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

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 block parties in the East German political system. The ballot in the *Volkskammer* was the first ever in which representatives abstained or cast a “no” vote. 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.

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**Initial opinions on the statement of reasons and the decision on the law on pregnancy termination in the 4th session of the *Volkskammer***

A majority of our members and large groups of nonaffiliated Christians, especially church officials, followed yesterday’s session of the *Volkskammer* with great interest and attention. According to our review up to now, it can be assessed that the decision on the wording of the law before the *Volkskammer* read by Minister of Health Dr. Ludwig Mecklinger has been described as objective in member circles and his views have found acceptance by a 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 in particular in church circles. It was valued as an expression of great honesty that the Minister of Health also mentioned the reservations against the law within the church and its supporters.

Many Union Friends<sup>1</sup> and especially church circles received the results of the vote on the law on the termination of pregnancy with satisfaction. 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 followed their conscience and voted no, and eight abstained. People who think they created the democracy are faced with the fact that here, against all talk of uniformity in the formulation of opinions, objective expression of opinion has been practiced at the highest level.”

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] in the GDR referred to themselves as *Unionsfreunde*: Union Friends – trans.

The participants of the meeting of the *Diakonische* Committee<sup>2</sup> of the Association of Protestant Churches in the GDR also showed great interest in the law that was passed and responded positively to the results 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 numerous occasions, Union Friends asked if the no-votes and abstentions came exclusively from the party caucus of the CDU, therefore expressing a specifically Christian stance. Union Friend Kniebusch (strict Catholic) of Magdeburg City, for example, said that since it could not be determined from the media what parties the no-votes and abstentions came from, 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 caucus did not represent a uniform opinion against the law, he would leave the CDU.

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

*Illegible*

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* [Agreed, E.H.: *Internal Party Memos, Letters, Files, and Conspiracies from the Honecker Era*]. Berlin, 1999, pp. 74-75.

Translation: Allison Brown

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<sup>2</sup> Similar to what is referred to as the Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in the United States – trans.