

Neues Deutschland After the Wende

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On 2 October 1989 *Neues Deutschland* (ND), the “Organ of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany,” took editorial notice of the tens of thousands of citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) who had recently left the country: “They have trod on all moral values by their behavior and removed themselves from our society. One should shed no tears over them” (2). According to the paper, all was well with socialism. The GDR’s few problems were the consequence of action by the class enemy. On 19 March 1990, ND, now calling itself simply “a socialist daily newspaper,” reported on the electoral defeat of its owner, the former Socialist Unity Party (SED), renamed the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

In the intervening five-and-a-half months, almost every aspect of the newspaper had changed, as had its role in the nation. In October it was the organ of the ruling party of the state, firmly under the Marxist-Leninist principle of democratic centralism, indispensable reading for anyone wanting to know the official position of the GDR’s leadership. By March, ND was caught uncomfortably between its Marxist-Leninist past and an undefined future. Although still widely read, it no longer spoke for the government. It had different editors, a new format, altered coverage, and unprecedented fear for its future. The “market” no longer valued Marxist fidelity. The more Marxist ND now appeared, the less likely its survival.

After reviewing the situation before October 1989, I will examine the changes in ND’s self image, the steady growth of criticism of social problems, party and government, changes in coverage, and conclude with a discussion of ND’s role in a transformed society.

***Neues Deutschland* in Context**

The GDR tightly controlled entrance to the field of journalism. Those who wished to study at the Karl-Marx-University in Leipzig, the single GDR university at which journalists were trained, demonstrated their political reliability long before admittance through active participation in the Free German Youth, the SED, or other organizations. The four-year program centered on Marxism-Leninism. Regular continuing education courses and the *Verband deutscher Journalisten* reminded working journalists of their duties (Blaum, 27-33; Holzweißig 1989, 34-43).

If journalists in general were watched carefully to guarantee political reliability, those who worked for ND faced particular scrutiny. A journalist in the provinces might occasionally manage a small deviation from the party line and survive. ND was different. ND was a typical newspaper of a ruling pre-*Glasnost* communist party, with all that entails. Over a million copies were sold each day; fewer were read. It printed, but did not influence, the party line. Copy included pages of long, dull and repetitive speeches. Journalistic independence was tightly limited. Editors received daily directives from the Party leadership that included not only what to print, but sometimes where it should be placed and what wording should be used. Günter Schabowski, ND's editor from 1978 to 1985, recalled that the newspaper was one of Honecker's hobbies (1990, 26), and that it was often a topic of criticism while *Politbüro* members had lunch together (1990, 46). The phrase cited in the first paragraph of this essay, for example, "No one should shed any tears over them," was added by Erich Honecker (ND, 10 January, 2; 18 January, 2; 24 January, 1; Schabowski, 1990, 81).

Although the GDR constitution prohibited censorship, the consequences of violating well-known rules (or Erich Honecker's directives) were clear.

Censorship was replaced by self-censorship, *die Schere im Kopf*. Those who worked to maintain some mental independence (and many did not) faced an impossible challenge. Every slight victory was won only by abject adherence to the party line in many more instances. The result was inevitable: journalists faced an unpleasant choice between “cynicism, schizophrenia, or corrupted silence.” (ND, 10 January, 2). Only in the arts was it possible to address some controversial issues; literature became the real newspaper of the land.

A Changing Self-Image

Later we shall examine how ND responded to steadily increasing journalistic freedom. To begin, we shall look at ND’s explicit statements of what it was doing.

Editorial Statements

The first editorial comment came on 16 November, and that in startling way. The previous editor was no longer on the masthead; only four of the thirteen names on the former masthead remained. There was no explanation of how or why the staff changes occurred. However, ND did announce new goals:

Our readers will find a new masthead on page 2 of this edition. As of today, *Neues Deutschland* has new leadership.

As in all the base organizations of our party, the comrades in the editorial staff and the firm have worked intensively to discuss their past work, to analyze the causes of the serious failures, and to develop a basis on which we journalists, as workers at the organ of the Central Committee of the SED can contribute to the renewal of socialism in the GDR, to the renewal of our party. The result of these discussions is not

only a new editorial staff, but above all a new concept for the newspaper.

It is a matter of new contents, more information, political viewpoints and timely journalistic forms. We see ourselves as a forum for democratic opinion building in our party.... Closeness to life, truthfulness, and party-spiritedness [*Parteilichkeit*—from these we must and will be led in the future (1).

Although the statement indicates significant changes, it also signaled the intent to remain true to the SED. The “new editorial staff” was new to its positions, but not to ND. The word *Parteilichkeit* was particularly important, a word with clear meaning within the Marxist-Leninist system. As a standard GDR reference work defined the term:

Parteilichkeit indicates the class character of all forms of social consciousness and human action in the class society, and means representing the interests of a certain class.... In Marxism-Leninism, P[*arteilichkeit*]. is at the same time a theoretical-methodological principle: it demands that all questions of social life be addressed from the standpoint of the interests of the working class, its struggle for freedom, social progress, and the establishment of socialism and communism (*Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, 738).

The next significant statement came on 4 December, when the line under the title on page one changed from “Central Organ of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany” to “Central Organ of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.” There was pressing reason for the change; the central committee no longer existed, having resigned under pressure. The change prompted another statement of ND’s goals:

This change is also a response to growing demands from the base of the party that *Neues Deutschland* should in the future pay more heed to the

opinion and the opinion building process of the party base. By the way, the party organization within the editorial staff and publishing firm of our newspaper, by a majority vote, also agreed to make such changes. ND's staff now see as its most important task to contribute effectively to the reformation of a modern socialist party, and not only in the two short weeks before the emergency party congress....

