

ABSTRACT

Peace and Protest: "Revolution" in the German Democratic Republic

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The German Democratic Republic fell in 1989. The inevitability of the fall and the years of instability within the GDR have been widely debated. The state external policy of Peace provided a rallying point and common nomenclature for the GDR regime and Churches to create a symbiotic relationship; while providing a domestic point for internal complaint and a call for reform within socialism. The result of the 1989 upheaval, was not simply an inevitable result of long run instability in the GDR, but rather gradual instability caused by an aging leadership and the lack of SED policy to come to terms with the hypocrisy of the GDR Peace Council, centered around the Church within socialism as a place for the growing opposition of the 1980s to rally and provided the space necessary for the 1989 upheaval.

Peace and Protest: "Revolution" in the German Democratic Republic

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DEDICATION

To my parents, for their love and support throughout my life

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the city of Leipzig located in East Germany, on October 1989, shouts of “*Wir sind das Volk*” (We are the People) were proudly and defiantly declared by droves of East Germans throughout the streets of Leipzig. This spirit, hope, and defiance continued and on November 9, 1989, the people of East Berlin proudly declared their freedom and non-cooperation as they celebrated what had previously seemed impossible: the removal of travel restrictions and the Berlin Wall, which had separated East and West Berlin since 1961, seemingly came crashing down. On the first of the following month, the *Volkskammer* removed the Marxist-Leninist Party from its constitution. Four days later the Politburo resigned and the Socialist Unity Party (SED) changed its name to the Party of Democratic Socialism under a new leader Gregor Gysi.¹ After four decades, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) ceased to exist and started on a path toward unification with its Western neighbor. Although the events of 1989 came as a shock to the world, the events were not a spontaneous occurrence. While many historians and Germans, East and West alike, have made the argument that this was an inevitable occurrence; closer inspection of evidence and the events argues the contrary. Rather, they were the result of a constant call for reform in the latter two decades of the GDR that had been met with silence by the GDR regime led by Party Secretary Erich Honecker since 1971.

¹Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 615.

After World War II, the world divided along political ideologies. The Soviet Union led the Eastern bloc promoting Communism, while the United States and its Western Allies attempted to prevent the spread of Communism and became champions of democracy. As World War II ended, the German question became and remained a point of contention for the Allied Powers, pitting West against East. What was to be done with Germany? The superpowers agreed on the negative aspects of the Potsdam Treaty: de-nazification, de-militarization, and de-centralization. The positive aims, on the other hand, of re-education, reconstruction, and reform enflamed the already intense political rivalry among the Allied powers.² The continued deterioration between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies was mirrored in the deterioration between the Eastern and Western zones of occupation in Germany.

The Eastern zone under Soviet occupation adopted a communist style government led by Walter Ulbricht and the SED. The Western zone under the Allied powers adopted a similarly democratic style of government. The Soviet Union occupied the Eastern zone of Germany from the end of World War II in 1945, until it removed its occupying forces in 1949. The German Democratic Republic was established in 1949, a counter reaction to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) that year. Initially the FRG failed to acknowledge the existence of the GDR, and relationships between the two were contentious, particularly a result of the re-militarization of Western Europe. The re-militarization of both Western and Eastern played a major role in the burgeoning official peace council of East Germany. This movement played a role in the eventual collapse of the GDR. In 1961, the tensions reached a fever point with the building of the Berlin Wall,

²Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany Since 1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14.

a physical representation of the separation between East and West. Thus, Western Germany began its path towards a democratic government and power, while East Germany continued its role in the Eastern bloc and a part of the Warsaw Pact. During the period between the 1950s and 1960s, East Germany established itself as a true political entity and separated its existence from that of Soviet occupation and as a mere shadow of the FRG. During the 1970s, the GDR appeared to be a functioning socialist state. The GDR established a burgeoning economy, helped by Western connections and technological advances, a strong state that was able to deal with internal and foreign threats to its power, and a state that had developed relationships with institutions usually outside state control (i.e. the Church.) The Western policy of *Ostpolitik* saw a thawing of tension between the two Germanys, but the neighbors continued their political policies separately with no goals towards unification.

In light of the tremendous changes that the year 1989 brought to world politics, many contemporary historians have looked with great interest at this final period of the GDR. The history of the GDR, therefore, has been studied and told with its inevitable demise constantly at the forefront. The resulting events of 1989 were representative of the fact that the GDR had become unstable, and its instability resulted in the regime's overthrow. Does this mean, however, that the GDR had always been unstable? On this point historians disagree. In his book *The Fall of GDR*, David Childs argues that the East German government actually never had stability, rather the seeming stability of the GDR in the 1950s and 1960 was merely superficial. The true instability, then, came to light in the 1980s and resulted in the end of the regime. This idea is also expressed by historian Martin McCauley in his book *The German Democratic Republic since 1945*. McCauley

provides an in depth narrative about the economic instability of the GDR that led to the instability of the 1980s and the subsequent revolution. Robert Goeckel in *The Lutheran Church and the East German State: Political Conflict and Change under Ulbricht and Honecker* and John Burgess in *The East German Church and the End of Communism* focus on the role of the church and the state, arguing that the inability of the state to suppress the church early on led both to instability and the ultimate downfall of the regime.

In contrast historians Mark Allinson and Mary Fulbrook present arguments that the GDR was at least politically stable through its first three decades. *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-68*, Allinson's book, explores the policies of the GDR and culture of its citizens using Thuringia as a case study. He argues the large amount of political involvement by GDR citizens attests to the political stability. Fulbrook's book *An Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, provides a more comprehensive analysis of the GDR, and a more convincing argument for the stability of the GDR. She argues that the political opposition of 1989, was not isolated. Rather political opposition had a history within East Germany. Its failure to succeed on a large scale, she argues represents the political stability of the GDR regime. Fulbrook further presents the argument that Honecker's more lenient policies toward dissidents set the stage for the revolution of 1989.

This thesis will argue that the events of 1989 were primarily the result of cultural upheaval and unrest, not out of nowhere, but a build-up throughout the regime that was the result of purposeful action. This does not mean that the regime itself was unstable as argued by Childs, Goeckel, McCauley, and Burgess. Rather this thesis will discuss the

stability of the regime established in the 1960s and solidified in the 1970s. The arguments made by Childs and McCauley focus more exclusively on the political and economic instability, with minor significance given to the moral and cultural movement behind the events of 1989. The 1953 June uprising was a period of instability for the regime, but the uprising had been effectively dealt with by October. In addition, the regime established effective political and economic reforms that prevented an uprising the size of the 1953 regime to occur in the late 1980s. Rather, by the 1980s the aging government of the regime had in many ways become complacent and did not effectively deal with the growing discontented population.

Goeckel and Burgess also argue the instability of the regime. Unlike McCauley and Childs, Goeckel and Burgess argue the instability was set in motion by the establishment of the “church within socialism” in 1971. While the church’s unique position in the regime did allow for a position of free space and facilitated the opposition movement, its early position created stability and provided a safe outlet for quiet discontent. However, this does not mean that the church had complete freedom, and the failure of the government to cooperate with these groups in the latter 1980s led to the collapse of the regime. The “church within socialism” concept did not create an inevitable downfall, its creation allowed for individuals failed up with an aging and failing SED to have an outlet and organized protest. It was not a result of the decision to allow the Protestant Church to remain as a cultural entity, but rather the government’s inability to cooperate and deal with its own hypocritical policies that led to instability in the latter 1980s.

As a result, the space and environment needed for a successful reform movement existed, a perfect political storm. This will be explored by focusing specifically on the connection of the church's unique acceptance as a "church within socialism" and the role of the official peace council's connection with the Evangelical Church. The connection between the GDR peace council and the Evangelical Church allowed for the development of the unofficial peace movement in the 1980s. "Freedom" under the veil of the church and the peace council provided a unique opportunity for growth. As Allinson and Fulbrook argue, the GDR was not a slowly devolving state but where Allinson and, to some extent, Fulbrook look at the agency of the small groups within the church, it was a combination of failing government policy and agency within the church by individuals that led to the collapse of the GDR. Using the official newspapers of the East German government and documents from the GDR constitutions and laws, this thesis will show that the East German collapse was not inevitable. The collapse came because of the policies placed by the GDR and taken advantage by those who were demanding reform of the socialist government through the latter 1980s.

The opposition that took place in the 1980s called not for an end to the Socialist system, but rather, insisted on its reform. The 1989 upheaval occurred largely as a result of the unique relationship that existed between the Church and the socialist government of the GDR. The Church became a free space for the dissidents largely consisting of the Churches, intellectuals, and the peace movement. All three played a pivotal role which were individually initiated and gradually integrated. The intellectuals had a privileged, yet divisive, role in the SED and East Germany. The intellectuals supported socialism and had thrown their lot in with East Germany, but grew wary with the policies of the

GDR. In particular, the lack of free thought and censorship created a strain between the intellectuals and the GDR. The unofficial peace movement, also found itself allied with the official policy of the GDR's peace council. Internationally, the policies of the GDR and the peace movement existed in cohesion. The internal policies of the GDR, however, particularly militarization created a growing tension and disillusionment within the movement. This resulted in the peace movements growing opposition to the SED and Honecker's regime.

Many intellectuals found themselves supporters and members of the peace movement, but without a place to organize and discuss, they remained ineffectual within the East German police state. The policies and practices of the GDR had created such an environment, despite its best efforts: the Lutheran Church. In an effort to ensure cooperation of the Church with a socialist government, the GDR provided certain concession to the Church including no censorship laws against Church literature so long as it remained within Church walls. Intellectuals and the peace movement had a vehicle through which to organize and disseminate their propaganda against the regime. The events of 1989 represented the evolution of the intellectuals, peace movement, and Lutheran Church which were a result of the GDR's contradictory policies and failure to engage in its own *glasnost*.

After 1933, Germany had experienced a large intellectual emigration. With the fall of the Nazi regime, many of these intellectuals felt duty bound to return and help their country rebuild, despite the roots they had developed in their countries of refuge.³ In turn, West Germany and East Germany found themselves welcoming back these

³Kettenacker, 14.

intellectual émigrés. For many of the intellectual émigrés East Germany was a promising concept; a part of the Soviet Zone, under the anti-fascist Socialist Unity Party committed to a socialist democratic government. The Communist government welcomed these writers, artists, and historians who would be duty bound to remind their patrons of the crimes committed by the “other” Germany, many of whose leaders were tainted by the Nazi regime.⁴ This did not mean free reign for intellectuals, they were to serve a propaganda purpose for the government and were expected to obey certain taboos.

As early as the 1950s, intellectuals in both the West and East began to criticize the two governments from the Left. For these New Left intellectuals the protection of human rights and promulgation of peace had become inseparable from the ideals of Marxism.⁵ By the latter part of the 1970s, dissatisfaction with the real existing socialism of the GDR had grown, a charge led by the author Rudolf Bahro. He criticized the post-Stalinist GDR and all Communist nations for economic policies and practices that he argued remained closely tied to capitalism.⁶ During this same period, the SED leadership grew dissatisfied with its intellectuals. The SED experienced conflicting opinions towards the intelligentsia. On the one hand the intelligentsia were necessary members of the GDR in order to construct socialism, yet their independence and free thought presented a constant threat to the East German government.⁷ Wolf Biermann’s loss of citizenship from the

⁴Kettenacker, 14.

⁵Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans 1945-1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 159-161.

⁶Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*. trans.David Fernbach. (1978), in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2080.

⁷Jarausch, 195.

GDR, after criticizing the socialist practices of the regime while on concert in West Germany, showcased the rigidity of the system. It also initiated the intelligentsia to take a stand against the GDR. The mistrust felt by the government and the disillusionment experienced by intellectuals resulted in a straining of their relationship.

The German Democratic Republic remained entrenched in its own hypocrisy. The GDR, under both Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, claimed to stand for peace and human rights, yet the reality of its internal policies undermined those declarations. The GDR used its role in the Helsinki accords to internationally admonish the United States and West Germany, while presenting itself as champion of peace.⁸ Following this international appeal, the GDR supported the peace movement in West Germany, while refusing to tolerate similar movements within its own border.⁹ The contradictory stance of the GDR created internal troubles. Particularly troublesome for the GDR was its constitutionally mandated compulsory military service for men of the GDR.¹⁰ East Germans were given a rallying point from which to object, the internal militarization of their lives struck such a contradictory cord with the population. The peace movement consisted of laborers, preachers, intellectuals, and even housewives. The peace movement's primary target was disarmament, but the issue of militarization illuminated a bigger problem: subordination. For many dissidents the peace movement was the first step toward full opposition in which they wanted freedom and the protection of their

⁸“An alle, die den Frieden wollen. Appell des Friedensrates der DDR an die Friedensanhänger in Westdeutschland und in allen Ländern“ [“To All Who Want Peace: Appeal of the Peace Council of the GDR to the Advocates of Peace in West Germany and in all Countries on the Occasion of the World Peace Congress in Helsinki”], *Neues Deutschland*, June 29, 1965, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 7, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1947.

⁹Jaraus, 160.

¹⁰Judt, 571.

human rights.¹¹ The peace movement targeted one of the core issues of contention for citizens of the GDR: internal militarization. Yet, the call for peace still conflicted with the GDR's own policy of peace. However, the GDR continued its conflicting internal and external policies, preventing any reconciliation between the dissidents and the government of East Germany. Roger Woods discusses the fracturing of the group and the role it plays in the GDR, arguing that the intelligentsia criticize the regime from the left but the degree they were willing to do so openly was a point of contention amongst the intellectuals.¹² The question, however, remains to what degree did the intellectual influence society outside its own circle?

The GDR's hypocrisy continued to fuel the peace movement, while its change in policy toward the Evangelical Church helped fan the same flame. During the first two decades of the GDR, the church had managed to maintain a precarious independence under the GDR's socialist government. The idea of the "church within socialism" had ensured a détente of sorts between the church and the atheist government. Initially the SED sought not to alienate the influential church, instead it had broached a mutual beneficial relationship. The Lutheran Church chose to cooperate rather than dissent while the SED leadership chose to allow the church to act independently within a private sphere.¹³ However, owing to growing dissatisfaction with the militarization of East Germany the peace movement had begun to grow in the shadow of the Protestant

¹¹Traude Ratsch, Interview with Roland Jahn: "Ich persönlich bin kein Pazifist" ["Personally, I am not a Pacifist"], *tageszeitung*, July 21, 1983, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2487.

¹²R.A.Woods, "East Germany in Search of a Voice," *East Central Europe* 19, no. 2 (1999): 165-178.

