

# “A Very Orderly Retreat”: Democratic Transition in East Germany, 1989-90

## Abstract

East Germany's 1989-90 democratization is among the best known of East European transitions, but does not lend itself to comparative analysis, due to the singular way in which political reform and democratic consolidation were subsumed by Germany's unification process. Yet aspects of East Germany's democratisation have proved amenable to comparative approaches. This article reviews the comparative literature that refers to East Germany, and finds a schism between those who designate East Germany's transition 'regime collapse' and others who contend that it exemplifies 'transition through extrication'. It inquires into the merits of each position and finds in favour of the latter. Drawing on primary and secondary literature, as well as archival and interview sources, it portrays a communist elite that was, to a large extent, prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and capable of learning from 'reference states' such as Poland. Although East Germany was the Soviet state in which the positions of existing elites were most threatened by democratic transition, here too a surprising number succeeded in maintaining their position while filing across the bridge to market society. A concluding section outlines the alchemy through which their bureaucratic power was transmuted into property and influence in the 'new Germany'.

## Introduction: East Germany's transition in the literature

The 1989-90 regime change in East Germany is one of the best known of democratic transitions, by virtue of two media-spectacular events – the exodus of East German citizens through Hungary and the storming of the Berlin Wall – as well as its symbolic significance as the keystone of the Soviet imperium. Because democratic change was imbricated within the process of German unification, of which the leading architects (Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, George Bush) were external, the East German experience has a *sui generis* quality, and appears to suit historians rather better than political scientists and other 'transitologists'.

Yet there are aspects of East Germany's democratisation process, notably the mechanisms by which the old regime relinquished power and acquiesced to democratic reform, that have proved amenable to comparative and theoretical approaches. In the early scholarly analyses of the transition in East Central Europe, attention was drawn to features that were shared throughout the region. It was not just that outcomes, considered broadly as marketisation and democratisation, were similar, but certain aspects of the transition process too. In each case, some form of negotiation occurred. Each was characterised by the 'rapid disintegration of existing political institutions', by the 'aggravation of economic dislocations', by the proliferation of political movements that broke into the political arena, and by 'the establishment of transitory power arrangements in which opposition forces acquired varying degrees of access to the official political process'.<sup>1</sup>

Equally, the differences in *modes of transition* could not be overlooked. In distinguishing amongst these, analysts drew upon a large and rapidly growing body of literature. Portugal and Spain, among the first transitions of the so-called 'third wave', were taken as representative of

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<sup>1</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert, 'Democratization Processes in East Central Europe: A Theoretical Reconsideration', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol.21, (1991), p.287.

two distinct routes to democratisation. The former exemplifies transition by rupture, featuring an inflexible old guard that fails to compromise when confronted by mass social movements, allowing hitherto marginal parties and/or middle-ranking officers and functionaries to successfully replace or revolutionise existing institutions. Such transitions are rapid and forceful, and involve extensive popular mobilisation which may lead to challenges to property relations. In the case of Portugal,

[t]he working class took the world by surprise by leading the most massive seizures of property in Europe since the Russian Revolution. Workers occupied more than 23 percent of the nation's farmland in less than twelve months and took control of more than 940 industrial enterprises. [...] The vertical command structure of the armed forces was radically transformed [...] The middle-ranking officers who toppled the dictatorship engineered the most extensive purges of any democratic state in the third wave, including those of eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The contrasting course, exemplified by Spain in the late 1970s, is pushed primarily by elites associated with the old dictatorship who accede to democratic transition because they believe it will provide them with a new formula for legitimating their rule.<sup>3</sup> In reference to the pivotal role played by negotiations between regime and opposition, the model is commonly known as transition through *transaction*. In the Spanish case, a 'class compromise' was hammered out, in which parliamentary democracy, including the legalisation of the Communist Party, was offered to the left parties and trade unions in exchange for a commitment on their part to remove their opposition to the monarchy and to the privileges of church and army, to advocate wage restraint, acquiesce to austerity measures and abandon claims for the return of funds sequestered by General Franco's regime.<sup>4</sup> High levels both of political violence and of strike activity notwithstanding, the Spanish working class never challenged property relations as their counterparts did in Portugal, and nor were there major disruptions to personnel continuity at the top of the state apparatus.<sup>5</sup> For mainstream transitionology, 1970s Spain serves as a benchmark: it is a paradigm case of a transition in which

a compromise among class interests [is] forged to reassure the bourgeoisie that its property rights will not be jeopardized for the foreseeable future, and to satisfy workers [...] that their demands for compensation and social justice will eventually be met.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside the two paths represented by the Iberian nations, others may be added. For the purposes of this article, the most pertinent is 'transition through extrication', introduced by Scott Mainwaring and developed by his colleague at Notre Dame, J. Samuel Valenzuela. As with transitions by collapse (such as Greece in 1974 and Czechoslovakia and Romania in 1989), extrication involves a sharp break with the formal rules of the authoritarian regime. But as with

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Bermeo, 'Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.29, No.3 (1997), p.308.

<sup>3</sup> Bermeo, *Myths*, p.316.

<sup>4</sup> Jose Maria Maravall and Julian Santamaria (1986) 'Political Change in Spain and the Prospects for Democracy,' in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*, Johns Hopkins; Bermeo, *Myths*, p.310.

<sup>5</sup> Maravall and Santamaria; Bermeo, *Myths*.

<sup>6</sup> Although a compromise, the temporal descriptors in this quote, indicating immediate security for one party and deferred gratification for the other, suggest that one side was willing to give rather more than the other. The quotation is from O'Donnell and Schmitter, 'Tentative Conclusions', (1986) in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*, Johns Hopkins, p.46.

transitions by transaction, the authoritarian regime is strong enough to dictate important terms of the process, and the outgoing rulers 'hold on to power for a significant length of time beyond the onset of the crisis that sets in motion the process of transition.'<sup>7</sup> In brief, this third category of transition describes those – such as Peru in 1980 and Uruguay in 1985 -- in which the rules of the old regime are abandoned but the rulers retain sufficient strength to negotiate their retreat from power.<sup>8</sup> Valenzuela includes East Germany in this category, but does so in passing, without providing supporting evidence.

As regards modes of transition in Eastern Europe 1989-91, a number of studies have drawn attention to the distinction between Poland and Hungary, characterised by negotiated openings in which preliminary pacts between the party-state and opposition forces were established, stipulating the manner and extent of political change, and East Germany and Czechoslovakia, where mass movements forced significant political concessions within a relatively short time frame.<sup>9</sup> In 1991, Judith Batt, of Birmingham University, penned a pioneering article that attempted to explain the differences between the two paths of Eastern European transition. She discusses Poland and Hungary under the rubric 'failed reform': in both, hopes in economic reform in the 1970s faded in the following decade as economic difficulties mounted; elites began to lose faith in the communist project, and their ability to repress or co-opt opposition diminished. The Polish government's defeat in a referendum on economic policy toward the end of 1987, together with a resurgence of industrial action, led to the convocation of Round Table negotiations which were successfully concluded in early 1989. In Hungary, also in 1987, the need for an 'anti-crisis pact' had become apparent to leading figures in regime and opposition elites, a development that gave rise to negotiated democratisation in 1989. Elites in the latter two countries, by contrast, resisted reform. The Czechoslovak and East German economies were highly centralised, autarkic, and relatively stable; the *nomenklatura*<sup>10</sup> was, in each case, unified and disciplined; and the security forces were used extensively to keep oppositional forces at bay. These were regimes which 'totally rejected reform, because they saw it as incompatible with communist power'; they therefore 'faced total and rapid collapse when confronted with the challenge of Gorbachev's perestroika'.<sup>11</sup> In Prague and East Berlin, 'the intransigent ruling elite was unprepared for negotiation, and collapsed in the face of spontaneous mobilization of the population.'<sup>12</sup> In sum, democratisation occurred not through negotiated transition but 'regime collapse and velvet revolution'.<sup>13</sup> In East Germany, the government -- in disarray -- was forced to concede elections, allowing West German political parties to move in and assume command.

In subsequent years, the application of this sort of model in comparative analysis of the East European transitions had become commonplace. Klaus von Beyme, for example, differentiated between 'negotiated revolution' and the avoidance of system collapse in Hungary and Poland, the 'implosion of the Communist regime', involving mass mobilisation, in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, and the cases of Romania and Bulgaria, in which transition

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Mainwaring, 'Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues, in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, 'Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions, in Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1992, p.74. See also Munck, ##p.359.

<sup>9</sup> Ekiert, p.287.

<sup>10</sup> 'Nomenklatura' refers to the lists of senior positions in Party, state and economy.

