



Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

The Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED on the *Junge Gemeinde* [Young Congregation] (January 27, 1953)

In their efforts to gain a political hold on East German youth through Socialist schools and youth groups such as the Young Pioneers and the Free German Youth (FDJ), the East German government and the SED quickly found themselves in opposition to traditional educational institutions, chiefly the Christian churches (and the Protestant Church, in particular). The Protestant Church was especially active in the area of Christian youth work, and, for this reason, it was the target of vehement attacks by the state. The SED accused the Protestant Church of acting in a manner that was hostile to the state and of using its youth programs to deliberately undercut the work of the FDJ. As an initial countermeasure, the state outlawed the work of student pastors in July 1952.

At the beginning of 1953, the state and the party instituted various coercive measures against the Protestant Church's *Junge Gemeinde* [Young Congregation] and mounted a propaganda offensive against the group. The *Junge Gemeinde*, its writings, and its badges were banned. Religious instruction was abolished in secondary schools. Young Christians were excluded from university study. The allegedly treasonous activities of the *Junge Gemeinde* were to be unmasked in public show trials. At the same time, the Socialist Free German Youth was supposed to offer attractive programs to improve its recruitment of young people.

Excerpt from Protocol No. 5/53 of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED on January 27, 1953

Decision Point 6: *Junge Gemeinde* and Attachment No. 2 to the Protocol, *Junge Gemeinde*

6. *Junge Gemeinde*:

Reporter: Axen

- 1) The measures against the *Junge Gemeinde* are approved. (Attachment No. 2)
- 2) The ordinance on the approval of compulsory event registration is approved. (Attachment No. 3)
- 3) Comrade Grotewohl and the State Administration department are instructed to organize a meeting between comrade Grotewohl and the church representatives of the GDR.

Junge Gemeinde

I. Unmasking the *Junge Gemeinde* in public as a cover organization for warmongering, sabotage, and espionage directed by West German and American imperialistic forces.

1) The comrade State Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of the GDR is instructed to hold three to four public trials using the relevant evidence. The trials shall be held successively and in short intervals (total duration 14 days) in a few district capitals or county seats of the GDR – not in Berlin. They should give clear proof of warmongering and spying and sabotage activity by members and functionaries of the *Junge Gemeinde*.

2) The county publications of the district press of the SED and of the other block parties shall publish documents and/or letters revealing the subversive activity of the *Junge Gemeinde*.

3) The district press of the SED and of the block parties shall publish exposés on the subversive and demoralizing activity of the *Junge Gemeinde* by former members and functionaries of the *Junge Gemeinde* themselves.

4) At the same time, there shall be a broad-scale organization of public appearances by pastors, church council members, Christian parents, and Christian youth against the so-called “Youth Chamber East” in West Berlin, which is submissive to the U.S.

5) The local groups of the DFD [Democratic Women’s League of Germany] and the women’s committees of the relevant enterprises and factories shall organize meetings in which the hostile role of the *Junge Gemeinde* is exposed to mothers.

6) The district and country leadership of the party are instructed to organize Parent Council meetings in schools in their [respective] counties and cities for the purpose of exposing the hostile activity of the *Junge Gemeinde*.

7) Statements by the leadership of the CDU [Christian Democratic Union], the LDP [Liberal Democratic Party], the NDP [National Democratic Party], and the DBD [Democratic Farmers’ Party], and then from the block committees in the communities and counties, later in the districts, against the subversive activity of the *Junge Gemeinde* shall be collected, and some, especially those from the CDU and the LDP, shall be published in the district press.

II. Strengthening the ideological-political and cultural work of the FDJ [Free German Youth], the sports organizations, the DFD, and the VdgB (BHG) [Association for Mutual Farmers' Assistance (Farmers' Trading Cooperative)].

1. The comrades in the Central Council of the FDJ are instructed to:

a) quickly publish popular-scientific book series in mass editions and to ensure their widest possible propagation.

b) [They are instructed to] organize popular-scientific lectures that give special consideration to certain cities, villages, and schools. In terms of theme, these lectures should focus in particular on questions of morality, marriage, love, family, happiness, questions surrounding the knowability of the world, matter, and idea, and so on.