Today's decision is less a look back than a step forward. We want to be a stronger forum in which comrades discuss the unity and the future of the party, in which the problems of today (e.g., a necessary economic reform or questions of the ability to act and of the self concept of the SED) can be discussed and solved (4 December, 1).

This statement retained a firm commitment to the party, but broadened the definition of what was open for discussion. The paper claimed now to be the paper of the whole party, not only of its leadership.

On 18 December, the slogan changed again. Now the paper claimed simply to be "A Socialist Newspaper," in part responding to the decision of the just concluded emergency party congress to change the name of the SED to the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands—Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (SED-PDS), rather a long name to repeat every day. Although the masthead on page 2 retained the party connection, its disappearance from page 1 was significant, underscored by the simultaneous removal of the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!" from the top of page 1.

The change was not noted editorially on the 18th, but on the following day a page 1 statement further refined the paper's goals. After reaffirming the statement of 4 December, it continued:

Meanwhile, the emergency party congress met. Major decisions resulting in a new concept of our party were made, and our party received a new, expanded name. That alone required our reaction. And

why should we continue to call ourselves an organ instead of what we really are, a socialist daily newspaper?

After reporting that many readers questioned dropping the quotation from Marx, the statement continued with a pledge that ND would now encourage pluralism:

Of course we affirm our commitment to the work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. *The Communist Manifesto* is among these. But our new modern socialist party also includes social democratic, socialist, anti-Fascist, and pacifist traditions. The stereotypical repetition of slogans or phrases—this too we should learn from the past—helps neither in advancing this tradition nor in attempting to build a politics dedicated to a realistic, to a democratic socialism (19 December, 1).

This statement represented the most significant change yet in the paper's professed goals. It affirmed a continuing relationship with the SED-PDS, but rejected the slogans and the rigidity of the past, admitting that there was value to be found in the non-Marxist-Leninist traditions it previously had forcefully rejected. It remained difficult, however, to imagine a Marxist-Leninist newspaper that could take press freedom seriously.

The last major statement came with a total make over of ND's appearance, first seen on 19 February. Almost everything about the paper changed, from type face to layout to the nature of the stories. The accompanying page 1 statement also differed significantly from what had been said before:

ND appears today to its readers in a new form. The new layout goes along with efforts to enrich the contents. More understandable and better prepared information, more opinions by leaders in politics and the economy are part of the change. The editorial staff will continue their own thoroughly researched articles on political life in the GDR and the world.

The article listed the numerous changes being made, thanked readers for their loyalty, and noted that the price for ND, as the price of all GDR periodicals, would increase significantly in April as press subventions ended.

That price increase was a matter of considerable concern to ND. Before April, newspapers were extraordinarily cheap. ND sold for 15 pfennig, about nine cents at the official rate of exchange.

On 2 April, however, ND's price increased to 55 pfennig. On 14 March, a columnist reported on reader reaction to the format change. Most was favorable. But the writer went on:

As the media market gradually fills, many readers are talking about the higher prices. Some tell us that they want to subscribe only to our newspaper, and therefore expect better local news from us. We agree that the room for a broader offering of short news items will be found through shortening all articles, which should not thereby lose their essence (16).

There was nothing about loyalty to the party, now called the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), nothing about seeing the world from a Marxist or socialist standpoint. The claim was simply that the paper was useful and interesting to its readers.

Past Sins

The statements we have so far examined are positive, announcing what the newspaper intended to do. But that implies that in the past improper things had been done. Understandably ND preferred to look more to the promising future than to the embarrassing past, but it did carry occasional analyses of past errors, and even several apologies, something previously inconceivable.

The most interesting apology dealt with a blatantly false story carried during the exodus of GDR citizens through Hungary. On 21 September, ND ran a remarkable interview on page 1 with a GDR citizen who claimed to have

been drugged and kidnapped by FRG [Federal Republic of Germany] agent in Budapest. The day before, a major story had accused the FRG of responsibility for the tens of thousands of GDR citizens fleeing the country through Hungary.

The story was absurd on its face. On 3 November, ND retracted the story and apologized for printing it:

Our publication of 21 September, "I Experienced how FRG Citizens Are 'Made,'" unleashed continuing criticism from our readers. The editors received numerous letters that doubted the story, because the case was not typical of the many GDR citizens who left. Given what we know today, we must accept this criticism and regret the story (2).

After summarizing the story, ND told its readers it had hired an attorney to investigate the matter, and they would learn the results.

Readers did learn the facts, but the news came first from a television report on 4 January, not from ND. The following day, ND ran an editorial that began by reviewing the situation. It continued:

The story is a truly bitter one for everyone concerned. Its deeper causes lie in the deformed social and media policies before the *Wende*. As we also know from other events, it was frequently characterized by wishful thinking, glossing things over, and always a well-refined commando system with regards to ND, television, radio, and the news agency. This was an exemplary case. The then SED leadership accused the FRG media of being entirely responsible for the mass exodus. The former ND editor received orders from the Agitation Section of the Central Committee on 19 September to publish the kidnapping story as quickly as possible....

The TV story made clear...what human misery can be caused by such campaigns, ordered by "media czars." We want to apologize.... (2).

ND itself had been less than energetic in researching the story, but when the facts were clear, it at least confessed its error, and vaguely hinted at similar cases. ND made several other apologies public, including one to Walter Janka, whom the paper had falsely accused in 1961 as part of an orchestrated government campaign. On 2 February ND carried an interview with Janka about the affair and noted that it had apologized to him the previous day (3; see also Holzweißig 1992, 33-34).

