



Volume 9. Two Germanies, 1961-1989

Independent and Official Peace Policies on a Collision Course (April 16, 1982)

In this telex to the first secretaries of the regional SED headquarters and the head of the main political administration of the National People's Army, Erich Honecker criticizes the churches' role in supporting the independent peace movement in the GDR. Honecker makes clear that the SED's talks with church representatives had to emphasize that its peace policies formed part of a broader class struggle.

Telex 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

Dear Comrades,

As you know, some forces within the circles of the Protestant churches in the GDR¹ recently have been trying to burden the relationship between state and church through provocative behavior. As a pretext, they often cite the prohibition on the wearing of unauthorized buttons, especially by young people who have been greatly influenced by the church. In connection with this, the initiators of these destructive incidents are trying to disrupt the relationship between the Protestant churches and the government, which up to the years 1978-80 has been generally good.

On April 7, 1982, the undersecretary for church matters, comrade Klaus Gysi, had an extensive discussion with leading representatives of the Protestant churches in the GDR. In this conversation, he explained that the actions of certain church representatives stood in contradiction to earlier declarations by leading persons in the Protestant church. According to those declarations, the churches represented by those individuals would not let themselves be forced into the role of the "Trojan horse," but would instead view themselves as the "Church in Socialism." Leading representatives of the Protestant churches in the GDR stated that their church would continue to support the results of the meeting of March 6, 1978, between the chairman of the state council of the GDR and the executive committee of the Conference of Protestant Church Leaderships in the GDR. Regarding the issue of peace, however, their opinions, which had to reflect a Christian standpoint, would have to go beyond the framework of the GDR's peace policy. The Protestant churches, they argued, were "not simply amplifiers of

¹ The plural refers to the eight regional Protestant churches in the territory of the GDR [*Landeskirchen*] – trans.

the state's foreign policy," as stated by the executive committee of the Conference of Protestant Church Leaderships in the GDR.

*It is obvious that certain church forces, under the pretext of an "autonomous," "independent" peace movement, are striving in the interest of imperialistic circles to organize oppositional forces against the authority of workers and farmers. This finds expression not only in the provocative behavior of various church leaders, but also in the flank protection offered by the western mass media. This was most fittingly expressed in an editorial in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 13, 1982) – that is, in an organ of the West German upper bourgeoisie – where it was audaciously stated that the representatives of the Protestant churches in the GDR should demand participatory rights. The initiators of such behavior are of course well aware that there has been a separation of church and state in the German Democratic Republic since it was founded. This also corresponds to the biblical instructions to give God what belongs to God and the State what belongs to the State.*

Until the meeting on March 6, 1978, leading representatives of the Protestant churches had no interest in developing what they now call an "independent" peace movement outside of the Peace Council of the GDR. The deputy of the state bishop of the Thuringian Protestant church, High Consistory member Dr. Gerhard Lotz, held the office of vice president of the Peace Council of the GDR until his death last year. Church officials were included in the Peace Council delegations to the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow (1973), the World Congress of Peace Builders in Warsaw (1977), and on other occasions. Bishops also took part in them. Thus, it is obvious that the claim about the necessity of an "independent" peace movement is nothing but a disguise for efforts aiming to distort the peace policies of the GDR and damage the GDR's international reputation, and for intentions that pursue the long-term goal of negatively influencing domestic developments in the GDR. For this reason, in circulating the unauthorized "Swords to Ploughshares" badges of this unauthorized organization, the initiators believe that they have a popular foundation for their sinister intentions. From all of this, it is obvious that they are not concerned with any "independent" peace movement at all, but with an action that in the long term would lead to a confrontation with the government.

The undersecretary for church matters, comrade Klaus Gysi, told the representatives of the Protestant churches in the GDR clearly and unequivocally that in the present situation it is not a question of whether the church had a more comprehensive peace program than the Peace Council of the GDR; instead, it is a matter of banishing the risk of a nuclear world war.

[. . .]

In general, however, we must assume that contrary to the practice in capitalist countries, some church leaders in the GDR would like to deny our state the right to self-defense.

Remarkably, the very same people do not say a word about how weapons and their responsible bodies receive blessings in imperialist countries, about the spiritual counseling in the military in the FRG, or about the existence and work of military bishops and pastors in the capitalist countries.

Therefore, it is particularly necessary to talk with members of church circles at all levels, especially pastors, synod members, parish council members, as well as active members of the parishes in the counties, cities, and communities. Based on the aforementioned information, it is especially important to explain convincingly and conclusively how the GDR, in firm alliance with the Soviet Union and the other states of the socialist community, is fighting to banish the threats

to world peace coming from the aggressive circle of imperialism, especially the present government of the United States and NATO. The influence of destructive positions must therefore be resolutely opposed.

For this political outreach to the masses, orientation should be sought especially from the “Christian Circles” study groups in the county committees of the National Front of the GDR. The Union Friends^{2*} of the CDU and other friendly parties, and not least the theologians and church officials who are members of the Peace Council of the GDR, who support the peace policies of the GDR, should also be integrated more effectively into these persuasive efforts.

We kindly ask you to inform the chairmen of the councils of the districts and counties about the content of this letter.

E. Honecker
Berlin, April 16, 1982

Source: Telex 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 SächsHStA Dresden, BT/RdB Dresden Nr. 45071; reprinted in Anke Silomon, *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen und die DDR. Die Friedensarbeit der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR im Rahmen der Friedensdekaden 1980 bis 1982* [*Swords to Ploughshares and the GDR. The Peace Work of the Protestant Churches in the GDR in the Context of the Peace Decades 1980 to 1982*]. Göttingen, 1999, pp. 327-29.

Translation: Allison Brown

² Members of the CDU in the GDR referred to themselves as Union Friends. – trans.