¹³Robert F. Goeckel, *The Lutheran Church and the East German State: Political Conflict and Change under Ulbricht and Honecker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 32-33.

Church.¹⁴ While the GDR maintained control of the public sphere, the peace movement and opposition found its voice in the private sphere of the Protestant Church. The church's role in the peace movement proved crucial. The church provided not only a vehicle for dissident voices, but also an umbrella of protection.¹⁵ The church in conjunction with the dissident groups became a stalwart against the regime. In his book *The Lutheran Church and the East German State: Political Conflict and Change under Ulbricht and Honecker*, Robert Goeckel argues that the Lutheran tradition of passivity played a part in its attempts to cooperate with the church, but did not prevent the church from playing a dissenting role against the state particularly in the case of human right issues. John Burgess in his book, *The East German Church and the End of Communism*, further argues that rather than becoming an institution that stood in opposition to the GDR, it's very cooperative existence proved a space where dissidents could meet and organize within an institution more akin to democratic impulses.¹⁶ The authors both provide in depth accounts of the church and its role within the GDR, however whether the Church was a passive or active participant in the events of 1989 remains in question.

The peaceful demonstrations which took place in Leipzig in September 1989 radiated outward and spread to other parts of East Germany. Informal protest groups began to form throughout East Germany, and the local SED leadership made the pivotal

¹⁴Jarausch, 202.

¹⁵Women for Peace, Christians, and Pacifists in the GDR – Enemies of the State?, ed. Bernard Pollman (1984), in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=174.

¹⁶John P. Burgess, *The East German Church and the End of Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

decision not to react with violence, allowing dialogue to take place.¹⁷ This was an unprecedented moment for the citizens of the GDR to publicly voice their opinions. From there, the opposition created a firm organization called *Neues Forum* to act as the dissident voice in public.¹⁸ However, this was not spontaneous but a result of the work already established by the decades of peaceful meetings and open discussion that occurred in the free space of the Churches. The 1989 upheaval was not sudden nor was it the result of only a few people, rather it was a gradual build up that occurred by people looking for a way to reform not overturn their government.

¹⁷Jarausch, 205.

¹⁸“Founding Appeal of the New Forum,” eds. Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=2875.

CHAPTER TWO

Stability in the German Democratic Republic: Creating a “Church within Socialism”

The German Democratic Republic's (GDR) stability has long been a subject of debate among historians. Many have argued, Childs for example, that the GDR was never stable, but rather waiting to crumble. In the words of Ernst Richert, the GDR was “the state that ought not to be,” while other historians, such as Fulbrook, have held that after the SED's success in ending the 1953 uprising until the economic uncertainty of the GDR government under Honecker in the mid-1980s, the GDR functioned effectively as a socialist state.¹ The GDR had many factors that led to its instability and ultimate collapse in 1989-1990, but it was not an inevitable pre-determined conclusion. A glance at the development of the relationship between the SED and the church, particularly the Evangelical Church, the militarization of East Germany, and the growing socialist educational policies shows the emergence of a stable political state after the fall of the Third Reich and the occupation of Germany. The uprising of 1953, was a point of internal disruption with the East German state, but it was dealt with by October of the same year. After this uprising, there was not another large, organized disturbance until 1989. The establishment of the relationship with the Evangelical Church, the

¹Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic 1945-1990* (Singapore: Pearson Education Asia Pte Ltd., 2000), 3; Mary Fulbrook, “Popular Discontent and Political Activism in the GDR,” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 3 (November 1993): 267-268, accessed June 14, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20081489>.

strengthened military and police forces, as well as the development of a socialist youth movement shows the strengthening of a stable state.

A major factor in the fall of the GDR's socialist government and the eventual reunification of Germany, would be the church, particularly the Evangelical Church in Germany. The unique role of the Protestant Churches in Germany would lead to its eventual overthrow, playing a pivotal role unlike any other factors. The Protestant Churches held the unique role of a "church within socialism," first phrased by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in 1971.¹ The church's unique role would allow it to act as a "free space" for opposition to the SED (Socialist Unity Party). The church leadership and SED leadership learned early in the GDR regime that the church should not be permitted to become an enemy of the regime, despite the fact that the church's belief system put it at odds with the atheist philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. The church was not and could not function as an organ of the state. During the 1950s, the SED followed what could be characterized as an antagonistic policy towards the church. However, as time and policy progressed, the church and the state worked, for different purposes, through the 1960s and 1970s, to establish a "church within socialism." The unique position of the church allowed enough autonomy that it became a "free space" for those who needed a space to meet and advocate for reform without fear of repression. The early development of the relationship between the church and GDR was full of repression and tension that one would assume existed in a socialist society advocating the belief of atheism. As the GDR followed the New Course, it began to advocate more freedom for the churches. The church's reveling in their new found 'freedom' and with

²*Christians and Churches: A Report from the German Democratic Republic* (Berlin: Panorama DDR, 1983).

protection of the GDR constitution saw that it was in their interest to advocate not against or on the outside of socialism, but their place ‘in socialism.’

Background of the Development and Role of the “Church Within Socialism”

On October 7, 1949 the constitution of the GDR was released. This initial document, one that would be replaced twice, projected the Stalinization of the GDR, a hard party line that connected the SED with the Soviet bloc. This included a strong single party state (under Ulbricht), the end of capitalism and large landowners, and an army, the collectivization of agriculture, as well as the religious discrimination, and an emphasis on the power of the working class.² This harsh line alienated the people of the GDR who believed they had rid themselves of one fascist leader, only to find themselves under the thumb of another, albeit bearing a different party name. In addition the early GDR planned to focus the education and family life around the teachings of Marxism-Leninism; a decision that would have overarching consequences for many aspects of East German society including the churches.

Viewing the churches as a threat to the culture The SED’s political agenda resulted in the repression of Protestant Churches in 1952 and 1953. This is in part because of the need to focus on education and the ideology of the socialist party. In the GDR, the youth received a ten year education that either ended with skilled vocational work or for certain students university level learning. The schools emphasized “socialist education” or “scientific” learning over religion.³ Pure Marxism-Leninism meant an emphasis on science and atheist thought, for religion was an opiate for the masses, a

²Dennis, 58-59.

³Burgess, 5.

bourgeois thought that enslaved the people in fantasy.⁴ Initially the proponents of Marxism-Leninism intended for the “gradual death” of religion. They believed this death would be inevitable once the youth received a scientific education. The church was a natural enemy; there was no way the two could coexist. The SED’s *Kirchenkampf* forbade the churches to conduct religious education in schools, and any ministers that actively engaged in politics were to be dismissed or imprisoned. Even those involved in the *Junge Gemeinden* (organization for young people) were falsely accused of espionage for the West and many students found themselves expelled from secondary school.⁵ The churches had been firmly identified as an enemy to the state.

The harsh repression and economic policies of Stalinized Soviet Union were difficult to enact and successfully carry out in East Germany, although they continued until 1953 up to the death of Stalin. After Stalin’s death, the GDR made the decision to carry out its “New Course” on May 27, 1953. The “New Course” was a Soviet policy that would be implemented in the ‘satellite states’ as a process for de-Stalinization. A GDR delegation that consisted of Ulbricht, Grotewohl and the Central Committee Secretary for Propaganda met with representatives from the Kremlin. The Kremlin urged the SED to pursue more conciliatory policies towards certain populations in the GDR, including farmers and the churches. The GDR delegation decided to proceed with the Soviet’s proposed to New Course. This was an implicit promise of the end of discrimination against young Christians, as well as change in policy towards farmers, and the final

⁴Burgess, 4-5.

⁵Dennis, 59; Burgess, 9.

ending of collectivization.⁶ The New Course would set up the role of the church in the GDR that would allow it the position to shield those who opposed the government. The church had previously been harshly repressed and now the easing of pressure left both the church and the GDR with questions as to the role of the church. It was not an inevitable consequence, but given the right circumstances and decisions made by members of the Politburo, churches, and East German citizens the churches would become the center of dissent with the GDR.

After the New Course, the SED continued to lead and direct society, absorbing a majority of mass organizations that then held only marginal power. Even the economy had moved into the socialist state; private ownership in industry and trade were now largely succeeded by public ownership.⁷ This did not mean that the SED had no challenges or obstacles to its authority. There were other political parties, such as the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), that continued to exercise some, albeit a small amount of power. The churches were a loud and true representation of an alternative to Marxism-Leninism.⁸ The true extent to which the Evangelical Church was an active or passive alternative will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

“Church Within Socialism:” Building the Foundation

After the 1953 uprising and the change of policy to the New Course, the official policy towards the churches and even German citizens changed. The 1953 Uprising was a reaction to the “New Course” and the failure of the Politburo to rescind the work norms

⁶Dennis, 64.

⁷Ibid., 74.

⁸Ibid., 75.

in addition to the other concessions they were providing for other members of East German society. The industrial areas had already begun to show their distress, but the mass protest spread very quickly throughout East Germany amongst workers and farmers alike.⁹ The regime had shown its weakness, by ineffectively following the Soviet policy and enacting the new reforms. The regime would either collapse under the uprising, or the regime had to enact new legislation that would prevent further upheaval.

The 1968 GDR constitution ensured that every citizen had the “right to profess a religious faith and exercise religious activities [and] the churches and other religious communities order their affairs and exercise their activities in agreement with the Constitution and legal provisions of the GDR” in Article 39.¹⁰ This article both provided for and restricted the freedom of religion. The purpose of the GDR constitution as expressly stated in the constitution was to establish a socialist state in Germany. If religious activities interfered with that role, than the affairs of the church would no longer be in accordance with the legal provisions of the GDR. So long as the church remained a loyal organ of the socialist state and refrained from antagonizing the GDR; their “rights” would be protected. This was a result, because first and foremost “every citizen of the GDR had the same rights and duties regardless of his nationality, race, world outlook, or religious faith, and social origin or position” as stated in article 20.¹¹ This became a regular part of the SED policy towards the church. They walked a fine line between accommodating the religion, by emphasizing their mutual goals and languages, while

⁹Dennis, 64-65; Fulbrook, 267-268.

¹⁰Constitution of the GDR (1974), ed. Dietrich Muller-Romer (1974), in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 3, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=2859.

¹¹Ibid.

appeasing party hardliners and not abandoning the scientific aspect of Marxism-Leninism.

The change in policy can be seen substantiated in the GDR as early as 1960 when Ulbricht made a statement to the People's Chamber in 1960 that "Christianity and the humanist goals of socialism are not irreconcilable."¹² This amounted to a complete change in SED strategy, by allowing the churches into the fold of the socialist state, rather than allowing it to sit on the outside as an alternative to socialism. The term "church within socialism" will not come until the 1970s under Erich Honecker's regime and only after the Protestant Church shed their alliance with the Western Protestant Church of Germany, an allegiance that made the SED regime uneasy. One should not assume that the Protestant Church experienced no problems with the state or even a membership rise, rather membership continued to fall during the Honecker years as a result of the long-term forces of secularization and urbanization, and by 1989 membership had dropped to 5.1 million or about 30 percent of the population against 80.4 in 1954.¹³ The church faced many problems under socialism. As previously mentioned, it had to learn to co-exist with a government whose educational philosophy involved the death of religion. Additionally the church's unique position under Honecker provided some autonomy, but it also set the church up to be a targeted threat.

Problems Facing the Church

One would not want to presume that the church and SED were friends who easily broke bread together. Rather the relationship only existed because it was mutually

¹²Dennis, 247.

¹³Ibid.

beneficial, and in particular beneficial to the SED. In East Germany, religion had long held an ambiguous role. In one respect, in accordance with the communist belief of religion; ruling classes had repeatedly used religion to convince the exploited to accept their lot on earth and await their reward in heaven. On the other hand religion had sometimes held a revolutionary impulse, even the German hero Martin Luther, himself held this ambiguous role. Just as the socialist state accused religion of exploiting the people and their weaknesses, the SED sought to exploit the role of religion and use “its vision of justice and equality that moved the masses to rebel against their oppressors.”¹⁴ It remained a clear understanding that Article 20 of the GDR constitution would take precedence. Duty to the party would always come first. This is seen in the Report on Christians and Churches issued from the German Democratic Republic, in which a utopian view of socialism and Christianity living in symbiosis is portrayed. In response to the criticism from the West that the toleration of Christianity in the GDR was only a temporary tactic, the piece of propaganda argued:

Over the years the responsibility borne by Christians from every section of the population in leading our State and society forwards have actually grown, not diminished. They never stop to wonder whether there will be room for Christianity in tomorrow’s world, because they know that it is their task to preserve the substance of the Christian faith.¹⁵

This continued to emphasize and substantiate the role of the Christians as secondary to leading their society and the state forward as examples of socialism. However, it does provide an interesting idea, that Christians were encouraged to bring their faith into the success of the socialist state. This coincided with the policy of the SED to emphasize the

¹⁴Burgess, 9.

¹⁵*Christians and Churches*, 10.

mutual goals of socialism and the church, while shoving aside the differences. This is not to say that the SED believed or more importantly expected its people and the international community to believe that socialism and the church did not have conflicting ideas, they were simply not emphasized in favor of a more mutually beneficial policy.

The issue of religion continued to be an important concern within the state policy of the GDR. Prior to 1953, a major component of the conflict between the church and the state, was the Protestant youth organization, *Junge Gemeinde*. As discussed earlier, youth that participated actively in *Junge Gemeinde* prior to 1953, were targeted as spies. They were actively pursued by the government and the actions of the government resulted in three hundred Christian youths being expelled from schools.¹⁶ Loss of an education as result of adhering to one's belief does not end during the New Course and especially not under Honecker's government as will be seen during the "swords into plowshares" movement.

The SED used its control of education in order to monitor religion in regards to the GDR youth. As discussed earlier, the SED found itself walking a fine line between its everyday GDR citizen, particularly those non-party members, and the hardliners who wanted a pure socialist society. Youth and education play a huge role in the ideological struggle of any regime. As mentioned earlier, education was meant to emphasize the "scientific" and "atheism" if it were following Marxist-Leninism. However the GDR argued that it is not the role of schools to extract professions of any kind, but rather provides them with a standard of scientific education.¹⁷ The emphasis for the new regime

¹⁶*Christians and Churches*, 11.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

was to portray itself as a regime that emphasized individual choice, even going so far as leading the people and international community to believe that no figures existed on the number of the Christian followers because it was an individual decision not monitored by the regime. The regime did argue that there were probably less youth represented in the regime, although they were present in *Junge Gemeinde* and its Catholic counterpart *Pfarrjugend*.¹⁸ The competition for youth involvement between the Christian youth groups and the FDJ (GDR youth group) and Young Pioneers did not help facilitate the relationship between the two institutions.

