

Political Guidelines for Party Organizations on Preparing and Implementing the *Jugendweihe* (1957)

Abstract

After the *Jugendweihe* was introduced as a secular alternative to confirmation in the GDR, the SED strove to persuade as many young East Germans as possible to participate in the ritual. In addition to young people themselves, parents in the 1950s were also supposed to be convinced of the benefits of the *Jugendweihe* through targeted propaganda in the workplace. The *Jugendweihe*, and the year-long “youth lectures” in preparation for it, were supposed to convert young people to the Socialist worldview. They were also closely related to the educational ideals of the reformed school and the youth organizations of the GDR.

Source

Excerpt from Internal Party Materials; Decision by the Politburo from October 22, 1957

1. Ideological tasks of the Jugendweihe

The *Jugendweihe* was successfully implemented in 1957. As an old revolutionary working-class custom, it is among the valuable traditions of the Socialist workers' movement; it is being cultivated among us and filled with new content.

The *Jugendweihe* is contributing to an ever-greater extent to educating our boys and girls in Socialist thinking and acting, to enriching their knowledge, and to solidifying their morals. It helps in developing our youth into people who are educated in an all-around way, steadfast in character, and fit for life, and who, borne by noble patriotism, affirm the German Democratic Republic and actively stand up for peace, friendship among nations, and Socialism as the highest goals of progressive humanity. The *Jugendweihe* serves to prepare young people for their future lives as adult members of our Socialist society. It confers rich knowledge and experience, which enable them to meet the demands of their future professions and to successfully attend our middle and upper schools. Above all, boys and girls become familiar with the developmental laws of nature and learn to apply them, in order to participate actively in the Socialist build-up of our republic.

The youth lectures in preparation for the *Jugendweihe* contribute to the formation of the Socialist worldview, especially by dealing with the laws of nature and society and with the questions of Socialist morality and ethics. They also address such issues as help in the future stages of life, the choice of a profession, the elucidation of Socialist relationships among people, and the historical role of the German Democratic Republic. In the coming year, as well, these lectures should be designed, in accordance with suggestions by the Central Committee for the *Jugendweihe*, to be interesting, varied, and rich with experiences. The youth lectures must be connected more closely than before to the life and struggle of our nation in building up Socialism. Through visits to enterprises, MTSs [machine tractor stations], LPGs [collective farms], and other production sites, participants in the *Jugendweihe* should learn not only about the scientific-technical aspects of production, but also about – and more strongly than before – the economic interconnections. The work of political education, which has often been neglected in recent times, must be improved. In the preparatory classes for the *Jugendweihe*, the oath must be more thoroughly explained than previously and incorporated into Socialist education as a valuable instrument. The work with scientific-technical films is crucial in the youth lectures. They are to be

systematically integrated into the program of the youth lectures.

The *Jugendweihe* is very valuable for all boys and girls, regardless of the worldview of their parents or the worldview in which they were previously raised. Our workers in the enterprises, all working people, especially all parents, must be persuaded that the *Jugendweihe* serves the good of our young people, and that it is indispensable for their lives ahead. In that way, we will succeed in achieving mass participation in the *Jugendweihe* over the next few years.

II. The working class and the Jugendweihe

The working class bears a great responsibility for the Socialist education of our young generation. The *Jugendweihe*, with its own forms and methods, supplements the Socialist educational work that is being done in schools, in the pioneer organization “Ernst Thälmann,” and in the home. That is why the successful implementation of the *Jugendweihe* as a contribution to the Socialist education of youth is an important task of the working class. It is interested in seeing an ever larger number of boys and girls participate in the *Jugendweihe* and in making the youth lectures and events even more interesting and eventful than before.

Good persuasive and educational work was possible wherever capable activist groups for the *Jugendweihe* existed in enterprises. It is the task of these groups, especially in close collaboration with the women’s committees in the enterprises, to convince more and more workers and young people of the correctness and necessity of the *Jugendweihe* through systematic education about scientific-technical problems and through conversations about questions of Socialist morality and ethics. In the process, topics like the following should be addressed: problems of nuclear energy, intercontinental rockets, the study of outer space by Soviet earth satellites, and so on, as well as questions concerning the Socialist attitude toward work and public property, Socialist relations among people, and other topics.

