

Petition for an Exit Visa (April 20, 1977)

Abstract

Manfred Krug's career in the GDR came to an abrupt end in 1976 when he signed a petition protesting the expatriation of songwriter Wolf Biermann. After being harassed by East German authorities, Krug filed a petition for an exit visa to West Germany, which was approved surprisingly quickly. In June 1977, he moved to the West with his family and resumed his career with great success.

Source

April 20, 1977, Wednesday

A friend and neighbor is trimming my little fringe of hair with a comb and scissors; a tear sometimes falls onto my bald head. Up until today she still didn't believe I would do it. She wants me to read the petition to her aloud:

Petition for an exit visa from the GDR to enter the FRG.

My name is Manfred Krug. I am an actor and singer. As a result of my parents' divorce, I left West Germany as a thirteen-year-old and moved to the GDR, where I have lived ever since. I am married and have three children.

In 1956 I met Wolf Biermann, who became—and still is—a friend. In 1965 the first article attacking Biermann was published in *Neues Deutschland*, and I inveighed against it. This brought me reprimands and the usual disadvantages. I was never part of the “travel cadre” and was never permitted to participate in one of the many DEFA^[1] delegations traveling to foreign countries. At the time, however, I did not suffer any more far-reaching consequences.

This time it is different. As is known, after Biermann was expelled from the country, twelve writers wrote a letter of protest, which I also signed. After I refused to withdraw my signature, my life changed abruptly.

—GDR Television excluded me from any type of collaboration. This was a harsh measure because as a result two roles in original literary adaptations were irrevocably lost to me: the original *Götz* and *Michael Kohlhaas*.

—*Die grossen Erfolge* [*The Great Successes*], an LP [album] that is already finished, will not come out.

—The DEFA film *Feuer unter Deck* [*Fire below Deck*] was not included in the 1977 Summer Film Days festival on the grounds that I supposedly beat up a comrade in Erfurt.

—Two days before Biermann was expelled, the Committee for the Entertainment Arts [*Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst der DDR*] of the GDR offered me a tour through West Germany. This tour will not take place.

—The publicly owned record company *VEB Deutsche Schallplatten* had offered me the production of a Mark Twain record for the first quarter of 1977. This production will not take place.

—Last fall, I abstained from taking a pre-approved trip to West Germany to attend my brother's wedding because the Committee for the Entertainment Arts requested instead that I participate in the Days of the Entertainment Arts of the GDR in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic [*Tage der Unterhaltungskunst der DDR in der ČSSR*] festival, which I did successfully. The Ministry of Culture did not keep its promise that I would be permitted to take the cancelled trip at a later date; my application was not even answered.

—Although all my jazz concerts of the past years were sold out, I have received no new offers. Of the fifteen concerts that were authorized last year, nine were cancelled without an alternative date or any explanation.

This is an incomplete selection of reprisals, of which it had been announced that there would not be any. —Recently, untrue information about me has been spread: for example, the Minister of Culture has claimed that I pressured people to sign the petition.

—False stories are being circulated. In Erfurt, a man publicly claimed that I have a dollar account in Switzerland. This man's occupation—he works for the State Security Office [*Stasi*—makes it presumable that this was not a rumor he was passing on, but deliberate slander.

The isolation resulting from such means is painful. Some acquaintances have started avoiding visits. When year-end bonuses were distributed, only five out of a hundred at DEFA dared to shake my hand. Parents prohibit their children from continuing to play with mine. At party gatherings people say, Krug may play party secretaries [on screen] but he lives the life of a bourgeois; one should sever contact with such people. A political science teacher in Berlin told her students that actors would sell their opinions for money and that Krug, in particular, is a criminal who has already been to prison several times. A sculptor-friend of mine was advised by army officers, his clients, to distance himself from me. Officials have investigated the neighborhood to determine who I visit, when and how often. At a forum in Potsdam, a statement was made publicly that I am an enemy of the state and a traitor to the working class.

That is something I never was and never will be.

During my last concert tour in the winter of 1976–77, I was openly observed by police detectives; the comments I made on stage were pointedly transcribed. Fans of our concerts complained that there was no free sale of tickets. Photographers were removed from concert halls by force. There were assorted audience members, especially in the front rows, who displayed grim expressions throughout the concert and were demonstrative in their refusal to applaud. There were planned expressions of hostility from the audience; these were of a sort that makes it impossible for a stage artist to work, they break him down. I now know the countless ways through which people can be discouraged and depressed. In contrast, the examples of tastelessness that I experienced at the premiere of the film *Spur der Steine* [*The Trace of Stones*] were relatively clumsy and painless.

I was and am of the conviction that a range of different opinions must exist, and that it should not be forbidden to express them openly. I am convinced that Biermann has left a gap behind in our country. Based on my experience, I see no chance for me to continue living here. The situation might be different for a writer who needs only paper and pencil to do his work.

After careful consideration, I herewith apply for an exit visa for my family and myself to leave the GDR and enter the FRG, where my mother and brother are living.

I leave to the state my house at Wilhelm Wolff Strasse 15, in 111 Berlin. It is the material result of long years of hard work. I also leave to the community of Vipperow in the county of Röbel the property that I was able to buy in 1968 as a privilege after completing the television film *Wege übers Land* [*Paths across the Land*].

I sincerely hope that my petition will be granted, and I request that I have the opportunity to arrange my affairs for my move without delay but not with undue haste.

Manfred Krug

NOTES

[1] *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (German Film Corporation)—trans.

Source: Manfred Krug, *Abgehauen: Ein Mitschnitt und Ein Tagebuch*, 4th edition. Düsseldorf, 1996, pp. 122–25.

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