



ERIC SINGH surveys the deepening social crisis, including the rise of fascism, that is spreading across east Germany, his adopted country, and argues that while the former communist leadership must be held responsible for the failures of socialism, in the areas of social welfare and international solidarity the GDR achieved much more than their western counterparts

Germany after unification: Shattered hopes and stark realities

Ever since the Wende (change) in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) I have been inundated with questions of my reaction to the events in Germany since October 1989. The period in question has not been easy for anyone, least of all for the people of east Germany, irrespective of their enthusiasm for the unification with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Gone is the rampant euphoria which swept through this part of the world in those hazy days of October and November.

Today Germany is once more united, bringing with it stark realities which east Germans are now having to face. How many times have I heard east Germans saying: 'We did not know this would

happen', or 'I did not want this'. Young east Germans have welcomed unification: travel is now unrestricted provided the cash is there. And here is the nub. Gone is the security of vocation provided by the state and the job guaranteed with it. That is just one aspect of the situation. The true extent of the problem, which affects many facets of life, is still to be felt.

Benefits of social security

Despite the criticisms levelled against the East German rulers there is agreement that benefits of social security can never be repeated. The most privileged people in the GDR were undoubtedly the children. The state paid huge sums for their welfare. Mothers could work with the security that their children were safe in the kindergartens, which were either provided by the state or various enterprises. The average monthly kindergarten payment per child amounted to around 20 marks (R12). Today, the price is between 2 and 2,5 marks a day, and continues to rise. In the FRG the minimum cost has been over 300 marks (R180) a month.

Since 1971, the GDR made a concerted effort to overcome the housing problem by providing thousands of homes in the country at minimal rents. That is now a thing of the past. Rents are expected to rise to almost four times the present level. These and other social measures cost the state around 58 billion marks (R34,8bn) a year.

Such huge subsidies (which included cheap transport and basic food) meant that something had to be neglected. The meagre investment in industry resulted in the poor upkeep of many huge industrial plants, which in turn has been a factor influencing foreign firms' reluctance to invest in industry.

Before the Wende unemployment was unheard of. Today, thousands of people, roam the streets in search of work. The economy has been run into the ground deliberately, say the pundits, so that the hawks can have labour for grabs. This in turn has prompted people to comment that yesterday they were the 'Zone' (a derogatory Western term to denote GDR as a Russian Zone) and today we are the 'colony' (of the West). According to estimates, by mid-June two to three million people will be out of work - a staggering figure given that the east German popula-

tion is around 16 million.

People are being advised to tighten their belts until relief comes in about four to five years. In the meantime prices soar. Those who have kept their jobs are now doing the work of three or four people despite earning a fraction of the wages paid in the west, thereby causing headaches for trade unions in wage negotiations. The future looks bleak for the vast majority of the population who face a situation they could not have imagined.

What went wrong and why?

People are asking what went wrong and why. The simple truth is that the leadership of the SED (Socialist Unity Party - an

ship from holding out in Wandlitz, safely out of the view of the people. Explaining this, Dr Gregor Gysi, leader of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS - formed in late 1989 to replace the SED), said he could understand the establishment of the Wandlitz settlement after the events in Hungary in 1956. But he challenged the validity of it after the securing of the borders in 1961. I will be even more generous and add ten years to the affair.

Moving out of isolation

The year 1971 witnessed the collapse of the isolation of the GDR. States were stumbling over each other in their rush to establish diplomatic relations with it. This included such countries as the USA, France, Great Britain and their allies, who for years stubbornly supported Bonn's contention of sole representation of the entire German people.

The GDR and the FRG became members of the United Nations (UN) in 1973. Both were welcomed into the forums of its various commissions and began to play active roles in the international arena, with their experts working in many UN agencies. The Special Committee Against Apartheid was strengthened through the active participation of the GDR.

Sadly, the performance of the GDR emissaries did not penetrate the thinking of its leaders. Instead of moving out and joining the world community, the SED leadership's adoption of an introverted attitude cut the population off from the outside world. They turned their backs on the people and then had the audacity to say the population was behind them.

The SED leadership did not trust the masses on whom they imposed strict travel laws. The Stasi (State Security) were also known to act cruelly against anybody who dared to challenge the status quo. Among the victims were solid, tried and tested revolutionaries.

The Biermann affair

The Biermann affair of 1976 put the seal on the SED leadership's attitude. Wolf Biermann is a folk-singer whose father was in the ranks of the Communist Party during the 'Third Reich' and was killed by the Nazis in a concentration camp. They lived in Hamburg.

With the formation of the GDR (1949) young Wolfgang was invited by the SED



amalgamation of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and Social Democratic Party in the Eastern sector of Germany in 1946) failed to liberate themselves from the cold war mentality. This is somewhat understandable. They were the victims of a concerted effort by the West to destroy them and they showed heroic patience and resilience in withstanding this.

