

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The new Berlin crisis

Gorbachov's brinkmanship course uses crisis spot Berlin, again—timed with the 25th anniversary of the Wall.

The ever-latent world crisis spot Berlin has been reactivated by the Soviets. Violent confrontations with the Western Allied Powers, border incidents, air-space disturbances, and a massive increase of subversive activities are the road-marks on this confrontation course. Especially the past six weeks in Berlin have been characterized by East German violations—coordinated with Moscow—of the existing Allied Power status of the city.

At the end of May, East Germany introduced passport controls for all diplomatic personnel crossing the sector borders between the western and eastern part of the city. This was in flagrant violation of the Allied status, as laid down in the 1971 agreements between Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The agreement confirmed the exclusive Allied Powers in the city, including the privilege of control. Tolerating passport controls at the sector borders, however, meant to grant the East Germans the right of sovereignty over the Allied status.

After two weeks of diplomatic communication between the three Western powers and the Soviets, East Germany reluctantly agreed to rescind the measures. But since the West had not put much pressure on the passport issue, the East saw an incentive to escalate tensions on other issues. Since the end of the "passport crisis," authorities in West Berlin noticed a dramatic increase in asylum-seeking foreigners. Mostly consisting of Iranians, Lebanese, Iraqi Kurds, Ghanaians, and Tamils from Sri Lanka, these

"refugees" had come by Soviet or other East bloc airlines to Schönefeld Airport, the official airport for East Berlin.

The airport, a few hundred meters southeast of Berlin, is operated officially by the East German regime. All air transit to West Berlin is handled through it.

The dramatic rise of "refugee" figures from 50-100 daily to 300 or even 568 on one weekend in July, could not have occurred without East German permission, especially since most of these foreigners have no ID documents. Western sources report that refugee transit from the home countries to Berlin is organized by the state-controlled East bloc airlines.

For West Berlin, this means an ever-rising stream of asylum-seeking persons, as the sector borders between the two parts of the city are open and can only be closed to the advantage of the East German regime, which wants the sector border to become a state-like border, casting in stone the post-war division of Europe.

As East Germany was letting thousands into West Berlin, cynical warnings were issued to the government in Bonn "not to interfere with the status of Berlin"—not to consider measures to stop or control the stream of refugees.

In Bonn, prominent Christian Democrats denounced the East German practice as "destabilizing," and "aggravating German-German relations." Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann even stated that this provocative policy was "a method taken directly from a KGB manual for

subversion." Several Christian Democrats warned East Germany to step back, or face political and economic sanctions, as on the credit lines, for example.

The crisis peaked at the same time that Soviet leader Gorbachov met with Bonn's appeasing Foreign Minister Genscher in Moscow, demanding that Bonn pull out from the Strategic Defense Initiative. Timed with Gorbachov's threats of July 21, the East Germans sent signals to the West that they were not afraid of launching another big crisis over Berlin.

The preliminary high-point of this escalation was the warning in the Aug. 1 issue of *Neues Deutschland*, official daily of the East German regime, that any official counter-measures "against the free transit to West Berlin" would be taken as "a frontal attack against the German-German treaty system." "Is it really necessary to recall the fact," wrote *Neues Deutschland*, "that any interfering with the transit agreements would result in a threat to the West Berlin population in the first place?" All past crises in Berlin, the newspaper added cynically, had "always been to the direct disadvantage of the population in the western part of the city."

The official response of the three Western Allied Powers to this policy of confrontation has been less than weak. The U.S. State Department filed a mere note of protest with the Soviet embassy in Washington, D.C., which will not change anything. The East German regime will take this as an incentive to go ahead with its policy of confrontation. Historical irony has it that on Aug. 13, the East German regime celebrates the 25th anniversary of its monstrous Berlin Wall, which was the fruit of Western appeasement during the big Berlin crisis from 1958 to 1961.