There were in fact plenteous examples of interference in the past, but during the period examined ND never carried a clear story dealing with the policies it had followed only months earlier. The information that readers got came, as was on also the case on other matters, most often in the middle of other stories. For example, on 7 December a letter from a reader complained about an article downplaying the effects of Stalinism that had been carried the previous May. ND replied that it had not commissioned the article. Rather, Joachim Herrmann, then the *Politbüro* member responsible for the mass media, ordered the editor to print it, although the edition was already set. The reply ended by noting that ND had adopted a new editorial policy on 2 December that would prevent such events in the future (7). Details on the policy were not given. ND made other references to the tight controls it had previously endured when Herrmann was interrogated by a parliamentary committee investigating the corruption of former SED leaders, but at no time did it print a clear article analyzing its past weaknesses.

Criticism: Social Issues

That the GDR had major problems was clear to its citizens, who daily experienced shortages, pollution, and petty corruption. Foreigners who relied on ND to understand the GDR had a very different picture. All was well in the

land of “real existing socialism.” According to the official line, printing negative news or forthright accounts of problems would only aid the enemy (Schabowski 1990, 41). ND adapted uncertainly and uncomfortably to its new freedom to criticize. In this section, I shall consider ND’s progress in printing unpleasant but often obvious facts.

Growing Criticism

ND was understandably cautious in making critical comments about controversial issues. Even slight mistakes in the past meant expulsion from the profession as the mildest sanction. Just before Honecker’s fall on 18 October, there was evidence the government was beginning to permit broader criticism. On 12 October, for example, ND published a statement by the *Politbüro* that, in contrast to the notorious statement of 2 October, said:

Socialism needs everyone.... We cannot be indifferent when people who lived and worked here leave our German Democratic Republic.... The causes for the step may be varied. But we must also look for the reasons here, each in his place, all of us together (1).

The statement mentioned in general terms other problems of the GDR, problems that needed to be solved, though certainly not with the help of the FRG. It called for discussions throughout the country. Only a month later the statement seemed hopelessly out of touch, but at the time it was unprecedented in its willingness to grant limited license to criticize..

Two days later, ND carried the last major report of a speech by Erich Honecker. Although he repeated the old empty slogans, he also said that it could not be a matter of indifference that so many were leaving the country (14/15 October, 1).

In the same issue, ND carried 22 brief letters from citizens supporting the *Politbüro* statement of 12 October. This had been common practice in the past. Such letters, always improbably uniform in praise of whatever the government

or party had done or said, were regularly invented by the editorial staff (Steiniger interview). Some of these letters were of the old ilk. One, typical of thousands that preceded it, said:

The declaration strengthens my confidence in the party of the working class and its policies. In creative dialog with all levels of the people, with initiative and action, we will with determination solve all problems. For that I give my entire strength (2).

Other letters hinted at criticism. The most forceful:

In my opinion it was high time to make a statement about the tense and for me most unsettling situation in our republic. The time for accurate reporting in the mass media is long overdue, and I hope and wish that the ratings of ZDF and ARD [the two FRG television networks, widely watched in the GDR] in the GDR will finally drop (2).

In the same issue, ND reported on the visit of a *Politbüro* member to a shipyard. The criticisms he heard, e.g., pay inequalities, insufficient vacation opportunities for families with children and poor quality consumer goods, were mentioned, but no specifics were given (3). The following issue continued on these lines. Another *Politbüro* member in Magdeburg heard workers criticize “the insufficient information of the past weeks and months,” as well as “what hampers productivity in their factory (16 October, 3). Again, ND gave no specific details.

On 17 October, ND carried a report on a factory visit. This time, more specific comments were printed. One worker, for example, complained that he and his comrades passed the truth up the line, but the answers they got back could be stretched like a rubber band (3). An editorial praised the new openness:

How many critical questions, constructive proposals and new ideas, unvarnished opinions and thoughtful answers there were just in our

reports of discussions with workers in Magdeburg, with the ship builders from Boizenburg, with employees of Bergmann-Borsig in Berlin and coal workers in Oberlausitz (2).

Although the reports ND had carried did not justify this high praise, they were a step forward.

Now changes began to appear quickly. On 18 October, Manfred Gerlach, head of the Liberal Democratic Party, one of the subservient block parties that formerly had followed the SED line, commented that the reasons why so many left the GDR had above all to be sought at home (2). In the same issue, an article briefly noted the pollution caused by a steel mill. Several letters made general criticisms, one even criticized specific building decisions in the city of Gera (3). None of the stories could have been printed even two weeks earlier.

The next day's headlines announced that Erich Honecker had resigned for reasons of health, and that Egon Krenz was his successor. In the course of his speech Krenz revealed a fact known to anyone who listened to FRG media, but previously unmentionable in the GDR: "more than 100,000 people, among them many who are young, have left our land" (19 October, 2).

Following weeks brought a similar surprises. Each issue carried previously unprintable information. But ND was still following the leadership. Until December, ND displayed limited editorial initiative. It took a step only when Egon Krenz or another leader broke the ground. It did not press the limits. In short, the new party line was openness, and ND as before followed the party line.

Three Trends

Several trends are clear between October and December. First, there was a growing tendency to print specific information. The earliest criticisms were general. Goods were shoddy and in short supply, there were housing problems, some pollution existed, people were leaving the country. Gradually,

ND carried more specific information. On 27 October, for example, ND reported that 22,000 citizens from the Dresden district had left the country so far in 1989, including 600 people from the health care system. That was an unprecedentedly precise statistic. A week later came a report on a visit by the new head of the trade union to a factory that made light bulbs. One worker said he had resigned from the union, since he had never seen a member of the leadership on the floor. Another worker complained that, despite the factory's product, lighting was abysmal (4/5 November, 3). The tendency was to raise a problem in general terms, then in following days or weeks to provide more specific information.