The other issue that faced the regime and the churches as they attempted to successfully portray a church within socialism regime was the issue of the Christian voice in government. There needed to exist a way for policies to face both the church and regime. It was important that the churches felt their agenda and identity were protected, while the GDR must continue upholding its own policies and power. The way this manifested itself in the GDR, was through the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) founded in Berlin in 1945, a party that helped to establish the CDU in the East. The CDU did not act as a voice “crying in the wilderness,” but rather its party and officials worked within the regime holding national, regional, and local leadership positions.¹⁹ The CDU defined itself as a political party which plays its part in the socialist state. The CDU was a political party that was permitted to exist and outwardly portrayed an alternative to the SED. However, the CDU had no real power despite the propaganda published by the SED. According to a Report on Christians and Churches issued to the

¹⁸*Christians and Churches*, 11.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 33.

Western public by the GDR, “it unites Christian citizens whose Christian responsibility and democratic commitment motivates them to serve the people’s welfare and peace.”²⁰ The CDU as an institute and the role of the Christian is once again focused on its mutual discussion of peace, although the definition of peace and welfare would not always be the same for the two entities. The CDU’s role then was to act as a go between for the state and church, two separate spheres. The CDU used the same terminology and within its public persona, focused on the similar goals that existed between their party and the SED.

The reason the CDU could exist, according to the regime was that the GDR had set up a separation of church and state, which once again emphasizes the individual and their choices.²¹ According to the “Report on Christians and Churches,” the CDU does nothing more than help explain the Christian beliefs to the socialist regime and then in turn explained the socialist policy to the Christian communities. For many Christian leaders this would be an extremely important role of the CDU as they came to realize “that the reputation and status of Christians in socialist society depended on how they treat their civil rights and duties, and in particular how active they are in their commitment to peace”²² The CDU, seemed to become the socialist mouthpiece for the Christian community. It was not a true alternative to the SED party, rather a different way to phrase and sell the socialist ideology.

The churches, with a modicum of autonomy given from the GDR, carved out their own autonomous existence, so long as their separate sphere did not crash or conflict with

²⁰*Christians and Churches*, 12.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 35.

the State's sphere. The church leaders were aware that despite the necessity for the regime to in many ways maintain an appearance of religious toleration due to the existence of Article 39 in the constitution and keep up appearances for the sake of international relations; if their aims came into conflict with the regime so would their autonomy. The regime similarly kept up its appearances by emphasizing individual thought and purposefully denying Western attacks that Christians were discriminated against in the GDR. "There are no unemployed Christians in the GDR, just as there are no unemployed Marxists."²³ Christianity is another part of a GDR citizens identity but it was secondary to their role, and because they have the individual choice to make that decision as long as they continue to play ball so to speak and participate in the government and fulfill their socialist role than there were few problems that they would face. Plus admitting to a weakness in unemployment of any members of its society would admit to weakness within the socialist economy.

Militarization of the East German State

On January 24, 1962, the German Democratic Republic issued a new law based on articles 5 and 112 of the 1949 constitution. This new law was a compulsory military service law, touted by the Eastern German state as a necessity.²⁴ The leaders of the SED claimed it was the result of the growing concern of the GDR for protection and safety. The German Democratic Republic led a precarious existence prior to the mid-1950s.

²³*Christians and Churches*, 17.

²⁴Nationale Front des demokratischen Deutschland, ed., *Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (1968), in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 16, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=79.

Many labeled the GDR as the “state that should not exist.”²⁵ It was a partial state, and reunification was something that the Western state of Germany included in its constitution. The GDR was a buffer between the East and the West, between capitalism and communism. As a result Ulbricht and the leaders of the SED were often paranoid of their existence and safety. Without the support of the Soviet army, and without the understanding of Soviet support: the need, then, existed to improve its military.

According to the general terms and conditions of the compulsory law general conscription was necessary in order to fulfil the national duty and protect both the fatherland and achievements of workers. Those who fulfilled their military service were expected to serve as both active and reservist in the National People’s Army (NVA). All male citizens between the ages of 18-50 were expected to report to duty, included in the conscription were non-citizens.²⁶ The compulsory service law, meant that all males age 18-50 who were susceptible to this law made the pledge to the National People’s Army.²⁷ In the East German newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, the radio address given by Minister of National Defense Army General Heinz Hoffmann was published and expressed the party line for the reasons behind the law and the hopes for the East German nation. In this address General Hoffmann tells the German people that the meaning behind the conscription law was the aggression of the Bonn government and their NATO allies.²⁸

²⁵David Childs, *The Fall of the GDR* (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2001); Dennis, 3.

²⁶Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, “Im Namen der Nation auf Wacht für den Frieden,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 13, 1962, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 14, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19620113-0-1-16-0>.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

The armament of West Germany, meant that the National People's Army needed to be prepared to defend themselves from "imperialist" and "nefarious" aggression. Their defense was necessary not only for the safety of the East German state, but for the safety of all of socialism, which the East German state was the defender.

The militarization of the GDR became a point of contention between the people and the State particularly towards the latter part of the 1950s. With the issuance of the compulsory military law in 1962, those who opposed the militarization of the state looked for an alternative to the militarization. The alternative came in the form of the construction soldier (*Bausoldaten*).²⁹ This would allow for those citizens, a number of Christians included, who did not want to have to use weapons in order to fulfill their role as citizens. The alternative allowed for the GDR to continue to proclaim itself as promulgator of peace. While the alternative was not perfect, a point of major contention that could have resulted in an uprising that was seen in June 1953 was avoided. A compromise was created in the 1960s that met the needs of the State, and although it would not be seen as a completely viable alternative by the people as time went on, particularly because military training was still required.³⁰ During the 50s and 60s it served its purpose. The GDR only militarized as a means for peace against the "imperialist" West. Dennis argues that the instability within the GDR's government, required it to create a defensive machinery.³¹ The threat from within and without required the State to establish itself with a strengthened army and a male populous trained and

²⁹Dennis, 226-7.

³⁰Fulbrook, 270.

³¹Dennis, 209.

ready for war. The strengthened National People's Army also acted as a deterrent to internal strife.

In the State supported newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, General Hoffman proclaimed the GDR as the "bastion for peace and socialism."³² The soldiers of the GDR were declared true patriots who would protect Germany and socialism from the aggressive nature of the West. It was the patriotic duty to participate and join the NVA. Of course, there was no need to mention within the newspaper article that this compulsory law, did not leave its citizens the choice of whether or not to be patriotic. Further discussion of the conscription through the month of January shows a continuous use of terminology of the West as the aggressor and East the continuous peace-maker. The need for a military draft was caused by Western aggression. The argument made was that the government in Bonn followed policies similar to those of Hitler, and therefore was dangerous. In contrast to "fascist" West Germany, the Eastern state has waited until it was a necessity, and only because West Germany forced East Germany into the position. In addition the newspaper used these arguments as a way to call on the people for more sacrifice, for more soldiers, and for a longer required term of service.³³ The words used in the newspaper article, also supported by the other two GDR papers, were not shocking or surprising and were not a change from policy. The aggressive dialogue used by the state sponsored paper stressed the message of the SED. The aggressive terminology used to promote such a contentious issue opened the door for opposition.

³²Minister für Nationale Verteidigung, "Im Namen der Nation auf Wacht für den Frieden," *Neues Deutschland*.

³³ "Bundestag verlängert Militärdienst" *Neues Deutschland*, January 20, 1962, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 2, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19620120-0-2-21-0>.

However, without a space to proclaim their dissatisfaction, detractors from the militarization of the regime found themselves in a difficult situation. The official peace council and acceptance of the “church within socialism” in the 1970s provided a more stable interaction between opposition and the GDR leaders. During the 1960s, however militarization and reactions against socialism created a more serious situation. The state powered newspapers continued their message of propaganda in regards to militarization. However, to question the militarization of the GDR or to suggest a more peaceful alternative was not allowed.

Included in this state powered message of propaganda were the statements of support from citizens of the GDR. Because of the distrust of the media and the power of the SED over the East German newspapers, one could not assume or even hope for the veracity of these statements. Rather these statements can shed light on the position of the state as to why there should be support of the new conscription law:

‘I agree to the adoption of the law of conscription, because it is a law of our workers 'and peasants' state. I have four children. My oldest is 18 years old. With him, I experienced Dresden, the bombing. It was horrible. But it was also a lesson: do everything to ensure that peace remains. My husband and I, we are committed to making every effort to [secure the] state, because here rules the people, and there is no one who is interested in a war. We welcome any step that strengthens our state that we built. [...] Therefore, we also trained our boy so that he is ready at any time to protect our peaceful state and defend.’ Elsbeth Wückmann, Secretary at VEB, work for television electronics, Berlin-Upper³⁴

The message of peace continued. First, a reminder to the reader of the SED political line, what happens if “warmongers” were in power: death, destruction, and an almost certain return to fascism. These fears were not imaginary, they had been seen during World War

³⁴“Werkätige sagen ihre Meinung vor der 21 Sitzung der Volksammer,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 24, 1962, accessed June 9, 2014, http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SN_2542889X-19620124-0-1-8-0.

It as a result of the imperialist aggression and fascist leaders, according to the SED party platform expressed in the above quote. To prevent war from happening again, the GDR must protect itself from Western aggression. This woman and her husband were willing, despite the atrocities experienced or rather because of those atrocities to have their son trained to defend his country in the name of almighty peace. The justification of the regime and what they intended their people to believe and repeat was that militarization of the East was a defensive measure, not an aggressive measure as seen in the West. However, as a reader or citizen of the GDR, one might question the importance if you did not have children:

‘As a girl I care about conscription [...] because time is precious with the soldiers for the youth, so to speak. We strive to be Young Socialists, and therefore want to learn well. But Young Socialists also need to be good soldiers. And as for the guys in my class, I do think that they will be good soldiers.’ Barbara Otto, student of Friedrich-List-Schule Berlin Upper-Lower Dion Hausen³⁵

It was important that the men of the East German state fulfilled their role as good GDR citizens. In order to be a true citizen of the GDR, it was no longer enough to simply follow the GDR education, now a young man had to fulfill his role as a soldier. The youth were the future of the state, and therefore need to be able to defend the state. It was important that they not only learnt to be “young socialists” but also defended their nation. The position of soldier was added to the definition of an East German citizen. With the introduction of this new law and the propaganda of the state, the GDR was asserting its power and control over its citizens and defining what it meant to belong to the state.

³⁵“Werkätige sagen ihre Meinung vor der 21 Sitzung der Volksammer,” *Neues Deutschland*.

As is necessary with any new policy, the militarization of the GDR, included educational policies geared towards the youth, a movement to focus attention on the areas, where indoctrination will occur.

‘Yes, the military is necessary. It is our duty to do everything for the protection of our achievements in determined building of socialism. What use is the rapid pace of development in all spheres of our social life, if we do not do enough to defend ourselves if necessary to care of our own skin? If a sovereign state deems it necessary to strengthen itself militarily and to introduce conscription, which is his very own right.’ Heinz Tretschok, engineering VEB³⁶

These words spoken by Heinz Tretschok, parroted the values and words spoken by General Hoffman. It was the right of any sovereign nation to protect itself and to build its army up. The problem existed when the country set its sights on destroying another regime or country. The question was how to combat that issue, and Hoffman’s answer was to militarize and for every male citizen between the ages of 18-60 to sacrifice their time and themselves for this worthy cause. As Tretschok argues, it would be very likely that another country would develop its military and be prepared for military action. If the GDR was not prepared than they would not be able to counteract this attack and might not exist. General Hoffman gave that possible enemy a name and a realistic time of the threat: West Germany and right then. Throughout the 1960s, particularly in the month of January, these discussions of the draft can be found and were argued from the viewpoint of the SED in great length.

The Development of an “Official” Peace Movement

The establishment of the GDR Peace Council in East Germany provided a platform for the GDR to attack the “imperialist” politics of the West Germans. The West

³⁶“Werktätige sagen ihre Meinung vor der 21 Sitzung der Volksammer,” *Neues Deutschland*.

continued to perpetuate the policy of aggression, while the East German council and policy was peaceful. Within the policy, the accusation, that Gerhard Schröder “demands: a greater ‘share of responsibility and participation’ in the power to deploy nuclear weapons.”³⁷ The question asked in the appeal was “why? against whom?” The only answer according to the GDR Peace Council was the Erhard and American government plans to incite war against the GDR, citing American President Johnson for demanding that the GDR disappear on May 8, 1965. The call made by the GDR Peace Council was for universal disarmament.³⁸ As early as 1948, the terminology of peace as justification for East Germany’s militarization could be seen by the SED media, particularly the East German newspapers. In various newspaper articles from 1950, there was an early call against the warmongering West Germany and a call for the peace-loving East Germany to lead the charge for disarmament. In 1950, there was still a large tie to the protection of the Soviet Union. The Soviets led the charge, to which the East Germans stood firmly behind.³⁹ The call for peace extended from the SED members to the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) of the West. This did not mean that there was an alliance between the two parties, but showed that under the guise of peace, opposing ideas could come together for a similar message. The SED intended this to be an undermining

³⁷“An alle, die den Frieden wollen. Appell des Friedensrates der DDR an die Friedensanhänger in Westdeutschland und in allen Ländern“ [“To All Who Want Peace: Appeal of the Peace Council of the GDR to the Advocates of Peace in West Germany and in all Countries on the Occasion of the World Peace Congress in Helsinki”], *Neues Deutschland*, July 28, 1965, in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1947.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹“Parteitag des Kampfes um den Frieden,” *Neues Deutschland*, July 12, 1950, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19500712-0-2-18-0>.

measure against the West German government, by once again framing the East as the peace-makers and seemingly extending an olive branch to the SPD.⁴⁰ The call, once again, for peace, combined forces with the other socialists and trade unionists, as well as Western social democrats despite other ideological differences. Together they could go against the policies of the West and Erhard's aggressive and violent government. This was the message delivered by Albert Norden, Politburo member of the Central Committee of the SED, which was published in the *Neues Deutschland*.⁴¹ In addition, the GDR protested what it called the unconstitutional suppression of West German supporters, democrats, and anti-fascists.⁴² Arguing that it was within the borders of the East German government that these things were permitted.