In this way, the workers in the enterprises will be introduced to Marxist-Leninist views of the developments in nature and society and will realize the great value of the *Jugendweihe* for their children. This kind of educational and persuasive work, which should extend over the entire year, will lead to more and more children of members of the enterprise participating in the *Jugendweihe*.

It is necessary to proactively engage with the issue of the *Jugendweihe* everywhere. Successes were achieved wherever the working class engaged in intensive persuasive work. Wherever it was possible, through mass-political education about the reactionary role of certain circles within the church, to isolate aggressive clergy from the faithful, to convince church councils to be tolerant of the *Jugendweihe*, or to achieve mass protests by workers and parents (including Christian circles of the population) against coercive measures and pressures on the conscience on the part of various church leaderships, the opponents of the *Jugendweihe* retreated. Those forces must be shown that our workers’ and farmers’ state places the freedom of conscience of all citizens under its protection. During these struggles, the feelings of the circles of the population that still have religious sentiments should not be offended. Through this and other methods, as for example, a public debate about scientific-technical questions, we will succeed now and in the future in putting the reactionary forces in their place and in successfully carrying out the *Jugendweihe*.

In promoting the *Jugendweihe*, our party comrades must be won over, through the patient work of persuasion, to send their children only to the *Jugendweihe* and not to confirmation. In order to achieve mass participation in the *Jugendweihe* next year, individuals who still have religious sentiments must be made aware that their children can participate in the *Jugendweihe* even if they are also being confirmed. For that reason, the promotion of the *Jugendweihe* by the committee and activist groups must in no way be limited to ideologically advanced workers and parents, but must be expanded as soon as possible to Christian parents and children as well.

III. Tasks of the party

The leadership of the basic organizations of our party is responsible for the political guidance of the *Jugendweihe*. That applies especially to the party organizations in schools.

Active help from the offices of the district and county leadership has had a favorable effect on the development of the *Jugendweihe* in the past few years. For the planning and implementation of the *Jugendweihe* in 1958, it is recommended that the district and county leadership thoroughly assess the work of the committee for the *Jugendweihe*, hear reports in their office meetings about the state of the preparatory work by the end of November 1957, and pass the appropriate decrees to improve the political-ideological work for the *Jugendweihe*. Special help is to be rendered to the committees of the counties, the rural communities, and the activist groups for the *Jugendweihe* in the enterprises. In many committees for the *Jugendweihe*, the one-man-job, where it still exists, is to be eliminated, and a collective way of working is to be assured. Through the comrades in the committee for the *Jugendweihe*, it is to be guaranteed that the celebrations for the *Jugendweihe* generally take place within the stipulated period, on the last Sunday in March and the Sundays in April. Ideas about only holding the *Jugendweihe* celebrations after confirmation must be opposed. For participants in the *Jugendweihe* from places where only a few children currently participate in the *Jugendweihe*, greater efforts must be made to hold interesting youth lectures and impressive festivities for the day of the *Jugendweihe* in the MTS sections.

We must succeed this year in forming effective activist groups for the *Jugendweihe* in all enterprises, especially in the MTS, VEGs [state-owned farms], and LPGs [collective farms]. These activist groups in the workplace are to be given special attention. All districts and counties, following the examples of the districts of Gera and Erfurt, shall carry out enterprise-based conferences of the committees for the *Jugendweihe*. The party organizations within enterprises, in conjunction with the activist groups, shall recruit experienced and conscious members of the workforce who will provide active help in preparing and carrying out the *Jugendweihe*, who will make themselves available for designing the youth lectures, and who will be active as youth lecture leaders. In this context, close systematic collaboration is also necessary between the party organizations of the sponsoring enterprises and the sponsored schools. Qualified comrades who are suited for participation in the committees for the *Jugendweihe* shall be relieved of their social function and freed up to work in the committees.

