

EAST GERMANY BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

Jean-Marie Vincent

ECONOMICALLY and industrially, the German Democratic Republic is one of the most advanced people's democracies. Its standard of living can be compared to that of Czechoslovakia, and is higher than that of the Soviet Union. It is by far the second economic power of the Soviet bloc and it has, in certain economic spheres, achieved an undisputed supremacy. Yet, it is at the same time, the weakest and most threatened of the people's democracies, and the one most burdened with uncertainties and dangers. This paradox is, of course, based on the fact that Germany is divided, and the adverse influence which West Germany continues to have on the people of the German Democratic Republic. What remains to be explained, however, is why this division has such a one-sided impact whilst in Viet-Nam and Korea it is the reverse which seems to be the case. In order to determine what kind of relations have come to exist between the people and the regime, it is necessary to go back to the historical circumstances of Germany's division and to the emergence of the German Democratic Republic.

At the beginning the Soviet authorities, true to the spirit of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, had no thought whatever of creating wholesale revolutionary upheaval in their zone.¹ They envisaged a fairly long period of good relations and only intended to guard against an aggressive comeback of the old ruling classes by favouring a new anti-fascist and democratic order. Their aim was also to get the maximum economic gain from their sector (dismantling, reparations) in order to accelerate the rebuilding of their own shattered economy. It is thus with a good deal of mistrust that they viewed the spontaneous demonstrations of the German working class in favour of a new social order. They did not want to see come into being independent authorities with strong popular roots, which might therefore come to oppose their policies. The anti-fascist committees which had sprung up between May and June 1945 were dissolved without much ceremony and, as far as possible, replaced by municipalities created from above.² Under Soviet guidance, the German Communist leaders restricted their policies to agrarian reforms (distribution of latifundia to poor peasants) and to a few measures of nationalization; these reforms fitted within the framework of the new anti-fascist and democratic regime without dealing a decisive blow to capitalist relations of production.

Even the compulsory fusion of the Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) which gave birth to the United Socialist

Party (SED) cannot be interpreted as showing a will to wholesale "sovietization" as there remained until 1948 three bourgeois democratic parties enjoying a certain degree of independence.³ All that the Soviet authorities really wanted was to prevent the emergence of a socialist opposition which could have endangered the ascendancy of the Communists on a section of the masses, and perhaps lead to a revolutionary transformation of society which would have been contrary to the compromise made with the West. In fact, the Russians believed that, with a few modifications, their policies could be applied to the whole of Germany and that, with a minimum of good will, the Western Allies could accept a central German government whose aim would be to promote an anti-fascist and democratic system. In the gradual widening of the division of Germany the initiative was almost always taken by the Western powers, particularly the United States, and not by the Russians; the latter merely reacted to the Western unilateral measures by progressively assimilating their zone to their own economic and social structures.

All this gives to the revolutionary process which took place in East Germany after the war a rather special character. More than in any other popular democracy this process was achieved by sudden moves, unexpected as far as the social classes most affected were concerned. Moreover this process appeared closely linked to that of the division of the country into two hostile states, and as the result of a policy dictated from above by a foreign power. This revolution, with its faltering and unco-ordinated advance could hardly seem inspiring even to those who sincerely supported the régime; it could not liberate the energies and the creative spirit of the masses on the Russian or Cuban pattern. It could only take place against a background of indifference, and even hostility, on the part of the exploited classes, who never had the feeling that they were the moving force of the social changes which were taking place. Given to a people who did not ask for it in this form, the revolution seemed to be the result of sheer violence and to an intervention from outside. For the masses, socialism took on the repulsive face of constraint.

The anti-fascist and democratic phase lasted until 1948, but, as early as 1947, it was possible to detect a change of direction.

The four-power conferences which took place during 1947 (in Moscow in March, in London in November-December) showed that the West was slowly moving towards the creation of a separate West German state. In view of the policies adopted by those who had become their adversaries, the Russians deemed it necessary to tighten their hold on East Germany. This was done by a two-fold action: on the one hand the workers' councils, which expressed the workers' autonomy, were deprived of most of their powers in July; on the other hand, a German economic mission (DWK) largely dominated by the SED and constituting the first embryo of an East German Government, was created

in June. At the same time the dismantling of German concerns gradually ceased and gave way to a more sophisticated economic policy, designed to contribute to a more rapid restoration of the economy of the Soviet occupied zone; and to larger reparations. Soviet policy thus remained fairly ambiguous: its aim was not the setting up of a socialist society since it was opposing the anti-capitalist activities of the working class; but it was also careful not to give to the capitalist forces too much freedom of action. The struggle against Western policies more and more took the form of bureaucratic measures rather than of an appeal to the initiative of the masses, still lively at that time.