The German Democratic Republic supported, encouraged, and even maneuvered a unique relationship with the church within its regime. The churches took this as an opportunity to enjoy autonomy that the church in other socialist countries were not able to experience. The role of the church then came to be not one of opposition to a regime, but also not support. It was a tight rope that both the SED regime and the church walked. Christians were not unhappy with socialism. They largely just wanted certain reforms, particularly travel and housing reforms. It was this position of autonomy and even solidarity with the socialist regime, that placed the church in a position to act as a shield for dissent as the definitions of peace and human rights between the GDR and the East

⁴⁰“Antwort an SPD-Genossen: Aus der Diskussionsrede von Prof. Albert Norden. Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK der SED,” *Neues Deutschland*, November 20, 1965, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://zeffys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19651120-0-3-164-0>.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²“Die Wahrheit über Strauß: DDR-Staatssekretariat Ober den Weg zur europäischen Sicherheit,” *Neues Deutschland*, April 25, 1968, accessed May 3, 2014, <http://zeffys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19680425-0-1-159-0>.

German citizen begins to come to a crashing conflict. The next chapter, will explore the role the Church had carved for itself as a “church within socialism” and how it both supported the official and independent peace movement.

An Early Exit: Emigration

The number of people leaving East Germany for West Germany differed by decades depending upon the policy and practices of the government. Through the 1950s and 1961, the number of those leaving East Germany for the West was in the six digits, however by 1962 the number drastically decreased from 207,026 to 21, 365. This was a result of the Berlin Wall built in 1961 in an effort by the Berlin government to keep from losing more of the population. The number decreased through the 1960s. The movement of East Germans to West Germany was given a name: *Republikflucht*. On December 15, 1953, the Politburo of the SED issued measures in the fight against *Republikflucht*. Once again the rhetoric was aggressive: “West German imperialism was out to thwart not only the negotiations on the regulation of inter-zonal traffic but also the peaceful resolution of the German question.”⁴³ The accusation was that the West Germans recruited able-bodied workers to work on military production and youth that would facilitate their army. Attached to the accusation of West Germany, was an accusation against America. West Germany was a puppet of American aggression and therefore not to be trusted. The measures were given a year to work.

⁴³SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/337, Bl. 49-52, Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 83/53 der Sitzung des Zentralsekretariats der SED vom 15. Dezember 1953 [Attachment No. 4 to Protocol No. 83/53 of the Meeting of the Central Secretariat of the SED of December 15, 1953], eds., Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (1961), in the German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5029.

During this year, the German People's Police reports were to be expanded for a more "realistic" overview of *Republikflucht*. This also involved more training and a focus on the State and Central organs. In the 1950s, the question of re-unification was still unanswered and how the two states should co-exist was a hazy hypothesis. As a result, the East German state was vulnerable, and losing large numbers of citizens to the West. This was a difficult time for the East German state. Its rhetoric was aggressive, as were its policies. The difference of immigration between 1953 and 1954 was 331,390-184,198 (West German data). While there was a small number from 1953 to 1954, that experience a bump from 173, 279-270,115 in 1955. In 1956, another memorandum was published by the Politburo, in which they analyzed the reasons for the movement. Once again, the West German government was the conspirator and East Germany the peaceful victim of aggression. The flight of East Germans towards the West could be explained by many causes. The main reason for flight, appeared to be the youthful age of the émigrés. A majority of the émigrés moving west were young men and women.⁴⁴ Many left for seemingly normal reasons, such as marital differences. In some cases it was simply an adventure. Whether the adventure was encouraged by the influx of Western ideas and propaganda, or an elder German family member making the comment that when "I was your age I traveled and explored the adventurous spirit."⁴⁵ What is made clear by this declaration is that the seemingly minor issue of the *Republikflucht* was actually beyond the security agencies' ability to take care of and therefore needed other help. The largest

⁴⁴BArch P, DO 1/11/18, Bl. 25–26/44–51, eds., Dierk Hoffman, Karl-Heinz Schmidt, and Peter Skyba (1961), in German History in Documents and images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5061.

⁴⁵Ibid.

districts that had a large percentage of people leaving, close to three percent of the population annually included Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin.⁴⁶ These three districts would play a larger role in the events of 1989.

From the period 1949-1962, the majority of those who were leaving the GDR were between the ages of 18-44. This age group made up close to half those leaving the GDR and entering Germany and West Berlin. Although the numbers in 1962 were considerably lower than the numbers in previous years, the percentages were relatively the same.⁴⁷ The *Neues Deutschland* reported on June 11, 1953, prior to the beginning of the June 16, 1953 uprising, that the Politburo was addressing the issues to improve living conditions and working on food conditions and other material goods within farmers, intelligentsia, and workers.⁴⁸ The crisis of émigrés had leveled off by the 1960s, a result of the policies implemented by the SED and Walter Ulbricht, in particular the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Effectively ending a largely open border in East Germany. The GDR's need to deal with the situation and the uneasiness between the GDR and the FRG led both states to keep statistics as to the reasons and identification of those who emigrated from the GDR. While there were people who wanted to leave, the number of

⁴⁶SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/483, Bl. 15-24 and 42-47, Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der SED, Nr. 29/56, vom 19. Juni 1956 (Abschrift) [Attachment No. 4 to the Protocol of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED, No. 29/56, from June 19, 1956 (Copy)], eds., Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (1961), in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5044.

⁴⁷Ralf Rytlewski and Manfred Opp de Hipt, eds., *Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik in Zahlen. 1945/1949-1980* [The German Democratic Republic in Numbers. 1945/1949-1980], in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4080.

⁴⁸“Kommunique des Politburos des Zentralkomitees der SED vom 9. Juni 1953,” *Neues Deutschland*, June 11, 1953, accessed May 3, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19530611-0-1-7-0>.

individuals who received a legal visa or had their exit application was very few.⁴⁹ This does not mean that individuals were happy in the regime, but rather that the regime had developed strategies that would allow it to counter the movement out of East Germany.

As previously described the majority of those emigrating were youth and those of working age. In an effort to deal with the *Republikflucht*, the Central Committee of the SED deployed the Working Group for Youth to investigate. The investigation discovered that a majority of the young people who fled had significantly taken place between January and September 1960. Once again Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin were top among the districts of people leaving.⁵⁰ Many of those who fled, had been members of the FDJ. The majority who fled were employed in industry and agriculture, or skilled workers. Also a high portion of the young people who fled were teachers, university students, and students at vocational colleges.⁵¹ This was partly why the movement took place in the cities that had the highest percentage of émigrés. For example, in areas of Berlin there were technical institutes and state offices that caused the high number of émigrés to exist, because there was a high number of students, teachers, and vocational students in Berlin, in an area that was the only open crossing point in East Germany before the building of the Berlin Wall.⁵² The ease of movement in Berlin, compared to the other areas of East

⁴⁹Gary Bruce, “‘In Our District, the State Is Secure’: The East German Secret Police Response to the Events of 1989 in Perleberg District,” *Contemporary History* 14, no. 2 (May 2005): 224, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20081257>.

⁵⁰SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/16/230, SED-Hausmitteilung, Umdruck. Bezug: Darstellungsband 8, III 10 (Familien-, Jugend- und Altenpolitik) [Policies on Family, Young, and the Elderly], note 68, eds., Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 7, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5038.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

Germany, and the existence of higher education institutes meant that Berlin had larger number of emigration.

One reason that the working group believed such as an exodus existed was the failure of the *Volksammer* to reach the youth and pay attention to them and their educational development. The failure of this education resulted in a negative feeling among young Germans, who argued that developing communism deepened the rift between the two Germanies. The idea that this could continue was awful. In addition, why would the East Germans need to catch up if capitalism was so bad? While some left because of fear of punishment, marriages, or joining spouses, many fled because they believed the republic held nothing for them. The biggest issue found with the situation of movement to the West, was a lack of education.⁵³ The issue of *Republikflucht* was a serious issue that also opened the GDR's eyes to the issue of the youth movement. In order to strengthen the position of the GDR and the role of the government, it became important to address the issues of youth in socialism.

The *Junge Gemeinde* was an example of this issue, because in the eyes of the state they represented a huge threat. Another target of the early GDR as they worked to solidify power, shows early animosity to any organization that stood outside of the SED's control. While the Protestant Church would eventually find acceptance, within socialism, initially there was conflict between the Protestant Church and the SED. One of the largest sources of conflict was the *Junge Gemeinde*. The *Junge Gemeinde* was the Protestant Youth group and viewed by the GDR government as a way for the Protestant Church to undercut the FDJ and Young Pioneers.

⁵³SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV 2/16/230, eds., Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz.

As a result, the Politburo took the opportunity to formally challenge the control of the *Junge Gemeinde*. First they attacked the *Junge Gemeinde* as a cover for the imperialist West.⁵⁴ Publications discussed the subversive activity of the organization. A campaign against any Western ties to youth groups and statements made from former youth members and members of the state leadership about the *Junge Gemeinde* were to be distributed to and by the press. Additionally they were to lead full time meetings about the FDJ, encouraging mass publications of books about the policies and having widespread lectures at meetings. The FDJ was to hold celebrations for graduating members of the FDJ to honor and reward members.⁵⁵ Administratively, the attack on the *Junge Gemeinde* included inspecting schools to restrict religious instruction from impeding socialist doctrine. The administrative attacks include making sure the press was aware of the hostile activity of the *Junge Gemeinde* and made the “hostile activity” available to the press. The State Secretariat for Higher Education was instructed to monitor the necessary measures to stop any admission of active members of the *Junge Gemeinde* into Universities.⁵⁶ Once the measures had been taken, the government would then prohibit any activity held by the *Junge Gemeinde*. Protestant pastors who encouraged membership in this organization or any of the ideas from this organization were considered agents of West Germany. Those who defied the ban would be criminally prosecuted under the Law for the Protection of the Peace.⁵⁷ During this period, the

⁵⁴SAPMO-BA ZPA J IV 2/2259; ed. Frederic Hartweg, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5033.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

animosity between the church and the recognition of movement of youth outside the regime, made the *Junge Gemeinde* a threat to the regime. Erich Honecker would be chairman of the commission to implement these positions. Members of the commission also included Eric Mielke, the eventual leader of the Stasi.

Another attack on the youth work of the Protestant Church and Catholic Church in the GDR was the *Jugendweihe* (Youth Dedication). This was meant to be a replacement for the Church's confirmation. The ceremony predated the GDR and had already been popular within the Weimar republic, although initially rejected by the SED. In the 1950s, the SED changed its attitude in response to Soviet pressure. In both an oath from 1955 and 1958, the youth were called to pledge to be noble fighters for peace and socialism.⁵⁸ The purpose of the *Jugendweihe* was building the fatherland and promoting socialist ideas internationally as well. It was meant to prepare the future citizens of the GDR. Those who participated affirmed the GDR and actively stood for peace, friendship among nations, and socialism as the highest goals of progressive humanity. Youth were prepared through lectures on the formation of a socialist worldview, the future stages of life, choice of profession and the relationship among people of socialist ideas and the historical role of the GDR. They were meant to have real life connections to the difficulties and struggles that existed in building up socialism. The working class bore the great responsibility of participating. Important topics that were to be discussed included the problems of nuclear energy and socialist attitude toward work and public property.⁵⁹

⁵⁸H.G. Koch, *Staat und Kirche in der DDR [State and Church in the GDR]*, ed., Christoph Kleßmann, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4573.

⁵⁹SAPMO-BA ZPA IV 2/14/28, ed., Frederic Hartweg, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=5742.

The movement of the *Jugendweihe* not only exemplified the initial distrust of religion that characterized the 1950s and 1960s in the GDR, it also exemplified the emphasis on youth education in socialist ideology. Confirmation, however, continued to take place, particularly in rural areas. A result of the limited freedom granted to the church. Some young people went through a public *Jugendweihe* and a private confirmation, once again attesting to both the limited freedom and the role the church was able to play as an opposition to the regime.⁶⁰ The church did not give in to the demands of the SED, by completing forgoing its religious ceremony for the *Jugendweihe*. However, there were consequences for not participating in the SED's ceremony. Some youth chose to participate in both, while others openly defied the SED. The result was that the church was increasingly becoming a place for quiet defiance within the regime.

One attack made on the *Jugend Gemeinde*, was that it undermined the position of the FDJ. The FDJ was founded in 1946 as an organization to recruit German youth for the great ideals of liberty, humanism, a proactive democracy, international peace, and friendship among the nation.⁶¹ The intention was that all German boys and girls would participate in rebuilding a secure and anti-fascist fatherland that provided equal access to education, cultural institutions, equal pay for equal work, and vacation and recreation. It called on all German children who wanted a “joyful, free, happy, and peaceful future” to participate as comrade and be a member of the FDJ.⁶² Chairman of the FDJ at its inception was Erich Honecker, future First Minister of the GDR. As of the year 1959, the

⁶⁰Bernd Schaeffer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 75.

⁶¹SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/796, ed., Udo Wengst, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4484.

⁶²Ibid.

FDJ conceived itself as the voice for the next generation. It was more than just a leisure organization. Members of the FDJ participated in paramilitary training and served in the National People's Army. It waged a battle for peace and socialism against militarism and nuclear armament in West German, while still discussing the confederation of the two German states. The members of the FDJ "regard it as their honor and duty to defend, selflessly and full of sacrifice, peace, their socialist homeland, and to acquire pre-military knowledge and skills."⁶³ The FDJ was against imperialism and preparation for nuclear war in the Western zone. "It awakens in the hearts of the youth a passionate hatred for and revulsion against the militarism in West Germany, against all enemies of the youth who threaten their life and happy future."⁶⁴ The FDJ was the breeding ground for the definition of what it meant to be a GDR citizen. It was through the FDJ, that the SED hoped to appeal to the youth. It was also a comrade to all young patriots of West Germany who advocated peace and the happiness of the young generation.⁶⁵

The initial years of the GDR were unsure and unstable. The first threat to the independence of the GDR was found in its brother state, FRG. The desire by many or unification to take place between the two, left the future of the GDR unclear. Additionally the movement of the working-aged population of East Germany towards the West German state further shook the foundation of the country. In June of 1953, the uprising could have ended the control of the GDR, but the response of the government and the strengthening of the state helped to stabilize the GDR. During this time of

⁶³*Dokumente zur Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend [Documents on the History of the Free German Youth]*, eds., Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-c.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4484.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

building, the Protestant Church worked to establish itself not as an enemy of the state, but rather as the “church within socialism.” The unique position of the church made it possible for those who had issues with the GDR to have a “free space” in which to express their disapproval. The result was that by the 1970s, the GDR had stabilized and as producing a functioning government. The establishment of a youth organization and new travel policies further stabilized the GDR by the 1970s.

