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## Interview: Karl-Heinz Rudolf

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# East Germany's revolution, as seen by a Leipzig industrialist

*October is the first anniversary of German unity and the second of the peaceful revolution in East Germany. Karl-Heinz Rudolf, an industrial management expert from Leipzig who twice spent some years in prison for political reasons, reviews the East German revolution. This is the first in a series on developments in eastern Germany.*

**EIR:** How did the opposition in East Germany come into existence?

**Rudolf:** In greater Germany after the Second World War, there was positive economic development. It was achieved by means of a forced development strategy that everyone had to join to stay at work or in business. The "social" aspect of the market economy in the West was developed by ever newer laws and regulations in the social area, the cost of which was borne by the mass of the population.

In [Soviet-controlled] lesser Germany, there was no positive development in favor of the broader population. But as long as the citizen had work and a relatively secure future, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) was able to continue with its twisted truth. Under the pretext of social goals, it pursued the interests of the party. The common interest took priority over individual interests, and the common interest was determined by the party.

Under the SED regime, on all levels, rule was exercised by the party and the major organizations: the Free German Trade Union Organization, the Society for German-Soviet Friendship, the Free German Youth, the German Gymnastic and Sport Union, the German Women's Union, the Cultural Union, the Chamber of Technology, and so forth. There was always an SED majority on all committees and, in addition, the functionaries of the organizations held their offices only because of their membership in the SED. Since the SED early recognized that they were not well received in rural areas, the National Democratic Party of Germany and the Democratic Farmers' Party were formed with the express sanction of the SED and the victors from the East. Apparently, all opposition was brought into line, and the situation was ominously reminiscent of the beginning of the year 1933.

### The opposition remained alive

But the opposition was alive. It first became visible in the popular uprising of June 17, 1953, which was crushed

with armed force. Thousands fell victim to the SED's purges. The SED installed a civil-war army in the "Battle Groups of the Working Class." Many could not stand the pressure, and left everything they owned and illegally fled into an uncertain future. The party reacted, literally locking up the entire population in 1961.

The phase of double- or triple-dealing also began in 1961 with the construction of the Wall. Everyone had a special phraseology: one for private use among friends and relations and one for official use. During this time, an extra-parliamentary movement also began, but it was, admittedly, still modest.

All the SED's actions were aimed at giving citizens the feeling that everything was being done for them. The formation of the agricultural production societies, the partial nationalization of private industrial firms, and the formation of production societies for handicrafts led in these years to a supposed improvement. This served as the pretext for the SED to neutralize anyone who even mildly warned against dangers, to discriminate against them professionally, isolate them socially, and persecute them legally.

But the regime went too far. The economic decline began at the start of the 1970s. With the full nationalization of the previously half-nationalized firms, the domination of the party over the economy was total. Plant managers became well-paid lackeys. The idiotic directives of party central were followed, because all key positions down to foreman were occupied by party members.

Production became more and more faulty. Material bottlenecks appeared, and costs increased. The planned commodity supply, which never satisfied real needs, was no longer attainable.

First, individuals openly turned against this economic policy—often insofar as they communicated their prognoses and proposals in writing to the party. Publication in the press or a radio broadcast was not possible because of censorship. But at this time, complete plans were developed for restructuring the economy, taxes, reasonable costs for rent, electricity, gas, public transportation, and even food—a sacred cow of the state ranking even higher than Lenin. Relations within Comecon were as much a topic as trade and emigration to the West. Only the official doctrine of socialism remained untouched, since that would have been life-endangering.

Groups were cautiously formed among individuals from all layers of the population. The party reacted, and had discussions with these people, but a breakthrough was not attainable since the political system did not lend itself to radical change.

