

East Germany: The Federation of Protestant Churches

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An East German communist official taking a government position after the War would almost certainly have had little respect for the Church. In the late 19th century, the Protestant Churches in Germany had opposed the militant labour movement and had helped to provide the moral legitimation for German imperial aspirations.¹ Very few pastors joined the Socialist Party (SPD), and in urban areas the Church was out of touch with the working class.² The German labour movement was strongly anti-clerical and Marxism was committed to atheism.

Although there was some church opposition to Hitler after his rise to power in 1933, centred on the Confessing Church, it was concerned mainly with preventing state interference in church affairs. Few Confessing Church pastors spoke out on behalf of the Jews, communists, socialists and trade unionists as they were imprisoned. However, the church struggle did lead some theologians and pastors—for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant pastor who was executed by the Nazis—to recognize the failings of the German Church to witness effectively on social issues;³ and in 1947 at Darmstadt, the Fraternal Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (the “left-wing” of the Confessing Church) published a statement pointing out past mistakes.⁴ However, these voices remained the exception in a Church which was still conservative and cut off from the working class milieu from which the new leaders in the GDR came. That some pastors had been in prison for resisting Hitler was not sufficient to eradicate decades of justified suspicion felt by the labour movement for the Church.

After the War many people expected that Germany would be re-unified, but as the two parts of Germany became more integrated into the major power blocks, this possibility receded. The position of the Churches was unique. They were the only major social institutions operating across the border. However, while many of the traditional church privileges (for example, the lucrative Church Tax) were

restored to the Churches in the West,⁵ the situation for Christians in the GDR was often difficult. The militant atheism of government propaganda was met by the dogmatic response of the leadership of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).⁶ During this period, however, some Christians were looking for a constructive way to live as Christians in a socialist society.⁷

During the 1950s considerable pressure was put on the Churches. Some of the disputes of the time still influence the attitudes of older Christians. A number of pastors, young Christians and students were imprisoned for their opposition to atheist propaganda. People known to be active Christians were discriminated against: they were deprived of educational opportunities and suffered disadvantages at work.⁸ The West German decision to re-arm in 1950 and the EKD's agreement to provide military chaplains met a hostile response from the East German leadership, who consistently designated the EKD a "NATO Church".

In the 1960s, the emphasis in GDR state religious policy changed. Walter Ulbricht, Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers, declared in 1960 that "Christianity and the humanist goals of socialism are not contradictory".⁹ More efforts were made to engage in dialogue with the Churches through amenable intermediaries, including members of the East German Christian Democratic Union (CDU).¹⁰ After the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which showed that the authorities were determined to make the GDR a separate, viable country, the organizational problems of the EKD became more intense. The West and East German sections of the EKD had to meet separately, but still tried to operate as a single synod.

In 1968 the new GDR Constitution was passed. This was an important watershed. The original draft of the Constitution would have made it legally impossible for regional churches in the GDR to remain part of the EKD. Although the final version used a less stringent formulation, church leaders in the GDR saw which way the wind was blowing. The institutional paralysis of trying to operate across the state border was likely to continue, unless the East German Protestant Churches formed their own organization.¹¹ The eight regional Protestant churches¹² in the GDR duly created such an organization in 1969—the Federation of Protestant Churches—but even after its establishment some Churches continued to have ties with the West.¹³ The Federation itself came under pressure to remove from its Constitution the clause which affirmed a special relationship with the West German Protestants. The government obviously felt that this would prevent the Protestants in the GDR from committing themselves to the socialist system and would leave them exposed to western influences.¹⁴ It now seems, however, that the formation of the Federation of Protestant

Churches did in fact provide the necessary basis for the credible witness of East German Protestants within their socialist society and for practical co-operation between Church and State.