1948, which witnessed a separate conference of the West in February-March, and then monetary reforms unilaterally introduced in the Western sectors in June, did not mark a fundamental change in this still cautious orientation. The blockade of West Berlin appears in retrospect more like a means of pressure against the Allies in order to make them change certain aspects of their policies, rather than a demonstration of a will to "communize" the whole of Germany. In fact, the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949 saw in East Germany the creation of a movement organized by the SED in favour of the reunification of Germany. Until the last moment the Soviet Union tried to prevent a division, the consequences of which it feared. There is every reason to believe that the Russians were reluctant to create in 1949 a separate East German state. But even at that time, the political task assigned to this new state appeared much more the completion of the democratic revolution and the realization of German unity on a basis which would be favourable to the Soviet Union, than the setting up of a socialist society. The introduction of planning (the two-year plan of 1949-50) which had become possible only on the basis of the growth of the nationalized sector was not irrevocable and could, in the event of reunification, have given way to a capitalist economy. What led the GDR on the anti-capitalist path was the cumulative consequences of partial measures and the inner logic of an economic and social evolution under Soviet guidance, rather than deliberate calculation. Under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht, who understood early on the consequences of the division created by the Cold War, only a small fraction of the SED actively worked towards making the new state the first "workers and peasant state in German history."

Given the circumstances, this effort by a group of men directed towards the introduction of new social relations in Germany could not fail to appear as the extreme expression of a movement of bureaucratization brought about by the occupation forces. Those who favoured the creation of a popular democracy were from the start deprived of popular support and could in fact rely only on the exacerbation of differences with the West and on the will of the Russians to control the centrifugal forces in their part of Germany.⁴ Moreover, during a fairly long period, they remained uncertain of the result of their actions. As

late as March 1952, a Soviet note to the Western powers more or less suggested the abandonment of the Democratic German Republic in exchange for the neutralization of the whole of Germany. The West immediately rejected this note and this must have given Walter Ulbricht and his followers strong encouragement to proclaim during the second national conference of the SED in July 1952 the construction of Socialism in the German Democratic Republic, i.e. the beginning of collectivization and the speeding up of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. But a Russian change of attitude always remained possible. This is, in fact, what seems to have happened in the first few months following the death of Stalin (see an article dated 26 May 1953 in *Pravda*); a marked relaxation occurred internally in the regime's relations with the former owning classes and the theme of an agreement between the Big Four on the reunification of Germany reappeared in the press. Afterwards, Walter Ulbricht maintained that Malenkov and Beria had intended to give up the German Democratic Republic in the course of negotiations with the Allies. Taking into account a certain exaggeration on the part of the first secretary of the SED, the substance of his thesis seems to rest on solid foundations. Only the rising of June 1953, with its repercussions in the whole of the Soviet bloc, prevented any further move in this direction. After that date, the question of a bargain at the expense of the SED never came up again, but it is obvious that the leaders could not completely discard the possibility and that they had to act accordingly, i.e. they had to seek at all cost the good will and protection of the Russians. In these circumstances, the progressive building of a socialist-type state hardly enjoyed propitious conditions. The leaders of the SED were forced to fall back on bureaucratic methods, more especially since the leadership was isolated and unpopular. The party itself, divided by conflicting tendencies, by currents formed at various moments in the history of the German working-class movement, was not an instrument which could easily be manipulated. It often put into words popular dissatisfaction, and offered a passive and stubborn opposition to the line adopted by the leadership. It was only a small core (specialists assess it at 160,000 to 200,000 members)⁵ which formed in these difficult circumstances the main support of the policy chosen by Walter Ulbricht. The great majority of the party activists, of the trade unions and the mass organizations, were given the task of applying these policies; they did not participate in its making and they had, moreover, no right to discuss its execution.

The authoritarian tendencies inherent in such a situation were, moreover, considerably reinforced by the serious economic difficulties which beset the new State.⁶ The Soviet occupation zone, carved out without regard to any economic considerations, was not at all suited to autarchy. It had practically no power industry and no heavy industry worth mentioning; but on the other hand it possessed extremely well developed manufacturing industries. It was, in fact, largely dependent on deliveries

