

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

East Berlin's race for time

Both the East German regime and the opposition are under time pressure, to escape economic and social chaos.

The leadership of East Germany's communist party, the SED, is trying to contain the public protest movement and to have reforms, if only to stabilize the one-party rule, but seems to be provoking ever greater protest rallies and marches against the regime. Refugees are still leaving the country as well, with almost 4,000 crowded into the West German embassy compound in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

There are no illusions among refugees or those who are still engaged in protest actions, about the new man at the top, Egon Krenz, whose remarks at an international press conference after talks with Gorbachov in Moscow Nov. 1 revealed that he does not conceive of himself as a "reformer."

Krenz's Moscow remarks in response to press questions from the floor read like a Stalinist consolidation program: "Whether or not I am a hard-liner in your eyes, is not the question. I am a Communist, in the first place. . . . I have had, and still have, to fulfill certain tasks in my function at the party top, for which I am held responsible at the party; the aim of my policy is to make socialism stronger on German soil."

Krenz reiterated his "firm conviction that the system of socialism is the better one, a real alternative to capitalism." He said his offer of "dialogue is addressed to all those that share the postulates of our constitution for socialism."

Two days earlier, Krenz addressed a meeting of cadets from Warsaw Pact military academies in East Berlin, emphasizing the impor-

ance of the armed forces. "There are, nowadays, mass protest actions where the slogan 'We are the people' can be heard. I want to emphasize that the 'people' includes everybody—also the members of the army, the border troops, and other armed forces, who are seeing to it that normalcy rules at the dividing line between socialism and capitalism every minute of the day.

"Generations of socialists and communists have worked for this first socialist state on German soil, and we will not give it up, just to hand it over to the forces of capitalism as if it were a bankrupt venture. We will work on, with joint forces, to make socialism more perfect."

Krenz knows he doesn't have much time to get the explosive social situation in East Germany back under control. True, he is in command of a powerful police-state apparatus, but even a Communist with 25 years of training in the hands of the Soviet KGB like him, has to weigh the question whether it is opportune to go the Chinese way and order a bloody crackdown on the opposition, provoking a stream of refugees which brings down the regime by mere desertion to the West, or to grant concessions to the growing anti-regime movement.

Opposition leaders are also under time pressure to get reforms on the way, but their prospects are dim. Upfront in the demands of the movement are calls for substantial modifications in the political and judicial system, the economy, and the education sector.

The proposed political reforms

aim at a redefinition of the key "treason" and "political crime" articles in the penal code of law, a relic from the Stalinist period of the 1930s and 1940s. The ban on unauthorized travel abroad—still considered "illegal border-crossing" and a crime against the state—is to be lifted. The one-party rule of the SED would yield to a degree of pluralism that permits other, non-Communist parties to emerge and grow, and to have free elections to a free parliament. Also new legislation defining the role of the police and state security forces (operating in an absolute gray zone now), and a "freedom of information act" for the citizens, are urgent.

Furthermore, the movement is calling for free labor association outside of the hitherto SED-controlled labor federation. There are calls for the deregulation of the monstrous but inefficient industrial combines, to make way for the growth of productive private sector initiatives like crafts shops and medium-sized ventures. Also the agricultural cooperatives are to be deregulated, for the sake of establishing private sector farming.

The restoration of the ailing railway system, the development of strong sectors producing consumer goods, civilian electronics and machinery, is another demand on the movement's priority list. Over the past 20 years, hardly any new investment has been made into these sectors, while massive investments were pumped into the military sector and cash-oriented export industries producing for dumping offensives on Western markets.

Finally, the demilitarization of the education sector is being called for, aiming at the withdrawal of the pre-military training from the curricula and an end to the mandatory training in special camps for secondary and university students.