

# The Christian Peace Movement in the GDR (1983)

## Abstract

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Responding to the arrest of peace movement members, the East German group “Women for Peace” turned to church leaders in Saxony, Berlin-Brandenburg, and Anhalt, reminding them of the church’s special role in mediating with East German state authorities and requesting immediate help.

## Source

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The arrest of Frau Kathrin Eigenfeld has affected us deeply. We are stunned by the fact that this happened at a moment when we were in the middle of preparing a children's peace festival, one day before World Peace Day.

Furthermore, two young men who were closely involved in the organizational aspects were temporarily arrested on World Peace Day. It should be emphasized that this was a church event. According to the church leadership in Halle, Frau Eigenfeld was charged on the basis of Paragraph 106 of the penal code (subversive agitation), a much over-used paragraph at the moment. We take “subversive” to mean, in the first instance, “unconstitutional.” We recall, however, Article 19, Paragraph 3 of the constitution: “Free from exploitation, oppression, and economic dependence, every citizen has equal rights and varied opportunities to develop his abilities fully, to expend his energies freely for the benefit of society and for his own use in the socialist community. Thus shall he realize his freedom and the dignity of his personality.” Article 21, Paragraph 3 offers an impressive confirmation of this point, as it states: “The realization of the right to co-determination and participatory action is, at the same time, a high moral obligation for every citizen.”

We see no breach of the constitution in the fact that we engage ourselves, by word and deed, on behalf of peace and the environment. We do so with a sense of full responsibility for the people in our society. One can also say it even more clearly, precisely out of this responsibility. In the words of (the writer) Stephan Hermlin, on the value of the “Berlin Encounter” (December 1981): “You should let citizens of the GDR and other states think out loud, people who not only come from different countries and social systems, but who in many cases also have very personal opinions about the ‘important questions of our time.’” (*Neues Deutschland*, December 7, 1981)

Unfortunately, we are seldom given this opportunity to think aloud. Should ideas about peace that deviate from official opinion be enough to be discriminated against? In this connection, we consider the extreme application of Paragraph 106 to be inconsistent with the constitution.

The adherents of the Christian peace movement have always striven for coexistence. “Dare to trust” remains our guiding principle, for we want to do something here for our society and its survival. We have not submitted an application to emigrate, and we do not seek to do so. But we would like to avail ourselves of our constitutional right, also vested in international law, to the free expression of opinion, without being prosecuted in court. We are aware, however, that we are in constant violation of Article 23, Paragraph 1 of the constitution; for we are pacifists. All of our peace activities are determined, in word and deed, by this fundamental position. Pacifism is publicly rejected as unconstitutional (see SED Politburo member Werner Walde, *Neues Deutschland*, November 21, 1981).

From this perspective, therefore, everything we say and do is unconstitutional and thus, subversive, and falls under the purview of Paragraph 106, which is so sweepingly applied. The difference between an

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indictment against Frau Eigenfeld or one against us can only consist in the proportionality of the sentence. It is becoming increasingly clear that anyone whom the state finds disagreeable can be arrested on a pretext. Only within the space provided by the Church can one speak openly. Thus, the Church, and we Christians, have been entrusted with a clear responsibility.

We think that those in the Church leadership have to be conscious of this responsibility, and that they can no longer rely exclusively on [the pronouncement of] March 6, 1978, in which the GDR leadership promised Christians a position of equal esteem and equal rights in society. A confession of principle, often provided by the rank and file, must be supported by the Church leadership; otherwise all Christians promoting peace and all non-Christian pacifists will one day disappear behind prison walls.

The state agencies do not want to speak with us. But the Church is an institution that must be reckoned with. We see therein the possibility of doing something against the arbitrary distortion of the law. We request immediate action on the part of the Church leadership.

Source: Women for Peace, Christians, and Pacifists in the GDR—Enemies of the State? (Autumn 1983); reprinted in Bernhard Pollmann, ed., *Lesebuch zur deutschen Geschichte*, vol. 3, *Vom deutschen Reich bis zur Gegenwart*. Dortmund, 1984, pp. 268–70.

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