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East Germany: Opposition Group Prepares for Action

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Summary:

An analysis of opposition movements in East Germany and their pressure on the government.

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~~Top Secret~~**EAST GERMANY: Opposition Group Prepares for Action**

New Forum, the country's largest opposition group, is using grassroots debates and an open recruitment of workers to build pressure for reform; large demonstrations planned for next week might force the new leadership to choose between repression and fresh concessions.

A crowd of at least 20,000 staged a peaceful protest in Dresden last night.

Planning continues for more demonstrations in coming weeks, including a large protest in East Berlin on 19 November. Opposition members predict a rally today and a demonstration and wildcat strikes in East Berlin on 1 November.

Comment: A sustained grassroots campaign by New Forum to focus public discontent will hinder the new leadership's efforts to defuse unrest by cosmetic policy changes. New Forum's recruitment drive in the factories—ostensibly a bastion of Communist party power—spells more trouble for the new regime.

The leadership might try to restrict New Forum's activities by using legal tactics but probably will shun a blanket prohibition on the group for fear of causing more unrest. It presumably hopes New Forum's intellectual orientation and loose organization will keep it from getting a firm foothold among East German workers.

The Leipzig demonstration on Monday, after the weekly church service, may be a turning point. A large turnout would show popular skepticism of Egon Krenz's promises of changes in media policy, travel regulations, and consumer goods supplies. The regime is likely to keep the police presence to a minimum as a show of good faith.

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