



Volume 9. Two Germanies, 1961-1989
No New Wallpaper (April 10, 1987)

In this widely read interview, Kurt Hager, the member of the Politburo in charge of ideological issues, defends the party's policies and sets them apart from reform efforts in the Soviet Union. The interview was first published in *Stern*, a West German magazine, and reprinted one day later in full length in *Neues Deutschland*, the news organ of the SED.

Kurt Hager answers questions for *Stern* magazine

Question: The SED leadership supports the reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. At the same time, the GDR emphasizes its own independence. Are the times in which the land of Lenin set an example for German communists long gone?

Answer: The GDR and the Soviet Union are allies. They have concluded a treaty on friendship, cooperation, and mutual support. There is a firm, indestructible friendship between the people of these two countries, and this finds expression in the direct relations between companies, universities, and other institutions, as well as countless personal meetings. The SED and the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] are sister parties, and they regularly share their experiences with each other, in order to learn from each other. That is how it has been, how it is, and how it will continue to be in the future.

Question: So the slogan "Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win" no longer applies?

Answer: I remember that Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, said on the occasion of the 11th party congress of the SED in April 1986: "You know that our party and our people have always stood by you in all these years since the war, always prepared to help the young state of workers. We were true friends and allies of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, of the German Democratic Republic, and we will remain that for all times."

You can assume that it would be a wasted effort to force a wedge between the GDR and the Soviet Union or to invent differences between the SED and the CPSU.

Question: "Perestroika" – does that mean restructuring the GDR too?

Answer: It is known that in the interest of further strengthening socialism, the 27th party congress of the CPSU made important decisions to accelerate the socioeconomic development

of the Soviet Union. In his welcome address to the 27th party congress, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED Erich Honecker emphasized that the implementation of this action program has fundamental significance for the good of the Soviet people and at the same time carries considerable weight internationally.

Also, on numerous other occasions, we told the Soviet people and its communist party that we are convinced that the restructuring initiated by the 27th party congress in order to overcome unfavorable trends and difficulties that arose in the 1970s and early 1980s will be crowned with success, since it is a matter of allowing the immense material and intellectual potential of the Soviet Union to develop fully, thereby further developing and strengthening socialism.

Question: That makes it sound like the SED would prefer not to have much to do with all that?

Answer: We German communists have always felt great respect and admiration toward the land of Lenin, and nothing will change that. This year we are acknowledging the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution, which led to the collapse of the capitalists and major landowners and the establishment of the first socialist state in history. It made socialism possible in the 1920s and 1930s, especially industrialization and collectivization. We know that the Soviet Union carried the major burden of the struggle against Hitler fascism, and we will never forget that our people especially owe thanks to the Soviet Union for the liberation from the Nazi regime. We adopted the teachings of Lenin, especially the theory of socialist revolution and building up socialism, as well as the doctrine of the party, and we have benefited from the rich experience of the CPSU.

But this does not mean – nor did it mean in the past – that we copied everything that happened in the Soviet Union.

Question: Those are harsh words . . .

Answer: Even the announcement of the Central Committee of the KPD of June 15, 1945, said: “We are of the opinion that forcing the Soviet system on Germany would be the wrong path, since this path does not correspond to the development conditions in Germany.” And by the way, the Soviet Union does not copy the GDR either. It seems like the Western media is interested in the subject of “copying,” since it fits into their illusions about the “hand of Moscow” or the supposed monotony and uniformity of socialism. Would you, by the way, feel obligated to redo the wallpaper in your apartment just because your neighbor redid his?

Question: So is there an autonomous German path to socialism?

Answer: Of course all socialist countries learn from each other, since they have basic commonalities, such as a Marxist-Leninist worldview and the common goal of socialism and communism. But every socialist country has a certain level of economic and social development, historical and cultural traditions, geographic and other conditions that must be taken into account. Every party is responsible to its people and works for their well-being. At the same time, its policies contribute to the common cause of socialism, to strengthen and stabilize the socialist community.

[. . .]

Question: The socialist democracy, says General Secretary Erich Honecker, is far superior to the bourgeois democracy. Doesn't Mikhail Gorbachev's restructuring of the relations between

the citizens and the state refute this thesis? If the aura of real socialism really were so great, no changes in the model would be necessary.

Answer: The CPSU strives to perfect the socialist democracy in the Soviet Union. I know that it does not view the path it has taken as a model for the other socialist countries.

Question: So there is no reason to take action in the GDR?

Answer: With regard to the GDR, democracy here means that millions of citizens can participate and exercise their democratic rights in parties and mass organizations, in assemblies, various associations and interest groups, social commissions and party actives, and in house and residential collectives. This democracy is alive and is constantly being developed further. Let me mention just two examples: more than 260,000 representatives and successor candidates of the elected assemblies work together with another 450,000 citizens in commissions and committees to make sure that the preparation, implementation, and control of the implementation of all state decisions that are important to the lives of the citizens take place in close contact with the voters.

In the composition of our assemblies, from the *Volkskammer* to the smallest local assembly, the reality of our democracy finds expression, since it [this composition] precisely reflects the political and social structure of our population. Thus, the *Volkskammer* consists of ten caucuses, which represents all five political parties and the mass organizations. All social classes and strata, the workers and the farmers, the academic and artistic intelligentsia, as well as the middle class, youth, and women participate in exercising the power of the workers and the farmers.

A decisive characteristic of the socialist democracy in the GDR is that, in the national economy – that is, in the most important sphere of human life, the sphere of the workers – it expressly guarantees the comprehensive participation of the workers in the leadership and planning of all economic processes.

[. . .]

Source: *Neues Deutschland*, April 10, 1987, p. 3; reprinted in “SED und KPD zu Gorbatschows ‘Revolution’” [“SED and DKP (German Communist Party) on Gorbachev’s ‘Revolution’”], *Deutschland Archiv* 20, no. 6 (1987), pp. 655-57.

Translation: Allison Brown