parties of the CDU and SPD in West Germany enter the hot phase of the election campaign for "their" parliament on Dec. 7.

De Maiziere's CDU has, among others, the ministries of economics, transportation, agriculture, health, family, education; the SPD controls the ministries of foreign relations, labor, technology; the Liberals have the ministries of construction and justice; the DSU holds those of the interior and Third World affairs, and the DA has the defense ministry.

The new government has three domestic priorities: 1) building post-communist structures of a democratic government, reorganizing the entire administrative apparatus; 2) launching a program for rapid economic recovery; and 3) dismantling the remains of the old regime, and opening trials against former top communist functionaries, the state security police, and the judicial system.

At the same time, the best of the revolutionary spirit that helped to overthrow the SED party regime in October-November 1989 has to be preserved for the future. This spirit is something that the West does not yet have; it is a genuine property of the Germans in the East that they share with the East Europeans and the Chinese democracy movement. The West Germans—and this is true for the government, industry, and citizenry—did not encourage the revolution in the East, but accommodated to it.

The degenerative aspects of Western liberalism—like pornography and

drug abuse—are strongly opposed in the East, and there is a good potential, if the East Germans can predominate in their views, for moral repair of the society in the West.

This also holds for economic policy. The East Germans want decent homes like their brothers and sisters in the West, and they want the investments of West German construction firms, but they don't want the real-estate speculation that is driving land prices sky-high in West German cities.

A sensitive issue will be how the two German governments shall deal with the Soviet Union, which still has 380,000 soldiers occupying East German territory. The stationing of the troops demonstrates the Soviet interest in full access to East Germany's economic potential, especially in the machinery and spare parts sectors.

This delicate issue was discussed in a Bonn meeting April 9 between Stepan Sitaryan, the Soviet vice premier, and Helmut Haussmann, the West German minister of economics. Sitaryan reiterated the Soviet view that Bonn has to give guarantees to Moscow that deliveries of machinery and spare parts from East Germany to the Soviet Union are maintained at the level defined by existing contracts. These contracts were signed, however, by East Germany's previous communist regimes, and it remains to be seen how many of these can be kept in the future.

The next session of the joint West German-Soviet commission on economic cooperation will take place in Moscow on May 21. But since the next summit between Bush and Gorbachov takes place only days later, it is not certain whether these talks will be productive. Getting away with its sabre-rattling against Lithuania, Moscow may be tempted to intensify the pressure on the Germans.