CHAPTER THREE

“Real existing socialism”: Church, Peace, and Militarization

The GDR during the 1970s experienced many changes. The first change was the removal of Walter Ulbricht as chancellor of the GDR and his replacement by Erich Honecker. Honecker was a member of the old guard and ushered in a period of “real existing socialism.” During this period, the leaders argued that their economic, social, and cultural policies represented socialism as it could exist in reality. Those ideas that did not conform to Marxist ideology, were justified based upon the argument of what was feasible. In what also during these years, the 1970s, that the leadership targeted Ulbricht for removal. In 1971, the SED leadership issued a message in which they argued Walter Ulbricht’s inability to lead the party, citing his advanced age, his tendency to go against the party publicly, and his coarse dealings with other Politburo members.¹ The change in leadership from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971, showed a pronounced change within the government and the policy of the GDR.

At this time the policy and compromises made with the church, along with the policies that continued to build up the military and the encouragement of the official peace council strengthens the political stability of the GDR. However, it was the creation of these institutions and the toughening of GDR politics that led to the eventual demonstrations during the latter 1980s and resulted in the collapse of the GDR. Marxism

¹Mitglieder des SED-Politbüros an das KPdSU-Politbüro und Generalsekretär L.I. Breshnew, 21. Januar 1971 [Members of the SED Politburo to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and General Secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev, January 21, 1971], ed. Andreas Herbst, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1570.

Leninist regimes of the latter twentieth century asserted a policy of peace while rejecting the militarization of the Western powers. This created an opening for the already accepted “church within socialism” in the East German regime. Peace was a common message found in Christian ideology and in the socialist regime. This means that the “church within socialism” presented a common message on which the two seemingly conflicting institutions could focus. The church united its voice behind the official movement for peace, rather than the contentious voice that existed during the 1950s. The church became a free space for movements and ideas not politically aligned with the official policy of the GDR. The 1970s was a period of political stability, while there were many, particularly intellectuals, who were opposed to the regime, the ability of the regime to crackdown on these positions, became more institutionalized. Issues that existed during this time were dealt with in a way that allowed the government to prevent a large oppositional uprising against the socialist regime.² This provided a unique opportunity for the church, within foreign policy it was able to take the cry internationally to join with the SED in one voice against the global nuclearization and to proclaim the need for protection from the West and from the militarization. This does not mean that the church was completely behind the regime, rather it allowed the church legitimacy and free reign after the concordat signed in 1978. Within this free space, the church became an arena from which anti-militarization would take place. The creation of this voice, in the late 70s and early 80s, allowed for the larger demonstrations that developed in the year 1989.

²Fulbrook, 267.

Along with the executive of the League of Protestant Churches and its chairman Bishop Albrecht Schonherr, Honecker signed the concordat in March 1978. Bishop Albrecht Schonherr put the words to the new policy: “We do not want to be a church against or alongside but we wish to be a church within socialism.”³ The church officially stood not beside, but within the regime. This helped remove the church as a unifying rallying point against the socialist regime. This idea was further encouraged by Paul Verno, member of the SED Politburo,

The line followed by our party is correct: the Churches should be more strongly at home within socialist society, and we should aim to make it possible for their power and ability to influence-both internally and externally-to be more effective for the GDR.⁴

By the 1980s, there was no longer a belief in the eventual “death” of religion, rather the continued reduction of the masses into a small active core would suffice.⁵ Religion, particularly the Protestant faith became an accepted part of the regime. So long as the church continued to follow the policies of the regime, it remained within socialism. This became a true symbol of the line held by the SED party under Chairman Honecker.

Unlike other countries in the Soviet bloc, the role of the church continued to be extremely important to the make-up and tradition of the regime. Honecker, as a leader, was concerned with the regime and the way the regime would seem an excellent opportunity to use the church to his advantage. Following in Ulbricht’s footsteps, Honecker relied on the similarities he believed existed between the church and the SED. “All citizens are entitled to the same rights and respect in working for socialism,” he argued, and because

³Dennis, 247.

⁴Schaeffer, 190.

⁵Ibid.; Burgess, 5.

the Christian example of following peace fit in well with the socialist goal of peace there would always be a place for those who held that humanitarian goal.⁶ The state further emphasized the support of the church leadership, when Bishop Schonherr referred to the “church within socialism” as a church which helped the Christian citizen and individual congregations to find their way in socialist society, both sides motivated by responsibility for the same world and the same people.⁷ Christians did not understand their citizenship purely to mean formal adherence to the laws. Their faith taught them to accept their share of responsibility for the whole.⁸ The policy of the “church within socialism” created not only a unity between leadership, but encouraged the members of the church that continued adherence to their faith would be continued adherence to the regime.

At its tenth Congress in 1981 Erich Honecker’s report to the party also covered relations between the state and the churches. The aforementioned talks (between church and state), he said, had brought new openness, understanding and readiness to arrive at constructive settlements. Foundations had been laid for an objective and sympathetic relations to progress in accordance with the Constitution.⁹ “Real existing socialism” and the agreement with the church meant that the two were able to coexist. Neither was a threat, this position meant that the 1970s was a period of social and cultural stability within the framework of the church. The policy had proved its merit and would be continued. The successors to those leading church representatives have also described an understanding of this kind between the two institutions as useful, because it allowed the

⁶*Christians and Churches*, 40.

⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 42

church both legitimacy and freedom. The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR, which united the eight provincial Evangelical Churches in the Republic, held its first Synod in 1971, the speakers described how they had undergone a process of learning and ascertaining their position. It was at this Synod that they first formulated the principle “We do not want to be a church existing alongside this society or opposed to it, we want to be a church within socialism.”¹⁰ Honecker’s words and thoughts were further used by church leadership as a means to show both their legitimacy and to publicly acknowledge the new political role of the church. The two would exist together in the framework of a socialist nation. The implication made in the published piece of propaganda, “Christians and Churches” was that the secularism under Honecker and a proper education would result in a logical and rational decline within church membership, particularly as a part of individual choice. There did not need to be an outright attack on the church and those who chose to follow the church would not betray the regime. The individual’s rights, in so much as they continued to support and push forward the socialist state, are protected in the GDR. An idea that the regime would continue to portray outwardly until its fall in 1989. The GDR and a “church within socialism” existed peacefully during the 1970s for those church members who willingly worked with the state. Christian youth who did not participate in the *Jugendweihe* and remained active members of the FDJ, experienced exclusion from universities and certain jobs.¹¹ The SED had not eased up on its expectation that the socialist regime came first.

¹⁰*Christians and Churches*, 42.

¹¹Burgess, 49.

As expressed earlier, both the SED and the church came to focus on the idea of the “church within socialism,” albeit for very different reasons and goals. As a result, it became important particularly for leaders of the church and the GDR emphasized that socialism and Christianity could and did coexist in the East German society. The “Report on Christians and Churches,” published by the GDR, described the Christian village of Gruna on the outskirts of Berlin. Gisela Gunther, CDU member, served as the mayor on recommendation from her party for the village of Gruna. Gunther discusses that as a Christian she has a duty to perform her best for her town, and argues that she is commanded by the Bible to do just that.¹² Once again the focus of the party agenda and the Christian Church is the same: the aim of socialism is progress and moving forward. Modernization and progress was demonstrated through the existence of a bathroom in every home. Gunther worked side by side with Christian Billinger, the village chairman and member of the SED, and the village parson to create a peaceable place to live. The GDR emphasized that different groups could coexist in the socialist state, because they emphasized common socialist goals. The priority was the socialist goals. There was not a need for the different parties to separate and create their own self-interests. Working together towards the common theme of peace and progress and improvement of human dignity, made it only natural that the Christians and socialists could coexist.

This can be seen in the role of the everyday Christian throughout the GDR. Christians, according to the GDR publication, do not need to hide. Dr. Hans Ladstatter, a Catholic doctor from Bergen claims:

The GDR offers Christian citizens a guarantee that they can live entirely within their faith without having to make any sacrifices in their material conditions, their financial position or their jobs. As far as Christian teaching

¹²*Christians and Churches*, 37.

is concerned, the moral demands for sincerity, truthfulness and justice, neighborly love, self-sacrifice and helpfulness are at one with imperatives in socialist morality.¹³

Unlike the Soviet Union or Poland, where faith found itself in opposition to the regime, the citizens of the GDR found themselves in a position where they could practice their faith openly, according to the SED. The truth for many Christians was more precarious, they were able to claim Christianity and attend church, but also had to accept certain SED policies and ceremonies above their own faith. Failure to toe the party line would and did result in being barred from certain advancements such as attending university.¹⁴ The position of the church helped create cultural stability within the regime, but the failure of party leadership to fully accept the church and cooperate with other oppositional groups opened the door for a growing oppositional leadership.

As long as the message and their words coincided with the mission of the SED, Christians had a “free space.” The goal emphasized by both the Christians and the socialists included sacrifice of individual interest and emphasis on a higher purpose. There was a convenient amnesia in regards to the fact that religion and atheism were each other’s antithesis. However, the SED regime and even the Evangelical leadership would most likely point to this as a success of a true separation of church and state and idea that they truly believed they had brought to fruition.¹⁵ The goal of a truly separate church and state had merely been a piece a paper in the postwar German government of 1919, and was portrayed as being an actuality by 1970s. Once again, the issue of reality for the GDR citizen and the propaganda issued by the regime were in contrast with each other.

¹³*Christian and Churches*, 25.

¹⁴Burgess, 5.

¹⁵*Christian and Churches*, 25.

The church had limited freedom, because failure to “comply” with all aspects of the regime resulted in a loss of rights for the citizens. In alliance with the mayor of Gruna, and Dr. Hans Ladstetter, other prominent GDR citizens made the argument that their role as Christians was to perform their job for the strength of the socialist society.¹⁶ The purpose, first and foremost, of the GDR citizen was to help establish the socialist state. This meant that every citizen must bring their strengths and work to build that society. The leaders of the Christian Church, saw their role in the regime not as voices of doom, but rather as leaders both in Christianity and socialism. Pastor Manfred Sult, President of the Federation of Evangelical Free Church Congregations in the GDR took this even further when he argued that the role of the Christian as a “church within socialism” was important, because it was a reminder that they were one body, one living community. It was their most important role to serve others within their community, and that meant discipline at work and charity at home. This was an important insight into the role that church fulfilled during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The emphasis throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, was that Christian work ethic and diligence were for the purpose of human duties and human rights, the same purpose of socialist progress in science and technology. The two were not mutually exclusive. Dietrich Affeld, a teacher who was head of the Greifswald synod, phrased it thus: “if we earnestly wish to live as Christians, then we are earnestly citizens of our socialist country for our commitment to socialism does not derive from adjustment, but from choice”¹⁷ This was a choice that the staunchest socialist would argue was simple to make because to turn away from socialist

¹⁶*Christian and Churches*, 25.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 27.

goals would mean turning away from the Christian goals and focus. Together the church and state were establishing a stable regime.

However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, while the church was not in opposition or on the outside of socialism, it also was not a quiet bystander that always fell into party-line. A new education policy in 1978 alerted many Christians to a potential danger of their peaceful society. While peace had been a continual mutual policy between the church and SED, the government's internal policies were threatening to negate that message. The Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR met with leaders of the government about the introduction of military instruction into schools, which would affect ninth and tenth grade of general education schools.¹⁸ In the early stages the Conference appeared to be responding merely to rumors, and so they turned to the GDR for specific information. The dialogue that existed between the SED and its representatives to the church allowed for the Conference to express their reservation and objections, although these were seemingly ignored as the SED continued with its plan.¹⁹ This was a sign that the "church within socialism" meant that the church could coexist but was not equal, nor could it surpass the socialist agenda. The Undersecretary for Church Matters expressed the plan that would result in coed military education for ninth graders that would continue in their tenth grade year. The military education would be weapon free, and was defended on the foundation of similar education practices in other

¹⁸Konferenz der Evangelischen Kircheleitung in der DDR zur Einführung des Wehrunterrichts vom 14. Juni 1978, eds., Hans-Jürgen Fuchs and Eberhard Petermann, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/section.cfm?section_id=15.

¹⁹Ibid.

Soviet bloc states and the fear of NATO aggression.²⁰ The terminology of both the East German government and the church had come to revolve around peace as their main objective. Therefore, according to SED policy and church ideology, the regime focused the issue of military education on defense, but the church members once again found themselves faced with the hypocrisy of the SED leadership and GDR peace council.

In addition to the non-weapon military education, the SED also announced that in 1979 tenth grade boys would take part in a two week pre-military camp that would include weapons training. Once again the argument for this claim was that the GDR's role was to ensure the country's defensive readiness in order to safeguard their preservation.²¹ The GDR relied on Article 23 of their constitution which called for the protection of peace as well as relying on the law of civil defense and youth education for support of this new practice. The Undersecretary to the Churches insisted that Christians were fulfilling their brotherly love by defending their neighbors and country. Further, he argued that while participation would be one hundred percent, the use of weapons would be purely voluntary for those who had conscientious objections due to their faith. Their role could be fulfilled through building units.²² The Protestant Churches' fears were not allayed by the Undersecretary's assurances. The Protestants argued that increased military education would hinder peace and create a military focused youth. In addition, they believed that this would hinder their role in the peace movement particularly their testimonials to foreign powers. This was a clear step towards militarization and increased

²⁰Konferenz der Evangelischen Kircheleitung in der DDR zur Einführung des Wehrterritoriums vom 14. Juni 1978, eds., Hans-Jürgen Fuchs and Eberhard Petermann.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

power by the SED. Despite assurances that they had been heard, the GDR policy of military education continued.²³ Many Christians and individuals opposed the new policy were able to avoid military service with weapons through the position of construction soldiers (*Bausoldaten*) and engaged in what became known as the unofficial peace council that attacked not only the foreign policies of the Western powers, but also their internal policies as well, a point that will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

“Church within socialism” existed, but it was not completely passive. The church was not an arm of the state, but held a unique position as an independent entity within the regime when the disagreement over pre-military education. Representatives of the church promised their support to those parents who could not conscientiously allow their children to participate, while worrying that nonparticipation might be seen as a sign that Christians were politically unreliable and the autonomy they had come to cherish would end. The end of Christian autonomy did not happen, although those who voiced concern could find themselves or their church under surveillance. It also helped set up a more active resistance within the confines of the church that became gradually more irritated with lack of reform at the government level during the latter 1980s.²⁴ While the church grappled with their role in socialism when they could not support the regime, the GDR continued to present a front that emphasized compliance and support from its citizens. The GDR claimed that there were no conscientious objections to military service, because of course they were not permitted and that “all young men who are fit,” fulfill

²³Konferenz der Evangelischen Kircheleitung in der DDR zur Einführung des Wehrterritories vom 14. Juni 1978. eds., Hans-Jürgen Fuchs and Eberhard Petermann.

