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# ›What About Peace and Bread?‹: East Germans and the Remilitarization of the GDR, 1952–1962

Throughout its entire history the SED devoted a considerable portion of its propaganda efforts to denouncing militarism. According to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, militarism and war are integral elements of capitalism, where the logic of ruthless competition, ever-expanding markets and the constant striving for ever-greater profits inevitably leads to imperialist expansion and ultimately military conflict. Just as capitalist states function to secure and advance the interests of the ruling class, so too do their military forces fight against any perceived obstacles to sustaining the capitalist hegemony and to achieving the highest possible profits for the ruling elite. As a consciously socialist state that functioned instead in the interests of the common people, the GDR was a primary target for capitalist aggression. It was only a matter of time, so the argument went, before the ruling classes in the West would unleash yet another imperialist war against the enemies of capitalist exploitation. When that war came the GDR had to be prepared to defend itself, and in order to do so it needed armed forces. In short, the SED argued that militarization in the GDR was necessary to defeat militarism.

The history of the build-up of East German military forces and paramilitary units from around 1947 onwards has hitherto been examined almost exclusively in terms of their organizational history, their role within the Warsaw Pact and the development of SED defence policy under Soviet influence — largely as a matter of high politics and macroeconomics<sup>1</sup>. But as Michael Geyer and John Gillis have pointed out, militarization as the ›social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence‹ also has various cultural and social aspects<sup>2</sup>. These include not only the generation of a minimum of popular consensus on the principle of using violence in the form of military forces, but also, of course, the mobilization of young people to serve in their ranks. Despite the wave of scholarly

<sup>1</sup> In the interests of space, I simply refer to *Die Militär- und Sicherheitspolitik in der SBZ/DDR. Eine Bibliographie (1945–1995)*, ed. by Hans Ehlert, (Munich 1996). Among the recent literature using previously inaccessible internal sources, most noteworthy are *Volksarmee schaffen — ohne Geschrei! Studien zu den Anfängen einer ›verdeckten Aufrüstung‹ in der SBZ/DDR 1947–1952*, ed. by Bruno Thoß, (Munich 1994); Rüdiger Wenzke, *Die NVA und der Prager Frühling*, (Berlin 1995); *Im Dienste der Partei. Handbuch der bewaffneten Organe der DDR*, ed. by Torsten Diedrich, Hans Ehlert, Rüdiger Wenzke, (Berlin 1998); *Nationale Volksarmee — Armee für Frieden. Beiträge zu Selbstverständnis und Geschichte des deutschen Militärs 1945–1990*, ed. by Detlef Bald, Reinhard Brühl, Andreas Prüfert, (Baden-Baden 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Geyer, ›The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945‹, in: *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. by John Gillis, (New Brunswick 1989), p. 65–102, this quote p. 79. Geyer makes a useful distinction between militarization as a social process and militarism as an older concept denoting either the predominance of military over civilian authority, or more generally the prevalence of warlike values in society. See also *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Ute Frevert, (Stuttgart 1997).

interest in the GDR since its collapse, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge of the development of the East German military forces, especially concerning their relationship to East German society more broadly speaking, and in particular the perspective of the general populace and of those most directly affected, the recruits and would-be recruits<sup>3</sup>.

The aim of this article is not to question the findings of previous research on the political and economic aspects of remilitarization in East Germany during the 1950s and early 1960s, but rather to complement them by viewing the process from this other perspective, to approach the problem ›from below‹<sup>4</sup>. It examines the popular reception of the East German remilitarization campaign at the grass-roots, paying particular attention to the problem of mass recruitment of ›ordinary‹ soldiers under the particular circumstances of the GDR in the 1950s and early 1960s — that is, having to raise a ›volunteer‹ army in order not to be the first post-war German state to introduce conscription, but in a society where relatively few people supported the build-up of armed forces and departure to the West was relatively easy for those not willing to enlist<sup>5</sup>. It focuses on three primary thrusts of the regime's rearmament programme: the expansion of the ›garrisoned People's Police‹ (*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, or KVP) in 1952–53, the run-up to the founding of the National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*, or NVA) in 1955–56, and the recruitment drive beginning in early 1961 and ending with the introduction of conscription in 1962. A brief outline of the development of these armed forces and the system of recruitment will be followed by an examination of popular opinion; the arguments, motives and strategies of enlisting and refusing to enlist; the role of local functionaries and the organizational difficulties of recruitment at the grass-roots; and finally the effects of the Berlin Wall and the introduction of conscription. As we will see, in a society still acutely feeling the effects — both material and emotional — of the last war, the establishment of armed forces and in particular the recruitment of young able-bodied men was a task that was not only broadly unpopular, but also riddled with internal political, propagandistic and organizational contradictions.

## I. The Establishment of East German Armed Forces and the System of Recruitment

The establishment and development of the KVP and NVA during the 1950s and -60s has been dealt with elsewhere, so there is no need to offer more than a brief recapitulation here. The period from early summer 1952 to the New Course in June

<sup>3</sup> An exception is Rüdiger Wenzke's examination of the mood and responses of non-commissioned officers and conscript soldiers during the ›Prague Spring‹, *Die NVA und der Prager Frühling* (as in n. 1).

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of this literature in German up to 1991, see *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, ed. by Wolfram Wette, (Munich 1992).

<sup>5</sup> These questions have as yet received little attention. Rüdiger Wenzke has dealt with them briefly in ›Auf dem Weg zur Kaderarmee. Aspekte der Rekrutierung, Sozialstruktur und personellen Entwicklung des entstehenden Militärs in der SBZ/DDR 1947–1952‹, in: *Volksarmee* (as in n. 1), p. 205–272, albeit primarily for the incipient officers' corps and

1953 saw the strongest militarization push in eastern Germany since the end of the Second World War. Although the Soviets and SED had already established a sizeable quasi-military ›police force‹ in the late 1940s numbering around 20 000 men whose arms, uniforms and organization resembled those of soldiers more than police<sup>6</sup>, explicit plans for the establishment of ›national armed forces‹ for the GDR were first worked out in the spring of 1952. In connection with developments in the international situation in central Europe — above all the consolidation and strengthening of the western military alliance and the confusion wrought by the famous Stalin-note of March — the Soviets forced a mobilization of the various military forces in the eastern camp. As Wilhelm Pieck recalled from talks with Soviet leaders in Moscow on 1 April 1952, the object for the GDR was to ›create a People's Army without a big fuss‹ by expanding its existing paramilitary forces<sup>7</sup>.

The nucleus of the incipient army, the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei* (so named in order to hide its decidedly military character before the establishment of a West German army) comprised the bulk of the GDR's ground forces, including infantry, tank and artillery units. Complementing the KVP were the newly-founded *Volkspolizei-See* and *-Luft* units, which in every way apart from their names resembled naval and air defence forces, as well as the so-called *Betriebskampfgruppen* (*Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse* after 1959) which were initially intended as a paramilitary force for the protection of factories but which eventually took on broader functions of civil defence<sup>8</sup>.

As the Cold War deepened and the opposing military alliances of East and West expanded and crystallized in the mid-1950s, the Soviets and SED leadership soon agreed that it was necessary to upgrade the GDR's military defences once again for entry into the Warsaw Pact. Against the backdrop of an escalating arms race between the Superpowers and West German entry into NATO, the SED Central Committee first publicly announced the intention to transform the KVP into a ›powerful, effective cadre-army filled with a high level of awareness‹ at its twenty-third convention on 15 April 1955. There followed a general re-emphasis on the GDR's need to defend itself against its enemies — which was even given expres-

over an earlier time period. Michael Buddrus has also briefly dealt with the problems of recruitment, again concentrating at the level of officer-cadre, in ›»Kaderschmiede für den Führungsnachwuchs«‹ Die Kadettenschule der Nationalen Volksarmee in Naumburg 1956–1961. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Militär- und Jugendpolitik der SED, in: *Von der SBZ zur DDR. Studien zum Herrschaftssystem in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, ed. by Hartmut Mehringer, (Munich 1995), p. 167–232. Torsten Diedrich's portrayal of popular opinion during the months leading up to June 1953 is unique in its emphasis on the effects of remilitarization, *Der 17. Juni in der DDR. Bewaffnete Gewalt gegen das Volk*, (Berlin 1991). The only exception to date that deals with these questions directly, but one that paints a rather distorted and rosy picture, is the pre-*Wende* study by Karl Greese and Rüdiger Wenzke, ›Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Volk der DDR und seiner Armee in den Jahren 1956/57‹, in: *Militärgeschichte*, 23 (1984), no. 5, p. 387–396.

<sup>6</sup> See generally, *Volksarmee* (as in n. 1).

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Wenzke, ›Auf dem Weg‹ (as in n. 5), p. 261; see also Rolf Stöckigt, ›Direktiven aus Moskau, Sowjetische Einflußnahme auf DDR-Politik 1952/1953‹, in: *Brüche, Krisen, Wendepunkte. Neubefragung von DDR-Geschichte*, ed. by Jochen Cerny, (Leipzig, Jena, Berlin 1990), p. 81–87.

<sup>8</sup> See Armin Wagner, ›Die Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse (1953–1990)‹, in: *Im Dienste der Partei* (as in n. 1), p. 281–337; also Volker Koop, *Armee oder Freizeitclub? Die Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse in der DDR*, (Bonn 1997).

sion in the East German constitution<sup>9</sup> — as well as a second recruitment push lasting through to the official deployment of the *Nationale Volksarmee* (NVA) in December 1956.

The scale of the militarization programme was immense, and necessitated a correspondingly aggressive recruitment campaign. In 1952 the planned overall strength of the KVP was approximately 160 000 troops, or 200 000 including the naval and air units. Recruitment was thus made a policy priority. Only weeks after Pieck's meeting with the Soviets, Ulbricht told local party secretaries that recruitment for the armed forces was one of the ›most pressing tasks of the party and FDJ‹ and that agitation for the popular acceptance of an East German army would be of primary importance in the months to come<sup>10</sup>. On 8 April the HVA (*Hauptverwaltung Ausbildung*, the forerunner to the KVP) even ordered that recruitment be the ›exclusive focal point‹ of its efforts during the month of April, and that the directors of local police precincts devote at least half of their time to it over this period<sup>11</sup>. Although the perhaps unrealistically optimistic recruitment targets were not completely fulfilled in 1952–53, the armed forces did manage to gain 60 000 new recruits in less than twelve months following the Second Party Conference, altogether numbering 90 250 by December 1952 and 113 000 by summer 1953<sup>12</sup>.