from West Germany and the economic division of Germany involved difficult problems of readjustment in the GDR. Within the Communist bloc, there was no country capable of supplying everything which had so far come from West Germany. Consequently, the creation of a separate state implied a fundamental reshaping of the economic structure and a considerable effort was required in order to create a heavy industry. All this was possible only on the basis of a high rate of accumulation and therefore with a low rate of unproductive consumption. The more or less inevitable choice of autarchy meant a low standard of living over a long period. Of course, had these difficulties been consciously shouldered by the great majority of the population, they could have been borne without too much opposition. But since they served to worsen an already unfavourable political climate, they only underlined the lack of popularity of the régime. Relations with the working class, the keystone of the social structure, were under these circumstances deeply ambiguous. The leaders of the régime claimed that they themselves belonged to the working class and that they were acting in its name. They tried to obtain its active participation in a task which, they maintained, was its own task. The whole of official ideology sought to convince the workers that they were directing their own affairs and that through their daily work they directed and determined social life as a whole. The workers, on the other hand, knew only too well that these good relations they kept hearing about were a mere façade and that, although in theory very powerful, they were in fact closely controlled and constricted. In their activities, they tended to deny the false front of the official organization by opposing increases in work norms, by questioning the bureaucratic organization of production or by using for their own purposes some of the institutions of the régime.

What was most surprising in such a context was not the fact that the working class opposed the new régime more vigorously and persistently than any of the other social classes, but that the attachment of so many workers to the ideals of socialism should have endured.⁷ Much of the workers' opposition to the régime is, to a definite extent, based on a progressive critique of its policies, and it cannot be regarded as a simple nostalgia for the capitalist past.

From this point of view, the uprising of 1953, denounced by the leaders of the SED as an attempted Fascist putsch, is very revealing both in its origins and in its development. For it laid bare the real nature of the relationship between the masses and the régime. In June 1953 the leadership of the SED adopted a new political line—most likely at the instigation of Moscow and under the pressure of the discontent of a great part of the population. This new political line included a notable reduction of investment in heavy industry and an increase of investment in the consumption industries; the granting of short-term credits to private concerns (in industry, transport, trade); the review of certain

sentences punishing delays in compulsory deliveries (or in the payment of taxes); the restitution of goods to refugees who came back to the GDR; a greater humanity in the administration of justice and a general amnesty; the diminution of political indoctrination in education; a *détente* in the relationship with the Churches; and more facilities for travel between the two German states.

On the whole these new policies, which had as their aim a more rapid rise in the standard of living, brought immediate gains to the peasantry, the bourgeoisie and the small bourgeoisie, that is to say to classes considered hostile to socialism, while they only gave promises to industrial and white-collar workers. Moreover, the workers were asked to make an even greater effort. They were asked to agree to a considerable increase of working norms and in certain cases to a temporary lowering of their standard of living. It was undoubtedly the workers who had to bear the largest share of the burden of the new policy. The workers' endurance was thus stretched to the limit. Their discontent was first expressed by the bricklayers of the Stalinallee in Berlin, but the movements spread very rapidly. At the same time political demands made their appearance. The strikers, who numbered approximately 300,000, very often asked that the most unpopular rulers be deposed, particularly Walter Ulbricht; they attacked the internal regime of the party, protested against the lack of freedom and against the privileges enjoyed by the "cadres" of the party. In certain areas political demands showed a subterranean social-democratic influence, for instance in Magdeburg. However, the main impulse of the workers' agitation pointed towards the democratization of the regime and an improvement in the conditions of labour in industrial enterprises. The demand for free elections, which was expressed in a number of working-class areas, does not appear, if the whole character of the movement is taken into account, to have stemmed from a desire to see the regime replaced by a West German type of society. The situation was completely different among the other groups of the population. The peasants' demonstrations were clearly in favour of the Federal Republic and the few open demonstrations of the bourgeois opposition were, of course, of a completely reactionary character. It is also undeniable that, especially in Berlin, elements of diverse origins were encouraged, not least by Western broadcasts (RIAS) to take aggressive action of an openly anti-communist and anti-Russian character. In this sense, the description of the uprising by the leaders of the SED as fascist seems to have a degree of justification. But careful examination does not really sustain this view, in that the uprising of June 1953 (much more than the Hungarian insurrection of 1956) had an essentially working-class character. The demonstrations of the peasant and bourgeois oppositions were in fact of quite secondary importance and did not play a notable part in the events. The defenders of the official thesis have, in any case, understood this so well that they attributed the main responsibility to the influence

of ex-Nazis who had become workers in the GDR. Erich Glickauf thus writes:⁸ "Those who today still construct theories about the 'workers' uprising' of 17 June forget, either consciously or unconsciously, the sociological transformations which occurred in the working class of the GDR when an important element of active ex-Nazis, still steeped in an anti-working-class ideology, was incorporated into the direct process of production. A number of them have, of course, been able to assimilate and to work decently and peacefully, but this process of assimilation has been hindered by the continuous attempts of West Germany and West Berlin to organize these new 'workers' into shock troops, intended to fight against the workers' and peasants' régime in the GDR." This argument is not in the least convincing. It is in fact difficult to imagine that the proportion of ex-Nazis was sufficiently important to pervade almost the whole of the working class with a fascist-type ideology: on the contrary the slogans used and the tactics of the struggle were derived from the socialist and communist traditions of the working-class movement. In order to accept Glickauf's thesis, one would have to suppose that the movement of June 1953 concealed its real aims and that the strikers had constantly in mind a double objective, one real and another which was used as a screen; and such a supposition is absurd. The only really negative element in the workers' movement was the absence of a clear perspective on German unity, that is to say on how to confront West German capitalism.