<sup>11</sup> Judy Batt, 'The End of Communist Rule in East-Central Europe', *Government and Opposition*, Vol.26, No. 3, (1991), p.368.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.384.

was controlled by old-regime cadres of the second rank (not unlike the 'extrication' model of the Notre Dame school).<sup>14</sup> Of greater relevance to this article, due to the detailed attention paid to the East German case, was a comparative study by the US political scientist Daniel Friedheim. As with Batt, Friedheim contrasts pacted transition in Poland and Hungary (as well as Spain), with regime collapse in East Germany, Czechoslovakia (and Portugal). Whereas Batt's piece is discursive, with extensive discussion of background conditions, Friedheim proceeds by isolating two variables: regime divisions and the organisation of political society. In line with a growing body of literature that criticises mainstream transitionology for its overemphasis on the degree of control that outgoing rulers exert over the transition process, with popular organisation and mobilisation left as a residual category, he elevates the latter as a core variable, and concludes that the experience of the 1989 revolutions reveals a need to 'bring society back into democratic transition theory'.<sup>15</sup>

Friedheim's hypothesis is that a transition will tend to be pacted 'when the authoritarian regime is split over initiating radical reform and an opposition has had time to organize itself.'<sup>16</sup> (A pact is defined as 'a mutual understanding between regime and opposition elites about how to reach free elections, on the basis of mutual guarantees for the "vital interests" of those entering into it.'<sup>17</sup> It may take the form of a round table, secret consultations, or both.) Otherwise, where the old regime remains unified and political organisations in civil society exhibit little autonomy, transition will likely 'occur through regime collapse and the mass mobilization that then becomes possible.'<sup>18</sup> Friedheim demonstrates that the higher the ranking on each variable (disunity of regime and organisation of opposition), the greater the chance of negotiated transition as against regime collapse. Thus, in the case of Spain, he highlights the regime divisions following Franco's death, and the existence of oppositional organisations in an illegal but tolerated grey zone, from which political parties could rapidly emerge, presenting premier Adolfo Suárez with well-organised negotiating partners. In Portugal, by contrast, opposition organisation suffered from stifling restrictions and a formidable secret police up until 1974, and opposition leaders were routinely exiled; the regime, meanwhile, remained comparatively unified. The result was a 'collapsed transition', via a series of revolutionary interim governments.

If there exists one clear-cut example 'of how weak opposition and a unified, hardline regime can generate a transition through collapse', Friedheim suggests, it is East Germany in 1989.<sup>19</sup> Up until October of that year, opposition was weak, and Erich Honecker's Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime remained united. 'In this context, instead of negotiating a transition, the regime quickly collapsed, surrendering control of the streets, and even its Stasi archives, to peaceful demonstrators.'<sup>20</sup> In the process the regime did attempt to swerve onto a track of transition by extrication, by means of a pact prepared at round table talks, but this failed, largely due to the lack of organisation of opposition forces.<sup>21</sup> Being sponsored by a disintegrating regime, the East German round tables that did eventuate were not instances of pact formation, in the sense given above, for they simply coordinated the final details of regime implosion. Unable to locate

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<sup>14</sup> Von Beyme, *Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), pp.28,40,131.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Friedheim, 'Bringing Society Back into Democratic Transition Theory after 1989: Pact Making and Regime Collapse', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.7, No.3 (1993), p.512. See also Paul Cammack, *Capitalism and Democracy in the Third World; The Doctrine for Political Development* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997); Graeme Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization; Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000); Mainwaring, pp.302-4; Bermeo, Myths.

<sup>16</sup> Friedheim, 1993, p.489.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.491, drawing upon O'Donnell et al., *Transitions*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.489.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.511

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.511.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp 493-4.

credible negotiating partners, the GDR regime ‘withered away’, surrendering power to the opposition. Rather than endeavouring ‘to implement radical reform’ or to ‘defend itself by all available means’, it simply collapsed.<sup>22</sup>

The portrayal of the East Berlin regime as having ‘quickly collapsed, surrendering control of the streets’,<sup>23</sup> concords with that of many other political scientists, including Batt’s assessment that the ‘ruling elite collapsed in the face of spontaneous mobilization’, and her assigning of East Germany, with Czechoslovakia, to the category ‘regime collapse and velvet revolution’. It has also received support from historians, notably Mary Fulbrook. In her highly (and rightly) esteemed *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, the British historian not only traces the collapse of Honecker’s regime, but argues forcefully that the functionary class as a whole experienced a ‘loss of the will to power’ in the weeks and months that followed the storming of the Berlin Wall.<sup>24</sup> Up until that date (November 9), she contends, the SED was engaged in a ‘desperate attempt to cling on to power’, but thereafter, functionaries ‘lost the will to rule’.<sup>25</sup> The picture she paints of the SED post-Wall fall is one of ‘disarray: the functionary system was beginning to collapse. [...] Functionaries were resigning their positions, members leaving the party *en masse*, no decisions could be reached or carried out.’ The end of SED domination, she concludes, ‘was marked by the loss of its functionaries’ will to rule.’<sup>26</sup>

| <b>Model of Transition</b>                         | <b>Rupture / Collapse / ‘Velvet Revolution’</b>   | <b>Negotiated Transition</b> |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Exemplified by</b>                              | GDR, Czechoslovakia                               | Hungary, Poland              |
| <b>Reforms in 1980s</b>                            | None  | Failed                       |
| <b>Regime unity (1989)</b>                         | High  | Low (or falling)             |
| <b>Political elite’s commitment to Communism</b>   | Strong  | Weak (or falling)            |
| <b>Opposition (late 1980s)</b>                     | Repressed   | Tolerated                    |
| <b>Radical reform instigated by</b>                | Popular movements                                 | Regime reformers             |
| <b>Transition speed</b>                            | Rapid   | Gradual                      |
| <b>Functionaries’ psychology during transition</b> | Initially inflexible; then ‘loss of will to rule’ | Adapt and change             |
| <b>Political power</b>                             | Surrendered to ‘the streets’ / opposition         | Shared with opposition       |

In the above survey, the main points of which are summarised in the above table, a number of elements are uncontroversial. Communism did collapse in East Germany, more rapidly than in Hungary or Poland, under greater immediate pressure from mass movements, and with a lesser role for the organised opposition. Some arguments, however, deserve further scrutiny. To what extent was the SED a rigid and unified monolith (before November 10, 1989)? Did the regime

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.494.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.494.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.259.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.262-3.

spurn radical reform altogether? How adamant was its rejection of negotiation? In what sense did functionaries lose the will to rule? And in what ways was power 'surrendered to the streets'? In the following I present a brief history of the East German revolution, focusing on the five issues on which the above questions turn: regime unity; the organisation of political society; loss of the will to rule; initiation of radical reform; and the extent of negotiation. The article will find that (i) the appearance of regime unity masked major underlying divisions and declining morale; (ii) many old regime functionaries were able to adapt to changing circumstances and to learn from experiences elsewhere in Eastern Europe; (iii) radical reform, and pact making, were taken further in East Germany than is generally acknowledged, and (iv) the loss of the 'will to power' was an illusion. These findings raise theoretical questions concerning democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe that will be highlighted in the final sections.

### **Intra-elite tensions**

The transformation of Eastern Europe in 1989 took citizens of the region and Western analysts alike by surprise. For Samuel Huntington, writing in the mid-1980s, the likelihood of democratic development in Eastern Europe was 'virtually nil.'<sup>27</sup> To sociologists such as David Lane and Zygmunt Bauman the Soviet system seemed 'revolution proof'; it had developed forms of system integration that produced a congruence between the values and beliefs of the working class and those of political elites, thereby ensuring 'internal stability and an absence of popular revolt'.<sup>28</sup> In the case of East Germany, no major episodes of public protest had occurred since 1953; the state seemed omnipotent. Yet something had changed. In the 1960s SED leaders had exuded confidence. Walter Ulbricht even felt able to predict that the GDR would overtake its Western rivals 'on the economic front'. From the mid-1970s, however, signs of deteriorating confidence appeared at all levels.

Presenting the backdrop to this sea change were economic troubles and Soviet decline. Gradually, inexorably, the Soviet model was hollowed out from within. Ideas of a socialist market economy and political pluralism gained ground throughout the region. Unlike Hungary, East Germany did not experience open intra-elite divisions. But it did experience the same underlying problems. For the economy of the GDR, as for Hungary and Poland, the 1980s was a lost decade, marked by declining competitiveness and an unsustainable debt burden. And in East Berlin, as in Warsaw and Budapest, elites were torn between a commitment to existing structures of accumulation, international alliances, and ideologies, and an imperative to economic restructuring and revitalised engagement with Western businesses and states. Typically for masters of relatively backward economies, a more or less resentful admiration for aspects of Western capitalism had long prevailed amongst East German officials and industrialists. Particular esteem was extended to the economic and technical achievements of the 'class enemy,' which were held up as the standard, to be imitated, adapted and (it was hoped) surpassed. Increasingly, competition with the West was augmented by cooperation. Autarky was abandoned. Détente, and expanding trade relations, bred a proliferation of collaborative ventures and associated political negotiations that helped to modify perceptions of the 'capitalist enemy'. Interdependence effected subtle shifts in the mind-sets of at least some politicians and

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<sup>27</sup> Samuel Huntington, quoted in McSweeney and Tempest, 1993, p.412.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Rutland, *The Myth of the Plan* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p.263; David Lane, *The Socialist Industrial State* (London: Allen & Unwin 1976), p.91; David Lane, 'Soviet Industrial Workers: The Lack of a Legitimation Crisis?', in Bogdan Denitch, ed., *Legitimation of Regimes* (London/Beverly Hills, 1979); Zygmunt Bauman 'Social Dissent in East European Politics', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, Vol.12, No.1, 1971.

