

personalities from all groups together, and try to form some kind of coalition government from them. Something like that will have to happen. We have no serious parties at present. What we can have by the time elections come in a few months time is a dozen really credible, upright personalities who can exercise some kind of leadership.

The Communist Party is, as you say, in a process of disintegration and will certainly not have a vanguard role in the future. It will just be one among many parties. But from the middle echelons of the party and from the rank and file there will be a good number of honest individuals who will gain political credibility.

People like Gregor Gysi, the new secretary, who is now trying to build up a new party platform. Another man I'm

thinking of is the mayor of Dresden, Wolfgang Berghofer, who along with Gysi and Modrow is part of the new leadership in what's left of the party. There are a number of personalities who even the population at large would still believe in.

But, returning to the Polish analogy, the Communist Party at the moment is such a dirty word that one wonders whether, if they went to the polls in May, they'd get more than 10% or 15% of the vote?

Ten or fifteen percent; they'd get a few positions from that! But it's very difficult to speculate. The party's future is still in turmoil. Until that's sorted out it's very difficult to predict what a new democratically elected government would look like. ♦



Preaching Water, Drinking Wine

Werner Goldstein is a senior editor on the foreign desk of Neues Deutschland, the official Socialist Unity Party (SED) newspaper, and is a member of the reform wing of the SED. He has worked on Neues Deutschland for some forty years, since his return to the country from Britain after World War Two. He is angry and disillusioned, but still believes socialism worth striving for.

We're living in a situation in which East Germany has moved very quickly towards change. Some argue that the churches were the main catalyst for that change. Do you think that's correct?

I think there is some truth in that. The church assembled people who had different views and gave them the chance to voice opinions which they would otherwise not have been able to voice. And the church made itself felt on the government in various ways. In that respect it really was a catalyst for change, though not, I think, the main one.

What was it about the churches that made people go there? What could they provide that the state organs and other officials couldn't?

In the GDR the church is very much an independent force; there has always been a separation between state and church. The church was a secure place to voice opinions, and the churches also had their own media. There was a possibility to spread divergent views. That was really the start of the movement in this country.

So it's not a surprise to you when we talk to opposition groups and many of them are priests and Protestant church people, or have close ties with the church?

No, I'm not at all surprised because, for many years, the

party leadership, as well as the party at the regional level, has tried to talk with and work together with the church. The party has tried to exchange views and find common ground if possible.

You concede that the church was a catalyst for change in the GDR, but not the main catalyst. In your view, what was the main catalyst for change?

The main catalyst, I believe - and many of my comrades in the Socialist Unity Party believe - has been the Soviet Union: the rise of Gorbachev, and of perestroika and glasnost in the media there.

So was perhaps Gorbachev's visit to Berlin for the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the GDR the final catalyst that began the move for change?

We put a lot of hopes in that visit. We were a bit disappointed in that Honecker didn't really respond. But we were sure that Gorbachev made a big impression, though it took another couple of days or more to be sure that the consequences were in the right direction.

You're implying that even before Gorbachev came to East Berlin there were already divisions inside the East German Communist Party between reformers and conservatives. At the time I must say it was rather difficult to find those reformers.

You have to understand that while the leadership, the

24 members of the executive committee, was quite monolithic, the party organisations were a different matter. Rank-and-file party members, many of them staunch friends of the Soviet Union, were keenly aware of Gorbachev's attempts to escape from stalinist ways of thinking and from the whole stalinist period. And I would think a majority of the party membership felt it was the right thing to do also for the GDR, where there are similar political and economic contradictions well known to many people.

Do you believe that the SED is saveable? Will there still be an SED in the form that we know it? Or must the East German Communist Party do something similar to what the Hungarian Communist Party did?

I think it's saveable. If I didn't think so I would have put down my party card already. We still have a big membership, perhaps 1.5 million members, although many hundreds of thousands have left the party ... I hope that with our new leadership new ideas can spread and also a new sense of confidence.

But the party, surely, is very angry and disappointed with the behaviour of the former leadership which appears in retrospect to have been a bunch of gangsters.

Yes, of course, their loss of confidence has been almost fatal for the party. That's a fact. And everybody is very disappointed - although some of us who have had to work pretty closely with the people who are now infamous are less surprised than others. The former leadership disgraced themselves. They isolated themselves from the mass of the people and the mass of the party membership, and they didn't know about the realities of life in the GDR anymore.

You're a senior politician, how much did you know about what was really going on? I'm sure you knew about the party's estate at Wandlitz. Did you know about the corruption? Did you know about the Swiss bank accounts? Were they things you knew and couldn't print or were they simply things you didn't know?

Wandlitz was of course familiar to people like us who accompanied members of the politburo on various foreign visits, and we were critical of what was going on. But we didn't see the depth of corruption, naturally. We couldn't comprehend the extent. And, by the way, there's nothing proven yet about the Swiss bank accounts; it's just a rumour. I personally don't think there were Swiss bank accounts.

