

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Why was Honecker sent to Bonn?

The visit of the East German leader is sparking illusions about the future of Germany.

The German Question, the unresolved problem of the partitioned nation, has been the weak flank of all policy in Germany after the war. It has always been a strong lever for the Kremlin to influence and intimidate the West Germans. Moscow's policy on Germany has two prime objectives: first, to consolidate the Kremlin's grab over East Germany and to have the West Germans accept that; second, to lure the West Germans into the Soviet sphere of power, by creating the illusion that this might help Germany to be reunified.

The first aim of Soviet policy on Germany has been achieved by the visit of East German party boss Erich Honecker to West Germany (Sept. 7-11). He is the first East German leader to be received as a state guest in Bonn, with formal diplomatic protocol, and for the first time, a West German army band played the tune of the East German anthem.

Although in the context of the 1970s "détente," the Bonn government already signed several treaties with the East German regime, its formal recognition was always carefully avoided. With Honecker receiving a formal welcome in Bonn, his regime has been recognized, and thus the Soviet claim on East Germany. The recognition was openly announced by West Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Richard von Weizsäcker, who spoke in their Bonn dinner addresses of "two independent German states."

Said in the presence of Honecker, this statement has a special symbolic

meaning, as he was the one who commanded, on East German Politburo and Soviet directives, the construction of the Berlin Wall on Aug. 13, 1961, as a symbol of the Kremlin's claim on East Germany.

As for the aforementioned second aim of Moscow's policy on Germany, the Honecker visit to Bonn opened the door as well. The Bonn government gave formal recognition to the German Democratic Republic, hoping that by meeting this old demand of Moscow's, the Kremlin leaders could be warmed up for official talks on the reunification of Germany.

Aspects of this were discussed between President von Weizsäcker and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov at the Kremlin on July 7. When Weizsäcker brought up the German Question at that meeting, Gorbachov reminded him that Josef Stalin once offered reunification to the Germans in March 1952, on "very favorable terms," but that the West German chancellor—then Konrad Adenauer—turned the offer down.

Adenauer, a strong proponent of a German (reunified or not) alliance with the West, had good reason to turn Stalin's "offer" down. Stalin wanted a neutralized, largely demilitarized Germany, which was no threat to the Red Army and could be tolerated as a reunified territory, on the condition it stayed away from the West.

The Germany Stalin envisaged in 1952 would have looked very similar to the Germany Gorbachov has in mind for the time after a Geneva "zero option." There would be no U.S. nuclear

missiles and troops on West German territory, and the Germans, as a non-nuclear and non-SDI power, could always be kept hostage of the Red Army's war machine.

A door to this grim future has been opened in Bonn during the Honecker visit. The final statement of his talks with the West German government included the mutual recognition of the "zero option" as desirable for a general process of denuclearization in Europe. It referred to the Jan. 8, 1985, joint statement "respecting a strict interpretation of the 1972 ABM treaty" between U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, as a general point of reference for both German governments.

A significant obstacle to this is West Germany's current involvement in the U.S. SDI effort.

The concluding statement on the Bonn talks between Honecker and Kohl speaks of "joint initiatives" of both Germanies for arms control, and of "high-level consultations on a regular basis." There will also be more exchange of scientific and technological studies between the two Germanies, including aspects of nuclear reactor technology, and more exchange on the cultural and political level.

Furthermore, regular contact will be established between the parliaments of both Germanies, and regular contact between the political parties of either side as well. The groundwork for this was laid by the three years of joint work between the ideology commissions of the East German Socialists and the West German Social Democrats. A few days before Honecker arrived in Bonn, they published a joint statement speaking of alleged "common roots of Communism and Social Democracy in the tradition of European humanism."