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SOURCES OF EAST GERMAN REVOLUTION AND GERMAN UNIFICATION¹

by Frederick O. Bonkovsky

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For the first time in its 2000 year history, Germany has been united peacefully. In retrospect we can now see that the path to reunification and the revolution in East Germany received major direction and impetus in the confrontations of January 17, 1988, and the events which followed.

The East German autocratic and single party regime sustained blows in early 1988 from which it never recovered. It lost its internal cohesion and its self-confidence. Thus when winds of change gathered force from East and West, the totalitarian bulwark tottered and collapsed. Once the political and social cement was gone, the Berlin Wall fell easily.

By late 1989, the Cold War was officially ended, even in Germany, the center of the old battlefields. A new Germany was born in October, 1990. A new Europe waits in the wings.

This essay details how that arterial flow worked internally and persistently to renew East Germany in the months leading to fall, 1989. We begin with an overview of the event of January, 1988, and the challenges and changes they occasioned. It is important to have in mind the changing shape of East German and Eastern European society throughout the 1980s. By the late 1980s the regime in the person of Erich Honecker had lost its youthful hardline enthusiasm. On the other side, a significant and impressive array of system critics had arisen and found support in various quarters.

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But the most dramatic decisions of 1988 (and 1989) were made by Protestant church leaders who with great skill and ultimate success sought change in state and society while protecting human rights and moral freedom. The church risked much, including its own traditional identity. The final outcome of that risk is not known. But in the years 1988-1990, there was no more important source for change than the persons grouped around the traditional churches.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

The revolution began with a reaffirmation of the ancient regime. On January 17, 1988, 200,000 of the committed marched to the graves of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Led by Communist East German State and Party Chief Erich Honecker, they commemorated the Spartacists' murders in 1920. At the old Frankfurt gate in East Berlin dissenters tried to join the march. Their placards proclaimed Luxemburg's bold anti-imperial slogan, "Freedom must be freedom for those who think differently."

Scores of dissenters were quickly rounded up by the police and security agents. In the following hours, the security services conducted raids on homes and other buildings. Offices and rooms controlled by the Protestant church and used by groups with church approval were searched. About one hundred people were arrested, including many of East Germany's best-known system critics.

Vera Wollenburger, the most prominent leader of the Protestant "Church from Below," was arrested, quickly tried, found guilty, and imprisoned without possibility of appeal. The 'Ecology Library' at East Berlin's Zion Church was searched, as they had been in November, 1987. The ecologist leaders were jailed. The police knew exactly where to look for evidence. The crackdown was felt across Berlin and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Charges ranged from rowdyism and anti-social behavior to treason and working with agents of capitalism (for which sentences of 12 years were proposed). Of the first 100 arrested, 60 were immediately expelled to West Germany.

Two famous East German artists were jailed, Stephan Krawczyk, the poet and balladeer, and his theatrical director wife, Freya Klier. The prosecutor proposed sentences of 12 years given the accused' histories of statements and songs which criticized the GDR. Moreover, the prosecution charged that the two and others had direct and treasonous contacts with agents of western capitalism. Krawczyk and Klier thus accepted expulsion to West Germany rather than 12 years prison terms. But they violated their agreement by immediately holding a western press conference in which they proclaimed their continuing solidarity with friends in East Germany and noted that they had left the GDR only under the meanest of pressures.

In the East German churches the nation-wide Alliance Prayer Week had ended. But across the country, large groups gathered in churches every night to pray for the arrested and for the leaders of society and state. In East Berlin there were nightly services where thousands gathered.

The 1945 Four Power Status and the Quadripartite Agreements of 1972 assured some openness to East Berlin. So western journalists and observers could be present. For weeks, the events in East Berlin made daily headlines in West German newspapers and on national television and the radio. Seventy-five million German and millions more in other countries followed the developments in East Berlin very carefully indeed. The BBC World Service and other world communications networks covered the events extensively.

G.D.R. DISSENT AND DEVELOPMENT

While the dissenters were a diverse group, the most prominent may be grouped under such titles as perspective emigres, the system critics, and the rowdies. Many of these were younger people. This at least seemed to be how progressive circles within the Socialist Unity Party [S.E.D.](the ruling coalition of political groups controlled and led by the communist party) viewed their non-Communist opponents.

