

Prime Minister,

BERLIN

I spent two days in Berlin, West and East, with one of my people last week. This note sets out our impressions and asks some questions that urgently need to be considered.

Impressions

Although I have written frequently of the terrible degradation of life under communism, what cannot be experienced unless one actually goes into a communist state and walks the ordinary streets and goes into ordinary peoples' houses, is the way communism breeds the deepest, most dreadful sense of resignation.

It took me two hours of walking in the streets before I saw one smile. People seem to wander, rather than walk with any purpose. Life is in slow-motion. I saw three largish buildings under construction. Two had been under construction for ten years and one for six. In Britain they would have been completed in twelve months, in America in nine. No workmen were in sight. They had not touched any of them for two years at least because there are no building materials for them to work with. No cement. No bricks. Nothing.

Away from the two good Western-style hotels, the condition of the streets and the buildings is terrible. I saw healthy, cleanly dressed young people rummaging in a skip at the side of a street looking for things that might be useful to them. One found an old rolling pin. I started to take photographs of them fully expecting to be asked to desist. They took no notice of me and continued quite unashamed. Eventually I asked them what they were doing and one replied he was doing his 'shopping'.

East Berliners' initial reaction to the freedom to travel to the West is like that of prisoners who have served their sentence and are leaving jail, blinking at the light with deep suspicion. Their suspicion is well founded. The Communists have by no means given up and will go to very great and devious lengths to retain their grip on power as their brethren in Hungary and Poland are doing.

And most of the activists organising the opposition to the Krenz government are not yet ready to abandon Socialism, because they have been successfully indoctrinated and because to do so would be to admit that they have been taken for an appalling ride for the last forty years. They hope that they can create a new

socialism with a democratic face. They believe that economic activity can somehow be separated from political activity. When they realise that they cannot, their anger may well be uncontainable.

We walked under a bridge in East Berlin where, after the last war, ten Nazi informers were hanged by the population and left to rot for eight days. The bridge could be used for the same purpose again. Certainly some East German communist leaders think so. Several have committed suicide in the last few days.

I had several conversations with student leaders from the Humboldt University including those who had and were continuing to organise demonstrations. Not one of them was prepared to abandon socialism. They genuinely believe that property rights cause wars, Northern Ireland is occupied against the will of the population by British troops and that there is a dignity in the East that is absent in the West. One reason for this is that no student can get in to any GDR university unless he or she is vetted by the Security apparatus and declared 'sound'.

There is no coherent, organised political opposition. The leaders of the New Forum, Democracy Now and the other organisations are all intellectuals and socialists, at present. Exposure to the West will change many of them very quickly. Both the West German CDU and SPD are trying to revive their counterparts in the East. Bohme (SDP Organiser) was very chary of the West German SPD (rightly, Egon Bahr almost certainly belongs to the Soviet Union) and the CDU is still inextricably linked to the Communists.

#### Questions

Why did Krenz, the man who publicly applauded the Chinese government's actions in Tienanmen Square, succumb to public pressure and allow free travel?

The best information I have is that Krenz feared that the situation would get out of control, that he did not have enough troops on whom he could rely to deal with the scale of the demonstrations and that Gorbachev, with whom he was in close touch, forbade him to use force, partly for fear of the consequences on Western public opinion.

Will the two Germanies reunite and if so when?

Despite a widespread fear in East Germany of being gobbled up by West Germany there is considerable support among ordinary people for reunification. A majority of the intellectuals are against, partly because the best of them have either escaped or been expelled to the West and those that remain are not intellectually bold.

Despite the inconveniences that West Germans are presently suffering at the hands of the East Germans, they see the benefits of reunification and see it as a demonstration that their post-war guilt has finally been expunged. For this reason, West Germans badly want reunification in their hearts although many are still cautious in their mouths.

We should proceed as though de facto reunification is underway even if formal reunification is some way off. De facto reunification cannot now be prevented. Formal reunification could be prevented by the US and the Soviet Union but the Americans are publicly in favour and the Soviet Union is almost certainly secretly in favour whatever Gorbachev says.

Does Gorbachev have a covert agenda for Eastern Europe?

An exchange of NATO for the Warsaw Pact would suit him very well and is a long-standing goal of the Soviet Union. There is absolutely no equivalence in Soviet eyes between the two organisations.

First, despite much public squabbling, NATO is a cohesive military alliance that would respond collectively to any Soviet invasion. The solidity of Warsaw Pact forces in the event of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe is very doubtful.

Second, the Soviet armed forces could manage such an invasion without Warsaw Pact forces although they would have considerable difficulty if Warsaw Pact forces were actually hostile, still unlikely.

Third, a withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Soviet Union would be much less of a step (and much less important militarily) than the withdrawal of US and British troops to the US and Britain.

Fourth, such a deal would undoubtedly decouple the US from Europe a continuing and long standing goal of Soviet geo-strategy. Such a decoupling would be very destabilising for the West.

It has to be said that the likelihood of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe is far less than it was a few years ago. Against that the following question needs to be considered.

How will the Soviet Union survive if economic and other conditions continue to deteriorate?

The short answer is that it will not survive as now constituted. On the way to collapse it will undoubtedly attempt to obtain massive assistance from the West. We should consider how much and what kind of pressure it might apply to obtain what it needs if the West continues to be as unwilling as it is at present to provide help on a scale that would actually make a difference or if the West insisted on conditions that the Soviet Union found unacceptable?

Conclusion

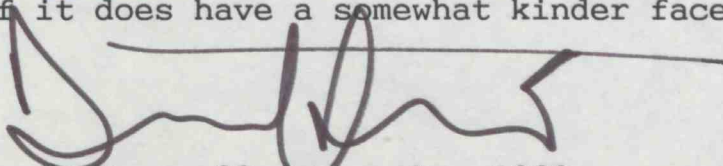
The principal reason for the collapse of Communism is that it is a system without any moral validity. When you are under attack, as you have been recently, you draw on immense reserves of strength because you know that your own political views have moral validity and are widely held in Britain. Imagine how difficult it would be to resist such attacks if you knew that your political views had no moral validity at all and were widely detested by your people. Only Stalins and Hitlers can sustain themselves in such circumstances.

The collapse of Communism is a tremendous moral victory for the West. We are in grave danger of squandering it - as we have squandered our other great victories in this strange century.

The Communists have been trying to subvert the West since the Revolution. Uncounted billions of dollars, pounds, francs etc have been and are still being dedicated to this task. Since the early sixties they have also been trying to frighten us. We have been forced to tax our citizens in order to build up substantial defences against a massive and quite unnecessary threat.

We have every right to insist that the Soviet Bloc including the Soviet Union introduce reforms to our liking - independent judiciaries, enforceable property rights, free markets and free trade - if it wants us to assist it rebuild its shattered economy and political system.

If we do not make stringent demands they will laugh at us behind their hands, call us useful idiots to each other and probably eventually manage to convert the West to a kind of watered down Socialism that will be just as debilitating as Communism, even if it does have a somewhat kinder face.



David Hart, 23rd November 1989