

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Mass flight from perestroika

The dramatic increase in emigration of East bloc ethnic Germans to Germany has everything to do with austerity

An ever-increasing flow of immigrants from the East bloc into West Germany is reported. In 1987, some 78,000 came; by the end of 1988, the figure will have tripled. More than 200,000 are expected to arrive in Germany, mainly from the Soviet Union, Poland, and Romania, but also Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. A cautious prognosis by experts speaks of some 2 million to be expected by the end of 1991.

All in all, 3.5 million ethnic Germans are still living in the East, 2 million in the Soviet Union, 1 million in Poland, and about 220,000 each in Romania and Hungary. Most of them can be traced back to the big emigration treks of Germans to the East in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ironically, their fate comes full circle: Then, they tried to escape limitations and repression under the German oligarchs; today, they flee from repression by the postwar czars of the East.

To these 3.5 million ethnic Germans, one has to add the 17 million Germans living under Soviet domination in East Germany. All in all, more than 20 million Germans have been kept hostage by the Kremlin since 1945.

With very rare exceptions, as for family reasons, most of the ethnic Germans prefer to settle in West Germany. They are emigrating mainly for economic-social reasons, because working and living conditions are getting unbearable with the pace of militarization imposed on the Warsaw Pact economies under the *perestroika* of the Ogarkov Plan.

A special problem emerged in Ro-

mania, with dictator Ceausescu's crazed plan to eradicate some 8,000 villages in the northwestern regions, where more than 200,000 ethnic Germans are cut off from food, new housing, medicine, churches, and literature. Better skilled and a bit more productive than most of the indigenous Romanians, they are deprived of whatever they produce by the regime for exports into the Soviet Union and the West, and what is left is the poor ration of potatoes the average Romanian has to live on.

Faced with a similarly worsening situation, many of the 2 million ethnic Hungarians living next to the German minority in northwestern Romania, escape into neighboring Hungary. Reports have it that since the beginning of this year, at least 40,000 ethnic Hungarians have gone west.

The ethnic Germans don't have that choice to just cross the border, and that is why Ceausescu is using them for blackmail of West Germany. Since the mid-1970s, after the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accord, an "emigration quota" has been arranged between Romania and West Germany. A few thousand would be allowed to leave Romania each year, at a fixed "per capita price." First, this was 3,000 deutschemarks the Bonn government had to pay, then 5,000 and 8,000, and since the end of 1987, the "price" is 15,000 deutschemarks.

In late spring 1988, Ceausescu made a cynical offer to Bonn to bail out all of the German minority for a "preferential, one-time sum." Rumors have it that the Romanian dictator thinks of a sum of up to 12 billion

deutschemarks. The Bonn government, having been a business partner with Ceausescu in this despicable trade with human lives for reasons of "détente" propaganda, speaks of 2.5 billion. A big public outcry has emerged over the Romanian issue, but less attention is paid to the fact that the Polish regime has no such "emigration quota" for ethnic Germans, but is generously being provided with credit lines from West German banks. No public attention is placed, either, on the fact that East Germany has been "selling" emigrants to the Bonn government for a sum of between DM 50,000 and 100,000 per capita for years.

This trade with human lives, which goes along with rosy statements on "more conciliation on the eastern side" and a new "level of tolerance" on the part of East German leader Honecker or Moscow's Gorbachov, is disgusting enough.

The fact that the figures of immigration from the East are pointing upward, and the costs the immigrants impose on West German society, may cause a shift of perception, and hopefully also of policy, in Bonn. The costs are immense, because the immigrants, mostly whole families, arrive with nothing more than a few bags filled with some clothes and other personal belongings. They need homes and jobs, schools and medical care, also professional training—and credit.

The Bonn government is posed with the alternative either to continue its austerity policy and worsen the social situation in Germany, or to return to the rapid-growth economy of the 1940s and 1950s, when 13 million German war and post-war refugees and expellees from the Soviet-occupied East were successfully integrated in the free western part of Germany.