New awareness and perspectives characterized the younger generation in East Germany. Born after Stalin and reared after the Berlin Wall of 1961, young people viewed the GDR as part of an established East European System. The young differed from their elders who had extensive personal contact with Western Germany and could recall Stalinism or Nazism.

The GDR was almost 40 years old. Its younger adults were educated under state socialism and had been socialized to believe in the promises and ideals of communism. More than any other, German socialism in the 1970's had been successful in producing a good and equitable standard of living for its people. In 1978, the GDR was rated the worlds tenth greatest industrial power and its standard of living was estimated by British scholars as exceeding that of the United Kingdom.

Economically, the 1980s were not a good decade for the GDR and Eastern Europe. Recent estimates put East Germany 26th by world standards. It no longer challenged highly advanced western societies. The GDR stagnated economically while parts of the west boomed and much of Eastern Europe declined noticeably.

Politically, however, elements in the GDR became more daring and liberated during the past decade. The context was a Berlin situation normalized in 1972 by Four Power agreement. Communications to and from West Berlin were guaranteed. East Berlin made major strides in rebuilding and becoming the world's showcase of socialism.

State and Party Chief Erich Honecker was increasingly active in international relations. In 1988-89 he paid the first East German official visits to Paris and Bonn. He received the President of Greece in East Berlin. Having entertained West German chancellor Schmidt some years earlier, in 1987 East Germany was visited by the conservative Bavarian minister-president, Franz-Josef Strauss. Sitting West German chancellor Kohl owed Honecker a return visit. But the revolution of November, 1989, transformed Kohl's visit into an electoral campaign wherein Kohl's Christian Democratic Union triumphed.

Honecker was not the only East German travelling. In 1988 there were three million visits by GDR citizens to West Germany, two million of them by persons of pre-retirement age. Fewer than one percent of those who visited stayed in the West. Not everyone was permitted to visit, of course. Families often had to stay at home while members visited the west. But overall, the GDR was loosening its controls.

PERSPECTIVE EMIGREES

In 1988 it was estimated that some 200,000 East German citizens had officially applied and were waiting to immigrate to West Germany (Official DDR sources said 20,000). When emigres arrived in the West, they were immediately given full citizenship papers, social benefits, some money, and help in finding work. These aids greatly helped in making it relatively easy for East Germans to make a new life in West Germany which holds that all Germans are part of one nation.

Foot dragging GDR authorities normally took from two to four years to process an immigration application. At best, the applicants were viewed as 'antisocial.' Thus, they lost their job and educational opportunities in the GDR. Why should society give free education or job to a perspective capitalist foreigner or turn coat or traitor or enemy. Often applicants could only find work as poorly paid part-time janitors in unofficial organizations. Applicants also lost their right to travel. They were regularly harassed.

Many of the dissidents at the Luxemburg parade were such immigration applicants who have been waiting months and enduring harassment. Their actions of 17 January 1988 had the desired effect of irritating the central leadership. The irritation was at least of two sorts. Honecker's 'development through detente' policies were challenged by protest. A few dissenters brought public disrepute on the whole socialist project. Secondly, for devoted socialists, Rosa Luxemburg is an appealing heroine, particularly in these days of *glasnost* and *perestorika*. To violate her and Karl Liebknecht's parade and memory is like an American's defaming the memories of Betsy Ross and Patrick Henry (or Nathan Hale).

Thus in the days after 17 January, the GDR quickly shipped some 60 of the arrested immigration applicants to West Germany. It was assumed by GDR authorities that these

people had lost their GDR citizenship and all claims on GDR society. No return to the GDR was likely. Good riddance to social rubbish is how the GDR authorities seemingly felt.

The existence and policies of 'The Other Germany' (West Germany) helped make immigration a historical devilish problem for the GDR. In the late 1950s, it seemed GDR society might collapse completely as thousands of professionals and skilled workers streamed to the West. The Berlin Wall of 1961 stunted the flow and helped preserve the GDR, Eastern Europe and the Soviet region.

Every industrial society has a significant number or disaffected or unintegrated (especially young) people. In the West, one can immigrate to Australia. But it is a long move involving much risk. A move across the inner German border is socially and economically much easier. After 1978, fewer East Germans than ever before moved illegally. Then the late 1980s political and economic sclerosis of East Germany (and Eastern Europe) created new pressures.

Increasingly, young people sought to emigrate because of general disaffection which might focus in specific political or economic causes. Western economic standards were higher. But so were the risks and the stress. In the West, but not in the East, one can fail economically. Some emigrees returned to Eastern Europe after trying the west.

