

# Umweltblatter

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February 2017

The Church from Below was initiated in the 1970s by a breakaway faction of pastors and peace activists who sought to develop alternative forms of socialism within the East German state. Taking refuge in various churches in Berlin and Leipzig, the movement became a point of resistance within a growing community, including women's liberation groups and environmental activists. The Environmental Library, in particular, formed a base from which to report on the conditions of life in East Germany, particularly human rights abuses and environmental pollution. The Library, taking refuge in the Zionskirche in Berlin, published a clandestine newspaper, and collected similar publications from around the Eastern Bloc. Printed using ink smuggled in from the West, and occupying a back room in a nearby apartment building, printing took place behind closed doors and windows, the sounds of the machines being muffled through makeshift forms of insulation.

*"... the more deeply I listen to myself, the more I am able to listen to others, to be open to their stories, their points of view, to craft together revolutions great and small." (Jamie Heckert)*

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# Environmental Paper



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# Miracle there is always church from below

*this acoustics of  
resistance / this  
lyrical dimension /  
of weak communities  
/ and conscientious  
objection / this in-  
visible construct /  
around which some  
gather / this re-  
sounding underground  
/ second under the  
first / "social-  
ism with a face" /  
a common order /  
sounded by these /  
liminal subjects /  
to withstand and re-  
orient / can you  
hear me?*

**FREIASSUNG DER HARTEN  
EINSTELLUNG DER ERMITTLUNGS-  
VERFAHREN  
AUFHEBUNG DER STRASSEN.**



**Martin Böttiger speaks before a crowd gathered in Jena for the peace workshop, "Hands for Peace", 1982**

Where the grass and the wind meet, and when it becomes imperative  
To make a stand, and to stand for the earth and the uncounted  
The withheld, and the held down  
Those that collapse and that are resistant  
This we make today, like other days as we have seen and known  
Here we give voice, with voices shared and gathered in the service of the green earth  
The hollow land that we seek to replenish, as a common good and a common aim  
That is what we may grasp, and that guides the principle thought and action  
To work for the peace of the community, this community  
And those of despair and hope  
Where the grass and the wind meet, and when it becomes essential  
To stop and to demand and to listen, the listening out and for each other  
Now that summer blooms and the headlines steal our tender project  
To stop and to listen  
And to gather, with words to resist the regime that builds only poverty  
Of the fields turned dry, and the dry throats and dry ideals  
This is why we paint, and we decorate, and we sing, and we join together  
To form a coalition from the wounded and the empty  
The strained voices, and the voices that spell out the possible, and that work  
For the tattered dreams and the peace struggles, the theater actions and the readings, and for the libraries of  
environmental papers, these stained reports  
The pages stacked against pages, one report over the other  
And that speak of you and us, and those that we know disappear  
This is what we organize today, the hands and the silent dignity  
And the papers and the pages that may travel undercover  
Of the hurting communities and the common breath  
The haunted land, the haunted hands chapped with longing  
What we've seen and what we've heard and that we know  
Let us take note of what brings us together, if we can  
To call it by a name, and that may open new directions  
The streets that turn us toward this formation and gathering, the gathered  
For you, for me, for the others, and even for them  
Those that stand in the back whispering  
You know what I speak of, even against the cold  
That voice against other voices, and the terrible listening that haunts and that captures, and that undermines the  
greater hearing  
    They hear, they whisper, and they report  
That which deepens the empty sensation, that empties our voices  
    Which hollows the voice, this voice that speaks regardless, as it must  
Of narratives, and of the missing, and the not knowing, but knowing as well  
    Which I do know, and yet knowing does little until it is spoken  
Spoken against, and through, spoken from the position of the wounded  
    To speak over and above, under and below those that own the air, the walls, and the silence  
To reshape the silence from the position of our own compassion, and the good of the common breath and the  
earthly green  
    I am the green of the silence that speaks  
I take support from the dark and dreaming eyes I see around me, and the lyrics she sings, and the forest boys  
who hide in the trees, and that build with broken pieces  
With nails stolen from the west, and the ink wells we dip our tongues into