²⁴Ibid.

their duty because of the necessity of hard work and military protection to create a strong and peaceful GDR. The GDR did admit that there were those who made the decision due to their largely Christian beliefs not to serve with a weapon, and they fulfilled their national duty by serving in the construction unit.²⁵ This became a large point of contention between the GDR and the “church within socialism” that led to other groups’ dissension. The church did not propose a revolution in the GDR, but in this moment its dialogue of open discontent with the regime would help cement its place in the middle of the call for reform of the 1980s.

The role of military education and its challenge to the church within socialism was preceded by issue of conscription as mentioned in the previous chapter. Very little from the 1960s to the 1980s changed in purpose and philosophy with the mandatory military law. However, the size and expectations grew exponentially. The message found in the state newspaper, presented very clear expectations. It was once again the terror and aggression of the West and NATO that drove the issue, but it would be the East and socialism that would successfully rise to the occasion, because right was on their side.

The law takes into account since the introduction of conscription in 1962 changes occurred in society that contributes to increased demands on the socialist forces in the 80's [...]. It will help to strengthen the Republic and the readiness to defend its citizens. This is necessary in view of [...] the aggressive circles of NATO threats to peace, the minister stressed. Still need socialism, needs peace plowshares and swords. Members and reservists of the NVA will watch together with the classes and brothers in arms from the USSR and the other countries of the Warsaw Pact for the fact that the achievements of socialism remain untouched.²⁶

²⁵*Christians and Churches*, 21.

²⁶Tagung der obersten Volksvertretung in Berlin, *Neues Deutschland*, March 26, 1982, accessed June 8, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19820326-0-1-4-0>.

The newspaper references the swords into plowshares movement that was first expressed by the Soviets. The need to defend the Republic was in the name of peace and tied itself to the goals of the Soviets and Warsaw Pact. East German peace, the need for socialism, and Western aggression continue to be the reason for the need for conscription. However the issue is further exasperated by the need for higher numbers. The “aggression” of NATO and the West came to be mirrored in the GDR, despite its ardent policies for peace. The hypocrisy was not lost on its citizens, but the call by the citizens was reformed and the view of Western Germany and the United States was one of the aggression by many.

A major stress of the official peace council in the GDR was on NATO’s dual track plan. NATO made it clear that they would continue to threaten deployment of nuclear weapons in the event that the states in Warsaw Pact did not stop stationing SS-20 missiles. The dual track plan was issued because of the threat of the SS-20 missiles which were more highly developed than previous Soviet missiles and believed to pose a greater threat to the security and peace of the NATO countries. The plan was to create a deterrent to the missile program of the East and provide safety for their country.²⁷ The dual track could present a real threat to the GDR and became an easy rallying point for members of the regime.

In 1982, eighty members of the East German opposition signed the Berlin Appeal. This was in retaliation to NATO and the failure of the GDR official peace council. The Appeal argued that the only type of warfare that the world needed to be concerned about was nuclear warfare. The Appeal questioned the necessity for having weapons if the

²⁷Ministerial Communiqué: Special Meeting of Foreign and Defense Ministers, Brussels December 12, 1979, accessed June 8, 2014 <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c791212a.htm>.

nuclear warfare was the problem. Therefore, the only answer was to get rid of weapons. Without weapons, Europe would become a nuclear-free zone. This was a problem that was even more frightening for East and West Germany because they found themselves facing off against each other. The threat of nuclear war means that civil defense was not necessary and therefore should not be used or maintained. The alternative was a call for true civil service, feed the hungry and help the needy rather than spending money on defense and making weapons.²⁸

The Hypocrisy behind GDR Peace Policy

As the militarization of the GDR continued, the protests become more widespread and outside of previously understood safe places. The compulsory military education in schools was protested by Christians, parents and teens. It was this militarization that created the “swords into ploughshares” movement as an opposition to the state. As Childs argues, this could have been a very easy moment for the government to merge this protest into their own movement.²⁹ The “swords into ploughshares” sculpture had been a Soviet creation by a Soviet artist that the Soviet Union gave the sculpture to the United Nations as a symbol of peace that would stand in New York. As militarization continued to build both in the East and West, and issues such as the military education in school became more prevalent, people began to wear the patches of “swords into ploughshares.” Those who wore the emblem had it torn off of their clothes.³⁰ The patches worn by young

²⁸“Berliner Appell – Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen” [“The Berlin Appeal: Make Peace without Weapons”], January 25, 1982, ed., Wolfgang Büscher, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1134.

²⁹Childs, *The Fall of the GDR*, 43.

³⁰Ibid.

children and pacifists were not innately anti-communists or anti East, in fact in New York the emblem sat as a symbol of the Soviet Union. This could have been an easy move for the East German government to bring the protestors into the fold, instead children were expelled from school. The swords into plowshares became a position of defiance largely due the inefficiency of the government to keep up and change. This was an act of defiance that would help the churches in their creation as a safe place for revolution, but this position was not inevitable, rather a blunder committed by the government.

The SED used its socialist platform to adhere to a policy of peace and positivity of the Eastern militarization versus the aggression of the West. This hypocrisy did not sit well with all citizens and within the free space created by the Protestant Church, producing early opposition movements.³¹ The movements were not loud and open, but rather created their own form and space. These movements also did not stand against the regime, as a whole, but rather challenged one or two options, for example ecological, human rights, and peace. In some cases, there were more traditional and open forms of opposition. One such open form of opposition could be seen in the politically motivated suicide of East German pastor Oskar Brusewitz who committed suicide by publicly lighting himself on fire in opposition to the placement of nuclear weapons on German soil.³² Additionally opposition emerged through the call for an alternative to the construction soldier that would be truly separate from military action. However, this call was rejected outright by the SED. The official peace council highlighted discontent

³¹Gary Bruce, “‘In Our District, the State Is Secure’: The East German Secret Police Response to the Events of 1989 in Perleberg District,” 233.

³²Dennis 237.

within the GDR, when it failed to appeal to all issues found in the GDR and emphasized the lack of a true outlet, so the people were forced to find a way to express the discontent. Fortunately this was found through the establishment of the “church within socialism,” because there existed a space for expression of peace outside of simple party slogans.

The propaganda of the GDR and the necessity of its message of peace, once again created a unique position for opposition within East Germany. The Evangelical Church in Germany continued to provide a place outside of state control, because it was an institution that was not state created. As mentioned before this outlet did not undermine the regime and was often under surveillance. The church provided a necessary free space while also providing for the existence of a socialist state. However, the pluralism of the West and the propaganda of the East, would act as a barrier to this movement. Part of the barrier that was created was tied directly to the issue of rearmament and militarization. After the Third Reich, Germany was left to rebuild, but as an occupied and divided state. This represented a challenge not only for the creation of government, but also for non-state institutions. Additionally, they were faced with creating a post-Nazi agenda and challenged with the role of their institutions under the Nazi regimes. As a result militarization and rearmament were on the forefront of the church leaders’ mind, a factor that both the FRG and GDR used to their advantage.³³ When the *Kirchentag* was held in Dresden, this became perfect propaganda for the GDR. It was the perfect opportunity to show the connection between church agenda and state agenda. It contrasted Western

³³Benjamin Pearson, “The Pluralization of Protestant Politics: Public Responsibility, Rearmament, and Division at the 1950s Kirchentage,” *Central European History* 43, no. 2 (June 2010): 284, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27856184>.

aggression and lack of cohesion with the unified policy of peace in the East. This move helped to solidify the power of the regime.³⁴

The peace movement as it existed in the 1970s and 1980s was divided between the official and the unofficial movement. The official movement, supported by the State, was one that could be supported by members of the unofficial movement as it stood against nuclear rearmament and fought for human rights and against what it declared were “imperialist” wars such as Vietnam. The issue, though, was the lack of freedom of expression. Rather than argue for the slogans mandated by the state with no access to freedom of thought or expression and with no ability to stand out against the military service law, people needed another outlet.³⁵ It was not that there was an official movement and an unofficial movement that stood in opposition. There was an official movement and then there was a need for more.

This is why the peace movement always has to be driven forward from the grass roots. People have to refuse to go along with the system. Put in a totally naïve way: there won't be any missiles if no missiles are produced. And who produces them? Workers. That's where we have to start, and there I think the question of unilateral disarmament is good. To start unilaterally with yourself: don't go to the army, don't produce armaments or [war] toys, contribute to teaching peace, starting with very simple things. Wars cannot be prevented by preparing for them, but rather by teaching peace.³⁶

The peace movement continued to center around the issue of militarization, nuclear weapons, and human rights.³⁷ The issue of militarization in the GDR in 1981 was concerned with the mandatory service law. Although conscientious objectors to the use of weapons could choose to serve the GDR as a construction soldier, they were still required

³⁴Pearson, 287.

³⁵Traude Ratsch:”Ich persönlich bin kein Pazifist“[“Personally, I am not a Pacifist”].

³⁶Ibid.

to go through a socialist education and to receive military training in school. This continued to be a point of major contention in the GDR, and in the spring of 1981 a petition circulated by three church workers from Dresden called for the introduction of civilian service as a true alternative to military service.³⁸ This was not the first time someone had written or spoken out against the lack of a true alternative for unarmed military service in the NVA. This policy was different than previous attempts that had existed since the alternative to the mandatory service law had been announced. The petition was intended for more than just a church audience.³⁹ The signatures gathered for this petition became known as the Social Peace Service (*Sozialer Friedensdienst*). It was not sent to State or church leadership, but rather was sent to the synods in the fall and then forwarded to the government.⁴⁰ The text appealed to the younger generation and to the Protestant Church groups and particularly the combination in the *Junge Gemeinde*.⁴¹ As ideas circulated, many who signed were attracted to the concept that peace was more than a slogan or a piece of propaganda, but should be practiced. It was a test to the State, would they put their words into action?

Unfortunately the proposal was largely ignored, and the SED flatly rejected any civilian alternative to military service. Those who attempted to meet with state representatives, were often small in number and very rarely did an official actually meet with them. On the rare occasion that this took place, the individuals took the opportunity

³⁸“Eine Welt ohne Militär – das wäre eine Alternative” [“A World without the Military – that Would Be an Alternative”], *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 7, 1982, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2087.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

to discuss the reforms to the construction soldiers, particularly those who wanted a peaceful alternative but were still forced into pre-military training. Also the shortage of health and service professions or other helpful and peaceful professions that could serve as an alternative to military service provoked the call for reform of the military service law.⁴² The need for defense was too important to the regime within the early 1980s that a truly civilian option seemed to go against the needs of the regime.

The unofficial movement took place within the walls of some Protestant Churches in the GDR, because this was an area where the 1978 concordant protected some freedoms that were not protected outside of the position of the church. They were not the rights of citizens but the rights of the church, a point that Erich Honecker took as an opportunity to challenge. He challenged that some leaders of the Protestant Church were engaging in activities that were intended to undermine the position of the church and the state.⁴³ Since March 6, 1978, the GDR and the Conference of the Protestant Church Leadership have created a good relationship, in which the leadership of the church had given their support. However, April 7, 1982, leading members of the Protestant Church, once again gave their support to the church within socialism, while at the same time proclaiming that they must go beyond the GDR policy of peace, because it was the Christian message required them to do.⁴⁴ The church used its position as a symbol of peace and as a semi-autonomous entity to propose a change in the policy of the regime.

⁴²“Eine Welt ohne Militär – das wäre eine Alternative,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*.

⁴³Telex by Erich Honecker to the First Secretaries of the SED District and County Leaderships and to Heinz Keßler, Chief of the Main Political Administration of the National People’s Army Berlin (April 16, 1982), in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1977.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Honecker accused the leading members of the Protestant Church for looking out for imperialist means to create issues within the position of the workers and others. He argued that it can only be a guise to distort the peace policies of the GDR because, an independent movement was not needed prior to 1978.⁴⁵ He also argued that many church leaders unfairly called for a lessening of the military, something that would not be found in a capitalist country.⁴⁶ In 1983, the “Women for Peace” called on church leaders to provide aid in their current plight. A woman and two young men were arrested during their World Peace Day for subversive agitation. The letter to the church leadership challenged the idea that there was freedom but then the right to thinking freely or being a pacifist put them at odds with their government. They said that only within the space provided could they speak openly. The women challenged the idea that the church leadership could continue to keep quiet. If so, they charged that “one day all Christians promoting peace and all non-Christian pacifists will one day disappear behind prison walls.”⁴⁷

The creation of Peace Decades and Workshops, or government sponsored peace rallies, allowed for a way for those disillusioned with the regime or unhappy with the lack of kept promises to have a say. The use of the term peace and the call for no more weapons evolved into a call for civil and human rights. It was an attack on the unkept promises of the regime. It made the regime nervous and Stasi informers left many notes on the churches and their work. The autonomous peace circles in the GDR existed within

⁴⁵Telex by Erich Honecker to the First Secretaries of the SED.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Women for Peace, Christians, and Pacifists in the GDR – Enemies of the State? (Autumn 1983), ed., Bernhard Pollmann, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=174.

the Protestant Church, their safe area and from there they filtered out into the population. A member of the peace movement in Jena spoke about the different work outside the general population and the work of the peace council in the GDR. The people who participated were looking for a way to express more than just the party message. They participated in often unobtrusive ways, such as a moment of silence on Christmas. Some church leaders placed their support behind these groups, while other church leaders and parishioners viewed these tactics as pointless against a powerful regime.⁴⁸ The opposition was gradual and initially small, but there was a place and a method for those discontented with the regime to express themselves within the church and the message of peace.

Moderate Emigration during the 1970s and early 1980s

The number of those leaving from East Germany to West Germany after Erich Honecker came to power remained largely consistent from 1971 to 1984 in regards to legal emigration between about 8,000-12,000 re-settlers.⁴⁹ The number jumped to 34,982 legal re-settlers in 1984, and remained high for the rest of the latter 1980s, although 1985-1987 were considerably lower than the other periods.⁵⁰ The number of escapees that resettled in the West were considerably lower than in the 1960s.⁵¹ Dissatisfaction the regime developed towards the mid-1980s period. When it came to border relations with the Western government, Erich Honecker followed a hardline policy and believed that it

⁴⁸Traude Ratsch: "Ich persönlich bin kein Pazifist" ["Personally, I am not a Pacifist"].

