

Founding Appeal of the New Forum (September 9, 1989)

Abstract

In response to the mass exodus, a group of East German activists and intellectuals (including Bärbel Bohley, Katja Havemann, Rolf Henrich, and Jens Reich) appealed for the creation of a “New Forum” [*Neues Forum*] to help initiate an open, uncensored public dialogue on the necessity of reforming the GDR.

Source

Communication between the state and society has obviously broken down in our country. Evidence of this is widespread disillusionment, to the point of withdrawal into the private sphere or mass emigration. Elsewhere, refugee movements of this size are caused by poverty, hunger, and violence. None of that exists here.

This disturbed relationship between state and society is paralyzing our creative potential and preventing the solution of existing local and global problems. We are wasting our time in sullen passivity, while there are more important things we could be doing for our lives, for our country, and for humanity.

The interests of groups and classes in the state and the economy are poorly balanced. Communication about the situation and about these interests is also hampered. In private, all of us offer diagnoses and name those measures that we view as most important. But such wishes and desires vary greatly; they are never weighed rationally against each other and examined for feasibility. On the one hand, we want an increase in available consumer products and improved supply; on the other, we are aware of the social and ecological costs, and advocate a renunciation of unlimited growth. We want leeway for economic initiative but not degeneration into a dog-eat-dog society. We want to preserve that which is proven, while creating room for something new, in order to live more frugally and less at odds with nature. We want order, but do not want to be told what to do. We want free, self-confident citizens who nevertheless behave responsibly. We want protection from violence without having to put up with a state full of henchmen and spies. Those who are lazy and do nothing but talk are to be driven from their comfortable jobs; yet we do not want to disadvantage the socially weak and defenseless. We want effective health care for everyone but do not want people taking sick leave at others' expense. We want to participate in export and world trade without becoming either the debtors and servants of leading industrial states or the exploiters and creditors of economically weaker nations.

In order to recognize all these contradictions, to hear and evaluate opinions and arguments, and to distinguish between special and general interests, we need a democratic dialogue on the responsibilities of the state, the economy, and culture. We must think about these issues and talk to one another about them, publicly, together, throughout the country. Whether we can find a way out of the present crisis in the foreseeable future will depend on our readiness and willingness to do so. Given the present state of our society, it is necessary

- for a greater number of people to participate in the process of social reform, [and]
- for the diverse activities of individuals and groups to be joined together in a concerted effort.

Therefore, we have come together to create a political platform for the entire GDR. This will allow people from all professions, parties, and groups to take part in the discussion and resolution of crucial social

problems in this country. For this comprehensive initiative we have chosen the name

NEW FORUM

We wish to place the New Forum's activities on a proper legal footing. We refer to the basic right, governed by Article 29 of the Constitution of the GDR, to achieve our political goals through common activity in an association. We will register the founding of the association with the responsible organs of the GDR, in accordance with the decree of 6 November 1975 on the "Formation and Activities of Associations" (*Gbl. I*, No. 44, 723).

The desires that the New Forum hopes to express and give voice to are based on a wish for justice, democracy, peace, and protection of nature. It is this impulse that we would like to see brought to life in the coming reorganization of all areas of society.

We call on all citizens of the GDR who would like to participate in the reorganization of our society to become members of the New Forum.

The time is now.

Source: "Gründungsaufwurf des Neuen Forums" (9. September 1989), *Die ersten Texte des Neuen Forums*. Berlin, 1990, p. 11.

Translation: "Founding Appeal of the New Forum" (September 9, 1989), in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944–1993*. Translated by Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper. Berghahn Books: Providence and Oxford, 1994, pp. 39–41.

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