

November 11, 1989

**From the minutes of the joint special session of the
Executive Committee of the SPD and the Steering
Committee of the SPD faction**

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English translation: Dwight E. Langston
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Summary:

Willy Brandt's observations on the joint special session of the Executive Committee of the SPD and the Steering Committee of the SPD faction. Brandt discusses the November 9 opening of the border between East and West Germany.

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**From the minutes of the joint special session of the Executive
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11 November 1989

*AdsD, SPD-Parteivorstand, Vorstandssekretariat, Protokolle des
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Published in: Berliner Ausgabe, vol. 10

English translation: Dwight E. Langston

At the start of the joint session of the Executive Committee of the party and the Steering Committee, Willy Brandt was cordially welcomed by Hans-Jochen Vogel. He said to Willy Brandt: "Your political life's work was crowned with success on the evening of 9 November 1989."

[...]¹

Willy Brandt said, three observations were important to him:

1. It is necessary to ascertain and to criticise the fact that the Federal Government and the CDU are not doing justice to the situation if they, as so happens, are trying to use the situation for partisan purposes. They should be called on to follow the suggestions of the SPD Chairman and establish a round table here in the Federal Republic.² Waving one's index finger rather than encouraging a willingness for meaningful help is not presently desirable. This must not be an occasion for propaganda, but rather for substantive commonality.
2. The situation in the GDR is characterised by instability. In the SED, processes of differentiation are taking place. Instability can only be overcome if free elections take place soon. In the meanwhile, the GDR must make efforts to include alternative political groups in the leadership of the country. It is necessary to point to the fact that reform can only be brought about by those

who remain there, without passing harsh judgment on those who have left.

The role of the Soviet Union is of crucial significance for security. There are indications that Honecker had already issued an order at that time to deploy troops in Leipzig.³ The Soviet Union had made it clear that its tanks would not intervene.⁴

Willy Brandt reported that he had received a letter from Gorbachev after his speech in front of Schöneberg City Hall.⁵ Gorbachev apparently was concerned that the situation after the two demonstrations on the previous day in East- and West-Berlin could result in trouble. In the letter, he expressed concern that all European borders, including the German-German border, must continue to exist. Gorbachev emphasized this more decidedly than he had expected.

3. It is crucial that our party not get entangled in the issue of national unity, particularly not at a time when people everywhere in Germany were uniting. To make a dogma of the two-nation solution would be just as fallacious as seeing a national state as the only solution to be inferred from the Basic Law. And we Social Democrats ought to be proposing a necessary process for the parts of Europe to grow together.

[...]⁶

¹ Vogel describes his impressions in Berlin.

² Concerning this suggestion, cf. *Presseservice der SPD*, No. 701/89 of 10 November 1989.

³ At the demonstrations on 9 and on 16 October 1989 in Leipzig, forces of the national police represented the largest contingent. However, on 9 October, NPA units were waiting on the outskirts of the city for possible deployment. The plan of deployment did not provide for an order to shoot, however State Security spread the rumour that live ammunition would be fired if the demonstration should take place. In view of the participation by 70,000 people, which exceeded all expectations, commanders at the scene declared the planned dissolution of the demonstration to be unfeasible. Cf. *Jankowski, Martin*: Sieg ohne Helden – eine vergessene Revolution. Der Volksaufstand vom 9. Oktober 1989, in: *Deutschland Archiv* 41 (2008) 5, p. 820-825. In fact, the deployment order for 16 October, which Egon Krenz and Fritz Streletz (Secretary of the National Defence Council of the GDR) had presented on 13 October 1989 to Erich Honecker, did provide for

preventing the demonstration from occurring. Should this fail, however, in no case could the use of firearms be allowed. Cf. *Hertle, Hans-Hermann: Der Fall der Mauer. Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstaflösung des SED-Staates*, Opladen 1996, p. 129. According to Krenz, Honecker had demanded a more severe approach and had signed the order only after a lengthy discussion. Cf. *Krenz* 1999, p. 107.

⁴ Referring to an interview with Valentin Falin in 1999, one of Gorbachev's former associates writes that the Soviet State and Party Chief had already explained to Honecker in the summer of 1989 in Moscow that there would be no support from the Kremlin in the event of internal difficulties in the GDR and especially no intervention by the Red Army. Cf. *Grachev, Andrei: Gorbachev's Gamble. Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, Cambridge 2008, p. 137.

⁵ Cf. No. 57.

⁶ After that Hans-Jochen Vogel rose to speak.