To that end, every county leadership of the FDJ shall immediately draw up, with support from the Culture Association [*Kulturbund*], a relevant list of speakers and lecturers for popular-scientific lectures, disputations, public discussions, and so on. The ideological debates shall begin at universities and colleges and secondary schools in accordance with a precise plan.

c) [The comrades in the Central Council of the FDJ] should make sure that a broader and, above all, more systematic recruitment of larger numbers of participants for the FDJ school year [program] is carried out on the basis of the FDJ's plan for the observation of Karl Marx Year.

d) Dignified school graduation celebrations for the year 1953 must be organized with special care.

e) At precisely the time when the trials are being held and the measures are being implemented, [the comrades in the Central Council of the FDJ should] begin the crucial reinforcement of the FDJ's work in the area of joyous youth life by organizing winter hikes, horse-drawn and motorized sled trips, carnivals and spring balls, newspaper festivals, and so on.

f) A full-time FDJ functionary should be installed in every secondary school.

g) A conference for full-time and volunteer FDJ secretaries in secondary schools should be organized in February, with the goal of determining concrete measures to strengthen the unity of youth and to reinforce the political and cultural work of the FDJ.

h) As part of the exchange of association records, the leadership of the base-level units of the FDJ should be purged of active members of the *Junge Gemeinde*, especially in secondary schools and universities.

2. The comrades in the State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport are instructed to organize particularly interesting sporting events on certain calendar days and to work up a detailed plan for individual counties for this purpose.

III. Administrative measures

1) The comrades in the Ministry for Popular Education are instructed to:

a) work together with school inspectors and the directors of general-education schools to establish effective control measures, so that religious instruction does not impede the general curriculum or the children's participation in the Thälmann Pioneers organization;

b) examine whether instruction in ancient languages – Latin, Greek – which has been offered at secondary schools up to now, could not be carried out, in general, within the framework of the relevant course of study at university;

c) to no longer allow religious instruction in the new 10-grade schools.

2. The comrades in the Ministry for State Security and in the Main Administration of the German People's Police are instructed to provide the press office of the Minister President with materials on the hostile activity of the *Junge Gemeinde* for the purpose of making it available to the democratic press.

3. The comrades in the State Secretariat for Higher Education are instructed to take and monitor the necessary measures to immediately stop any and all admission of active members and functionaries of the *Junge Gemeinde* to universities and colleges.

4. After the trials have been held, the government shall inform the leadership of the Protestant Church that:

a) the GDR government has exposed the so-called Youth Chamber East in West Berlin as an anti-GDR organization in religious guise, and that any activity by this Youth Chamber is strictly prohibited in the territory of the GDR. The state and country youth chambers operating under the West Berlin Youth Chamber are to be immediately dissolved. Any and all further activity is to be stopped.

b) Any activity by the so-called *Junge Gemeinde* is prohibited. The heads of the so-called youth circles will be removed from their function.

5) The district councils are instructed to strictly prohibit any activity by so-called "itinerant preachers" in the GDR, because they are acting as agents of West German and foreign imperialists. Those who appear despite the ban shall be identified and criminally prosecuted.

The comrades in the Ministry of the Interior and the comrade chairmen of the district and county councils shall outlaw any assembly and any activity by young people of any religious congregation on the territory of the GDR and in the democratic sector of Berlin that goes beyond the framework of the exercise of religion guaranteed in the constitution (e.g. youth hikes, tent camp, retreat camps, lay theater, lay choirs, Christian academies, and so on). That also applies to activities within the church. The wearing of so-called confessional insignia [*Bekennniszeichen*] is prohibited. The publication and dissemination of church youth magazines will be halted.

6) The leaders of former church youth groups, pastors and so on, who violated the decree of the state organs shall be held criminally accountable on the basis of the Law for the Protection of the Peace and other democratic, statutory stipulations.

7) Comrade Interior Minister Stoph is instructed forthwith to present the presidium of the Council of Ministers with a new ordinance on compulsory event authorization and registration for its approval.

IV. 1) A commission under the chairmanship of comrade Erich Honecker will be established to implement the decisions described above. The following comrades belong to the commission:

Dahlem
Ilse Thiele
Lauter
Wandel
Mielke
Barth.

The commission is instructed to immediately draft a concrete plan to implement the Politburo's decisions.

2) The first secretaries of the district and country committees are instructed to install, in all district and country committees, special commissions under the chairmanship of the first secretary, to which shall additionally belong:

the 1st secretary of the FDJ
the representative of the Ministry for State Security
the chairman of the district or county council
the comrade responsible for popular education

The commissions will work in precise accordance with the decision of the Politburo and the plan of the central commission.

Source: SAPMO-BA ZPA J IV 2/2259; reprinted in Frederic Hartweg, *SED und Kirche. Eine Dokumentation ihrer Beziehungen* [*SED and Church. A Documentation of their Relations*]. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1995, pp. 88-91.

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