To print out in bursts of desire the sentences of deep veins and heart patterns  
The broken inspiration, the conscience of the underground  
Take back the city, take back the lost causes  
Take back the campaigns, and the military resources and consciousness  
Let us object to the invasive ponderings of the big no one  
No one and the great nothing that listens without listening, the lie of the gun and that rips the skin, the idea of  
the new socialism, the green community and its workshops  
Let us object to the moral take over, and the take over of earthly possession  
The dead trees and acid leaks that I know you have tasted, and that give way to this effort and the efforts of the  
few and the many, even those that cannot stand and that lie down for the good of the common good  
The hungry generation, and those that try to construct the houses and the centers and the schools, for the pov-  
erty of all this  
Can we speak of how such visions and such concerns may take root?  
Can we build from the haunted land the beginnings of the wish and the hand in hand?  
Can we will the poverty of the voice with new sensations?  
    And what of the vacancy, the loss, and the impossibility?  
That which deepens the forgotten desire  
    Which hollows the voice, this voice that speaks regardless  
Of narratives, of the missing, and the not knowing  
    Which I do know, and yet knowing does little  
While we may hide in the dark, and shiver to the touch of even the smallest breath of hope, I know that in the  
corners of talk, and in the backrooms and the secret hours you have already imagined and given movement to  
the deep human community  
To scrape the grey surfaces so as to gather the pigment  
To collect the dusty cloths so as to tie together  
To bring the silence to life so as to voice the lyrical promise  
Is this not why you have gathered today?  
And which shivers the darkness with its bright touch



**Bettina Wegner, East Berlin 1965 //// I sing from one side of the wall toward the other, I am myself divided, one side held by the other, and yet never touching . . .**

Sind so kleine Hände  
winzge Finger dran.  
Darf man nie drauf schlagen  
die zerbrechen dann.

Sind so kleine Füße  
mit so kleinen Zehn.  
Darf man nie drauf treten  
könn sie sonst nicht gehn.

Sind so kleine Ohren  
scharf, und ihr erlaubt.  
Darf man nie zerbrüllen  
werden davon taub.

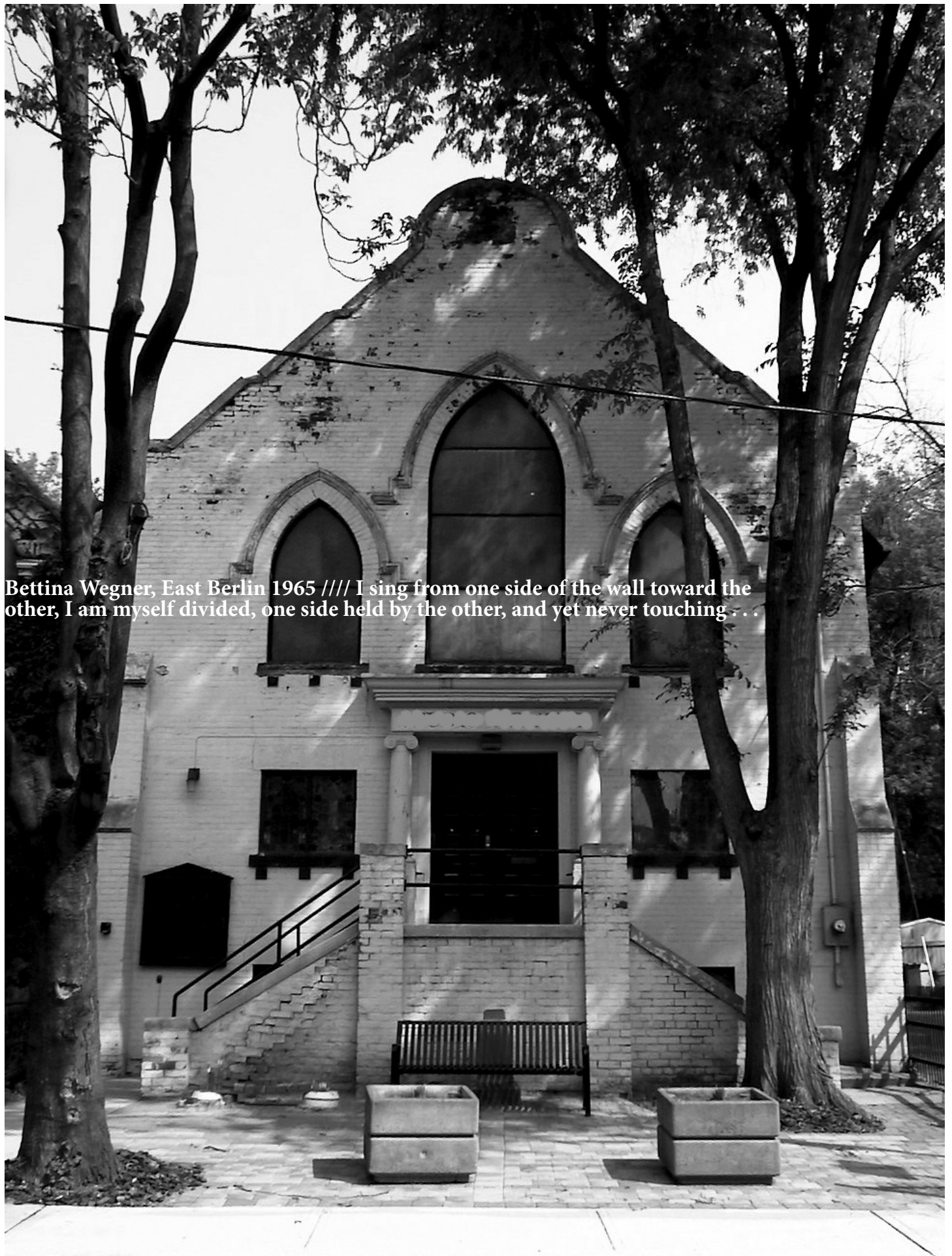
Sind so kleine Münder  
sprechen alles aus.  
Darf man nie verbieten  
6 kommt sonst nichts mehr raus.