Until the events of early 1988, one could believe that politically the GDR was moving continuously, if incrementally, in progressive directions. *Glasnost* and *perestroika*, while feared by the SED, had their inevitable effects. A Prague Spring might come to much of Eastern Europe. Thousands might still be drawn to the bright lights of Hamburg. But hundreds of thousands of others contented themselves with "niches" of good living--a good family, a circle of like-minded friends, a small country retreat, a series of connections which provided economic advantage in the GDR.

SYSTEM CRITICS

The most important and most challenging critics in East Germany were the system critics. Sharing many values of the regime and the elite, these folks voiced alternative or higher ideals. No system will much improve without such people. But no system is free to function in easy harmony as long as they speak. From a regime perspective, they are more thorns than roses. At times, regimes grow tired of the pricks, the irritation, and the loss of blood. The beauty of the rose is forgotten.

Until 1985, Stephan Krawczyk was a member of the GDR ruling Socialist Unity Party. In 1981 he won the first prize in the GDR's Chanson contest and established himself as the most popular young balladeer and poet. Born in 1956, Krawczyk sang of the ideals of socialism and symbolized the worth of an artistic life free from capitalist pressure. He and

his wife, the GDR award-winning theater director Freya Klier, were favorites of the intellectual and progressive elite in East Germany.

In 1983, however, in the midst of the Euro-missile debates, Krawczyk criticized SED policies complaining of the militarization of GDR society. He remained a socialist and proclaimed GDR patriot. But increasingly his ballads called for greater freedom and changes in the GDR. Klier shared her spouse's concerns. When Krawczyk ran into trouble with the authorities, Klier made public displays and even went to western media with her proclamations and calls for freedom.

In 1985, Krawczyk and Klier were removed from their government-supported artistic positions. They responded by producing and performing cabaret programs laced with social criticism on such topics as peace and women in socialism. The artists became key communicators in a network of social critics.

Krawczyk was arrested in the crack-down following the January 17, 1988, protests. Along with the imprisoned leaders of the "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights," Krawczyk was accused of organizing the January 17 protests as well as of anti-social activities and possibly treasonous ties and action. A week later, after calling publicly for her husband's release, at 6 a.m. on a Monday morning, Freya Klier was taken by police from her apartment to the State Security Prison in Berlin-Hohenschonhausen.

At the same hour, the graphic artist Baerbel Bohley, 42, was also incarcerated.² Bohley had gained particular notoriety in September, 1987, when her friend, the West German Green political leader, Petra Kelly, delivered Bohley's protest letter and drawing, ("No Man's Land") to Erich Honecker as he visited Bonn.

These leading critics were quickly charged with treasonous relationships, contacts with western agents, etc. After a few days of imprisonment and interrogation, Krawczyk and Klier were given the option of being tried quickly for crimes with penalties up to 12 years imprisonment with no possible parole. Or they could be banished from the DDR.

Similar arrest procedures and charges were brought up against Vera Wollenburger, leader of the Protestant "Church from Below." Her husband and children were not arrested. (When authorities arrested the unemployed philosopher, Wolfgang Templin, 39, and his wife, Regine, who is a trained Christian educator, by contrast, the two Templin sons aged 3 and 13 were taken to an orphanage.)

For years Wollenburger had been a key lay leader of younger East German Protestants. A slender, attractive and apparently unbelligerent person, Wollenburger gained national attention as a peace and arms reduction advocate in the early 1980s. The "Church from

²See Der Spiegel, Feb. 1, 1988, pp. 18ff.

Below" which Wollenburger helped found and lead, served as a lay-run alternative to the official church.

Led by distinguished bishops, since the 1970s, the official church has lived in co-existence and accommodation with the SED and regime. The church gave up its organic ties to the West and understood itself as a "church within socialism." The state allowed the church to exist and even applauded its social work (with elderly and children, hospitals, etc.).

Appealing especially to the young, the "Church from Below" took on such causes as ecology, peace, anti-militarism, and alternative service (to the compulsory GDR army draft). At the church convention in East Berlin in summer, 1987, the "Church from Below" sponsored sessions attended by thousands. Thereafter Wollenburger was widely known as key advocate of the idea that East German citizens must be treated as political adults, not as underage children. The regime and the people must dialogue.