The basic structures for soldier recruitment were set up in 1952<sup>13</sup>, and despite the transition to the NVA in 1956, changed little until the introduction of conscription ten years later. Most noteworthy was the involvement of the vast organizational machinery of the GDR, including the police, state and party apparatus as well as the various ›mass organizations‹ (MOs: FDGB, FDJ, National Front, etc.). As an initial step, the government expanded its pre-existing registration capacity in 1952 by establishing 225 local registration offices all across the GDR, in all of the larger towns and principalities<sup>14</sup>. By summer 1952 all local *Volkspolizei* authorities with jurisdictions of up to 150 000 residents were instructed to assign at least two officers to recruitment for the armed forces, those with over 150 000 at least three, and the larger *Kreise* such as Leipzig and Dresden up to eight officers<sup>15</sup>. Various bonuses were also established as an incentive for winning recruits<sup>16</sup>. In October the regional registration offices were placed under the authority of the central Recruitment Office (*Verwaltung für Rekrutierung*) of the KVP within the Interior Ministry, which was responsible for coordinating the entire recruitment campaign.

Among the mass organizations, the FDJ played the most important role by providing a forum for the recruitment of young people, who would naturally comprise the rank-and-file of any East German fighting force. In May 1952, the SED

<sup>9</sup> Article 5 was expanded to read that military service was no longer merely an honour, but an ›honourable national duty‹ of the citizens of the GDR.

<sup>10</sup> Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAP-MO-BA), DY30/IV2/1.01/191, bl. 15, cited in Wenzke, ›Auf dem Weg‹ (as in n. 5), p. 261.

<sup>11</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), DVH3/2711, ›Befehl Nr. 210/52‹, 8 Apr. 1952, bl. 152–153.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The basis was actually a transformation and enlargement of the pre-existing system of recruitment for the *Volkspolizei* and HVA.

<sup>14</sup> Wenzke, ›Auf dem Weg‹ (as in n. 5), p. 262.

<sup>15</sup> Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Potsdam (BAP), DO1/11/1634, ›Werberichtlinie 3‹, 25 Jan. 1952, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), BPA IV/4/06–379, ›Bericht über die VP-Werbung in den Betrieben‹, 26 Nov. 1952, p. 2.

leadership commissioned the FDJ to embark on a systematic programme for educating the East German youth about the ›great importance of the People's Police as the protector of the people's interests‹. Thenceforth one of its main tasks was the recruitment and so-called ›Wehrerziehung‹, or military education, of all East German youths. This new emphasis on the virtues of military vigilance was clearly expressed at the FDJ's Fourth Parliament in Leipzig at the end of May, when thousands of young people carried rifles in strict military formation on their marches through the city. From July to September 1952, some 37 000 youths were supposed to be recruited for the KVP and Border Police via so-called FDJ ›Aufgebote‹, or summonings, in addition to some 5000 young SED members who were to be either persuaded or ›delegated‹ into the KVP<sup>17</sup>.

In August 1952, two new organizations were introduced to aid the FDJ and recruitment offices in mobilizing the East German youth for the defence of the republic. The so-called *Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik* (GST) was officially founded on 7 August, which, despite attempts to hide its paramilitary nature, was clearly intended from the outset to attract youths into the armed forces and serve as a kind of preparatory school for subsequent military training. The other was the rather short-lived *Dienst für Deutschland* programme (DfD), which consisted of a six-month period of service building barracks for the KVP at one of several ›Großbaustellen des sozialistischen Aufbaus‹, but which resulted in more unwanted pregnancies than barracks<sup>18</sup>.

The organizational machinery enlisted for the campaign was thus immense, and allowed for an almost total coverage of all recruitment opportunities in the GDR — a kind of saturation approach only possible in what was at least formally a ›durchherrschten Gesellschaft‹<sup>19</sup> like the GDR and one which few young people, many of whom belonged to more than one ›mass organization‹, could possibly avoid. Not even those who did not belong to any of the mass organizations could easily escape the regime's recruitment overtures. If one missed the recruitment presentation at school or at work, one still might be visited at home by a police officer or representative of the local *Wohnparteiorganisation* (WPO). In some cases the pressure was even exerted via family members. The regional SED Secretariat in Potsdam, for instance, stipulated that party members try to persuade their sons to join. Those members who forbade their sons to do so were to be summoned before the party control commission, and if this did not work, then subjected to a party trial (*Parteiverfahren*)<sup>20</sup>.

Recruitment methods did not exclude forms of coercion, and especially from 1955 onwards the methods of recruitment appeared more and more like a thinly-veiled form of conscription. Because the cohort of soldiers that had joined during

<sup>17</sup> SAPMO-BA, NY 36/657, ›Bericht über den Verlauf der VP-Werbung‹, 20 Sept. 1952, bl. 17 ff.; SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/3/309, ›Protokoll Nr. 180 der Sitzung des ZK der SED‹, 21 July 1952, bl. 11 ff.; both citations from Wenzke, ›Auf dem Weg‹ (as in n. 5), p. 263.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. generally Michael Buddrus, *Die Organisation ›Dienst für Deutschland‹* (Weinheim 1994). Although the DfD did manage to attract 6000 volunteers, the scheme was an overall failure. By late autumn 1952 there were already mounting problems in supplying adequate provisions for the volunteers, as well as serious complaints about conditions in the camps and the treatment of those working in them.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Kocka, ›Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft‹, in: *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. by Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr, (Stuttgart 1994), p. 547–553.

<sup>20</sup> Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA), Bez. Pdm. Rep. 530, Nr. 2052, ›Sekretariatsvorlage‹, 13 May 1952, bl. 56–8.

the 1952–53 campaign was coming to the end of the three-year period of service in 1955, it was estimated that the KVP/NVA faced a 50 percent shortage in the number of troops in the mid-1950s<sup>21</sup>. The tried-and-proven method of setting numerical targets as an incentive to recruiters increasingly led to what many young men called the ›sledgehammer method‹. Recruitment targets were raised dramatically in some *Kreise* in 1955. One local official who fled to the Federal Republic from Bad Doberan told West German interviewers that the local recruitment target was arbitrarily raised overnight from 20 to 200 ›volunteers‹<sup>22</sup>. Such rapid increases inevitably led to excesses on the part of recruiters, who not uncommonly resorted to such coercive techniques as threatening someone with the loss of his job, ordering young men to a recruitment office ›for a discussion‹ followed by delivering them directly to a NVA unit, or even, in a few cases, getting a group of young men drunk in order to deliver them to the NVA<sup>23</sup>.

In short, the recruitment campaign came at young people from all sides — in the workplace, at school, in the FDJ — and in a number of different forms, ranging from the more common ›mass deployments‹ in the factories to more personal (and less escapable) ›individual conversations‹. But as we will see below, getting this sprawling network of state, party and affiliated agencies to recruit young people effectively at the grass-roots faced a number of obstacles that included not only a lack of support for the armed forces among the broader populace, but also within the lower levels of the regime apparatus itself.

## II. ›What about Peace and Bread?‹: Popular Opinion and the Contradictions of the Armed Forces

How did ›ordinary‹ East Germans receive the government's rearmament campaigns? While a small minority of East Germans actively supported the project and a somewhat larger minority unenthusiastically accepted the argument that an East German military presence was necessary given developments in the West, what stands out most in the internal reports throughout the 1950s are three interrelated strands of criticism: the high costs, the widespread fear of war, and the concern of deepening German division.

From an economic standpoint, the SED could hardly have chosen a less auspicious time to found the KVP. The forced ›construction of socialism‹ from summer 1952 was an extremely expensive project, and as merely one part of this broader set of policies the expansion of the armed forces had to compete for state funding with other priorities such as the expansion of heavy industry and agricultural collectivization<sup>24</sup>. Although the actual financial inter-connections of the broader ›acceler-

<sup>21</sup> BA-MA, DVH3/2062, ›Beschluß der Sicherheitskommission‹, 17 Mar. 1955, bl. 1–3.

<sup>22</sup> See Volker Ackermann, *Der ›echte‹ Flüchtling: Deutsche Vertriebene und Flüchtlinge aus der DDR 1945–1961*, (Osnabrück 1995), p. 198.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> The expansion of the armed forces alone required an initial expenditure of 1.5 billion DM. Since this was not part of the current economic plan, it was clear from the outset that rearmament would have to be financed by drastic cuts in other areas. These included reductions in social services and social insurance of 420 million DM, increased property and

ated construction of socialism‹ in 1952–53 were naturally a matter of strict confidentiality, they were quite rapidly figured out by a populace still living under the constraints of rationing and still acutely sensitive to changes in wages and the price and availability of consumer goods. The expanding KVP was quickly perceived as an unnecessary and, more importantly, *unjust* economic burden. The sheer costs of weapons and equipment were not the only issue; the relatively high wages of soldiers and especially officers were also a source of widespread resentment. Whereas the average monthly wage of an industrial worker in 1952 was around 318 DM and the average state pension between only 65 and 90 DM, the monthly pay for KVP soldiers was around 300 DM (similar to the average pay for industrial workers of all ages, but far over the average pay of an apprentice or especially a young agricultural worker) and for a lieutenant anywhere between 500 and 1500 DM, plus other perquisites such as child support, subsidized rent and an attractive retirement package<sup>25</sup>. It therefore comes as no surprise that the mood reports from summer and autumn 1952 are full of complaints about the adverse effects that the expansion of armed forces and especially officers' pay had on living standards. Though the financial strains of the rearmament campaign were less acutely felt by ordinary East Germans in 1955 than in 1952–53, the connection between living standards and the costs of expanding the military remained a focus of disaffection.

