

tion, the local SED-Leadership decided to withdraw the troops. This was the turning point in the history of the fall of the wall. Unlike East Berlin in 1953 and Prague in 1968, the Russian tanks stayed home. Honecker was isolated in his own party and the power of the large demonstrations with *Kerzen und Gebete* rendered the SED-Regime *ratlos* and powerless. Nine days later, on October 18, 1989 Erich Honecker was replaced by Egon Krenz in a desperate attempt to regain some kind of control over the accelerating events.

III. Der Versprecher

Erich Honecker's relinquishing of power to Egon Krenz did not yield the expected outcome. Instead of damping the protests it inspired even more people to take their demands to the streets. Several hundred thousand people gathered at the Alexanderplatz in the heart of East Berlin on November 4th. Over five hundred thousand party members had announced their resignation from the SED by November. The citizens were voting with their *Partei Buch*. On November 7th, Minister President Willi Stoph resigned. His successor was the reform-minded Hans Modrow.

In an attempt to relieve the pressure that was coming from people's demands for *Reisefreiheit*, the Politbüro issued new travel regulations. These were presented by Günter Schabowski in an international press conference on Thursday, November 9th, 1989. The regulations were designed to make travel to West Berlin through the Berlin Wall easier and to go into effect the next day.

Obviously ill-prepared and without understanding the impact of his statement, Schabowski was asked when, exactly, East German citizens could begin to take advantage of these new travel rules. Schabowski shrugged and responded "*Das trifft ... nach meiner Kenntnis ... ist das sofort, unverzüglich*". It was shortly before 7pm.

After West Germany's ARD news show had broadcast Schabowski's announcement as its lead story at 8pm under the heading "GDR opens border", crowds of East Berliners started turning up at the checkpoints. Thousands, then tens of thousands, then hundred of thousands of Berliners, both East and West, began converging on the Berlin Wall. Without orders on how to handle the surging crowds the East German border guards simply opened the gates later that evening. The rest is history.



THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Deutschlandspiel - Part 1: Auf die Straße!

By Hans Christoph Blumenberg

November 20th, 2015

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Detuschlandspiel - Part 1: Auf die Straße! (2000)

Credits:

Director: Hans Christoph Blumenberg
Production: Ulrich Lenze
Editor: Guido Knopp + Team
Camera: Hartmut E. Lange
Year: 2000
Length: 89 Minutes
Commentary: Karl Moehlmann



Cast:

Igor Maximytschew: Peter Ustinov
Margot Honecker: Ilse Zilstorff
Fritz Streletz: Hans-Michael Rehberg
François Mitterrand: Jean-François Balmer
Wjatscheslaw Kotschemassow: Peter Fritz
Erich Mielke: Peter Sodann
Aram Radomski: Fabian Busch
Roland Wötzel: Jaeki Schwarz
Viktoria Herrmann: Stefanie Stappenbeck
Fernsehredakteur Seidel: Gustav-Peter Wöhler
Günter Schabowski: Bernd Stegemann
Helmut Hackenberg: Günter Junghans
Helmut Kohl: Lambert Hamel
Kurt Masur: Andreas Schmidt-Schaller
George H.W. Bush: Edgar M. Böhlke

Condoleezza Rice: Sheri Hagen
General Gregorjewitsch: Walter Gontermann
Anatoli Tschernjajew: Elert Bode
Marschall Sergej Achromejew: Michael Mendl
Erich Honecker: Rudolf Wessely
Michail Gorbatschow: Udo Samel
Egon Krenz: Rudolf Kowalski
Walentin Falin: Ezard Haubmann
Margaret Thatcher: Nicole Heesters
Harry Tisch: Jürgen Holtz
Siegbert Schefke: Arnd Klawitter
Jan Carpentier: Tobias Langhoff
Horst Teltschik: Udo Schenk
Hans Modrow: Hermann Beyer
Nikolai Portugalow: Matthias Fuchs

I. Deutschlandspiel

Deutschlandspiel tells the story of the peaceful revolution in East Germany which culminated in German unification. A year of extraordinary circumstances is depicted, where the dizzying pace of events swept up the people of East-Germany and eventually compelled them to take their political fate into their own hands. The large gatherings occurring in the churches and on the streets thus gave birth to the peaceful revolution which toppled the SED Regime. Further aided by a political climate of détente and disarmament, this revolution then triggered the events which led to German unification, an outcome which until that momentous year of 1989 was thought to be impossible.

The movie effectively combines archival footage, reenactments, and interviews. This synergy of documentary and drama yields a compelling view of the unfolding events. The interviews in particular (with key players including government officials, politicians, soviet diplomats, television journalists and hobby-film activists from East Germany) demonstrate how the perception of events differed among individuals as well as groups.

II. Die Peking-Lösung

The movie begins with the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the formation of the GDR on October 7th, 1989. Michael Gorbachev was present, although his reform policies were not shared by the orthodox, hardline East German *Staats und Parteichef* Erich Honecker. Honecker seemed genuinely annoyed when Gorbachev was greeted with enthusiastic shouts of “Gorbi, Gorbi”- from crowds at various stops during his visit. The difference in their approach to the crisis in the East is obvious when the two expressed their opinions at a reception at Schloss Niederschönhausen. Gorbachev’s “*Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben*” proved to be prophetic for Honecker and his regime.

Honecker had endorsed the forceful and violent manner in which the Chinese leadership had reacted to their own democracy movement in Beijing earlier that summer. The massacre on Tiananmen Square on June 4th, 1989 spoke volumes to the opposition in East Germany as to what might happen to their own ranks if push came to shove. Tiananmen Square thus served as the template by which Honecker’s regime hoped to eradicate the increasingly uncontrollable democracy movement of its own citizens.

However, the situation in Central Europe was quite different from the situation in China. Hungary had opened its border to the West in the summer of 1989 and many East German citizens took advantage of this opening by crossing the Hungarian-Austrian border to flee to the West. Many others had occupied the West German embassy in Prague and forced the regime to let them leave. When demonstrations continued to increase in intensity in October of 1989 (culminating in Leipzig on October 9th) it seemed as if the fearlessness of the populace had closed any window of opportunity Honecker might have had to implement his own “*Peking-Lösung*.”

On Saturday, October 7th, several hundred people who had gathered in front of the Nikolai Kirche in Leipzig were surrounded by Stasi-officers. These protesters were taken away by force when they refused to clear the square. Their *Zuführung* to a *Messegelände* outside the city equipped with stalls for horses was an ominous sign. Moreover, there were rumors that the hospitals in Leipzig were preparing for a bloody confrontation by increasing their blood supply. Honecker had ordered the suppression of any further demonstrations (“*weitere Krawalle unterbinden*”) and a large contingent of military troops was stationed in Leipzig, rendering the possibility of a massacre very real.

The SED had then dispatched one thousand of its own members to the Nikolai-Kirche, and by 2 pm six hundred of them had crammed their way into the church. Shortly before the end of the peace prayer, a call for non-violence was read in the church, invoked by among others Kurt Masur and several local SED-Leaders (“*Aufruf der Leipziger Sechs*”).

Seventy thousand people participated in the demonstration that followed the peace prayer. During their march around the inner city ring they chanted “*Wir sind das Volk*” and “*Keine Gewalt*”. In the face of the size and character of this demonstra-