

Chronicle

Summaries of Events and Background Information

The Church's Peace Initiative in the GDR— Developments during Spring 1982

To mark the thirty-seventh anniversary of the Allied bombing of Dresden on Ash Wednesday, 1945 (an attack which, according to at least one authority, claimed more victims than the atomic bomb at Hiroshima) a congregation of some six thousand young people met in the rebuilt Lutheran Kreuzkirche to demonstrate their devotion to peace. Since the 1940s enormous prominence has been given to peace propaganda in the GDR, the eastern part of a divided nation. Many of the young people wore shoulder-patches, some carrying the motto "Make peace without weapons" (*Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen*), others depicting a worker beating swords into ploughshares. The picture is of a sculptured figure erected by the Soviet government in front of the United Nations building in New York. The wording is taken from the Old Testament (Isaiah chapter 2, verse 4; repeated in Micah chapter 4). The whole passage reads:

"The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

(Micah 4: 2-3)

Despite the peaceful nature of the occasion, some members of the congregation had their shoulder-patches torn from their shoulders by State security personnel who were present.

A number of the young people present at the peace forum criticized church leaders for their lack of energy in organizing a campaign for disarmament in both East and West. In

reply, Bishop Hempel said that the Church is not a "revolutionary force". Nonetheless, it was stated that the Church would soon seek further signatures for the "Berlin Appeal" of the East Berlin Lutheran pastor Reiner Eppelmann issued individually in 1981 (a call for a nuclear-free Europe, and the withdrawal of NATO troops from West Germany and Soviet troops from the GDR). As bells tolled to mark the hour when bombs had begun to fall, members of the congregation lit candles and sang "We shall overcome".

The events of this February day highlight the dilemma in which the Evangelical Churches of the GDR constantly find themselves. On the one hand, Church leaders wish to distance themselves from politics (both from uncritical support for the government and from backing what would be seen as anti-communist policies); on the other hand, they are determined to make a public stand when the witness of the Gospel demands it. A policy of some kind on peace and war is thus inevitable, although the Church leaders realize well enough that any alliance with Western-inspired or even with strictly neutral peace movements might well enmesh Christians in dubious political situations—something which they have always striven to avoid. The latter part of February, therefore, saw some hard decisions taken.

It was decided (despite the previous undertaking) to dissociate the Church from the Berlin Appeal, and to discourage Pastor Eppelmann from collecting further signatures; the Appeal was now seen to cross the boundary which separates Christian peace initiatives from direct political involvement. However, the Churches decided to continue

and intensify their opposition to pre-military training in schools (in 1978 such training had become compulsory for fifteen and sixteen-year-old pupils, and in 1981 was extended a further year, exceptions being made only for the most compelling reasons). The older generation of church people remember very well the poisonous effect of warlike training given to the Hitler Youth. Arguments advanced by churchmen in the present situation are, firstly, that the emphasis on pre-military training harms the credibility of the GDR's peace policy; secondly, that it creates a fixed climate of thought in which the socialist camp is regarded as "friends" and the West as "enemies"; thirdly, it flies in the face of the Christian peace initiative. At present, however, there seems to be no change at all in the State's attitude about the necessity for pre-military training.

For some while church leaders have been calling for some kind of civilian alternative to military service—"social peace-service" (*Sozialer Friedensdienst*), as it is known. True, as far back as 1964 unarmed "construction units" (*Baueinheiten*) were established as part of the armed forces of the GDR, and it was recognized that men with conscientious objections might complete their periods of service in them; service in the armed forces, however, remained compulsory for all. The Church has recently underlined some of the problems of objectors. For example, recalled reservists are normally required to serve with weapons whatever their feelings may be; and there is frequent discrimination against citizens whose military service has been done in a construction unit. On 25 March a new law regulating military service in the GDR was passed by the *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber). The new law did not extend the period of service from 18 to 24 months, as had been expected by many. On the other hand, it defined the duty of all state agencies and mass organizations to prepare citizens for military service. Moreover, the period during which reservists are liable to recall has been extended. The law also adds that women between the ages of eighteen and fifty are liable for conscription in times of emergency. Deferment possibilities for students are much reduced. Furthermore, the new law contains no provision whatsoever for "social peace-service". It would be an understatement to say that church leaders were disappointed with the new provisions.

