previously been seen as a rock of quiescence in the stormy seas of both Western and Eastern Europe. Thus attempts to explain the relative stability of East German communist rule, in contrast to Poland and Czechoslovakia, in terms (at least partly) of the alleged docility of the masses, are misplaced. In so far as docility is to be found, it may perhaps be better sought among the technical and cultural intelligentsias—those who indicated their disapproval by at best a passive withdrawal, a compromise conformity and critique within bounds, or a flight to the West.

For the greater part of the GDR's history, however, élites were able to exert effective control over the rumblings of discontent from below, which remained for the most part easily isolated and uncoordinated. It was not these popular expressions of outright hostility to the regime which ultimately brought it down, but rather—ironically—attempts to improve the GDR from within: that is, it was not opposition, so much as a form of reformism, which contributed to the beginning of the end of the GDR.[63] What needs further examination now are, rather, two separate sets of developments: on the one hand, the key changes in the nature of political dissent, and the emergence of a more widespread and better organized activism for change within socialism, in the course of the 1980s; and on the other, the significant changes in the attitudes, concerns, and responses of the authorities, in particular the SED, in the context of changing domestic and international conditions. Together, these developments helped to determine the way in which the GDR came to an end as much at the hands of a revolution from above as of one from below and one from without—and at the hands of some of those who wanted to improve, rather than destroy, the functioning of actually existing socialism on German soil.

[63] Of course the beginning of the end was only that—the *beginning* of the end. With the opening of the borders, the masses reappeared on the political scene, in the shape of a mass exodus to the West, to ensure that the notion of a reformed GDR would remain an unattainable mirage. Thus popular opposition to the GDR, which had failed to shake its foundations for four decades, was under altered circumstances able ultimately to deal its final death blow.

8

THE GROWTH OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

THE East German regime *never* succeeded in quelling dissent, discontent, or opposition. What was new about the 1980s was not the 'growth of opposition'—as so often argued—nor even the growth of discontent, but rather a combination of other factors. These include: the changing organizational forms and cultural orientations of a growing minority of political activists, who were seeking, not to overthrow the regime, nor even to escape from the GDR, but rather to improve it from within; the changing domestic political context of their actions, including both the growth of structural spaces within which to act, and the changing responses of the state to what they denigrated as 'hostile-negative forces (*feindlich-negative Kräfte*)'; and, finally, changing aspects of the international context.

These factors of course interrelated, and it is a difficult task to disentangle, for analytic purposes, the interweaving strands of a complicated story. The present chapter will proceed both thematically—to illustrate different aspects of the development of political activism in the 1980s—and chronologically, in order to show the ways in which the developing goals and organizational strategies of activists interrelated with the changing modes of intervention and response of the political authorities (party, state, Stasi), with the Church leadership caught in the crossfire between the demands of communist authorities, would-be reformers, and God.

Broadly, the decade from the late 1970s to 1989 can be divided into three main periods. The meeting between Honecker and Church leaders on 6 March 1978 marked a key turning-point as far as the structural context of political action was concerned.[1] In the years that followed, the state consciously *used* the Church leadership as an indirect means of seeking to control dissident activities. At the same time, of course, dissidents themselves used the free spaces provided by the Church for more open discussion, and for experimentation with new forms of debate and organization. While the state was conscious of—and highly exasperated

[1] See Ch. 4 above.

by—the fact that the Church leadership did not seem able to exert very effective discipline, it nevertheless felt it right to allow more time for Church leaders to do what they could.

The mid-1980s—perhaps from 1984 to 1987—form a transitional period. The state appeared to have achieved much of what it was aiming for: the demoralization of the peace movement, the exile of many dissidents, the co-option of a compliant Church leadership prepared to adopt a conciliatory, indeed obsequious role (as exemplified in the person of Manfred Stolpe). But, at the same time, new currents were emerging: the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR gave new heart to those yearning for reform in Honecker's GDR, and dissident spirits within and outside the Church began increasingly to bridle against the conservatism and caution of some of their leadership. Grass-roots groups for reform began to proliferate, to create organizational networks and new forms of publicity, in what can be viewed as an emerging, if very limited, 'civil society'.

Finally, from late 1987 matters took a very different turn, on both sides of the equation: ever more aware that Church leaders were losing what little control they had ever exerted over dissident movements, the state resorted to more open and visible repression, more obvious use of heavy-handed tactics by the Stasi. But the forces for reform had by now developed more sophisticated organizational forms and tactics for pressurizing from below, and the last two years of the GDR's history, prior to the autumn of 1989, were characterized by increasing instability and political polarization.

At the same time as the growth of a political activism, however, it should be emphasized that the vast majority of East German citizens continued in the patterns of conformity, grumbling, and making do which have been described in previous chapters. The new political activism was characteristic only of a very small minority—a few handfuls—of citizens. Their activities and organizations grew up in the interstices of East German society, alongside continued patterns of obedience, retreatism, and disparate discontents. Yet, in contrast to an earlier era, in curious ways the concerns of political activists were shared by some members of the political élite, at least at lower levels and in provincial areas if not at the centre or top of the party hierarchy. As we shall see, the developments of the 1980s played a key role in the pattern of the 'gentle revolution' of the autumn of 1989.

Contexts and conditions of emergence

A (Western) report on the mood in the 'Eastern zone' (the GDR) of mid-November 1950 comments on the very striking generational differ-

ences in political opinion, and concludes rather pessimistically that 'seen like this, the implementation of bolshevist ideology in the Eastern zone appears to be merely a matter of generations. And this is food for thought for a lot of very serious people from Plauen to Rostock.'[2] In the event, the opposite was the case. The generation of 20- to 40-year-olds—metaphorically, the children of Ulbricht, not Hitler—were at the forefront of the new political initiatives which became increasingly prominent from the late 1970s.

Specific policy issues—peace, the environment, human rights—engaged the attention of a growing minority of young adults from the late 1970s. But a broad spectrum of social-cultural orientations lay behind these particular policy concerns. A new generation was coming to maturity, young adults who had been born and bred in the GDR, and who increasingly questioned *not* the right to existence of a separate East German state, but rather the quality of life in a continuing GDR. Among these, a significant if comparatively tiny minority had refused to conform, even while at school: they had resisted pressures to undergo the *Jugendweihe*, or to participate in the FDJ; they had sought alternative service as *Bausoldaten*, or refused conscription altogether; they had uttered remarks critical of the regime, or shown too much interest in the Western media or Eastern European reform movements. Since the penalty for nonconformity was often non-admittance to institutions of higher education and the restriction of career opportunities, many such young adults had found that the only educational paths and professional careers open to them that were commensurate with their talents and interests were within the Church.[3] The study of theology might still be possible if medicine or journalism were ruled out; a career as a pastor or as a Church employee in some capacity or another might be open while becoming a teacher or doctor would be wholly impossible under the political circumstances.

Thus the regime itself was producing a distinctive generational cluster of nonconformists who, for structural reasons, very often came together on common ground, in a common cultural space, in the penumbra of East German Protestantism. These were young adults who were committed to a degree of honesty, open debate, and discussion which had prevented them

[2] IfZ, Fg 44/2, 'Ostzonaler Stimmungsbericht nach den Wahlen vom 15.X.1950'.

[3] This was the case with Rainer Eppelmann, for example. Cf. *Der Spiegel*, 47: 38 (20 Sept. 1993), 63: 'Only after a period of service as a *Bausoldat* did Eppelmann decide . . . to become a pastor—not out of any religious fervour, but rather on the basis of more pragmatic considerations: "I asked myself, what can you become, for a contented or even a happy life in this country? The only answer which occurred to me was: pastor . . . It was clear to me that only the study of theology was able to offer me a little mental freedom."'

from exercising their talents in other walks of life: instead, they were peculiarly concentrated in the environs of the Protestant Church.

The new nonconformists—whether or not they were committed Christians—were characterized, too, by participation in a particular subcultural milieu. This might be characterized as a combination of continuing currents that had prevailed among Western youth in the later 1960s—emphasis on peace, the symbolism of flowers, communal sharing—with a certain puritanism and Christian overtones. The flavour is captured, for example, in this invitation to a 'peace workshop' on 27 June 1982:

Beginning of the WORSHIP SERVICE at 10.00 a.m.
Programme for participation for children and adults until 5.00 p.m.!
You can BRING WITH YOU:
Your musical instruments—songs—poems . . .
Desires, anxieties and ideas.
FOOD for yourself, and for someone who has nothing
and a FLOWER IN YOUR HAIR OR BUTTONHOLE[4]

Music, flowers, the honest sharing of ideals and anxieties as well as food, were characteristic of what was essentially a social and cultural, as well as narrowly political phenomenon.

Many of these young adults had just gone through the process of facing up to the dilemmas of whether or not to conform with respect to education, military service, career prospects; many too had young children, and were increasingly horrified at the ways in which their own offspring were being indoctrinated and pressurized even while still in the crèche or kindergarten. This was a generation which had not experienced the Nazi dictatorship, had nothing to cover up in its own past, and no personal reasons to be particularly respectful of the older generation of wartime communists. The latter were by now perceived as ageing, ossified, out of touch with reality. On the contrary, as far as the future for themselves and their children was concerned, the new generation of nonconformists had everything to play for; and it was their earnest desire to ensure that, so far as possible, they would change the GDR for the better. In their darker moments, many feared that if they did not have the courage to pressurize for change, there might indeed be no tomorrow. As Bärbel Bohley once put it, when threatened that she would have to face the consequences if she continued to engage in 'illegal

[4] BP, O-4 766. Capitals and underlining as in original.

activities': she would also have to face the consequences if she did *not* speak out against the increasing militarization of society.[5]

Those involved in the new movements of the late 1970s and 1980s were generally concerned with a whole bundle of closely interrelated issues, and many of the same individuals were actively involved across a range of campaigns. Given the political circumstances, it was virtually impossible to separate critiques of specific policies from a critique of the whole nature of social life and the pressures for conformity operative in the East German dictatorship. As an open letter of students at the Katechetischen Oberseminar Naumburg of January 1981 put it:

In our society, images of the enemy are constantly being created in order to arouse hatred and readiness to engage in violence. This hinders a positive attitude towards peace. Thoughtlessly going along with all this for reasons of fear or for personal advantages furthers this trend and makes us accomplices. Therefore we support all attempts to point out that, through such behaviour, Christians and non-Christians withdraw from their responsibilities for society.[6]

It was above all a deep sense of moral and social responsibility, and the courage to speak out and to seek realistic changes and improvements, which characterized the new activists of the 1980s. After *Ostpolitik*, with international recognition of the GDR, the continued existence of the GDR was essentially taken for granted by most people in both Germanies (with the rather curious exception of the East German leadership, who continued to be plagued by paranoia with respect to Western perceptions and intentions, even in 1987—retrospectively, an *annus mirabilis*—on the occasion of the Berlin 750th anniversary celebrations and Honecker's ceremonious welcome on his trip to the Federal Republic). The brief period of apparent cultural liberalization in the early 1970s, the official commitment to the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, and the generally reformist flavour of Honecker's initial emphasis on social policies and pragmatic improvements in living conditions, stimulated hopes in many quarters for a real possibility of some change towards a more democratic form of 'actually existing socialism' in the GDR. And these hopes were not purely passive: increasingly, social critics sought to make use of official declarations to pressurize the regime to live up to its public word. A process of *Gratwanderung*—tightrope walking—became more widespread: instead of ineffective

[5] IfGA, ZPA, IV B 2/14/69, 'Aktennotiz über ein Gespräch mit Frau Bohley, Bärbel, 15.9.83'. The compiler of this report was a state functionary who had no interest whatsoever—quite the reverse—in presenting Bärbel Bohley's courageous stance in a favourable light.
[6] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3100, No. 23/81 (12 Jan. 1981), Anlage.

mouthing of slogans or expressing discontent through unofficial work stoppages, people began to develop strategies of pushing the state towards an expansion of limits, of changing the boundaries of the politically possible. It was this, above all, which distinguished the political activism of the 1980s from the disparate discontents of earlier decades.