Wollenburger's particular challenge was her insistence that she was thoroughly committed to building socialism and Christianity in the GDR. She repeatedly said she had no desire to leave the country and in fact insisted she would not leave. Her commitments to her GDR spouse, children, and the "Church from Below" made her witness particularly compelling both in the GDR and outside.

In December, 1987, Wollenburger brought civil suit in a GDR court against the editor of the (Communist) Free German Youth Newspaper, Young World. Wollenburger claimed she had been defamed by an article which lumped together the Christian and Peace activists with skinheads and rowdies.

The January, 1988, arrest of Wollenburger thus seemed particularly significant as a general attack on system criticism, rather than as related only to specific actions in January. This interpretation is supported also by the arrests of leaders of the Ecology Library at the Zion Church in East Berlin.

Periodically publishing an unauthorized newsletter which recorded ecology problems in the GDR (where factories are publicly owned) and collecting such information, the Ecology Library was visited and searched by the secret police several times during 1987. In the January, 1988, arrests, the police knew exactly where to look for evidence. The trial's guilty verdict for conspiracy was based particularly on evidence provided by a Crown's Witness who had been a member of the ecology Group.

For the past half-decade, beginning with Euro-missile and peace campaigns, system critics met mainly in rooms borrowed from the church and thus under a kind of ecclesiastical umbrella. It is estimated there were some two hundred outspoken critics in East Berlin and perhaps ten times that number in the country as a whole. The arrests, guilty verdicts, and sentences of the most visible were aimed at decapitating the critical network. The irony was quickly evident. Those who were committed to improving socialism and the GDR and were

desirous of staying in East Germany, were charged with serious crimes and imprisoned. Those who wanted to leave the GDR for West Germany and capitalism, were arrested but then expelled from East Germany.

Few regimes are comfortable with real critics. In West Germany social critics ran afoul of anti-Communist laws which prohibited their working as civil servants or teachers (for which many are trained). In the US, the FBI (and sometimes the CIA) has 'monitored' social critics (sometimes in ways similar to East German State Security's monitoring of the Ecology Library). Police files and dirty tricks are not unknown in western democracies.

THE HONECKER LEGACY

Erich Honecker was only the second GDR leader in forty years of East Germany's history. Under the Stalinist, Walter Ulbricht, who spent the war years in Moscow, Honecker headed the Free German Youth organization and was a major figure in the building of the Berlin Wall. When he succeeded Ulbricht in 1971, Honecker was a faceless bureaucrat who it was assumed would primarily continue the hard line cold war politics. Much changed, gradually in the 1970s and then with a rush in the 1980s. The earlier decade saw the stabilizing of the GDR and the Eastern European system symbolized in the Berlin Agreement of 1972 and the Helsinki Accords of 1975. In exchange for recognition of post-1945 borders in Eastern Europe, the Soviet bloc agreed to Helsinki rights guarantees.

The GDR received billions of West German marks every year in loans and payments and with these could buy much needed high tech and consumer goods. GDR manufactured items passed into West Germany without import fees and so into the European Common Market of which the GDR was thus an unofficial member.

With the 1980s traumas in Soviet bloc economies, and the serious crisis in such places as Romania and Poland, the GDR had unusually much to gain in good western relations. This seemed to be understood by the 75 year old Erich Honecker who may also have been increasingly interested in what history books will say about him.

East Germany remained the Soviet frontline state. The Berlin Wall and heavily guarded inner-German border were harsh realities. But western television and radio rudely penetrate the entire country. West German agents could move easily in their sister country's language and customs (as could East German agents in the FRG). In sum, the Security and Secret Police had a tough job in the GDR. In July, 1987, police cracked down on the Rock Fans at the Brandenburg Gate. In November and again in December, police searched the premises of the Zion Church where the Ecology Movement published its newsletter and had its library. The January 17, 1988, corruption of the Luxemburg/Liebkecht memorial march was a last

straw and/or gave police forces an opportunity for a more general crack-down, round-up and purge of dissidents.

The Security Apparatus, under the leadership of the old hardliner, Erich Mielke, was doing its job well. But by the beginning of February there were major players besides the police. Most notable and public were the various people who may be lumped together under the rubric 'church' as described above. These ranged from bishops, to lawyer Manfred Stolpe, to local pastors, to thousands gathered for week-day services. The church, having pledged and proven itself a "church in and for socialism" during the past decade, could play the role of honest broker and could be so represented by the western media. Because of their public nature, church events had great coverage in the world media. Because the church has high legitimacy, when it spoke on behalf of dissidents or prisoners, its words were taken seriously.

