

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Bush shows disinterest in Germany

*U.S. support, rather than glamorous speeches, is what Germany needs to handle the East-West crisis.*

**D**uring the past few weeks, West German media presented a seemingly relaxed U.S. President—sailing, fishing, and golfing at his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine. West Germans concerned with the tense situation in Eastern Europe and in East Germany tended to put it sarcastically: “Bush is so busy, he can’t have any time left to deal with the German problems.”

It’s not only Bush’s being “busy”; he doesn’t grasp at all how critical the situation in Europe is right now.

Remarks Bush made on the German question in a speech in Montana on Sept. 18, made this clear. Asked about the prospects for a reunification of East and West Germany, he said, “I would think it’s a matter for the Germans to decide. But put it this way: If that was worked out between the two Germanies, I do not think we should view that as bad for Western interest.”

On May 7, when critics charged the ruling East German party, the SED, with having rigged its municipal elections, Bush had nothing to say. And at the peak of the East German refugee crisis (before Hungary opened its borders to Austria to let the refugees out) in mid-August, Bush’s State Department gave directives to the U.S. embassy in East Berlin to close its doors to the public, in order not to become a haven for East Germans. The U.S. said that it was an “affair to be settled among the two Germanies.”

It was not. Moscow certainly isn’t permitting the Germans—east and west—to settle their own affairs. So-

viet Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, one of Gorbachov’s closest advisers, emphasized this in an address before the Finnish parliament on Sept. 14. Akhromeyev insisted that Germany still be considered enemy number one, as laid down in Moscow’s 1947 “military assistance treaty” with East Germany. “The strategic situation has not changed, since that treaty was signed,” he said.

Unlike “neutral” Finland, East Germany is the Warsaw Pact’s direct frontline state against the West. The “Elbe river line” is essential in Moscow’s theater warfare planning for Central Europe. That is why the Red Army has 400,000 soldiers stationed there, and that is why East Germany is a preferential bridgehead of black propaganda against West Germany.

Soviet Politburo member Yegor Ligachov, visiting East Berlin Sept. 12-16, alluded to this strategic function of East Germany, when he reassured the SED party of Moscow’s “full observance of the existing [1955] friendship and military assistance treaty.” So there’s no room for speculation about “deep rifts” between Moscow and East Berlin, nor for speculation that the East Germans could settle anything with the West Germans directly, without paying attention to Moscow’s thoughts. In fact, the SED has the Kremlin’s full go-ahead not only for the barrage of black propaganda it is currently launching against the West Germans; it also has the go-ahead for a ruthless crackdown on opposition elements, especially those who are getting organized now in the Neues Forum (New Forum), a

new umbrella organization for a whole set of religious and political groups.

Moscow considers stability at its western front line an utmost priority, at a time when the other Warsaw Pact members and nationalities inside the Soviet Union are turning more and more rebellious. Gorbachov will personally attend the Oct. 7 official celebrations of 40 years of existence of the SED, and he had Ligachov announce that he is coming, too.

But the SED state is infected with the virus of potential revolt.

A new study by Gorbachov’s German policy task force, headed by former ambassador to Bonn Valentin Falin, expects “uncontrollable mass riots by spring 1990” in East Germany, and recommends a phased counter-move by the SED party state security apparatus, ranging from low-intensity operations to full-scale military intervention—which would invoke the “military assistance” clause Ligachov was speaking of. This option is being prepared, propaganda-wise, in Moscow as well as in East Berlin.

The SED has already declared the Bonn government the main scapegoat for East Germany’s internal problems. Ligachov, appearing on East German television Sept. 15, denounced “intensified, new provocative actions launched by the Federal Republic of Germany.”

The Soviet Communist Party daily *Pravda* of Sept. 16 went even further, characterizing Bonn’s conduct in the refugee crisis as a “threat to the stability of relations between the two German states, to the coherence of the community of socialist states, and moreover, a threat to all states on the continent of Europe.”

So the U.S. President, or at least some of his advisers, had better wake up, and at least insist on explanations from Moscow.