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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION IN EAST GERMANY

From Mass Exodus and Mass Protests to the Fall of the Wall and German Unification

As late as January 1989, the general secretary of East Germany's communist Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED), Erich Honecker, stated: "The Wall will remain as long as the conditions that led to its building have not changed." It would "still exist in fifty years and even in a hundred."[1] Even Zbigniew Brzeziński, one of the few who predicted the fall of the Soviet empire, was also still convinced that, of all the countries in the Soviet bloc, the situation in the German Democratic Republic and Bulgaria was not critical.[2] The GDR, he predicted, would remain a "communist Prussia" for some time to come, especially if "West Germany continued to give the East German economy such generous" support.[3]

It seems that both Honecker and Brzeziński were incapable of imagining not only how radically, and how quickly, East Germany's foreign affairs and living conditions would change, but also, as a result, how radically its internal political situation would be transformed. The same was inconceivable for the CPSU general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, US president George H.W. Bush and the West German federal chancellor Helmut Kohl, not to mention British prime minister Margaret Thatcher or French president François Mitterrand. Only months before

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[1] "Die Mauer wird [...] solange bleiben, wie die Bedingungen nicht geändert werden, die zu ihrer Errichtung geführt haben." [Sie werde] "in 50 und auch in 100 Jahren noch bestehen bleiben." Erich Honecker in *Neues Deutschland*, 20 January 1989. This statement of Honecker was an indirect dismissal of a remark made by Mikhail Gorbachev, who had been addressed by West German president Richard von Weizsäcker in Moscow on 7 July 1987 with regard to the unity of the German nation. Gorbachev responded by stressing that the double nation was the reality, but also added that history would decide what will be in a hundred years. This albeit vague acceptance of the structure of the German Question was later interpreted by the East German leadership as the beginning of the Soviet "betrayal of the GDR." Cf. Michail Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), 701, as well as Richard von Weizsäcker, *Vier Zeiten. Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1997), 346.—The following article is based on: Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls*, 12th ed. (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009); idem, *Der Fall der Mauer. Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates*, 2nd ed. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999).

[2] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Das gescheiterte Experiment. Der Untergang des kommunistischen Systems* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 1989), 265.

[3] Ibid., 283.

its demise, the GDR was considered an island of stability by nearly all domestic and international observers, both political and in the scholarly community.[4]

Twenty years after the fall of the GDR and the reunification of the two German states, the years 1989–90 have become one of the best-researched periods in modern German history.[5] This is primarily due to the opening of East German archives: The records of the SED, of the GDR Council of Ministers, as well as the records of the East German secret police have been freely accessible since the early 1990s, as has a great deal of material from the East German civil rights and opposition movements.[6] On the West German side, government files are usually subject to a thirty-year restricted access period before declassification, although critical documents have already been released in a special volume entitled *Deutsche Einheit*.[7] In addition, the authors of a four-volume history of German unity, published in 1998, were granted privileged access to files.[8] Russian,

[4] "Indeed, the 300 to 400 West German sociologists, political scientists, economists and educators who were spread all over the (old) Federal Republic working at 56 institutions did not foresee the revolutionary events of 1989. The specialists did not even notice signs of increasing discontent and unrest, nor did they take small signs of change seriously, or consider them worthy of scholarly analysis." Carola Becker, "Kläglich versagt," *Die Zeit* 22, 24 May 1991. Since 1990, the scholarly community hasn't given much thought to considering the reasons for the miscalculation of "hundreds of paid observers" from various disciplines.

[5] On the current state of research, see: Klaus-Dietmar Henke, ed., *Revolution und Vereinigung 1989/90* (Munich: DTV, 2009); Andreas Rödder, *Deutschland, einig Vaterland. Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Beck, 2009); Mary E. Sarotte, *1989. The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 2009); Ehrhart Neubert, *Unsere Revolution. Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/90* (Munich: Piper, 2008); Wolfgang Schuller, *Die deutsche Revolution 1989* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009). A database of literature on the German reunification, with more than 53,000 entries (stand: December 2007), can be found on the internet under: http://www.wiedervereinigung.de (accessed 7 September 2012).

[6] The records of the SED leadership and the East German government are accessible at the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorgansationen der DDR and Abteilung DDR), the archives of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the Former State Security of the GDR (Archiv der Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des ehemaligen Staatssicherheitsdienstes der DDR) and the Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry (Politischen Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes); written documents of the GDR opposition can be found at the Matthias Domaschk Archives of the Robert Havemann Foundation, as well as in the Grünen-Archiv of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

[7] Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hoffmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998).

[8] Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 1: Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft. Regierungsstil und Entscheidungen 1982–1989* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1998); Dieter Grosser, *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 2: Das Wagnis der Wirtschafts-, Währungs- und Sozialunion. Politische Zwänge im Konflikt mit ökonomischen Regeln* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1998); Wolfgang Jäger, *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 3: Die Überwindung der Teilung. Der innerdeutsche Prozess der Vereinigung 1989/90* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1998); Werner Weidenfeld, with Peter Wagner and Elke Bruck, *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 4: Außenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit: Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1998).

American, British and French records have also contributed to clarifying the events, as have, on the American side, the early studies by Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, both based on government records as well as accounts of eye witnesses.[9]

The publication of official documents has been augmented by the biographies and memoirs of a large number of the leaders and diplomats who were directly involved, as well as by the many valuable interviews conducted with them by journalists, documentary filmmakers and historians.[10] And finally, the media coverage at the time—press, radio and television—has been a major source of information about this period of history.[11]

Internal and external crisis factors

In particular, analyzing East German archives has led to the general awareness that the symptoms of the internal structural crisis, which had gradually begun to undermine the GDR's existence as early as the 1980s and which significantly influenced the actions of the SED leadership in the final crisis of the autumn of 1989, were only slightly different than those in its "brother countries," the other states of the Soviet bloc. The economic situation in all of these countries was disastrous. Technical advances lagged far behind those in the West, and labor productivity was less than half as high. Many manufacturing plants were dilapidated, and in countless places, health, safety and environmental conditions were catastrophic. The infrastructure was derelict and urban areas were decaying. The

[9] Cf., for example: Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Robert Twigge, eds., *Documents on British Policy Overseas III, vol. 7: German Unification 1989–1990* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009); Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolii Chernyaev, eds., Mikhail Gorbachev i Germanskii vopros (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2006); Philipp Zelikow/Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).—The following works are based on privileged access to documents in Moscow (The Gorbachev Foundation) and in Paris: Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands—ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2002), and Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, la fin de la guerre froid et l'unification allemande. De Yalta à Maastricht* (Paris: O. Jacob, 2005). See also: Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, ed., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010).—To embed the German events into the international context of the end of the Cold War, see: Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III: *Endings 1975–1991*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), as well as the three-part study by Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256 (Part 1); 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 3–64 (Part 2); and 7, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 3–96 (Part 3).

[10] On this, see the bibliographies in Rödder, *Deutschland,* 452–84; Sarotte, *1989*, 287–308.