In fact the construction of the Berlin Wall and the securing of its borders in 1961 contributed immensely to the GDR's economic stability and strength. Over the past 20 years the country was among the industrial giants of the world, occupying 8th or 9th position.

But this did not stop the SED leader-



The glitter of West German capitalism: As prices and unemployment in East Germany rise at astronomical rates, the enthusiasm is beginning to wane

to live and school in East Germany, which his mother could not afford to do in the FRG. Whilst studying at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Wolfgang came into conflict with official thinking, which resulted in his being blacklisted - so that he was unable to work. Over the years his music became fairly popular in the West. When asked to leave the country he refused.

Finally he was allowed to tour the FRG in 1976 and in one concert, which was relayed over West German TV, he lashed out at the SED leadership, which then revoked his GDR citizenship and declared him *persona non grata*. This move caused an international furore. The repercussion was most felt in the GDR itself. Thousands of people, including musicians, writers and celebrities, signed a protest note and demanded a repeal of the measures taken against Biermann.

The SED's intransigence led many leading people from the cultural world of the GDR to leave the country for the FRG.

This episode pushed the SED more and more into a corner. The backbone of socialist democracy is undoubtedly its practice of democratic centralism. But the Biermann affair changed this concept. Whilst centralism was enhanced, the democratic process died. No arguments were accepted in party meetings. Orders from above had to be rubber-stamped by the branches. Failure to ac-

cept these orders resulted in 'culprits' being branded as 'dissidents'. Even (ex-Prime Minister) Erich Honecker's travels abroad failed to break this mentality and stronghold on the party membership.

East German internationalism

The founding fathers of the GDR, many of whom were graduates of the anti-fascist movement who came either from exile or from the Nazi prisons and concentration camps, were genuinely promoting the interests of the people. Not even the most ardent opponent of the GDR will deny that to a large extent the state did precisely that. Nobody who left the GDR can ever claim that he/she was economically in the doldrums. The strange sight of motorized 'refugees' flooding the FRG speaks for itself.

Another side of GDR that people from the Third World remember is the support that they received from the government and people of the state which went out of existence on 3 October 1990. I am convinced there are millions of people all over the world irrespective of whether they are in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Korea, Cuba, Chile, Indo-China, West and North Africa, just to name a few, who will endorse this statement.

ANC members also found friendship and support in the GDR, especially in the dark days of the early 1960's. *Sechaba*, the official organ of the ANC in exile, was printed in the GDR from January

1967 until October 1990.

The ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania was also made possible by the generosity of the GDR. These are only some examples of the support the GDR gave the ANC. Over the years assistance was rendered in many other fields too, including medical treatment for ANC cadres and in the diplomatic field.

The ANC was not the only recipient of the GDR's generosity. According to figures released by the Solidarity Committee in 1989 (last figures available) close to 120 000 people from Africa, Asia and Latin America have studied or undergone vocational training in the GDR since 1970. Working as engineers, doctors, farmers, teachers, economists, cultural and highly skilled workers, they are now active in the economic and cultural development of their countries.

Over the same period, about 22 000 specialists from the GDR worked as economists, engineers, teachers and vocational instructors, physicians in developing countries. Most active in this field was the the GDR youth movement FDJ.

What about the other Germany? Where does it fit into the picture in terms of its relationship to the ANC in exile? Bonn has always been a close patron of Pretoria and looked upon the ANC as a communist-dominated terrorist organisation. Although there were no official ties, this attitude changed slightly after the ANC

set up a mission in Bonn in the early 1980's.

But this does not mean that the ANC had no support there. On the contrary a number of groups have been instrumental in supporting the ANC's Bonn mission and in providing educational facilities for its cadres. Nelson Mandela's visit to Bonn last year has signalled a shift in attitude towards the ANC.

Mistakes of the leadership

The current misery in east Germany must be attributed to the former SED leadership, which failed to read the situation correctly. Even when the Stasi pointed out the real situation in the country it was brushed aside. In an interview before his overthrow Honecker said studying Stasi reports gave him the impression that he was reading the Western media, which meant they could not be taken seriously.

The SED leadership also failed to understand the weakness of a state built on the shaky foundation of a victorious Soviet Red Army - the state was neither established nor accepted by the masses. The people rejected a divided Germany. Few accepted the GDR and among those who did there was much room for opportunism. This opportunism was created by the SED. If you wanted to get anywhere, then SED membership was your safest passport.

The case of Joachim Streich, one of the few European footballers to have played in over a hundred internationals, illustrates this. At the Olympic Games in 1976 he won the gold medal with the GDR team.

But the fact that he got to Montreal at all is a classic piece of opportunism. He was told that if he wanted to be selected for Montreal, he had to join the SED. He did so although politics was of no interest to him. 'All these years I was a dues paying member of the SED', he said in an interview. Today he is a trainer of a second division team in West Germany.

The re-emergence of fascism

Most significant is that the masses who rejected the GDR, show no hesitation in identifying themselves with the West German state.