In view of this new law, and the recent banning of the "swords into ploughshares" sym-

bol, a meeting was held between leaders of the Evangelical Churches and Klaus Gysi, the State Secretary for Church Affairs. A report on the meeting, summing up the views of both sides, was read out in GDR Protestant churches on Easter day, 11 April. It may be summarized as follows:

The conference emphasized that it cannot regard the state decision against the symbol of the peace decade (i.e. the "swords into ploughshares" shoulder-patch) as anything other than a restriction of the public witness of the Church and a curtailment of freedom of religion and conscience;

Citing a multitude of cases, the conference objected to the fact that the independent Christian commitment to peace was suspected of being designed to establish an "independent peace movement";

That wearing the peace symbol "swords into ploughshares" was wrongly regarded as a denial of the GDR's peace policy and as an attempt at weakening defence readiness;

That the peace symbol was being passed off as having been produced in the West and imported illegally into the GDR;

That the security authorities indiscriminately suspect the wearers of this symbol of ulterior motives, that the wearers are made out to be criminals by largely inappropriate measures, that their dignity is violated and their confidence in the State lastingly impaired.

The State Secretary was told that the churches had no way of making young people understand the State's attitude; and that they feared that the course of action on which the authorities had embarked would have serious consequences for the relationship of predominantly good-willed young people towards the State, for the internal peace of society and for the personal development of the young people.

The State Secretary's reply was summarized officially as follows:

The State's objections are not directed against the message and meaning of the symbol as expounded once again by the conference. But since the symbol has been misused for the purpose of weakening the GDR's defence readiness it cannot be tolerated in public any longer.

This involves a political decision for the implementation of which various legal provisions or ordinances are being invoked.

Nevertheless, an overall assessment of the wearers of the symbol is at odds with the purpose of the state decision. The State Secretary confirmed that the Churches should make direct contact with the appropriate state authorities in the event of transgressions. He promised that he himself would pursue the clarification of serious cases.

Making a report to the eastern region of the Berlin-Brandenburg Church on 16 April, Bishop Gottfried Forck added some further comments. He believed that the basic reason for the State's banning of the "swords into ploughshares" symbol was a suspicion that the wearing of it showed support for the recently published "Berlin Appeal" of Pastor Eppelmann. Some who had not heeded the request to remove the badge had often been detained for hours at police stations. From time to time the badge, banned in schools, colleges and universities, had been slandered. The State was obviously of the opinion that the badge was being worn by many who had nothing to do with the Church. Bishop Forck repeated his thanks to all those who had worn the badge and despite all difficulties had maintained peaceful views. It was obvious, he said, that the responsibility for peace goes further than the wearing of badges. (Bishop Forck is himself in the habit of wearing the symbol on his jacket.) He added that it had not proved possible to persuade the State authorities to introduce "social peace-service". On the other hand, there remained the possibility of employing "construction soldiers" on social projects more widely than hitherto.

During this period the state campaign against unofficial peace initiatives was maintained and intensified. A common slogan was: peace must be defended—peace must be armed! (*Der Friede muss verteidigt werden—Der Friede muss bewaffnet sein!*) The official viewpoint can be summed up in the words of

Werner Walde, Party chief in the town of Cottbus:

The slogans of the peace movement serve only to undermine the essential military strength of the socialist world. Those who call for "social peace-service" are opponents of peace, socialism, and our very Constitution. It must not be forgotten that our whole Republic is peace-service.

Although the main drive of the peace initiative has come from Evangelical Christians, the witness of the Roman Catholic Church must not be left out of account. A recent statement of the "Halle Action Group" (*Aktionskreis Halle*, an association of priests and lay people in the Magdeburg area, founded in 1969) attacked what it alleged to be the intolerable silence of the Roman Catholic Church in face of threats to peace. A West Berlin church spokesman, Wolfgang Knauff, agreed that Roman Catholics did their best to keep clear of direct political involvement; he pointed, however, to official statements made in 1975 and 1978, in which the view of the Church on such themes as military service and infringements of freedom were made unmistakably clear.

The principal indications therefore during the Easter season were that Church-State relationships were moving into a more difficult phase. Further friction seemed almost inevitable. Yet there were causes for optimism. During the last days of April Karl Mau, the General Secretary of the World Union of Lutherans, had an interview with Klaus Gysi during which the latter said, "The concern of young people for peace all over the world is a sign of hope". Mau replied that the young GDR citizens' activity on behalf of peace strengthened the world-wide peace effort. Peace could be preserved, he added, only if all nations strove for it decisively. Such efforts could be in line with a government's policy, or against it.

ARVAN GORDON

Pressure on Czech Catholics Continues

The Trial of Fr Lízna

The trial of Fr František Lízna S.J. took place on 21 January 1982 in a small district court in Prague (Dejvice) without official publicity, and away from the public gaze. Nevertheless, early in the morning, a small group of friends, including a band of Charter 77 supporters

headed by the new spokesman, the Catholic philosopher Dr Radim Palouš, and some foreign journalists began to converge on the court. However, they were soon outnumbered by the police, who after taking their photographs told them menacingly to go home. After a long delay the priest's mother