functionaries on both sides, softening attitudes and building reservoirs of trust, even friendship. 'Totalitarian dictators' and 'revanchist imperialists' began to reinterpret one another as valued partners at the negotiating tables of business and politics. One of the major sites of bridge-building between East and West German elites was a series of discussions between representatives from the SED and SPD that culminated in a 'Joint Paper' in 1987. Two of the GDR's representatives told me of the 'human dimension' of the talks. 'We took one another seriously' during the negotiations, Rolf Richter explained; and in the evenings both sides would 'get to know one another, drink beer together'. Before long, Helmut Meier added, 'we saw our SPD partners as colleagues, as friends'. Similarly, 'Economics Czar' Günther Mittag has described how 'the countless meetings with West German politicians and business leaders [...] shaped my thinking, both consciously and unconsciously.'<sup>29</sup>

Over the course of the 1980s, severe tensions developed over international economic policy. Some sections of the elite banked on furthering détente and cooperation with Western firms and states, particularly the FRG. Their strategic orientation was to 'strengthening economic relations with the FRG in order to achieve a higher degree of independence for the GDR, also within the Eastern bloc.'<sup>30</sup> They were not blind to the dangers presented by closer engagement with the West. In the archives of the old regime one finds repeated warnings, for instance that Bonn's support for economic cooperation 'is a plank in the FRG's strategy of achieving "reunification"'; or that the West Germans were striving to 'upgrade' Berlin to the 'potential capital' of all Germans. Such fears, however, were taken much more seriously by an opposed group, for whom the emphasis was 'communist internationalism', understood as the reaffirming of East Germany's orientation to Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. They too perceived the need to pursue economic integration, but held that this should occur above all within Comecon.

In the late 1980s these tensions were exacerbated by a renewed set of economic difficulties that demanded urgent action. High levels of interest payments in the early 1980s had reduced funds available for investment, leading to a deterioration of industrial and public infrastructure. In 1986-8 growth rates declined abruptly, largely as a consequence of lower export earnings. With East Germany's balance of trade declining precipitously, new policies were sought. Some functionaries advocated expediting direct cooperation with Western businesses. Without support from West Germany, as the head of economic planning Gerhard Schürer put it, the GDR would 'be unable to find anyone else to take twenty billion dollars of debts off our hands'.<sup>31</sup> Others were aghast at the dependency upon Bonn to which this path would lead. A western orientation, they feared, would turn the GDR into an 'object of exploitation' for West German business, and they vigorously opposed the aforementioned SED-SPD discussions.<sup>32</sup>

A second economic policy debate turned on reductions in state expenditure. With robust demand for diminishing revenues – from workers for pay rises, from managers for investment, and from international banks for debt servicing – SED leaders looked to areas in which spending could be cut. In 1988, Schürer proposed that the microelectronics industry and the security forces were suitable candidates for sacrifice. A further possibility, he suggested, was to cut consumer goods subsidies. However, powerful constituencies backed the status quo in each of these areas, and Schürer's suggestions were for the most part rejected.<sup>33</sup> Later the same year the politburo did

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<sup>29</sup> Günther Mittag, *Um jeden Preis*, (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp.96,104. Mittag is not always a reliable witness, but these comments ring true.

<sup>30</sup> Mittag, as reported by Jürgen Nitz, *Landerspiel*, (Berlin: edition ost, 1995), p.60.

<sup>31</sup> Schürer, "'Das reale Bild war eben Katastrophal!'", *Deutschland Archiv*, 10, 1992, p.142.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1992), p.355.

<sup>33</sup> Jörg Roesler, 'Der Einfluß der Außenwirtschaft auf die Beziehungen DDR-Bundesrepublik', *Deutschland Archiv*, 5, 1993, p.569.

come to agree cuts in the budget for consumer subsidies and for the security services. Although a relatively moderate measure, it nonetheless led, for the first time in the Honecker era, to open resistance from government ministers, seven of whom refused to accept the decision.<sup>34</sup>

Tensions over economic policy were overlaid by the challenge posed by 'new thinking' in the USSR. Moscow's reforms sharply undermined the confidence of official East Germany. For many, Gorbachev came to symbolise a worrying decline in Soviet power and an untrustworthy ally, while for others, he represented resolution and initiative, qualities that the domestic leadership blatantly lacked. Throughout the apparatuses of power, there was considerable sympathy for *glasnost* and *perestroika*.<sup>35</sup> Interviews with SED functionaries and Stasi officers reveal that criticisms of the leadership were widely held, if rarely articulated.<sup>36</sup> Cautiously, some prominent SED members began to test the boundaries of orthodoxy: Hans Modrow, a Politburo member with close links to Moscow, published an article that commended China's 'special economic zones', and his friend (and former head of espionage), Markus Wolf, spoke positively of *glasnost* in a radio interview. In the public sphere, outright reformers were conspicuous by their absence. No reformist SED member, as far as Manfred Gerlach (leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, LDPD) could recall, 'had, to my knowledge, fought for a change of course in the Honecker period.'<sup>37</sup> Gregor Gysi, nowadays the best-known of erstwhile SED reformists, admitted that 'we did not see ourselves as an opposition within the Party.'<sup>38</sup>

Neither the defenders of orthodoxy nor the reformers possessed clear ideas as to how to extricate the country from economic decline or how to devise decisive reforms.<sup>39</sup> What is more, the crises and transformations of 1953, 1956 and 1968 had instilled a deep fear of major policy shifts and the inner-Party divisions that they entail. As one politburo member recalls, the 'decisive brake' on reform was always 'the spectre of splitting the Party,' together with the related 'fear that if Honecker was challenged everything could collapse.'<sup>40</sup> From the mid-1980s, politburo member Siegfried Lorenz has written,

there was no doubt that fundamental changes and reforms were necessary in the GDR. There was much discussion about this [...]. And yet at the end of the day we just kept our mouths shut. Ultimately, we had no plausible and comprehensive alternative.<sup>41</sup>

'The crazy thing', Markus Wolf observes, was that the need for change was widely recognised, and 'whomsoever you talked to, even at the highest levels – with the exception of a few of those right at the top – they all shared this view. Yet they did nothing. That applies to those who should have acted, myself included.'<sup>42</sup> These insights into the thinking of top functionaries indicate that if unity prevailed, it was of a negative, and thus fragile, kind. This was no cohesive elite, ideologically fired and with *esprit de corps*. On the contrary, policymakers were losing faith. By the late 1980s a survey of security elites revealed that only about half found Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>34</sup> Hans Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996), p.72.

<sup>35</sup> Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten* (München: Bertelsmann, 1993), p.509; Olaf Georg Klein, *Plötzlich war alles ganz anders* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), p.94.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with Michael Brie, Helmut Meier, Rolf Richter, conducted in Berlin, October 1994. See also Cordia Schlegelmilch, 'Die politische Wende in der DDR am Beispiel der sächsischen Stadt Wurzen', in Alexander Fischer and Günther Heydemann, eds, *Die politische "Wende" 1989/90 in Sachsen* (Weimar: Böhlau 1995), p.136; Helena Flam, *Mosaic of Fear* (Boulder, 1998), p.93; Christina Wilkening, ed., *Staat im Staate* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Manfred Gerlach *Mitverantwortlich* (Berlin: Morgenbuch 1991), p.296.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, *Störenfried* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), p.283.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Maier, *Dissolution* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> Wolfgang Herger, interview in Jean Villain, *Die Revolution verstößt ihre Väter* (Bern: Zytglogge, 1990), p.120; Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds, *Das Ende der SED: Die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees*, (Berlin: Links, 1997), p.325.

<sup>41</sup> Brigitte Zimmermann and Hans-Dieter Schütt, eds, *ohnMacht*, (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1992), pp.148–154.

<sup>42</sup> Rainer Land and Ralf Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus: politische Diskurse von Intellektuellen aus der DDR*, (Bochum: Winkler, 1994), p.26.

ideology credible.<sup>43</sup> And behind the façade of unity, profound policy disagreements existed, divisions that were to manifest themselves in a variety of ways in 1989.

### **'The edifice of rule starts to crumble'**

The series of remarkable domestic and foreign policy shifts in Hungary and Poland in the first months of 1989, tolerated by Moscow, were described by an incensed Erich Honecker as 'the visibly accelerating erosion of socialist power, achievements, and values'.<sup>44</sup> The SED leadership behaved as if stunned. One member of the Politburo, at a crisis sitting in May, bemoaned the 'lack of a clear conception for the way forward'.<sup>45</sup> Outwardly, East Berlin maintained a stiff silence, punctuated by declamations of the unity of the socialist bloc. The only plausible reaction to such paralysing circumstances was, it seemed, to sit tight, in the hope that the crisis would resolve itself. Those in charge held faster to the certainties that had underpinned their survival thus far. Reporting on a Central Committee meeting in June, one journalist captured the 'Tocquevillian intuition' of the SED leadership at the time: 'The message of the 8th central committee plenum is the following: No experiments, or else the entire edifice of rule will start to crumble.'<sup>46</sup> Even in the highest echelons of the Party, some began to place their hopes in the removal of the ageing Honecker, either by way of the 'biological solution' or through collective intervention by his critics. But no such initiative was taken. The crisis intensified in the summer, with the westward emigration of East German citizens. Hemmed in by Soviet ambivalence, Hungarian 'treachery', and by the GDR's reliance upon international banks and upon Bonn, the SED leadership was ill equipped to respond. Diplomatic representations to Budapest were fruitless, revealing the East Berlin regime's impotence to the world, and to the populace. Within the Party and state apparatuses questions and doubts proliferated.