⁴⁹*Mauerbau und Mauerfall. Ursachen – Verlauf – Auswirkungen* [The Building and Fall of the Wall. Causes – Course – Effects], Hans Hermann Hertle, Konrad H. Jarausch and Christoph Kleßmann, eds., in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=824.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

was important that “the continued demarcation of the socialist GDR from the imperialistic FRG is the most effective answer to the reactionary-nationalistic, anti-Communist policy of the FRG’s ruling circles.”⁵² The historian Jürgen Kuczynski presented this argument in a response that challenged the West German call that the East-West border of Germany should be closed. Using Honecker’s words and his own notions, Kuczynski, argued that the reason for the divide was to prevent the spread of capitalist and fascist ideas that would weaken and corrupt the GDR. He argued that many in the East had friends and loved ones in the West, and that these true friends, those that they had read “Marx and Heine and Hölderlin” would want the East to remain separate.⁵³ Eastern Germany had an identity that Kuczynski felt needed to be protected. The West would continue to be dominated by an imperialist system, while the East would remain free.⁵⁴ The real issue of losing citizens to the West, made Honecker’s hardline position necessary. The hardline became once again apart of the need to fight for peace against an aggressive West Germany.

While Kuczynski and Honecker supported the policy, the dissident Robert Havemann’s “Ten Theses” on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the GDR attacked the emigration and travel policies between East and West Germany. In his fifth point, Havemann argued that the suppression of travel to the West and the closed “Wall” resulted in the impression that the opponents to the GDR were stronger and more

⁵²Jürgen Kuczynski, "Abgrenzung" ["Demarcation"], *Neues Deutschland*, February 10, 1971, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 9, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=93.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

powerful than the government itself and that the policies followed by the GDR, led people to believe that there was a fear of a mass exodus like that of 1961.⁵⁵ He encouraged lowering the age of travel to the West in order to enhance the state of the GDR.⁵⁶ This was a sign that the message of the people was not a dying and weakening regime, but one whose policies needed to be eased.

This division seemed cemented on September 19, 1973, when the GDR and the FRG joined the United Nations as two separate countries. The Foreign Minister of the GDR, Otto Winzer and the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, Walter Scheel both addressed General Assembly of the United Nations in recognition of their acceptance. Winzer's acceptance highlighted the difficult path of the GDR and the sacrifices made by the people to separate itself from the imperialism of the Third Reich and the current Western policies. The focus was on the "peace-loving socialist" country that wants to maintain world peace and international security.⁵⁷ Scheel's acceptance, contrastingly, highlighted the FRG's desire not to remain divided out of a choice made by other nations. However, the Basic Treaty of December 1972, regulated relations between the two parts of Germany and seemed to assure the FRG that problems would not escalate between the two. The Basic Treaty provided the guidelines by which the two sides of Germany would reach agreements, focusing on peace and avoiding threats of

⁵⁵Robert Havemann, "So schwindet der letzte Rest des Vertrauens dahin..." ["And the Last Bit of Trust Fades Away..."], *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 1, 1979, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1174.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷*Bulletin*, Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic, no. 114, September 20, 1973, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 13, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1684.

violence and the two states adhering to policies set by the United Nations.⁵⁸ Scheel ended his speech with the goal that the FRG will work towards peace in Europe, but also to “regain unity in free self-determination”⁵⁹ This represented a reminder that while the regime may have been seen as a hardline, the threat of being reunified by the FRG at the expense of the socialist ideal seemed real.

The peace movement in the GDR, really begins its ascent to power and control during the late 70s and early 80s. It became an issue of Honecker, rather than Ulbricht. The “aggression” of NATO and the Americans became the thing around which the GDR might rally behind. The placing of nuclear weapons on German soil, facilitated the build-up of the peace movement in both Western and Eastern Germany. In East Germany, the unofficial movement also grew, as people were called upon by the regime to acknowledge that the “evil” nuclear build-up occurred only on the Western side, and the GDR continued to view the buildup of nuclear weapons and the militarization of the state as necessary to ensure peace, it allowed for the emergence of more opposition. Ministers who had previously existed within the confines of the 1978 concordat, now felt it necessary to use their position to call out the hypocrisy of the regime and the falseness that rang through the party line. The freedom and protection offered to the church as a result of the 1978 church concordat helps to ensure the growth of an oppositional group in a country without free speech. It is from using the words and expressions of the regime

⁵⁸*The Bulletin*, vol. 20, n. 38. Published by the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (Bundespresseamt), in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 13, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=97.

⁵⁹*Bulletin*, Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic, no. 114, September 20, 1973.

itself and from the loopholes created within the government, which calls for reform and change can take place.

CHAPTER FOUR

Inevitable Revolution?

On November 9, 1989, televisions around the world broadcast news of what had previously been considered impossible, hundreds of people crossing from the East to West along the Berlin Wall. Celebrations were broadcast globally. The scene was vibrant and joyful, people danced across the wall and climbed across what would have previously resulted in their death. The event did not mean that happily ever after occurred the very next day, but eventually through much discussion and work the East and West were unified in 1990. How did the GDR, an established state, that had gained recognition and up until 1988 held by the Soviet powers, collapse in a year?

Needing and Wanting Reform within Socialism

Many East Germans and historians have argued this point. It was not, however, the simple case of one year suddenly resulting in the end of an established forty year regime. As discussed in the previous chapters, the policies of the GDR from the previous thirty years set the stage for a situation in which an aging regime had lost touch with the needs of the people. The militarization of the regime, the hypocrisy of the peace movement, the establishment of the church as a “free space,” and the policy toward emigration set a stage ripe for distrust and upset with the regime. In the spring of 1986, Erich Honecker released a report of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, in which he reviewed the success of the GDR and the economy. He declared

that improvements to the economy, science, education, and defense had occurred. His claim held that new modernized apartments improved the living conditions of 7.2 million citizens, improved daycare for the parents that desired this for their children (73 percent) and that since 1971, 46,772 classrooms and 2,041 school gymnasiums had been built.¹ Still following more strict communist economic policies, Honecker wanted to show off the economic success and appeal to the good that the GDR had established for the people of the state. According to the report, the actual income of citizens doubled and care for children, working mothers, and young families had increased. The GDR and SED continued to belong to the entire people and to work for good of the people and the happiness of the working people.² Honecker was holding tightly to the regime and the policies of old and established the evidence to prove that this had occurred, even if the average day to day life of the citizen did not support this.

Despite Honecker's assurance of the regime's success and the promise that the SED was working for the good of the people, oppositional groups continued to meet in as many public and private forums as they could. The Stasi targeted these movements and as the peace groups began to develop some issues in their meetings, they began to face some push back. The issue began to go beyond just peace and opened up the discussion for human rights. Dissidents Wolfgang Templin, Ralph Hirsh, and Peter Grimm opened the Initiative for "Peace and Human Rights." The issue had become more serious, as individuals who stood up for peace were prosecuted and criminalized, in both the West

¹Bericht des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands an den XI. Parteitag der SED (17.-21. April 1986). Berichterstatter: Genosse Erich Honecker [Report of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany at the 11th Party Congress of the SED (April 17-21, 1986). Given by Comrade Erich Honecker] ed. Günter Benser, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1666.

²Ibid.

and the East. Despite their efforts to hold a human rights seminar within the peace circles, they were often rebuffed.³ The failure of the GDR to accommodate the unofficial peace council, which went against their regime and acceptance, led the peace movement to put their support behind human rights. These human rights included freedom of speech and thought and the right to protest within the regime. As the 1980s continued, the regime began to have more direct conflict with the people and with the opposition movements that previously opposed an aspect of the regime but not the regime itself. While within the program itself there were issues as to how it should be organized, what became clear was that the desire to ensure a human rights connection to the peace movement became increasingly important, but the organization wanted a clear front and it was important that there was trust within the ranks.⁴ The movement needed to be organized and unified against the regime. It was becoming less an informal meeting of like-minded individuals within a “free space,” but now with even more purpose.

As had happened previously in 1977, a West Berlin rock concert in 1987 resulted in confrontations between East Berlin youth and the police. The youth took the opportunity to protest against the lack of reforms and to show their distaste with the strict regime. There were shouts for Mikhail Gorbachev and an end to the wall that divided their city.⁵ This was largely a youthful confrontation against the regime. This incident

³Sprecher der Initiative “Frieden und Menschenrechte” (Menschenrechtsseminar) [“Spokesperson for the “Peace and Human Rights” Initiative (Human Rights Seminar)”] ed., Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 13, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1177.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Robert J. McCartney, “East German Police, Rock Fans Clash in Berlin for the Third Straight Night,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 10, 1987, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1118.

represented only one example of problems with the youth in the GDR. Concerned with the situation of the youth of the GDR, Walter Friedrich, director of the Central Institute for Research on Youth, sent a memorandum to the leader of FDJ, Egon Krenz in 1988. Friedrich argued that “we are at the beginning of a period of cultural upheaval” and that “we will have to judge our socialist society more strongly.”⁶ Friedrich began the memorandum by suggesting that there was a cultural crisis, something that had been largely ignored by the SED leadership. He called for a re-evaluation of the socialist policy and questioned its effectiveness, again an issue ignored and rejected by the SED. In Friedrich’s second point, he argued that there was not enough recognition of the changes in youth mindset, particularly that there seemed to be miscommunication between the youth and the SED leadership. There was a failure to recognize the “new reality.” In this memorandum, Friedrich, argues that the youth of the GDR experienced higher self-esteem and self-determination. This was a factor that made the “from the ashes to greatness” regime excited, but with self-esteem and self-determination. Friedrich argued also this came an anti-authoritarian attitude. This attitude was distrustful of organizations and people that did not provide realistic and truthful information. They were looking for something to follow, and the informal alternatives to these organizations were appealing, especially the church. This additionally explained their need to freely express themselves in voting and participation in social movements. They had only largely found their voice through the church group and other organizations.⁷ Their desires

⁶Walter Friedrich, “Einige Reflexionen über geistig-kulturelle Prozesse in der DDR” [“Some Reflections on Mental and Cultural Processes in the GDR”], November 21, 1988, ed., Gerd Rüdiger Stephan, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1178.

⁷Ibid.

and need for socialist values did not change: peace, human rights, social security were still important. However, the way in which they achieved those desires needed to change. Friedrich, argued that there needed to be a recognition of the new independence and change within the youth.

In 1988, the SED sponsored the annual memorial march for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. As the official memorial called for freedom and the demonstrators marched through East Berlin, an unofficial group from the aforementioned Peace and Human Rights group held up banners with a banner quoting Rosa Luxemburg: “freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.”⁸ The undercover Stasi, quickly took down the banner and arrested three or four of the young men. While the group gathered protested, according to the West German reporter there was no recognition of what was happening from those participating in the official march. The unofficial group were corralled, not carted off, but prohibited from leaving or participating in the walk. Any attempt to bring attention to themselves, was stopped by the Stasi, but there was no acknowledgement of why there were held until a police van arrived. The group was put into the van and their credentials were taken.⁹ The regime found itself unable to deal with the unofficial movement that seemed to be growing. The unofficial movement found themselves unable to deal with the hypocrisy of the established GDR peace movement.

⁸E. Mielke *, “Sie sind bei dieser Demonstration unerwünscht” [“You Are Not Wanted at This Demonstration”], *tageszeitung*, January 18, 1988, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed May 3, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1186. *pseudonym?

⁹Ibid.

And the Year was 1989...

An additional issue that created problems for the regime, was the exposure of the fraudulent elections on May 7, 1989. In an interview with the West German newspaper *tageszeitung*, Protestant pastor Rainer Eppelmann talked openly about the fraudulent elections that took place in May 1989. He claimed that this was not the first time that fraudulent elections had taken place, simply the first time that they could be proven. Eppelmann argued that in 1986, his peace group participating in counting the votes and had counted more “no” votes than were later announced, however at the time they could not speak of solid evidence only a tendency, now they had solid proof: “the newspapers referred to 1,611 “no” votes [...] but were present for the vote count [...] and came up with over 4,700 ‘no’ votes.”¹⁰ This number was given by the official results of each polling station to the newspapers. A formal petition was filed, but Eppelmann remained reticent as to whether anything would happen. However, he believed that the rules should be followed because the problems could not be ignored anymore.¹¹ The discrepancies were reported in samizdat pamphlets, passed to Western reporters. “We could prove the people who ruling our country were criminal, Eppelmann says, they weren’t satisfied with 70 or 80 percent (of the vote). They needed almost 100. It was sick-sick and criminal”¹² The fraudulent elections were seen as not only a betrayal of trust, but also a sign of the desperation and failure of the GDR to change. Through their actions, they not

¹⁰Birgit Meding, “Glasnost gegen Wahlbetrug” [“Glasnost against Election Fraud”], *tageszeitung*, May 25, 1989, in German History in Documents and Images, accessed June 7, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1179.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Andrew Curry, “Before the Fall,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 19, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20700623>.

only lied to the citizens of the GDR, which was not a new betrayal, but also broke its own laws and continued to deny its people a voice in the state. As Eppelmann discussed the issue, his concern was not the punishment that the perpetrators of this scheme would receive, but that procedure and the law were not followed. The failure of the government to adhere to its own laws, was a huge betrayal. One that left many citizens feeling like they had to do something.

To exasperate the disapproval and angst of the East German people, in September 1989 Hungary opened its borders to Austria.¹³ Many East Germans on vacation in Hungary took advantage of this unprecedented opportunity. This created a panic amongst the leaders of the SED, because it led to a mass exodus of the people.¹⁴ With this movement, there existed even more pressure on the leaders. In addition, the falsification of communal elections put pressure on leadership. The actions that took place during the latter 1980s exacerbated the building disapproval that had occurred during the early 1980s. People were angry and began to publicly protest. This was a unique situation that existed in 1989, not because it was inevitable situation, but because of choices made by the leadership within the SED and the decision made outside of the regime.

Prior to allowing movement between East and West Berlin in November 1989 and Hungary's opening of the Austrian border, it had not been impossible for East Germans to emigrate legally, rather it was a tedious process that was often denied. The majority of applicants who were accepted were elderly and those with "urgent family matter" to deal

¹³Childs, *Fall of the GDR*, 164.