Much of the criticism referred back to the SED's own *contradictory* rhetoric. Given both the repeated promises of improving living standards and the recent propaganda campaign against West German signature to the European Defence Community, the SED's current attempt to drum up support for the armed forces seemed blatantly hypocritical to most East Germans. During an assembly at the Houch factory in Berlin-Weißensee, workers even referred to Stalin to help prove this point: ›Stalin himself says it is impossible to strengthen armed forces and raise the living standard of the people simultaneously. Isn't then the strengthening of the KVP an attack on our living standard?‹<sup>26</sup> Indeed, such sentiments appear to have been widespread even among the rank-and-file of the SED. At a party meeting in Prenzlauer Berg the *Kreisleitung* was repeatedly confronted with angry comments from party members who were now essentially being asked to contradict their own previous argumentation: ›For weeks now the party press has reported that the signing of the Atlantic-pact and the re-militarization in the West means a squandering of the people's wealth, etc. We can hardly talk. [...] Up to now we've preached ›We shall not take up arms.‹ It only costs money, pensions and wages [...]‹<sup>27</sup>.

Yet popular disapproval of the establishment of armed forces in the GDR was not based solely or even predominantly on the deterioration of living standards that it caused. The prospect of another war was also a constant source of concern

income taxes worth 350 million DM as well as a general decrease in consumption amounting to 300 million DM. To make matters even worse, the initial expenditure forecast of 1.5 billion DM proved to be a gross underestimate. Torsten Diedrich has calculated that the costs had actually risen well beyond 1.5 billion DM as early as mid-1953, by which time they already totalled around 2 billion DM. Idem, ›Aufrüstungsvorbereitung und -finanzierung in der SBZ/DDR in den Jahren 1948 bis 1953 und deren Rückwirkungen auf die Wirtschaft‹, in: *Volksarmee* (as in n. 1), p. 273–336, esp. p. 306–326.

<sup>25</sup> Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1955, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/319, ›Einige Diskussionen und Stellungnahmen zur Frage der Nationalen Streitkräfte‹, 26 June 1952, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

throughout the 1950s, and any military build-up along the inner-German frontier was quite understandably viewed with great trepidation, as it was in the Federal Republic as well<sup>28</sup>. These fears were expressed in innumerable reports and myriad different ways: occasional runs on savings accounts, periodic outbreaks of *Hamstern* (stocking up on food and other essentials), erecting bomb-proof shelters in gardens and the like. One 1952 SED report from Berlin even complains of an unwillingness among worker-activists to move into flats in the Stalinallee because the area might be a potential bombing target<sup>29</sup>.

With all due caution regarding the prejudicial gender stereotypes of report authors within the party apparatus, it seems that such concerns were particularly widespread among women — or at least that women tended to be more vocal about them. In factories with a majority of female employees, political agitation on the question of the armed forces and recruitment often confronted outright hostility from working women, many of whom had already lost their menfolk in the last war<sup>30</sup>. A fairly typical illustration was the reaction by the predominantly female workforce at a clothing factory in Wusterwitz, where it was estimated that 90 percent openly rejected the NVA during discussions: ›most of us don't have our husbands any more, and we are not going to send our children into a new war‹<sup>31</sup>.

There was also more or less universal disapproval of any action that might serve to deepen German division. Whereas militarization campaigns are often occasions for nationalistic fanfare, this was a case — rather like that in the Federal Republic — of trying to excite people for a fighting force that ran against the grain of popular nationalist sentiments. Although with hindsight it seems unlikely that German unification was ever achievable in the 1950s, to most contemporaries it still seemed a viable prospect, and a highly desirable one at that. Moreover, hopes for unification were particularly high during both recruitment campaigns: in 1952 they were raised by the immense publicity surrounding Stalin's note to the western powers in March, and in 1955 by the upcoming Geneva Conference<sup>32</sup>. The expansion of the East German armed forces not only dampened these prospects, but also raised the spectre of German shooting on German in a future East-West conflict. These concerns were particularly prominent at the founding of the NVA in January 1956, which, as an officially acknowledged expression of hostility between the two German governments, seems to have dispelled whatever residual illusions there still were about the consequences of opposing armed forces on the chances for German unification. The internal party reports in January 1956 are filled with such comments as ›We'll never shoot at our brothers in West Germany‹ and ›The West German workers won't shoot at our workers, but at the government‹<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> There were, of course, similar sentiments in the Federal Republic during the mid-1950s, especially after the Paris agreements of 1954, when the intensity and scope of anti-militarization were great indeed, ranging from the trade unions to important sections of the church to youths who howled down government speakers in Cologne and stoned the Defence Minister in Augsburg with beer mugs.

<sup>29</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/303, report of 18 Dec. 1952.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/544, ›DFD Stimmungsbericht von den Ereignissen des 17.6. in Berlin‹, undated, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/20780, report of 16 Feb. 1956, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> See generally SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/573; also BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 332, Nr. 395, ›Meinungen zur Note der Sowjetischen Union an die Westmächte‹, 12 Mar. 1952, unpag.

<sup>33</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/22083, report of 21 Jan. 1956, p. 1.



No one wanted war, and many still harboured hopes for German unification. The expansion of the armed forces seemed like a step in the wrong direction on both counts.

On the whole, the SED's campaign to drum up popular support for rearmament in 1952–53 and 1955–56 was not much of a success. Though there were some reports that ›among the older colleagues in particular there are sectarian attitudes that emphasize that it is high time that young people finally get polished up‹<sup>34</sup>, supporters of the armed forces were clearly in the minority. For what it is worth, the Berlin regional union executive for local trade was prepared to hazard a guess that only around one-third of those in his constituency spoke out in favour of the NVA (some of whom were probably outwardly telling functionaries what they wanted to hear) whereas two-thirds were either ›unclear‹ or expressed ›arguments of the class enemy‹<sup>35</sup>. Although the SED tried to portray the establishment of armed forces as a deterrent to ›imperialist capitalist aggression‹ from the West, and therefore a contribution to maintaining peace in Europe, few East Germans — like their erstwhile compatriots in the West — seemed assured, much less convinced, by the Cold War ›peace through strength‹ argument. In fact, such scepticism was widespread within the lower levels of the SED itself. At the Second Party Conference in July 1952, Wilhelm Pieck openly demanded that ›every unclarity and vacillation within the ranks of our own party on the question of the armed protection of our republic is to be completely eradicated‹<sup>36</sup>. Similar demands by the party leadership in 1955 plainly reveal that such ›unclearities‹ continued to pose a problem among the rank-and-file of the SED, which presented a number of difficulties for the recruitment drive<sup>37</sup>.

### III. Recruitment and Refusal: Pacifism, Disinterest and Evasion

To a large extent, however, it did not really matter what the broader East German populace thought. A successful propaganda campaign was not absolutely necessary for the establishment of a sizeable fighting force; a successful recruitment campaign was. As was already noted, the sprawling network of SED-led organizations gave the regime unique advantages in this regard. Yet at some point the vast might of this organizational machinery had to confront young people as they were, with all their various interests and plans for the future. In the event, would-be recruits were often less well-disposed and pliable, and the circumstances of recruiting them at the grass-roots less propitious, than the party leadership would have wished.

The internal reports exhibit a wide variety of responses from would-be recruits, ranging from a marked eagerness to join to a conditional willingness to defend the GDR if it is attacked all the way to outright refusal and illegal emigration to the West (figure 1)<sup>38</sup>. Although they present certain interpretive problems both in terms

<sup>34</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/22672, ›Information Nr. 10‹, 3 Feb. 1956, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/20780, report of 16 Feb. 1956, p. 5–6.

<sup>36</sup> *Protokoll der Verhandlungen der II. Parteikonferenz der SED*, (Berlin 1952), p. 214.

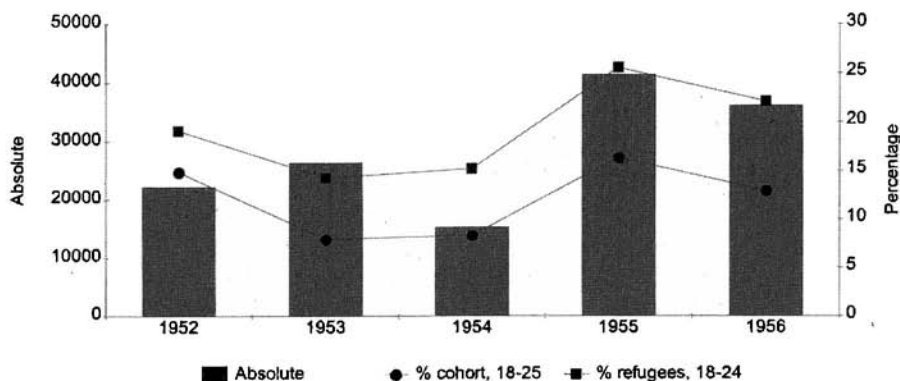
<sup>37</sup> ›Die neue Lage und die Politik der SED‹, in: *Dokumente der SED*, Bd 5, (Berlin 1956), p. 471.

<sup>38</sup> Though military recruitment was of course not the only factor behind young men's emi-

of the questionable sincerity of reported ›positive‹ reactions given the pressure to conform as well as the possibility of regime functionaries writing ›schöngefärbte‹ reports to their superiors, it nonetheless seems clear that the willingness to enlist — for whatever reason — was on balance far outweighed by refusals and by a general disapproval of rearmament, based on a range of different factors.

**Figure 1: Emigration out of the GDR**

Males, Ages 18-24/25



sources: Rüdiger Wenzke, ›Auf dem Weg zur Kaderarmee‹, in: *Volksarmee schaffen — ohne Geschrei!* Ed. by Bruno Thoß, (Munich 1994), p. 265; Helge Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ, DDR 1945/1949–1961*, (Düsseldorf 1994), p. 49.

Given the deliberate cultivation of war-like values among youth under the Nazis, it is remarkable how much evidence of principled pacifism (by which I mean refusal to resort to violence under any circumstances) one finds in the reports. And considering the politically-charged, highly pressurized atmosphere in which the recruitment campaign often took place, it is also remarkable how forthright and unambiguous many of these pacifist refusals were. There are of course any number of possible reasons for this, and pacifist arguments might just as well have been self-serving as principled. But it seems that one important reason was that, in their campaign to produce a peace-loving ›anti-fascist‹ youth, the SED and FDJ had to a certain extent been too successful for their own good. Many young people saw in the SED's current idealization of the virtues of military vigilance and unquestioning discipline some of the very values they were taught to associate with the fascist past, not the socialist future. Accordingly, disapproval of East German armed forces was by no means tantamount to support for NATO or the West, and pacifist criticism was often directed against what was perceived as a distortion of the values that the regime had preached for the preceding seven years. Thus many youths who refused to join the armed forces did so at least in part on the basis of the SED's own prior teachings. Indeed, the FDJ's new emphasis on ›Wehrerziehung‹ and its decidedly militaristic displays at its Fourth Parliament in Leipzig

gration to West Germany, changes in the number of men aged 18–25 who left the GDR strongly suggest that the two were related.

drove many young people from its ranks<sup>39</sup>. As one Berlin FDJ member who resigned his membership because he did not want to carry weapons put it: ›it is unheard-of that Walter Ulbricht declares at the Fourth Parliament that young people should attain the *Abzeichen für gutes Wissen* and also become good sharpshooters. Shooting is against the goals of the FDJ‹<sup>40</sup>. In *Kreis Loburg* these sentiments even found organizational expression in the form of a clandestine group that called itself the ›FDJ Action Committee against the National Armed Forces‹<sup>41</sup>.