Sind so klare Augen  
die noch alles sehn.  
Darf man nie verbinden  
könn sie nichts verstehn.

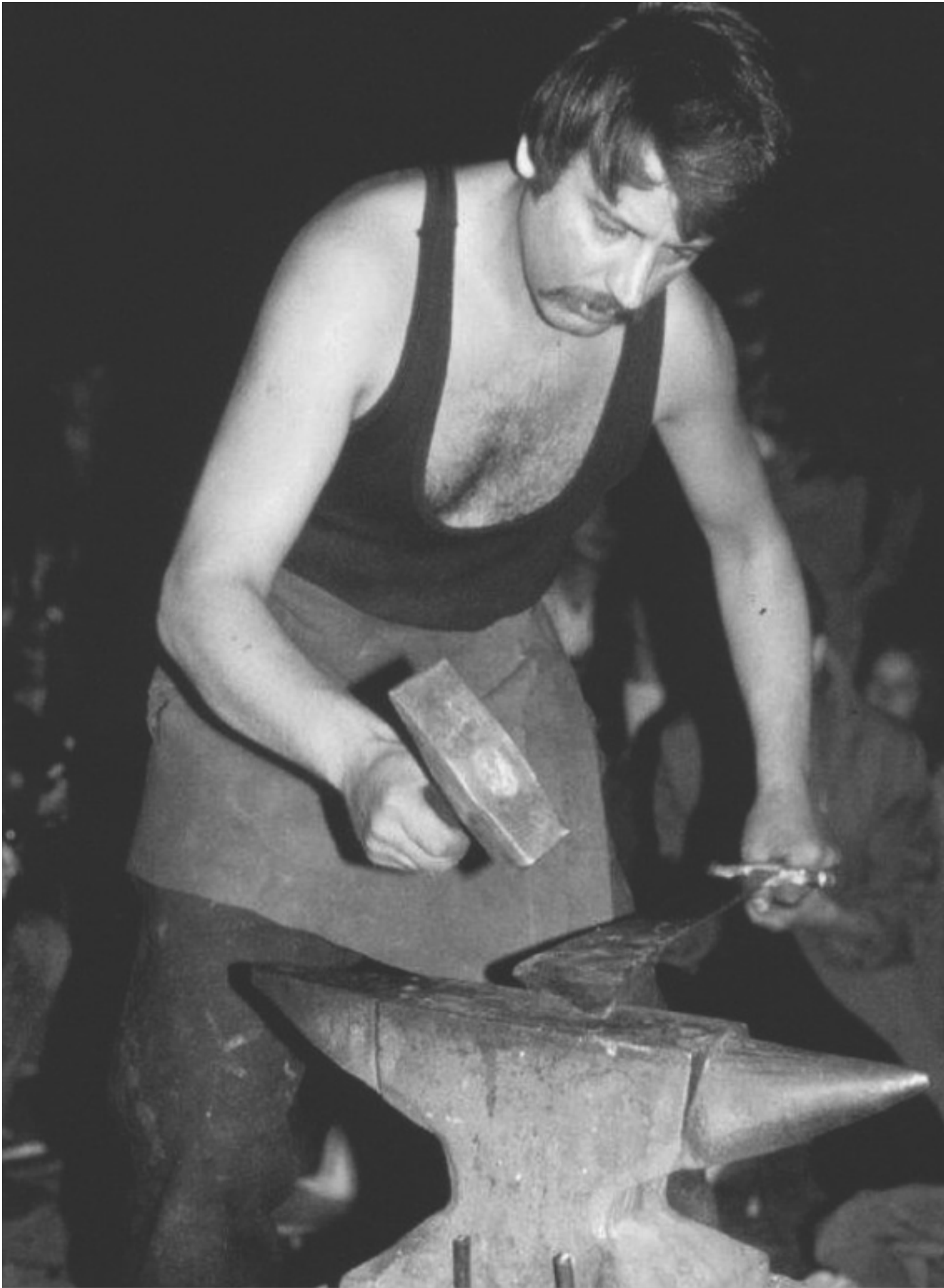
Sind so kleine Seelen  
offen und ganz frei.  
Darf man niemals quälen  
gehn kaputt dabei.