Second, that specific information came in bits and pieces, making it difficult to form an overall view. Take the *Übersiedler* situation. The continuing stream of people leaving the GDR forced the government to take step after step to attempt to stop the flow, and resulted in enormous problems throughout the country. Yet ND never provided an overview. On 30 October, in the middle of a long article on the problems in Leipzig, readers learned 5600 people had left that city in 1989 (4). On 4/5 November, ND reported that 4500 people were gathered in the FRG embassy in Prague (2). The next day, the paper said that to date 13,000 GDR citizens had left through Czechoslovakia (2). On 9 November, the day the Wall opened, ND carried the text of a speech by Egon Krenz that revealed over 200,000 had left. Krenz went on:

With some exceptions, the citizens who left the GDR were neither opponents of socialism nor criminals. They are citizens who saw no or only limited possibilities for the full unfolding of their personality, for the satisfaction of their individual needs and interests (3).

In the same issue, a story based on Western accounts reported that about 45,000 citizens had left through Czechoslovakia. Two other stories reported that 600 soldiers and 385 employees of State Security were being temporarily

assigned to the civilian sector as a result of the “current situation in the economy and the tense situation in the area of health care” (7). The three stories, representing a major area of public concern, appeared on the paper’s penultimate page. Although readers might know from personal experience which the situation in the health care field was, they did not receive any clear picture from ND.

The government clearly hoped that removing travel restrictions would reduce the exodus. It did not; the opposite occurred. Soon, 2,000 people were leaving the country daily, a figure that declined only after the elections on 18 March 1990. This was matter of enormous importance to the continued existence of the GDR as a separate state, but ND gave it but scattered attention.

An editorial on 15 November noted a decline in the number of *Übersiedler*, quoting a recent poll that found 87% of the GDR’s citizens definitely planned to stay. One sentence in a story on travel by GDR citizens to the West reported that, since 9 November, 42,000 people had stayed in the FRG (22 November, 1). A 29 November article covered a demographic conference in Berlin. The headline stated that 800,000 people had left the GDR since the building of the wall in 1961, and that most were young (1). That was a critical point. The GDR was not only losing large numbers of people, it was losing its most productive citizens. But no commentary accompanied the story.

From December 1989 to March 1990, ND’s reporting was basically the same. The figures on the continuing stream of *Übersiedler* were printed, either in brief stories or in the middle of longer ones (e.g., 11 January, 1; 2 February, 1; 7 March, 1). Occasional stories mentioned in passing the problems resulting from missing employees (e.g., 11 December, 9).

The editorial comments were vague. A commentary on 14 February observed that there had been a drop in the number of *Übersiedler*, but that there had still been 85,000 since the beginning of the year:

Even if it were only a thousand or even a few hundred [a day]—each one who departs leaves behind not only tears, but also a gap that for a long time now has been impossible to fill (1).

That general statement was not fleshed out in interior articles. GDR citizens encountered in their daily lives the difficulties resulting from the exodus. Colleagues disappeared, overtime became necessary, shops closed more often, trams ran less often. But ND did not provide an analysis to help its readers understand the situation the country was in.

The third general trend is that ND began with “safe” criticism and moved to more sensitive issues. The first general criticism dealt with the daily difficulties with which GDR citizens were unpleasantly familiar, despite the previous failure of the press to pay heed to them. Gradually, more controversial topics and data were carried. Pollution, the grim signs of which were everywhere evident in the country and which previously had been ignored by the GDR’s press, is an excellent case study. Before the *Wende*, the accurate data were classified, known to a few and ignored by the political leadership (Ruthe 4-5).

The first clear mention of pollution after Honecker’s fall came on 18 October in an article on a steel mill that mentioned the pollution the plant caused (3). No details or consequences were given. On 25 October ND carried the text of a Krenz speech that proposed establishing a parliamentary committee on environmental protection (1). Several days later, a letter called for the publication of accurate environmental data (28/29 October, 7). On 14 November ND began printing the daily air pollution statistics for Berlin (8).

Although an article the following day explained how the figures were measured (15 November, 8), the article did not explain the health consequences.

On 3 January an article treated a Berlin power plant. It noted that the plant caused considerable pollution and that hundreds of millions of Marks had been invested in British technology to reduce emissions, with limited success (3). On 19 January, the former Minister of the Environment was quoted as saying that harmful environmental data had been ignored by the previous leadership (2).

A rather vivid story appeared on 20/21 January. Accompanied by a picture of belching smokestacks captioned “An average day in Espenhain,” the article began: “There is ever increasing massive public criticism of the enormous pollution...” The bulk of the article was an interview with an official in the south of the GDR, the area most heavily polluted. He said that the citizens of Leipzig endured ten times as much dust and thirteen times as much sulfur dioxide as the average citizen of the GDR. Plans existed to close the worst polluters. Although the article asked what would happen to the workers in the plant, there was no question about the impact of the pollution on the citizens of the area (4). Still, it was the most explicit article ND had yet carried on the subject of pollution. There were few major stories on pollution for the remainder of the period here covered.

ND’s near silence on the issue was not due to lack of information. The West German periodical *Der Spiegel*, for example, carried a series on the extent of the GDR’s ecological disaster in February 1990, filled with statistics, interviews with GDR citizens, and photographs. Although other GDR periodicals took note of the interview (e.g., Ruthe 1990), ND failed to provide coverage of an issue of critical importance to its readers.