[11] Cf. the two series *Deutschland 1989* and *Deutschland 1990. Dokumentation zu der Berichterstattung über die Ereignisse in der DDR und die deutschlandpolitische Entwicklung*, edited by the Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung.

accumulation of Western debt had reached a dramatic level—particularly in Poland, Hungary and East Germany. Spending on the military and (secret) police apparatuses devoured huge portions of the state budgets of all the communist states—in the Soviet Union alone it stood at 40 percent.[12]

The ideological erosion was obvious: the promise of a communist society that by 1981 was supposed to provide abundant material and cultural goods, as well as the highest living standards in the world[13]—as had been announced in October 1961 at the twenty-second CPSU party congress under party leader Nikita Khrushchev—had been quietly withdrawn. The twenty-fourth CPSU congress in April 1971 under Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev, and subsequently the party congresses of all the "fraternal parties," set its new "main task" as "increasing the material and cultural living standards of the people."[14] In the GDR, the expression "unity of economic and social policy" had emerged out of this welfare proviso. The utopian communist society that was supposed to bring happiness to its citizens shriveled into the daily task of secular Socialist consumerism. Thus, the goal of socialism and fulfilling promises of prosperity became virtually the same thing—with the unavoidable result that breaches of these consumer promises could be held up to the communist leadership as proof of socialism's total failure.

The alleged "driving force" of the communist parties was exhausted, and the belief in the historical and legitimate victory of socialism over capitalism was shaken. The party leadership was demoralized by years of crisis management, much of the party cadre was worn out, and the party's nucleus, including the "armed forces," was demoralized and disoriented.

But despite the common symptoms of structural crisis, the case of East Germany differed considerably from its "brother countries." The communist German part-state was, on one hand, a forced and artificial product of the global political interests and imperial claims of the Soviet Union. As the "satrapy of Soviet hegemony,"[15] the existence of the East German state, from its founding in 1949 until 1990, depended directly on the military, economic and political support of the Soviet Union, and thus in a special way was also subject to its favors. On the

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[12] Manfred Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion 1917–1991. Entstehung und Niedergang des ersten sozialistischen Staates* (Munich: Beck 1998), 1031; for an analysis of the fall of the Soviet Union, cf. Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch. Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

[13] See "Der Kommunismus ist die Hoffnung der Völker, die Garantie ihrer strahlenden Zukunft," "Rede von N.S. Chruschtschow über das neue Programm der KPdSU," as well as "Das Kommunistische Manifest der gegenwärtigen Epoche," *Neues Deutschland*, 20 October 1961.

[14] "Die Direktiven des XXIV. Parteitages der KPdSU zum Fünfjahrplan für die Entwicklung der Volkswirtschaft der UdSSR in den Jahren 1971–1975," *Neues Deutschland*, 7 April 1971; in addition, see Peter Hübner and Jürgen Danyel, "Soziale Argumente im politischen Machtkampf. Prag, Warschau, Berlin 1968–1971," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 50, no. 9 (2002): 804–32.

[15] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, vol.5: Bundesrepublik und DDR 1949–1990* (Munich: Beck 2008), 356.

other hand, the GDR was in direct competition with the Federal Republic, the other German state. All attempts to create a "socialist German nation" or even a "national GDR identity" had failed miserably. For over forty years, the SED leadership had been confronted by the expectations of large portions of the population for democracy and prosperity based on the West German model, as well as by their orientation toward a unified Germany.

Indeed, the relations between the two German states had become nearly "normal" in the course of détente and after the signing of the East-West German Basic Treaty in 1972. The GDR received financial sustenance allowances from the West German government for granting so-called humanitarian relief (improved travel opportunities, the opening of new border crossings, ransoming of prisoners, easement in postal, parcel and telephone communications, etc.), something envied by its "brother countries." Beginning with 600 million deutsche mark (DM) in the second half of the 1970s, by the 1980s these payments had risen to approximately DM 1.5 billion annually.

The more destitute the GDR became—it stood on the brink of economic bankruptcy for the first time in 1981–82[16]—the more dependent it became on the economic assistance of the Federal Republic, and the greater the political concessions it made (de-mining on the inner-German border in 1983–84, granting of more exit visas in 1984, allowing more Western travel for GDR citizens from 1986).

But until the end, the West German government refused to recognize East German citizenship. According to its constitution, the "people of the GDR," as they were called in the official rhetoric of the West, were also (potential) citizens of the Federal Republic, possessing the same rights to its social welfare. They merely had to manage to reach West German soil.

To keep more of the population from looking to the West, as well as to counteract the exodus between 1946 and mid-1961 to West Germany of about 3.5 million people from a total population of 18 million, the East German leadership did not know what to do other than sealing the inner-German border (May 1952) with mine fields, as well as constructing the Berlin Wall and installing military guards (August 1961). To prevent escape attempts, they even ended up accepting the killing of refugees. Hundreds of refugees lost their lives at the inner-German border, in the Baltic Sea, or during their flight via third countries. Alone at the Berlin Wall, from 1961 to 1989 at least 136 people were shot, died by accident, or committed suicide after failed escape attempts.[17]

And tens of thousands were arrested between 1961 and 1989 while in the process of planning their flight or on the way to the border. Statistics from the

[16] See Hans-Hermann Hertle, "Die DDR an die Sowjetunion verkaufen? Stasi-Analysen zum ökonomischen Niedergang der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 3 (2009): 476–95.

[17] See Hans-Hermann Hertle and Maria Nooke, eds., *The Victims at the Berlin Wall, 1961–1989: A Biographical Handbook* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2011).

GDR General Attorney reveal about 110,000 cases of "escape from the Republic" or "illegal border crossing" from 1961 to 1988.[18] According to a study of political prisoners based on random samples of GDR crime statistics, between 1960 and 1988 imprisonment for "illegal emigration" was imposed across the GDR in more than 71,000 cases.[19] As a rule, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, citizens of the GDR who applied for an exit visa were marginalized, discriminated against, or criminalized. Tens of thousands of them were sentenced to prison—merely because they had claimed the right of freedom of movement.

The management of the border was continually modernized and perfected; at no point in the twenty-eight years after the Wall was built did the SED leadership waste even a thought on dismantling the border installations or creating a political system that would have made the Wall superfluous. Nonetheless, between the building of the Wall and its fall, a total of about 40,000 East Germans managed to escape through the barricades, taking daring paths and accepting risks that were life-threatening. About 5,000 of them escaped in Berlin. Mirroring Count Mirabeau's saying that Prussia was not a state with an army, but an army with a state, Stefan Wolle described the GDR in the following words: "This was not a state with a border, but a border with a state."[20] The segregation, detention, injury, or death of people who wanted to leave their country was part of a system that could not exist without walls.

In none of the Central and Eastern European states was it inevitable that the latent factors of their internal crises would lead to the upheavals and revolutions of 1989. For the GDR, the decisive impulse rather came from outside: from the changes in the Soviet Union and their military, political and economic repercussions, as well as the reform processes that had been initiated in Poland and Hungary at the time.