¹⁴There has been much research over the importance of the 'exit' strategy in the GDR revolution and throughout the Eastern bloc. Steven Plaff, Carol Mueller, and David Childs have written extensively on this topic. While they can agree that the decision of Hungary to open its borders with Austria, created a strain on the population and the SED. The exact correlation that the 'exit' had with the revolution remains more debatable.

with. The application process was difficult and often resulted in the loss of rights and privileges in East Germany, such as private property and job prospects.¹⁵ According to data released from Stasi files, for every one hundred East Germans, two applied to emigrate in 1980, a number that rose to nearly twelve in every hundred by June 1989.¹⁶ The number and the variety of reasons that individuals were leaving became a source of concern for the SED. Erich Mielke, the head of the Stasi, had daily meetings to inquire about those applying for a travel permit to Hungary.¹⁷ The Stasi appeared to be at a loss as to how to deal with or even describe the growing number of people leaving. The numbers had been high in the 1950s, but the analysis of the reasons gave what seemed like conclusive answers: lack of opportunity and living arrangements. The group leaving during the 1980s had relatively few material goods, were young, between twenty-four and forty (60 percent). They had a comfortable standard of living, participated in social functions and neighborhood activities and were average to very good workers.¹⁸ There was a reason that people were leaving, but they were unable to put their finger on the reason why. The weekly meetings dealing with the émigrés came to an end in October 1989 because at this point the East German government had banned travel to Czechoslovakia, the last permitted country.¹⁹ This was a last attempt by the government to end the flood of individuals leaving. Rather than choose to acknowledge the issues or

¹⁵Carol Mueller, "Escape from the GDR, 1961-1989: Hybrid Exit Repertoires in a Disintegrating Leninist Regime," *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, no. 3 (November 1999): 715, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/210358>.

¹⁶Bruce, 224.

¹⁷Ibid, 226.

¹⁸Ibid., 227.

¹⁹Ibid., 228

attempt to develop a reasonable solution, Honecker and other SED leaders continued to deal strictly with the people, even going so far as to go against the constitution and policies they themselves had established. Once again there seemed to be a desperation in the way the SED responded and in a way that left the leaders of the GDR looking out of touch.

The SED government was not the only one that had an issue with the reasons for the movement. East Germans themselves found this to be a disturbing occurrence. “People lost friends suddenly. Overnight, your doctor was gone, or the baker on the corner disappeared, Schwabe remembers. Everyone had to come to grips with the future and ask themselves, ‘Do I want to stay and change things, or leave?’”²⁰ “With their behavior, they’ve trampled on our values and cut themselves off from our society. One shouldn’t shed any tears for them, read an editorial in *Neues Deutschland*, the party’s official newspaper.²¹ “What an affront,’ Schwabe says. ‘These were our brothers, our sisters, people we might not see for 20 years.’”²² Rather than address the issue in a reasonable way with a plan for more manageable exit, the GDR chose to respond heavily handedly against those leaving and attacked them for their betrayal. Those who remained had very little support from the regime.

At the fortieth anniversary of the GDR, Honecker continued to defend the achievements of socialism. He boasted that the “working class nation” had made drastic achievements. Honecker argued that throughout all of its adversity, the GDR was an

²⁰Curry, 21-22.

²¹Ibid., 22.

²²Ibid., 22.

“outpost of peace and socialism in Europe.”²³ The work of the GDR since its founding in 1989 resulted in land reform, the conversion of companies into public property, school reform, and the structural changes in the economy to name a few. He boasted about a modern economy that was eleven times what it had been in 1949. In talking about the economic achievements, he made the claim that the social policy would continue. Everyone in the GDR “has his place, independent of worldview and religion.” He did address the issues that were taking place through the summer and fall of 1989. However he described it as a “slandorous campaign” against the GDR in order to undue socialism and weaken the power of the GDR. This would not happen, he argued. The GDR would rise to the occasion.²⁴ The dissatisfaction of the people with the real situation that they experienced in daily living could not be reconciled with the GDR that Honecker and other SED leaders were portraying. The failure of Erich Honecker to recognize the need for reform within the state, led people to publicly protest the events of 1989.

Organizations during this time that stood against the government included a Berlin environmental group. The group was created under the oversight of the church during the mid-1980s. It was within this area that the environmental group was able to keep tabs on and attack the environmental issues occurring in East Germany. Over time the group became more political, writing to Honecker and other East Germans about the damage.²⁵ The group was monitored, as was the church. This was a challenge to church

²³“The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR Erich Honecker on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Founding of the GDR, in East Berlin,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 6, 1989, eds., Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 10, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1179.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Bruce, 229.

authority because as they were overseeing this, which led to a discussion of whether or not to change the view of the church.²⁶ The church was not an outstanding problem that attacked the government. Rather during the demonstrations in Perleberg in October, the church was quiet.²⁷ Following this were the Leipzig demonstrations on October 9, 1989. This was the moment when the highest leaders of the SED started to perceive the serious nature of the situation. The situation, however was not unified. Dresden, Leipzig, and East Berlin were areas where revolutions occurred. However, smaller provinces like Perleberg showed very few signs of movement towards revolution.²⁸ The availability of Western media and the openness of even the SED sponsored newspapers as the events of 1989 continued meant that even though not every province incited their own protest, they were aware and could participate to their own desire.

Even though the demonstrators were coming together in a show of peace, there was a sense of fear within the East German state. This was post-Tiananmen Square. Egon Krenz, a top SED member who would replace Honecker, had visited Beijing and praised the Chinese government just days after the fact. This seemed a threat to the peace meetings on Mondays in Leipzig.²⁹ The diary of Lily Heileger, a Massachussetan who lived with her German husband in West Berlin, records that:

We were fascinated to hear that during police attacks on demonstrators in Leipzig, Russian soldiers had systematically placed themselves between the

²⁶Bruce, 230.

²⁷Ibid. 232.

²⁸Ibid. 244.

²⁹Curry, 21.

demonstrators and police to protect the people. We speculated about why this was.³⁰

Where did the people go to protest? How were they able to find an outlet within the state?

Within the streets, within the large cities. Additionally, the churches became an area where there can be more vocal protest. After the prayer meeting held within the Leipzig churches; there was more vocalization of grievances. The rallies become larger. As reactions to the fraudulent elections continued, and the Monday prayer meetings took place in Leipzig, the Stasi were coming to conclusions about how to deal with the opposition. Their targeted programs included the peace movement. The issue was that the domestic pressure of these groups was politically destabilizes the regime and had dealt with. The Stasi charged that these individuals with attempting to gather and assemble since the beginning of the 80s. It was their goal to undermine the GDR by changing the way in which organizations, groups and individuals interacted in the GDR. These groups were embedded largely in the Protestant Churches and had been using the resources of these churches in order to engage in subversive activities, taking advantage of the unique position of the church. Many of these groups had been formed before 1985, but just as many were recent creations in the last couple of years.³¹

The leaders of the SED hoped that their dialogue and propaganda in the newspaper would keep people from the protest. Rather thousands showed up at the St. Nicholas Church on Monday, September 4, where Monday prayer services had been

³⁰“Lily Heiliger’s Diary, Berlin 1989,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 12 (2010): 124, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5224/masshistrevi.12.1.0119>.

³¹Stasi Bericht über „Persönliche Verbindungen oppositioneller und anderer negative Kräfte” [“East German Secret Police Report on ‘Personal Ties to Oppositional and Other Negative Forces’”], eds., Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, in *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed June 8, 2014, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=244.

occurring since 1982. On October 3, people heard that trains of refugees from the embassy would be stopping in Dresden on their way West. This resulted in thousands going to the trains and battles broke out between police with clubs and water cannon and stone throwing rioters trying to reach the trains. Dozens were injured.³² Four days later, the fortieth anniversary celebrations were planned in East Berlin. There was a large counter-rally that seemed to swell spontaneously. The result was for police to use force on the proceedings. A seemingly quiet, nonviolent revolt turned violent. The *Neues Deutschland* covering the event called the gathering unlawful and described how six “criminals” attacked the police and uninvolved citizens. Included in their crime was that they had applied for an exit visa. The author went on to question the hooligans that were participating at the events of the Nikolai Church.³³ According to Hollitzer, the Stasi museum director in Leipzig, during the first week of October, nearly 3500 East Germans were arrested. Hospitals in Leipzig prepared extra beds, and centers were set up to handle the overflow of arrestees. Roughly 8,000 police were brought in as a response to what could be close to an expected 20,000 protestors. “The decisive day was in Leipzig,” Eppelmann says. “They were all ready to crack down on 30,000, but 30,000 didn’t show up, 70,000 did.”³⁴ On October 16, the numbers of those marching in Leipzig were believed to have equaled 150,000; and would grow to 300,000 by the next week. Describing the event in the *Berliner Zeitung*, Peter Venus cited 100,000 people attending and editorialized that there were no hooligans, but rather many Germans from all walks

³²Curry, 22.

³³“Aus dem Gerichtssal: Krimineller wollte menge zur Gewalt aufwiegeln,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 10, 1989, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19891010-0-4-61>.

³⁴Curry, 24.

of life to peacefully ask the GDR for change. He ended his article by questioning how often Christians have to turn their cheeks.³⁵ In a completely new way than had previously been discussed, *Neues Deutschland* described the peaceful protest citing that the participants were disciplined and determined wanting a critical evaluation of social development in the GDR and changes within daily life.³⁶ The SED controlled paper portrayed the event with reform for the regime in mind. The participants were no longer hooligans, but reasonable Germans with reasonable requests. They were quietly demanding a change from a regime that over the course of the year had reacted very harshly.

Only a short week after the “miracle at Leipzig,” the East German people experienced a change within their party. Erich Honecker asked to be removed from the Politburo due to health reasons and per his request was replaced by Egon Krenz October 18, 1989.³⁷ Although this was a change, it was not completely remarkable as Krenz had been a part of the previous leadership and failed to truly help re-evaluate socialism. In his own words to his comrades, Honecker cited his illness and surgery as his reason for leaving, but he also reminded the people and the Politburo of his years of service and the

³⁵Peter Venus, “Unsere Meinung: Leipzig, Montag abend,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 18, 1989, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP26120215-19891018-0-2-152-0>.

³⁶“Friedliche Demonstration durch Leipziger Innenstadt,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 24, 1989, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19891024-0-2-32-0>.

³⁷“Kommunique: der 9. Tagung des ZK der SED,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 19, 1989, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19891019-0-1-5-0>.

hope that the communist state would continue with any experience and advice that he could give.³⁸

By November 4, more than 500,000 people met in Alexanderplatz in East Berlin.³⁹ The confusion caused by the announcement made by Gunter Schabowski on live television that all restrictions were being lifted and overwhelmed the guards. Thousands were sent to Berlin's border crossings on that night, and overwhelmed guards let people through.⁴⁰ The event was unprecedented and not predicted, but as the year progressed, the enthusiasm of the citizen for change and the rigidity of the government against that change finally broke through a wall.

The early 1980s began a true call for reform through the early peace movements and peace decades. Opposition groups called for domestic and international recognition of true peace, human rights, and de-militarization. As the decade progressed and little seemed to change in the GDR, the citizens grew disillusioned. In addition to domestic dissatisfaction, external factors such as Gorbachev's reforms that alluded East Germany and the opening of Hungary's border put pressure on the East German state that its current government had been ill-equipped to handle. After a decade of calling for reform, the GDR would cease to exist and be reunited with its Western brother by 1990.

³⁸“Erklärung des Genossen Honecker,” *Neues Deutschland*. October 19, 1989, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19891019-0-1-6-0>.

³⁹Curry, 24.

⁴⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The GDR was established in 1949 and existed for a short forty years. However, during these forty years it was not a decaying and dying state. Rather the GDR was a strong and viable force within the Eastern bloc. Although the uprising of June 1953, could have resulted in the end of a short-lived experiment, the regime was able to overcome the uprising and create a strong state of “real existing socialism.” The rigidity of the state that was established came to force under Erich Honecker, but it was too rigid for a population that was demanding and craving reform. As a result, the government was not able to respond adequately to the events of 1989 and Germany was unified in 1990.

The first steps for the GDR required establishing its initial policies, constitution, and developing its power. Initially the church and the GDR found themselves at odds as a communist state and a Christian entity. However, each institution recognized the advantage that existed by working together in areas where they could have a common voice such as peace. This was an important moment in the GDR for the position of the two institutions. It was necessary that the church established its own area and separated itself from the restrictions of the state. The GDR needed to solidify its defense and make sure that the population was trained in case of conflict with the Western powers. Building the military also created an army in addition to the police that would deter domestic opposition. In 1962 the mandatory service law was enacted and the church found itself in

conflict with the government. The Evangelical Church as a “church within socialism” had to stand behind the law, but many Christians disagreed with this decision. Their position in the socialist regime, meant that they had a space to meet and express discontent away from government reprisal. The unofficial peace movement and other oppositional groups found their voice within this free space. As the GDR dealt with the position of the church and the development of an unofficial peace movement out of the official peace council, they also enacted education reforms and state sponsored youth programs. The SED saw the necessity for establishing a solid and socialist based education early during the GDR. Early education reforms did not include a religious education and put an emphasis on state sponsored youth groups such as the FDJ over the Christian youth groups. The church and the unofficial opposition movements were unable to actively oppose or protest, but they had certain rights and freedoms from issues such as censorship that provided them a unique position in the state. Their desire for certain changes and need to speak out against offense was not a population wide-need nor was this a case where only a few dissidents that were exiled spoke out.

The establishment of a space for discontent set the stage for the events that took place in 1989. As time progressed and power switched hands from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker, the state seemed to gain more power while simultaneously making necessary allowances such as the 1978 agreement with the church. The church was firmly entrenched in the state as a “church within socialism.” The opposition movements were not looking for wide sweeping changes but wanted minor improvements. While economically the GDR struggled in comparison to the Western powers, not all East Germans were dissatisfied. However things start to change mid-way through the 1980s.

The Soviet Union's move towards reform under Gorbachev and the continued failure of Honecker and his regime to meet any of the requests made the groups or recognize basic human rights spurred the protestors on, and by 1990 the GDR no longer existed and Germany was unified. This was not the result of a slow decaying regime, but rather the result of deliberate choices and bad leadership. Cultural upheaval and unrest spurred the events on as a result of purposeful action. While the GDR of the latter 1980s could be argued to be unstable, the regime in the 1970s and even early 1980s was not in the same position.

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