Moreover, these political activists were operating in a wholly new situation, with respect both to the domestic political context and the international situation. The Church–state agreement of 6 March 1978 appeared to signify that the boundaries of the politically possible had indeed begun to shift. But the Church–state agreement meant a number of quite different things, depending on perspective.[7] In the event, the activists were able to make use of the new-found spaces for discussion and organization within a rather ambivalent Protestant Church. Mindful of outward appearances and public image in the era of Helsinki, the state too sought to make use of the Church leadership as an indirect means of controlling dissent. Caught in the middle, the Church itself played a highly ambiguous role, as we shall see. Internationally, the new Cold War of the early 1980s, and the subsequent thaw and movements towards reform in Eastern Europe under Gorbachev from the mid-1980s, were important factors in the development of domestic dissent in East Germany. Within these broader contexts, reformist tendencies and incipient social and political movements within the GDR underwent their own processes of cultural and organizational development and change.

The controlled ventilation of dissent, 1978–1984

The period from 1978 to the mid-1980s is characterized by considerable state use of the Church leadership to seek to allow a 'controlled ventilation of dissent', in which protests and relatively open discussions could take place within the context of religious meetings on church premises, but the state impressed on Church leaders the importance of restricting the influence of these gatherings and ensuring that they did not transgress certain clearly defined rules. At the same time, however, the very possibility of more open and free debate attracted many more young people into churches—for reasons having at least initially very little to do with the Christian faith—and contributed to something of a snowball effect. The result was ultimately to be the proliferation of groups, in the mid-1980s, and the eventual loss of control of these new movements by both the Church authorities and,

[7] Cf. the detailed discussion in Ch. 4 above.

eventually, even the more openly repressive state by the closing years of the decade.

It is important now to distinguish between a number of different aspects of what has just, rather globally, been referred to as 'the state'. As far as appearances were concerned, there were three separate instances of authority, intervention, and control: first, the state functionaries proper—those holding governmental offices, at the national, regional, or local levels; secondly, the closely related SED hierarchy; and thirdly, the—less visible—levels of the State Security Police, or Stasi. There was a circuitous route of observation, intimation, and ultimately veiled intimidation, culminating finally in meetings of Church leaders (having been themselves subjected to a degree of pressure from party and sometimes Stasi functionaries) with dissidents to seek to deflect their original intentions or to exert some control over the events which did take place. 'Social forces' (*gesellschaftliche Kräfte*) might also be deployed to exert a degree of indirect influence. It is important to note, however, that the Stasi was almost certainly involved, in an essentially *directive* (rather than simply reactive or servicing) capacity, in all aspects of observation, intervention, and control of dissent.[8]

The earliest forms of organized political activism were largely concerned with issues of peace and the militarization of society. Pacifist voices had always been heard in the GDR. We have seen, in previous chapters, the popular fears of war in the 1950s, and the stand of the Church with respect to the introduction of military service in 1962. The creation of an alternative form of service as 'construction soliders' (*Bausoldaten*) in 1964 had in the event served to bring together individuals concerned with defence issues, with around 220 to 240 young men opting for this rather longer period of service—which also marked them out as nonconformists, with associated career disadvantages—each year. Many of these former *Bausoldaten* maintained contacts with each other long after their period of alternative service was over. In 1972 the first *Friedensseminar* (seminar for peace) organized by former *Bausoldaten* took place in Königswalde; by 1979, the numbers attending had swollen to 125 (given the political circumstances, a quite considerable figure) and the seminar had to move into church premises to find adequate space for discussions. In the course of the 1970s, other circles for the discussion of peace issues (*Friedenskreise*) also began to be formed. More broadly, state policies of militarization, and the official cultivation of a friend/foe mentality, with West Germans designated not as relatives but as

[8] Cf. the discussion of the Stasi as 'nerve system and brain of the party' in Ch. 2 above.

the arch-enemy, had long been a cause for concern among many East Germans.

Incipient peace initiatives were given added impetus by the changes in the international context of the late 1970s. In 1979, the Western decision to station nuclear missiles on German soil frightened Germans, both East and West, and inaugurated a new period of more intense campaigning from the grass roots on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the new chill in superpower relations in the early 1980s after the thaw and *détente* of the 1970s, exacerbated by the Cold War rhetoric of the Reagan administration in the USA, made the prospects of a Third World War appear ever more possible. Many people, both Christians and non-Christians, sought to protest against the new climate, and to influence the decisions of their governments in a more pacifist direction.

To speak of an unofficial peace movement in East Germany is misleading. There was no single 'movement' as such; rather there were a number of different initiatives, some more spontaneous than others, some more organized and continuous than others, some seeking contacts and publicity in the West or elsewhere in Eastern Europe while others eschewed such potentially risky contacts. A number of key occasions, issues, and developments stand out; at the same time there were longer processes of development, subcurrents, and—as we shall see—what might be called events which did not take place. The relationships of the political authorities and the Church leadership to these initiatives were complex. Both had, in different ways and for different reasons, an interest in seeking to allow the expression while containing the political impact of such pressures for peace.

The state's own official peace movement was directed against NATO missiles, and sought to represent the East German army and the Warsaw Pact troops as simply defensive forces, designed to protect peace. In so far as the Eastern European peace initiatives supported Western peace movements, they were a useful aid in undermining the NATO side of the military balance; and there was some hope that grass-roots movements might put sufficient pressure on Western democratic governments to effect genuine changes in policy. The communists thus had a vested interest in Christian voices for peace which would aid the undermining of the Western will to increase military spending and provision. On the other hand, such energies must not be deployed against the Warsaw Pact's weaponry; moreover, it was essential that the party retain control over *any* movement in the GDR, and not allow any genuine development of organizational pluralism or open discussion. Purely from the political point of view—the aim to quell any initiative not controlled by the party—the unofficial peace initiatives of the

late 1970s and early 1980s were an implicit challenge to the hegemony of the SED.

The Church leadership was caught between the demands of conscience and the state. On the one hand, many individual Church leaders and pastors felt passionately that they must speak out for peace; on the other hand, the more cautious or diplomatic members of the Church leadership felt that any expression of concern must be kept within the bounds imposed by the state, to ensure, first, that the campaign could continue, and secondly, that the newly confirmed freedom of religious practice in the GDR should not be put in jeopardy. Thus the leadership at the same time both facilitated and limited incipient peace initiatives. And the state made use of this indirect mechanism of control to avoid the overt appearance of outright repression, while ultimately retaining—at least until the mid-1980s—the upper hand in what was a very delicate balance.

The opposition to the introduction of military education as a compulsory subject in schools, announced in April 1978, was completely unsuccessful. But it gave many people courage to continue to voice their concerns. Bishop Werner Krusche of Magdeburg and Bishop Armin Härtel of Dresden voiced their opposition to this, as did many less prominent churchpeople. Although the 'construction soldier service' was unique among Eastern European states, many pacifists felt that even this did not go far enough for those who had conscientious objections to military service of any kind, even without bearing weapons. In 1981, Pastor Wonneberger of Dresden proposed the notion of 'social peace service' (*Soziale Friedensdienst*, or SoFD), which, although rejected by the state, remained a campaigning issue for many peace activists.

'Blues masses' and peace prayers began to be a recurrent feature in the programmes of many churches, particularly (in association with Pastor Eppelmann) in the Samariterkirche and the Erlöserkirche in Berlin. Numbers attending very often reached 800–1,000. Although these events achieved no tangible or immediate changes in regime policy, they fostered new cultural currents among young people. Prayers for peace were complemented by discussions on more general social problems, such as the *Leistungsdruck*, the pressure to conform and succeed, felt by many young people. The need for better interpersonal relationships, for changing the nature of society rather than succumbing to pressures or dropping out, began to be articulated.[9] Here we can see the outlines of a culture of political activism, to be distinguished from the currents of conformity or retreat so prevalent in earlier years.

[9] See e.g. the reports on the blues masses in BP, O-4 766.

The early 1980s saw the beginnings of the politicization of the peace movement, with individuals beginning to link whole society problems with the question of peace. There were also growing links between secular intellectuals (Marxist dissidents) and members of the Church, broadening the spectrum of dissent. For example, in 1982 the dissident intellectual Robert Havemann and the pastor Rainer Eppelmann co-operated in producing their joint Berlin Appeal calling for peace. This by no means elicited universal approval, even among peace activists; many saw it as unnecessarily provocative and politically counter-productive. Despite sympathizing with Eppelmann's 'disquiet and concern', 'concern and impatience', the Berlin-Brandenburg Church leadership withdrew their support on 13 February 1982, commenting that 'the current political and military constellation must be considered much more precisely than is done in the Appeal'.[10] Many pastors rejected it 'because it puts in jeopardy the relationship which has developed between the Church and the state', as a report from Bezirk Cottbus put it.[11] Others, however, such as Pastor Wonneberger in Dresden, continued to try to collect signatures for the Berlin Appeal.

A Stasi report on a peace forum in the Dresden Kreuzkirche, led by Wonneberger, provides interesting insights into the complex processes of influence and control which were at work. On this occasion, Bishop Hempel, in response to a question about whether the Church leadership in Saxony agreed with the decision of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church not to support the Appeal, replied that the Church had to work within clear limits:

> This means in practice that political freedom is of great value and we should work for it wherever we can. But external freedom and freedom in the inner sense are not the same thing, and above all not for the Church. This means that as far as working for political freedom in the structural, external sense is concerned, my understanding is that the Holy Scriptures have, for the sake of Christ, set clear limits for the Church. I can well believe that, on the one hand, that is a great disappointment for you, but on the other hand it is, ultimately, the essential strength of the Church.[12]

This theological formulation—separating freedom of spirit from freedom in the secular sphere—was rather typical of the more conservative Church leadership, and was of course in a tradition with which German Protestants,

[10] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3201, No. 82/82 (16 Feb. 1982), which includes a copy of the *Stellungnahme* of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church.

[11] IfGA, ZPA, IV B 2/14/69, 'Rat des Bez. Cottbus, Informationsbericht für die Monate Feb. und März 1982' (13 Apr. 1982), 2.

[12] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3202, No. 85/82 (19 Feb. 1982).

inheriting the legacy of Luther and Kant, were very familiar. Typical, too, were the suggestions made by the Stasi at the end of this report for exerting further influence over the undesired activities of Pastor Wonneberger: on the suggestion of the Stasi, a regional state functionary (the *Stellvertreter für Inneres beim Vorsitzenden des Rates des Bezirkes Dresden*) would speak to the President of the Regional Office of the Landeskirche of Saxony, President Domsch, who would in turn speak with Wonneberger. The Stasi were assured that the regional Church leadership would 'continue to work on disciplining Wonneberger and would let him know that he must not exceed the boundaries of his competence as a pastor'.[13] But despite such efforts, the new initiatives were not so readily suppressed.

At the same time, peace initiatives were beginning to spread as a broader social movement with an incipient mass base. The first *Friedensdekade* (peace week, in fact lasting a period of ten days) was held in the autumn of 1980, adopting as its symbol the 'Schwerter zu Pflugscharen (swords into ploughshares)' badge. Initially printed by a Church printing press in Herrnhut as a bookmark on linen paper, and thus not subject to censorship, the swords into ploughshares symbol had impeccable communist credentials. The picture chosen to accompany the biblical quotation was a depiction of the statue donated by the Soviet Union to the United Nations building in New York, and could thus hardly be objected to by the East German authorities. What they did object to, however, was the way in which this symbol caught on as a badge of protest. Worn as an armband by increasing numbers of young people who wished to express their discontent with the official state-sponsored peace movement, the symbol became an outward sign of a growing wave of incipient political unrest within the GDR, and thus could not politically be tolerated.

The state made this very clear by the winter of 1981–2. The symbol was explicitly forbidden in relation to the Dresden Peace Forum of February 1982. By April 1982, the Church in Saxony explicitly renounced any responsibility for people who continued to wear the symbol. In a letter entitled 'We can protect you no longer (*Wir können Euch nicht mehr schützen*)' Church leaders suggested that it was time to rethink tactics, and that the meaning of the symbol now had to be reconsidered in the light of political circumstances.[14] Many activists replaced their swords into ploughshares badges with a sign equally irritating to the authorities: a blank patch sewn on to the arm where previously the armband had been. This was of

[13] Ibid.

[14] The letter is reprinted in Klaus Ehring and Martin Dallwitz (eds.), *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen. Friedensbewegung in der DDR* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982), 65–7.

course totally beyond any non-ludicrous form of state repression. But the effect was probably only one of a brief lifting of spirits among activists rather than anything more substantial.