The established churches in the GDR served as both promoters and sanctuaries for pacifist refusal by would-be recruits. Although there were significant local variations and differences between individual clerics, by and large the churches, acting to some extent as social and cultural ›islands‹ in East German society, presented an obstacle to soldier recruitment at the grass-roots. The extent to which they hindered the campaign in a given locality depended to a large degree on the views and personalities of particular pastors, their support or otherwise by the regional church and especially on the strength of the penumbra of church-affiliated organizations that they managed to build up and sustain in their local parishes. On the whole it seems that communities in which the church was strong proved more impervious and ›resistent‹ (in Martin Broszat's sense of the term)<sup>42</sup> to the new message of military vigilance than other areas.

It was arguably a case of poor planning on the part of the SED that the first mass recruitment push should coincide with the first concerted attempt to break the hold of the Protestant youth organizations over the younger generation. Indeed, the decision to outlaw the popular *Junge Gemeinden* backfired as far as the recruitment campaign was concerned. With many of their members discriminated against at school, in some cases even expelled or barred from entering higher education, the Protestant *Junge Gemeinden* not surprisingly proved to be a particularly impervious haven for young Christian pacifists. This was clearly the case in the village of Schleife in *Bezirk Cottbus*, for instance, where the unusually energetic local pastor not only presided over an active *Junge Gemeinde*, but also reportedly undermined the local FDJ group by persuading the young people in his church to resign. According to the SED *Kreisleitung*, the effects of his activities were manifested most conspicuously in terms of KVP recruitment: ›We'd rather fly planes to West Germany‹ was reported as a typical response from youths in the village. Generally speaking, schools in which the *Junge Gemeinden* had a strong presence also feature frequently in reports as focal points for pacifist refusals to join the KVP — for example, the secondary school in Weida, where pupils unanimously and demonstratively ex-

<sup>39</sup> Even many teachers openly disapproved of the Fourth FDJ Parliament: ›We have no desire to give the children paramilitary training‹. BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 202G, Nr. 83, bl. 16. Unfortunately, there are not yet any reliable statistics that could offer an acceptably precise estimate of the number of resignations from the FDJ in 1952 and 1953. The FDJ's membership statistics in the early 1950s are undoubtedly inflated, and statistics on the reasons for resignation were not systematically kept. See *DDR-Jugend: ein statistisches Handbuch*, ed. by Edeltraud Schulze, (Berlin 1995).

<sup>40</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/319, ›Einige Diskussionen [...]‹, p. 5–6. The *Abzeichen für gutes Wissen* was a badge honouring outstanding technical knowledge and skills.

<sup>41</sup> ›Aktionausschuss der FDJ gegen die Nationalen Streitkräfte‹. SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/16/84, bl. 173–4.

<sup>42</sup> See Martin Broszat, ›Resistenz und Widerstand. Eine Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsprojektes‹, in: *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, vol. 4, ed. by Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich and Anton Grossmann, (Munich 1981), p. 691–709.

pressed their refusal to carry weapons, as well as the agricultural-vocational school in Weimar, where pupils declared that they would rather be shot than enlist<sup>43</sup>.

Of course not all unwilling would-be recruits responded in such a courageous and forthright manner. Graffiti and defacement of recruitment posters were rife throughout 1952–53 and 1955. Fairly typical were the slogans painted in *Kreis Sangerhausen*: ›We'll tear up our draft papers, we don't want fratricide, not us (*ohne uns*)‹<sup>44</sup>. Nor were all expressions of refusal very pacifist. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the principled peace-advocates, some young people met the prospect of recruitment with violence. The reports posit an alarming increase in the number of anonymous attacks on FDJ functionaries and *Volkspolizisten* during summer and autumn 1952, and explicitly draw a causal connection between most of the attacks and the victims' recruitment activities. While many such attacks were simply attributed to ›rowdies‹ who seemed to despise all figures of authority regardless of their specific organizational affiliation, in some cases the causal connection is unmistakable. Returning from a recruiting trip to Patendorf, the loudspeaker-van from Leuna-Werk ›Walter Ulbricht‹ had to stop because of what seemed to be a badly imbalanced wheel. When the driver and passenger of the van got out to inspect it, they discovered that the lugs on the wheel had somehow worked themselves loose and bent the lug-bolts. Two cars full of young men that had been following the van from Patendorf soon pulled over to offer what initially appeared to be roadside assistance. What they gave the recruiters instead was a rather gruesome beating. Subsequent police inspection of the wheel confirmed that its lugs had been intentionally loosened in the village, and that the attack had therefore been planned in advance<sup>45</sup>.

As one might expect, the majority of refusals to enlist lay somewhere between these two poles of violence and principled non-violence. Probably the most common response, evident in more or less all the reports on recruitment, was a Schwejkian reference to the regime's own previous ›peace and bread‹ rhetoric. The East German national hymn not uncommonly served as the point of reference: ›What about the national hymn, that a mother will never again mourn her son? What about the *Volkspolizei*? The national hymn has now become obsolete‹<sup>46</sup>. Most East German workers understandably felt that they were of more use to society in their factories than in the army, and the SED's constant rhetoric about economic reconstruction and improved living standards was also commonly used to lend legitimacy to refusals to enlist: ›Whatever happened to the slogan, »Peace is defended at the work-bench«?‹

#### IV. Divided Loyalties: Motives for Enlisting and the Problem of Local Functionaries

Conventional wisdom has maintained that, whatever parallels one might draw between the responses of would-be recruits in the GDR and the ›*ohne mich*‹ move-

<sup>43</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/302, reports of 24 June 1952, 10 July 1952, 25 September 1952.

<sup>44</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/302, ›Kurzinformation über aufgetretene gegnerische Arbeit‹, 21 May 1952.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/319, ›Einige Diskussionen [...]‹, p. 5.

ment in West Germany in the 1950s, the crucial difference was that in the GDR ›unwilling‹ youths faced far more pressure to join, sometimes in the form of being branded ›hostile to the state‹, sometimes through various occupational or personal sanctions. Though the evidence in the East German archives supports this view in general, it also enhances and qualifies it in a number of ways. In reading the reports on youth's reactions to recruiters, what stands out most is the frankness and direct manner of many refusals, which suggests that most were not terrified of opening their mouths on this key ›*Einstellungsfrage*‹. Throughout the entire period under consideration here — from the 1952–53 KVP campaign to the introduction of conscription in 1962 — instances of refusal, even if expressed very explicitly, were by no means universally punished. In fact, even the young emigrants attempting to gain refugee status in West Germany on the basis of being coerced into joining the East German armed forces often divulged during their interview proceedings (*Anerkennungsverfahren*) that friends, relatives and other acquaintances who had continually refused to enlist remained unmolested apart from repeated attempts to recruit them<sup>47</sup>. Yet the party declared cooperation to be a question of loyalty to socialism and the GDR, so it was hard to refuse membership in the KVP, NVA or GST without exposing oneself to accusations of being hostile to the state, which might carry with it any number of undesirable consequences. Why then did the KVP and NVA experience such difficulty in winning young recruits? And how did so many would-be soldiers in the GDR refuse military service without incurring any meaningful sanctions?

In the event, joining the armed forces was not necessarily a question of loyalty or a matter of ›*Farbe bekennen*‹ to either the would-be recruit or the ›regime‹ itself. As was so often the case, what the SED-leadership propagated in abstract black and white terms of ›positive‹ versus ›negative‹ attitudes, of ›loyal‹ versus ›*staatsfeindlich*‹ behaviour, looked far more complex at the grass-roots. Two points are important here. First, a refusal to enlist was not necessarily a clear rejection of either the GDR or socialism or, for that matter, armed forces in principle, just as willingness to enlist was not necessarily a sign of approval or support. Lower-level functionaries were well aware of this and often acted accordingly. Secondly, and more importantly, conflicts and contradictions between different elements of ›the regime‹ at the grass-roots offered significant opportunities to avoid recruitment.

Starting with the first point, young people's reasons for joining or refusing to join were manifold, and could not automatically be construed as ›political‹ reasons, however hard the party leadership may have tried to define them as such. Many of the refusals described above reflect very basic human desires, and cannot be reduced to a simple question of loyalty: not wanting to be separated from friends, family or colleagues; a reluctance to leave a job which one enjoys or to delay one's studies, not wanting to give up such cherished moments as Saturday night at the films, sleeping late on Sunday morning and going ›boogy-woogy‹ dancing in West Berlin. In any event, insofar as enlisting was perceived by young people themselves as an *Einstellungsfrage*, this generally gravitated *against* the recruitment campaign. As one politically wary youth in Pritzwalk explained: ›If the times should change again, then people would say, »Look there, he's also one of the ones who went voluntarily«‹<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> See Ackermann, *Der ›echte‹ Flüchtling* (as in n. 22), p. 178.

<sup>48</sup> BLHA, Bez. Pdm. Rep. 530, Nr. 2045, ›Textbericht‹, 29 Apr. 1959, unpag.

