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# **Making Revolution : The Rebirth of East German Socialism**

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*The Village Voice, November 21, 1989, pages 20 and 22. Thanks to Joseph Auciello*

A combination of May '68 in France and the Prague Spring, multiplied by two : That's how you can summarize what is occurring at present in the German democratic revolution. It's the beginning of a genuine revolution, a struggle to build a democratic, popular alternative to both communist oppression and free-market despotism.

All that has been achieved — promises of free elections, independent inquiries into repression, freedom to travel, the dismissal of the old Politburo, etc. — was exclusively the result of direct, peaceful, mass action on a gigantic scale. During the three days of November 4, 5, and 6, two million people descended on the streets. At that level, quantity transforms itself into quality. If in the main industrial city, Leipzig, 350,000 out of 500,000 inhabitants take to the streets, it means that the entire working class has gone into action. Petitions urging the removal of the Politburo circulated, not in universities, but in factories. These petitions were backed by the threat of a strike — and the Politburo, soon enough, was gone.

Even more important, perhaps, than the size of the demonstrations was the political sophistication of the demonstrators. In Berlin alone, on November 4, we counted about 7,000 different posters ; with few exceptions, these were manufactured by small groups, not organizations. They expressed an impressive variety of demands, but all partaking of common themes. We didn't see a single one demanding German reunification. We saw only a few urging a market economy. The overwhelming majority were socialist and democratic in content ; they were also sarcastic, insolent, humorous, concrete, heavily antiauthoritarian and antimilitaristic.

The working people of the GDR have been oppressed for 40 years by a bumbling state bureaucracy. East German officials, despising their own people, have behaved like satraps of the Soviet leadership. Long cowed by fear, resigned, and lacking perspectives, the masses have now risen to shed their chains. This is not reform ; this is revolution. "We have the power," shouted thousands in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, Magdeburg, Karl-Marx-Stadt (formerly Chemnitz). "We are the people.

When the Berlin Wall fell on November 10 and freedom of travel was granted, Western commentators debated about who was really behind the victory. But the mayor of West Berlin, who at least knows the score, didn't hesitate a minute to congratulate "the courageous people of the GDR who have achieved a peaceful democratic revolution." You had to be deaf and blind to believe that anybody but the working men and women of the GDR had broken the Berlin Wall.

At least two million East Germans have poured into West Berlin and West Germany since, enjoying their new freedom. Then, however, they return home. In all the mass demos we saw, there was near unanimity behind the slogan : "We don't leave our country.

For many months now a rather repetitive chorus has been heard in various world capitals : "Communism is dead. Socialism is finished. Capitalism has triumphed." But hardly has the spittle dried and here you have socialism and revolution proudly asserting themselves. Where is the death of socialism ? The East German opposition groupings, which will probably win any democratic election, assembled in September in the little town of Böhlen. Their existence was still illegal, but they met anyway and issued a common platform. Here are two significant quotes :

The example of the Hungarian People's Republic shows that in these conditions [the crisis of "actually existing socialism"], uncritical borrowing from the arsenal of market regulators in an attempt to carry out economic reform itself produces crises and social differentiation.

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We firmly reject any "replacement" of political-bureaucratic oppression with capitalist exploitation. The left must unite on the following basis :

- The predominance of social ownership of the means of production as the basis for socialist socialization.
- The development of self-determination of producers in achieving real socialization of total activity.
- Consistent application of the principle of social security and justice for members of society.
- Political democracy, the rule of law, consistent application of all human rights and free development of the individuality of every member of society.
- Restructuring of industrial society to conform to the needs of protecting the environment.

The organizations united behind the Böhlen Platform – the most important of which is the New Forum, an extremely influential group in Leipzig – have reached out to opposition forces within the East German Communist party. The party opposition is often more radically critical of the bureaucracy than is the independent opposition : 25,000 of them gathered on November 8 before the Central Committee building, calling for an extraordinary party congress this year. Where is the demise of socialism ? Where is the triumph of capitalism ? When we say that genuine people's power is being born in the GDR we mean just that : We are at the beginning of a process, not at its end.

For this revolution is far from victory. Two main threats weigh heavily on its further progress : The first is the disorganization of the groups and currents involved, including the Communist party opposition. They must find specific institutions through which to enforce the power they have taken. Otherwise, the bureaucracy's reform wing, centered around Hans Modrow, will propose all manner of compromises and coalitions to keep power in party-bureaucratic hands. The repressive apparatus has withdrawn into the background. It has not been dismantled, and could return if the people weary of demonstrating and become discouraged by a lack of permanent, radical change.

The second, more serious threat is an increase in economic difficulties and tensions. Freedom to travel will bring a powerful desire to consume Western goods. That desire will translate into pressure to make East German marks convertible into the West German variety. Such convertibility cannot be achieved without big assistance from the West German state and private banks, with the IMF lurking behind the boardroom curtain. All these players will be inclined to demand their pound of flesh in exchange for credit : the right to invest in the GDR, to buy land and goods, to "assist" the private sector, or to impose "austerity." Today the great majority of East German workers reject such management from abroad. But if the economic situation deteriorates, if their real incomes decline far enough, demoralization may set in. Joining the EEC, and even uniting with West Germany, may then appear as lesser evils.

So the East German people's revolution can still be defeated. Indeed, defeat is more likely than victory. But an initial victory is in hand, and the chance of extending it is real. It is the greatest chance for democratic socialism – quite distinct from the social democracy that has been integrated into capitalism – since 1918.

On November 4, the platform in front of the huge crowd in Berlin presented 26 speakers in an astounding manifestation of socialist, pluralist democracy. The dais even featured two members of the East German Communist party, though these lonely figures were not well received by the audience. The meeting opened with a tremendous surprise : a moving song sung in honor of Nicaragua, sung by two young singers in the Wolf Biermann style.

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Solidarity with the South African freedom struggle, with the Czech dissidents, with the Chinese students, and with the victims of Stalinism in the USSR was as widespread among the demonstrators as on the platform. That wonderful display of internationalism was not accidental. The defiant masses of the GDR are the first German generation largely liberated from nationalism and militarism, deeply addicted to nonviolence, and hating the traditions of the Reich, of fascism, of Prussia.

The superpowers are afraid of the contamination that could spread from East Germany to the rest of Europe and to their own homelands. But for the time being they cannot impose "order" through violence. There is nothing to fear from a democratic, socialist, antimilitarist and antinationalist East Germany. Quite the contrary ; it carries a hope for all of us.

If the East German people don't want to exchange bureaucratic despotism for the despotism of the market, if they don't want reunification "that is, absorption into a capitalist West Germany" it is their perfect right to make that choice. They have suffered enough from being bossed over. They don't want anybody's tutelage, including that of the combined superpowers. They want to be their own masters, to determine their own fate. [didim escort](#), [marmaris escort](#), [didim escort bayan](#), [marmaris escort bayan](#), [didim escort bayanlar](#), [marmaris escort bayanlar](#)