It must be emphasized that Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" had not started with glasnost or perestroika but rather with "*uskorenie*," socio-economic acceleration. It was the economic plight of the Soviet Union that forced it to undertake reforms. In addition to the structural problems of the Soviet planned economy—low labor productivity, lack of innovative skills, declining investment rates, creeping deflation of capital assets, and inflated military spending—in the 1970s and early 1980s new problems developed, such as the depletion of stocks of raw materials in the western parts of the USSR, greatly increased development

[18] See the statistical material of the GDR attorney general in Johannes Raschka, *Justizpolitik im SED-Staat. Anpassung und Wandel des Strafrechts während der Amtszeit Honeckers* (Cologne et al.: Böhlau 2000), 314.

[19] Cf. Jürgen Wilke and Wilhelm Heinz Schröder, "Politische Gefangene in der DDR—eine quantitative Analyse: Wissenschaftliche Expertise für die Enquete-Kommission des Deutschen Bundestages 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit'" (Cologne: 1997), 92.

[20] Stefan Wolle, "Flucht als Widerstand?," in Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Peter Steinbach, Johannes Tuchel, eds., *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR* (Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 1999), 309.

costs in Siberia, and a series of poor harvests. The Soviet leadership under Gorbachev was thus faced with a serious financial and supply crisis. To overcome this crisis, contributions from the "brother countries" were expected: already in 1987, the Soviet Union announced at the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) that from 1991, foreign trade prices were to be adjusted to world market prices. For the GDR this was to mean an additional expenditure of DM 184 billion annually, a number that caused sheer horror for party economists.[21]

Many scholars tend to underestimate the economic causes in the decline of communism. At least for the GDR, one of the more surprising archival findings after 1989 was the extent to which the innermost circles of power in the SED spoke openly, already in the mid-1970s, about the increasing structural and debt problems, finally even speculating in 1988–89 on the prospect of bankruptcy.[22] Nonetheless, at the same time, SED propaganda outside the GDR continued endlessly to claim that the country ranked tenth among the largest industrial nations in the world and never tired of extolling its alleged "political stability and dynamically rising economic development."[23] Already in June 1988, Honecker appealed to the Politburo that "we must prevent the collapse."[24] Günter Mittag, the Central Committee secretary responsible for economic affairs, expressed his gloomy prognosis for the future to a small group of financial experts in November 1988: "As it is now, we're driving straight into a tree: we'll be totaled!"[25] And in May 1989, Gerhard Schürer, Politburo candidate and chairman of the State Planning Commission, told the small group of members of the Politburo responsible for financial affairs that the GDR's debts in the West were increasing monthly by DM 500 million and "if this development continues, the GDR will be insolvent by 1991."[26] It was urgent to connect the cuts that had already been made "to a series of economic measures taken in the area of spending."[27] But no one in the inner circle of the SED leadership wanted to face the task of lim-

[21] "Volkswirtschaftliche Berechnungen zum Warenaustausch DDR/UdSSR," n.d. [1986], in Bundesarchiv (BA), DE 1/56348, 3.

[22] The crisis discussions at the Politburo during the 1970s and 80s are portrayed in Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer*, 17–73. In addition, see: Maria Haendcke-Hoppe-Arndt, "Der ökonomische Niedergang der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 6 (1995): 588–602; as well as André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan, Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: DVA, 2004), 165–226.

[23] *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitages der SED, 17. bis 21. April 1986* (Berlin: Dietz, 1986), 739.

[24] Quoted from Major Friedrich to Generalmajor Alfred Kleine, Information [about the Politburo session of 14 June 1988], 16 June 1988, in Archiv der Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des ehemaligen Staatssicherheitsdienstes der DDR (BStU), MfS, HA XVIII Nr. 3376, 47.

[25] Quote based on Heinz Klopfer, "Persönliche Notizen über ein Gespräch beim Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der SED, Genossen Dr. Günter Mittag," 23 November 1988, in BStU, MfS, HA XVIII Nr. 3374, 118.

[26] "Darlegungen Gerhard Schürers zur Zahlungsbilanz mit dem nichtsozialistischen Wirtschaftsgebiet," 16 May 1989, in BA, DE 1/56317.

[27] Ibid.

iting the population's standard of living. "What can we say to the people? How shall we then face the nation?" asked the president of the Trade Union Federation, Harry Tisch.[28] But Egon Krenz, responsible at the Politburo for security questions, declared the following motto for the future: "We should be looking forward now. For me, it is not a question whether the union of economic and social policies should be continued. It must be continued, since that is the GDR's socialism!"[29]

It was not only the ongoing economic decline that demoralized the SED leadership in the summer of 1989. Powerless, they had watched the attempts that had been made since 1987 between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic to improve their relations; these led in June 1989 to the signing of a "joint declaration" during a state visit of Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Bonn. In this declaration, both sides recognized the right of every state "to freely choose its own political and social system," and to consider the "respect of the self-determination of all nations" an incontestable principle.[30] Just three weeks later, in July 1989, on the initiative of the Soviet leadership, an official document was signed at the congress of the Political Consultative Committee in Bucharest in which the Warsaw Pact countries broke with the superiority and hegemonic claims of the Soviet Union, whereby they also broke with the "tank philosophy" of the limited sovereignty of the member states (the Brezhnev Doctrine). In the meeting's communiqué, the party and state leaders of the East bloc countries expressed that there is "no universal model of socialism whatsoever," and "no one" possesses "a monopoly on the truth." They stressed the need to develop relations with one another "on the basis of equality, independence and the right of each to formulate and develop their own independent political line, strategy, and tactics without outside interference."[31] Unlike their neighbors, the leaders of the East German part-state had difficulties understanding the right to self-determination and independence that were being granted to the "fraternal parties" as a "basis for a democratic renewal on the basis of national struggles for independence." Rather, just as they already saw the "joint Soviet-German declaration,"[32] such rights were simply

[28] Heinz Klopfer, "Persönliche Notizen über die Beratung beim Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Erich Honecker, betreff Entwurf des Volkswirtschaftsplanes und des Staatshaushaltsplanes 1990," Berlin, 16 May 1989, in BA, DE 1/56317, 25.

[29] Ibid., 42.

[30] "Gemeinsame deutsch-sowjetische Erklärung," 13 June 1989, *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 15 June 1989, 543.

[31] "Kommuniqué der Tagung des Politisch-Beratenden Ausschusses der Mitgliedsstaaten des Warschauer Vertrags am 7. und 8. Juli 1989 in Bukarest," *Europa-Archiv*, no. 20 (1989): 599.

[32] Andreas Wirsching, "Die Mauer fällt. Das Ende des doppelten Deutschland," in Udo Wengst and Hermann Wentker, ed., *Das doppelte Deutschland. 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008), 357–74, 368.

considered a threat to their existence. If the Soviet guarantee of the SED regime's existence were suspended, then from now on the SED would be faced with the task of legitimizing their rule to "their people" themselves—and this in the face of a pending economic bankruptcy. The fact that SED chief Honecker suffered a gallstone colic during the Bucharest meeting and had to be flown to East Berlin before the signing of the final document was highly symbolic.

