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Revolution and diplomacy do

Josef Joffe says attempts to slow German reunification are likely to fail

FOR A while, the dog refused to bark in the night. The Berlin Wall came down, everybody was dancing in the streets, and for the suddenly liberated East Germans it was not *Deutschland über alles* but shopping *über alles*. Kiwi fruit and bananas raised their heartbeats, not the heady lure of the "Fourth Reich".

But now, only five weeks after the breaching of the Wall, the dog of nationalism has begun to bark — above all in Leipzig, the hotbed of the East German revolution where it all started. One single German word marks the critical difference between the early demonstrations in the weeks that swept away the Honecker regime and the most recent manifestations of *vox populi*.

In the beginning the key slogan was *Wir sind das Volk*, we are the people — meaning: power is lodged in us, the people, not in the almighty politburo. Now more and more banners are proclaiming *Wir sind ein Volk* — we are one nation, though we have been kept apart since 1945.

There were 150,000 people marching in Leipzig on Monday night, amid swelling chants of *Deutschland, Deutschland* and "Germany, united Fatherland". But that was not the whole story.

Suddenly the mood turned ugly. The crowd booed and whistled when some demonstrators tried to buck the trend, demanding "open borders yes, reunification no" or holding up posters for a "sovereign GDR". In some places there were hand-to-hand "discussions" as the Fatherland forces clashed with GDR loyalists.

Why has the dog of nationalism begun to bark? For one answer, perhaps the most important, let us turn to the demonstrators again. The most interesting posters were those that fused the rousing message of nationalism with the down-to-earth claim of bread and butter. "Reunification yes — Socialist impoverishment no" proclaimed one banner. Another put it even more bluntly: "Reunification equals prosperity."

East Germans, apparently, have de-

spaired that political chance — which they have aplenty — will fill their larders and pocketbooks any time soon. As everywhere in the revolutionary East, *perestroika* does not bring prosperity; indeed, the opposite is true. Yesterday's creaking command economy obeyed orders and delivered the goods, shoddy and drab as they were. Now East Europeans live in the worst of possible worlds, where the once-almighty plan is abdicating while the hand of the market remains as invisible as ever.

But unlike Poles, Hungarians *et al*, the East Germans have a rich uncle living right across the formerly impenetrable border. Herr Schmidt in Leipzig and Frau Müller in Dresden do not have to be raving nationalists to grasp the obvious. For them unification is the shortest of short cuts from moribund socialism to the fleshpots of West German capitalism.

The way to almost instant riches would be *Anschluss* with a twist — whereby the weaker partner would grab the bigger one, proceeding to gorge himself on the enormous wealth the West Germans have accumulated in four decades. With reunification would come capital, knowhow, export markets, currency reform, a price system — all those good things that even post-Stalinist regimes have found it, until now at least, impossible to do.

Thoughts such as these must surely change the calculations of those who, only a few weeks ago, were earnestly proclaiming that they did not wish to be swallowed up by the West German behemoth next door. These were the people who wanted to *save* socialism, who wanted "socialism with a human face", who believed that the GDR, suitably cleansed and reformed, deserved a continuing place in the geography and history of Europe.

The juncture to watch, therefore, is the point where nationalism and economics come together. Nationalism alone is probably too weak to redraw the post-war borders of Europe. The

West Germans, happily ensconced in their modern welfare state that strikes an almost perfect balance between equity and efficiency, have been curiously unmoved by the revolutionary spectacle unfolding across the Elbe river.

To be sure, they did hug and kiss their long-lost brethren as they Trabbi-hopped across the border, and they wept tears of joy when the long-postponed family reunion was finally there. But the cries of *Deutschland, Deutschland* and of "Germany, united Fatherland", were first heard across the crumbling Wall. And for good reasons: the East Germans have nothing to lose but those chains that, even with democracy, will tie them to economic misery for years and years to come.

Indeed, reunification may just follow economics willy-nilly. As of 1 January 1990, and perhaps even by Christmas, the freedom to travel will be a two-way street. (Right now, West Germans still have to go through the old, stultifying visa procedures.) Capital will inevitably flow in with people. Already West German companies are jockeying for position in East Germany, and Western-organised production will soon follow. That will force some kind of East German currency reform plus the many legal accoutrements required by the capitalist "relations of production". If so, what is the difference between "real" and *de facto* reunification?

That is precisely what worries everybody else between Washington and Vladivostok. At first stunned by the sheer momentum of the upheaval in the most sensitive place of the European — indeed, global — balance, the Western powers and the Soviets have returned to claim their due. Of course none of Bonn's allies dared to question Germany's right to self-determination and national unity, but . . .

The "buts" were nicely enumerated by the US Secretary of State, James Baker, yesterday, and the venue was just as important as the message. He

chose Berlin as his forum, as had the ambassadors of the four wartime allies — of Britain, France, the US and the USSR — the day before. (For their first formal meeting *à quatre*, the Big Four assembled in a symbolic building in West Berlin — the seat of the former "Allied Control Authority", vacant since the Russians left in a huff just before the Berlin blockade in 1948.)

Self-determination was just fine, Mr Baker intoned, and surely in tune with the best of Western traditions. Reunification should be neither "endorsement nor excluded" but it had to be embedded in a "new European architecture". It had to proceed with due respect to the rights of the Four Powers. It could only occur in the framework of German fealty to Nato and the Eur-

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opean Community. And, above all,
reunification had to take place slowly
as well as peacefully, and it could not
run against the "legitimate interests"
of all parties involved, among which
the Secretary of State listed the US
and Canada.

Well put, except that people in re-
volt rarely pay attention to the con-
ductor's baton that diplomacy is now
trying to wave. If *de facto* reunification
is already — or almost — upon us,
who could stop it? The point is that
diplomacy and revolution don't mix
well, that the former seeks to impose
order and predictability precisely
where both have been swept aside.
This is the essence of any revolution-
ary process, and so far the people are
calling the tune in the streets of Leip-
zig and Dresden.

*The author is foreign editor of the
'Süddeutsche Zeitung' in Munich.*