From 1980 onwards, however, peace weeks (*Friedensdekaden*) became a regular annual event. These were regional gatherings, with programmes of activities lasting for ten days, with a predominantly religious flavour but clear political overtones and implications. They served to provide continuities within the unofficial peace movement, and to facilitate networks and contacts among activists in different areas of the GDR. They thus performed a very important organizational function, as we shall see, which was to distinguish the political activism of the 1980s from the disparate discontents of previous decades. But they also facilitated the state's overview of dissident activities, and were relatively easy to control by the state. *Friedensdekaden* were organized under the close oversight of the Church authorities—and, through them, of the state.

There were concurrent organizational developments. In the spring of 1983, at a peace seminar in Berlin, a number of peace groups came together to form a network, or *Netzwerk*. Several peace activists began regular meetings under the heading *Konkret für den Frieden*, and an organizational committee—the *Fortsetzungsausschuß*—was formed to coordinate future events. Local groups retained autonomy, and there was no single leadership figure in these activities. It was thus relatively difficult for the state to seek to behead these proliferating movements, although the Stasi scored considerable success in devastating particular local groups.[15]

The cross-fertilization between Christians and non-Christians was evident too in the growing unofficial women's movement of the early 1980s. Following the introduction in March 1982 of a new law on military service stipulating the mobilization of women, in 1983 the group known as *Frauen für den Frieden* (women for peace) was founded. Early activities included a demonstration under the rubric of '*Fasten für das Leben* (fasting for life)' in August 1983. Among leading individuals were Bärbel Bohley and Ulrike Poppe, both of whom were arrested for their activities later in 1983. Bohley was quite explicit that she was prepared to make use of the Church for protection so long as it was necessary, but not to engage in undue compromises to its authority. As she put it in a meeting of women's peace groups on 14–15 September 1984: ideally, she would like 'to break with the "tutelage and regulation" of the Church'; but she had no idea 'whether and how an "independent women's group" outside the Church could exist'.[16] As we shall see, however, by the later 1980s the tensions between Church and some groups had developed to such an extent that many did, effectively, operate to a large degree outside the Church, except in those areas where individual pastors were favourably inclined.

In addition to longer-term strategies, there were many individual events or demonstrations, some of which were repressed or diverted, others of which took place but with greater or lesser degrees of publicity. Those which became known to Western observers at the time—such as the peace demonstration in the Frauenkirche in Dresden on 13 February 1982, or the demonstration in Jena on Christmas Eve 1982[17]—represent only the tip of a very much larger iceberg, the true extent of which will only become known as the archives are extensively trawled. A few examples to indicate the range of activities which did or did not take place must suffice to illustrate the multiple political seethings below the apparently tranquil surface of an outwardly stable state.

Individual events included planned demonstrations on specific occasions. Some were suppressed before they could begin: in March 1982, for example, the Junge Gemeinde in Jena planned activities to commemorate the anniversary of the bombardment of Jena. Appropriate state pressures were put on Bishop Leich, who was persuaded to forbid the planned commemorative service.[18] A more successful unofficial demonstration did, however, take place the following year, without the protection of the Church, on the occasion of the 38th anniversary of the bombardment of Jena on 18 March 1983. A 'hostile-negative group of individuals' appeared in a 'provocative' manner 'with public impact' at the official demonstration of approximately 15,000 participants. The thirty or so 'hostile-negative' forces bore home-made banners bearing such slogans as 'Make peace without weapons!', 'Disarm yourselves!', 'Get rid of war toys!', 'Militarization out of our lives', 'We want social peace service!', and the by now wholly provocative 'Swords into ploughshares!'[19] In the church service of the same evening, Bishop Leich adopted a notably pro-state stance, emphasizing that there were boundaries which must not be overstepped. People would simply have to

[15] Cf. e.g. Wolfgang Rüddenklau, *Störenfried. ddr-opposition 1986–89* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), and Vera Wollenberger, *Virus der Heuchler: Innenansichten aus Stasi-Akten* (Berlin: Elefanten-Press, 1992), on the breaking-up of the Friedenskreis Pankow by what became known as 'Lutzis' (since a remarkable number of Stasi infiltrators rather clumsily adopted the same cover name of 'Lutz').

[16] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3396, No. 368/84 (27 Sept. 1984).

[17] Cf. Ferdinand Kroh, 'Havemann's Erben—1953 bis 1988', in id. (ed.), *'Freiheit ist immer Freiheit'. Die Andersdenkenden in der DDR* (Frankfurt-on-Main and Berlin: Ullstein Sachbuch, 1988).

[18] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3206, No. 133/82 (18 Mar. 1982).

[19] Ibid., Z 3290, No. 101/83 (21 Mar. 1983).

come to terms with the lack of a social peace service (SoFD), a dissident could not make use of the service to collect signatures for a petition to Honecker, 'the church is not for purposes of advertising'. Leich concluded that 'it is necessary to have confidence in the state'. The indirect pressures of the Stasi, via state functionaries, on the Church dignitary had achieved the desired effect, although they had not succeeded in suppressing initiatives from below.

Similarly, demonstrations were planned for the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing on 6–7 August 1983. Actions were planned for Jena, Berlin, Halle, Schwerin, Neubrandenburg, Karl-Marx-Stadt, and elsewhere. The final comment which follows the Stasi's analysis of the plans is very revealing of its *modus operandi*, and demonstrates yet again the role of the Stasi as nerve system and brain centre of the state: 'Measures were introduced in all the affected districts and areas to investigate these plans further and, in conjunction with the relevant state organs and social forces, either to prevent the planned activities, or to exert influence in such a manner as to ensure that the course of events unfolded without any disturbance, or to reduce them to purely religious activities.'[20]

Some events simply did not take place at all. One such, which for its sophisticated simplicity deserves to make up in historical fame what it lost in publicity at the time, was a plan for a symbolic act of 'mass death' at the eleventh moment of the eleventh hour planned by a number of independent peace groups and the Initiative Frauen für den Frieden for 22 October 1983. The individuals involved intended simply to lie down in front of the Red Town Hall (Roter Rathaus) in East Berlin's central square, Alexanderplatz, at five minutes to twelve precisely, and have the contours of their bodies outlined in chalk on the pavement. They would remain until removed by security forces. In the event, the demonstration never took place. Sixty-four people were individually prevented from participating; in the words of the Stasi report, they were 'rounded up, interrogated, and taught a lesson (*belehrt*)' before ever reaching the site of the planned demonstration, while a further sixteen were arrested on the spot before anything had begun.[21]

Perhaps most important were the emerging currents of discussion, debate, and the establishment of organizational forms with a degree of continuity and longevity under the protection—and constraints—of the Church. The small peace circles themselves helped many young East German adults simply to learn to express themselves more freely, to articulate their own ideas in public, in ways which the pressures of GDR education and social

[20] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3300, No. 258/83 (28 July 1983).
[21] Ibid., Z 3324, No. 361/83 (21 Oct. 1983), and No. 362/83 (24 Oct. 1983).

institutions did not allow. As Vera Wollenberger was later to put it, for example: 'It is for me today still one of the most important outcomes of the work in peace circles that the participants learnt to express their opinions freely and openly. Most of them had not only to overcome their timidity about talking in front of a lot of people, but also their fear of saying openly what they were thinking.'[22] From these small, local circles sprang broader and larger initiatives.

The proliferation of dissent in the mid-1980s

The middle years of the 1980s were marked by a number of new features. Groups became more specialized, focusing on particular issues; and there were attempts to coordinate the activities of groups in different areas through networks which transcended local and regional boundaries. There were also increasing efforts to create some limited form of 'public sphere' through the production of illicit *samizdat* literature—a phenomenon which had been markedly absent in the GDR for the most part of its history (in contrast to neighbouring Eastern bloc countries), partly because of the relative ease of publication in West Germany. By 1987, too, it became apparent that many individuals and groups were increasingly irritated with the more conservative Church leadership, and were seeking to free themselves from the protection of the Church, which now appeared more constraining than enabling. The state, too, became aware that the Church's allotted role as the controller of dissent was no longer (or not yet?) being adequately fulfilled, and the Church leaders appeared to have ever less control of the development of dissidence. As the political activists became ever more bold and organized, so the state came to use more overt means of control, bypassing an apparently ever more ineffectual Church leadership. These developments were to come to a head in the winter of 1987–8.

Networking and specialization

The idea of networking had been present already in the peace movements of the later 1970s and early 1980s, and there were quite explicit views in some quarters about the forms it should take. A Stasi report gives a very succinct summary of the viewpoint articulated at a peace seminar in March 1983:

> EPPELMANN and TSCICHE [*sic*] reckon that conditions have developed to the point that 'networking' through the formation of a 'community of solidarity' should be taken in hand. In their view, this should take place not through a hierarchical but

[22] Wollenberger, *Virus der Heuchler*, 17.

rather a federal structure. In this way, the possibility would be avoided that any state measures against the main actors would cripple the organization. In the framework of the planned 'community of solidarity' it is intended to introduce processes of 'alternative further social development'. In this way, alongside the intended exchange of experiences and information, those who are involved in this community should be guaranteed protection, help, and solidarity. The assumption was made that the goals to which the 'solidarity community' aspired would provoke the resistance of Church leadership bodies, and that the realization of these goals would only be possible beyond the boundaries of the Church. In this sense they had to be more daring.[23]

Similarly, in a meeting on 14–15 September 1984, women's peace groups from all over the GDR met in the Evangelical Community Centre in Wörmlitz-Böllberg/Halle. In the view of a Stasi report, this meeting was

to be evaluated as a first attempt, analogous to meetings of representatives of so-called peace circles and environmentalist groups in the GDR, to bring together the so-called women's groups which have recently been formed, and which are quite varied as far as their social structure and political goals are concerned. It is intended to get them to agree on common basic positions, to draw them more strongly into public visibility, to exchange experiences of their political impact, and to orient them towards further activities.[24]

That the women's movement was relatively rapidly successful in these aims becomes clear from a report on the second GDR-wide meeting of women's groups on 29–31 March 1985 in Berlin. Despite previous typical discussions between state representatives and Church leaders, the Stasi's expectations were 'not in the least fulfilled', in particular because of the attitude of 'tolerance and inconsistency . . . on the part of Generalsuperint. KRUSCHE'. As a result, in the light of various Stasi reports

the second supra-regional gathering of so-called women's groups in the GDR is to be evaluated as a further significant step of sufficiently well-known hostile-negative forces to bring together women's groups effectively for purposes of inspiring and organizing a so-called inner opposition, agreeing on unified political and organizational basic positions, and orientating themselves towards further activities.[25]

In the Stasi's view, the women's movement had 'qualitatively and quantitatively reached a higher stage of development'—praise indeed from this source, supreme master as the Stasi was of the art of political organization.

The notion of networking, in very loose political forms—informal contacts, liaison between essentially leaderless, autonomous regional and local groups—became a common feature of the development of a variety of forms

[23] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3332, Information No. 86/83 (7 Mar. 1983), 7–8.
[24] Ibid., Z 3396, No. 368/84 (27 Sept. 1984).
[25] Ibid., Z 3450, No. 152/85 (29 Apr. 1985).

of political activism in the middle years of the 1980s. This was a key organizational characteristic which distinguished the dissent of this decade from the more isolated and spontaneous popular protests of earlier years, and made the proliferation of grass-roots dissent less easy to deal with as far as the state was concerned. For the time being, the state's main strategies remained those of Stasi observation, infiltration, and intervention, as well as the use of the Church authorities as a means of control.

In addition to networking, however, the groups were themselves becoming increasingly specialized in their work, and distinct from one another in a variety of ways. The general wave of concern about peace began to crystallize into a number of more distinctive groupings and orientations, focusing on different aspects of policy. The Bundestag decision of 22 November 1983 that nuclear missiles were to be stationed on German soil (followed by the arrival of the first Pershing missiles the very next day) had a depressing effect on unofficial peace initiatives, one of whose main aims had now been defeated. And, in preparation for Honecker's planned, but ultimately aborted, trip to West Germany in 1984, there was a relaxation of restrictions on travel visas and a consequent spate of emigrations to the West in the period from February to May 1984. The combination of the defeat on the issue of nuclear missiles in central Europe and the so-called *Ausreisewelle*, which robbed the incipient alternative political initiatives of many potential supporters and activists, produced a widespread mood of resignation.[26] But the response was ultimately to pursue new strategies and to focus on other avenues of possible change. The broad issue of human rights in the GDR, and the need for specialized pressure groups focusing on particular areas, came to the forefront of concern.