We do not know about dealings at the inter-governmental level--e.g. between the FRG and the GDR. It seems that agreements were made between the GDR Protestant church and the GDR authorities. In exchange for the release of the arrested and imprisoned, the church agreed to hold no more prayer services, to close its Advice Centers, and to affirm the State's full control over emigration policy. As services were still being held and Advice Centers were thronged, on February 6, four dissidents were released from GDR prison, given new GDR passports, and sent to West Germany. On February 7, the dissenters Boettcher and Kalk were released from prison after serving only two weeks of their terms. They continue to live in East Berlin.

About a hundred had thus been sent to West Germany and another score or so were released in the GDR. This left only Vera Wollenburger, by far the most prominent church person arrested. Wollenburger steadfastly argued that her task was to help improve life in the GDR. She had no intention of becoming an emigrant.

On 8 February, church officers declared the Advice Centers were being overwhelmed and would shortly be closed. The church noted that its proper task where public policy was concerned was to help persons stay and live in the GDR. The church wanted to assist those who were in personal difficulty. But the church could not aid those who wanted to emigrate, as emigration policy is a matter of State function, said the church on February 8. On 9 February, Vera Wollenburger's case was resolved. She would accept a study year in Great Britain given by the Archbishop of Canterbury. With new GDR passports which guaranteed their return to the GDR, Wollenburger, her husband, and one son were on their way to the UK. A second son, age 16, remained in the GDR as a student. On February 10, the Wollenburger news sent scores of GDR citizens streaming to the churches to inquire about emigration. The church noted this was a matter for the public processes. But the church

publicly urged the authorities to clarify the laws regarding emigration. This also implied that bureaucratic delays and manipulation should be ameliorated.

On 11 February, Erich Honecker published a nine page newspaper declaration in the official party newspaper, Neues Deutschland. Honecker reviewed events of the past weeks and noted the GDR desires to uphold human rights and promote harmonious relationships. He criticized elements in West Germany and beyond for their attempts to undermine the GDR. He also warned against anti-socialist critics at home, some of them even in the SED. On 13 February, the winter Olympics began in Calgary, Canada. By the time they ended on February 28, GDR athletes had won 25 medals, the U.S. six. The representatives of 16 million East Germans had nine golds, ten silvers and six bronzes while those 240 million Americans had two golds, one silver, and three bronzes.

Katherina Witt of Karl-Marx Stadt won a second Olympic Gold in figure skating, only the second women in history (after Sonja Heine) to win two. Witt reigned as queen of Calgary. She was celebrated as model of socialist youth and citizenship in East Berlin. Her beautiful closing program performance was to a western popular song in which the female singer proclaims her independence and self expression. For her encore Witt donned a studded black leather motorcycle jacket. She charmed and astonished the Calgary crowd with hard rock ice dancing.

The ironies for this world triumph for the GDR could not have been lost on the Erichs, Honecker and Mielke. They had just led their party and country through an intense month in which irony was always present. It is arguable that all of the main players had won. The State had showed it could crack down and that it had the police and juridical means to make life very uncomfortable for dissidents. Many emigrees were in West Germany. Some system critics had escaped imprisonment and had maintained their GDR passports. The church had proven itself a center of great skill and no little social and political power.

On March 6, 1988, Reuters news service carried a dramatic report from East Berlin. "Uniformed and plain clothes security forces prevented Christian worshippers from gathering for a church service today, detaining several people" a West German radio station reported. "The police set up check points in the streets leading to a main church, temporarily detaining people and telling others they could not take part in the service...ADN, the East German news agency denied the report... "Word of the detention came amid reports of a wave of arrests in several East German cities in the last few days. Those arrested reportedly had applied to emigrate to the West. The earlier reports, giving arrest figures ranging from 60 to more than 200, cited officials in the Protestant Church."³ So the struggle continued

³New York Times, 7 March, 1988, p.3.

through 1988 and 1989. But January, 1988, marked a turning point. Persons who had been arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned were freed thanks to the sturdy role of the Protestant Churches. Moreover, many of the dissidents and particularly the church made clear that they were committed to permanent change in East Germany. Already in January and February 1988, the old men of the SED had seemingly accepted some of the reality of these changes.