And finally, Moscow's foreign policy toward the United States had also shocked the SED leadership. In order to gain ground in disarmament negotiations with the United States, Gorbachev and the Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze declared the Soviet Union willing—without consulting its allies and, as the SED leadership saw it, primarily at their expense—to implement extensive concessions in human rights issues. In January 1989, the Soviet Union literally forced the East German government to sign the Vienna CSCE accords. The signing states pledged, among other things, to respect the right of all people "to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country with no restrictions."[33] Similar international agreements had already been signed several times, even by the GDR, but they had never been implemented legally. But in Vienna it was the first time that the GDR committed itself to guaranteeing this right—that is, unrestricted freedom to travel—by law, and to allow its compliance with this requirement to be monitored.

The foreign policy of the Soviet Union thus imposed domestic commitments onto its allies, particularly East Berlin. But they were commitments whose implementation not only threatened the political stability of the GDR, but also its existence: if the border became permeable, the state was endangered.

In Poland and Hungary, democratic reforms toward a multi-party system were introduced in the summer of 1989. While these reforms were forced from below, in contrast to the GDR, they were then pushed forward from above by party reformers. But the SED leadership stood with its back up against the wall, leading to its well-documented uncertainty as well as its resulting "speechlessness." While displeasure with the leadership had grown among the party's members, nonetheless, no significant pressure on the party leaders emerged, to say nothing of any sort of inner-party opposition.

In view of the later developments in 1989, one must look for conditions under which latent critical factors develop into governmental crises. And one must also examine how the symptoms of structural crisis can trigger a process that mobilizes the masses to protest a regime. And finally, there is the question of how the role of the media should be understood in this context.

Fundamental crises in political systems emerge, as Pierre Bourdieu has attempted to explain, through a "conjunction of independent causal chains" that

[33] "Konferenz über Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Abschließendes Dokument des Wiener KSZE-Folgetreffens. Wien, 15. Januar 1989," *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 4 (1989): 467–68.

first develop parallel to one another, and then, at a particular moment, interact.[34] When the perception of the actors in such local crises is synchronized, whereby these individual crises are driven to suddenly change into a general crisis or a revolution, is called a "critical moment" by Bourdieu.[35] In turn, this synchronization effect is generated by "critical events" that spread the latent crises to many different places, causing latent tensions to change abruptly into manifest acts.

The media, which Bourdieu does not include in his concept, can play an important role in this synchronization process by conveying what has happened, whereby it intensifies perceptions and creates a feedback effect—especially when the media intervenes directly in events and becomes an actor.[36] This augmentation of the concept provides a framework of analysis that is capable of combining, on both macro and micro levels, the history of structures and the history of events (structure and agency).

The October Revolution

Until the autumn of 1989, the momentum for further developments in the GDR was less due to civil rights activists than due to people leaving the country—and the television coverage of them. This momentum was triggered by the more than 100,000 people who applied to leave the GDR, especially those demanding exit visas in the summer of 1989 who occupied embassies in East Berlin or the West German embassies in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest.[37]

It is true that in East Germany the number of opposition groups critical of the system had increased, especially since the mid-1980s.[38] Among the issues they focused on were peace and the environment, democracy, human rights, and especially the freedom to travel. Quite a few parish priests were involved; the

[34] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 254–303.

[35] Ibid., 274–92.

[36] See Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "'Kritische Ereignisse' und 'kritischer Moment'. Pierre Bourdieus Modell der Vermittlung von Ereignis und Struktur," in Andreas Suter and Manfred Hettling, ed., *Struktur und Ereignis,* Geschichte und Gesellschaft Sonderheft 19 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 120–37, 135; see also idem, "Die Nacht der Barrikaden. Eine Fallstudie zur Dynamik sozialen Protests," in Friedhelm Neidhardt, ed., *Öffentlichkeit, Öffentliche Meinung, Soziale Bewegunge,* Sonderheft der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), 375–92.

[37] For comprehensive portrayals of the GDR revolution, see: Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *Endspiel* (Munich: Beck, 2009), esp. 301–469; Ehrhart Neubert, *Unsere Revolution* (Munich: Piper, 2008); Wolfgang Schuller, *Die deutsche Revolution 1989* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009); another key work: Walter Süß, *Staatssicherheit am Ende. Warum es den Mächtigen nicht gelang 1989 eine Revolution zu verhindern* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999).

[38] See Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998).

Lutheran church gave shelter to many groups. It is possible to gain the impression that during 1989, the number of demonstrations organized by these independent and civil rights groups increased steadily: from protests against fraudulent local election results in May, to demonstrations against the violent suppression of the Chinese student uprising in June, the founding of the opposition movement New Forum (*Neues Forum*) on 9–10 September and then other groups, and finally the founding of the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei*, SDP) at the beginning of October 1989.

But this impression is deceptive. These opposition groups were primarily involved with their own concerns, and for the most part failed to involve broader sections of the populace.[39] Until late summer 1989, it was rare if a public protest attracted more than a few hundred people—this happened only a few times. Only after the New Forum and other groups, such as Democratic Awakening (*Demokratischer Aufbruch*) and Democracy Now (*Demokratie Jetzt*), were founded in September did they gain popular acceptance. Nonetheless, these newly organized civil rights groups also had little to do with the beginning of the protest movement; in the early stages, demonstrations were usually spontaneous and unplanned. The first time more than 1,000 people took part in a Leipzig Monday demonstration was on 18 September; on 25 September it was 5,000, on 2 October, 15,000, and finally on 9 October, 70,000—always following events at churches. The opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border for East Germans on 10–11 September was followed by a mass exodus. Only then, at the beginning of October, did open protest quickly begin to swell and move to many cities.[40]

This was because the opening of the Iron Curtain in Hungary had shifted the balance of power between the government and the population in East Germany in a decisive way.[41] The exodus generated expanding repercussions among people who wanted to remain in the GDR. For the first time since the uprising of 1953, they saw a chance to place demands on the regime: "We will stay, but only if things don't stay the same," was an early slogan at the Leipzig demonstrations. The new possibility of leaving via Hungary could be used as a means of pressure; in return for their remaining in the GDR, they could insist on a political price. No longer did fleeing or leaving the country weaken potential political resistance, it gave it social justification. The mass exodus via Hungary undermined,

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[39] See Detlef Pollack, "'Wir sind das Volk!' Sozialstrukturelle und ereignisgeschichtliche Bedingungen des friedlichen Massenprotests," in Klaus-Dietmar Henke, ed., *Revolution und Vereinigung 1989/90* (Munich: DTV, 2009), 178–97.

[40] On the earlier history and background of the Hungarian opening of the border, see: Andreas Oplatka, *Der erste Riss in der Mauer. September 1989—Ungarn öffnet die Grenze* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2009).

[41] See Detlef Pollack, "Das Ende einer Organisationsgesellschaft; systemtheoretische Überlegungen zum gesellschaftlichen Umbruch in der DDR," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 19, no. 4 (1990): 292–307, 300–1.

in an unprecedented manner, the authority of the state and was a prerequisite for the mass protests that were then to unfold.[42]

For the SED leadership, the "Hungarian betrayal," not to mention the Soviet Union's passive attitude, was terribly humiliating. Reduced to relying on their own authority, the first point of discussion at the Politburo meeting of 12 September 1989 was how to "close the hole in Hungary,"[43] since applications for travelling to Hungary had skyrocketed everywhere in the country. To avoid "heavy losses" in citizens, Mittag suggested that "leaving the country should not be carried out as globally as has been done until now. Why do the ambivalent candidates have to go? This internal regulation may not, however, affect our party or the majority of the population. We would upset them. The Stasi and the Ministry of the Interior should undertake these actions."[44] In this way, the SED leadership solved their own political dilemma by foisting it onto the employees of the security forces.