By the same token, an agreement to enlist was by no means tantamount to a declaration of loyalty to the GDR. Whereas military service represented to some people the annoying interruption of a satisfying career, to others it represented a way out of a poorly paid, dead-end job or perhaps a temporary stopover before moving into another line of work. Of the dozens of KVP deserters questioned by West Berlin authorities during the second half of 1954, 63 percent admitted that they had enlisted voluntarily because they saw in the armed forces an alternative occupation that they could take up without any prior training once further advancement in their current occupation was no longer possible. Among the other desirable attractions of the KVP mentioned by deserters were the relatively high wages, the opportunity to acquire a driving license free of charge and the opportunity of getting special training as an airplane mechanic, marine engineer or radar technician which was unavailable elsewhere. Though it is difficult to quantify, it seems that, as one might expect, factories with a high proportion of skilled and relatively well-paid workers were less fertile recruiting ground than agricultural areas or factories employing predominantly unskilled labourers. The promise of occupational training was especially attractive to young men from rural areas, who saw in the KVP a chance to ›see a few things‹ outside of their sleepy villages or to ›finally escape the boredom of farming‹.<sup>49</sup> Judging from the opinion and morale reports, it would also seem that, on the whole, there was precious little difference in political outlook and opinion between rank-and-file soldiers and the general populace.<sup>50</sup> As Willi Stoph complained to the Central Committee Convention in April 1955: ›the pacifist attitudes that are common among a certain portion of the working-class have a negative effect on members of the KVP [...] and we have determined that when on vacation, young soldiers spread the widest range of hostile opinions‹.<sup>51</sup>

As to the second point, ›the system‹, or ›regime‹, was more self-contradictory, had more conflicts of interest and offered more room for manoeuvre for those disinclined to enlist than the simplistic notion of ›*Farbe bekennen*‹ allows. The term ›regime‹ is placed in quotations here because it is crucial to realize that this singular linguistic label obscures the various components of the East German apparatus of power involved in or at least affected by the recruitment campaign and therefore masks some important disjunctures within it. We have already seen how the contradictions in official rhetoric could be used to legitimate a refusal to enlist. But far more important than the logical inconsistencies of official rhetoric were conflicts of interest and loyalty within ›the regime‹ itself — whether between different functionaries with conflicting assignments or between conflicting assignments given to an individual functionary.

Despite the inbuilt advantages for military recruitment under the dictatorial conditions of the GDR, there were nonetheless numerous organizational problems from the outset. Ambitious, and sometimes unattainable, recruitment targets were introduced in order to motivate functionaries in the various recruitment offices and mass organizations. The recruitment targets were a perpetual source of headaches, and success at fulfilling them varied dramatically from place to place. The

<sup>49</sup> Ackermann, *Der ›echte‹ Flüchtling* (as in n. 22), p. 198.

<sup>50</sup> See esp. the reports on inspections of individual KVP divisions in BA-MA, DVH3/2683. See also BAP, DO1/11/351, reports of 31 July 1952, 23 Dec. 1954.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Buddrus, ›»Kaderschmiede für den Führungsnachwuchs«?‹ (as in n. 5), p. 176.

October 1952 success rates of the various *Kreise* in *Bezirk* Halle, for example, ranged from between 32 % and 75 %. Faced with reprimands from their superiors, functionaries in poorly performing districts often tried to show that the discrepancy lay in the erroneous calculation of the target figures, and not in any shortcomings in their own work. Figures were therefore occasionally reviewed and revised, much to the confusion of everyone involved<sup>52</sup>.

Lower-level functionaries had a whole range of grievances pertaining to soldier recruitment. According to an SED Central Committee report on the activity of the FDJ, functionaries were failing to juggle their regular tasks with their additional recruiting duties, and often neglected one for the benefit of the other. Another problem was so-called ›*Punktejagd*‹, which also led to a backlog in functionaries' regular duties<sup>53</sup>. As the SED secretary for *Kreis* Jena complained to the local FDJ secretary, ›it doesn't matter what you do. If you fulfil the recruitment target other tasks get neglected and you get it in the neck; if you solve your other problems and neglect recruitment you also get it in the neck [...]‹<sup>54</sup> Moreover, many simply did not like recruiting and wanted to get back to their old jobs as soon as possible. Among the SED *Kreisleitungen* in *Bezirk* Potsdam there was ›moaning‹ about the extra work, as well as reports that the ›discipline and eagerness (to recruit) is none too strong‹<sup>55</sup>.

Little wonder, since recruiters encountered all kinds of problems in their dealings with other functionaries. Reports often complained that they got little or no technical or organizational support from either the party or mass organizations, which, as we have just seen, were often more concerned with their own regular duties<sup>56</sup>. Even less helpful were local state officials and *Bürgermeister*. The mayor of Schnolde, *Kreis* Pritzwalk, even took it upon himself to advise youths that ›whoever does not want to join the People's Army should leave the republic, then when he returns he won't be called up‹ for cadre-political reasons<sup>57</sup>. Least helpful of all were the managers and BPO (*Betriebsparteiorganisation*) secretaries in the factories. Given the unceasing pressure to increase production and efficiency, many were quite understandably reluctant to forfeit their young, productive employees for military service which many of them deemed unnecessary in any case. Like thousands of comrades across the GDR, the party secretary at the Ziegelei Rädels near Brandenburg openly told recruiters to ›leave our workers in the factory, we already have so few‹<sup>58</sup>. The *Bürgermeister* and

<sup>52</sup> BAP, DO1/11/1635, ›Betr.: Werbearbeit‹, 1 Oct. 1952.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, the FDJ secretary for *Bezirk* Halle was reported to have told his subordinates that they could only begin preparing for the new school year after getting three KVP recruits.

<sup>54</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/5/267, ›Wie werden die Beschlüsse der 2. Parteikonferenz in der FDJ ausgewertet‹, 13 Nov. 1952. See also BLHA, Bez. Pdm. Rep. 530, Nr. 2035, report of 23 Oct. 1952, unpag.

<sup>55</sup> BLHA, Bez. Pdm. Rep. 530, Nr. 2052, ›Bericht über den politischen Zustand in den einzelnen Kreisen und über die Zusammenarbeit mit der Partei und den Massenorganisationen in den Fragen der Werbung für die KVP‹, undated, bl. 77–81; Nr. 2035, ›Bericht über die Anleitung der KL Königs Wusterhausen‹, 14 Oct. 1952.

<sup>56</sup> BA-MA, VA-01/2904, ›Analyse über die bisherigen Erfahrungen in der Werbung von Reservisten‹, 30 July 1958, bl. 163; BA-MA, VA-01/2900, ›Betr.: Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Einsatzbereitschaft der Verbände und Truppenteile des MB V‹, 13 May 1957, bl. 1–3; BAP, DO1/11/1634, ›Auszüge aus den Quartalsberichten‹, undated, bl. 88.

<sup>57</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/13/397 ›Wie ist die gegenwärtige Lage in der Abwanderung nach Westdeutschland?‹, undated, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> BLHA, Bez. Pdm. Rep. 530, Nr. 2052, ›Bericht über den Instrukteureinsatz von 22.10. bis 27.10.1952 in Brandenburg-Land‹, bl. 140.

local party-secretary in Stendal even organized a local counter-campaign against the recruitment of young farmers and farmhands. Most forthright of all was the director of the Zeiss optic works in Jena, who not only ordered that all recruiters be banned from the factory premises, but even got police support to enforce the order<sup>59</sup>. As a Ministry of National Defence report of 1957 put it, 'Serious discussions with factory directors, cadre directors, progressive *Meister* and brigadiers [...] must be organized in the factories.'<sup>60</sup>

One way of circumventing such problems associated with recruiting people at their places of work was to instruct local officials to send young men directly to the local recruitment authorities 'for the purpose of discussion'. But even this method often foundered on the unreliability and conflicting loyalties of grass-roots functionaries. Some were downright emphatic in their refusal to cooperate, such as a director at the Kombinat Espenhain, who sent a 70 year-old employee to the local recruitment commission. Most, however, tried to appear as if they were co-operating with party directives without actually doing so in the hope of keeping recruiters at bay until the current demand for new troops had passed. One particularly uncooperative BPO secretary at the Ifa Tin Foundry sent nine workers of suitable age to the police authorities in Leipzig, all of whom had to be rejected because of various physical handicaps or chronic diseases. When the police discussed this uncanny coincidence with the nine men, they all admitted to informing the party secretary about their health conditions beforehand as well as pointing out to him that their disabilities would surely preclude any service in the armed forces. 'That's not so important', the secretary reportedly answered, 'the main thing is that you appear at the local recruitment commission [...]'<sup>61</sup>.

The worsening labour shortage meant that such problems only got worse by the end of the 1950s. The practice of giving the most lucrative jobs only to those who would not interrupt their employment by joining the armed forces appears to have become increasingly common<sup>62</sup>, and some economic functionaries even tried to change the minds of those who had already enlisted by offering them more money. As exasperated military recruiters in *Bezirk* Cottbus complained in early 1961: 'The economic functionaries are a serious weakness. On repeated occasions and in a number of enterprises, youths who have pre-enlisted suddenly receive a considerable pay increase and then rescind their enlistment agreement'<sup>63</sup>.

The result of the increasingly uncooperative stance of many economic functionaries were signs of growing resignation and frustration on the part of recruiters themselves. One manifestation of this was the high turnover rates on recruitment commissions. By the end of 1961, 27 of the 49 officials appointed to the Cottbus regional recruitment board three years previously had quit; in *Bezirk* Potsdam even eight directors of the *Kreis* commissions had quit in 1960 alone. How did officials in the Ministry for National Defence account for the turnover? As a report to the

<sup>59</sup> Wenzke, 'Auf dem Weg' (as in n. 5), p. 264.

<sup>60</sup> BA-MA, VA-01/2900, 'Betr.: Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Einsatzbereitschaft der Verbände und Truppenteile des MB V', 13 May 1957, bl. 1-3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 'Textbericht', 22 Apr. 1959. See also BLHA, Bez. Ffo. Rep. 730, Nr. 1100, 'Einschätzung der Werbung zur NVA', 8 Nov. 1960, unpag.; BAP, DO1/11/967, bl. 78.

<sup>63</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, 'Kurzinformation über die Sitzung der Bezirkswerbekommission Cottbus mit den Vorsitzenden der Kreiswerbekommissionen am 9.8.1961', bl. 212-3.



SED Central Committee explained: ›The motivations that cause colleagues to take this step are above all the high intensity of the work and the great nervous strain vis-a-vis the slim successes in recruitment. For these reasons many officers and officials prefer to take up work in the economy‹<sup>64</sup>.