The Protestant Church since the War

Since the end of the War, the number of nominal Protestants has declined from over 16 million (almost the entire population) to under eight million. This is partly due to the fact that less than one-fifth of babies are now baptized. In contrast, the Catholic Church has shown considerable consistency in size, although its membership has also decreased slightly.¹⁵

In a society such as the GDR, the work of the Church and the political demands of the State can conflict. While some pastors have engaged directly in political discussions, many have attempted to continue their parish work and to avoid unnecessary conflict by not seeking to involve themselves in social and political matters.

Christoph Hinz, now Provost of Magdeburg Cathedral, has described three stages in the adjustment of the East German Protestants to life in a socialist society.¹⁶ First, after the War, many Christians felt that the logical extension of the work of the Confessing Church was to oppose the atheist principles of Marxist ideology. Second, the Church learned later to accept its place in socialist society. Christians began to acknowledge that the changes introduced by socialism were genuine improvements.¹⁷ The Protestant Church came to accept its role as being that of a "fellowship for witness and service": a "Church *in* socialism" and not a "Church *against* socialism". Some Christians go beyond this, arguing that the Church should accept the Marxist analysis of society and participate fully in the class struggle against capitalism. This is the East German CDU position and is not generally accepted. It is a minority view among pastors and is not representative of the church leaders' position.¹⁸ Third, some Christians are now trying to find a new position. Hinz considers himself to be one such Christian. They agree that socialism gives the basis for a more just society than capitalism, but they believe that the GDR's socialism is confronted with many unsolved problems. They consider all societies to be provisional and only relatively just. No human society is, or can be, the Kingdom of God. Socialism has to be seen as a process, not a finished product. To improve the GDR's socialism, they hold that the leaders should be prepared to discuss openly problems such as alienation in a planned society, the difference between opportunities for committed Marxists and for those of other persuasions, and the danger of addiction to material goods. Such criticisms are intended to strengthen socialism by making it a more humane environment, but

the authorities tend to interpret such views as anti-communist and destructive.

Present Relations between Church and State

After the establishment of the Federation of Protestant Churches in 1969, Church and State were keen to find a *modus vivendi*. In February 1971 Paul Verner, a member of the Politburo, made a speech which amounted to formal recognition of the Federation. He welcomed the decision by the East German provincial Churches to leave the EKD. He was aware of the need to establish working relations with the Federation but also emphasized the ideological differences. Bishop Schönherr, the head of the Federation, agreed with this general position:

The basic speech on church policy by Paul Verner . . . reminded us yet again that Marxism-Leninism and Christian faith are irreconcilable opposites—and we can only agree with him. Nevertheless, we have to live with each other. The socialist State will not be able to do without the co-operation of its Christian citizens in the long run.¹⁹

This confident prediction has proved to be correct. State and Protestant church leaders met for top-level talks on 6 March 1978. These talks were intended to provide the basis for church-state relations in the future.²⁰ Direct negotiations between Honecker, the Party leader and head of State, and the Protestant leadership constituted a *de facto* recognition that Christians have a genuine role to play in East German society, and that the State recognizes the Protestant Christians as an identifiable group within society. The authorities have decided that it is best to discuss matters directly with church leaders, at top level, rather than to ignore them or to use intermediaries.

As a result of these talks a number of concessions were granted to the Federation: the Churches were given greater access to television and radio, and allowed to choose their own speakers for religious broadcasts; permission was granted to build a large number of new churches, many of which will be in new housing estates which previously had no church (these will largely be paid for by West German currency)²¹; and promises were made that Christians would not be discriminated against in education or at work. Bishop Schönherr's response was one of guarded optimism. Church-state relationships, he said, are as good as Christians find them to be in their everyday life. The key issue is whether the tendency to treat Christians as second-class citizens will disappear. Church members express a certain degree of scepticism, and the church leaders are aware that they must convince their members that the talks were of value. Otherwise it will seem as though the church leaders have been co-opted into the Marxist establishment.