Human rights initiatives

At the *Friedenswerkstatt* in Berlin on 29–30 June 1985, the possibility of setting up a GDR-wide seminar on human rights was discussed.[27] This was to discuss not only issues relating to peace, but also matters which directly affected individual activists, such as their effective *Berufsverbot* or ban on appropriate professional careers. A planned meeting in the autumn of 1985 to discuss this new initiative was, after Stasi pressures, forbidden by the Treptow church in which the meeting was to be held. In the event, the participants in the new initiative—who had disagreed already over tactics in

[26] Cf. Kroh, 'Havemann's Erben'; and Rüddenklau, *Störenfried*, 49–51.
[27] Cf. MfS, ZAIG, Z 3467, No. 286/85 (3 July 1985); and Wolfgang Templin and Reinhard Weißhuhn, 'Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte. Die erste unabhängige DDR-Oppositionsgruppe', in H. Müller-Enbergs, M. Schulz, and J. Wielgohs (eds.), *Von der Illegalität ins Parlament. Werdegang und Konzept der neuen Bürgerbewegungen* (Berlin: LinksDruck Verlag, Christoph Links, 1991).

relation to the banned meeting, and whose disagreements were exploited and exacerbated by the Stasi informers in their midst—subsequently split into two groups.[28] One later became known as Gegenstimmen; the other was the Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte (IFM), formally founded in January 1986.

The IFM conceived itself as the first truly independent political group, outside the Church.[29] In retrospect, it was perceived as the first group 'which openly articulated its role as political opposition',[30] and thus was essentially forced into operating *outside* the Church, which still maintained the role of a Church within socialism. Rather than making use of church premises—with all the associated compromises and constraints—the IFM met in private homes, and attempted to make use of privately owned writing materials and copying machines.

The IFM consciously adopted less cautious strategies, seeking to publish open letters, petitions, and appeals, sometimes jointly with Church or peace groups and sometimes independently. A nice example of its activities is the open letter of 20 July 1986, from Hirsch, Grimm, and Templin jointly with Pastor Rainer Eppelmann, to the Council of Ministers of the GDR. This protested against the Wall, demanded greater freedom to travel, improvements in communications, East–West contacts, the freedom of information, culture, and literature. The letter was firmly grounded in astute political tactics, appealing to the officially acknowledged leadership of Moscow: 'The "new thinking and acting" demanded by the General Secretary of the CPSU is demonstrated first and foremost by both sides refraining from whipping up fear and suspicion and by demolishing barriers of all sorts.'[31] Gorbachev was essentially being used as a legitimatory means of appealing to the Honecker leadership: Gorbachev was less an instigator of these political initiatives than an occasion for strengthening the case of the would-be reformers in East Germany. The IFM also fostered contacts with the West, and sought publicity in the Western media, as well as linking up with similar groups elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

The basic aims of the IFM were focused on the issue of *domestic* social peace: on the democratization of society, the establishment of the rule of law, the right to strike, the establishment of independent courts, and guarantees of the freedom of speech, of the press, of organization. Socialism—even with a human face—was not a professed goal or explicit plat-

[28] Cf. Wollenberger, *Virus der Heuchler*, 67–70.
[29] See Templin and Weißhuhn, 'Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte', on which this and the following paragraphs are based.
[30] Ibid. 154. [31] BP, O-4 766.

form of the human rights activists in the IFM. Membership was left deliberately informal: anyone who signed a petition or joined in an activity was deemed to 'belong'. There was no hierarchy or structure, and after the early period in which there were three spokespeople—Peter Grimm, Ralf Hirsch, and Wolfgang Templin—there were no formal positions in what remained essentially a very small group. Active membership was probably only in the region of thirty individuals. Several participants in the IFM were to be founder members of Neues Forum, including Bärbel Bohley, Katja Havemann, and Katrin and Frank Eigenfeld, while others were subsequently involved in other movements of the autumn revolution (Ulrike Poppe in Demokratie Jetzt, and the Stasi IM Ibrahim Böhme in the Social Democratic Initiative, for example).

The IFM produced the first truly *samizdat* publication of the GDR, *Grenzfall*, on 19 June 1986 (previous quasi-political publications, such as the ten-page 'information paper' *Schalom*, having been produced under the auspices of the Church and stamped with the censorship-evading mark, 'Only for inner-Church use').[32] This first issue of *Grenzfall* was distributed at the 1986 *Friedenswerkstatt* on 29 June 1986 in Berlin Lichtenberg, despite the state's previous attempts at influencing the proceedings through Church leaders. The Stasi report on this occasion notes rather grumpily that, despite previous discussions with the Berlin state functionary responsible (Genosse Hoffmann), Generalsuperintendent Krusche's influence on the gathering was minimal: his and others' 'influence on the way in which the occasion went off was . . . characterized by inconsistency and lack of determination'. Templin, Hirsch, and Grimm were thus able to distribute the '1st edition of an information leaflet with the title "Grenzfall"' which was an 'attempt . . . to construct a "GDR-wide" information network for all those active in the work of a political underground'.[33] In the later, post-1989 view of Templin and Weißhuhn, the monthly publication of *Grenzfall* proved to be 'a stimulus for further publications and independent periodicals within and beyond the Church, in other words a stimulus for the development of a second public sphere, which was characteristic of the new quality of activity and of networking of the groups in the second half of the eighties'.[34]

By September 1987, human rights issues—particularly in connection with

[32] Cf. the exemplar of 17 Sept. 1984 in BP, O-4 766. On 12 Nov. 1984 Generalsuperintendent Krusche was officially warned of the dangers of permitting another issue of *Schalom* to be produced.
[33] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3524, No. 313/86 (2 July 1986).
[34] Templin and Weißhuhn, 'Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte', 154.

the desire to leave for the West—had become sufficiently burning that a new group was formed dealing solely with human rights, the Arbeitsgruppe Staatsbürgerschaftsrecht der DDR (Working Group for GDR Citizenship Rights). Although many individuals associated with this themselves desired to leave for the West, one of the main activists, Wolfgang Templin (also a founder member of the IFM), was more concerned to remain in the GDR and work for the improvement of human rights within the system. The tensions between those seeking exit, and those pressurizing for change within the GDR, were to grow in the ensuing months. Many political activists felt that demonstrations for reform were being effectively hijacked by people seeking to have themselves arrested and exiled—the quickest way of going west. Similarly, the Church leadership was caught between its professed aim of persuading people to stay and build a better GDR, and helping those in need of advice, care, and confession at times of personal distress and doubt. The advice centres which the Church set up were a perpetual focus of SED criticism, since the dual functions—individual counselling while yet supporting the view that it was better to stay than to leave—were often incompatible.

Peace initiatives between Church and state

Peace initiatives continued of course to be a major focus of concern—and a cover or pretext for a range of parallel and related discussions. There were a variety of types of meeting and demonstration, including meetings of local peace circles (*Friedenskreisen*), joint meetings under the heading of *Konkret für den Frieden*, regional peace workshops (*Friedenswerkstätte*), and the annual peace weeks (*Friedensdekaden*). Although the middle years of the 1980s represented something of a trough with respect to the peace movement, narrowly defined, these gatherings sustained a certain momentum of organization and discussion which was to prove important in the genesis of 1989.

The *Friedenswerkstatt* of 1985, for example, was not initially expected to be of much import, according to a report of a preliminary discussion on 11 June 1985 between the *Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters für Inneres*, Comrade Hoffmann, and, on behalf of the Church, Manfred Stolpe and Generalsuperintendent Krusche: 'Stolpe explained that, for the planned peace workshop he feared, not fireworks (*Brisanz*) but rather "boredom". The excited agitation in respect of the peace question was over, and also many "agitators" were no longer in the country. Problems could only arise where Western journalists made a big deal of certain minor incidents.'[35] In

[35] BP, O-4 766, 'Information über ein Gespräch des Stellvertreters des Oberbürgermeisters für Inneres, Genossen Hoffmann, mit Konsistorialpräsident Stolpe und Generalsuperintendent Dr Krusche am 11.06.85'.

the event, there were indeed significantly fewer participants in 1985 than in the previous year: perhaps 1,800 in 1985 compared to around 3,000 in 1984.[36] The discussion was allegedly 'laborious and hard to keep going . . . The mood in the room corresponded with the general mood, questions were raised, without being able to answer them.' The state concluded that the Church leadership remained predominantly loyal; that negative forces were not gaining in support but were nevertheless becoming more outspoken and seeking to provoke confrontation; and that it must remain the state's strategy to stick to the current course of avoiding open confrontation or the creation of martyrs. It was this strategy of course that was to change in the later 1980s.

The significance of peace workshops was not, however, limited to discussion of peace policies in a narrow sense. They were in the event more important in the function they performed for the airing of a wide range of related topics, and in cross-fertilization between an ever-increasing number of groups. As we have seen, it was at the allegedly relatively unsuccessful 1985 peace workshop that the human rights movements were conceived. Many individuals and groups were able to meet in the context of church-protected peace events in ways which would have otherwise been impossible. The 1986 *Friedenswerkstatt* in the Erlöserkirche in Berlin, for example, attracted around 1,300 participants (a further drop in numbers from the previous year), mostly in their twenties.[37] Stalls were set up on the church premises, representing the following groups: the (pro-regime, officially supported) *Christliche Friedenskonferenz* (Christian Peace Conference, CFK); various peace groups from different areas and churches (Samariter, Erlöser, Pankow, Friedrichsfelde, Potsdam, Weißensee, Kaulsdorf, Pfarr, and Glauben); the *Niederländisch-Ökumenische Gemeinde* (Ecumenical Congregation of the Netherlands); Inkota; *Ärzte für den Frieden* (Doctors for Peace); *Homosexuelle Selbsthilfegruppe* (Homosexual Self-help Group); *Ökologiekreis Zion* (Zion Ecology Circle); *Lesbenkreis* (Lesbian Circle); *Frauen für den Frieden* (Women for Peace); *Wühlmäuse* ('voles'; *wühlen* also has overtones of subversive—underground in the metaphorical sense—activities); *Aktion Sühnezeichen* (Action Sign of Atonement); and the IFM, which had been expressly forbidden. The plethora of groups represented essentially reflected the increasing specialization and proliferation of grassroots activism in preceding years. This peace workshop included discussions of socialist democracy, human rights, and ecological questions, particularly with respect to the Chernobyl disaster.

[36] Ibid., 'Information zur "Friedenswerkstatt" am 30.06.85 in der Berliner Erlöserkirche'.
[37] Ibid., 'Erste Information über den Verlauf des "Friedenswerkstatt" am 29.06.1986 in der Berliner Erlöserkirche, 10.00–18.00'.

The state's report on the 1986 peace workshop drew rather negative conclusions in comparison to the more self-satisfied view of the previous year. Despite the fact that participants tended to seek individual solutions to perceived problems (personal austerity, use of the bicycle rather than the car, for example), the capacity of the Church leadership to control the event was clearly less than adequate. The event showed 'that Church leaders again promised more to state representatives than they were able to deliver'. It was also apparent 'that their influence on the participants in the peace workshop was minimal'.[38] Rather belatedly, the state was discovering that the Church was not organized on the lines of democratic centralism so familiar to SED and Stasi functionaries. It could not be simply assumed that decisions reached at the top would have any impact lower down: the Church could not, in fact, prove to be as useful as had been assumed as a coordinated (*gleichgeschaltet*) arm of the state.

The planned *Friedenswerkstatt* of 1987 was in the event forbidden, following pressures put on Günter Krusche in Berlin. Krusche's increasing compliance with the state—notwithstanding his helpfulness to individual dissidents—had already been evident in earlier years. A state report of 1981 on the question of human rights and the Church had at that time differentiated within the Church leadership and singled out Stolpe and Krusche as the most 'positive': 'Among the contributions currently available, the ones from OKR Stolpe and Dozent Günter Krusche are the most constructive.'[39] In the ensuing years Krusche and—to a much greater extent the always compliant Stolpe—had been learning the arts of cultivating a good relationship with secular authorities, even if this meant adopting a relatively heavy-handed stance towards activists within the Church.