In turn, this growing sense of resignation led to widespread ›formalism‹ on the part of both local recruitment commissions as well as party and ›mass organization‹ functionaries who were supposed to be helping them. The unceasing pressure to get enlistments meant that recruitment commissions sometimes tended to act according to the ›*Tonnenideologie*‹, concerning themselves primarily with the quantity of recruits and not their quality. In the Ministry for National Defence there were frequent complaints about insufficient consideration of hiring guidelines, which led to a string of other problems. There were numerous instances of local recruitment commissions carelessly enlisting youths under the age of 18 or even individuals with criminal records, many of whom eventually deserted<sup>65</sup>. As for the MO functionaries, an April 1960 report from the Ministry for National Defence complained that: ›In general it can be said that the regional and district executives of the FDJ compose good resolutions for the patriotic education of the youth. [...] Because of the insufficient control on their actual implementation, the resolutions have only a slight influence on the recruitment results‹. Although Honecker had sent a letter to all local FDJ secretaries on 16 February 1960 admonishing them to support the recruitment drive, this reportedly had ›no effects worth mentioning‹. Indeed, the comments of the FDJ secretary in *Kreis Wanzleben* were quoted as typical: ›The main thing is that we have a lot of signatures, what comes after that is another matter‹<sup>66</sup>.

It would thus seem that the internal study commissioned in 1972 by the Ministry for National Defence on ›the problem of personnel acquisition for the NVA on the basis of the volunteer system‹ was only half correct in its conclusion that, despite the ›untiring efforts of all members of the regional and district commandos under the leadership of the party organizations‹, the reason why so many were ›not in a position to realize the tasks put to them‹ and why ›the personnel quotas of many troop formations were only 55 %–65 % fulfilled for junior officers and 75 %–80 % for soldiers‹ was first of all the ›principle of voluntarism‹ itself, and secondly the ›underdeveloped consciousness‹ of many youths regarding the necessity of service in the armed forces<sup>67</sup>. Another major factor that is left out was that many recruitment commissions were not working very ›untiringly‹ at all, but were plagued by high turnover rates, ›formalism‹ as well as the uncooperative stance of other local officials.

<sup>64</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Bericht über die Gewinnung von Jugendlichen für den aktiven Dienst in den bewaffneten Organen der DDR‹, undated, bl. 243.

<sup>65</sup> BA-MA, VA-01/1832, ›Befehl des Ministers für Nationale Verteidigung Nr.: 75/57‹, undated, bl. 171–175; ›Befehl des Ministers für Nationale Verteidigung Nr.: 76/57‹, bl. 176–181. There was even one case in Bernburg of a new recruit being dispatched with an outstanding jail sentence. BA-MA, VA-01/2029, ›Bericht über die Werbung von Kadern für die Nationale Volksarmee‹, 30 May 1956, bl. 73–74.

<sup>66</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/55, Ministry for National Defence report of 19 Apr. 1960, bl. 125–9.

<sup>67</sup> BA-MA, VA-01/25099, ›Das Problem der personellen Auffüllung der Nationalen Volksarmee auf der Grundlage des Freiwilligensystems von 1956 bis 1961 und nach Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht‹, bl. 10–31, here bl. 11–13.

What the party leadership presented as a coherent plan to raise a ›volunteer‹ army at the same time as raising productivity looked very different at the grass-roots. It was in this overlap between ›regime‹ and ›society‹, the articulation point where official policies were actually put into practice, that the contradictions of these two policy imperatives — not to mention of the SED's own rhetoric — became unmistakably visible to local representatives of the regime and would-be soldiers alike. In turn, these contradictions caused cracks to open up between the central authorities that dictated ›official‹ policy and local functionaries confronted with realities on the ground. And it was in these narrow rifts, under the shelter of a sympathetic local functionary willing to ignore or at least dilute central directives, that one could often find temporary or lasting refuge from having to perform one's ›patriotic duty‹ in the armed forces.

## V. The Demographic Crisis, the Wall, and the Introduction of Conscription

The basic problem, then, faced by the East German armed forces in the 1950s and early 1960s was that it was exceedingly difficult to secure the necessary supply of suitable recruits without introducing conscription. The fact that it was only introduced in 1962, after the threat of a mass exodus of potential recruits to the West disappeared with the construction of the Berlin Wall, speaks volumes about how the SED leadership viewed the problem of recruiting. As long as young people could, for whatever reason, avoid military service by fleeing to West Berlin (which had the added attraction of offering exemption from even the alternative military service in the rest of the Federal Republic), maintaining troop levels would remain difficult. Until the threat of flight was dealt with, the basic problem of recruiting volunteers for a military force that relatively few East Germans — even in the lower levels of the party-state apparatus — approved of remained unsolved.

In fact, by 1960 the problems had grown significantly worse. The threats and ›nerve-deadening‹ tactics that apparently ever more recruiters were resorting to in order to meet their recruitment targets led to little more than an increase in disingenuous agreements to enlist<sup>68</sup>. At the end of the 1950s the reports posit a rising trend of youths not honouring their resolutions to join; in 1960 this amounted to 15 percent of all resolutions made<sup>69</sup>. Promises of wage-hikes for rescinding enlistment agreements were not the only reason. The increase in international tension resulting from the disputes over Berlin (›the situation is coming to a head, wait until you are drafted‹) seems to have played a role as well. As a report from Frankfurt/Oder explained, many youths made a resolution simply ›in order to escape the bothersome recruiters, then they rescind their resolution, change jobs, sometimes even move to another area in order to avoid further conversations with recruit-

<sup>68</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, report from Ministry for National Defence of 23 Sept. 1960, bl. 130.

<sup>69</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Betr.: Maßnahmen zur Sicherung der Werbung von Jugendlichen für die bewaffneten Organe der DDR im Jahre 1961‹, 12 June 1961, bl. 189.

ers.<sup>70</sup> There were even reports of youths temporarily leaving for the West simply in order to be considered unfit for NVA service<sup>71</sup>.

What happened when someone rescinded his resolution? While there was no legal obligation to honour them, recruitment commissions could threaten youths with any number of sanctions. The menacing letter sent by the local recruitment board in Cottbus to Wolfgang B. gives an idea of the kind of crude scare tactics that were sometimes used in order to pressure youths to abide by their agreements:

After a number of discussions at your factory, you have refused to perform your honourable duty in the ranks of the NVA. Every citizen of our state must be a conscious fighter for peace and for the defence of our homeland. [...] Many citizens are organized, are comrades-in-arms for peace, unity and socialism. But you set yourself in a stubborn and reactionary manner against our state. [...] We hope that you will still become a socialist citizen and that you will want to defend our homeland. If you do not follow our advice, we will then take other steps. We will investigate your place of work, whether or not you are influenced by reactionary circles there. We will arrange for your factory to transfer you to Cottbus (with your consent). Perhaps you are influenced by your sport friends. We remind you once again that you declared yourself willing to perform your duty of honour in the ranks of the NVA<sup>72</sup>.

Whether Wolfgang B. and others like him changed their minds upon receiving such a letter, simply ignored it or were among the 33 116 males between the ages of 15 and 25 who fled the GDR in 1960<sup>73</sup>, the difficulties of getting individual youths to honour their resolutions were dwarfed by those presented by demographic trends in the GDR. It was around 1960 that the effects of the dwindling birth-rate during the war and the years immediately following it began to be felt. Statistics on the number of young males in the GDR born during these years give an idea of the scale of the problem (figure 2).

In early 1960 it was calculated that the NVA needed around 35 000 new recruits annually, the Border Police an additional 13 000, the Alert Police 6500 and Air Defence 1000. Up until then around 25 % of youths were not considered fit for duty for ›cadre-political‹ reasons and a further 5–8 % for health reasons<sup>74</sup>. Factoring in the annual losses to the Federal Republic, these statistics alone painted a grim enough picture for recruiting over the years 1961–1965. But to make matters worse, the plan was to raise the number of recruits over this period from 193 000 to 275 000. Taken together, the smaller cohorts and higher number of recruits meant that whereas 1 in 5 young males between the ages of 18 and 24 had to be recruited from 1956 to 1960, between 1961 and 1965 the ratio would skyrocket to 2 in 3<sup>75</sup>. The reports convey a sense of panic, the upshot of which was the unfolding of a broad and purposeful recruitment campaign in 1961.

<sup>70</sup> BLHA, Bez. Ffo. Rep. 730, Nr. 1100, ›Einschätzung der Werbung zur NVA‹, 8 Nov. 1960, unpag.

<sup>71</sup> BAP, DO1/11/967, bl. 80.

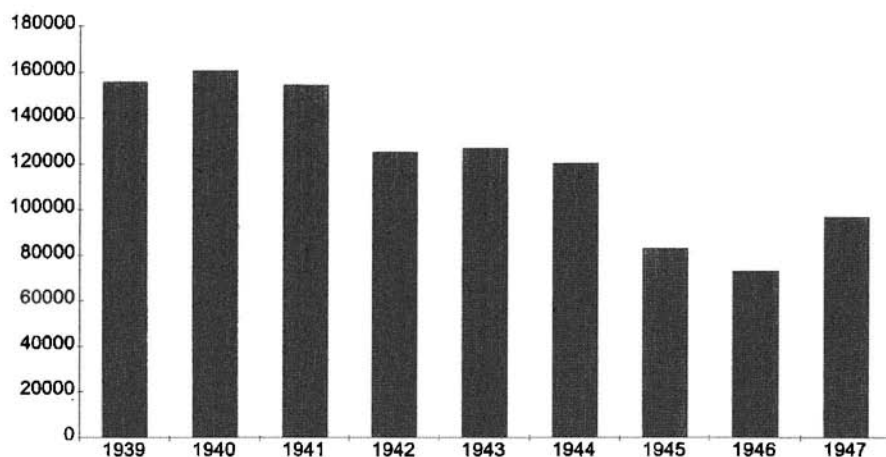
<sup>72</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, letter from Kreiskommando der NVA Cottbus, 15 Sept. 1960, bl. 129.

<sup>73</sup> This figure from SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, bl. 187.

<sup>74</sup> These and the above birth-rate figures from SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Information über die Entwicklung der Werbung und Auffüllung der Nationalen Volksarmee und der anderen bewaffneten Organe von 1960–1965‹, 29 Jan. 1960, bl. 113–4.

<sup>75</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Betr.: Maßnahmen zur Sicherung der Werbung von Jugendlichen für die bewaffneten Organe der DDR im Jahre 1961‹, 12 June 1961, bl. 182–9.