Within the Federation, efforts are being made to strengthen co-operation between the regional Churches, to allow the formation of a United Protestant Church in place of the present confessional groupings within the Federation.²² The picture, then, is that improved relations with the State are being consolidated by well-advanced plans for church reform.²³ The Church is no longer a *Volkskirche* (national Church) embracing most of the population in even nominal membership. Nor, however, does it correspond to Bonhoeffer's "Church without privileges". Church representatives on official business may travel more freely than most other people—perhaps, in part, because they always return. One pastor suggested to me that church leaders should not accept ecumenical invitations abroad until the majority of the population can also travel abroad. This pastor argues that church leaders should not accept privileges which set them apart from the majority of the population.

There is a sense in which the recent concessions by the State could represent a threat to the witness of the Church: The warm glow of acceptability could blunt the prophetic edge. However, given the integrity of the present church leadership, I doubt whether this is likely. The church officials are very capable. They are supported by strong lay participants in the regional synods and the national Synod. Church members are actively committed to the Church. It requires a conscious decision to be a practising Christian in the GDR. In the past, it has also meant accepting possible disadvantages with regard to one's career prospects or one's children's education.

The level of enthusiasm for church life is shown by the massive attendance at the three Church Assemblies (*Kirchentage*) in 1978 (over 100,000 participants). The attention given in the western press to unhappy occurrences like the two pastors who burnt themselves to death (in separate incidents) gives a distorted picture, suggesting a desperate Church. In fact the Protestant Church has considerable vitality and internal unity, and enjoys better circumstances today than it has for many years. The church leaders are quite capable of presenting their own case before the state authorities. They have to be careful in their public statements because much of what they say is reported in the West in a distorted and tendentious form. Such reporting does nothing to help the Churches in the GDR.

Social Responsibility

The Protestant Church considers itself to be a part of East German society and seeks to make a positive contribution to public life. There are many church-run hospitals and homes in the GDR.²⁴ While visiting the GDR in November 1978, I was able to learn from staff at a Catholic hospital how co-operation between Church and State works.

Hospital running costs are paid by the State, but the finance for buildings and new equipment must be found by the hospital. There is no discrimination on religious grounds (or on financial grounds—treatment is free). The staff are not allowed to ask whether a patient is Protestant, Catholic or atheist. The chaplain or a ward sister can provide counselling if a patient asks for it. Some of the ward sisters are members of nursing orders which previously provided the entire hospital staff.

The State is obviously pleased to be relieved of some of the financial burden of providing social services. It seems to have no objection to the Churches taking care of the sick and elderly. In a society which is so geared to productivity, one can ask whether non-productive members of that society are fully valued. The annual emigration of 10,000 pensioners to West Germany indicates that the State is not slow to allow their welfare costs to be borne elsewhere. Church work for the elderly and the handicapped can be a powerful illustration that they are valued as people, not merely for their productive capacity. This is a challenge from the Gospel to the values prevalent in East German society (and the West).²⁵

The Church is also trying to come to terms with secular industrial society through urban and industrial missions. The Gossner Mission is a group working in this area. A number of its members have taken factory jobs to acquire a better understanding of the relation between work and witness in the present system, and they also consult with those involved in similar work in other socialist countries. One of their main projects is to try to work out how to function as a Christian community in a socialist city. They also have international contacts, and seek to inform people about the Third World and to engage in “solidarity work”—support for socialist governments and liberation movements in the Third World.²⁶

Like the Gossner Mission, the church aid agency “Bread for the World” is independent of the organization of the same name in the Federal Republic. The “Bread for the World” campaigns are part of church life in the GDR, much as Christian Aid Week is in Britain. One of its more ambitious campaigns (begun in 1971) was to collect for the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). Many church members were initially reluctant: they had been affected by the sensationalized debate in West Germany on “support for violence”²⁷ or had reservations about giving any form of support, even humanitarian, to liberation movements. Discussions and well-prepared material overcame much of this resistance, and voluntary offerings amounted to 1.75 million marks (well over £200,000 then) between 1971 and 1974. Since the East German mark is not a freely convertible currency, the money was transferred in kind. For example, wounded members of