The churches and the dissidents had revealed a major fissure in the autocratic SED society. Throughout the coming months, that fissure would widen. Finally, the Wall itself would crack and come tumbling down. The years 1938 and 1939 mark dark days in the history of the German churches and society. A half-century later, the churches had learned important lessons and were able to serve their people and all of humankind. But it was a risky and unsure business. Church policy in 1938 was safer.

CLEAN HANDS AND NATION STATE POLITICS

More than any single institution, the East German Protestant Church was mother and midwife to the revolution of 1989 and hence to the reunification of Germany in 1990. Through highly courageous action, which risked its own identity, the church in 1988 served human rights and social dissent by exploiting the fissures in East German socialism. As the events of October and November, 1989, showed, when the push came, the supposedly concrete wall and will of the East German regime crumbled, having previously been undermined and compromised.

But in 1988 and 1989 as throughout history, it was dangerous for church persons to put their hands to political tasks. Politics and society involve conflict, power, and manipulation and violence. As humans, let alone as moral or religious persons, we are concerned with duties, obligations, and other moral norms. In communities a person's duties and obligations may conflict.

Since politics here refers to regulating the life of an entire nation-state, millions of moral actors and their conflicting duties and differing perceptions are at stake. Immanuel Kant of the eastern German cities of Koenigsberg and Berlin argued that to be moral is to do one's duties as those duties can be read in terms of universal norms (categorical imperatives).

But politics involves the balancing and adjudication of competing PARTICULAR claims. Our views are usually parochial, rather than universal. Justice to my valid goals and causes, such as homes for the poor, requires limitation of your freedom to disrupt my plans. This is further complicated if 'you' and 'I' are groups rather than individual persons who can sacrifice ourselves (as Reinhold Niebuhr warned in Moral Man and Immoral Society which

I prefer to rethink as Immoral Persons And Even More (?) Immoral Societies.) Can any group discern Kantian categorical imperatives? Can a group act in pure ways for pure ends?

These rhetorical questions suggest the truth that real politics is the realm of compromise and the impurity. Politics is about the action of groups in a real world of limited knowledge, moral conflict ambiguity, and political trade-offs. Hence the French poet, Peguy, noted that Immanuel Kant might conceive of clean hands--but he would have no hands in action.⁴

Christian churches are expected to be centers of religious devotion, moral insight, and ethical action. Much of the church's social power is derived from the churches presumed transcendence of corrupted and corrupting daily political life. We expect churches to have clean hands.

Yet westerners, and especially Europeans, affirm that churches have responsibility in and for the society. Any establishment invests a church with some social and political power. Constantinian establishment leads to very great social and political power. The Romans brought Christianity to Germany. German Christianity was established by Constantine, and re-established by Clodwig the Frank, by Karl der Grosse (Charlemagne), by the Holy Roman Emperors, by Luther's leadership of and co-operation with the German princes, by Protestantism's alliance with German nationalism and emperors which continued through the Third Reich and into the post-war period. Immanuel Kant, like G.W.F. Hegel, was a devoted son of the Protestant German establishment known as *Volkskirche* (people's church or societal church.)

In *Volkskirche*, the church recognized the obligation to serve all Germans, to undergird and inform all of German society. The German Protestant Church was committed to serving the entire people through word and sacraments, through instruction and confirmation, through moral teaching and leadership, through social service and advising public policy. The great nineteenth-century father of modern Germany, Otto von Bismarck, and the present West German President, Richard von Weizsacker, are clear examples of Protestantism as a major element in public policy.

After decades of struggle and mutual hostility, the GDR and the long established Protestant church reached an accommodation in 1978. The church accepted its new status as 'church in socialism' and cut its organic ties with the West German church ('in capitalism!') The GDR expected the church's existence and curtailed harassment. The state accepted the church to play positive social roles (e.g. sponsoring hospitals and day care centers) in addition to performing traditional religious functions. Moreover, the Church continued to receive

⁴ I learned of this comment from Stanley Hoffmann, cf. his Duties Beyond Borders. 1981, pp. 143-144.

western Deutsche Mark contributions from West German churches and citizens which were spent in East Germany for church repair and programs.

The Church continued its historic *Volkskirche* obligation even if the GDR Volk was now 50% Protestant (1980) rather than 90%(1946). During the first months of 1988, the role of the church in the GDR and the compromise nature of Church in socialism were challenged sharply. Secular critics have charged that the Protestant church capitulated to the State. Religious critics hold that in becoming involved with State policies, the Church sacrificed its religious identity and thereby put its very existence at risk. Powerful hands lead to no true Christian church, they say. Clean hands are the only viable option.