As morale declined amongst the SED's supporters, political society outside the regime began to organise. In the first months of 1989 a rash of small but brave protests attested to rising confidence of the 'grassroots' opposition groups. In the summer, these succeeded in breaking from their previous dependency upon the Church, and began to reach out beyond the small milieu of churchgoers and dissidents. By late August at least seventeen initiatives existed which aspired to establish some sort of independent oppositional presence.<sup>47</sup> Of these, New Forum, with its manifesto, *Awakening '89*, made the greatest impact. Throughout the country, activists established New Forum groups, with contact addresses at which sympathisers or the merely curious could find out about this controversial new phenomenon. Within fourteen days of its formation some five thousand had signed its list of supporters.

The uprising itself began in Leipzig, when street demonstrations of would-be emigrants were joined by 'here-stayers' calling for reform. The regime was determined to crush the movement but buckled. A number of factors explain its failure, including above all the number and determination of demonstrators and Moscow's refusal to commit troops, but also divisions between hawks and doves within the SED leadership and the willingness of senior police officers and middle-level officials to negotiate with protestors. The continued growth of demonstrations revealed the exhaustion of a strategy based upon police methods and weakened its authors,

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<sup>43</sup> Mark Thompson, *Democratic Revolutions*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.76.

<sup>44</sup> Hertle, p.92.

<sup>45</sup> Mittag, p.323.

<sup>46</sup> Johannes Kuppe, 'Zum Plenum des ZK der SED', *Deutschland Archiv*, No.8 (1989), p.722.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Gutzeit, 'Der Weg in die Opposition', in Walter Euchner, ed., *Politische Opposition in Deutschland und im internationalen Vergleich*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1993), p.95.

notably Honecker himself. With Gorbachev's tacit approval, members of the Central Committee and Politburo plotted his removal, which they secured in mid October.

The new SED leader, Egon Krenz was a cautious and conservative figure, and his administration could hardly be described as reformist. However, in his inaugural speech he did promise that the regime 'will introduce a *Wende* [turnaround], with immediate effect'. The *Wende* involved the renunciation of armed force in favour of conspiratorial techniques of counter-subversion, coupled with some immediate concessions and promises of significant reform. These measures, it was hoped, would boost the new government's credibility, and enable the demonstration movement to be contained. Whereas repression had provoked protest, SED leaders believed, concessions would appease it. They assumed that several months breathing space would be gained in which to retrench and restructure.<sup>48</sup> Having won time and re-established stability, the administration would then be in a position to consider, in an unhurried manner, how to proceed with more substantial reforms. The *Wende* was designed as a holding operation, providing a framework within which the *nomenklatura* could begin to restructure itself in an orderly fashion. But these hopes were to prove illusory. The *Wende* reforms failed to dampen the popular movement. To the contrary, the numbers filling the streets and squares climbed exponentially.

In this potted summary of the preconditions, and early stages, of the revolution, some divergence from the assessments outlined in the first section of this article may be seen. The GDR was not as autarkic as Batt maintains, and regime unity was more fragile, and the opposition more organised, than Friedheim suggests. But these differences are of emphasis only. They modify rather than challenge the image of a unified, intransigent ruling elite, poorly equipped to adapt to changing circumstances, unprepared for negotiation, and facing an unfolding crisis in which the drive for change came from below. As regards subsequent events, however, my interpretation deviates substantially from those of Batt and Friedheim and sharply from that of Fulbrook.

## Polish lessons

Faced by mounting popular pressure, most of the East German elite -- particularly those who had sympathised with Gorbachev's reform agenda in preceding years -- chose not to raise the white flag but to adapt to the changing circumstances. They showed an ability to learn: that certain strategies, notably Honecker's attempt to clamp down on dissent and the *Wende* project of appeasing protest with sops, were futile or counter-productive. They were also keen to learn from the successes and failures of their counterparts elsewhere. After Honecker's downfall, Poland quickly entered the frame as the most appropriate 'reference state' (defined by Nancy Bermeo as a polity that, by virtue of 'geographic proximity, cultural similarity, shared history, or some combination of the three', serves as a point of comparison for policymakers elsewhere).<sup>49</sup> From the vantage point of the Polish Communist party (PZPR), it was engaged not in a project of maintaining existing institutions but of restructuring such that core goals could be advanced and elite replacement minimised. In general terms, the aim was to restructure elite organisation from a centralised *nomenklatura* model to a Western-style formation, which has been concisely described as a complex of dense formal and informal networks of influence and acquaintance which 'overlap and interlock so greatly as to constitute "webworks" that encompass and tie together all

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<sup>48</sup> Günter Schabowski, *Das Politbüro*, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), p.111.

<sup>49</sup> Nancy Bermeo, 'Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.24, No.3 (1992), p. 283.

important elite groups.<sup>50</sup> The dismantling of the *nomenklatura* system had begun with a Round Table agreement that had originally been envisaged

as initiating a four-year transition period towards full democracy, pluralism and marketisation under conditions of general, if loose, Communist domination during which the PZPR would learn how to maintain its rule through competitive methods.<sup>51</sup>

The Communists' plans began to unravel when the PZPR was trounced -- to Lech Walesa's dismay<sup>52</sup> -- in national elections in June 1989. However, while the new government was headed by a Catholic activist and Solidarność advisor, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Communists retained control of the Interior and Defence ministries and the government operated through existing Communist institutions, as modified by the Round Table.

It was at this juncture -- November 2, to be precise -- that Egon Krenz journeyed to Warsaw to seek advice from his Polish comrades. One of these, General Jaruzelski, reassured his guest that he didn't find liberal democracy to be the evil that they had once assumed, and that democratic reform did not threaten the *nomenklatura's* core commitments to capital accumulation, population management and social stability. 'As a result of major economic problems we have experienced difficult times', he lamented, referring to the economic crises and uprisings of 1970 and 1980.

We undertook a series of attempts to reform, but they all ended in failure. The obstacle in each case was our population. The Party, the government, was not in a position to persuade the majority to accept unpopular decisions. And yet these very same decisions -- now being implemented by the current coalition government -- are being accepted without much ado, even though living standards are worsening. Strikes are rare. This shows that the population places greater trust in this form of government.<sup>53</sup>

Just as, in the USSR, *glasnost* was vital to winning allies to the cause of *perestroika*, so, in Poland, democracy could prove an effective means of selling austerity to a sceptical public.

Nor did democratisation equate to capitulation. 'We have, of course, transferred the enterprise', the General continued, making a revealing analogy between the Communist elite and company directors, 'but have secured for ourselves a controlling stake, in the shape of participation in the government, security forces and army, and the office of president.' Of greater significance than such tools of control, however, was the degree to which old regime and opposition elites could find common ground. 'In respect of cooperation within the coalition, it is the shared position with regard to the interests of state that is central. Here, I find myself on the same terrain as Prime Minister Masowiecki.'<sup>54</sup> In Poland at the time, *nomenklatura* privatisation was already well under way, and although Jaruzelski did not yet know it, was destined to be successful, at least from the vantage point of the Communist elite. Entrenched antagonism between Communist Party and opposition began to give way to a fragmented system, in which

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<sup>50</sup> John Higley, Judith Kullberg and Jan Pakulski, 'The Persistence of Communist Elites', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, No.2, (1996), p.139.

<sup>51</sup> Sanford, ## 1997, p. 178.

<sup>52</sup> Helga Welsh, 'Political Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.26, No.4 (1994), p.386.

<sup>53</sup> On other occasions, Jaruzelski was still more explicit: In the past 'we tried economic reforms time and again. But we always met with public resistance and explosions. It is very different now. Now, with a government that enjoys public confidence, it has become possible to demand sacrifices.' In Romy Husan and Mike Haynes, 'The State and Market in the Transition Economies: Critical Remarks in the Light of Past History and the Current Experience', *The Journal of European Economic History*, Vol.27, No.3 (1998).

<sup>54</sup> Egon Krenz, ##1999, p. 207.

Solidarność factions in the *Sejm* were later to make common cause with the Communist successor party (Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland) on a variety of issues, including electoral law.<sup>55</sup>

Krenz did not return from Poland fully convinced of the need to follow Jaruzelski's advice. He was racked by doubts, more on which below. Yet he could not ignore the parallels: like Poland in the 1980s, his country was now in the throes of economic crisis, a major reform initiative (the *Wende*) had failed to restore regime legitimacy, and the prime obstacle to future, SED-led, reform was the lack of public trust. If the Krenz's, ostensibly reformist, administration was to retain any credibility, major concessions would be inescapable. As in Poland, the only viable course seemed to be democratisation, entailing cooperation with the opposition, and *nomenklatura* privatisation.