Frelimo and the other movements fighting for independence from Portugal were treated in the GDR, school books were printed and sent to Mozambique, as well as blankets and food. The operation was facilitated by the help of the state Solidarity Committee. The sum collected shows considerable sympathy for the PCR and understanding of its purpose. The collusion of the Churches with "violence from above" in the Hitler period has been a source of constant embarrassment to Christians in the GDR in discussion with Marxists, and the support given to the PCR shows that there is no desire to repeat past mistakes. The bishops have lent strong support to the programme. Bishop Schönherr, a friend and pupil of Bonhoeffer's, in encouraging support for the programme specifically referred to Bonhoeffer's readiness to oppose the Nazi regime with force if necessary.

The sceptical reader may think that such a position might be adopted to curry favour with the East German government. However, the support given by the East German Churches was of a purely humanitarian character and was not intended as a *carte blanche* for revolutionary violence. What is more, other policy statements by the Protestant Church show that the stand it now takes is not always what the government wishes.²⁸

The most serious test of the durability of the agreement between Church and State was the announcement in 1978 that pre-military education would be a compulsory school subject for all 15- and 16-year-olds. Protestant church leaders protested about this: they felt that such a course might so accustom school-children to the idea of military means as a solution to conflict that this would hinder efforts at détente and disarmament. Neither Catholic nor Protestant leaders accepted the view that the suggested education was a contribution to peace. Protestant leaders were under no illusions about the likely effects of their protests. In any case, it is hard for the GDR's leaders to make a unilateral policy decision as the country is integrated into a comprehensive military network. In such circumstances, all that can be done is to try to foster schemes of "education for peace" which take a different line from that taken by the State. Over 4,000 copies of an information and study packet on the subject have been distributed to congregations. Another effort has been the continuing dialogue on détente and disarmament between the Federation and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Human Rights in the GDR

Any serious consideration of human rights in the GDR must recognize the important achievements made in establishing economic and social rights. Some of these achievements are highly desirable in

Britain today. Full employment and stable prices guarantee the livelihood of East German families.²⁹ Health care is good. The housing problem could soon be solved, if all goes according to plan. Women's rights are not merely a slogan: there are excellent crèche and kindergarten facilities with a place for nearly every child;³⁰ equal pay and good maternity benefits mean that women do not suffer financial discrimination; almost all women of working age are employed.³¹

It would be wrong, however, to create the impression that this is the whole picture. There are restrictions on various freedoms: freedom of information, it is argued, can be used as a means of subversion; and freedom of movement could be used by other countries to entice citizens away by material incentives, to the cost of the community. The GDR is harsh on its critics, and this seems to be particularly true now if they are Marxists. Wolf Biermann is a Marxist protest singer who was prevented from performing in the GDR from 1965 to 1976. In 1976 he was allowed to leave the GDR to give a big concert at the invitation of the West German metal-workers' trade union. The concert was seen by much of the GDR on West German television which is received and watched there. Biermann was deprived of his citizenship and prevented from returning home. Many leading writers protested.³² So did a number of church workers, but the church leadership did not support them. Professor Robert Havemann, a former university professor who spoke out in favour of Biermann in 1976, was recently released from two and half years' house arrest for this and other activities. The case of Rudolf Bahro, also a Marxist, was somewhat different. His major critique of the East German economy was published in the West, and in 1978 he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for "intelligence activity".³³ Both Havemann and Bahro were released (along with many other prisoners) on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the GDR.