What makes it even more remarkable is that Bonn was ruled by people who were very active in the Third Reich (under Hitler) until Willy Brandt and his Social Democrats ousted them from power in the 1972 elections. This did not prevent former Nazis from holding key positions in the judiciary and other important sec-

tors of the state. Younger Nazis have now replaced the old guard, especially in the police force.

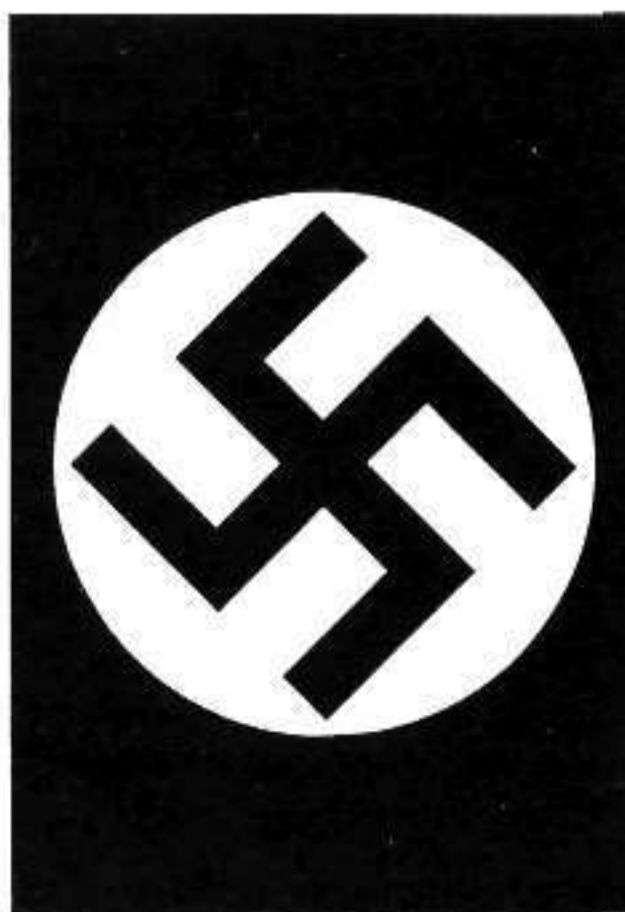
It is thus not surprising that the head of fascism is again openly showing itself in east Germany, although there are efforts to try and pin this onto imports from the West.

Dr Wolfgang Brueck, legal sociologist and criminologist from Leipzig, comments on right-wing activities in east Germany: 'My considerations are as follows - if a country with a left-wing oriented social system loses its identity and undergoes a deep crisis, a turn to the right is bound to occur. The loss of orientation has especially grave consequences on young people. They tend to look for a new place in life on the opposite of the spectrum.'

'Historical factors also exist. We are part of a country which was permeated by a fascist ideology more than five decades ago.'

In our (GDR) presentation of history we failed to point out clearly enough that in 1933 German fascism had a mass basis. Only one per cent of the German population fought in the resistance movement. To the vast majority of Germans (in the GDR) anti-fascism was, so to speak, "bestowed" upon them after 1945. But no people can get away from the dark side of its own history, they remain facts and

Fascists, who for a long time held positions of power in West Germany, are openly emerging in East Germany after unification



continue to produce effects. On top of this, a small group of anti-fascists in the GDR declared themselves to be the victors of history - something in itself which has to be questioned - repressing the complex aspects of their courageous resistance'.

Is fascism a passing phase in Germany, and what are the possible repercussions for its neighbours? Dr Brueck comments:

'Fears of right-wing extremism in Germany are well-founded. After all, our history has taught them a lesson, and it would be wrong to trivialise today's right-wing tendencies. In a nationalistic fervour there always arises dangers for the neighbouring peoples. Even if the right-wingers are cautious in their comments today, who knows whether they will be demanding the shifting of the frontiers soon after conditions have changed' (*News* No. 5/90).

Bitter about the war

There are sections of the German population who are very bitter at having lost two wars.

The allies have not been forgiven for having enlisted the help of the hated Russians to defeat 'Deutschlan' and the role of the deportee organisations (those expelled from Czechoslovakia, Poland etc after Hitler's war of world conquest) is very frightening. They have not accepted the treaty of unification whereby Germany waives claims to former territories in Poland and elsewhere. This is considered betrayal.

These Landsmannschaften (as they are officially called) are not to be taken lightly. They are a powerful block whose votes are wooed by the leading Bonn parties. They have an enormous political clout. Some of its leaders, old Nazi functionaries, are members of the Bundestag (Bonn Parliament) within the ranks of the ruling Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union coalition.

Hopefully, the Germans have learnt from history, though at times this looks doubtful.

Recent pro-war propaganda about the Gulf war has been disheartening. All forms of protest were swept aside. Now the Bonn government is picking the pockets of the people to pay for their involvement in the Middle East adventure.

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