But the SED leadership still received some support from Prague. The Czechoslovak government tightened its controls for GDR citizens at its border with Hungary. As a result, by the end of September more than 10,000 East Germans were staying at the West German embassy in Prague in an attempt to force their exit to the Federal Republic. Honecker gave in on 30 September 1989, letting the embassy refugees travel in locked trains over GDR territory to the West. A commentary edited by Honecker and published in *Neue Deutschland* on 2 October hurled after them: "No tears should be shed over their like."[45] The statement sparked outrage and anger in the families of the refugees, and even met with protest from members of the SED. "With its cynical inflexibility," Pollack has commented, "the leadership of the SED itself contributed to the protests forming in the streets."[46]

The SED leadership's room for maneuvering shrank more and more, becoming limited to either initiating political reforms—with an uncertain outcome—or building a "second wall" at the Czechoslovak and Polish borders and, possibly, having to quell demonstrations with military force. The closing of the East German border to Czechoslovakia on 3 October 1989, and in some cases brute force being used against protesters during celebrations for the fortieth state anniversary of the GDR around 7 October, point to their having chosen the latter option—the use of force. More than 3,000 protesters were temporarily arrested in the GDR

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[42] Norman Naimark also emphasizes this causal link: "It is worth reiterating that those who left the country started the revolution, while those, who demonstrated maintained it." See Norman Naimark, "'Ich will hier raus.' Emigration and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic," in Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 72–116.

[43] SED-Politburo meeting on 12 September 1989, in BA, DY 30/IV 2/2.039/77, 27.

[44] Ibid.

[45] *Neues Deutschland*, 2 October 1989.

[46] Pollack, "Wir sind das Volk!" 189.

and over 700 investigation proceedings were initiated. On the evening of 9 October, there was a threat that the "Chinese solution" would be used in Leipzig. Honecker and Stasi Minister Mielke had given the order to prevent "rioting" and "riots." But too many people had taken to the streets. In the end, the state power capitulated in the face of 70,000 peaceful demonstrators.[47] Footage of the demonstration was smuggled to the West, and on the following days it was broadcast on television news, becoming a beacon for the demonstrating to spread. As Pollack writes, "From 9 October, it was the people protesting in the streets who determined the pace and the direction of the political developments in the GDR."[48] On 16 October, there were already 120,000 people in Leipzig chanting "We are the people!" and demanding free elections, freedom of expression and the press, and freedom to travel. Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations on the same evening in other places, including Dresden, Magdeburg, Halle and Berlin.

The protests on the street drove the SED leadership to frantic activity. On 17 October 1989, SED general secretary Erich Honecker was toppled by an odd Politburo coalition consisting of both reformist and arch-conservative forces.[49] But instead of the expected stabilization of power under his successor, Egon Krenz, who announced a political "turning point," the rapid collapse of the communist dictatorship began. Increasingly, the main problem of the SED leadership was the economic situation. On 31 October 1989, an analysis of the economic situation in the GDR was presented to the Politburo. Its findings: production potential was exhausted, insolvency toward the West threatened, bankruptcy was imminent. An immediate reduction of living standards by 25 to 30 percent would be necessary, it stated. However, due to fears of an uprising, this was considered out of the question politically.

The proposed solution to save the GDR from bankruptcy was the following: in order to receive new loans to the sum of DM 12 to 13 billion, as well as improved economic backing from the West German government, the permeability of the Wall—in plain terms, easier travel opportunities for GDR citizens—should be offered as a final means of exchange. Not surprisingly, on 1 November 1989, Egon Krenz was told by Mikhail Gorbachev that economic assistance was no longer to be expected from Moscow. On behalf of the SED general secretary, on 6 November Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, as the GDR mediator, commenced secret negotiations in Bonn with Chancellery Minister Rudolf Seiters and Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble.

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47 On the developments of the protest movement in Leipzig, see Tobias Hollitzer and Reinhard Bohse, ed., *Heute vor 10 Jahren. Leipzig auf dem Weg zur Friedlichen Revolution* (Bonn and New York: InnoVatio, 2000).

48 Pollack, "Wir sind das Volk!" 194.

49 See Hans-Hermann Hertle, "Der Sturz Erich Honeckers. Zur Rekonstruktion eines innerparteilichen Machtkampfes," in Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Peter Steinbach, Johannes Tuchel, eds., *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR* (Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 1999), 327–46. On the references for the following section, see Hertle, *Chronik,* 92–202.

Unfazed by the change of leadership at the top of the SED, the exodus from the GDR continued; from 18 October, up to 2,000 East Germans crossed the Austro-Hungarian border daily. The continuous coverage by the Western media of the refugees' arrival in the West plainly exposed the SED regime's lack of legitimacy to the world public. At the same time, about 1,000 people a day applied for emigration; on 29 October the total number had risen to 188,180.[50]

Also the number of demonstrations had not waned. The protest movement did not regard Honecker's removal from office as reflecting the willingness of the party leadership to implement reforms, but saw it as the regime's running from the pressure on the streets, a victory that subsequently gave legitimacy and incentive to continue the demonstrations. As a result, pressure was intensified to push through even more demands. In the second half of October, the situation in the GDR had become explosive. Demonstrations against the SED spread across the country, reaching even small and mid-sized towns. While in the week from 16 to 22 October, the Stasi registered a total of 140,000 participants in 24 demonstrations, in the next week 540,000 people took part in 145 demonstrations, and from 30 October to 5 November there were 1.4 million participants in 210 demonstrations.[51] Ever more emphatic were the demands for free elections, permission to form opposition groups, and— over and over, and everywhere—the freedom to travel.

At the same time, despite the new secretary general and his vague promises of reforms, the party's members weren't letting themselves be mobilized simply at the drop of a hat. Attempts to convert opposition demonstrations into regime-friendly rallies failed, sometimes already in the planning stages. SED members' confidence that the party leadership could cope with the situation waned. The collapse of the SED regime's control in the face of the people had now expanded to the SED leadership losing authority and power over its own party base.

On 1 November, threatened by more demonstrations, the SED leadership lifted the ban on travel to Czechoslovakia. Prague immediately resembled a transit camp for East Germans wanting to emigrate. The Czechoslovak government registered a protest in East Berlin. The SED Politburo gave in, and from 4 November allowed East Germans to exit to West Germany via Czechoslovakia: after the one in Hungary, there was a second hole in the Curtain.

Within days, 50,000 East Germans had taken this new route. The Czechoslovak government feared this would spread instability in their own country, and in East Berlin strongly protested against the mass migration. It formally requested the SED to allow the exit of East German citizens to West Germany "directly, not over Czechoslovakia's territory." If this did not happen, they would have to close their border to East Germany.[52]

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[50] Cf. "Wochenübersicht" no. 44/89, 30 October 1989, in BStU, MfS, ZAIG Nr. 4599, 142.