II

The Russian repression quickly brought to an end the uprising of June 1953, but its repercussions made themselves felt for a very long time. The régime had suffered a blow which had shaken it to its foundations. The working class revealed itself as the most serious and most consistent internal opposition: it brought into question the type of socialism which the rulers of the SED advocated. Once the worst alarm was over, the rulers had a choice between two policies: one which would try and look for a slow *rapprochement* with the working class by making political and social concessions (workers' rights in the factories, progressive democratization of the party and the trade unions); the other one which would consist of trying to achieve even stricter control of social life, so as to restrain even further the spontaneity of the working masses. The first policy which was favoured by a number of the leaders (W. Saisser, R. Herrnsstadt, M. Fechner, etc.) was quickly condemned, because it seemed, both to the Russians and to the group surrounding the party leader, W. Ulbricht, to be fraught with too many dangers and unknown possibilities. The second policy was applied, gradually and with a certain caution in 1954 and 1955, but also with great firmness and great perseverance. In the field of production, the party saw its rôle increase (supervision of the managers) and, after a few unsuccessful

attempts at obtaining the voluntary participation of the workers, the use of coercion became more frequent in most fields. In this way, the leadership recognized indirectly that its claim to be a régime based on the workers' will was a mere fiction. It thus itself contributed to the rebuttal of its own claims by relying more and more on the use of force. In a certain measure the régime worked towards a "restalinization" in an international context of destalinization and it resigned itself to the hostility of a majority of the people. As a result, it is hardly surprising that the equilibrium of 1954-5 should have been relatively fragile.

The destalinization wave which shook Eastern Europe in 1956 has had deep repercussions on the political and social situation in the GDR. Of course the leadership did not have to fight an uprising as in 1953; the working class had too recently learned how much a frontal attack of this type could cost, and the Hungarian example was there to demonstrate Russian determination. However, the political ferment went deep: criticisms, often very bold, began to appear in the press and the government had to promise the formation of workers' councils in the factories; for their part the intellectuals turned hopefully to the Polish experiment. Once again the party was seriously shaken and almost fell in its majority under "revisionist" influences.⁹ Once again the ruling group reacted by trying to push even further the integration of various social strata in its system of organization and control by progressively reducing what was left of their autonomy in social life. This Stalinist-type counter-attack, which took shape as from 1957, spread in several directions. Its first target was the internal opposition to the régime and affected both the loyalist opposition (the group composed of Schirdewan, Wollweber, Gerhart Ziller, Fred Oelssner—all of them important leaders) as well as the radical opposition of the intellectuals grouped around Wolfgang Harich and who wanted to promote a thorough policy of destalinization as well as a rapid *rapprochement* with West German Social-Democracy in order to achieve reunification. But it aimed also at writers and at a number of economists like Fritz Behrens and Arne Benary who had dared to question authoritarian planning and who had become the advocate of workers' management on the Yugoslav model. In general, the rulers tried to impose an "orthodoxy" which ignored, or more exactly which condemned, the tendencies towards reform which had emerged in Poland, Hungary, and even to a certain extent in the Soviet Union. The only concessions which the régime thought it necessary to make concerned the standard of living and, more particularly, the level of salaries; and this policy was helped by the fact that after 1956 the Soviet Union gave the GDR a quite considerable amount of help.

On the surface the GDR, after the purge of the oppositions, became one of the most quiescent states in the Communist bloc, at least if one takes into account only the outward events of its political life. In actual fact this period left deep impressions under the surface, because the

Stalin-type counter-offensives of Ulbricht tended to turn the GDR into a régime comparable to the other people's democracies, both with regard to the extension of the socialized sector of the economy and to the extension of the control of the party on social life. It is thus significant that the exclusive domination of the theory of socialist realism or of dialectical materialism in its Stalinist guise dates from this period. The spirit of concession inherited from the time of the anti-fascist and democratic coalition disappeared almost entirely and Walter Ulbricht's team could in 1958 consider themselves firmly established. The optimism which they derived from this situation led them to over-estimate their own strength by promising, when they announced the seven-year plan (1959), that the GDR would soon pass the standard of living of West Germany. At the same time they ignored the considerable size of an opposition which neither coercion nor reduction to silence had succeeded in taming. As in 1954 and 1955, the consolidation of the State was in fact altogether precarious because, in the eyes of the people, it did not diminish the temporary character of the situation and the desire for reunification.