Perhaps the time has come for the Churches to make an open stand in such cases, by pleading for a more enlightened approach towards those who seek to stimulate wider discussion about the future course of East German socialism. Heino Falcke, Dean of Erfurt, for example, has asked whether the GDR now needs higher production and more luxury shops. His own view is that it is more important to have citizens who are "prepared to take responsibility and risk a public word when injustice occurs".³⁴

* * *

I am always encouraged by what the Protestant Churches in the GDR are doing. They have faced many problems in getting to where they are today. They are a minority in a society with a strong ideological orientation, but they have not given in to the temptations either to

sell out to the government or to become a ghetto church. It is to be hoped that the new State Secretary responsible for religious affairs will continue the policy of co-operation with the Churches which Hans Seigewasser, who died in late 1979, developed from the state side. Seigewasser was of course a convinced Marxist, but had a genuine respect for the Churches, going back to the period of the Third Reich when he was in prison together with members of the Confessing Church. The Protestant Churches face many of the problems familiar to the British Churches. They have had to come to terms with a more modest role within their society. They have the buildings, but not the staff or money, to carry on a parochial ministry of the traditional type in all parishes.

The GDR itself faces problems. There is little financial incentive to work hard within the official economy. Inflation, due not least to rising fuel prices, is beginning to bite. What will happen when the economic boom which has been sustained well into the 1970s slows down, and it becomes clear that the material aspirations of the population cannot be fulfilled? Will the authorities stick rigidly to economic planning of the established kind, or will they experiment with decentralization, allowing individual factories greater autonomy in setting production norms? Will the government allow any form of pluralism in the economic or the ideological sphere? There are pressures towards pluralism in both areas, but little sign of change.³⁵ In my opinion, détente remains a necessity even after Afghanistan. Further ecumenical work on opposing the arms race is even more necessary. Can Churches in the West and in the East do more to establish as policy the real need for security rather than allowing the present escalation to continue? The East German Protestant church leaders have shown real independence in their policy so far.

At parish level, much good work is done. Lively youth groups are a sign of great promise. Lay training and education indicate that the Churches are seeing the opportunity presented by the shortage of pastors and money. The church congregations which I have met are keen to practise ecumenism—they really enjoy contact with Christians from other countries—but wish that they could see for themselves. We in the West can learn a great deal from the Protestant Churches in the GDR—not least the ability to discern what is good and what is not so good in our own political and ecclesiastical situation.³⁶

¹The Lutheran churches, in particular, emphasized obedience to the rulers (Romans 13) and this fitted well with the authorities' view that "the citizen's first duty is to keep quiet". For a critical study of the "doctrine of the two Kingdoms" see U. Duchrow, *Two Kingdoms: The Use and Misuse of a Lutheran Theological Concept*, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 1977.

²According to the pastor and theologian Günther Dehn, only 0.5 per cent of the formal church members went to church regularly in his working-class parish in Berlin before the First World War. See W. Bredendiek, *Irrwege und Warnlichter: Anmerkungen zur Kirchengeschichte der neueren Zeit*, Herbert Reich, Hamburg, 1966, p. 15.

³See for example E. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, Collins, Glasgow, 1975, p. 119 and D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, SCM, London, 1973, p. 17. Bonhoeffer's opposition to the Nazis began early. He saw more clearly than most of his colleagues in the Confessing Church that the persecution of the Jews had to be resisted. Eventually he became involved in the plot to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944.

⁴The Council felt that the Church had failed because it had allied itself with conservatism to prevent necessary changes; it had tolerated absolute dictatorship and it had ignored the Marxist challenge to Christians to work for the poor and those deprived of their rights. The full text is given as "Wort des Bruderrates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum politischen Weg unseres Volkes" in K. Kupisch (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart. I. Teil*, Siebenstern, Hamburg, 1971, pp. 57-9.

⁵"In the legal sphere the Churches also face a test. Their privileges are so extraordinary, in many respects unique in the world, that these are bound to be increasingly questioned." F. Spotts, *The Churches and Politics in Germany*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 1973, p. 363. In spite of its title this book deals mainly with West Germany. Only a small group, the "left wing" of the Confessing Church, did not wish to have these privileges restored.

⁶One West German Protestant bishop went so far as to argue that the illegality of the government of the GDR meant that a Christian did not even have to obey traffic regulations.

