

@CHAPTER = EAST GERMANY

The opening of the Berlin Wall was one of the most dramatic events of 1989. For 28 years, it stood as a symbol of both the division of Europe and the hardline regime of Erich Honecker. Although no one could have predicted the extraordinary events that rocked East Germany in the second half of 1989, the Bush administration was slow to react when they occurred. During the first half of the year, the administration paid little attention to East Germany; in the second half of the year, beginning with the huge exodus of East Germans to the West but especially after the opening of the Wall, the administration concentrated on the political aspects of the situation -- stability and reunification -- and barely mentioned human rights. Although political considerations are important, the administration must not equate promises for free elections with respect for human rights.

Before the fall of Honecker's government in October, human rights violations in East Germany centered mainly on freedom of movement, expression and association. The U.S. State Department and its delegations at the Helsinki follow-up meetings, formally part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe ("CSCE"), criticized East Germany on these grounds. On October 10, for example, after police attacked peaceful demonstrators during the wave of demonstrations that eventually forced Honecker to resign, State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler stated that "[t]he United States deplores the use of violence to respond to peaceful calls for dialogue and reform," and that Washington supports East Germans "seeking peaceful dialogue aimed at bringing progressive change to their country."

The State Department also applauded the Hungarian government's decision in September to open its borders to allow more than 12,000 East Germans to leave for the West. On September 11, spokesman Richard Boucher commended "the unilateral action of the Hungarian government [that] courageously resolved what threatened to become a human problem of great magnitude. In so doing, the government of Hungary has demonstrated its own commitment to human rights and freedom of movement<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>"

But on November 9, when the East German government opened the Berlin Wall and allowed its citizens to travel freely to the West, the administration was surprisingly subdued in its response. In a press conference on November 9, President Bush called it "a good development in terms of human rights," hardly an enthusiastic reception for such an historic act. He continued:

@QUOTENOIND = I'm very pleased. And I've been very pleased with a lot of other developments. And, as I've told you, I think the United States' part of this, which is not related to this development today particularly, is being handled in a proper fashion. And we'll have some that'll suggest more flamboyant courses of action for this country, and we're, I think, handling this properly with the allies, staying in close touch in this dynamic change. Try to help as development takes place, try to enhance reform, both political and economic.

Since November when the mass movement in East Germany began to effect significant political changes, statements about East Germany by administration officials have concentrated on the political and economic reforms without emphasizing human rights issues. Secretary of State James Baker's speech in West Berlin on December 12 illustrated the administration's attitude. Although he touched on human rights issues, the thrust of his message concerned political and economic questions. He deserves credit, however, for making the following points relating to human rights:

@QUOTENOIND = [T]rue stability requires governments with legitimacy, governments that are based on the consent of the governed<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>.<%-20> <%0>NATO should also begin considering

further initiatives the West might take<0> <0>.<0> <0>.<0>  
<0>.<0> <0>to build economic and political ties with the East, to promote  
respect for human rights, to help build democratic institutions, and to  
fashion, consistent with Western security interests, a more open environment  
for East-West trade and investment.... The ballot box and the free market are  
the fundamental instruments of choice.... We need to offer the nations of the  
East hope, opportunities that can be seized as they take steps toward democracy  
and economic liberty<0> <0>.<0> <0>.<0> <0>.<0> <0>.<0>  
<0>"

Despite the rapid pace of events, supporting East Germany's transition to  
democracy, based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, should  
be the cornerstone of U.S. policy toward that country. Political  
considerations, such as stability in the region, the future of NATO and the  
question of German reunification, should not obscure the human rights  
dimension. In its actions and statements at this critical time, the Bush  
administration should make clear that respect for human rights in East Germany  
is a priority for the United States that goes beyond the holding of free  
elections. In so doing, the U.S. would be allying itself with the forces  
working to institutionalize democracy and respect for human rights in East  
Germany.