THE CHURCH: IN SOCIALISM, FOR SOCIALISM, IN TENSION WITH SOCIALISM.

In 1976 the very popular poet and writer, Wolf Biermann, was expelled from the GDR. He once noted that there are three ways to escape the heavy hand of the Security Police: over the Wall, through suicide, and in the Church.

For twenty years, the Protestant church in the GDR sought to maintain its ties to the West and minimize the existence of East Germany. The communist leadership expected the church to die and it sought to hasten the demise through pressure and some overt attacks.

In the 1970's it was clear that neither the communist East German regime nor the traditional church was about to collapse. Under pressure and in order to normalize church-state relations, the church cut its organic ties to the western church and at the same time reached an accommodation with the government. Church independence in socialism was guaranteed. The SED began to affirm the humanitarian work of the church. The church rethought its role and theology in order to become a 'church within socialism.'

After the 1976 self-immolation of Pastor Bruesewitz protesting state pressure against Christians, the SED became more accommodating. In 1978, for the first time, the top leaders of church and state met personally. Each acknowledged the other's legitimacy. A year later, when the church criticized the increased military training in GDR schools, the state took the opportunity to call for peace leadership through East-West church cooperation.

During the early 1980s, peace groups were approved in the GDR. They seemed useful as a part of the Warsaw Pact campaign against NATO's Euro-missiles. Many of these groups met in church buildings though they had no organic ties to the churches. In the mid-eighties, when these groups questioned Soviet as well as NATO missiles, GDR toleration came to an end. With missile deployment, the issue cooled and the groups became more quiescent. However, they continued to meet in church buildings.

The church seemed the only public place in the society with some independence from the *stadt apparat*. Young people and various kinds of dissenters gravitated toward the church

as an 'open niche' in society. Peace, nuclear weapons, ecology, the role of women, and many other topics were discussed by groups in church buildings. These groups operated in relatively open and democratic fashion even as most of the rest of society forgot how to utilize such procedures.

The bishops continued to seek good relations with the ruling SED. On the local level, some pastors became leaders and authority figures outside the SED. A clientele of system doubters grew up around some local parishes.

In this setting, the "Church from Below" prospered. Solidly in the Protestant Church, but also attuned to more general youthful and social concerns, Vera Wollenburger and her colleagues became a force which both church and state had to take seriously. The "Church from Below," representing and appealing to thousands of East Germans, played a major role in the 1987 East Berlin general church conference.

It was thus unavoidable that many of those arrested after January 17, 1988, would be persons with personal or associational contacts with the Protestant Churches. Quietly over the years, the church has been active on issues involving human rights and personal freedoms. But here was a very public matter. And one which threatened to explode.

For as soon as the arrests became known, hundreds turned to the churches as meeting places where they could seek solidarity with others. Pastors were urged to pray and speak for the arrested. Churches opened on the weekday nights so that people could meditate, pray, and express solidarity. In East Berlin thousands gathered for weekday meditation where only scores attend church on Sundays. Similar events were reported in Leipzig, Dresden and a dozen cities throughout the GDR.

The meetings drew increasingly large crowds, some as big as 2,000. Beginning with prayers and perhaps a homily (which might be rather pointed), the services could lead to discussion about the prisoners and their cases. Participants might even sing in English the American civil rights song 'We Shall Overcome.'⁵

The regime made things more difficult by lumping together prospective emigres and system critics with committed church folk such as Wollenburger. The large number arrested resulted not only in wide-spread notoriety. It represented a significant clientele of emigration applicants, 'artists', general system critics, and Christian socialist idealists.

The church might still have avoided the issues. But it chose to step forward and take a leading role in the dialogue and subsequent political conflict. On 21 January, 1988, Protestant Bishop Gottfried Forck affirmed a responsibility of the office of youth ministry to continue the prayer meetings until the human rights and other questions were more fully aired.

⁵See the report in the International Herald Tribune, 5 February, 1988, p.1

The church put legs on its prayers, moreover. "Bishops come and go," headlined the Frankfurter Allgemeine (West Germany's leading newspaper,) 'Stolpe remains.' Lawyer Manfred Stolpe from Stettin on the Baltic Sea was a leading figure when the GDR Protestants became an independent church in 1969.