Moreover, the existence of borders almost completely open continued to irritate the open wounds from which the East German economy suffered—the escape to the West and the currency speculation which took place in West Berlin. Between 1945 and 1961 more than three million people left the GDR; among them were, of course, old people who had retired from active life; but they included a large proportion of people able to work and of young people who had just finished their studies. It is obvious that this enormous loss of manpower was a major economic problem. According to Walter Ulbricht, the departure of skilled manpower represented a capital loss of the order of DM27 to DM30 milliard, which is considerable if one considers that in 1960 the budget was DM49 milliards, and that in 1961 the gross industrial production totalled a value of DM75.11 milliards. If to this is added the monetary speculation and smuggling, one may agree that the figure of DM4 to DM5 milliard of loss per annum, put forward by the East German economists, is quite plausible.¹⁰ No real stabilization was possible so long as the popular refusal to accept the division of Germany lasted, and so long as there occurred these considerable human and economic losses; in any case these two factors reinforced each other. It is thus characteristic that 1959, which was one of the best years before the building of the Berlin wall, witnessed the escape of 150,000 people. The ruling group was well aware of this, and therefore tried to push the Russians into signing a separate peace treaty and to impose on the West the neutralization of West Berlin. The fundamental problem of the East German régime was always that it was never completely a sovereign State.

The contradictions inherent in such a situation contributed to the creation of a third major crisis, the origin of which was, this time,

entirely internal, unlike the crises of 1953 and 1956. The will of the leaders to complete rapidly the socialization of the economy by the collectivization of agriculture (spring 1960) and the increase of police control to stop the escapes resulted in a very serious worsening of the situation. The economy was disorganized by a crisis due to the massive departure of the peasants and the difficulties in the economy were, in their turn, the cause of numerous escapes. Police measures designed to intimidate those contemplating escape, only succeeded in making these people escape all the more quickly. The GDR ran the risk of finding itself very rapidly confronted with a major catastrophe, that is to say, the collapse of its economy. The building of the Berlin wall on 13 August 1961 and the establishment of a State border in the middle of Berlin itself remained the only possible solution. The prestige of the régime had reached its lowest point and it seemed necessary to the leaders of the party to turn to an increased repression in order to stifle at the source any expression of discontent and opposition. Stalinization had reached its highest peak and for several months arrests became more and more frequent.

Nevertheless, it is from this critical point that the position of the régime slowly began to improve. The party, now purged and entirely controlled by Walter Ulbricht's team, had shown itself at the time of crisis in August much stronger than during the previous crisis. On the whole, the number of those in favour of the régime, although a minority in the population, had slightly increased. Having rid itself of the fear of the open border, the régime could as a result count on its relationships with the masses becoming more normal, the latter being condemned from then on to accommodate themselves to the SED's supremacy for an indefinite period of time. The most extreme of the Stalin-type measures became less necessary and the economic situation, difficult in 1961 and 1962, gradually improved as from 1963, and eased the political climate. The GDR was no longer threatened with collapse or serious political crisis: it became a State in which the centrifugal forces had been temporarily neutralized.

For these reasons, the problems of modernization and of the improvement of the system of economic management could now be placed on the agenda, which was the first sign of a serious destalinization. According to the new economic system (July 1963),¹¹ planning was to cease being a detailed nomenclature of objectives to be reached or of targets to be achieved by each factory, and was to be limited to the fundamental questions of development possibilities and to economic co-ordination. At the level of factories and groups of factories the material interest of the producers was to be used as an incentive to increased output and to the fulfilment of the tasks described globally by the plan. Moreover, production was to be better adapted to needs by the introduction of the techniques of market research in groups of factories, and prices were intended to become once again real economic indicators by

reflecting costs of production more accurately and the relative scarcity of products.

