

'Collapse' from Le Monde (11 November 1989)

Caption: On 11 November 1989, commenting on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the borders by the East German authorities, the French daily newspaper Le Monde speculates on the political future of the Communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fontaine, André. 1989.11.11, n° 13.931; 46e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Effondrement", p. 1.

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Collapse

What now? Gone the emotion at the sight of gaping holes in the Berlin Wall and the Fort Knox-style border between the two Germanies, but the question remains. Where does this leave us? What next? The answers are not very clear, which no doubt accounts for the cautious Western reactions, starting with that of President George Bush, confronted by high-speed history in the making, destination unknown.

For all that the situation is confusing and disorienting, there are a number of quite probable outcomes. The first is that the two Germanies will swiftly reunite their economies. The machinery is in place and will start moving very soon: since the GDR has promised its citizens freedom of movement and free elections, Chancellor Helmut Kohl will have no short-term alternative but to keep his promise of massive aid to the East German economy.

Unless West Germany wants to see hundreds of thousands, even millions of East Germans bursting onto its own labour market, with all of the political consequences that that would entail, it will have to do something to improve living standards in the East.

Another obvious fact is that Egon Krenz's concessions point to the weakness of his position. Will the regime survive genuinely free elections? And, if it transmutes into social democracy, how much legitimacy can it expect to have? De facto political reunification seems to be looming on the horizon, with a super-powerful German economic entity, which will certainly cause some headaches for Bonn's EEC partners. If West Germany is not careful, and others with it, then it may, in the next few years, find itself focusing increasingly on reconstructing the metamorphosing GDR at the expense of European integration and assistance to Poland and Hungary.

However, Germany is not all alone in the world, and the newly emerging inter-German relations are much too serious to be left to the Germans alone. The European and German order, now collapsing as a result of the crushing economic failure of the Socialist States, had its guarantors. Could it be time for them to get together, show their hand and regain some control of events?

The United States, Great Britain and France, in particular, would do well to start moving in step with Bonn before Mr Gorbachev takes them by surprise. The Soviet foreign affairs spokesman, Gennadi Gerasimov, showed his colours on Thursday. Questioned about the next Bush–Gorbachev 'non-summit', to be held off Malta on 2 and 3 December, he simply replied that the meeting could be called 'from Yalta to Malta' ...