[51] See Walter Süß, "Entmachtung und Verfall der Staatssicherheit," *BF informiert,* no. 5 (1994): 10.

[52] Cf. Telegram, Ziebart to Fischer, Ott and Schwiesau, 8 November 1989, in BStU, Sekretariat Neiber Nr. 553, 2.

On 8 November, Chancellor Kohl made the demands of the East German protesters his own: if the SED renounced its monopoly on power, permitting independent parties and guaranteeing mandatory free elections, he would be ready, he bluntly told Krenz as a condition for the requested loan, “to speak in completely new dimensions about our economic aid.”[53] The chancellor was quite sure that after free elections he would no longer need to discuss anything with the East German communists.

The fall of the Berlin Wall

In the first week of November, as SED Politburo member Günter Schabowski summed up later, for the East German population that had been walled in for twenty-eight years, “the experience of respect or scorn for the individual” culminated in the issue of being allowed to travel.[54] Under the pressure of the mass demonstrations and alarmed by the Czechoslovakian protests, on 7 November the Politburo gave the Council of Ministers instructions to produce regulations for short-term trips. On the morning of 9 November, an inter-ministerial team produced a draft in accordance with the responsible department of the SED Central Committee.[55] The plan was to grant permanent departures—that is, moves to the Federal Republic—at GDR border crossings, although only after an appropriate application had been filed. Visits—also subject to application—would be approved up to thirty days a year, but were dependant on a visa being issued and holding a passport. Those who did not have a passport, as the plan went, would first have to apply for one and then wait again for at least four weeks. It was felt that in this way, the immediate departure of all citizens could be averted. The new travel regulations were to be revealed on 10 November at 4:00 a.m., in order to let the employees of the application authorities time overnight to prepare for the expected massive influx of people wanting to leave. Based on the application process and the passport requirement, it was calculated that the first wave of travel to the West would only occur in mid-December 1989.

The government draft, including a press release, was agreed upon at noon on 9 November by the Security Department of the Central Committee and the relevant ministries—the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Central Committee, the highest decision-making body of the SED, had begun their meeting the day before. During

[53] Deutscher Bundestag, 11. Wahlperiode, 173. Sitzung, 8. November 1989, Stenographischer Bericht, 13017.

[54] Cf. Hans-Hermann Hertle, Theo Pirker, Rainer Weinert, eds., *“Der Honecker muss weg!” Protokoll eines Gesprächs mit Günter Schabowski am 24. April 1990 in Berlin-West,”* Berliner Arbeitshefte und Berichte zur sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung 35 (Berlin: Zentralinstitut für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung, 1990), 39.

[55] On the following, cf. Hertle, *Chronik*, 118–23.

the meeting's continuation, or more precisely, during a "smoking break," a few members of the Politburo confirmed that the draft had been written.[56]

In the afternoon, it was placed before the Council of Ministers for a resolution by circulation so that a quick decision could be guaranteed—namely, by 6:00 p.m. A copy of the draft was given to Egon Krenz. At around 4:00 p.m., he read the proposed regulations to the 216 members of the Central Committee and explained its urgency as being due to pressure from the CSSR. The hopelessness into which the GDR felt itself forced was expressed by Krenz with the remark: "However we do it, we'll do it wrong!" But the Central Committee saw no other way and gave its consent. At this time the travel regulations were—as emphasized by Krenz—only a "proposal," a draft. A decision by the Council of Ministers had not yet been made.

Nevertheless, Krenz spontaneously commissioned the government spokesman to release it "at once," thus lifting, almost casually, the news embargo.

This decision could have been corrected, since the government spokesman, Wolfgang Meyer, was aware of the holding period and its background. But Krenz's next decision was irreversible: he handed the resolution together with the press release to Politburo member Günter Schabowski, who during these days was serving as the speaker of the party, and gave him the order to report on it at the international press conference already scheduled for 6:00 p.m. This interference of the party in the executive work of the government led to the unraveling of all the preparatory work that the Stasi and the Ministry of the Interior had done for the new travel regulations.

Schabowski hadn't been there when the Politburo confirmed the travel regulations at midday. He had also not been in the hall when Krenz read travel regulations to the Central Committee. Thus, he knew neither the wording of the paper, nor anything about a holding period.

At the end of the press conference, which was broadcast live on East German television, he read the travel regulations from the piece of paper he had received from Krenz. According to the regulations, GDR citizens would not only be granted permanent departures, with permission being issued within a short period of time, but also private trips would be approved. Permanent departures would be possible at all GDR border crossings to the Federal Republic and to West Berlin. "When does this take effect?" asked the journalists.[57] Schabowski looked helpless, because "that question," the Politburo member said later, "had not been discussed with me earlier."[58] He scratched his head and glanced at the paper.

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[56] The proposed resolution is held in the records of the SED Politburo: Willi Stoph, "Vorlage für das Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der SED, Betreff: Zeitweilige Übergangsregelung für Reisen und ständige Ausreise aus der DDR," 9 November 1989, in BA, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/3256, 9–10.

[57] Cf. the transcript of the press conference text in Hertle, *Chronik*, 141–46.

[58] Hertle, Pirker, Weinert, eds., *"Der Honecker muss weg!"*, 40.

He overlooked the concluding sentence of the decision of the Council of Ministers, which stated that a press release would only be given on 10 November, and his eyes came to rest on the beginning section, on the words “immediately” and “without delay.” He thus formulated a terse response: “Straight away, with no delay!” A few minutes later, at 7:01 p.m., the press conference was over.

However, the storming of the border crossings was not a direct response to this press conference, as has often been incorrectly assumed, but it only began to occur on a massive scale—with a clear time gap—as a result of the subsequent press coverage, especially in the Western media. During the main evening news, which lasted until 8:15 p.m., Schabowski’s statement became the main topic under discussion. Lacking precise information, the Western media began to fill in what Schabowski had left open to interpretation, to condense the information in order to create a meaning and a context. Very quickly his contradictory statements had been interpreted as “the opening of the border.” Already at 7:05 p.m., the Associated Press headline was “GDR opens its border,” and at 7:41 p.m. the DPA spread the “sensational information:” “The East German border to West Germany and West Berlin *is* open.” At 8:00 p.m., the ARD “Tagesschau” made the travel regulations its top news item, superimposing the words: “GDR opens border.”

The high point of the Western television coverage was the ARD show “Tagesthemen” (Issues of the Day), which began slightly late that evening, at 10:42 p.m. An introductory clip showed the nearly deserted western side of the Brandenburg Gate. The news anchorman, Hanns Joachim Friedrichs, proclaimed: “Tonight at the Brandenburg Gate. It has ended its service as a symbol of the division of Berlin. So has the Wall, which for the last twenty-eight years has separated East and West. The GDR has yielded to the pressure of the people. They are now free to travel to the West.”

