



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister *ms*

East Germany

This is the note
of Julian Bullard's
impressions, on a brief
visit last year, which
Anthony Adair promised
to send you.

C D P
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PS/Mr Rifkind

CC: Private Secretary
PS/Lady Young
PS/PUS
Mr Jenkins
WED
EED
Soviet Dept
Planning Staff

Mr DND Thomas c/a

THE GDR

1. I spent three days in the GDR last week, half of the time in East Berlin and the rest in Weimar and Potsdam. I found it absorbing both as a tailpiece to my previous job and as a curtain raiser to my next - especially the latter. This was the week in which the Permanent Representation of the FRG in East Berlin had to close its doors to the public because of the numbers seeking political asylum there. It was also the week of Weizsäcker's inaugural speech, in which he came close to declaring himself President of the whole German people. It is a sign of the maturity of the GDR that these events were taken calmly by all my official interlocutors. But they illustrate the basic problem for the GDR: how to secure the loyalty of 17 million people in the face of the counter-magnet of the FRG.

2. It seemed to me that the regime is not only a very long way from this goal, but not making much progress towards it either. The FRG presence is so ubiquitous that the authorities are reduced to managing rather than trying to control it. Hence the interships and the other devices for sucking in hard currency. Hence the police cars which cruise the laybys along the autobahns, checking for stowaways. And hence the editorial policy of the official media, which is (so I was told by the deputy editor of Neues Deutschland) not to try to compete with the West German TV stations which are watched by three quarters of the population, but simply to record the doings of the GDR elite and to supply (after whatever delay may be necessary) a GDR Communist Party perspective on recent rather than current events. The hope presumably is to use the adversary's superior weight and strength to his own disadvantage, as in Chinese wrestling, and certainly the FRG has sometimes overreached itself or been made to look clumsy. But although the GDR may have survived several rounds, so to speak, I wonder how long this feat of bluff and agility can continue.

3. Everything really depends on public attitudes. I hesitate to comment on these after so short a stay. At one extreme, the Mayor of Potsdam and his wife talked like the carthorse Snowball in 'Animal Farm'. At the other, I met an East German couple 'celebrating' their 15th wedding anniversary in a state of deepest melancholy: they saw nothing in the GDR for themselves or their children to live for, and no prospect of things improving. From this and a few other conversations I wonder whether Mr Maxey's farewell despatch, critical though it was, did not underestimate the degree of popular discontent with the regime, the controls on daily life and the forced relationship with Moscow.

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4. I am thus more than ever inclined to regard Weizsäcker as in earnest when he asks what is 'the German people' and speaks of 'the still-open German question'. At the very least, I believe that Mr Everard and I will need to keep an ear cocked for this subject from our respective vantage points in East Berlin and Bonn.

5. On Anglo-GDR relations, I see a dilemma. We obviously need our own contacts, and I was impressed by the earnestness with which the Hungarians urged us recently not to underrate the significance of the GDR. We would not wish to leave this target to be covered entirely by the FRG, especially at a time when so much more seems to be going on between Bonn and East Berlin than we hear about. As to the level of contacts, to confine these to the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to be condemned to disappointment. Nier, Mr Rifkind's opposite number, manages to be limp and wooden at the same time. Fischer should have rather more to offer, and I hope the Secretary of State will find time to see him in New York. But as Felfe showed, conversation even with a member of the Polit Bureau can have its limitations. Only if the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister went to the GDR and saw Honecker would I expect a really illuminating encounter. In any case, I do not see the components on which a more intimate, valuable Anglo GDR relationship could be built - whereas I do see very clearly the gain to the GDR in adding British scalps to those which they have recently been accumulating (Palme, Papandreou, Craxi) and in further elevating their status internationally and within the Eastern block. On the whole, therefore, I would be in favour of proceeding fairly steadily, raising the level of our contacts a notch at a time and making the most of alternative channels such as the East German equivalent of Chatham House where I spent a valuable hour. I wish I could think of a really well placed unofficial operator, but to mention the name of Mr Robert Maxwell is to make the point that the field is limited.

J. L. Bullard

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9 July 1984

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