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East Germany: Communist Party Loses its Legal Monopoly

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Summary:

An analysis of the East German Communist Party, its loss of legal power, and forthcoming free elections.

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Contents:

Original Scan

14 12

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6.2(d)

EAST GERMANY: Communist Party Loses Its Legal Monopoly

East Germany's Communist party lost its legal monopoly of power yesterday, and roundtable talks next week will set the terms for free elections. [redacted]

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In its first televised session, the East German legislature yesterday eliminated the constitutional guarantee of the party's leading role. One legislator complained that the new government still is moving too slowly on economic reform and called for restoring the traditional territorial units—the *Laender*—to break the power of the state apparatus. [redacted]

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Yesterday, the Karl Marx Stadt branch of the New Forum opposition group called for a general strike on the eve of the roundtable talks, which are to discuss free elections and other political reforms. The call was opposed by Baerbel Bohley, a national leader of the group. [redacted]

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Pressure to put former party leaders on trial is increasing rapidly. On Thursday, New Forum and a local government official filed charges against former party boss Erich Honecker and his associates for illegal use of public assets. Honecker's successor, Egon Krenz, has intensified public criticism of his former superiors while protesting his own innocence of corruption. A special Central Committee session will convene tomorrow to hear a report on leadership corruption and to consider remedies. [redacted]

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Comment: The sudden end to the party's *de jure* monopoly of power makes the date and the procedures for democratic elections the key issue at the roundtable talks. In the longer run it sets the stage for a more genuine coalition government in which the Communists and perhaps even popular Premier Modrow may end up playing minor roles. The Czechoslovak example may be behind the call for a general strike, which, if heeded, will put great pressure on the party and on the government to agree to radical electoral reforms. [redacted]

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Legal proceedings against former party leaders may force a showdown between party reformers and hardliners as early as tomorrow's Central Committee session over how far to go with a purge. Krenz will surely face pressure from all factions to step down because he is tainted with suspicion and is widely disliked by the public. A clean sweep of the old guard seems increasingly likely at the mid-December congress. [redacted]

6.2(d)

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