In early November, the more far-sighted SED leaders were becoming convinced that, whatever the end goal, the impending transition could not but involve a conciliatory approach to the citizens' movement organisations.<sup>56</sup> In early November, the Central Committee was advised by Lorenz that:

a situation has arisen whereby we must approach certain representatives of 'New Forum' in a constructive way, particularly those who seek to prevent chaos - those who show clearly, and in public, a willingness to exert a calming influence.<sup>57</sup>

At the same gathering, another Party notable also declared that negotiations with the citizens' movement would be necessary, and sweetened the pill for sceptical sections of the audience with the counter-intuitive argument that this would in fact provide the best means of 'demonstrating, in practice, our power and our leading position.'<sup>58</sup>

In the same period, major reforms were announced. Although Krenz continued to insist on the perplexing formula that pluralism existed in the GDR thanks to the SED's 'leading role', he nevertheless propounded measures that would inexorably undermine the SED's power monopoly, including greater independence for the 'bloc parties', the media, and parliament, the dissociation of Party and State, and permission for citizens to travel freely to the 'non-socialist abroad'. In brief, the fall of the Wall was not quite such a sharp watershed as some historians have suggested, for far-reaching reforms had been initiated already in preceding weeks; indeed, such - of travel rights - precipitated that event.

### **'We are not deserters!'**

The breaching of the Wall was unquestionably a demoralising experience for its guardians. In the aftermath, the regime was subjected to a lengthy period of intense and unremitting pressure from the street movement and from its supporters, and began to disintegrate. 'Pressure is bearing upon us from all sides', Egon Krenz confided to his diary,

Pressure from "below" and pressure from "without": The street demonstrations, the demoralisation of the Party, the break-up of the socialist fraternity, the rise of anti-socialist forces, the anti-GDR

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<sup>55</sup> Gerardo Munck and Carol Skalnik Leff, 'Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective, *Comparative Politics*, Vol.29, No.3 (1997), p.351.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands - ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel*, 2. durchgesehene Auflage (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003), p. 110, also Modrow's speech to the Central Committee on November 9, in Hertle and Stephan, p. 285.

<sup>57</sup> Hertle and Stephan, p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> Hertle and Stephan, p. 336.

policies of Bonn, all this influences the situation.<sup>59</sup>

The exigency of stemming legitimacy decline led to an accelerated turnover of personnel in the apparatuses of power. The collective resignations of Politburo and government, already on November 7, were followed by that of the Stasi leadership. Numerous regional and town councils dissolved themselves. By the middle of the month, all fifteen secretaries of the SED's regional organisations and thirteen of their deputies had been replaced. Of district secretaries, 142 resigned and three took their lives, while hundreds more took leave of absence.<sup>60</sup> Most of these functionaries were replaced locally, and often democratically, with party leaders only hearing of personnel changes after the event, signalling the *de facto* end of the *nomenklatura* system.

The SED continued to haemorrhage, losing hundreds of thousands of members in a matter of weeks. Less tangible but equally dramatic was its loss of self-confidence. No longer could the membership be relied upon to dutifully carry out orders and to defend the regime against its critics. Too many comrades, one Party functionary complained, resembled 'rabbits before a snake.'<sup>61</sup> Attempts made to rally the party faithful tended to backfire. In Leipzig on November 11, for example, only 6,000 attended what had been flagged as a major pro-regime rally.<sup>62</sup> As the secretary of Erfurt district SED put it, 'the events of these days have the character of a revolution. Our Party has not stood up to the test, it has lost the initiative. It now stands before the abyss.'<sup>63</sup>

In the security forces, the picture was likewise one of disintegration. Police officers joined street demonstrations, bearing banners protesting corruption and file destruction in their institution.<sup>64</sup> In the army, officers were presented by soldiers with the alternative of acceding to demands for reform or facing mass desertions.<sup>65</sup> Rumours of soldiers' councils had circulated since October, but as winter approached mutinous discussion grew rife, and there were reported cases of conscript soldiers taking command of their barracks. Even the Stasi, the SED's 'shield and sword', was not immune to tendencies of decay. Signs of indiscipline multiplied.<sup>66</sup> The organisation's internal disciplinary mechanisms buckled under the pressure of a soaring number of internal disputes and refusals to obey orders.<sup>67</sup> Disgruntled officers sent petitions and letters to SED and state leaders that complained of persistent deception on the part of the Stasi leadership.<sup>68</sup> Some went further, organising illegal internal associations and even demonstrations.<sup>69</sup>

These manifestations of dissent and disintegration within core institutions eroded the effectiveness of the apparatuses of power and generated an atmosphere of impending collapse – one which thickened when old-regime institutions accelerated the destruction of files. *But these institutions did not in fact 'dissolve', and neither did the 'will to rule'.* The breaching of the Wall undoubtedly demoralised the SED elite, yet their commitment to retaining control of the transition process remained intact. Initially, it was hoped that new travel freedoms, significant reforms, and personnel turnover would deflate the protest movement, rewarding the regime

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<sup>59</sup> Krenz, p.305.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Richter, 'Friedliche Revolution und Transformation', *Deutschland Archiv* (2001), p.932; Karsten Timmer, *Vom Aufbruch zum Umbruch. Die Bürgerbewegung in der DDR 1989* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), p.315; Hertle and Stephan, p.84.

<sup>61</sup> David Selbourne, *Death of the Dark Hero* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), p.218.

<sup>62</sup> Steven Pfaff, *From Revolution to Reunification: Popular Protests, Social Movements and the Transformation of East Germany*, Ph.d. thesis, New York University, 1999, p.450.

<sup>63</sup> Richter, p.932.

<sup>64</sup> Marlies Menge, *Ohne uns läuft nichts mehr* (Stuttgart: dva, 1990), p.236.

<sup>65</sup> Hertle, pp.233-5.

<sup>66</sup> Edward Peterson, *The Secret Police and the Revolution. The Fall of the German Democratic Republic* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Ekkehard Kuhn, *Der Tag der Entscheidung* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992), p.41.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Richter, *Die Staatssicherheit im letzten Jahr der DDR* (Köln: Bochla, 1996), p.45.

<sup>68</sup> Roland Pechmann and Jürgen Vogel, eds, *Abgesang der Stasi* (Braunschweig: Steinweg-Verlag, 1991), pp.327-348.

<sup>69</sup> Gerd Knauer, 'Innere Opposition im Ministerium für Staatssicherheit?', *Deutschland Archiv* Vol.25 (1992), p.723.

with a breathing space in which to broaden its power base and restructure. Although less taut and increasingly frayed, the reins of power remained in the hands of the SED leadership, passing via Krenz to Hans Modrow. It was widely believed in SED circles that, if concessions were granted and further reforms made and if the citizens' movement were courted, the march route could be pulled back onto the tracks of 'passive revolution' (or 'transition through extrication'), characterised by limited popular involvement and gradual institutional and personnel change.

In this, SED leaders were encouraged by auspicious signals from Moscow. In November, Foreign Minister Edward Sheverdnadse indicated that the Soviet Union would continue to guarantee East Germany's sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> Gorbachev, when addressing East European leaders at the Kremlin in early December, conceded that their task was a difficult one but enjoined them to retain command: 'We're no longer in a situation of finding solutions; rather, the task is simply to control the waggon and keep a grip of the reins.'<sup>71</sup> For the most part, East German functionaries identified with this spirit. They came to redefine their role, in the words of one SED leader, as guardians of 'an orderly transition to a new society'.<sup>72</sup> The dominant mood was certainly not one of capitulation. When Politburo member Werner Eberlein encountered junior functionaries who expressed a wish to 'throw in the towel' he exhorted them to reconsider: 'No. That's not on. We must ensure an orderly transition; we are not deserters!'<sup>73</sup>

## A flock of Wrynecks

The reforms implemented by Hans Modrow's new government in the month that followed the Wall's fall transformed the polity, and to the extent that they were entered upon hastily, as a last-ditch response to the ongoing exodus and protests, metaphors of discontinuity (such as 'collapse') are warranted. Yet it would be one-sided to summarise the process in these terms, for elements of continuity were present in equal measure. The regime resembled a vessel which, although badly holed and possibly sinking, remained afloat and largely responsive to the actions of the crew, who remained at their stations. One should resist the temptation of allowing the noisy splashes of change, as captain and first mate were thrown overboard, to drown out the underlying hum of continuity. Modrow himself was undoubtedly committed to reform but, having joined the SED in 1949, its salariat in 1953 and its Central Committee in 1971, his face was hardly new. His government was dominated by the SED, and although only a third of its ministers had served in the previous administration the remainder were promoted from within the middle and upper ranks of old-regime institutions. As Modrow saw it, 'in certain areas we shall have to come together with young people who have been working in the second or third rows until now' – individuals such as Gregor Gysi whom previously we would not have 'taken very seriously or approached for advice.'<sup>74</sup>

The new government instigated a radical reform course. In its very form it attested to the fundamental character of the transformation underway. With Modrow's election the apex of power shifted from SED General Secretary to Prime Minister, and the Council of Ministers was freed from its subordination to the Politburo. In subsequent weeks, significant steps were taken towards more transparent and democratic governance. The political process was democratised, as

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<sup>70</sup> Von Plato; Manfred Wilke, 'Die bundesdeutsche politikwissenschaftliche DDR-Forschung und die Revolution in der DDR', in Konrad Löw, *Ursachen und Verlauf der deutschen Revolution 1989* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), p.121.

<sup>71</sup> Krenz, p.348.