At the end of 1964 the new economic system is, of course, still in its infancy. For this reason it is too early to assess its full impact, but it is already worth noting that it implies a basic rejection by the party of political "voluntarism" in the field of economics, as well as a concomitant choice in favour of the mechanism of the market. This inevitably entails a strengthening of the technocratic element and of the technical intelligentsia in social life. The entry into the Politbureau after the Sixth Party Congress (January 1963) of economic technicians like Erich Apel, Giinter Mittag, Herbert Jarowski and Margarete Muller, shows that the party has prepared itself consciously for this transformation in order to control and to limit its scope. On the other hand, for the sections of the working class most actively involved in the new organisms created by the régime, the new economic system is a source of increased opposition. It is significant that the movement of the socialist work brigades (launched in 1959) whose aim was to increase the qualifications and the sense of collective responsibility of the workers, developed a tendency to oppose the régime's attitude to the organization of labour. From 1960 and 1961, the brigades (groups of twelve to eighteen people) who were asked "to work, to learn and to live in a socialist way" tended to spread their activities to fields which had until then been reserved to the "management," and to ask for a real share in decision-making. Brakes were applied on more than one occasion, by Walter Ulbricht among others. But the virus of the workers' participation is hard to destroy and the problem keeps reappearing. One may judge its importance if one notes that in November 1962 there were 121,188 brigades totalling 1,735,041 people in the process of competing for the title of "Socialist Work Brigade." Also in November 1962, there were 32,671 working communities totalling 236,000 members, and including workers, technicians and engineers, whose aim was the improvement of this or that process of manufacture.¹² It is thus a fairly considerable part of the working class and of the intelligentsia which was swept into a movement leading them to the threshold of the democratic management of factories, which they were not, however, permitted to cross.

In October 1963 the leaders of the SED themselves felt it necessary to make some concessions to the demand for the democratization of management. Production committees which included all the organizations (party, trade unions, etc.) representing all personnel were established. The right to formulate views and to express demands to the director of the enterprise was granted. But the principle of a single direction remained unchanged, and so did the status of the director, who remained the all-powerful representative of the state and of the society; the régime was not ready really to reform the hierarchical structure of social life. For Walter Ulbricht and his colleagues, the

tutelage of the party over the working class remained indispensable and their wish to renovate did not go beyond minimal changes. Not very paradoxically, the leaders of the SED thus showed that they preferred to make substantial concessions to the technocrats rather than to trust the working class. The Apparatus, itself largely of working-class origin (75 per cent of its members stem from the working class according to official statements) had so far substituted itself for the class it was supposed to represent that the prospect of sharing power with it, even in a situation which was easier than before 1961, appeared altogether unacceptable.

III

At the present time, a great part of the people (without any class distinction) continues to be tied emotionally to West Germany, but this sentimental tie does not always take on a political colour. The majority of the middle classes in the small towns and the majority of country people remain attached to bourgeois conceptions.¹³ As for the technical and cultural intelligentsia, called upon to become an active agent of social transformation, it constantly comes into conflict with bureaucratic narrowness, and in spite of the material benefits it enjoys it is ultimately only half-convinced of the permanence of what has been achieved. In its turn, the working class is torn between several temptations: that of passive adaptation and the rejection of politics, that of nostalgia for its old forms of organization, and finally that of an active and militant participation aimed at transcending, in a socialist sense, the bureaucratic structures of the régime. Thus, in spite of a marked improvement in internal relationships, East German society lives, for all these reasons, in a state of latent malaise, with a sense of impermanence and in a grey atmosphere which stifles movements of enthusiasm and of hope, when these occur.

The attitude of the ruling party, with its mistrust and fear of the masses, contributes to maintain this state of affairs. A decisive improvement can in fact only be envisaged if the régime would accept some risks in order to win the confidence of the majority of the working class, which is by no means an impossible task in present circumstances. It is true, however, that such a reorientation would mean the abandonment of the political and material advantages acquired by the ruling oligarchy, since its position above classes and its apparent omnipotence rests on the impotence of the working class, on the hostility of a faction of the intelligentsia, on the irreducible opposition of what remains of the bourgeoisie. It is therefore not surprising that the SED shows a marked tendency to accept the present situation and to consider that destalinization and the building of socialism only mean an endless series of gradual and imperceptible improvements.

The German Democratic Republic is supposed above all to serve as

an example, in some ways like the Soviet Union, whose aim, in theory at any rate, is to assist the disintegration of capitalist forces by its economic superiority during the decade 1970-80. Of course, this political line, which postpones to a fairly distant future any real solution to the division of Germany and to destalinization, cannot be applied without a few concessions. Popular pressures have become too strong to be ignored. Nor can the international magnitude of the crisis of Stalinism leave the GDR completely isolated from the movements of innovation which occur almost everywhere in the Soviet bloc. This is why certain recent measures go further afield than was envisaged in the programme agreed upon by the leadership of the party. The agreements of 1963 and 1964 granting passes to the inhabitants of West Berlin, the measures allowing retired people in East Germany to travel to the West, the proposed amnesty for 10,000 prisoners (including people convicted for serious political offences) may be interpreted as so many attempts to consolidate the regime internally and as concessions to the immediate aspirations towards unity. In the same way the announcement by Walter Ulbricht, on 6 October 1964, of a new electoral law which would allow twice as many candidates as the number of seats to be filled, can be interpreted as a new step towards destalinization or as a measure aiming to limit the range of necessary reforms.

