

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Peak of E. German crisis lies ahead

The SED regime, backed by Moscow, won't give in to the people's call for change.

Media coverage on East Germany after the surprise opening of the borders to the West may lead some to conclude that the worst is over, now that the mid-October purges in the communist SED party leadership and the naming of a new government under "reformer" Hans Modrow mark the beginning of irreversible reforms.

The opposition in East Germany doesn't think so. The SED regime, as much in control of the new government as of the old one, has so far only offered vague promises, has made no substantial concessions of power, and has neither legalized any opposition group nor set a timetable for reforms or early elections before April 1991.

The opposition doesn't trust the truce between the regime and the people, and trust is lowest with Egon Krenz, the man at the top of the party, the state, and defense councils. A nasty joke is going the rounds in East Germany these days: Why is Krenz so fat? Because he puts on another suit of sheep's clothing every day.

The better-informed elements of the opposition are not fooled by the daily assurances of Krenz and other SED party leaders that their "commitment to reforms is serious." What really counts is the fact that the core of the SED regime's police state apparatus, the Stasi, is still intact and has only taken cover. The full exposure of the Stasi's 20,000 official members and a network of an estimated another 200,000 "unofficial" collaborators and informants in the factories and the transport sector, the media, the education sector, and the district commit-

tees of the housing areas, is a high-priority opposition demand.

The slogans "Put an end to Stasism" and "Don't replace Stalinism with Stasism," have become prominent in the opposition's political organizing. The abolition of the entire Stasi network is crucial, because there are well-founded fears that the economic emergency expected this coming winter will be taken as a pretext by the SED to impose quasi-martial law, before the opposition parties are officially recognized and established.

Unless the regime's repression apparatus is dismantled, the SED party's real power is not touched. The SED retains the key portfolios in the Modrow government—defense, police, state security, economic planning, and finance—the logistical basis for a winter emergency regime.

Remarks on Nov. 18 by Jürgen Kuczynski (86), the gray eminence of communist economic policy in East Germany, that the country will face a rough winter and may have to consider rationing of basic consumer goods, are a signal in the direction of emergency regime. Kuczynski said the supply of food and basic consumer goods has reached such a critical state, that food stamps for meat, milk, vegetables, eventually even bread, will have to be distributed. Without rationing, he said, the supply of basic consumer goods could not be guaranteed through the winter.

Apparently under the impact of new mass protest rallies in Leipzig, the center of the movement, the SED regime has offered an all-party roundtable on the crisis. This has been met

with deep mistrust by the opposition groups, because they are not legalized yet and have no say or direct influence on political decisions at the top.

The country is not yet on the verge of reforms, but on the verge of a deeper crisis. It has entered a highly complicated moment: The regime is shaken, the country has entered a kind of dual-power situation, but the opposition has not been able to win real power, and is still working on a program. The regime feels strong enough to play for time and crush opponents later, so long as the Soviets are backing them; meanwhile, the West is hindering West Germans from intensifying contacts to the opposition in East Germany, on grounds this "would be destabilizing."

Such policies will likely prove a gross miscalculation. The crisis can no longer be contained. Bush and Gorbachov may have the muscle to talk the Bonn Chancellor Helmut Kohl into restraint; but they have problems talking the mass ferment in East Germany into political abstention, not least because the spark of protest has already spilled over into neighboring Czechoslovakia. The level of communication between the two mass movements became clear when a Czech student spoke at the rally of 200,000 East Germans Nov. 20 in Leipzig, conveying a statement of support from Prague. He received big applause. One East German speaker called for "solidarity with the Czech freedom fighters," and then, a moment of silence was held for the victims the struggle for freedom has cost in Prague and other Czech cities in the past 21 years.

It is right there, through Leipzig and Prague, that the front line against the superpower deals over Europe is running now. An even more profound crisis, even bigger confrontation, lies ahead.