Ist son kleines Rückrat  
sieht man fast noch nicht.  
Darf man niemals beugen  
weil es sonst zerbricht.

Grade, klare Menschen  
wärn ein schönes Ziel.  
Leute ohne Rückrat  
hab'n wir schon zuviel.



Bettina Wegner, East Berlin 1965 //// I sing from one side of the wall toward the other, I am myself divided, one side held by the other, and yet never touching . . .





At the Wittenberg church congress on 24 September 1983, Stefan Nau forged a sword into a ploughshare in front of four thousand spectators. The slogan “swords to ploughshares” initially emerged mainly at church-run peace events. When it came to public attention as a patch sewn onto clothing in 1981, it became a protest symbol. The state took action against anyone caught wearing it.

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were get-togethers and soccer matches. Most important, however, the soldiers got clear and specific instructions about the peril border guards faced. The enemy was everywhere. Guards had perished in the line of duty, shot by fleeing citizens. Heavily armed groups of citizens were always plotting to crash the border, guards were told and woe to any guard who got in their way. The East German who tried to breach the Wall were either armed criminals or dangerous lunatics. This propaganda served several purposes. It reinforced the siege mentality and the importance of stopping escapes. Berlin was often referred to as a combat zone. Each regiment, said Huber, had a Memorial Room, which exhibited the history of the border troops, with a special glass case displaying information on soldiers who had given their lives in the line of border duty.

The idea of escapee-as-criminal also helped give legal justification to the order to shoot. The 1975 Helsinki Accords and the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulate that citizens have the right to travel, including the right to leave their countries. The East Germans were harsher than other East Bloc countries about travel because any East German was entitled to West German citizenship, thus greatly increasing the possibility that a traveler would turn into an émigré. Labeling fleeing Germans as criminals gave a public justification for denying this right.

In the end, though, the state didn't really care about what the border guards thought, only how they behaved. If they were not naturally inclined to be watchful and decisive in the struggle, constant surveillance helped. Although only one officer in each company had been formally detailed to the Stasi, Huber said, one in four soldiers had been a Stasi informant. The Egon Schulz Company's commander, Major Ronald Fabian, estimated that of the 220 men in his company, at least 40 had been working for the Stasi.

The regiment's youth officer—the ubiquitous Sven Huber again—made it his business to prevent any conflict that could distract a border soldier from his duty or tempt him west. The guards took better care of their soldiers than did their army counterparts, Huber said. For instance, he spent hours on the phone convincing errant soldiers' girlfriends to return or persuading the mayor of a

soldier's town to boost a border guard to the top of a waiting list for an apartment.

Huber asked about the four guards on trial. "Their main concerns were vacations and free time," he said. "They were normal, like all were there. Every month the company leadership and Stasi officer did a personality evaluation of each individual soldier: positive Western contacts, psychological stability, position in the college family conflicts, political reliability. That evaluation determined where a soldier would go. There is no doubt that Heinrich is the one I'd choose to go through enemy lines with; our evaluations rated him as the most reliable of the four. Kühnpast was rated as unstable. At the trial he said they had put him on kitchen duty early on because he said he wouldn't shoot—well, it had less to do with not wanting to shoot than the fact that he was being checked out, evaluated on whether he should be sent to the border. I wouldn't trust him for more than watching the horses. Schmett and Schmidt were in the middle. They would behave if the knew authority was watching them."

Huber asked why he thought Schmidt hadn't shot. "He had a problem with his arm and wasn't using his AK," said Huber. "He had only a machine pistol. If he had had his usual gun, the reflex—call out, warning shot, fire—would have come into play. But all of a sudden something wasn't there. I believe that's why he didn't shoot, and I believe he doesn't even know it."

The trial established beyond a shadow of a doubt that Andreas Kühnpast, Michael Schmidt, Peter-Michael Schmett, and Ingo Schmuntz were likely to follow orders. What those orders were, however, and their relationship to East German law, was not easy to determine. Paragraph 27 of the East German Border Law stated that force could be used only after exhausting all other means and was "justified in order to prevent the immediate, impending commission or continuation of a crime that is, under the circumstances, a felony. It is also legitimate to capture a person who is suspected of a felony." An escape is a felony, and therefore guards may shoot, according to Paragraph 213 of the Border Law, if it endangers the health of others, is done through falsifying documents or lying, is a perpetrator's second attempt, is carried out with special

Shall we cross the border?  
Or shall we hold still?