So you concede a level of corruption, but you don't concede the level of corruption that's now being intimated in some of the domestic and foreign press?

Yes, I concede there was a lot of corruption - a whole system of corruption, really. It was not only in the top ranks. It went pretty far down, and it became a sort of system going right down through the various levels of the party. But not all of what is being claimed now about the corruption or its dimensions is proven truth.

And yet similar allegations have been made in other



"With Kohl for German reunification" - the kinds of banners that are terrifying half Europe

countries where the stalinist leadership has been done away with. Zhivkov in Bulgaria is under investigation, and the case of Ceaucescu in Rumania is beyond doubt. Is there something in socialism that leads top officials to lose contact with the rank and file and to become corrupt?

I personally think it's not the system of socialism itself which is the problem. Rather, the problem is the stalinist system of administering and commandeering socialism. The problem is not in the essence of socialism, because socialism is, in my view, identical with democracy.

You're obviously a strong believer in socialism as a world view. How much has your view of socialism been shaken by the events of the last few weeks? Or is it simply confirmation for you of the death of stalinism?

I'm maybe not the typical case because I'm almost 70 years old now. I became a member of the Communist Party during the last war. I was a refugee from Nazi Germany in Britain, and I became a member of the German Communist Party there when it was still illegal. And of course I had my dreams about socialism and communism back at that time. But coming back to Germany in 1947 after the war I had to face up to the realities of a beaten Germany, of a people who were not pro-Nazi but who had no other real beliefs. We had to face reality and create our socialism with people who were actually opposed to socialism for many years, and some of whom were perhaps actually anti-communists.

Two Dramatic Months

In recent weeks East Germany has emerged as the focal point for the massive drama being played out in Eastern Europe. The curtain lifted on the first and most startling act of the drama in October, following Gorbachev's visit to the GDR's 40th anniversary celebrations.

Huge demonstrations in Berlin and Leipzig threw the government into chaos. Reliable reports have suggested that general secretary Erich Honecker was planning to send in armed troops, Beijing-style, when he was sacked by his party. His rather unconvincing replacement, Egon Krenz, lasted just three weeks, though his place in the history books became secure when he opened the border with West Ger-

many on November 9, thus effectively bringing down the Berlin Wall.

In early December the legacy of the Honecker era became clearer. There were allegations of huge fortunes in Swiss bank accounts, massive trade in foreign currency, and luxuries hitherto undreamt of by most East German citizens. These revelations, like those of the parlous state of the economy, shocked many party members and almost 600,000 resigned in the period from mid-November to mid-December.

The Socialist Unity Party (SED) has since tried desperately to regain some degree of legitimacy. The party congress in mid-December modified the party's name and reworked its platform in a more Western socialist direction.

The new General Secretary, Dr Gregor Gysi, had previously been ostracised by Honecker; and the new

leadership troika of Gysi, Dresden mayor Wolfgang Berghofer and Prime Minister Hans Modrow were all relatively untainted by the Honecker era. But the SED's electoral prospects in a free poll are not considered rosy. Elections are planned for May 6, although many opposition figures continue to argue that they are not being given a fair chance to win. In mid-January the SED's coalition partners threatened to resign, and Neues Forum threatened to walk out of roundtable meetings when it was reported that a new security apparatus was being created by the SED, supposedly to counter neo-Nazi agitation. Yet neo-Nazi groups are not new to the GDR. Mr Berghofer and other reformers, impatient with the slow pace of reform, resigned in mid-January to join the rejuvenated Social Democratic Party. The SED now looks on the verge of cracking up.

But people changed over time and we had high hopes that we could build socialism in this country. And for those reasons people like myself are now deeply disappointed, naturally. But our belief in socialism can't be destroyed. It is shaken, I will definitely admit that. But I still am a believer in socialism. I hope very much that we can retain the good things in our country and find a way to true socialism in this country, in the same way that I hope that in the Soviet Union, for instance, they will find their way to proper socialism.

What has to change in this country for you to get back the confidence you've lost?

The first thing is the democratisation of the party. People can really talk openly now, and they do talk openly. They should be able to elect true leaders and genuine people who are for the people, that's another thing. Something which is much more complicated is to try to put the economy in order. And the economy is very badly shaken, it's in crisis. We have to do everything to support and strengthen the new government in order that they can stabilise the economy. That's now a point of the first order.

Do you think the Communist Party can stay in power? Or have they lost the right to run this country?

I personally think they haven't lost the right to govern. They want the best for the people, and they have a plan to stabilise the economy and to see to it that people's living standards rise again and that things return to normal. In

that sense the party has a right to govern. Whether they can find the majority necessary in order to govern is a different question which can only be decided at the next election.

And what's your gut feeling? Do you think the party has retained enough support from the working class to keep power?