In summary, ND’s reporting gradually became more specific, but negative information remained scattered and piecemeal, and sensitive issues were

treated with considerable, and unnecessary, caution. Nowhere are these three trends more evident, however, than in ND's treatment of the its supporting party and the government, areas to which we next turn.

Criticism of Party and Government

Before the *Wende*, the SED determined the GDR's course, ignoring inconvenient provisions of the constitution. ND's purposes were clearly defined. It, like other means of mass communication, was to:

...persuasively report the nature of our republic and the advances in the realization of the social strategy of the SED in the cities and the countryside, and to motivate people to act creatively to strengthen socialism and to solve problems (*Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* 609).

From that perspective, negative information would only help the enemy. Anything that could be interpreted as criticism of the system, regardless of its accuracy, was avoided.

The leadership was treated well. Erich Honecker was always addressed by his full title: "the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR" (even the television news provided the full title each day). It was clear from ND's coverage that he was the most important political figure in the state. Neither he nor the actions of party or state were questioned. That changed, gradually but steadily.

Honecker, Krenz, and Gysi

Honecker's resignation was treated in the traditional way. The front page of the 19 October issue carried the communique issued after the ninth session of the Central Committee, the text of a speech by Egon Krenz with his picture, the text of Erich Honecker's resignation, and a telegram of congratulation from Mikhail Gorbachev. The Central Committee thanked Honecker "for his many

years of work for the Party and the German Democratic Republic and expressed hearty thanks for his political life's work, along with its best wishes." But the communique also reported that Joachim Herrmann, in charge of the media, and Günter Mittag, who ran the economy, had been relieved of their *Politbüro* memberships. They were not thanked, a clear sign to those accustomed to reading between the lines that they were leaving involuntarily. In fact, Honecker too was forced out, a fact plain to ND's readers, who heard it on West German television.

At first, Krenz was treated as Honecker had been. He regularly appeared on page 1, although now his full title was sometimes dropped (e.g., 26 October, 1). But he was a less sacrosanct figure from the beginning. On 27 October, ND carried an editorial denouncing Wolf Biermann, who in 1976 had been stripped of his GDR citizenship, citing Biermann's description of Egon Krenz: "the eternally laughing idiot.... He's always flashing his teeth in the midst of that society of mourners" (2). Such a statement would never have been quoted about Erich Honecker.

ND began carrying hints of changes in the government, but no criticism before the fact. On 2 November, Egon Krenz, then visiting Moscow, was asked if Margot Honecker, the wife of Erich Honecker and Minister of Education, would remain in office. Krenz replied that was a matter for the parliament and the government, and not up to him to decide alone (2). The following day, ND reported Margot Honecker's resignation "for personal reasons" (3 November, 1). Now other leaders of party and state were resigning or being ousted; several committed suicide. But ND had little analysis or background. It simply reported departures and arrivals.

The 9 November issue carried a long speech by Egon Krenz, which among other revelations provided details of Honecker's fall (3). Krenz also criticized other former *Politbüro* members. That probably provided the crucial signal that

it was now permissible to attack the previous leadership. Various investigating committees were established, which in the coming months provided a continuing series of scandals and corrupt practices. ND devoted substantial space to sometimes detailed condemnations of past leaders—but only of past leaders.

Egon Krenz was criticized only after his short reign had ended, but those able to read between the lines soon saw evidence that Krenz was in difficulty. For example, ND carried an interview in which Krenz was asked questions about his past and his political future that would never have been put to Erich Honecker (20 November, 1). On 25/26 November ND printed an unprecedented public opinion poll that found that only 9.6% of those surveyed listed Krenz as a politician whom they respected (1).

Even when ND staff members were engaged in protest demonstrations against the party leadership, the paper was reluctant to criticize. On 3 December, the entire party leadership resigned, admitting to a loss of public confidence. On 6 December an ND editorial looked back to a demonstration in which its staff members had participated:

When we demonstrated over the weekend in front of party headquarters in Berlin and demanded the resignation of the *Politbüro* and the Central Committee, we were working for the rescue of our party. Although a few members of the old leadership have contributed to a first step in the *Wende* in our party, the Central Committee and the new *Politbüro* it named at the ninth session proved themselves incapable of taking further steps necessary for the renewal of the party (2).

What is interesting about this forceful editorial is that the 4 December story on this demonstration made no reference to calls for the leadership to resign

(2), nor had any previous ND editorials called for or even hinted at such a step.

After Krenz and the *Politbüro* resigned, the new party leader, Gregor Gysi, was burdened with few of the affairs of government. His sole job was to try to salvage a disintegrating party. From the beginning, ND printed occasional criticisms of him, for example a complaint on 15 December that Gysi was too willing to believe that an end had been put to Stalinism in the GDR (6), but he was generally given ND's full support. It was also clear, however, that Gysi was a less central figure than former General Secretaries of the SED.

There was one former party leader that ND went after with considerable vigor: Joachim Herrmann. A 10 January editorial bitterly attacked Herrmann's reign as press head, and called for his expulsion from the party (2). The following day Herrmann testified before an investigating committee. ND had more critical things to say about his testimony than anyone else's (see 18 January, 1, 3; 19 January, 2).

The Government is (almost) Always Right

During the same period, there was little criticism of current government policy or arguments. For example, for years the GDR government had argued that a major reason its citizens were not allowed to travel freely was the refusal of the FRG to recognize GDR citizenship. That is, the FRG considered any citizen of the GDR as one of its citizens. A GDR citizen who reached the West was entitled to instant citizenship papers. The real problem was that the GDR was not sufficiently attractive to hold its citizens, but as late as the end of November ND was still carrying calls for the FRG to change its Basic Law (22 November, 1).

