Jim Hoagland, an editor at the Washington Post, wrote and published this commentary article on October 8, 1989.

**GORBACHEV, HONECKER TWO FACES OF COMMUNISM**  
  
EAST BERLIN, OCT. 7 -- As they marched past the reviewing stand studded with the world's most important Communist leaders, tens of thousands of cheering East German youths caught a glimpse last night of two small gestures large in political symbolism. There stood Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, communism's leading agnostic, waving to them in a friendly but slightly disengaged manner with an open palm. Beside him, energetically pumping the night air with the clenched fist long favored by Communist militants, stood East German leader Erich Honecker. Throughout Gorbachev's two-day visit, which ended today, the style and the words of the two leaders richly demonstrated that they represent not only two different generations but also two different, competing views of the world and of the need for change in the Communist system.   
  
Gorbachev returned to Moscow without giving any public hint that he had pushed Honecker's embattled but unyielding government to make reforms that might stem the outpouring of East German citizens, almost 50,000 of whom have fled to West Germany in the past month. But the lack of personal praise for Honecker in his half-hour speech Friday night was striking for some diplomats in the 5,000-strong audience. So was Gorbachev's failure to join Honecker in sharp criticism of West Germany for its role in aiding East Germans to flee to the West this summer. Instead, the Soviet leader spoke of his desire to continue developing "beneficial" relations with West Germany, which the Soviets see as the primary source in Western Europe of badly needed foreign financing and technology. Diplomats and other analysts characterized the Soviet leader's performance here as a double-edged one that will inevitably raise new questions in the minds of the East German leadership about the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe and Soviet intentions toward the future of a divided Germany. By his high-profile presence at the 40th anniversary of the founding of East Germany, Gorbachev appeared to underscore that East German stability remains the highest Soviet priority in Europe. He repeatedly praised East Germany, where more than 400,000 Soviet troops are stationed, as a reliable ally in his speech. "The Soviets have spent the summer trying to avoid having to make a choice between the hard-liners in East Germany and the reformers in Poland and Hungary," a Western diplomat said. "Now Gorbachev is making it clear that he will not choose between East Germany and West Germany if he can avoid it."   
  
Gorbachev did complain about discussion in West Germany of someday returning to Germany's 1937 borders. But he did not echo Honecker's sharper accusations that Bonn is undermining peace and stability in Europe by "questioning the postwar order." The Bonn government deliberately triggered the refugee exodus by asserting "custodianship for all Germans," Honecker said. West Germany refuses to recognize East German citizenship and holds that all 17 million residents of East Germany are West German citizens. Bonn's decision to provide East German refugees in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia with travel documents was an important catalyst in the flight to the West. "The new element in Central Europe is that West Germany has been able to establish that it has the right to look after the other Germans on this side of the wall," said one European diplomat based here. "The Soviets did not use this visit to object to that, and the United States does not seem to mind either."   
  
The most discussed portion of Gorbachev's speech at some Western embassies today was an exhortation that "it should be clearly recalled here that the Soviet Union was in favor of maintaining German unity" at the end of World War II. The Soviet leader listed a series of Western actions that in his view caused the division of Germany into antagonistic capitalist and Communist states. In an interview last June, Honecker emphasized that the division of Germany had been the only way to guarantee that "no more war will emanate from German soil." In contrast to Gorbachev's silence on the point Friday, Honecker said in June that Germany must remain permanently divided to guarantee stability in Europe. Although he made no specific reference to it in his speech, Gorbachev's remark on Soviet efforts to keep Germany united recalls an offer by dictator Joseph Stalin in 1952 to negotiate with the West on reuniting Germany as a neutral state. The offer was never taken up. Diplomatic analysts did not exclude the possibility that the reference to German unity was one of several subtle public prods by Gorbachev to the East Germans to be more responsive to citizens' demands for political and economic liberalization.   
  
Gorbachev's spokesman said today the Soviet leader, who is 58, and Honecker, who is 77, had met as "old friends and fellow fighters." But their competing visions of the state of world communism were on display in their speeches and extemporaneous remarks. Honecker spoke only in glowing terms of the accomplishments of Communist nations, which in his view are still locked in a pitched struggle with capitalists. Progress, in Honecker's view, is made only when communism forces concessions from the capitalist bloc. He described change as "a historical, long-term process." In contrast, Gorbachev opened his speech last night by acknowledging the "difficulties, the steep rises and dramatic turns" that communism now faces and went on to describe the urgent need for change in the Eastern Bloc economies. The Soviet leader paid little attention to ideological competition in his speech last night. He instead presented cooperation between capitalist and Communist nations as a positive feature. Saying "there was good news for the world in the agreements in Wyoming" to hold a Soviet-U.S. summit, he used the platform of the East German anniversary celebrations to praise President Bush and to cite favorably the 35-nation European agreements on human rights, which Hungary cited last month as justification for breaking a bilateral accord with East Germany and allowing the East German refugees to cross into Austria en route to West Germany.