<sup>72</sup> Zimmermann and Schütt, p.229.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> *Der Spiegel*, No.42 (1994), p.26.

symbolised by the appointment, by a reinvigorated *Volkskammer*, of a commission to investigate functionaries' privileges and corruption, and by the Attorney General's initiation of proceedings against members of the security forces accused of abuses against demonstrators. The SED retreated from its role as ligature of the arteries of power (or 'quasi-state mobilisatory force'<sup>75</sup>) and adopted instead the structure of a western-style political party. It commenced the dismantling of its organisations within the army, police and civilian bureaucracies and wound down its workplace organisations. On December 1 its 'lead role' was struck from the constitution and the National Front was dismantled, formalising the independent status of the formerly SED-loyal 'bloc parties' - Christian Democrat Union (CDU), National Democratic Party (NDPD), and LDPD. It even began to prepare its campaign in (as yet unannounced) parliamentary elections.

In the economic sphere, far-reaching change was in the air already before the fall of the Wall. In early November, *Kombinat* managers publicly agitated for radical economic reform. The new trajectory was outlined at the Central Committee meeting of 8–10 November. Some of the more arresting speeches, and certainly those that most exercised those present as well as historians since, were unsparing appraisals of the country's economic plight. Less widely publicised but of greater relevance to this article were a series of contributions proposing economic restructuring. The tone was set by reformers, such as Modrow, who called for *Eigenverantwortung*, by which was meant the dismantling of command-economic structures and the devolution of power and risk from central authorities to business managers. Praising 'the mobilising power of the principle of *Eigenverantwortung*', Günter Ehrensperger, a senior official in the central planning apparatus, argued that the existing 'system of steering, planning and economic accounting' should be 'fundamentally questioned and radically transformed', with the aim of establishing a 'market-oriented socialist economy.' East German firms should be oriented first and foremost to the market, indeed to the world market, argued Rudolf Winter, general director of an engineering *Kombinat*. Winter and Ehrensperger both insisted that enterprises be given the opportunity to 'participate fully in the international division of labour,' an aim that required that the GDR Mark be made convertible and that cooperation with western firms, including joint ventures, be expedited. Others proposed that labour relations be made more 'flexible' and that social spending be slashed.

Already before the fall of the Wall, in short, SED leaders were propounding radical economic reform, and thereafter, the only serious debates (if the question of German unification is set aside) concerned the tempo of change and whether some loosely defined Third Way of 'market socialism', as propounded by the SED, or privatised market capitalism, should be the goal. As to action, economic reforms came thick and fast under Modrow. Private property rights were expanded. Prices were oriented to world market levels, and cooperation between *Kombinate* and western firms was expedited. The combination of cheap East German labour with western technology, expertise and markets would, it was hoped, prove a winning formula, with greater exposure to competition forcing East German *Kombinate* to raise productivity to world market standards.

Policy changes were accompanied by a revolution in ideas. Seeing that the wind was turning, thousands of loyal supporters of the old regime began to abandon Communism, command economy, Moscow and all, to become more or less devout supporters of market capitalism. Modrow appealed to citizens to promote the 'socialist spirit of free enterprise.'<sup>76</sup> Another long-serving SED functionary and now Minister for the Economy, Christa Luft, effortlessly adapted to the teachings of classical liberalism, declaring that 'the market is the

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<sup>75</sup> Haynes ###Some Practical etc.##

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Selbourne, p.216.

medium in which citizens truly become emancipated as free consumers.’<sup>77</sup> The embrace of liberalisation (and in many cases liberalism) affected all sectors of the elite but was most pronounced amongst senior members of the bloc parties, individuals who had been faithful servants of the old order and had benefited from the sinecures that such positions brought but who, existing at one remove from the SED, could more readily divest themselves from associations with Communism.<sup>78</sup> A representative example was CDU leader Lothar de Maizière who, in November, was able to describe socialism as ‘one of humanity’s most beautiful visions’ yet, only months later, presided over his party’s election campaign that treated the socialist values of rival parties, including the SPD, with vitriol.<sup>79</sup> The ease with which so many functionaries appeared to discover that socialism had been flawed all along and that market capitalism and parliamentary democracy represented a desirable alternative was so striking that a popular epithet was coined to describe the spectacle. ‘Wrynecks’ they were called, after the bird that can effortlessly swivel its head 180 degrees.<sup>80</sup>

### General strike or round table

Simultaneously with the restructuring of institutions and economy, the new administration under Modrow also stepped up its engagement with the citizens’ movement. Against a background of radicalising protests, enlisting the aid of moderates seemed the only way of restoring stability and helping the regime to regain a modicum of credibility. It was also a course of action that was becoming more viable. Even when Honecker had been at the helm, some citizens’ movement leaders had seen in the SED a potential coalition partner,<sup>81</sup> but under Modrow’s reformist administration, that prospect became more attractive. That a leading New Forum member gave Modrow ‘a vote of confidence’ regarding his selection of government ministers attested to a new spirit of cooperation.<sup>82</sup>

It is commonly supposed that, as bargaining power shifted from the SED to opposition forces, political initiative and actual power automatically followed.<sup>83</sup> However, it would be more accurate to say that, as their bargaining power lessened, the old regime parties managed, with more than a little success, to maintain the initiative, and political power. Consider, by way of introduction to this argument, a strategy discussion involving Modrow and Wolfgang Schwanz, at a meeting held at the latter’s inauguration as chief of the secret police.<sup>84</sup> It was mid November, and the regime was in a tight corner. ‘The GDR’s situation is considerably more serious and much more difficult and complicated than it appears from outside,’ Modrow lamented, referring to the economic crisis and the unceasing exodus. As to the protest movement, no amount of concessions, even the lifting of travel restrictions, seemed able to placate it. Schwanz also warned of the danger of increased instability. ‘Time is pressing, like a hand on our throats’ he said, ‘we must get this pressure off us. [...] our power is at stake, we should have no illusions about that.’ The two agreed that their top priority was to win back public trust. ‘The game that we should play’ with the ‘friendlier’ sections of the movement (the citizens’ movement organisations), Modrow proposed, is to draw them into cooperation with established institutions. Offer them a morsel of power, above all at local-level ‘round tables’. Then, when their

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Roesler, *Ostdeutsche Wirtschaft im Umbruch 1970-2000* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003), p.59.

<sup>78</sup> See Gerlach, pp.314-70.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1991), p.38.

<sup>80</sup> The German word, *Wendehals*, also puns on *Wende*.

<sup>81</sup> Reinhard Meinel and Thomas Wernicke, eds, *Mit tschechischem Gruß* (Potsdam: Edition Babelturm, 1990), p.145.

<sup>82</sup> Neues Forum, *Wirtschaftsreform der DDR* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1990), p.10.

<sup>83</sup> See e.g. Helga Welsh, ### 1994, pp.384-5,387.

<sup>84</sup> The full document is archived in BStU, ZA (ZAIG 4886). Modrow’s speech is reprinted in Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, ed., *“Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer!”* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994).

representatives are shouldering a portion of responsibility and carrying the can for unpopular decisions, their allegiance to the state will be cemented even while the key centres of authority remain untouched. Schwanitz agreed. 'We must talk with these forces,' he said, 'persuade them to accept us as partners, in order that they feel engaged in a common responsibility to uphold state security.'

Modrow and Schwanitz's plans were clear in their outlines, but depended upon an unknown factor: the reaction of the citizens' movement. On the very day of Schwanitz's inauguration, the outlines of its response began to take shape, in the form of an appeal by Democracy Now for 'democratic parties' to begin negotiations at a national 'Round Table'. Hardly had the appeal been announced than it was taken up positively by parties of the old regime. For them, Dieter Rucht has written, 'the Table was an unwillingly accepted but necessary means to retain power by a strategy of co-optation.'<sup>85</sup> It helped them to regain the initiative at a time when the citizens' movement was still finding its bearings following the fall of the Wall.

This emerging rapprochement between regime and citizens movement was put to the test in early December, a turbulent period marked by protest radicalisation. Prisons erupted in revolt, with inmates demanding an amnesty, reform of the criminal code, improved conditions, and participation in prison decision-making. The movement began to enter the workplaces too. There had been activity here in previous months, but largely of a low-key sort. In the South, a wave of industrial action occurred, affecting a hundred workplaces and tens of thousands of workers. It crested on December 6, with a general strike call from Karl-Marx-Stadt New Forum, and strikes in several towns, including a general strike in Plauen.

For New Forum, this was the first of two defining moments. Its leadership was aware that the opportunity existed for the SED regime to be swept from office. 'Power to New Forum!' was a popular slogan on demonstrations. The potential for industrial action to be mobilised behind political demands was clear; in Saxony the signs were 'overwhelming', according to New Forum leader Jens Reich.<sup>86</sup> Delegations from several major factories approached New Forum bearing the message 'We're prepared to strike; just give us the signal.'<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, New Forum had already committed itself to inter-elite negotiation at the Round Table, and this depended upon a spirit of compromise with the regime that would be negated by support for confrontational mass action. Its leaders had to decide which way to jump: negotiations or general strike. After a somewhat confused debate they opted for the former, and took their seats at the Round Table, the declared aim of which was to seek ways 'to overcome the crisis'.<sup>88</sup> Karl-Marx-Stadt New Forum was leaned upon to overturn its earlier decision. 'We tried to calm [the workers] down', Jens Reich explains, for 'our aim was not to usurp power but to push for elections'.<sup>89</sup>

The second defining moment occurred a month later. In the intervening period the regime had retrenched. In late December the promised disbanding of the secret police had been postponed until the following summer, and it was announced that all former Stasi employees would receive continued salary payments and generous pensions. At the Round Table, government representatives prevaricated, particularly with regard to Stasi dissolution. In this context, and against a backdrop of economic breakdown and mass emigration, opposition leaders demanded that the government resume progress on Stasi reform. If not, they warned, up to a million workers in the South were prepared to take political strike action. Indeed, a strike wave was already underway, across the country, with a variety of economic and political aims including

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<sup>85</sup> Dieter Rucht, 'German Unification, Democratization, and Social Movements', *Mobilization*, Vol.1, No.1 (1996), p.41.