⁷Books such as E. Adler (ed.), *Pro-Existence*, SCM, London, 1964 and J. Hamel, *A Christian in East Germany*, SCM, London, 1960, both come from this period.

⁸There was considerable discussion as to whether children of Christian parents should take part in the *Jugendweihe*—"an official state dedication ceremony for boys and girls who wish to declare their readiness to accept responsibilities in the life of the nation". (Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour*, Collins, Glasgow, 1974, p. 182.) There was strong controversy between those who felt that this ceremony was a form of atheist confirmation, which involved denying one's Christian faith, and those who felt that to oppose the ceremony would have detrimental effects on their children's chances. The Protestant Churches now generally allow children to take part in the ceremony, whereas resistance in the Catholic Church has been stronger. (*Discretion and Valour*, pp. 178-9.)

⁹R. Henkys (ed.), *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR*, Eckart Verlag, Witten, Frankfurt, Berlin, 1970, p. 52. Henkys gives an invaluable collection of source material on the background to the foundation of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR.

¹⁰The CDU is not an opposition party. In the GDR, the leading role is played by the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which determines policy. The job of the other parties is to gain support for these policies among different sections of the population which are not eligible for membership of the SED, with its strong working-class bias and its atheist ideology. The CDU tries to muster support among Christians for the policies of the SED, or Communist Party as it is in effect.

¹¹R. Henkys (ed.), *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR*, pp. 31-5.

¹²These are either Lutheran or United. The united churches emerged from efforts to unite Lutheran and Reformed churches.

¹³In particular the Evangelische Kirche der Union.

¹⁴There was particular pressure to remove this clause (4.4 of the Federation's Constitution) at the time of the 1971 Synod. See H. -G. Koch, *Staat und Kirche in der DDR: Zur Entwicklung ihrer Beziehungen von 1945-1974: Darstellung, Quellen, Übersichten*, Quell Verlag, Stuttgart, 1975, pp. 139-41, 163-4, 181-3.

¹⁵Falling from 1.4 million in 1964 to about 1.3 million in 1974. H. -J. Roder, "Eine Bestandaufnahme in Zahlen", in *Kirche in Sozialismus (KiS)*, West Berlin, No. 2, May 1979, pp. 16-24.

¹⁶See C. Hinz, "Christliche Gemeinde in der DDR und das Thema von Nairobi", in *Evangelischer Pressedienst Dokumentation (Epd Dok.)*, No. 9, 23 February 1976.

¹⁷Hinz mentions the following: new property relations in industry and agriculture; a health service for all the population; an educational system open to all (even if allocation of university places has often been affected by ideological convictions); a guaranteed right to work; and fixed rents and prices for basic foodstuffs.

¹⁸cf. T. Beeson, *Discretion and Valour*, pp. 178-9. Günter Jacob has published a particularly helpful critique of this type of position (G. Jacob, *Weltwirklichkeit und Christusglaube: Wider eine falsche Zweireichelehre*, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart, 1977). In this new understanding of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms which Jacob detects particularly among professors in the theological faculties at state universities, political decisions by Christians are to be decided by the "political reason" of Marxism-Leninism. The "well-being" of the citizen is thus taken care of, and the Church can concentrate on preaching salvation. In this manner, the Gospel is effectively removed from the public sphere. See also Bischof Dr W. Krusche, "Christliche Kirche in einer sozialistischen Gesellschaft", in *KiS*, West Berlin, No. 2, April 1978, pp. 21-32.

¹⁹"Conversation between the Evangelischer Pressedienst (EPD) and the chairman of the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Bishop D. Albrecht Schönherr", in *Ecumenical Press Service (EPS)*, Geneva, 11/39, 20 April 1972, p. 4.

²⁰cf. R. Henkys, "Eine neue Qualität", in *KiS*, No. 2, April 1978, pp. 9-16, especially pp. 14-15.