### **Consumption declines**

In the mid-1970s, the SED introduced a two-tiered price system: The old conditions remained for the population, while the economy as a whole had to pay considerably higher prices. Companies experienced more losses, and were subsidized at the expense of the public, as usual. Salvation was then promised by the “production step program,” according to which normal goods, goods of an improved quality and a somewhat higher price, and goods of the highest quality at still higher prices for luxury sale, were also to be produced. Additionally, the wise, omniscient ones at the top issued production quotas for every type of ware. The quotas were not, however, adhered to. What was to be done if not enough material was available for a business? Instead of normal goods, simply more of the luxury goods were produced, and those were out of reach for most citizens. Instead of filling consumption gaps, the gaps were enlarged.

Since 1972, growth stopped. The material bottlenecks became continually worse, and led to idle times of up to 50%. But for private use, the companies functioned; there was material and capacity. In the 1970s and 1980s, each sought to fulfill his own needs in this way. The power apparatus stood by helplessly, since even the bosses were vigorously joining in.

The visits by former West German chancellors Willy Brandt to Erfurt and Helmut Schmidt to Güstrow in the 1970s awakened the hope of an opening of the prison walls, but it was not fulfilled. Visits from relatives from the West to the East were desirable to the regime only as a one-sided tourist stream that yielded hard currency. But the citizens in East Germany were not allowed in the West. And when travel was approved, the other members of the family had to be left behind as hostages. Otherwise, only pensioners and people from the party or important to the economy were allowed to travel in the West.

### **Social control**

Reprisals increased: In the schools, teachers were directed to organize grading in such a way in the eighth- and ninth-grade classes that only children of parents who were true to the party line were allowed to graduate and go on to further studies.

“Useful” citizens who were married to an unsuitable partner were supposed to get divorces. If anyone refused, professional or legal impediments were put in his or her way, and if that didn’t do the trick, the authorities were not afraid to use extortion and physical violence.

“Family reunion” existed only on paper; if anyone ap-

plied for it, he lost his job. Later, that would happen even to applicants for foreign travel.

In a quest for hard currency, the regime discovered the human commodity. On humanitarian grounds, West Germany paid money to the eastern regime, initially only for exit permits for the politically persecuted or political prisoners. Then, who was surprised when prosecutors increased their hunt for dissenters? After all, there was the prospect of good money. Applications for family reunions were permissible, and yet simultaneously subversive—since there was money from the West only for the politically persecuted. With physical terror, delayed processing, or conviction of those charged, the goal was reached. Either family members from the West intervened for release or the regime offered these individuals as a commodity to the West. No one can maintain that the population knew nothing of this traffic in human beings. Since 1973, it was known that even the Church took part, but there was silence abroad.

With these measures, a bankrupt system was kept alive. The economic collapse would have come earlier, and much suffering and misery would have been avoided, if West Germany hadn’t consciously given the SED leadership a helping hand. Each payment was a blow against those who were struggling for changed conditions.

At this time, the mood of the population turned. The people’s expectations for the Germany Treaty were not fulfilled. The door of Concentration Camp East had opened only for pensioners who still had money. They were allowed to travel, and it was hoped they wouldn’t return. The others were dependent on the mercy of the authorities. And whoever was considered a critic was not allowed to travel at all. That was too dangerous, because they could correctly analyze and interpret things. The number of such people grew from month to month.

Finally, a glimmer of hope appeared with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. The blockheads in East Germany feared that he would really change something, and made life difficult for him to save their own positions. The people thought otherwise, which led to the witchhunt being intensified against the opposition. Cautiously, the Church opened up, on the grassroots level, at least; the Church leadership held back where possible. They took in the motley mass of those who wanted a change. But the government security organs were still stronger, and new ways of evasion had to be found continually.

The economic situation became more and more difficult. Already, planned economic reforms had been terminated; they did not alleviate the situation. Mere personal motives were in the foreground; in short, everyone wanted to be free to move about. A new wave of refugees threatened. Many who had official duties in the West didn’t return, and family members staying behind filed for travel permits. This was still a minority until 1989, and then the wave of refugees through Hungary and Czechoslovakia unified the people, temporarily at least. And with that the revolution began.