**Figure 2: Males in GDR**  
Years of Birth



source: SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, bl. 113

The results of this last major recruitment drive before the construction of the Wall were by now fairly predictable. During the first half of 1961 the results were deemed ›completely insufficient‹. The NVA had fulfilled only 55 % of its recruitment plan (9800 for 17 600) by the end of June, the border police only 31 % (2200 for 6900), the alert police only 25 % (1400 for 5600) and air defence only 31 % (250 for 600). Although the Secretariat of the SED Central Committee responded on 12 July with a resolution on ›measures for securing the recruitment of youths for the armed forces of the GDR in the year 1961‹, which called for better coordination between the party, MOs and press, this effort, too, ›achieved no significant results up until 13 August 1961‹, by which time the NVA still had only fulfilled 73.7 % of its plan and the various police forces only 36.7 %<sup>76</sup>.

Was there, then, as one report put it, a ›fundamental turnaround in recruitment‹ in connection with the construction of the Wall, the new FDJ campaign ›Das Vaterland ruft, schützt die sozialistische Republik‹<sup>77</sup> and the passing of the *Verteidigungsgesetz* on 20 September, the legal basis for the subsequent introduction of conscription? Certainly there was a widespread belief that conscription was just around the corner. Many workers even thought that the *Verteidigungsgesetz* had actually introduced it<sup>78</sup>. And certainly the number of ›Bereitschaftserklärungen‹ leapt sharply: by the end of October 1961 the number of new resolutions had shot up to 242 048. But hopes for a sudden change in the fortunes of recruiters quickly proved illusory.

<sup>76</sup> This and the following two paragraphs are based on SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Bericht über die Werbung von Jugendlichen für die bewaffneten Kräfte der DDR 1961‹, undated, bl. 262–73.

<sup>77</sup> A copy of the official *Kampfaufgebot* can be found in SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/16/90, bl. 98–103.

<sup>78</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/22232, Anlage, 25 Sept. 1961, unpag. Young workers at the VEB Bergmann-Borsig even told their union secretary that the law should be formulated more clearly so that everyone could know when he would be called up.

It did not take long to discover that the rapidly rising numbers of ›Bereitschaftserklärungen‹ were more a reflection of the increasingly coercive tactics of recruiters than of any change of heart on the part of East German youths. As the year-end report of the Central Committee's Security Department remarked, ›often the methods of administration, of coercion, of threats and defamation of youths were given priority over the methods of persuasion‹<sup>79</sup>. This was especially the case in *Bezirke* Potsdam and Leipzig, which reported by far the greatest number of resolutions. In these two regions ›it was not uncommon for youths who did not immediately declare themselves willing to perform their honourable service in the armed forces to be branded as ›traitors to the Fatherland‹, ›supporters of the Bonner-Ultras‹, ›scoundrels‹, etc., sometimes even to be removed from their trained occupations and deployed as unskilled labourers‹. In *Bezirk* Potsdam it was reported that a number of party and state functionaries thought that, in view of the ›measures‹ of 13 August, they could ›do away with the patriotic *Erziehungsarbeit* and give a new tone‹. As the director of the SED *Bezirksleitung* Department for Security remarked, all youths should have to enlist ›whether wooden leg or glass eye‹. In a number of enterprises in the region, such as the Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg, VEB Industriebau Brandenburg and RAW Brandenburg-West, some young workers were given the choice of signing up or being permanently laid off. In Oranienburg it was discovered that a number of youths who had refused to appear at the municipal offices for a ›discussion‹ about joining the armed forces were sought out and delivered there by the police<sup>80</sup>. There were also ›a number of *Bürgermeister*‹ who sent written summons to youths to appear at the municipal offices for a ›discussion‹ where they were threatened with fines or arrest if they failed to enlist. The result of such coercive tactics was predictable: many youths appeared before the local recruitment commissions and gave statements of their willingness to enlist with no actual intention of doing so. This was even the case in the regions with poorer results: in *Bezirk* Erfurt only 181 of the 1432 resolutions made in October were honoured, and in *Bezirk* Magdeburg only 209 of 1835<sup>81</sup>.

What did such cases of coercion look like more concretely, how did youths try to escape the pressure and how did the higher levels of the party and state apparatus react when they discovered them? To offer an illustration, the 20-year old Rainer O. and eight other young men in Neu-Zittau received letters on 21 October 1961 summoning them to appear in two days at the local municipal council (*Gemeinderat*). The letter warned that if they failed to appear, they could be ›called to account‹ on the basis of the *Verteidigungsgesetz*. At the municipal council, all nine were presented with NVA enlistment papers which the officials present demanded they sign immediately; otherwise, they were told, they would be ›picked up‹ and taken to Fürstenwalde or Frankfurt/Oder for a ›discussion‹. If they still refused to sign after that, they would have to work in an LPG. In the event, all nine refused. The next day Rainer told the whole story to the BPO secretary at his workplace in Berlin-Schöneweide, explaining that they refused not because they were against service in the NVA ›in principle‹, but rather because they rejected the appalling

<sup>79</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Bericht über die Werbung von Jugendlichen für die bewaffneten Kräfte der DDR 1961‹, undated, bl. 270.

<sup>80</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, ›Überspitzungen bei der Gewinnung von Jugendlichen für den Dienst in den bewaffneten Kräften der DDR im Kreis Oranienburg‹, 14 Oct. 1961, bl. 274–6.

<sup>81</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, bl. 270.

manner of recruitment. The secretary was obviously sympathetic to their plight, and brought the entire case to the attention of the Central Committee in a letter requesting that such ›methods‹ (quotation marks from the original) be examined and that the young men's case be quickly reviewed as they were due to be taken to Frankfurt/Oder within the next few days<sup>82</sup>.

On instructions from the Central Committee, the SED *Bezirksleitung* in Frankfurt/Oder indeed carried out an investigation of the local council in Neu-Zittau which both confirmed that such coercive tactics were being used and placed the blame on the ›insufficient political and ideological clarity‹ of the *Bürgermeister* and his deputy. Were Rainer and the others off the hook? Hardly. Despite giving the local councillors a slap on the wrist, the *Bezirksleitung* instructors nonetheless recommended that they redouble their efforts and improve their work with local youth, especially as regarded the ›raising of their willingness to defend‹ the GDR, and also that they carry out personal discussions with all the youths who had received such a summons and present to them again — only this time in more proper form — the ›standpoint of the party and government‹ on the matter of armed service. The *Bezirksleitung* instructors tried but were unable to do this themselves with Rainer, who was at night school on the evening they visited his home. Speaking with his father, they emphasized that the local council's actions were not approved of in higher quarters. Yet even in assuring him of this, and despite being unable to speak with Rainer himself, they nonetheless tried to drive home the message by ›presenting to him [Rainer's father — CR] our standpoint on performing one's duty of honour in the armed forces of our republic‹<sup>83</sup>.

Clearly, the problems of recruitment were not all solved with the construction of the Wall. The behaviour of would-be recruits did not change overnight from widespread refusal to resignation. Low-level party and economic functionaries did not all immediately metamorphosize into military enthusiasts. Coercive recruitment methods were not suddenly rendered unnecessary. In fact, they still backfired occasionally.

Yet the inability to leave for the West did finally create the basic preconditions for solving the problems of recruitment. Or put another way, it made it possible to put an end to ›recruitment‹ as such (i.e. obtaining volunteers) and hence many of the problems associated with it. When universal conscription was finally introduced on 24 January 1962, popular responses were more divided than they had been towards the expansion of the KVP or founding of the NVA. They were divided in two ways. First, however irrational it may seem, it seems clear in the reports that more people approved of conscription for the army once it was established than of the establishment of the army in the first place. Secondly, even among the majority who did not actively support conscription — in particular the youths whom it directly affected — responses were more ambiguous than before. To be sure, there were still many signs of disapproval, outright rejection and instances of refusal. But given the often appalling manner of recruitment up until then, by the time a compulsory 18-month period of service for all young men was actually introduced it seemed to many East Germans a vast improvement.

Conscription clearly found its greatest support among the older generations, and not just because they were not personally affected. In view of the constant talk

<sup>82</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, report of 24 Oct. 1961, bl. 134–5.

<sup>83</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/58, letter from Mückenberger to SED-ZK, 19 Dec. 1961, bl. 136–7.

of the ›youth question‹ throughout the preceding years, it is scarcely surprising that, as one report put it, ›A large portion of older citizens say that it should have come much earlier. [...] They say that through (conscription) the youth problem will be better solved and the youth educated to greater order and discipline‹<sup>84</sup>. As welcome as such a ›positive‹ response from the older generation was for the party leadership, it rather ironically only made the task of winning support among young people more difficult. According to another report from Berlin: ›Remarks such as »a stint in the army is necessary to turn you into men«, which are primarily uttered by older colleagues, often only lead to opposition and strengthen false attitudes among youths‹<sup>85</sup>.

But for several reasons, conscription was not wholly unpopular among the younger generations either. A significant number of East Germans of all ages thought it would save the state money by making the high wages that had been used to attract recruits superfluous. There was also a pronounced sense of *Schadenfreude* among many of those who had already completed a stint in the NVA and who had ›very often been derided by other youths because of their supposed stupidity‹<sup>86</sup>. And of course many people, including some church pastors, found conscription preferable to the constant pestering and pressure<sup>87</sup>. Fairly illustrative of the overall popular response was the vote taken at an assembly at the RAW Jena, where of the fifty employees present only five came out in favour of conscription, six against it and the rest (especially youths, the report emphasizes) abstained<sup>88</sup>.

Yet whatever the perceived advantages of conscription, most East Germans were anything but enthralled by it, especially the young men who now knew with certainty that they faced a period of military service. Many still rejected military service outright, for precisely the same reasons and in precisely the same ways as during the expansion of the KVP and foundation of the NVA. There was the predictable wave of ›provocations‹, hostile flyers, graffiti, and ›hostile arguments‹. Notices of the new law were destroyed, smeared with graffiti or covered by other ›malicious posters‹; there was widespread slandering of Heinz Hoffmann, the Minister for National Defence; signs were hung on the doors of draft boards proclaiming ›Caution! Danger to Life‹; and at least one industrial work stoppage was motivated by the introduction of conscription<sup>89</sup>. There were also numerous instances of youths openly declaring that they would never shoot at West Germans. One young electrician even warned a recruiter that ›once we all get guns we might just point them at you‹<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, ›Information: Stimmung zum Gesetz über die allgemeine Wehrpflicht‹, 25 Jan. 1962, bl. 8. Similar findings are reported in BAP, DO1/11/1120, ›1. Bericht über Stimmungen und Meinungen der Bevölkerung sowie der Tätigkeit des Gegners zum Gesetz der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht‹, 27 Jan. 1962, bl. 4; SAPMO-BA, DY34/22233, ›Information‹, 25 Jan. 1962.