Proven old comrades should pass on their experiences with the struggle in the youth lectures more vigorously than before, and in this way, they should work on behalf of the Socialist education of our youth. We recommend that the leading party organs of the districts and counties, and the basic organizations, systematically advance – especially in the member meetings of the basic organizations – the previously initiated debates about the problems of the *Jugendweihe*.

The work of persuasion is to be intensified especially among the leading comrades from the state and economic apparatus, as well as in the social organizations. The district and county leaderships shall see to it that the problems of the *Jugendweihe* are addressed in the party press, in the district and village papers, and with the help of the radio. Persuasive and educational work is to be supported through lessons from the party cabinets as well as through the relevant treatment during the party study year. In the directives to the party secretaries from the county leadership and in the activist groups within the party, the questions of the *Jugendweihe* are to be thoroughly debated.

In preparing for and implementing the *Jugendweihe*, the leadership bodies of the party must pay special attention to the collaboration of the mass organizations. The party organizations in the central leadership bodies of the mass organizations shall deliberate on how they can best support the preparation for and implementation of the *Jugendweihe*. The problems of the *Jugendweihe* are to be carried into the membership of the mass organizations through the comrades in charge. Through them,

systematic educational and persuasive work is to be ensured. That applies especially to the unions and the Free German Youth. It should be recommended to the comrades on the executive boards of the industrial unions and the unions that they provide, through appropriate measures, more effective help than so far in the work of persuasion and promotion for the *Jugendweihe*. The problems of the *Jugendweihe* shall be the subject of discussions and debates within the framework of dealing with political-ideological questions. The union leadership in all enterprises shall offer help and support to the activist groups for the *Jugendweihe*. Through the Teachers' Union [*Gewerkschaft für Unterricht und Erziehung*], teachers and educators shall be acquainted more thoroughly than before with the questions of the *Jugendweihe* and be persuaded to participate actively in the committees for the *Jugendweihe*. The teachers at the general-education schools and the institutions for teacher-training, the organs for national education, must contribute to the success of the *Jugendweihe*. It is their task to get students interested in participating in the *Jugendweihe* and, above all, to be active as youth lecture leaders. In the process, the work of persuasion and promotion on behalf of the *Jugendweihe* must extend over the entire year; it should be systematically begun among the children of the lower classes and their parents. Through the comrades in the organs for national education it is to be ensured that the *Jugendweihe* as a tool of Socialist education is dealt with in the pedagogical councils of the school, in the teacher conferences, and in the curriculum of the institutions for teacher-training. The work of persuasion and promotion for the *Jugendweihe* is to be intensified in the institutions for teacher-training. The comrades and the party groups in the parents' councils should use their influence to convince the parents' council at our schools that their children's participation in the *Jugendweihe* is necessary and that they themselves should become active in planning and carrying it out. The task of the youth league, especially the pioneer organization "Ernst Thälmann," is to familiarize the students in the lower classes with the goals and tasks of the *Jugendweihe*. The vacation period, especially, is to be used for this. The leadership of the youth league shall proceed to have FDJ members who have already participated in the *Jugendweihe* speak about their outcomes and experiences in pioneer friendships and groups. This will help to strengthen the work of persuasion and promotion among our young pioneers. The Free German Youth, together with the committees for the *Jugendweihe* and the activist groups, shall hold meetings for the participants in the *Jugendweihe* after the *Jugendweihe* as well. These meetings shall be organized in a youth-appropriate way, in the form of hikes, camp fire evenings, sporting events, and the like.

The comrades in the Society for the Spread of Scientific Knowledge shall support the work of persuasion and promotion on behalf of the *Jugendweihe* through suitable lectures and lessons, chiefly also through the use of films, especially in rural areas.

If attention is paid to the suggestions provided and to the personal experiences that exist everywhere, we will be able to make the *Jugendweihe* 1958 into a complete success, as well.

Source: SAPMO-BA ZPA IV 2/14/28; reprinted in Frederic Hartweg, *SED und Kirche. Eine Dokumentation ihrer Beziehungen*. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995, pp. 255–59.

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