Controversies over particular events and developments were reflected in wider theological controversies within the Church. What should be the role of the Church within socialism? Some Church leaders sought to emphasize that the Church was about salvation, not politics. Others found neat formulations for the difficulty of their role in opening church doors to all of God's creation while at the same time sustaining the Church's compliant and therefore relatively privileged role in relation to a state which certainly held the ultimate power of coercion. As Bishop Werner Leich put it: 'The Church is there for everyone, but not for everything.'[40] There were great differences

[38] BP, O-4 766, 5.

[39] BP, O-4 1943 (Feb. 1981), 'Zu einigen Problemen der gegenwärtigen Auseinandersetzung um die Menschenrechte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Haltung der Kirchen'.

[40] Quoted in Josef Schmid, 'Die politische Rolle der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR in den achtziger Jahren. Gratwanderung zwischen Opposition und Anpassung', in Müller-Enbergs, Schulz, and Wielgohs (eds.), *Von der Illegalität ins Parlament*, 357.

in different areas: the Church in Berlin-Brandenburg was constantly in confrontation with grass-roots groups, whereas in Leipzig and Saxony groups were on the whole less aggressive and cultivated better relationships with the local Church leaders.[41] Similarly, some Church leaders, such as Heino Falcke of Erfurt, were much more favourably inclined to reformist currents from below than were others, such as the very pro-Honecker Bishop Horst Gienke of Greifswald.[42]

In response to the ever more frustrating compliance of key members of the Church leadership with the state's directives and pressures, certain Christians decided to break away from the hierarchy's control. In May 1987, the formation by Vera Wollenberger and others of the 'Church from Below' (*Kirche von Unten*) was announced in the underground pamphlet *Fliegende Blätter* as an autonomous Church within the Church, on the grounds that 'the Church has built up a structure and hierarchy which curtails all spontaneity, personal initiative, and self-determination on the basis of alleged objective pressures'.[43] Along with other developments in the summer and autumn of 1987, this marked the beginning of the end of the state's experiment in using a *gleichgeschaltete* Church as a means of exerting political control.

But, in the meantime, the situation remained in the balance: in a sense, the compliance and continued commitment of the Church to maintaining a good relationship with the regime was the necessary precondition for the slow, admittedly constrained but nevertheless protected, nurturing of distinctive cultural and political currents. In addition to the activities of local peace groups, for example, there continued to be the well-coordinated annual peace weeks (*Friedensdekaden*). Each year, from 1980 onwards, the Church organized these peace weeks under a specific theme.[44] Reading

[41] As one dissident put it: 'We in Saxony have quite a good relationship with the Church leadership . . . Of course we don't let them exclude us, but we don't exclude either (Natürlich lassen wir uns nicht ausgrenzen, aber wir grenzen auch nicht aus)'. Quoted ibid. 357; see generally 357–8.

[42] Cf. IfGA, ZPA, IV B 2/14/69, Rat d. Bez. Erfurt, 'Beurteilung der Probstei Erfurt der Evangelischen Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen, Dr Heino Falcke': Falcke is criticized for his support of Solidarność, Konkret für den Frieden, and even Gorbachev[!]; he allegedly wants the GDR leadership to 'take over Soviet practices on the path to social renewal. His destructive utterances against official GDR policies of dialogue, peace, and security moved in this direction . . .'

[43] Quoted in Kroh (ed.), *'Freiheit ist immer Freiheit'*, 48.

[44] 9–19 Nov. 1980: 'Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen'; 8–18 Nov. 1981: 'Gerechtigkeit Abrüstung Frieden'; 7–17 Nov. 1982: 'Angst Vertrauen Frieden'; 6–16 Nov. 1983: 'Frieden schaffen aus der Kraft der Schwachen'; 1–12 Nov. 1984: 'Leben gegen den Tod'; 10–20 Nov. 1985: 'Frieden wächst aus Gerechtigkeit'; 9–19 Nov. 1986: 'Friede sei mit Euch'; 8–18 Nov. 1987: 'Miteinander leben'; 6–16 Nov. 1988: 'Friede den Fernen und Friede den Nahen'.

through the materials collated in preparation for these annual gatherings, what is perhaps most striking is the highly religious tone, flavour, and content of the documents. The biblical references, prayers, and expressions of a Christian world-view are overwhelming: the power of prayer is clearly rated more highly than overt political organization. But there is also a sense of humour and recognition of worldly realities: the 1987 *Friedensdekade*, for example, produced a postcard with a cartoon of a mouse, at ankle height between two large pairs of aggressively confrontational jackboots, hopefully holding up a placard saying 'Frieden' (peace) and a flower.[45] This slightly anxious but intrinsically optimistic mouse, determinedly demonstrating its position against all the odds, stood as a symbol of what the Christian peace activists were seeking to do.

Friedensdekaden no doubt were of great individual interest to participants, whose personal faith and commitment must have been considerably strengthened in meetings with others. But at the same time these meetings were on the whole relatively easily controlled by the state, through the Church leadership.[46] With prior pressures exerted by state and SED functionaries, combined with a critical presence of Stasi and police officials, and the adequate distribution among the participants of 'reliable social forces', it was possible at the very least to ensure that any critical voices were not *öffentlichkeitswirksam* (had no public impact), that there were no public disturbances or *besondere Vorkommnisse* (notable incidents), and that there were no reports in the Western media. Even better from the regime's point of view, it was on occasion possible to ensure that in place of 'system-indifferent' comments (which did not distinguish on the *Animal Farm* lines of 'NATO weapons bad, Warsaw Pact weapons good'), some positive case could be articulated in favour of actually existing socialism. The observation and control processes thus veered between damage limitation exercises and the attempt to influence events in a 'positive' direction, as desired by the state.

The state's attempted harnessing of the Church is well expressed in a comment on preparations for the 1985 *Friedensdekade*: 'In the period of preparation and working up materials for this year's peace week, realistic forces in the leadership groups of the BEK and the regional Churches were able to achieve a further incorporation of the peace week in the overall framework of constructive Church peace activities. In this way, the leeway for the negative forces was further limited . . .'[47] For the most part, these

[45] BP, O-4 1431.
[46] Cf. the reports in BP, O-4 1432.
[47] BP, O-4 1433, 'Information zur sechsten Friedensdekade des Bundes der Ev. Kirchen in der DDR, vom 10.11.1985–20.11.1985'.

preparations reaped the appropriate reward. In some areas attendances were low, and the course of events was 'objective, calm, and accorded with state expectations . . .'. State organs were 'geared towards immediate intervention so that during the peace week the existing good state/Church relationship would not be burdened, but rather secured and enhanced'. Occasionally church services attracted only older, regular members of local congregations; and interest in some rural areas appears often to have been close to non-existent.[48]

Nevertheless, the odd event escaped even the closest state control. On 12 November 1985, for example, in Eppelmann's church in Berlin, West German journalists and television reporters witnessed the singer Stefan Krawczyk performing songs with lyrics critical of the fortified borders and travel restrictions of the GDR. On the same occasion, the invited Pastor Tschiche's 'massively demagogic and clearly antisocialist' lecture distinguished three possible modes of response to prevailing political circumstances, worth quoting for its highly apposite analysis of the alternatives open to citizens of the GDR who were not blinded by regime propaganda:

—retreat into the inner sphere (niche society)
—infiltration of social institutions in order to alter structures (but has the disadvantage that it might in the process stabilize conditions);
—rejection of current structures, search for new lifestyles, freeing oneself from dependence, training in the 'upright walk', publicly resisting those in power. (The speaker identified himself with this course of action.)[49]

It was precisely because small numbers of people chose the third option, in preference to the widely prevalent first and second forms of response, that the stability of the GDR began to be shaken in the course of the 1980s. And in 1988–9 increasing numbers opted for the third approach, at the same time as the Church leadership and the state began to lose control.

Environmentalist movements

Closely related to concerns about the threat of nuclear war were worries about the use of nuclear energy in power stations—a worry which was mightily fuelled by the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, on which more below. But environmentalism was not limited solely to the threat of nuclear annihilation from whatever source: there was increasing evidence of the ad-

[48] Cf. the Neubrandenburg report on the 1984 *Friedensdekade*: 'In rural areas the "peace week" plays virtually no role at all' (BP, O-4 1433).
[49] BP, O-4 1433, 'Schnellinformation über gravierend negative Aussagen in der Veranstaltung der Samaritergemeinde zur Friedensdekade am 12.11.85' (Abt. Kirchenfragen, Berlin, 13 Nov. 1985).

verse consequences on human health and longevity, on perinatal mortality rates and the incidence of chronic diseases, of the regime's general disregard for health and safety issues if these were to be at the expense of economic growth. The evidence of mounting environmental damage was so severe that in 1980 the state itself founded the official *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt* (GNU, Society for Nature and the Environment) to deal with growing public concern. But at the same time it sought to suppress the evidence which formed the basis for any rational response: in 1982 the state issued an order banning the publication of any data relating to the increasingly deleterious environmental situation.

Even without any hard facts, individuals living in the GDR could readily be distressed by the sheer visibility—and not only visibility, but also smell, even taste—of environmental pollution. One environmentalist, Michael Beleites, comments that it was not only contact with Church groups that awoke his concerns about the environment. Even as a child and youth, the contradictions were all too evident: 'The puddles at the marsh, in which the toads spawned, were always covered with a dull film of dust, the nightly song of the nightingale was drowned by the permanent droning of the turbines from the power station and the din of briquette moulding, and the scent of the summer meadows in blossom was mixed with the smell of gas from the smouldering works.'[50] And any Western visitor to the GDR would have been struck by the ubiquitous smell, flavour, even taste on the tongue, of brown coal (lignite) dust, and by the almost lurid, incandescent glow of chemical pollution afflicting the sky in the most polluted areas, such as the region around Bitterfeld and Halle.[51]

For all the state's official concern about the environment, the real strategy of the SED in the 1980s was to try to co-opt, deflect, or destroy unofficial environmentalist movements while continuing to pursue economic growth at the expense of environmental concerns. As one state document put it:

[50] M. Beleites, *Untergrund. Ein Konflikt mit der Stasi in der Uran-Provinz* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), 32.

[51] After the fall of the communist regime, one wit daubed the following slogan on the crumbling walls of the inner courtyard of a typically gloomy and decrepit tenement building in Berlin, which by most Western standards would have been designated unfit for human habitation: 'Ruinen schaffen ohne Waffen' (make ruins without weapons, a pun on the previous peace movement slogan, 'Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen'). For further details of environmental pollution in the GDR, cf. Joan DeBardeleben, '"The Future Has Already Begun." Environmental Damage and Protection in the GDR', in M. Rueschemeyer and C. Lemke (eds.), *The Quality of Life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989).

We must assume that certain economically necessary measures (particularly in the exploitation and opening up of resources) cannot be realized without pollution or destruction of the environment. Then there will be . . . reactions from the population . . . Especially since environmental consciousness is growing among broad circles of the GDR population and ecological questions will continue to form a focal point of ideological disputes.[52]

Western scholars have previously assumed that environmentalist movements were in some way less politically threatening than the peace movement, since state and environmentalists allegedly had common interests on which they could co-operate. It was thought that purely technical considerations allowed ecologically concerned citizens to work alongside environmental experts—who were often state functionaries—on common projects.[53] It is now clear that this was far from being a straightforward, self-evident arrangement based on questions of technical expertise. Rather, it was a politically motivated strategy for the *channelling* and political *containment* of the energies of environmentally aware citizens, specifically designed and executed by the state with characteristic cynicism. The East German authorities sought to deflect environmentalists into small-scale, time-consuming, narrowly focused, and state-controlled projects, and to bring them under the wing of the state-sponsored environmental society, the *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*.

One of the state's main concerns, reflected in innumerable documents, was the desire to ensure that all discussions were to remain 'objective' (*sachlich*), putting the state's interpretation of the 'facts' and separating any concern over environmental issues from possible public 'defamation' of the GDR, or independent political organization from below.[54] Their greatest fear was the political impact of uncontrolled environmentalism:

But precisely in the effort to understand the essence of the ecology problem and to arrive at basic pronunciations on how to overcome it, a range of politically false and negative declarations are arrived at on the basis of petty bourgeois starting points, neutral or system-indifferent basic positions, and a markedly bourgeois conception of democracy.[55]

The 'familiar politically negative forces within and outside the Church' were trying to 'misuse' this: 'in relation to the question of environmental protec-

[52] BP, O-4 799, 'Information zur weiteren Arbeit gegenüber dem Kirchlichen Forschungsheim Wittenberg' (3 Dec. 1985).