It is very significant that during the commemorations of the fifteenth anniversary of the foundation of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht¹⁴ put forward the old argument according to which reunification could only be achieved after a complete upheaval in West Germany's political situation. At the same time he also reaffirmed the necessity "of an agreement between the SED and the German (Western) CP on the one hand and the social-democratic party, the trade unions, and German democratic organizations, on the other hand." He further added that "they must get on together, otherwise reunification is not possible." ... It would thus appear that two lines keep crossing each other and this reflects the double nature of the regime, progressive because it propagates anti-capitalist values, conservative because it is tied to bureaucratic forms of social life. In the near future, when the problem of the survival of the State will have become less urgent, a more direct confrontation of these two tendencies must be expected, with all the consequences this will have for the fate of the whole of Germany and of Europe.

The German Democratic Republic symbolizes very well the contradictions of the countries which have broken away from capitalism in the wake of the Soviet Union. This particular State reveals these contradictions in their sharpest degree of acuteness because it meets them in their most extreme forms. As the most economically advanced of these States (together with Czechoslovakia), endowed with a proletariat whose socialist traditions go back a very long way, it has suffered intensely the contradictions of bureaucratic planning; having

been created in a divided country and separated from the most densely populated and the most important part of Germany—West Germany—it had to compete with the material superiority of the most advanced capitalism. As the most exposed part of the Russian bloc, its threatened international position sums up well enough the strength and the weaknesses of the European non-capitalist countries. At the same time, its implantation in the heart of an industrially advanced Europe and its indissoluble links with the economically strongest State of Western Europe (the Federal Republic) place it at the centre of one of the most fateful questions for the future of the two blocs. The establishment of the Europe of the Six is directly related to the conflict between the two German States; for the political, social and economic equilibrium of an essential bastion of capitalism depends on the strength or weakness of the GDR. A strong and attractive GDR would introduce a factor of instability in the Western European network of alliances and agreements; the reverse applies to a weak and despised GDR, which sustains the cohesion of the West German policies around Atlantic and anti-communist concepts and guarantees a solid basis to the building of the Europe of the Six. All this explains why Western policies aim by all possible means to make the GDR a second-class state, to whom diplomatic recognition is refused and whose ruling authorities are officially considered as non-existent or as the mere agents of the Soviet occupation forces despite the incontrovertible political changes which have occurred in East Germany since 1949. In West Germany, the Governments insist on qualifying the GDR as the Soviet zone occupation. In the economic field, fairly considerable economic pressure is applied to the GDR on the basis of inter-German trade; this trade is of secondary importance to the Federal Republic but vital to the East German economy, since it accounts for 10 per cent of its external trade, and includes a number of basic products not otherwise available to the GDR. The agreement on which this trade is based was cancelled by the Federal Republic in September 1960, though it was renewed a little later; this was a warning to remind the East German leaders that they were relatively dependent on the good-will of the West. The West Berlin problem is used for the same purpose. The Bonn Government tries to gain recognition for the degree of sovereignty it claims over West Berlin, though the position of the Western powers remains, in principle, that the agreement of 1945 should stand. In the final analysis, the defence of the liberty of the inhabitants of West Berlin is hardly more than an alibi, or a screen behind which is waged a bitter and ceaseless diplomatic war.

These elements of weakness are in part counter-balanced by the support given to the GDR by the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. For fairly obvious reasons (notably the risk of unsettling the whole of its East European position), the USSR cannot tolerate too great a weakening of the position of the leaders of East Germany.

Russia must always be ready to come to their help. For their part the People's Democracies, fearing the tendencies of certain groups in West Germany, have a definite stake in helping a German State which has accepted the frontiers drawn up at the end of World War II. Moreover, East Germany represents for most of these countries an economic partner of major importance. As the second economic power in the Soviet bloc, the GDR's deliveries of industrial products have become indispensable to the USSR, Poland and Hungary. Contrary to speculations appearing from time to time in the press, it is thus fairly certain that the countries of the Warsaw pact, or rather the USSR, will not surrender East Germany in order to obtain a marked *détente* in their relations with the West. The solemn support which they gave the GDR on 13 August 1961 is significant in this connection. This support has, however, an essentially negative value; it is opposed to any move which threatens the integrity of the East German State; but it does not help to improve its position in any direct way.