The most vehement criticisms of existing policy typically came in the texts of speeches by GDR leaders. The 11/12 November issue, for example, carried seven pages of speeches given at a meeting of the Central Committee. In the

past such speeches were generally numbingly dull. Now some carried criticisms blunter than ND was yet willing to make in its editorials.

The newspaper was also unwilling to consider major changes in the GDR's political system until it was clear those changes had the support of the overwhelming majority of the population. On 30 October, an editorial considered the discussions occurring throughout the country:

In a dialog everyone has opportunity to speak. Respect for the opinions and tasks of others is necessary.... But attacks on the constitutional foundations of the GDR as a socialist state of workers and farmers, as the political organization of workers in cities and the countryside under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party, are not in order. The socialist societal order is not in question.

That in any event is our position, from which we enter the dialog. It is our party that has taken charge of the *Wende* (2).

Similar editorial remarks appeared on 6 November (2).

It was simply not true. The changes were driven by mass protests throughout the country, not by the SED leadership, as party leaders themselves were shortly admitting. Günter Schabowksi was quoted by ND on 11/12 November, for example, as saying that the party "had been made painfully aware by the popular movement" of the deficiencies in the GDR (11).

A month later an editorial applauded what the above editorial claimed was out of the question: the just-passed change in the GDR's constitution that removed the leading role of the SED: "Parliament thus brought the constitution in accord with the reality of our political life and social developments, and also reacted to the millions of voices over recent weeks that raised that demand" (2/3 December, 2). But the editorial was after the fact. Although ND had printed reports of calls for striking the constitutionally privileged position of the SED (e.g., 30 October, 1, 3; 6 November, 4; 21

November, 2), it made an editorial statement only after action had been taken. It also failed to provide an analysis of what such a change would mean until after the fact.

ND was, however, reporting remarkable information, most of which came in the texts of speeches or reports of testimonies by former leaders before various investigating committees. On 14 November, for example, readers learned that contrary to previous claims that the GDR governmental budget was balanced, there was in fact an enormous deficit (3-4). The most startling information began appearing in late November, as a parliamentary committee investigating corruption provided three months of scandal. Members of the former leadership, it turned out, had benefited from a large number of corrupt and improper practices. The scale of the scandal dwarfed the Watergate or Iran-Contra affairs in the U.S., providing abundant opportunity for ND to practice its nascent investigative skills. Early in the process, ND ran a page one editorial on the matter:

That something is foul in the state of the GDR is all too evident: Misuse of office, corruption and the squandering of public resources by liars, parasites and moral bankrupts. The men of the “old guard” whose behavior damaged the people and the party and give unending examples for the telex and the television screen, are the subject of public interest as well as of everyone on the staff of this newspaper. The public is as angry as we are. We are as outraged as they. Relentless uncovering of everything that the Mittags, the Tisches, the Müllers, and whatever else they may be called (for we certainly have not uncovered all the skeletons in the closet yet) have wasted, squandered, and done in the name of the party, the people, and socialism, that is what the people, the party, and our newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, demand (1).

The editorial demanded a full investigation. It was not inclined do that investigation itself, since in the coming months most major corruption stories were based on what had happened at the parliamentary hearings or were taken from other media.

ND did on occasion fault government policy. On 7 November, an editorial criticized the first draft of a new law regulating travel, and printed letters from readers unhappy with it (2), but it was clear from the moment the draft was released that it was unacceptable to the majority of the GDR population, so that criticism was of little significance.

Hans Modrow, named Prime Minister on 13 November, received increasing coverage, all of it favorable. During the months leading up to the 18 March elections, there ND made not a single critical comment about Hans Modrow, who had the highest popularity rating of any GDR political figure. The leaders of the other leading GDR political parties that were founded or gained new prominence after the Wende, however, came in for considerable and forceful attacks in the two months leading up to the election.

Local government came in for more criticism than national government. For example, on 25/26 November the Berlin page of the newspaper criticized a mayor:

In some things, e.g., the events of 7 May [the date of 1989's manipulated election], I hoped for a clearer position from Mayor Günter Polauke, or a clear word that the Council had perhaps not always defended itself with the necessary energy against interference "from outside" (8).

The same page carried a blunt attack on a second mayor accused of illegally occupying a house. Such criticisms increased during the period considered.

The Stasi

ND's cautious approach to criticizing matters at the core of the system is clearest in its treatment of the State Security, or Stasi, the governmental agency that watched the citizenry with impressive thoroughness. It took over a month before ND was willing to write about the Stasi at all, and then in a remarkable way. It carried a long interview with a high Stasi official who maintained:

I can provide full assurance that the Ministry for State Security does its work on the foundation of socialist legality, and that our employees are trained to strictly follow the law.... The "total surveillance state," "the omnipresent informant system," exist only in the fantasies of Western media. The Ministry for State Security does not keep the people "under surveillance," it works with the citizens and in the interests of all in whose hearts socialism and the peaceful life of the people here are dear (3).

As was already clear to many, these remarks were false. ND, however, printed the interview without comment, and avoided for weeks any discussion of a topic of enormous public interest.

Indeed, at the time of the interview the public was already incensed by the activities of the Stasi, as another part of the official's remarks indicated:

In the name of all the employees of our Ministry, I want to speak forcefully against the growing discrimination, slanders, and even threats of force that have recently been made against the offices and employees of the Ministry.

ND failed to report the events mentioned above until some weeks later.

By now, public hostility to the Stasi (which had been covered at some length already by the Western press) was too great to ignore. ND began to take account of protests directed against the security apparatus. On 14 November,

a report on the weekly Leipzig Monday demonstration for the first time noted that the demonstrators surrounded the local Stasi headquarters (2), although that had been part of the weekly routine for several weeks. The following week, ND briefly noted that participants in a Dresden demonstration had called for public control of the Stasi (21 November, 2).

