

Legalizing First Trimester Abortions in the GDR (March 13, 1972)

Abstract

In the GDR, a draft law permitting abortions within the first trimester met with reservations from both the church and the CDU, one of the bloc parties in the East German political system. The ballot in the People's Chamber [*Volkskammer*] was the first ever in which representatives abstained or cast no-votes. The following report to Politburo member Albert Norden, who was in charge of cooperation with allied political parties, vividly illustrates the differences of opinion within the executive committee of the CDU.

Source

First Opinion Formation on the Justification and Resolution on the Law on Pregnancy Termination at the 4th Session of the *Volkskammer*

Yesterday's session of the *Volkskammer* was followed with great interest and attention by the majority of our members and large parts of nonaffiliated Christians, especially church officials.

According to our review thus far, it can be estimated that the justification for the text of the law before the *Volkskammer* by the Minister of Health, Prof. Dr. Ludwig Mecklinger, is generally described in member circles as objective and finds acceptance among the majority of our friends. The underscoring of the fact that fostering love for a child and enhancing the desire to have children continue to be a main concern of the politics of our state found great resonance, especially in church circles. It was considered an expression of great honesty that the Minister of Health also mentioned the reservations against the law within the church and its supporters.

The result of the vote on the law on the termination of pregnancy was received with satisfaction by many Union friends^[1] and especially in church circles. Church officials in particular welcome the fact that some representatives voted their conscience or abstained. In this regard Preacher Kautz from the Halle district said, "Fourteen representatives [*Abgeordnete*] followed their conscience and voted no, and eight abstained. People who think they invented democracy are faced with the fact that in our country, contrary to all the talk of uniformity in the formulation of opinions, free, objective expression of opinion is practiced at the highest level."

The participants in the meeting of the Diaconal [*Diakonische*] Committee^[2] of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR also showed great interest in the law that was passed and commented positively on the outcome of the vote.

The representatives' decision to follow their conscience led citizens, especially those connected to the church, to say that this increased the authority of our *Volkskammer*.

On various occasions, friends of the Union asked whether the no-votes and abstentions came exclusively from the CDU faction and thus expressed a specifically Christian stance. Union friend Kniebusch (strict Catholic) of Magdeburg City, for example, said that since it was not clear from the press from which factions the no-votes and abstentions came, he had to think about announcing his intention to leave the party. Union friend Haupt, partner from Radebeul, member of the district executive committee in Dresden, wrote a letter before the *Volkskammer* session to the district chairman to say he was convinced that the Union friends [Gerald] Götting and [Max] Sefrin in the *Volkskammer* would speak out against the

law. He referred to the personal friendship between Union friend Götting and Albert Schweitzer. He called the termination of a pregnancy the murder of nascent life and a violation of the respect for life, and he said that if the CDU *Volkskammer* party faction did not have a united opinion against the law, then he would leave the CDU.

The opinion on the substance of the law on the termination of pregnancy did not change among the friends of the Union after the decision passed by the *Volkskammer*. To this day, there is still widespread opposition to pregnancy termination among those Protestant and especially Catholic Christians who are closely tied to the church.

Illegible

NOTES

[1] Members of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) in the GDR referred to themselves as *Unionsfreunde*: Union friends—trans.

[2] Similar to what is referred to as the Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in the United States—trans.

Source: Bundesarchiv Berlin, SAPMO, DY 30/IVB2/2.028m sheet 40; reprinted in Henrik Eberle and Denise Wesenberg, eds., *Einverstanden, E.H.: Parteiinterne Hausmitteilungen, Briefe, Akten und Intrigen aus der Honecker-Zeit*. Berlin, 1999, pp. 74–75.

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