

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Phase 2 of the East German revolution

*With deep cracks in the communist regime, a labor strike and free elections are ahead.*

**E**ncouraged by the success of the freedom movement in neighboring Czechoslovakia, the revolutionary transformation of East Germany is taking a breathtaking pace. Growing discontent and signs of open revolt at the lower echelons of the SED (communist) party organization triggered the collective resignation of the party Politburo (including party chairman Egon Krenz) and Central Committee on Dec. 3, followed by the resignation of Krenz as chairman of the state and defense councils three days later.

A decisive catalyst of this decomposition of the leadership was a series of revelations that the SED and its state security apparatus, the much-hated Stasi, were involved in widespread illegal arms and dope trading, money-laundering, and corruption. Specifically, an export-import empire of 100 firms run outside any control by the assistant foreign trade minister, Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, and the Stasi foreign intelligence apparatus, had come under heavy attack in the last days of November. A touch of Iran-gate, of Ollie North's shredding operations, was all of a sudden hitting East Germany.

Ever new revelations about secret SED-Stasi bank accounts in Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Liechtenstein, leaks on intense emergency shredding of files at the Stasi headquarters, were the subject of a heated discussion Dec. 1 in the Volkskammer, East Germany's quasi-parliament. The main motive here was to debate how to respond to popular protest against the new government's harsh austerity, and calls for the reinvest-

ment of these offshore funds into the domestic economy.

Maj. Gen. Wolfgang Schwanitz, the head of the National Agency of State Security (NASI, a new name for the old Stasi), testified that his dismissed predecessor, Erich Mielke, had "emptied all the safes with the crucial files." This testimony was viewed as just another bad excuse and led to a turmoil in the Volkskammer, with enraged calls for a full-scale probe of the Stasi's offices and the foreign trade firms of Schalck-Golodkowski.

The day after, Dec. 2, news broke that Schalck-Golodkowski had fled the country and was hiding abroad, maybe in Switzerland, maybe in Cuba, Israel, or the Soviet Union. This made the growing public outrage boil over. That same afternoon, oppositionals searched Schalck-Golodkowski's IMES company in Rostock, uncovering a huge depot of illegal weapons and explosives, and, as a spokesman of the opposition group New Forum indicated, potential evidence of something else: "If we should find out that there was also involvement in the international dope trade, we wouldn't be surprised at all, the way things look now."

All of a sudden, longtime rumors about the port of Rostock being a key illegal transshipment point for arms and dope deals for the Stasi foreign intelligence machine, proved true. The people's outrage turned right against the SED party leadership, which was meeting in Berlin on Sunday, Dec. 3—ironically the day when Mikhail Gorbachov was to harvest big

political concessions from George Bush at the Malta summit.

A crowd of several thousand was gathering outside the SED party headquarters, calling for the immediate resignation of the entire leadership and punishment of all suspects in the Stasi and in Schalck-Golodkowski's illegal trade empire. Protest rallies also took place outside Stasi offices in Berlin and in the regions.

At noon, Dec. 3, the entire SED party Politburo and Central Committee announced their resignation and the forming of a transition leadership team of 30 leading party members. If this was meant as a concession to calm the waves, it didn't work. Monday, Dec. 4, brought the outburst of open revolt countrywide. The Stasi regional offices in Erfurt and Rostock were stormed by (unarmed) crowds of hundreds of enraged citizens; similar actions carried out in cooperation with the police led to the sealing of Stasi offices in Gera, Suhl, Dresden, and Leipzig.

Dec. 5, the two vice directors of the NASI, Col. Gen. Rudi Mittig and Lt. Gen. Kurt Neiber, resigned. They are charged along with many others by the opposition. As more evidence surfaces from the sealed file rooms, more Stasi personnel are certain to face trial.

Behind these spectacular actions, another severe threat is emerging to the regime: a labor strike movement, comparable to the situation in the Czech factories, is building in East Germany. Before, a strike was discarded by opposition spokesmen as "too premature, too dangerous." On Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, workers at the potassium mines in the Magdeburg region went on warning strikes for several hours. On Dec. 4, a protest rally of tens of thousands in Dresden was informed about the existence of a local strike committee.