The Ministry for State Security was transformed into an Office for State Security (supposedly reducing its significance and power) in response to popular pressure. On 23 November, the paper carried an interview with the new head of the organization. The official made unsettling admissions:

The MfS [Ministry for State Security] took over the responsibility of other governmental organs, which led to a distension of its own structure. This improper development nourished the justified impression that State Security was omnipresent and kept the people under surveillance (4).

Now specific details began to appear. On 25/26 November, for example, a story briefly mentioned charges that the Stasi had taken over a house for the purpose of observing visitors to the adjacent church (8). Two weeks later, the head of the Office of National Security said that the lives and health of his employees were under threat from the public (8 December, 1-2), although ND was still not reporting on such events in news articles.

For the next two months there was a deluge of articles on various aspects of the Stasi, greatly aided by investigations of the newly established Round Table (a body with representatives from the leading parties, organizations, the government and the church established to provide some legitimation for the government). Even then, ND was reluctant to provide details. For example, on 15 January the Round Table learned the full extent of the Stasi apparatus. Of the 85,000 full-time employees, 1052 listened to telephone calls, 2100 opened citizens' mail, and 5000 were engaged in observing citizens. ND noted there

were gasps as an official said there were also 109,000 part-time informers (3). This startling material was buried in the middle of a long story.

Numerous reports on the Stasi and its operations appeared beginning in January. On 23 January, for example, Egon Krenz, now evicted even as a party member, testified that the Stasi had become a state within a state (1). Readers learned on 9 February that the Berlin Stasi offices had files on 6,000,000 GDR citizens (1). But the data appeared in bits and pieces. There was no attempt to bring the scattered data together in a comprehensible article, as for example was done by the FRG periodical *Der Spiegel*, which in February ran a detailed three-part article on the Stasi.

Surely a major part of ND's reluctance to deal with the Stasi had to do with its own central position in the SED regime. The links between the Stasi and ND were necessarily close. Schabowski claims that he had had no direct relations with the Stasi before entering the *Politbüro* (he had been editor of ND for several years before advancing to candidate membership in 1981), but he also notes that such connections were unnecessary (1990 43). ND's staff knew very well what was expected of them. Of course, ND had its share, and probably more than its share, of Stasi informants (Holzweißig 1992, 38-39). Those staff members free of direct Stasi links could hardly be sure the same could be said of their colleagues. .

Other Changes

ND changed in many ways during the period. By April 1990, readers were receiving a different newspaper than only six months before. I have already surveyed the significant changes in content that occurred. Several further points are worth mentioning. Although the most sensitive issues were treated gingerly, ND increasingly attempted to provide more detailed analysis, even the beginnings of investigative journalism. It was clear from the start that this was uncertain territory. On 22 October, ND carried a report on a journalism

conference in Moscow, at which the GDR delegate (and author of the article) was asked about investigative journalism in the GDR. His reply: “Theoretically we have a very high opinion of investigative journalism, particularly within our socialist society, but in practice the ability to carry out such journalism must be constantly relearned and won” (6). In truth, investigative journalism was entirely foreign to socialist journalism. It was the very last thing, whether in theory or practice, that the GDR’s leadership wanted. Even occasional newspaper reports on problems known to every citizen of the land were vehemently denounced by members of the *Politbüro* (e.g., Schabowski 1990, 41).

Investigative journalism is a talent not perfected quickly. It took time before ND’s journalists were willing to go beyond reporting official news to discovering their own. Early in the process, ND’s journalists still trusted official sources. When Wandlitz, the special housing area for the leadership, was first opened to the media, for example, the tour was carefully orchestrated. The employees on display were given instructions on exactly what to say to minimize unpleasant reports in the press (21 December, 5). But at first it worked. A page 1 editorial on the day following the tour found no signs of corruption, only provincialism and isolation (25/26 November). By 30 November, however, ND’s first editorial cartoon displayed the realization it had been had (2).

The opposite problem was a willingness to believe unfounded charges. In December, when such criticism became more frequent, ND had to apologize several times for improperly researched stories (see, for example, 6 December, 8; 14 December, 8).

As mentioned previously, much of the most interesting information ND carried, at least until February, came not as the result of its own investigations, rather from official sources or other media, though there were

exceptions. The first major article based on ND's own research that attempted to give an overview of a serious situation came on 11 December. It described the difficulties of a provincial hospital suffering from staff shortages, outdated equipment, inadequate housing, and many other problems. The article was based on interviews with hospital staff members, and gave a clear picture of many of the difficulties facing the GDR's health care system, difficulties the article made clear did not begin with the recent wave of *Übersiedler*. The first of a series of detailed articles on the unpleasant state of the GDR's economy appeared on 11 January (3). After the February format change, stories of this nature increased significantly as ND tried to live up to its promise to provide readers "more understandable and better prepared information" (19 February, 1).

Much material that formerly had filled ND vanished over the period. For example, the pages of speech texts so characteristic of ND before the *Wende* gradually disappeared. They were not missed. Routine diplomatic pleasantries (e.g., a congratulatory message from the GDR government to a minor nation on the event of the anniversary of independence), long articles summarizing foreign press reaction to actions by the GDR or its leaders, and material printed primarily to indicate the GDR's significance in the world vanished.

Other things were added. The first editorial cartoon appeared on 30 November (2). It attacked attempts to deceive the press during a tour of the former settlement for party leaders near Wandlitz. By 20 November, ND was carrying FRG television listings. After the February format change, there was also a crossword puzzle, a serial novel, more information on celebrities, and regional pages.