Friedrichs then came into the picture and ended his introduction with these words: “When dealing with superlatives, caution should taken, since they wear out easily. But this evening, it is possible to risk one: The ninth of November is a historic day. The GDR has announced that its borders are now open to everyone. The Wall’s gates are wide open.” But Friedrichs’ announcement had jumped ahead of the events: contrary to his assertion, the introductory clip, which had been filmed at around 10:00 p.m. by the Berlin office, showed that, at least at the border crossings at Heinrich-Heine-Straße and Checkpoint Charlie, absolute silence reigned.

It was actually the reporting of the supposed “open border” in the Western media—especially on television and the radio—that triggered the onslaught of East and West Berliners at the border crossings and the Brandenburg Gate. The fall of the Berlin Wall is the first world-historic event to have attained reality because it was announced by the media.

With no information or orders from their military commanders, the East German border guards on duty the evening of 9 November 1989 were apprehensive

about the growing masses of people, on both sides of the border crossings, who had come to see whether the news was true. Queries by border guards with their supervisors, asking how Schabowski's statement was to be understood, remained unanswered, as was the same question at the next level up in the ministries. In the evening hours, only deputies, or deputies of deputies, could be reached at all levels—and nobody knew the answer. The lines of communication to the top were blocked: that day's meeting of the Central Committee had been extended until 8:45 p.m., and therefore no ministers could be reached by their deputies. Thus, the entire party and state leadership did not yet realize what had happened at the press conference, and did not know about the media response or about the beginning rush of East and West to the checkpoints.

The run on the east side was strongest at the border crossing on Bornholmer Straße, located in the densely populated district of Prenzlauer Berg. At first the border guards reacted cautiously, telling people to come the next day. They then allowed individuals to leave, but stamped their identity cards as void. Without knowing it, the first East Berliners who ran across the Bornholm Bridge to West Berlin had been expatriated.

Finally the pressure behind the barrier bar became so strong that the passport inspectors and border guards began to fear for their lives. They made their own decision, and at around 11:30 p.m. stopped making any checks. "We're opening the floodgates now! We're opening everything!," announced the senior passport control officer, and the barriers were opened.

Also at Checkpoint Charlie, the only way the border officers knew how to prevent the storming of the crossing was by opening all the gates at midnight. At the Invalidenstraße border crossing, the passport inspectors initially were determined keep the West and East Berliners at bay. They brought in reinforcements: forty-five men with machine guns. But as the situation escalated, they made a decision: "We won't shoot at unarmed people." The soldiers retreated and the supervisor ordered: "Let them go!"[59]

At midnight, all of the border crossings in Berlin were open; a short time later, East and West Berliners also celebrated the fall of the Wall under the Brandenburg Gate.

"We are one people!"—The path to German unity

The opening of the Wall on 9–10 November 1989 was more than an "opening of the border:" It was an act of self-liberation. The impact of the event, its form and symbolism, knocked the control of the borders out of the SED leadership's hands—and at the same time, their power over citizens who were no longer walled

[59] Hans-Hermann Hertle and Kathrin Elsner, eds., *Der Tag, an dem die Mauer fiel* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2009), 152.

in. Without the Wall, the SED leadership and the newly formed government under Prime Minister Hans Modrow also saw themselves stripped of their main collateral for negotiating about economic stabilization with West Germany; the GDR regime had lost its last creditworthy piece of property. "The people," as laconically stated by Schalck ten years later, "virtually pre-empted the leadership."[60]

At the same time, the pressure on the party and state continued to increase after the Wall had fallen. On one hand, migration to the West increased again sharply: from 10 November 1989 until the end of the year, over 120,000 people left the GDR (the total in 1989 was 343,854); from January to March 1990 more than 180,000 more left. On the other hand, the mass demonstrations continued in the second half of November. The chants of "We are *the* people" quickly changed to "We are *one* people"; within a short time, everywhere in the GDR banners with the slogan "Germany–one fatherland" and black, red and gold flags without the GDR emblem defined the image of the rallies. Many civil rights activists, writers, artists and intellectuals, who until then had seen themselves as the spokespersons and the vanguard of the demonstrations, distanced themselves from the demands for Germany's unification. Their attempts to stir up fears of a "sellout of our material and moral values" and to propagate the GDR's independence as a "socialist alternative" to the Federal Republic failed, and after the first free elections a few weeks later, they ended up being marginalized.[61]

But before this had happened, the new democratic movements and parties were able, based on the Polish model of a central "round table," to limit the SED's power, force the annulment in the GDR's constitution of the SED claim to leadership, and push through free elections.[62] Within weeks, the central party structures crumbled; the Politburo, the Secretariat of the Central Committee, and the Central Committee itself disbanded. Without the party's center of control, the state power structures crumbled; nearly imperceptibly, the National Defense Council simply ceased to exist due to lack of members. By mid-February 1990, the SED had lost 1.6 of their once 2.3 million members.[63] At the beginning of December 1989, district citizen committees occupied the state security buildings and prevented the destruction of files. On 15 January 1990 the Stasi headquarters

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[60] Conversation between Hans-Hermann Hertle and Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, 7 May 1999.

[61] Cf. the New Forum's description of 12 November 1989: "Die Mauer ist gefallen," in *Die ersten Texte des Neuen Forum*, hg. im Auftrag des Landessprecherrates des Neuen Forum (Berlin: Tribüne Druckerei, 1990), 20–21, as well as the proclamation "Für unser Land," 26 November 1989, *Neues Deutschland*, 29 November 1989.

[62] Uwe Thaysen, ed., *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch der DDR: Wortprotokoll und Dokumente*, 5 vols. (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000); idem, *Der Runde Tisch. Oder: Wo blieb das Volk?* Der Weg der DDR in die Demokratie (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990).

[63] Cf. Günter Fischbach, ed., *DDR-Almanach '90. Daten, Informationen, Zahlen* (Stuttgart: Verlag Bonn Aktuell, 1990), 355.

in Berlin were stormed. The round table finally forced the Modrow government to dissolve the Stasi, the East German secret police.

After the fall of the Wall and the end of the old SED, the Soviet Union was the only remaining guarantor of the GDR's existence as a state. At first, the Soviet leadership categorically opposed any tendencies toward a unification of the two German states. But its own internal problems—increasing national conflicts, the profound financial and supply crisis, the threat of insolvency toward the West, and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact—together with the unstoppable dissolution of the SED's power in January 1990 hastened the realization at the Kremlin that the GDR could no longer be saved. On 10 February 1990, in Moscow, Chancellor Helmut Kohl received Gorbachev's basic acceptance of Germany's reunification.[64] The day before, the CPSU party boss had already discussed with US secretary of state James Baker that the external terms for German unity, including the withdrawal of troops and the security of the neighboring countries, should be part of negotiations between the two German states and the four victors of World War II, later labeled Two Plus Four.[65] At this point in time, all sides still assumed it was going to be a process that would take several years.

