

# East Germany tries to stop refugees

by Rainer Apel

Tightened controls at the borders which East Germany shares with Czechoslovakia and Hungary have visibly slowed the stream of refugees from East Germany during the third week of September, with only 200-300 making it into West Germany, as opposed to the 600-800 who escaped each day during the previous week.

The East German police accomplished this through intense ID and luggage controls on trains traveling to Hungary, during which they looked for "suspicious documents" indicating plans to escape to the West, such as work certificates, university diplomas, or other documents that are usually not taken abroad. Passports were cross-checked with blacklists of those names whose appeal for emigration has been rejected by the authorities. Many arrests were made, with travelers being pulled out of trains and sent back home, and their passports confiscated. In most cases, "suspects" thus singled out will have to face trial and fines, and possibly jail terms ranging from several months to two years.

In tandem with this, East Germany's communist party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), has mounted a propaganda campaign which attempts to blame the flow of refugees entirely on Western attempts to "abduct" East German residents. The latest in this series of stories about alleged West German *Nacht und Nebel* operations to "rob citizens" from East Germany, is an interview Sept. 21 in the SED party daily *Neues Deutschland*. A young East German is presented, saying that while on vacation in Hungary, he was contacted by a another young German and lured into a flat where a Hungarian lady, who spoke German fluently, served him "tea and a menthol cigarette."

Shortly afterward, the East German reported, he fell unconscious and "only woke up already sitting in a bus next to the other young man" who was tapping him on the shoulder. Asking where the bus was going to, he learned that he was already "in the West." Apparently, he was "put on drugs or something like that in that apartment," *Neues Deutschland* writes, alleging that the story is "shedding a light on the typical criminal methods of West German agencies to abduct citizens of the German Democratic Republic."

## Church under attack

The SED has also launched its heaviest attack in years against the Lutheran church in East Germany. On Sept. 21,

*Neues Deutschland* commented on the just-concluded synod of the Lutherans in the city of Eisenach, which had featured public critique of the SED. The daily warned the church against "spreading adventurous slogans against the state," and against "joining hands with those who want to make the G.D.R. ripe for takeover by the forces of capitalism." The church, the SED warned, should "not become a Trojan horse" and "serve as a means for those enemies who for the past 40 years have not been successful in ruining this state, to achieve it by other means now under the pretext of reforms."

Indeed, in the city of Leipzig—the historic home of Johann Sebastian Bach—just going to church has become a crime against the East German state. Personnel of the Ministry of State Security and police have been conducting surprise mass arrests of participants in the prestigious Monday night mass at the St. Nikolai Church.

On Sept. 11, police and state security forces arrested close to 140 persons after the mass, deporting them in trucks. About 30 of these were kept jailed for several days and interrogated; four were sentenced to four months in jail, 12 others to fines above 1,000 marks, on counts of "conspiratorial gathering against the state." Those who were released can also expect fines. Another 100 were arrested after the mass Sept. 18.

Because open political opposition is not permitted, the churches have become gathering points for many East Germans who are at odds with the regime; on the average, the St. Nikolai mass attracts between 1,000 and 1,800 East Germans every Monday night.

In addition to the church networks, new para-political organizations are forming right now, and some intend to develop into political parties. But the SED could make them disappear instantly, especially because these new groups have not yet gained the level of Western sympathy and support as the Polish Solidarnosc.

Fully 10% of East Germany's 17 million residents, or about 1.5 to 1.8 million people, have officially enlisted for emigration, and surveys indicate that many more are actively considering it. In some areas and cities in the densely populated districts of Thuringia and Saxony, up to 20% of the populations want to leave for the West.

The SED, which originally took power over a population of 19 million in 1945, experienced an outflow of 2.6 million refugees in the 16 years until the building of the Berlin Wall and the fortification of the border with West Germany in 1961. The safety valve policy only worked in the 28 years between then and 1989, when "only" 700,000 emigrants (and a few thousand refugees) left.

In 1989, the universal awareness of an imminent, brutal crackdown as the Soviet leadership attempts to save its disintegrating empire, has given new momentum to the outflow, with 60,000 "legal" emigrants arriving since January and 25,000 refugees using the escape route through the open border between Hungary and Austria since the end of May.