The knowledge that ND would shortly have to operate without subventions made advertising appear attractive, particularly advertising from the West paid for in hard currency. The first advertisement from a Western firm appeared on

14 December (6). By March, not only were such advertisements common (the 16 March issue, for example, carried eight ads from FRG firms), even GDR firms were advertising their services in a previously unseen way.

Discussion

ND mirrored the collapse of the GDR's Marxist-Leninist structure. Just as the government attempted to maintain the old structures as long as possible, to bend but not to break, so too ND followed the changes, it did not lead them. It was no equivalent of *Moscow News* or *Ogonyok* in the Soviet Union, periodicals at the edge of the permissible (Hochman). That is not surprising. For 40 years, ND had been the newspaper of record of the GDR. More than any other newspaper in the land it was controlled by the political leadership. Only those who had given clear evidence of their political orthodoxy joined its staff. ND's new masthead in November 1989 did not represent fresh blood, only the replacement of one set of committed Marxist-Leninists by another perhaps slightly less rigid set. The political equivalent of St. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was hardly to be expected.

It was also not clear during the October-November of 1989 just what would happen to the GDR. Few predicted then that within a year the country would be part of a united Germany. Although a return to the old system was unlikely, it was not entirely implausible. In early November, Egon Krenz attacked the media for being too eager to criticize the party (Schabowski 1991, 316-317). Journalists who had survived the system long enough to work at ND were not likely to be risk-takers. They waited to see what was safe.

The transformation of the GDR also left ND's journalists in an awkward position. They had risen to their positions by supporting and advocating a system that was now discredited. Loyalty to the SED, once their security, was

now a decided disadvantage. To praise what they had only a few months before vehemently denounced and denounce what they had formerly praised was both awkward and implausible. The comfortable way out was to claim victimage, and that is the path ND took. Numerous ND stories lashed out at the former leadership for forcing the staff to print every manner of journalistic embarrassment (e.g., 7 December, 7; 4 January, 2; 10 January, 2).

Many in the GDR claimed to have been victims after the *Wende*. For some, it was a credible defense, but not for the staff of ND. They had accepted positions that they, and everyone else, knew could be reached and held only by a willingness to follow the party line. To say that they had secretly disagreed with the line all the while, or that they had been compelled to say what they did not believe to keep their jobs, was unpersuasive. No one had to work for ND.

What Gunther Holzweißig observed of the SED-owned press is most true of ND: “As a rule the SED press only scratched the surface of problems, or became active only when the pressure from below could no longer be resisted” (1990 227). ND preferred to deal with the admitted problems of the past, with the corruption of the former leadership, with bad decisions, rather than with the still existing problems of pollution, the activities of the Stasi, the declining strength of its supporting party, or its own past.

ND was a reluctant follower of the changes that came to the GDR’s media as the result of the *Wende*. Before October 1989, ND had set the agenda for other GDR journalists. After, it hurried to keep up. That shows in little ways as well as big ones. For example, ND began running Western television listings (a popular step) several days after other GDR periodicals (the *Berliner Zeitung* had been printing Western listings since 16 November). On major issues, the same was clear. ND was cautious in printing material on the Stasi, but other

newspapers, including the new independents, quickly printed detailed articles on Stasi operations in their area (e.g., Schlademann).

The electronic media gained increasing independence and initiative, breaking stories that were later carried by ND. As Anneliese Holzschuh notes in an analysis of GDR television and radio during the fall of 1989, even before the *Wende* the electronic media regularly had better coverage of sensitive cultural issues than did the press (231). After the *Wende*, ratings for the GDR's main evening news program (formerly classified information) rose almost overnight from less than 10% to better than 40% (233).

By 2 April 1990, the day ND's price rose from 15 to 55 pfennig, it was a livelier newspaper than it had been six months before. Little about the paper remained the same. But it was no longer indispensable reading. Its supporting party the PDS won 16% of the Eastern German vote in the 18 March 1990 elections, surprisingly high, but still unpromising for the future role of the party in a united Germany. Other GDR media had stronger coverage of significant issues. GDR newspapers that formerly followed ND's lead suddenly were strong competitors, and new newspapers opened regularly. The FRG media were freely available.

On 19 March 1990, the day after the GDR's first democratic election, ND's staff met for most of the day to discuss the future of the newspaper (Steiniger interview). The defeat of the supporting party made it clear that the newspaper's future was no longer secure. More changes were made. Some staff members even envisioned transforming ND to a leftist version of *Die Zeit*, not a particularly credible scenario given the paper's staff.

The changes came too late. ND's circulation fell from over 1,000,000 before the *Wende* to 560,000 in April 1990, 320,000 in July (Steiniger letter and interview), 200,000 in October 1990 ("Menschlich mies" 49), 130,000 in March

1991 (“Journalists Lament”), 100,000 in October 1991 (“Eastern German Newspaper”).

ND was hardly well-prepared for a market economy. Circulation and advertising revenues are insufficient to meet the costs. ND still receives substantial subsidies from the PDS, but those subsidies are not enough to permit the newspaper to continue in the style to which it had been accustomed. In December 1990, *Der Spiegel* reported that a third of the 250-member staff was to be laid off, with plans to reduce the staff to about sixty by summer of 1991 (“Menschlich mies” 49). By October 1991, the plans were for ND to be administered by a company run jointly by the PDS and the *Treuhandanstalt* (“Eastern German Newspaper”). The newspaper that rigidly proclaimed the party line for forty years has little credibility in a now united Germany. If it survives at all, ND will have no significant place in the German media landscape.

Footnote

1. All issues of ND cited with dates of September to December are 1989, all issues from January through April are 1990.

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