The vote at the first free parliamentary elections on 18 March 1990 was clearly for a quick route to national unity. The election winner, with 48.1% of the vote, was the Alliance for Germany (*Allianz für Deutschland*), made up of the former bloc party CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*), the DSU (*Deutsche Soziale Union*), and the Democratic Awakening (*Demokratischer Aufbruch*). The SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) received 21.8% of the vote, the SED-PDS (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands–Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*) 16.3%, and the Liberals 5.3%. Alliance 90 (*Bündnis 90*), the electoral alliance of the civil rights movements New Forum, Democracy Now, and the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights received only 2.9% of the vote. Under Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière, the "Alliance for Germany" formed a coalition government with the Social Democrats and the Liberals. The clear electoral mandate in this grand coalition was "the winding up of their own state and rapid union with the Federal Republic."[66] The East German and West German lower houses of parliament, the Volkskammer (People's Chamber) and the Bundestag, voted on 21 June 1990, with a two-thirds majority agreeing to a treaty for economic, monetary and social union. As a result, on 1 July, the West German mark was introduced as legal tender in the GDR. Financing the conversion costs was accomplished primarily through loans.

[64] Cf. Niederschrift des Gespräches des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Generalsekretär Gorbatschow, Moskau, 10. Februar 1990 in *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik. Deutsche Einheit*, 795–807, esp. 801. On Soviet policy in Germany's reunification, cf. Wolfgang Mueller, "The Soviet Union and the Reunification of Germany, 1989–90," in this volume, 321–53.

[65] On the discussions of US Secretary of State Baker in Moscow that began on 7 February 1990, see Sarotte, *1989*, 110–11.

[66] Rödder, *Deutschland,* 224.

The negotiations on the external aspects of reunification were the subject of the Two Plus Four conferences between the two German states and the victorious powers of World War II, as well as numerous bilateral talks. These negotiations were brought to completion on 12 September 1990, with the signing of the "Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany." In this treaty, the occupying powers renounced their rights and responsibilities connected with World War II, both in Berlin and Germany as a whole. Germany received sovereign rights over its internal and external affairs, confirmed the final form of its borders, and pledged, among other things, to abstain from offensive wars and to reduce its army to 370,000 troops. In addition, it was agreed that the 350,000 soldiers of the Western Group of the Soviet military would be withdrawn by 1994.

The most important political milestones on the path to internal unity were the following: The decision of the People's Chamber on 23 August to join, in accordance with Article 23, the constitution of the Federal Republic, and the Unification Treaty between the two German states, which created the legal basis for national reunification. When the two parliaments voted on 20 September 1990 for the treaty, their aim was also to create, after forty years of separation, unified living conditions in Germany. On 3 October 1990, the political unity of Germany was complete.

Conclusion

The emergence, course and outcome of revolutions—and this applies to the radical changes that took place in all of the Central European countries—are unforeseeable due to contingent constellations of actions and series of events, even if there is an accumulation of structural crisis factors. Bourdieu's analytical concept, especially if it is extended to include the effects of the media, is a methodology that requires the combining of the history of structures and events. It is helpful for deciphering the "conjunction of independent causal series" and their moments of interaction. By using this methodology, a significant contribution can be made toward understanding the revolution in East Germany as well as in other places.

The opening of the Hungarian–Austrian border for East Germans on 10–11 September 1989 can be seen, in Bourdieu's sense, as a "critical event." And the Leipzig Monday demonstration on 9 October 1989, which ignited the East German October Revolution, can be interpreted as a "critical moment." The awareness of the two events was based largely on the media, whose reporting greatly enhanced the effect of both. Hungary's "hole in the wall" laid bare the SED regime's weaknesses and its loss of support from a formerly allied government and, in particular, the Soviet hegemon. Over and above the nucleus of the opposition movement, the opening of the Hungarian border gave new options to

much of the East German population—both those who wanted to emigrate and those who wanted to stay—while it narrowed those of the regime. The exodus continued to grow, while at the same time, protests against the regime exploded in the streets.

The Leipzig Monday demonstration on 9 October 1989 and the inaction of the ready police and military forces against 70,000 protesters made 9 October a symbol of hope. The peaceful course of events emboldened many to take part in demonstrations; by 9 November 1989, several million people all over the GDR had taken part in more than 600 demonstrations and rallies, protesting for their democratic rights and against the regime. In this situation, the resignations of, first, the SED general secretary, and then the Council of Ministers and the Politburo, as well as the announcement of reforms, were interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of the country's leaders. Instead of saving the system, these acts intensified the protest movements and accelerated the breakdown of the party's rule.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989—not intended by the SED and caused largely by the media—did not end the revolution as is believed by some. It rather changed its course.[67] The number of demonstrations in the three weeks after the Wall fell remained as high as in the three previous weeks.[68] No longer walled in—a fact that made the communist regime finally lose its power and control over the "state inmates" (Joachim Gauck)—the majority of the protesters unambiguously called for German unification and the end, not the reform, of the GDR.

One of the ironies of the October Revolution is that in the previous weeks, when faced by the state's impending bankruptcy, some of the SED leadership had already abandoned their belief in the survival of the GDR without West German assistance, and thus were ahead of "their" people. And it is part of the tragedy of the opposition that even after the fall of the Wall, some of the civil rights groups—also because they were ignorant of the real economic situation—dreamed of socialist reforms, distancing themselves from the demonstrations and the ever more energetically chanted slogan "Germany, united fatherland." "They promoted the right of self-determination for the society, but refused to tolerate the self-determination as it was then practiced by the bulk of the population."[69] Many civil rights activists marginalized themselves because of this contradiction. Increasingly, the advocate for the mass movement of the GDR population was the West German conservative-liberal government under Chancellor Kohl,

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[67] See, for example, Stefan Bollinger, *1989—eine abgebrochene Revolution : verbaute Wege nicht nur zu einer besseren DDR?* (Berlin: Trafo, 1999).

[68] Cf. Uwe Schwabe, "Der Herbst '89 in Zahlen—Demonstrationen und Kundgebungen vom August 1989 bis zum April 1990," in Eberhard Kuhrt et al. eds., *Opposition in der DDR von den 70er Jahren bis zum Zusammenbruch der SED-Herrschaft* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999), 719–35, here 726–27.

[69] Rödder, *Deutschland*, 124.

who with his Ten-Point Plan of 28 November 1989 was already heading for German reunification.

Crucial for the success of the East German revolution was ultimately the position of the Soviet Union. "Our troops are with you," CPSU general secretary Leonid Brezhnev had impressed upon Erich Honecker in August 1970 before the latter came to power. "Erich, I am telling you frankly, never forget: the GDR cannot exist without us, without the Soviet Union, its power and strength. Without us there is no GDR."[70] In January 1990, the dictum was the same as it had been nearly twenty years before, but the price of maintaining the GDR, economically or militarily, was too high for CPSU leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his closest advisers—and to pay it would have contradicted Gorbachev's "new thinking." When the Soviet Union released the way for German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the basis for the GDR's existence was extinguished. It is this subsequent self-dissolution of the SED state after the collapse of its ruling system which characterizes the special path taken by Germany among the communist systems in Central and Eastern Europe.

Translated from the German original by Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek

[70] Conversation Leonid I. Brezhnev with Erich Honecker, East German protocol, 28 July 1970, in BA, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/3196.