[53] Cf. Merrill E. Jones, 'Origins of the East German Environmental Movement', *German Studies Review*, 16: 2 (May 1993), 235–64.

[54] Cf. e.g. BP, O-4 799 (4 Aug. 1988), 3.

[55] Ibid., 19 Nov. 1984, 5.

tion they are attempting to revive the notion of the Church as watchman *vis-à-vis* the state.'[56] The Church leadership and synods had been forced to consider environmental issues, which now appeared to be firmly on the agenda for discussion. It was the task of the state, in conjunction with the Church leadership, to ensure that the 'realistic-loyal' (i.e. pro-state) forces retained the upper hand, and that a process of polarization and isolation of 'hostile-negative forces' was set in motion.

In the event, intervention in the environmentalist movements achieved varying degrees of success. The main Church environmentalist movement, embodied in the Kirchliche Forschungsheim Wittenberg (KFH), directed by Dr Peter Gensichen, was to a considerable degree co-opted and its importance as a centre of dissidence defused. Other environmentalist currents were more successful in resisting the influences of Stasi and state, but were nevertheless split and savaged by Stasi policies. None, however, was completely destroyed, and the organizational networks and political strategies and experience built up in the course of the 1980s were to prove important when the opportunity for change finally came in 1989.

A case-study of the Kirchliche Forschungsheim Wittenberg proves extremely instructive in examining and illustrating the methods and tactics employed by state, party, and Stasi, and the conditions of their success. The combination of sophisticated techniques of observation and influence with a relatively compliant personality and a high-profile but potentially easily threatened Church institution in Wittenberg led to a higher degree of success, as far as the SED was concerned, than was possible with the more thorny problems of the less institutionalized groups led by more prickly personalities in Berlin.

The ecclesiastical research institute in Wittenberg had been founded as long ago as 1927, as the *Forschungsheim für Weltanschauungskunde*, to explore the relationship of Christianity to nature. In 1971, theologians and Church leaders asked the KFH to bring environmental issues more directly into its remit, and in 1974 Dr Peter Gensichen began work on these questions at the institute. As Director of the KFH from 1975, Gensichen became increasingly active, not just as a researcher but also as a publicizer and organizer. As a state report put it: 'With the arrival of Dr Gensichen . . . the thematic scope of the institution began to change. Alongside a continuing interest in traditional themes (evolution and faith in creation), questions of ecology and environmental protection began to be

[56] BP, O-4 799 (19 Nov. 1984), 6.

more strongly highlighted.'[57] In 1980 the institute produced a pamphlet entitled 'The Earth Is To Be Saved (*Die Erde ist zu retten*)'; and from 1980 onwards, it produced what was essentially the first ecological newsletter in the GDR, the semi-annual 'Letters' (*Briefe*). Gensichen also mounted a travelling exhibition shown in churches, and organized a number of meetings (in April 1983, June 1984, and April 1985) to which representatives from all over the GDR travelled, as well as demonstrations of alternative, ecologically sound lifestyles, such as the annual weekend entitled 'Mobile Without a Car (*Mobil ohne Auto*)'.

The GDR authorities were clearly concerned about the potential of this centre, and adopted a number of strategies to observe and influence the development of its activities. At the same time, they sought to work on the Director of the KFH to ensure that he would, indirectly, carry out much of this political work for them:

> It is necessary to strengthen the realistic positions of Dr Gensichen by commentaries and discussions on technical and political questions of environmental and nature conservation, in their totality as well as in relation to specific questions (in so far as this is possible), and in relation to philosophical and ethical problems in this area; and to encourage the acquisition of new insights [by Dr Gensichen], with the objective of ensuring that the insights attained in this way are reflected in the work of the KFH and so become effective in Church politics.[58]

In 1984, Peter Gensichen had still been evaluated as 'not very constructive'. For example, in the context of a discussion on environmental questions, Gensichen had tried 'on the basis of the alleged non-publication of the number of foggy days in the Halle area to demonstrate that, through the refusal to release information, insecurity and anxiety grew among the population'.[59] The state had to some extent 'put in train a process of growing awareness on the part of Dr Gensichen'. Nevertheless, 'at the same time it became clear that it is necessary to engage in well-directed political-ideological work with Dr Gensichen, to help him to reach further insights'[!].[60] Despite the fact that 'Dr Gensichen, and with him the KFH, continue to cling to a range of politically false and problematic orientations and methods'—in particular, 'the continued goal of coordinating Church ecology groups'—on the whole developments suggested 'that he, and with

[57] Ibid., 'Information zur Tätigkeit des Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes Wittenberg (KFH) und Schlußfolgerungen für die staatlichen Reaktionen gegenüber dem Forschungsheim' (19 Nov. 1984). Cf. also Jones, 'East German Environmental Movement'.

[58] BP, O-4 799, 'Information zur weiteren Arbeit gegenüber dem Kirchlichen Forschungsheim Wittenberg' (3 Dec. 1985), 2.

[59] BP, O-4 968, Information of 31 Aug. 1984. OKR Ziegler, Präses Wahrmann, and Präses Böttcher, by contrast, 'belonged to that group of realistic Church office-holders . . .'

[60] BP, O-4 799 (19 Nov. 1984), 10, 11.

him the activities of the Kirchliche Forschungsheim, are capable of being influenced in our direction'. Again and again this report stresses the need to emphasize 'co-operation on practical or related matters (*sachlich und sachbezogene Zusammenarbeit*)' as the best means of co-option.

The close co-operation of the Stasi and the state and Church functionaries is clearly demonstrated by subsequent developments. A Stasi report of May 1985 on a meeting of environmental groups in the KFH on 26–8 April 1985 comments favourably on Gensichen's rather cautious line, and his aversion to engaging in any overly provocative activities. The report makes the usual final suggestions: that there should be appropriate meetings between state (not Stasi) and Church functionaries at the relevant levels, to prevent the 'hostile-negative forces' from creating new structures, to continue 'the process of differentiation', to isolate the most radical spirits, and to involve other 'confessionally involved persons in practical measures' of environmental work under state and party control.[61] By March 1986, the allotted state functionary was clearly doing his best:

> The discussion had the general objective of making contact with Dr Gensichen and creating a basis from which further political influence on him would be possible, in other words, to generate confidence. For this reason, certain questions were not pursued further, nor was he forced into foregrounding any statements of position.[62]

In August 1986, although the state functionary felt that it was clearly necessary to continue to work on Gensichen, the latter was in any event of his own accord requesting further discussions.[63]

By the spring of 1986, the role of the KFH appeared to be moving in the state's desired direction, partly as a result of Gensichen's apparent pliability and caution. A Stasi report on the meeting of representatives of environmental groups of the Protestant Churches which met at the KFH on 18–20 April comments on improvements since earlier years:

> This sort of annual meeting has been held since 1983 and up till now revealed the intentions of reactionary forces in the Church and other hostile-negative forces of bringing together 'environmentalist groups' organizationally in the sense of a so-called alternative environmentalist movement and of creating a degree of internal unity.

This no longer appeared so threatening in 1986:

> It has become clear that the constructive and offensive policies of the party and government in environmental questions, and the state's related conception of incorporating Christians with an environmental consciousness and commitment, have found a positive response among the vast majority of Church 'environmental groups'.[64]

[61] MfS, Z 3458.
[62] BP, O-4 799, 'Vermerk zu einem Gespräch mit Dr Gensichen, Leiter des Kirchlichen Forschungsheim, am 7.03.1986 in Wittenberg' (17 Mar. 1986), 5.
[63] Ibid., 'Vermerk zu einem Gespräch mit dem Leiter des Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes Wittenberg, Dr Gensichen, am 27.08.1986 in Wittenberg' (9 Sept. 1986).

Gensichen appeared to be acting entirely in the state's interests by this time. He advised against the groups becoming involved in the *Konkret für den Frieden V* activities planned for 1987; rather, it should be left to individuals to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. He also advised against confrontation with the state: for example, there should not be a large cycling demonstration (*Radsternfahrt*) but rather a number of smaller, less noticeable actions. No decisions were taken as to whether there should be a follow-up meeting in 1987. The publication of the environmentalist periodical *Anstöße*, which until 1985 had been produced by the KFH, should be moved to Berlin. All in all, the Stasi were rather pleased with their indirect influence on what was happening:

> Through the consistent implementation of the state's plan for incorporating environmentally conscious and committed Christians, the ground was increasingly swept from under the feet of even those hostile-negative forces who were trying to misuse the 'environmental work' of the Church for the formation of hostile-negative groupings and the construction of an alternative conservation movement.[65]

The report concludes with a very typical proposal about the strategies necessary to continue to influence matters in the desired directions. Measures include: the continued engaging of Christians in state-run activities and organizations; the use of 'confessionally committed people' to influence environmental activities into the directions desired and controlled by the state, for example under the aegis of the *Kulturbund*; and to continue 'the process of differentiation' and isolation of the 'hostile-negative (*feindlich-negative*)' forces in the Church. While the former two strategies appear to have been relatively successful, the latter badly misfired as far as the state was concerned.

By 1987, the attempts of the state to influence Gensichen were quite clearly having the desired effect. One report concludes that 'in the two-hour discussion Dr Gensichen appeared visibly more receptive and active than in previous meetings. Altogether, the discussion proceeded in an open and constructive atmosphere.'[66] The report's final suggestions—apart from de-

[64] MfS, ZAIG, Z 3512, No. 225/86, 'Erkenntnisse im Zusammenhang mit einem erneuten Treffen von Vertretern sogen. [*sic*] Umweltgruppen evangelischer Kirchen in der DDR von 18. bis 20. April 1986 im Kirchlichen Forschungsheim Wittenberg/Halle' (14 May 1986).
[65] Ibid.
[66] BP, O-4 799, 'Vermerk zum Gespräch mit Dr Gensichen, Leiter des Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes in Wittenberg (KFH), am 28.05.1987, 15.00 bis 17.00 Uhr im Kirchlichen Forschungsheim' (12 June 1987), 6.

tailed tips on following up certain leads given by Gensichen in the course of the discussion—include the need to keep working on Gensichen.

It is not suggested here that Gensichen was in any way compromised by these discussions; he was probably not even fully aware of what lay behind many of them. This is in all probability a case of a genuinely committed, environmentally concerned Christian who was prepared to listen to what he considered to be reasonable arguments on specific issues. His own expertise, in combination with his institutional responsibilities, led him to adopt what was in the end the sort of moderate strategy which the state found least threatening and most easily controlled. This was not the case with some more radical spirits, who pressed their environmental concerns from rather more marginal positions in the Church.

The main competitor to the KFH was the Umweltbibliothek (UB, or Environmental Library) founded in the summer of 1986 in the East Berlin Zionsgemeinde. Two of the founders had suffered a ban on their careers (*Berufsverbot*) as a result of nonconformist behaviour, and were found employment as janitor and caretaker by Pastor Hans Simon at the Zionskirche—a very typical illustration of the ways in which dissenters found themselves in the environs of the Church. Originally conceived as a communication and information centre, collecting data and publications on environmental matters (with help from the West in the person of Roland Jahn, a peace activist who had been deported in 1983), from August 1986 the UB produced its own publication, the *Umweltblättter*.

The UB was by no means an entirely harmonious organization. There were internal tensions with respect to both strategic considerations and personality differences, which were adroitly exploited by Stasi infiltrators (IMs).[67] The suggestion made by Carlo Jordan in October 1987 that a network of local groups should be founded met with considerable opposition, and led ultimately to a split in the movement. On 10 January 1988 a number of individuals founded a loose association known as the *Arche*, with a new publication entitled *Arche Nova*, seeking to create a network within the GDR and the cultivation of contacts with Western and other Eastern European environmentalist movements. Other environmentalists disliked and disapproved of this more open confrontation with, or provocation of, the East German state.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of groups was associated with a related growth of political debate and the expansion of an incipient 'public sphere', the precondition for the emergence of a nascent 'civil society' in the East

[67] Cf. Jones, 'East German Environmental Movement'.