In January, 1988, Stolpe now 51 years old, quickly appeared outside the East Berlin courts where he represented several of those arrested. Speaking moderately, Stolpe did not criticize the court but he did express his defense views. After the guilty verdicts were announced, Stolpe said the verdicts would be appealed though the defendants remained imprisoned.

With central church offices in the provinces (no longer in East Berlin as in earlier days) it was Manfred Stolpe who probably personally bore the heavy weight of negotiations with state representatives. The established Protestant church was significantly engaged. Were the mass prayer-meetings not enough, by late January the church announced it was establishing 'Advice and Counseling Centers' in major cities throughout the GDR. These centers had no legal power. Even the advice offered may have been inexact.

But the centers were visible rallying points for the hundreds of disaffected GDR citizens who queued outside numerous churches. The people met and were encouraged by others of like mind. State authorities could see and hear on the western media, if not from the secret service, of major irritants to harmonious socialist living.

By the end of January, meetings had spread to Roman Catholic centers in the GDR. On 5 February, in a call for aid to all those under state pressure, Joachim Cardinal Meisner, the Roman Catholic Bishop of (all) Berlin, whose seat was in East Berlin, wrote to his priest and deacons urging support for the efforts being carried mainly by the Protestant churches.

After the sentencing of Vera Wollenburger, Manfred Becker, a member of the Protestant church leadership, publicly challenged the court's interpretation of criminal code paragraph 217 dealing with conspiracy. Becker noted he had also personally contacted a member of the GDR Politbuero urging a reconsideration of the issues.

By late January, in more than a dozen of the GDR's largest cities, the churches were active in what was increasingly seen as a more general campaign for human rights. Church leaders were careful to speak moderately in public, lest the situation get out of control. Daily accounts in the West German media emphasized not only the sharp conflict in the GDR but also the need for moderation and problem solving approaches by all concerned, including westerners. In its editorials, the Voice of America was less moderate.

No one could know at the time. But the events of January and February, 1988, and the special engagement of the church, led directly to the Revolution of 1989, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the disappearance of an East German state in late, 1990. (We and others are telling the full story in longer monographs).

Here it should be noted that January, 1988, marked an important turning point for both church and state. For the next two years, the church's explicit and highly effective engagement overagainst the regime paved the way for massive changes.

The Honecker government tried a harsh crackdown in January, 1988. This was dissolved into greater accommodation by February. For the next two years, in the interests and with hundreds, then thousands, and finally literally hundreds of thousands of compatriots, church and state wrestled over the future of eastern German society. The strengths and skills which churchfolk identified and honed in January, 1988, sustained them and the society in literally weekly confrontations for two years.

The GDR had always been a pillar of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe. As late as 1980, the GDR was proclaimed a model for world communism. By mid decade, however, the GDR economy slumped into stagnation and decline. There was increasing evidence of great trouble in the USSR.

Decades earlier, in worse economic situations, willful local regimes and Soviet tanks had prevailed--in East Berlin--1953, Budapest--1956, Prague--1968. But in 1988 and 1989, regimes like the GDR SED were rapidly losing their legitimacy. Yet it took courage and skill to probe the regime's weaknesses and to know where to lean against the corroded edifice. The Berlin events of January and February, 1988, were seminal for the new growth of popular participation and governance in the Soviet bloc.

By October, 1989, things had gotten so chaotic for the GDR regime that East Berlin resolved to reestablish authority by steel and the shedding of blood. The USSR apparently refused to order its million troops in East Germany to leave their barracks. Gorbachev would not put Soviet troops on the streets of Berlin or Leipzig (though he would sixteen months later use Soviet steel in Vilnius.)

East Berlin, however, sent thousands of police and para-military units to ring central Leipzig, site of the weekly Monday night church led services and rallies. On October 9, 1989, a hundred thousand citizens were expected. The armored units were ready to make the streets run red with blood.

For almost two years, the church and its allies had checked the regime. October 7 and 8 were days of frantic meetings involving thousands of church leaders and other citizens. On October 9, a small group of citizens met at the home of Kurt Mazur, musical director of Leipzig's world famous Gewandhaus Orchestra. For hours they negotiated with each other and made repeated calls to Berlin. They feared and warned of massive injuries and deaths; of resultant chaos and murderous hate.

Finally, East Berlin agreed to let the Leipzig Monday evening service continue without police intervention. A few days later, the Honecker regime was removed from office. A month later, the Berlin Wall fell.