The balance between the pressure of the West and the counter-pressure of the East is thus far from being markedly favourable to East Germany, in spite of the establishment of a State boundary in Berlin. In order to improve their position the East German leaders must start from a position of weakness. One cannot, of course, reproach them for this. But what is characteristic is that rather than go to the root of this weakness, namely, the nature of their relations with their own population, they concentrate on its symptoms and manifestations. Their ambition is limited to making arrangements within the *status quo* and to make the present situation as bearable as possible. For several years their efforts have been focused in the main on obtaining *de facto* recognition of their régime, both in Europe and in the under-developed countries; but the few successes they won can hardly be considered decisive. At the present time, the contacts between the authorities of the Federal Republic and the GDR have become more frequent, and deal with important questions, but officially they are limited to matters of simple "technical" contacts. All such signs of relaxation do not, however, foreshadow a fundamental reversal of the present situation. Western tactics may become more flexible, but the goal to be reached remains pretty well the same, namely to keep the GDR in a weak state. On a longer view, these tactics even aim at sowing in the whole of the Soviet bloc, through the GDR, the seeds of a pro-capitalist "reformism."

To recognize the GDR as a legitimate State would undoubtedly entail the recognition by the West of the legitimacy of communism in one of the strongest capitalist nations. In the present state of relations of strength between East and West, this seems unthinkable and one cannot help but find a Utopian or unreal aspect in the policies which the government of the GDR propose to follow. The initiative lies with the capitalist West, who can time their attacks, while East Germany is almost always on the defensive. In this context a partial victory of the

East, such as the agreement on passes in September 1964, is not without great drawbacks for the leaders of the GDR: massive visits from West Berliners help in fact to keep alive in the East Germans a nostalgia for national unity. The same applies to a whole number of recent measures which are aimed at increasing the internal and external prestige of the State: for instance the permission given to retired people to travel in the Federal Republic. With each step it takes the East German régime is reminded of the problem of reunification, which it would much prefer to ignore for an indefinite period.

In order to cure its own weakness and use positively all its dormant socialist forces the GDR would need to combine in an original way a bold policy of destalinization and a marked open-mindedness towards the problem of reunification; for the vicious circle of weakness giving birth to bureaucracy and bureaucracy to weakness can only be broken by a direct attempt to meet the fundamental aspirations of the population, i.e. by a genuine New Deal. Identification with the régime should no longer appear as a more or less forced identification with the narrow and conservative conceptions of a bureaucratic stratum afraid of any important change. What is needed is a conscious identification with, and support for, policies systematically intended to foster socialist democracy and reunification, and which would help to rouse from its torpor the working-class movement of West Germany.

(Translated by Nan Keen)

NOTES

1. On Soviet Policies, see Sergio Segre: *La Questione Tedesca* (Rome, 1959).
2. See Wolfgang Leonhard: *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Köln-Berlin, 1956).
3. On political life in East Germany, see, Georges Castellan: *D.D.R. Allemagne de l'Est* (Paris, 1955), and Stefan Doernberg: *Die Geburt eines neuen Deutschland* (Berlin, 1959).
4. On the part played by Walter Ulbricht and his colleagues see, Carola Stern: *Ulbricht, Eine politische Biographie* (Köln-Berlin, 1963).
5. See Carola Stern: *Porträt einer bolschewistischen Partei* (Köln, 1957).
6. On this see, Gunther Kohlmeier: "Spaltungsdisproportionen und Aussenhandel" in *Wirtschaftswissenschaft* (No. 1, 1958), p. 53; Fritz Schenk: *Im Vorzimmer der Diktatur* (Köln-Berlin, 1962); Gilbert Badia and Pierre Lefranc: *Un Pdy's Méconnu: La République Démocratique Allemande* (Leipzig, 1963); G. Seidel, K. Meinter, B. Rauch, A. Thorns: *L'Agriculture en République Démocratique Allemande* (Leipzig, 1962).
7. Viggo Graf Blucher: *Industriearbeiterschaft in der Sowjetzone. Eine Untersuchung der Arbeiterschaft in der volkseigenen Industrie der SBZ* (Stuttgart, 1959).
8. Erich Glickauf: "Apropos du 17 juin" in *La Nouvelle Critique* (March-April, 1956), p. 175.
9. On the part played by the various oppositions in the life of the German Democratic Republic see, Martin Jänicke: *Der dritte Weg. Die antistalinistische Opposition gegen Ulbricht seit 1953* (Köln, 1964); Ernst Richert: *Macht ohne Mandat. Der Staatsapparat in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands* (Köln-Opladen, 1958).

10. See Karl Bichtler and Willi Kunz: "Aspects Economiques du 13 aout 1961" in *Allemagne d'Aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1962), pp. 337-55.
11. On the new economic system see, Dieter Staritz: "Zum neuen ekonomischen System der **DDR**" in *Netie Kritik* (July 1964), pp. 6-11; and Stefan Doernberg: *Kurze Geschichte der DDR* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 473-85.
12. See Badia-Lefranc, *op. cit.*, p. **148**.
13. On opinion in GDR, see Peter Bender: *Offensive Entspannung—Möglichkeit für Deutschland* (Köln, 1964).
14. See the report in *L'Humanité* of 7 October 1964.