Germany of the 1980s. Many groups sought to produce publications, vehicles for a broader debate (comparable in importance, perhaps, to the expansion of publication of newspapers and periodicals in the eighteenth century, the classic period of the emergence of a 'bourgeois civil society' in Germany). The publication of *Grenzfall*, for example, by Templin, Hirsch, and Grimm was explicitly conceived as an attempt to create an information network for subversive forces across the GDR.

Moreover, the inescapability and ubiquity of environmental concerns was brought home to increasing numbers of people by the Chernobyl disaster of 26 April 1986. The relatively anodyne reporting of this event in the GDR media (which sought to propagate the view that no East German nuclear reactor could possibly suffer the same fate, due to allegedly greater technological prowess and efficiency) was counterbalanced, of course, by the extensive coverage of the after-effects of Chernobyl beamed over to the GDR on West German television. There was simply no possibility of disguising the seriousness of the disaster or covering up its consequences. Environmentalists and peace activists joined forces in producing a document under the heading 'Tschernobyl wirkt überall (Chernobyl Has Effects Everywhere)', and a petition protesting to the government. International links also became more important to many activists: there were first contacts with the Eastern European movement Greenway in 1986, and in September 1987 some East Germans attended a Greenway meeting in Cracow, Poland. But the environmentalist currents emerging in the GDR were by no means necessarily political allies of one another.

The degree of success of the Stasi in splitting the environmentalist movements is, for example, illustrated by the negative comments made by Gensichen on the UB in 1988:

> His criticisms concentrate on lack of objectivity, cheap publicity stunts, lack of technical substance, and not least a lack of religious/theological substance. All their activities amount to nothing much, as far as he is concerned. This is also evident in the style of the 'Umweltblätter'. He ... knows that there are forces active in the 'Umweltbibliothek' who really only want to use the Church as a cover. At the moment there are apparently quite enormous disputes between them ... In his opinion the Umweltbibliothek will, sooner or later, fall apart as a result of internal quarrelling.[68]

A degree of—perhaps?—jealousy was evident in a further negative comment: 'Unfortunately, because of the events at the Zion Church and the Western media coverage, the impression had arisen that the Um-

[68] BP, O-4 799, 'Vermerk zu einem Gespräch mit dem Leiter des Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes Wittenberg Dr Gensichen am 19.5.1988 in Wittenberg' (24 May 1988), 1.

weltbibliothek embodied the real environmental work of the Church in the GDR.'[69] Clearly by this time Gensichen himself was entirely 'objective' (*sachbezogen*) in the state's sense.

But the splitting of the movements had neither removed their basis, nor prevented their growth. If anything, Stasi strategies had ultimately aided a process of political education, as more and more East Germans learnt the complex arts of self-organization and political pressure group work under dictatorial conditions. They learnt techniques of information gathering and dissemination, they created bonds and—sometimes fragile—friendships across localities, and they developed some vision of what would make a better society. Much of this vision was vague and general in character—more open government, more democratic participation, more concern for peace and the environment, more respect for the dignity of human individuality and difference. The specifics of policy and political platforms did not emerge until the autumn of 1989: what was important at this time was the growth of coherent, articulate, widespread pressure for reform. Perhaps most importantly, the political activists of the 1980s acquired the courage of their convictions, to use the Quaker phrase.[70] Their concern was sufficient to engage in major personal risks in the pursuit of a better future.

Moreover, there were some grounds for realistic hopes in this respect. Following the accession of Gorbachev to power in 1985, many believed that the GDR too would begin to engage in a process of domestic restructuring and democratization. Despite the obvious resistance of Honecker and the old guard to any real policies of change—and the oft-repeated dismissive remarks about 'neighbours changing their wallpaper', summarizing the official view that there was absolutely no need for change in the GDR—there were nevertheless brief glimpses of apparent liberalization in the mid-1980s. Particularly in the period leading up to Honecker's visit—with all due pomp and ceremony, as respected head of state—to West Germany in 1987, there were public measures designed to emphasize just how liberal and open the GDR allegedly was. The early months of 1987, for example, saw a wave of visas for Western visits and emigration, allowing unprecedented numbers of East Germans to travel to the West on pretexts which in previous years would not have merited any consideration. The Berlin 750th anniversary celebrations of 1987 were similarly designed to foster the view of the GDR as a forward-looking, progressive, and increasingly tolerant society.

[69] BP, O-4 799, 'Vermerk zu einem Gespräch mit dem Leiter des Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes Wittenberg Dr Gensichen am 19.5.1988 in Wittenberg' (24 May 1988), 2.

[70] And despite their tiny numbers, certain Quakers were rather active in these movements: Hans Misselwitz, the Quaker husband of Pastor Ruth Misselwitz of the Friedenskreis Pankow, for example, fostered contacts with Western Quakers such as Eva Pinthus. So did many reformist members of the establishment Protestant Church who had an interest in active methods of non-violence; even at the leadership level, Bishop Heino Falcke of Erfurt was open to such currents. Many characteristics of peace circles—the egalitarianism, openness, and emphasis on active non-violence—have distinctive Quaker overtones and parallels.

The culmination of this period came with the Olof Palme peace march of September 1987. For the first time in East German history, unofficial placards were carried alongside the official banners of the state organizations. The authorities were clearly somewhat ill at ease with this unprecedented experiment in pluralism. As the First Secretary of the Bezirksleitung Potsdam put it, when evaluating the section of the march from Ravensbrück to Sachsenhausen on 2 to 4 September 1987, the whole situation was extremely difficult to handle. Determined to ensure that, under the spotlight of international publicity on this most sensitive lap of the international march, nothing should go amiss, the Potsdam First Secretary requested the Church leaders to remove the unofficial banners from view. Given the fact 'that the grass-roots groups simply take no notice of injunctions coming from leading Church personalities', this was unsuccessful; he then made a direct appeal to individual banner-bearers to drop out (even less successfully), and at the same time sought to ensure that official party and mass organization banners were displayed in full prominence.[71] The party's own standard-bearers appear to have had a little difficulty on occasion in exercising a degree of tolerance, but in the event the march went very peacefully and, on some accounts, rather fruitfully.[72]

The experiment could have been a harbinger of incipient liberalization within the GDR, in the broader context of Honecker's Western visit and the joint paper between the SED and the West German SPD. Had Honecker chosen to retire gracefully in the autumn of 1987, the history of the GDR might have been written a little differently (although it is likely that its ultimate end would have been much the same). Certainly Honecker's own role in history would have been evaluated less harshly. But, in the event, the brief thaw very soon came to a dramatic end. The wave of hope accompanying the Olof Palme peace march—evident among many SED functionaries as well as dissident political activists—was soon dashed by the events of the following months. From late 1987 until the summer and autumn of 1989,

[71] SAPMO-BArch, IV B 2/14/70, 'Zur politischen Wertung des im Bezirk Potsdam verlaufenden Abschnittes des Olof-Palme-Friedensmarsches von 02.09 bis 04.09.1987 von Ravensbrück nach Sachsenhausen aus kirchenpolitischer Sicht'.

[72] Cf. also Gerhard Rein, *Die protestantische Revolution 1987–1990* (Berlin: Wichern Verlag, 1990), 19–23.

the fragile balance of compromise and accommodation began to tip, until finally events swung out of control, beyond even the capacity of the apparently omnipotent and omniscient Stasi to salvage. It is to the combination of repression and resistance which characterized the closing two years of the East German communist dictatorship that we now turn.

Repression, resistance, and destabilization, 1987–1989

The political activists had been a force for destabilization and change within the GDR throughout the 1980s; in the closing two years their voices were heard more forcibly, their actions were less easily contained and constrained. The retreatist majority of the population, on the other hand, had for the most part been relatively quiescent politically, although throughout the 1980s (and particularly in 1984 and 1987) there was a constant stream of people applying for visas to leave for the West. Those seeking to leave by less orthodox routes were, however, deterred by the very real risk of death if caught trying to escape over the border illegally. Both sorts of disaffection became very much more important, in different ways, in the course of the two years from late 1987 to the autumn of 1989. And, at the same time, the forces of repression in the final years of the GDR became very much more open and confrontational: the situation was becoming more tense, or *zugespitzt*.

A convenient starting date for this last period of destabilization is provided by a particular incident, which nicely illustrates the change in climate after the moment of hope in the late summer of 1987. On 24 November 1987 a raid by the Stasi was carried out on the Umweltbibliothek. This was to be what is conventionally called a 'set-up': the Stasi had arranged, through an IM, that a copy of *Grenzfall*, the publication of the non-Church-based IFM, would be printed that night, illegally, on the Church-owned printer of the UB. Then, when the premises of the UB were raided, this illegal material would be found and appropriate charges brought. The raid went ahead as planned: unfortunately for the state, however, the Trabi which was to bring the incriminating material to the UB premises—owned by the Stasi informer, but clearly more sympathetic to the dissidents' cause—broke down on the way and failed to deliver the material in time.[73] The UB and the IFM publicized the raid, which proved to be more embarrassing than helpful for the SED and the Stasi.[74]

[73] Jones, 'East German Environmental Movement', 252–4.

[74] Stefan Wolle describes this as constituting the first 'cracks in the concrete of state socialism'; Stefan Wolle, 'Der Weg in den Zusammenbruch: Die DDR vom Januar bis zum Oktober 1989', in Eckard Jesse and Armin Mitter (eds.), *Die Gestaltung der deutschen Einheit* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1992), 78.

The consequences were to shift the relations between state and activists into a new gear. Activists mounted public demonstrations of support for those who had been arrested, including *Mahnwachen* (vigils of admonition or warning). The immediate effect was the return of Church property and the release of those who had been arrested, although in the longer term the Stasi determined to destroy the UB. A partial success from the state's point of view was scored when some environmentalists split from the UB to form the *Arche* in January 1988. The activities of this group were partially subverted by the tactics of certain IMs who were members, such as Henry Schramm of Halle, while another Stasi IM, Pastor Erler in Leipzig, successfully subverted attempts to establish a UB in Leipzig comparable to that in Berlin.[75] But on the whole the effect of the incident was to polarize the situation and to arouse dissident forces into more concerted political efforts and open demonstrations of protest. An invisible threshold of overcoming internal barriers of fear and seeking new ways of moving forward was gradually being crossed.

There are a number of as yet unexplained and curious features of the incidents of late 1987, suggesting some lack of coordination or communication between the Stasi and state authorities. For example, the lawyer acting for the dissidents, Wolfgang Schnur (who was later revealed as a Stasi informer) announced on 4 December at a large meeting in the Zionskirche that the Generalstaatsanwaltschaft had said that the proceedings against the arrested activists were to be suspended; the Staatsanwaltschaft, however, denied this.[76] Clearly somewhere an intended deal had not quite been clinched in time for public announcement.

Similarly, there is a degree of mystery over events surrounding an earlier meeting in the Zionskirche. Young people leaving the church after a concert service on 17 October were attacked by a group of neo-Nazis, described in the report compiled for the then security chief Egon Krenz as '30–40 "Skinheads" dressed in black' yelling slogans such as 'death to the Red Front (*Rot Front verrecke*)', 'Jews out of German churches', 'Jewish swine, Jewish sows (*Judenschweine, Judensäue*)', and 'Sieg heil'.[77] While Egon Krenz's office collated an extensive file on the issue, dissidents were somewhat disconcerted by the lack of any visible police intervention or control of these 'rowdies' and suspected that the neo-Nazis were acting, if not at the

[75] Jones, 'East German Environmental Movement'.

[76] SAPMO-BArch, Büro Egon Krenz, IV 2/2.039/312.

[77] See ibid., IV 2/2.039/191, for a report on the concert itself at which two *Punkmusikformationen* (Firma from East Berlin, and Element of Crime from West Berlin) had performed to around 300 young people, without official permission and advertised only through word of mouth; and ibid., Büro Egon Krenz, Abteilung für Sicherheitsfragen, IV 2/2.039/313, on neo-Nazi activities.

behest, then at least with the implicit or even explicit approval, of the Stasi, whose work of intimidation of dissidents they appeared to carry out rather well.[78] It was all the more incensing, therefore, when Vera Wollenberger found herself and others involved in the *Mahnwachen* implicitly coupled with neo-Nazis in an article in the relatively mass circulation newspaper *Junge Welt* on 12 December 1987. Wollenberger took the unprecedented step of suing the editor for defamation.[79]

In a climate of increasing tension, some individuals involved in the by now incipient citizens' movement (*Bürgerbewegung*) determined to make use of the annual Luxemburg–Liebknecht parade in January 1988 to demonstrate their concern for greater freedom in the GDR. The problem of demonstrating for change within the GDR was, however, increasingly complicated by the concomitant movement of those seeking a fast exit to the West, who were to some extent hijacking dissident activities for their own ends. The former sought, through subtle tactics of pressure and demonstration, to effect changes within the GDR, while the latter had a vested interest in more dramatic gestures designed to have themselves arrested and exiled—the most rapid means of successfully leaving for the West. There were increasing tensions within dissident groups, as suspicions were aroused—often either instigated or nurtured by Stasi IMs—as to the underlying motives of different individuals with respect to the likely effects of proposed tactics.