²¹*ibid.*, especially pp. 9-10. One somewhat anomalous aspect of the Federation's position is its financial dependence on the West German EKD to provide a substantial part of the budget. The East German authorities, however, are happy for this to continue—for example, in paying for these new churches—as it brings in valuable currency reserves.

²²R. Henkys, "Warten auf den Herbst", in *KiS*, No. 3, July 1979, pp. 15-18.

²³*ibid.*

²⁴In 1977 the Protestant and Catholic Churches had 52 hospitals with 7,000 beds, 87 homes for the mentally and physically handicapped, 11 mother and baby homes with 500 beds, 280 homes for the elderly and nursing homes with 11,000 beds, 23 children's homes with 647 beds, six hospices with 452 beds, 328 day care centres for children with 17,800 places, and 419 rural nursing stations. (Panorama DDR, *GDR '77: Facts and Figures*, Berlin GDR, p. 26.)

²⁵cf. Gollwitzer's comments on "meaning as grace and meaning as achievement" (Sinn als Gnade und Sinn als Leistung) in H. Gollwitzer, *Krummes Holz—aufrechter Gang: Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des Lebens*, Chr. Kaiser, Munich, 1976, pp. 68-82.

²⁶Financial contributions are made via the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee to socialist governments or liberation movements for their health, educational, political and military work. To refuse to make payments is seen by the GDR authorities as a sign of political unreliability.

²⁷It is a peculiarity of the East German situation that many people are able to watch West German television—and do so. This adds to the scepticism with which they view East German newspapers and television news—and indeed East German society in general. Many young people have an excessively positive view of western society as a result of watching West German television.

²⁸This is most clearly the case on the issue of Zionism. In late 1975, the United Nations passed a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. This resolution was criticized by Philip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. The bishops of the Protestant Church Federation and two Free Church leaders in the GDR also published a strong statement against the resolution (duplicated translation available from author). One reason given for rejecting the resolution is the past guilt of Germans in the murder of the Jewish people. This means that the Churches do not accept the easy formula that the murder of the Jews was the fault of fascism, which in its turn was the product of capitalism. To suggest such a thing is not popular, as the received orthodoxy in the GDR is profoundly self-righteous at this point.

²⁹The average family in the GDR has a comfortable standard of living and is materially secure. The figure for rent and heating is extraordinarily low. The average industrial wage

increased from c. £190 per month in 1970 to £220 in 1975. If the low price of necessities is taken into account, a more accurate picture of purchasing power is given. Less than half a family's income is spent on food, clothing, rent and domestic energy costs.

³⁰The provision of facilities and staff for these crèches is something to be envied for a British visitor. However, one cannot deny the socializing effect of the crèches. Many Christian parents (and some others) prefer to keep their children out of the state education system, where they will spend their later years, and send them to church kindergartens which are smaller but considerably more expensive. There are strong financial inducements for young couples to have children, and the wife's job is held open for her after maternity leave.

³¹In 1976, 87 per cent of all women of working age in the GDR were employed. Panorama DDR, *Die Frau im Sozialismus*, Berlin GDR, 1977, p.63.

³²Including Plenzdorf (mentioned below, note 35) who was one of those who suffered professionally as a result. See J. Steele, *Socialism with a German Face*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1977, pp. 165-6.

³³*Amnesty International Report 1978*, London, 1979, p. 213.

³⁴*KiS*, No. 4, October 1978, pp. 9-10.

³⁵Among young people there is a feeling of frustration at the system's rigidity. Restrictions on freedom of expression and travel (except to other socialist countries) are often mentioned as grievances. Lack of motivation and general disaffection among young people are apparent. Western fashions have been copied by young people. As one author writes: "Jeans are an approach to life, not a type of trousers" (U. Plenzdorf, *Die neuen Leiden des Jungen W.*, VEB Hinstorff Verlag, Rostock, 1973, p. 27).

³⁶The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own, and reflect the position of church-state relations prior to the recent developments in Poland.

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