<sup>85</sup> LAB, BPA IV/4/06-380, ›Stimmungen zum Wehrpflichtgesetz‹, 25 Jan. 1962, unpag.

<sup>86</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY34/22233, ›Information‹, 25 Jan. 1962, unpag.

<sup>87</sup> See SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/14/36, bl. 24-5.

<sup>88</sup> BAP, DO1/11/1120, ›1. Bericht über Stimmungen [...]‹, 27 Jan. 1962, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, bl. 30-32, 35-39, 56-57. The strike took place on 23 January in the Gustav Thiele factory in Löbau, where ten youths of conscription age downed tools for two hours and categorically refused to resume work because conscription was being introduced. The incident was quickly cleared up, however, by union officials and ›state organs‹. SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/6.11/66, bl. 22.

<sup>90</sup> BAP, DO1/11/1120, ›1. Bericht über Stimmungen und Meinungen der Bevölkerung sowie der Tätigkeit des Gegners zum Gesetz der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht‹, 27 Jan. 1962, p. 8;

Against the background of such reports, concerns in army circles that conscription might put weapons into the wrong hands or dilute individual units' fighting ability are understandable<sup>91</sup>.

But in the event such fears proved to be unfounded, for however much youths might have disliked the idea of compulsory military service, the vast majority complied with the new law without making much disturbance. This was even true of the majority of active Christian youth, despite their concerns about being able to attend services while in the army and their misgivings about the incompatibility of the oath of allegiance and the First Commandment. The attempts of the church to place the question of conscientious objection on the agenda for political discussion, which were eventually successful in gaining conscientious objectors the status of *Bausoldaten*, or 'construction soldiers' in 1964, were on behalf of only a handful of committed individuals — no more than 1 to 1.5 percent of eligible conscripts after 1964<sup>92</sup>. Draft boards reported precious few cases of 'provocations' upon induction and only minor difficulties in registering conscripts such as so-called 'rowdy-groups' trying to avoid registration by switching flats and jobs, isolated cases of recruits feigning illness or disability, and a brief wave of enquiries about signing up for the *Volkspolizei* as a way of avoiding military service<sup>93</sup>. A March 1962 report from *Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder* summed up the situation thus: 'The conscripts appeared punctually and in a disciplined fashion before the draft boards, but showed great reservation, from which it was clear that they are indeed willing to follow the law, but in large measure do not recognize the necessity of the military strengthening of our republic. A number of conscripts responded to the effect that they were only prepared to fulfil their duty as citizens because they were forced to do so by the law on conscription'<sup>94</sup>.

This lack of enthusiasm among the conscripts did not present a serious problem; mere compliance was enough. The greatest problem in filling out the ranks of the NVA and paramilitary forces in the months following the introduction of conscription were not presented by the conscripts at all, but rather by self-interested economic functionaries who reports complained were still showing a 'complete disregard' for military matters by applying for too many deferments and exemptions for their workers. Indeed, there were 7943 such applications during

ibid., '2. Bericht über Stimmungen [...]', 30 Jan. 1962, p. 4; SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, 'Information über Feindarbeit, die zum Gesetz [...]', 23 Feb. 1962, bl. 31.

<sup>91</sup> BAP, DO1/11/1120, '1. Bericht über Stimmungen [...]', 27 Jan. 1962, p. 8; SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, 'Information für den Genossen Honecker über Stimmungen und Argumente aus dem Bereich der Nationalen Volksarmee zur Einführung des Wehrpflichtgesetzes für die Zeit vom 22.1.-25.1.1962', bl. 13-15.

<sup>92</sup> On conscientious objection in the GDR generally, see Uwe Koch and Stephan Eschler, *Zähne hoch, Kopf zusammenbeißen: Dokumente zur Wehrdienstverweigerung in der DDR 1962-1990*, (Kückenshagen 1994). This statistic from Rüdiger Wenzke, 'Die Wehrpflicht im Spiegel der marxistisch-leninistischen Theorie in der DDR', in: *Die Wehrpflicht*, ed. by Roland Foerster, (Munich 1994), p. 119-132.

<sup>93</sup> BAP, DO1/11/1120, '1. Bericht über Stimmungen und Meinungen der Bevölkerung sowie der Tätigkeit des Gegners zum Gesetz der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht', 27 Jan. 1962, p. 7-8; '2. Bericht über Stimmungen [...]', 30 Jan. 1962, p. 12; SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, bl. 99. Over the two days following the introduction of conscription on 24 January, a record 16 youths enquired about enlisting at police headquarters in Magdeburg, all of whom were sent to the local army recruiting board.

<sup>94</sup> BLHA, Bez. Ffo. Rep. 730, Nr. 1100, 'Auszug aus der Einschätzung über den Verlauf der Musterung in der Zeit vom 3.9.62-15.9.62', unpag.



the three weeks in the middle of March alone. In *Bezirk Magdeburg* the number of applications for exemptions reached a total of 35.4 percent of all conscripts (1009 applications for only 2848 conscripts). As one report succinctly concluded, ›This shows an underestimation of the necessity of strengthening the defence of the republic‹<sup>95</sup>.

Although compulsory military service still ran against the grain of national sentiment among the majority of East Germans and was hardly something most youths wanted to do, it quickly became a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life in the GDR — even to factory managers, who eventually factored it automatically into their production plans<sup>96</sup>. Leaving for the West was no longer an option, and few youths were prepared to jeopardize their career prospects by refusing to comply. Perhaps more importantly, military service did not seem as unattractive once everyone had to do it and it was no longer paraded as a matter of ›showing one's colours‹. The one issue that was still considered an ›*Einstellungsfrage*‹ after the introduction of conscription was that of becoming a career soldier or officer. After ten years of rather disappointing recruitment experience since the initial expansion of the KVP it could thus come as no surprise to the party leadership when in February and March 1962 the NVA only managed to achieve 53 percent (6479 of 12 225) of the plan target for these career soldiers<sup>97</sup>. With the introduction of conscription it was possible to get the vast majority of young men to serve dutifully in the NVA, but not necessarily to believe in it.

<sup>95</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, ›Information über die durchgeführte Musterung in der Zeit vom 3.9.62–26.9.62‹, bl. 95–102; ›Abschlußbericht über die durchgeführte Musterung in der Zeit vom 15.–31.3.1962‹, bl. 73–9.

<sup>96</sup> For a personal view, see Thomas Spanier, ›In Erinnerung an meine Dienstzeit. 18 Monate als Wehrpflichtiger in der NVA‹, in: *NVA. Ein Rückblick für die Zukunft*, ed. by Manfred Backerra, (Cologne 1992).

<sup>97</sup> SAPMO-BA, DY30/IV2/12/57, ›Information über die durchgeführte Musterung der Wehrpflichtigen 1962‹, undated, bl. 42–9.

Felix Blindow

# Carl Schmitts Reichsordnung

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Carl Schmitt hat in seiner Schrift „Völkerrechtliche Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte“ von 1939 versucht, dem Reichsbegriff zu einer völkerrechtlichen Renaissance zu verhelfen. „Reich“ ist bei ihm gedacht als Kern einer europäischen Hegemonialordnung. Die Präsentation dieser Konzeption hat im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland sofort eine lebhafte Debatte ausgelöst. Der Verfasser versucht, sie nachzuzeichnen, wobei auch auf bisher unveröffentlichte Dokumente aus dem umfangreichen Nachlaß Carl Schmitts zurückgegriffen wird.

Der Autor weist auch auf die Parallelen zwischen Schmitts Konzeption vom „totalen Staat“ und jene vom Reich hin. Ähnlich wie Jüngers berühmte Wendung von der „totalen Mobilmachung“ hat sie Anfang der dreißiger Jahre großes Aufsehen erregt.

Das „Reich“ hat immer einen über das Verfassungs- und Völkerrecht hinausweisenden Beiklang – oder genauer: einen engen Bezug zur Politischen Theologie. Einigermmaßen überraschend ist, daß der katholische Politische Theologe Carl Schmitt Begriffe benutzt, die eher aus dem Repertoire der protestantischen Theologie stammen. Auch für die Deutung dieses Zusammenhangs wurden unveröffentlichte Briefe aus dem Nachlaß Schmitts herangezogen.

Das „Reich“ als politische Konzeption ist nach 1945 fast spurlos in der Versenkung verschwunden, und dennoch beweist Schmitts Schrift zur „Großraumordnung mit Interventionsverbot für raumfremde Mächte“ Aktualität durch ihre antiuniversalistische Stoßrichtung: „Die notwendige logische Konsequenz des Universalismus ist Imperialismus.“ So lautet nicht etwa ein Satz aus Schmitts Œuvre, sondern er steht in dem Buch „Kampf der Kulturen“ des Harvard-Professors Samuel P. Huntington.

## Aus dem Inhalt:

1. Teil: Auf dem Weg zum Reich. Der Kronjurist bis zu seinem Sturz
  - I. Abkehr vom Dezisionismus: Das konkrete Ordnungs- und Gestaltungsdenken
  - II. Der „Totale Staat“. Eine Konzeption zwischen Reichstheologie und Parteidiktatur
2. Teil: Das Reich als völkerrechtliche Konzeption
  - I. Die Wandlungen des Kriegsbegriffes
  - II. Der Großraum als Ausstrahlungssphäre des Reiches
  - III. Das Reich als Supra-Souveränität
  - Exkurs: „Zentraleuropa“: Geopolitik bei Giselher Wirsing
3. Teil: Die Politische Theologie des Reiches
  - I. Mythologie des Reiches: Der Gegensatz von Land und Meer
  - II. Von der Volksnomothemie zum Nomos der Erde
  - III. Der Kat-echon
  - Exkurs: Alexandre Kojèves Wiederbelebung der Schmittschen Reichskonzeption für den römisch-katholischen Mittelmeerraum

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