<sup>86</sup> Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.163.

<sup>87</sup> New Forum spokesperson Klaus Wolfram, interview, January 1995.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Lohmar, 'Die Entwicklung des Runden Tisches der DDR — eine vertane Chance', in Wolfgang Dümcke and Fritz Vilar, eds., *Kolonialisierung der DDR* (Münster: Agenda-Verlag, 1995), p.66.

<sup>89</sup> Joppke, p.163.

expedited democratisation and Stasi dissolution. In Berlin, construction workers downed tools and marched to the town hall; a convoy of taxi drivers surrounded the parliament building; and crowds gathered at Stasi headquarters and -- for reasons that have still to be fully explained -- managed to storm the building.

Yet again, citizens' movement leaders faced a dilemma. The opportunity to push for rapid democratisation was clear. Yet, as in December, this was outweighed by the fear that continued popular action would lead to 'chaos'. Regime spokespeople such as SED-PDS leader Gregor Gysi appealed to these fears, urging movement leaders to 'join with the SED-PDS in appealing for calm'.<sup>90</sup> As in early December, the movement was at a crossroads, which Steven Pfaff has described thus:

Had the civic movement been prepared to more fully exploit the situation, it is likely that the Modrow government could have been compelled to take much more radical steps *or have collapsed completely*. Of course, this is precisely what the civic movements feared -- a popular upsurge they could not fully control.<sup>91</sup>

What did result from this, the popular movement's final upsurge, was a strategic shift on the part of government. From mid-January onwards it became markedly more cooperative towards the opposition. At the Round Table, the SED collaborated with the new forces on drafting a constitution for a democratic GDR and, in February, opposition members were invited into a Government of National Responsibility.<sup>92</sup> However, the more significant phenomenon of the time was not the co-optation of new forces but cooperation between the established parties of Germanies East and West. In February, the western CDU formed an alliance with its namesake in the East -- alongside a small citizens' movement group, Democratic Awakening and, later on, another bloc party, the German Farmers Party (DBD) -- while the western Free Democrats (FDP) hitched up with the two remaining bloc parties, the LDPD and the National Democratic Party (NDPD). Following elections in March, these parties, alongside the SPD, formed the GDR's final government, a caretaker administration that ruled until October when the GDR ceased to exist. Although some ministries were occupied by former oppositionists, this was no government of 'new forces'. Rather, it was dominated by former functionaries from the middle and upper layers of the bloc parties, typified by the new premier, Lothar de Maizière, who had been a senior figure in the (eastern) CDU since 1987. 'All the three major players with whom Kohl formed the Alliance for Germany,' Dirk Philippsen has pointed out, 'namely the General Secretary of the CDU, Martin Kirchner, the chairman of the CDU and later Prime Minister, Lothar de Maizière, and the chairman of Democratic Awakening, Wolfgang Schnur, had for many years served as Stasi informants.'<sup>93</sup> Both Kohl himself and his government, Philippsen adds, 'possessed conclusive evidence of this fact at the time.'

### ***Nomenklatura* privatisation**

The story of Eastern Europe's transition is one of a learning process, in which functionaries came to see that although democratisation would spell the collapse of the *nomenklatura* system, it need

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<sup>90</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, 18 January, 1990.

<sup>91</sup> Pfaff, p.425. Emphasis added.

<sup>92</sup> Although of twenty-eight ministers, only eight were oppositionists, and all with the low-status tag of minister without portfolio.

<sup>93</sup> Dirk Philippsen, *We Were The People* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.337.

not spell the demise of their class's power. Communism itself was dispensable; after all, functionaries generally paid obeisance to Marxism not as a guide to, but as sanctification of, their Party's practice. For company managers, state officials and a range of other elite groups, their allegiance to the Party was a particular form of organising their loyalty to, and identification with, the national ruling class. Industrialists, for example,

did not care too much about ideology, providing they could run their enterprises successfully, accumulating capital to protect their very substantial privileges. They would hold party cards because party membership helped them to succeed – and because the party helped stamp out dissent among the workforce. But they did not take the party's avowed beliefs seriously.<sup>94</sup>

This style of 'pragmatic' Communism was also pervasive in the state apparatuses, and even amongst party cadre. Soviet-type institutions were given support in so far as they provided a viable framework for the achievement of economic growth and social control, but could be discarded without undue fuss when these conditions no longer obtained. This accounts for the 'Wryneck' phenomenon – the easy abandonment by Eastern European elites of what had appeared to be treasured sinecures and deeply held beliefs.

As Chris Harman points out, in the course of a comparison between the transitions in Eastern Europe and regime changes of earlier times, a ruling party and a ruling class are never quite the same thing. The former *represents* the latter,

binding its members together in a common discipline which helps them achieve their common goals against the rest of society. But the class can preserve the real source of its power and privileges, its control over the means of production, even when the party falls apart. This was shown in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain after the fall of their fascisms.<sup>95</sup>

In the post-fascist cases, the single party that bound industrialists, landowners, police chiefs, army officers and government ministers into a tight network disintegrated, but, a measure of elite replacement and reforms to corporate ownership notwithstanding, was replaced in each instance by a pluralist political system that preserved the class divisions upon which capitalist order rests. In Eastern Europe, Harman elaborates, changes to ownership structures were greater, but here too, 'the enterprise heads, the ministry officials, the generals, even most of the police chiefs, remain[ed] in place'. They did not abdicate but sought positions in new or reformed institutions, establishing new political parties and creating new structures of accumulation.

Harman's study, published in 1990, was prescient. As the years have passed, evidence has accumulated that shows high rates of elite continuity in Eastern Europe. In 1996, a concise summary was published by John Higley, Kullberg and Jan Pakulski:

During and after the transitions of 1989-91, communist leaders scrambled to protect their power bases or to create new ones. Their maneuvers were varied. Some negotiated places for themselves in postcommunist regimes through the famous "roundtable talks." Many cashed in the credits they had accumulated through patron-client networks and appropriated large parts of state-industrial enterprises ("*nomenklatura* privatization"); still others colluded in "mafia" activities to profit from weakened state oversight and regulation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Chris Harman, 'The Storm Breaks', *International Socialism*, second series, No. 46, (1990).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>96</sup> Higley, Kullberg and Pakulski, p.137.

Democracy, they added, did not constitute a major threat to established elites in the region:

Instead of having to fight tooth and nail to defend their power and status, most elites associated with the old order have adapted to democratization without major loss. [...] nothing approaching a “revolutionary” circulation of elites occurred; in this key respect there were no Central and East European revolutions in 1989-91.<sup>97</sup>

In a monograph published the same year, Klaus von Beyme felt able to conclude, similarly, that in contrast to democratic transitions from right-wing authoritarian dictatorships, ‘[t]here was no fundamental turnover of elites’. Although communist parties sometimes excluded the most dogmatic members from the party, the goal was not so much to *purge* -- as with democratisation in post-war Germany -- ‘as the opening of better chances for the younger generation within the party’, the overall effect of which was to produce an ‘accelerated *turnover of generations*.’<sup>98</sup> Despite this rapid turnover, he adds, in no former wave of democratization ‘were the reformed forces of the old regime able to make a come-back so quickly as in Eastern Europe’. Perhaps the most notorious case is Russia, where the private sector is dominated by former Soviet monopolies seized by ex-Communist officials who have become the core of a semi-criminalized business class. This ‘new’ capitalist class maintains such powerful links to the state that Russia’s post-transition economic system has been described as ‘a 100% merger between business and the authorities’.<sup>99</sup> But even in Czechoslovakia, with its ‘velvet revolution’, existing elites proved surprisingly resilient. Husák and his inner circle were driven from power in 1989, but less-discredited communist officials then embraced a handful of prominent dissidents in a process that is ill-described by the term collapse.<sup>100</sup> Some vacancies in top positions were opened, but it was primarily younger elites, who had held middle-ranking positions in the former communist regime, that rose to the top.<sup>101</sup>

In East Germany, the alchemy that saw ‘old’ bureaucratic power transmuted into investments in the embryonic new Germany was an important -- and in historical studies often neglected -- aspect of the transition period. The process began towards the end of 1989 and continued apace in 1990 under the coalition government of Lothar de Maizière. Under Modrow, the liberalisation of land and property markets enabled thousands of functionaries to exploit the resultant opportunities, buying up land and scooping luxury properties at bargain basement prices. Those in positions of economic authority, and with appropriate connections and knowledge, were able to siphon ‘people’s own’ funds into their own newly-established firms or bank accounts, transferring vast sums with a few strokes of the pen. Given their experience in the arts of ‘fast practice’, and that their operations were in any case shrouded in secrecy, Stasi officials seem to have been particularly adept at transforming state capital into private property, with entire sections ‘going under’ and resurfacing as business proprietors. Loopholes in the State Treaty (which unified the currencies of the two Germanies) enabled functionaries to convert colossal sums of GDR Marks and ‘transfer roubles’ into Deutschmarks at parity, by illicit methods – for example, through the ‘export’ to the Soviet Union of goods that existed only in accounting books. Of those that deployed illegal means to launder soft money into hard, or bureaucratic authority into private property, some were caught but many more evaded detection.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp.138-9.