It's very difficult to say. Very largely it depends on how things go in the next two or three months, with the economy being the main battlefield for campaigning around for the next government. If the party succeeds in stabilising the economy there's a good chance that we might attract enough people - not all of them of course, and not as many as we always pretended there would be. But there could be a chance that we could obtain a majority or be able to form a coalition in order to retain political power in a democratic way.

You've explained that you're angry with what's happened in the past, but my general feeling is that the people as a whole are very angry, and they feel betrayed by their leadership.

Yes, that's definitely the case. People are disappointed. They feel betrayed because some of these leaders have preached water for the people and they themselves have drunk wine, as the saying goes. But at the same time I would like to point out that this anger is also a result of agitation by forces interested in getting the communists



Photo: AFP-AP

out of power. And not all that is being shouted in the streets in the demonstrations is actually in the interests of the people.

Can we talk about the question of German unity? In Leipzig slogans demanding immediate unity with West Germany are fairly easy to find. Is that an issue that's coming to the boil in this country?

Of course I've noticed that the shouting about unification has become much louder lately, and it's been strengthened by the same slogans being spread from the West. At the same time you will find that quite a lot of people in those demonstrations - I don't want to try to quantify how many, it's difficult to say - are saying 'no' to reunification, not for all time, but at least for the near

future. Perhaps they envisage a single Germany again in 10 years or so.

There has got to be time to find ways of coming together again, with different economies, different cultural developments, and with the political changes here that are taking place at present. I think I heard right when I heard them also shouting in Leipzig that 'we don't want to return to the old Reich'. People are afraid of the chauvinistic, nationalistic developments appearing in West Germany, and of course we have certain elements here as well.

One of the slogans said you can be in favour of German unity without necessarily being a rightwinger.

Of course one could be a rightwinger too! The wave of chauvinism is very strong and it's getting stronger still.

This question of reunification is being speeded up dramatically. But we've got to allow time to develop to the point where it's achievable, in the interests of Europe as a whole.

Because, in fact, a speeded-up move for reunification could get in the way of the reform process in East Germany, couldn't it?

I don't really see a contradiction between the two. But, of course, at present we need to quieten down the situation in order to concentrate on work and production. That's the main thing really; we have to stabilise the economy and get back to a normal political and civil life. And after that there might come a time to think of the reunification process.

I get the feeling that the people are expecting very fast change, and very quick solutions. Isn't there going to be a problem where the wishes of the people and the realities of the political situation are going to come very clearly into conflict?

I think you're correct. People are impatient and afraid of losing more material comfort, of suffering greater cuts in their living standards. But our position as a newspaper, if we get the chance, will be to explain to people that we have to be patient, we have to work hard with our hands and our brains until we normalise the situation.

Talking in a slightly wider context, I get the feeling that the people of Eastern Europe want proper markets, and proper market mechanisms. They want to do away with the state-run economy, so in that sense they're thinking in capitalist terms, but not necessarily in the social sense - they want to retain the social net that socialism has provided. Would you concur in general with that analysis?

I think people don't want the social consequences of capitalism in our country. I'm just talking about the social consequences here, because the values we have created in this country are predominantly in the social field - in short, a certain material security which capitalism can't and doesn't give to all the people. It's our belief that we can attain a good life for the whole of the people, and we believe that we can use elements of market mechanisms in our economy to that end. The first steps have been taken already. For instance in Karl Marx Stadt, where there is a motor industry, there's a 50-50 partnership with Volkswagen of West Germany. We have the capacities and the know-how to make a good car, and I think it will be a success. And that can be an example for many other such undertakings.

Can we go back to marxist ideology, and to Marx and Engels. Were they just wrong? Were they right for their time? How relevant are the views of Marx and Engels for the 1990s?

In general I would say that they were not only right for their time; what they explored and tried to discover was the essence of capitalism. That was a very important step towards socialism and that's why it became important for us as well. They never said anything exactly in detail about socialism, but a lot was deduced in our countries just by taking extracts out of their teachings - and it has been proven those predictions haven't been right. There were

too many assumptions and not enough real proof. But we still believe in Marx and Engels. And also to some degree in Lenin.

Yet marxist ideology was based on the assumption that countries that became socialist would already be in an advanced capitalist stage. Nearly all the countries that have moved to socialism, however, have either been feudal societies or societies in early stages of capitalism. So in that sense the marxist model was never really applied.

Yes, you're quite right. Marx actually knew Britain best. It was the most advanced industrial capitalist country at that time. Marx and Engels believed Britain could become socialist quickly and successfully because of its high levels of productivity and social organisation. And we know what difficulties the Soviet Union had as the first country of socialism - besides having to fight a terrible war, or two wars actually. But East Germany used to be quite a developed capitalist country before the war. We have the qualified people to do the job. We have the standard of education needed in order to achieve much higher levels of productivity. What we lack just now - what we have lost, really - is the capital needed in order to invest in production, in science and in high technology. But we have most of the elements necessary in order to successfully build up socialism. If we can win the whole of the people for the job.

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