In the event, in January 1988 a somewhat uncomfortable quotation from Rosa Luxemburg—'Freedom is always the freedom to think differently (*Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden*)'—which was excluded from the official SED canon of the communist heritage was nevertheless displayed on a dissident banner. Despite the state's extensive preparations to ensure that the demonstration was not subject to any unwonted political disturbance, the dreaded *Öffentlichkeitswirksamkeit* (public impact) of dissident activities was achieved.[80] But the repressive

[78] Cf. Wollenberger, *Virus der Heuchler*, 83–4: 'As we discovered afterwards, the Volkspolizei . . . had installed observation points in side streets, but had not intervened or only intervened too late . . . The links between Stasi, army, police, and neo-Nazis have not yet been investigated . . . But after the Skinhead attack [I had] several more experiences of meetings of the citizens' movement being threatened by neo-Nazi attacks, and these threats often led to the Parish Council of the relevant congregation withdrawing permission for meetings out of fear of the consequences of such an attack.'

[79] Ibid. 87–90.

[80] On the security preparations, including plans to remove potential demonstrators from the crowds, cover up unofficial placards, and hand over individuals to MfS forces, see the report of the then Berlin party boss, later would-be reformer-in-waiting, Günter Schabowski, to the then security chief Egon Krenz: 'Maßnahmen zur Sicherung eines störungsfreien Verlaufs der Kampfdemonstrationen am 17. Januar 1988', SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2.039/312 (14 Jan. 1988).

response was massive. Large numbers of people were arrested; many were held without charges being brought for considerable periods of time, and the most prominent dissidents were sent into exile, willingly or unwillingly.[81]

This was in fact the beginning of the end. Ever larger numbers of people became involved in organized, non-violent demonstrations of sympathy and solidarity with the dissidents who had been treated so harshly on this occasion. Candlelit meetings, concerts, and vigils in churches became a standard method of demonstrating opposition to the repressive measures of the state. In Leipzig, for example, Monday prayer services became an important regular event—long before they were to become the highly public starting-point for street demonstrations in the autumn of 1989. All over the GDR, there was a growing sense that, somehow, there would have to be changes; and that people were increasingly willing to organize, discuss, and pressurize for change.

The relations between Church and state—the implicit compromise in the by now overstretched 'spirit of 6.3.78'—began to break down. Although Manfred Stolpe continued to play an essentially obsequious role, acutely irritating to individual dissidents (although the consequences may well have been beneficial for the citizens' movement in the longer term), other Church leaders began more openly to voice their concerns.[82] As the Thuringian Bishop Leich, for example, put it in a circular letter of 1 February 1988, there were widespread fears following the Luxemburg–Liebknecht demonstration that the state was resisting necessary processes of renewal and change: that hopes had been aroused by developments in the USSR and that citizens had a right to express their feelings on this matter. 'Many had hoped

[81] Cf. the personal account of her own imprisonment and the less than straightforward manner in which her case was dealt with (through the involvement of senior Church personnel and the Stasi as well as the legal system) in Wollenberger, *Virus der Heuchler*. Wollenberger's own situation was complicated by the fact that both her own husband, Knud, and her defence lawyer, Wolfgang Schnur, were Stasi informers and therefore hardly acted to represent her interests. See also Krenz's total and entirely uncritical justification of the mass arrests, the proceedings against Hirsch, W. and R. Templin, B. Bohley, S. Krawczyk, F. Klier, and Werner Fischer, and the compulsory exile of 53 persons, in a paper he drafted for party organizations, 'Zur Festnahmen von Personen wegen des begründeten Verdachts landesverräterischer Beziehungen', SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2.039/312.

[82] Cf. e.g. the record of Stolpe's discussion with the Hauptabteilungsleiter beim Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen concerning the permission for Bärbel Bohley and Werner Fischer to re-enter the GDR in the summer of 1988. Stolpe was personally to ensure that there would be no 'media spectacle' or 'victory celebrations' and 'that Bohley and Fischer will refrain from any activity hostile to the state and not return to their earlier environs'. Clearly overestimating his own capacity to influence the actions of these individuals, Stolpe 'explained that he would personally intervene to ensure a calm and discreet treatment of [Bohley and Fischer's] return to the country'. SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2.039/312 (5 July 1988).

that there would be some movement in the situation in our society. Instead of this, nothing is happening.' Leich went on to emphasize that while the Church could not support particular political positions, it would support individuals in need, whatever their views. To those in trouble in Berlin, he stated: 'You must know that we are on your side and will not leave you on your own. We will also not allow ourselves to be distanced from the peace and environmentalist movements in our congregations.' It was essential that 'the readiness to engage in dialogue should grow anew' between the state, the Church, and society.[83]

But it was precisely this 'readiness for dialogue' that the top political leadership of the GDR was resisting. Throughout 1988 Honecker and his close associates continued to pursue the policy of pretending that all was well and that suppression of alternative views—including even censorship of the Soviet magazine *Sputnik*, carrier as it was of notions of perestroika and glasnost—would ultimately ensure an end to all the troubles. Even the alleged reformers-in-waiting appeared to be paralysed by inbred habits of communist party discipline and horror of the ultimate political crime of factionalism: there is little sign in the records of this time of the supposed will to reform retrospectively claimed by a number of communists after the *Wende*.[84]

The Luxemburg–Liebknecht demonstration of January 1989 was successfully navigated, from the point of view of the state, and a number of other potentially destabilizing initiatives were successively repressed by the ever more vigilant Stasi.[85] Less easily disguised were the well-orchestrated observations of the rigging of results in the May 1989 local elections. Establishing to their own satisfaction that the standard massive returns in favour of the SED were fabricated, dissident groups mounted a campaign of monthly demonstrations against this manifest dishonesty, which came to symbolize the more general lack of democracy and legitimacy of the entire dictatorship. At the same time, however, events elsewhere were providing the conditions for more widespread demonstrations of the relative lack of popular legitimacy of the GDR.

In the first week of May 1989, while dissidents within the GDR were

[83] SAPMO-BArch, IV B 2/14/70, 18th Rundbrief (1 Feb. 1988).

[84] Cf. e.g. the files in the offices of Günter Schabowski and Egon Krenz, both of whom have subsequently cast themselves in a somewhat favourable and reform-minded light.

[85] Cf. e.g. the report of an attempted silent demonstration (*Schweigemarsch*) in Leipzig on 15 Jan. 1989: at 4 p.m., around 150 to 200 people were involved in an unofficial gathering (*Zusammenrottung*) in a market square, apparently intending to start on a march. This gathering was successfully broken up by 5.15 p.m., with 53 arrests by security forces. All those arrested were subsequently released the same evening. The whole thing 'hardly made any public impact (*kaum öffentlichkeitswirksam*)'. SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2.039/312, Bez. Leipzig (16 Jan. 1989).

monitoring the election procedures, a newly reformist leadership in Hungary was beginning to dismantle its border fortifications to the West. Hungary had always had more permeable borders than the GDR: given the material preconditions for travel in a hard currency zone, Hungarian citizens were relatively easily able to take their holidays in the West, as the ubiquity of tiny Hungarian caravans (more or less solid tents on wheels) jostling beside the more luxurious and capacious Bürstners, Adrias, and Dethleffs in West European campsites clearly demonstrated. By the early summer of 1989, the Hungarian government was toying with a move, not only to a more market-oriented economic system (with which Hungary had long experimented) but also towards a more pluralist political system and more open borders. On 2 May the Hungarians began to dismantle their border with Austria; in the following weeks, increasing numbers of holidaying East Germans took the opportunity to escape to the West. By August, the situation was rapidly developing out of control: East Germans were not only exiting in increasing numbers through the Hungarian–Austrian border, but also, under the spotlight of international television cameras, seeking refuge in the grounds of the West German embassies in Prague, Budapest, even East Berlin itself, in the hope of rapid escape to the West. On 11 September, Hungary formally opened its borders to the West, permitting East Germans to leave without visas. The consequence, of course, was to create a leak in the seal separating the communist bloc from the West; and with this, of course, a crack in the last remaining physical defence of communist rule in the GDR.

The suddenly renewed nightmare of a massive haemorrhage of citizens, almost forgotten since the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, represented a major challenge to the Honecker regime. It was a challenge to which the gerontocracy proved unable to rise. The international embarrassment of a leadership seeking to prepare for the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the GDR was immense; it was exacerbated by Honecker's own illness and personal incapacity to respond. Given the manner in which, over preceding years, Honecker had successfully isolated the top leadership and immobilized his immediate political subordinates, the regime seemed incapable of any flexible or effective response to a situation of increasingly serious proportions.

The moment was clearly ripe for the nascent movements for democratization within the GDR. In late August, the first initiatives were taken to found an East German Social Democratic Party; its call to supporters was published on 26 September, while it was officially founded as a party on the symbolic date of 7 October. Other incipient political groupings also declared their programmes and aims in the course of the early autumn weeks.

Democracy Now published its programmatic pamphlet on 12 September; Democratic Awakening was founded on 1 October. Most important, however, was the collective movement, New Forum (Neues Forum), which understood itself not as a political party, but rather as a (constitutionally permissible, at least in theory) association (*Vereinigung*), intended to open up the public sphere for open discussion and debate. The founding document of New Forum, proclaimed on 10 September, urged the importance of free and open discussion of the manifold, often contradictory, imperatives of policy and public welfare, arguing that the time was ripe for the energies of citizens to be directed to the issues of the day:

> Communication between state and society is visibly disrupted in our country. Evidence of this ranges from the widespread sense of being fed up (*Verdrossenheit*) through the retreat into private niches to mass emigration . . . The disrupted relationship between state and society cripples the creative potential of our society and hinders the solution of pressing local and global tasks. We fritter ourselves away in bad-tempered passivity and yet we have so many more important things that we could be doing for our life, our country and humanity.[86]

It was precisely this mobilization of ever-increasing numbers of formerly passive citizens that was to bring movement into the system in the coming weeks.

[86] Quoted in C. Schüddekopf (ed.), '*Wir sind das Volk!*' (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 29.

9

The End of a Dictatorship

Mass Mobilization and Regime Implosion, Autumn 1989

No revolution, historically, has been a simple matter. In no case is it sufficient to seek to explain only the growth of popular discontent: dislike of prevailing political conditions has never been a sufficient explanation even of an isolated revolt, let alone a successful revolution. As argued above, dislike of the GDR was relatively constant throughout its forty-year history, and does little to elucidate its final collapse.[1] While every revolution is in a very real sense unique, there are certain recurrent features. *All* successful revolutions appear to be characterized by a particular combination of factors. One of these is the growth of a revolutionary movement which at crucial moments is capable of mobilizing large numbers of people to mount a serious challenge from below. But equally important is the question of élite claims to power and exertion of effective rule. Historically, notable revolutions—including the English Revolution of 1640 and the French Revolution of 1789—have originated, not with a challenge from below, but rather with splits among ruling élites (although of course emerging splits are often simultaneously exploited and exacerbated by growing challenges from below).[2] The course taken by revolutionary developments may also depend crucially on international circumstances. In the East German case, the state was characterized by a lack of national legitimacy and the artificial nature of its construction and dependence on the Soviet Union:

[1] It is therefore not sufficient to emphasize this factor as the final explanation of the revolution, although this sort of emphasis is prevalent in many essays on the GDR; cf. e.g. David Childs's essay in Janet Wharton (ed.), *German Politics and Society from 1933 to the Wende* (Nottingham: INGASA, 1992).

[2] For a path-breaking comparative analysis of the conditions for successful social revolutions, see Theda Skocpol, *The State and Social Revolutions: France, Russia, China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For my own analysis of the historiographically rather contentious English Revolution, see M. Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).