<sup>98</sup> Von Beyme, pp.67-8,74,165.

<sup>99</sup> Grigory Yavlinsky, quoted in *The Economist*, 25 June 2005, ‘A survey of the EU’s eastern borders’, p.12. See also Stephen Cohen, *Failed Crusade; America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p.142.

<sup>100</sup> See e.g. George Lawson, ‘Negotiated Revolutions: The Prospects for Radical Change in Contemporary World Politics’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol.31, No.3, (2005), p.491.

<sup>101</sup> Higley, Kullberg and Pakulski, p.141.

'In this way,' Martin Flug has described, thousands of representatives of the old regime, including the "'dissolved" Stasi, became German unification's victors, through the back door.'<sup>102</sup>

As the 'communist' elites filed across their hastily constructed bridge to capitalist democracy two striking phenomena could be observed. One was the readiness with which most of them shed the ideological commitments and trappings of their previous calling. Senior army officers, to give an example that stands for many, would happily exchange the title 'Genosse' [comrade] for 'Herr.'<sup>103</sup> Managers resigned their SED membership in droves,<sup>104</sup> and actively sought partnership with the western 'enemy'. Even most of the SED's membership embraced, more or less eagerly, the 'social market' and parliamentary democracy. The second phenomenon of note was that although the transition necessitated the sacrifice of many of those most implicated with the old regime, in the first two years there was surprisingly little 'elite replacement.' As the editor of Berlin's *tageszeitung* remarked a year on, 'it is quite eerie how the GDR state apparatus was allowed to carry on blithely maintaining its hold on power.'<sup>105</sup> Even after two years the degree of elite replacement had been minimal. In the *economy*, 70–80 per cent of directors and managers of the *Kombinate* in mid-1991 had been managers before 1989.<sup>106</sup> In *politics*, it was largely the 'lower nobility' – middle and lower officials – who were able to remain active.<sup>107</sup> Hundreds of the bloc parties' elected representatives in the new Germany had been activists or functionaries in the old GDR. In the army, the vast majority of senior officers were retained, albeit at one rank beneath their existing station. As to the *administrative elite*, some took the opportunity of early retirement while others engineered their transfer to offices with greater prospects. In the *legal elite*, 78 of 1,300 judges were forced to resign by June 1990, but the remainder were allowed to 'cleanse' their files of incriminating documents pending re-election.<sup>108</sup>

In the long-run, of course, German unification led to far greater elite replacement in the former GDR than elsewhere in Soviet Europe. Indeed, the threat of unification had haunted SED leaders throughout the transition period – for them, it sharply exacerbated the dilemmas of liberalisation. When, for example, Krenz had listened to General Jaruzelski's reassuring words with regard to 'shared position with regard to the interests of state' between Communist Party and Solidarność leaders, the East German leader had found little comfort. The question 'But what are the interests of state?' nagged at him -- it highlighted the distinction between his precarious situation and the General's. 'However much is reformed in Poland, the state remains Poland', he wrote in his diary; 'But what if the SED loses? Without it the GDR would not exist. [...] There would be no *raison d'être* for *two* capitalist German states. The GDR's existence as a German state depends upon its socialist nature.'<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>102</sup> Martin Flug, *Treuhand-Poker* (Berlin: Links, 1992), p.26.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Chemnitz, in Dieter Golombek and Dietrich Ratzke, *Facetten der Wende* (Frankfurt am Main: IMK, 1991), p.125.

<sup>104</sup> In the space of two months, 330 of the 333 *Kombinat* General Directors resigned from the SED, many of them resurfacing as CDU and FDP members. See Volkhard Mosler, 'Klassenkämpfe in der Revolution 1989', *Sozialismus von unten*, No. 2, (1994), also *Linksruck* 22 June 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Klaus Hartung, *Neunzehnhundertneunundachtzig* (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand, 1990), p.60.

<sup>106</sup> Mike Dennis, *Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl* (London: Pinter, 1993), p.123.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Baylis, cited in Jennifer Yoder, *From East Germans to Germans?* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1999), p.51.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Schneider, *The German Comedy* (London: Tauris, 1992), p.111; Thomas Blanke and Rainer Erd, eds, *DDR – Ein Staat vergeht* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990). Judges and prosecutors, according to Inga Markovits in her *Imperfect Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.141, followed the government's invitation to cleanse personnel files 'with a vengeance.'

<sup>109</sup> Krenz, p. 207.

It is not the purpose of this article to suggest that counterposing transition by rupture in Czechoslovakia and East Germany with the negotiated transitions of Poland and Hungary is a profitless enterprise. Modelling democratisation processes in this fashion undoubtedly has merit, and has spawned numerous intriguing research questions – for example, with regard to the connection between a Communist party's stance during a transition and the ability of its successor party to adapt to the new political environment.<sup>110</sup> However, where the case of East Germany has figured in models of democratisation the result is often less than satisfactory. This article has suggested that the East German opposition movement of the late 1980s was somewhat stronger, and the SED more divided, than commonly supposed. Even those SED leaders, such as Krenz, who were reformists only under duress, proved capable of learning, and instigated radical reforms -- albeit under pressure from popular protest. Hans Modrow and his colleagues embraced parliamentary democracy as a lesser evil, but their revised attitudes to democracy and the market were not simply a product of adaptation to changing circumstances. The ground had been prepared in the 1980s, with the erosion of elite beliefs in 'Marxist-Leninism'. In 1989 orthodox Communism became discredited, not just in society at large but in the elite too, and this encouraged processes of 'political learning', entailing an enhanced receptiveness to ideas from abroad – above all to the 'new thinking' emanating from Moscow, but also to advice from counterparts in Poland and elsewhere.<sup>111</sup> Although negotiation was not as central to the transition process as in Poland or Hungary, pact making involving regime and opposition did occur, at the Round Table. In the same period (winter 1989-90), the established 'bloc' parties began to disengage from the SED, helping to create a pluralist political landscape, before merging with their West German counterparts. Power was not surrendered to protestors on to the streets, but was passed to reformists, most of whom had occupied senior positions in the old regime. With one or two exceptions, the East German elite did not lose the 'will to rule'. This was a case of transition via extrication, not collapse.

If one overlooks the distinction between the old regime, defined by institutional structures and ideology, and the ruling elite, the demise of the former *appears* as the collapse (or 'loss of the will to rule') of the latter. But I would insist, with Harman, that such a distinction should be made. The GDR was a class society, with the means of production controlled by members of the *nomenklatura*, the core commitment of whom was to improve their collective position in world hierarchies of competitiveness, wealth and influence. Relative to this overarching goal, Communist political structures were of secondary importance, and this became transparently clear in 1989-90. As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, existing elites by and large adapted to new circumstances. Economic leaders (such as *Kombinat* General Directors) repositioned themselves, hoping to emerge from the transition as managers or even owners of private companies; police chiefs, army officers and state officials strove to remain at their posts; even SED functionaries hoped to remain influential players, in a competitive party field alongside their erstwhile allies of the 'bloc parties' and citizens' movement groups. Although German unification ensured that East Germany did not experience the 'velvet restoration'<sup>112</sup> of old elites that was experienced by the GDR's erstwhile allies in Eastern Europe, these hopes were realised to a degree. Not only was the Modrow administration committed to minimising elite replacement, so too was its CDU-led

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<sup>110</sup> John Ishiyama contends that Poland witnessed 'the emergence of a democratic reformist leadership in the SDRP which could adapt and thrive' in postcommunist conditions, whereas the Czech ex-Communist party 'has been unable to shed its tarnished past, leaving it politically isolated and in decline.' Ishiyama, 'Communist Parties in Transition: Structures, Leaders, and Processes of Democratization in Eastern Europe', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.27, No.1 (1995).

<sup>111</sup> Bermeo, *Democracy*, p. 281.

<sup>112</sup> Adam Michnik, cited in John Nagle and Alison Mahr, *Democracy and Democratization: Post-Communist Europe in Comparative Perspective* (London: Sage, 1999), pp.202-3.

successor. It is inaccurate to describe the SED regime under the rubric 'collapse'. Rather, it wound down its affairs and restructured. As New Forum leader Sebastian Pflugbeil put it, somewhat ruefully:

We [...] had a peaceful revolution in which we abstained from destroying anything [...] But the price we had to pay was that the old apparatus, the old mafia, could continue doing its thing for several more months, and without much interference. We allowed them, if you will, a very orderly retreat.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> 'We should have pursued this revolution much more decisively,' Pflugbeil concludes, and 'with much more force.' In Philipsen, p.310.