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# Criticism Against the Education System in Protests Against the Government of East Germany: With the Case of the Affair in the Carl von Ossietzky School

## OTA, Yukari

**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the people's movement before the reform of National Education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). After Honecker's resignation, the new administration efforts to rebuild the system, including proposing reform plans through the Ministry of National Education. This political process has been studied to understand how the education system of the GDR was integrated into that of West Germany. In contrast, this study focuses on the evolution of public criticism against the National Education leading up to political reforms. Specifically, this study examines the Ossietzky Affair as a pivotal moment in this movement. Occurring in the late the 1980s, this incident reflected widespread demands for freedom and systematic reform. Students from this school voiced their opinions about society, a practice initially tolerated by the government. However, when these students faced punishment, it sparked heightened activism, particularly led by Evangelical churches. Through these movements, discussions about National Education became widespread in society. This study seeks to shed light on a segment of the broader public movement demanding freedom and challenging the government's unreasonable policies during the final years of the GDR.

### Introduction

The policy of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was always shaped by the dynamics of the Cold War. The administration governed society by emphasizing socialist ideology to justify the system. The Ministry of National Security (Stasi) monitored the entire society to prevent anti-establishment activities. Criticism of the government often leads to disadvantages in one's prospects.

In the 1980s, the GDR faced a severe economic crisis, and the government struggled to function effectively, as only top officials had a full understanding of the social situation. Erich Honecker refused to follow Gorbachev's call for reforms, even though the people had high expectations for change after Gorbachev's rise to power. This refusal led to widespread disappointment with E. Honecker's obstinate attitude. A lot of people applied to leave the country in pursuit of freedom in Western countries, while others chose to protest against the government. At that time, in 1988, the Ossietzky Affair took place. In those days, young people who were influenced by Western countries tended to rebel against the internalization of the socialist character. The Affair is regarded as a representative example of this tendency<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Izeki, Tadahisa. (2016). *Protest movement in Germany after World War II: a search for 'a mature civil society'*. Iwanami Shoten. p.102 (井関正久 『戦後ドイツの抗議運動：「成熟した市民社会」への模索』 岩波書店、2016年、102頁).

This study examines the Ossietzky Affair as a turning point in the transition of criticism against education policy. Preceding studies about protest movements against the government revealed the process that the people of the totalitarian state gained the power to change the establishment<sup>2</sup>. The research on criticism against the education policy uncovers how the nation called the nature of the totalitarian governance into question because the goal of National Education was the cultivation of the people who contributed to the socialist society<sup>3</sup>. Preceding research about National Education has explained the political processes involved in reforming the education policy after E. Honecker's resignation to understand how East Germany's education system was integrated into that of West Germany. According to Amano (1993), the citizen's movement towards democratization prompted the administration to change its education policy. He regarded Margot Honecker's resignation from the Ministry of National Education as a symbol of the turning point in education policy and described the process of democratizing the education system. One day after her resignation, the new administration announced, 'Action Plan<sup>4</sup>,' which outlined the abolition of military practices and the restoration of teachers' autonomy. Ono (2002)<sup>5</sup> referred to education reform as an early stage of curriculum reorganization. She viewed the rebuilding of the Ministry of National Education as part of the government's self-reform driven by significant population outflows and pressure from the democratic movement. These researches have not revealed the transitions in popular claims before political reform.

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<sup>2</sup> See these resources: Neubert, Ehrhart. (1998). *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989*, Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin, S. 25. Kwai, Nobuharu. (2001). The formation and the development of "opposition" in the German Democratic Republic (1) – Was 'the oppositon' a pillar of 'civil society'? *Hogaku-seijigaku kenkyu* 25. pp.51-70 (河合信晴「ドイツ民主共和国における「反対派」の形成と展開(1) – 「反対派」は「市民社会」の担い手かー」『成蹊大学法学政治学研究』第 25 号、2001 年、51-70 頁). Id. (2002). The formation and the development of "opposition" in the German Democratic Republic (2・completion) – Was 'the oppositon' a pillar of 'civil society'? *Hogaku-seijigaku kenkyu* 26. pp.19-42 (河合「ドイツ民主共和国における「反対派」の形成と展開(2・完) – 「反対派」は「市民社会」の担い手かー」『成蹊大学法学政治学研究』第 26 号、2002 年、19-42 頁). Izeki, *op.cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Yoshida, Nariakira. (2011). *German reunification and reorganization of Didactics - historical evaluation of East German Didactics*. Hiroshima University. pp.17-18 (吉田成章『ドイツ統一と教授学の再編－東ドイツ教授学の歴史的評価』広島大学出版会、2011 年、17-18 頁).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>5</sup> Ono, Ayumi. (2002). *Curriculum reform in former East German region -Revolution of the establishment and change of the school*. Kyodo Shuppan. pp.19-20 (大野亜由未『旧東ドイツ地域のカリキュラム改革－体制の変化と学校の変化』協同出版、2002 年、19-20 頁).

To complement this drawback, the Ossietzky Affair must be taken up as a turning point. However, preceding studies referred to it only as one of the events that happened at the end of the 1980s<sup>6</sup>. For example, Heike Kaack (2016) stated only that church members used this affair to strengthen their influence on the education policy<sup>7</sup>, which overlooks the expansion of the discussion about the policy into the people outside the church.

This study examines the transition of criticism against the education policy, taking up the Ossietzky Affair as a turning point in this movement. This paper uncovers the process of widening discussions about National Education and the change of their substance.

### **Signs and Development of Oppositional Movements**

Evangelical churches<sup>8</sup> were the main actors in oppositional movements in the GDR. They supported anti-establishment groups and criticized policies, particularly those related to militarization and discrimination against Christians. Since the government promoted atheism, public schools did not offer religious education and Christian children faced discrimination especially regarding school admissions. From 1968 onwards, churches began supporting Christian and non-Christian people deemed unable to adapt to society. That year marked the end of military service or the first construction soldiers. The government did not publicize the option of serving as construction soldiers, so churches actively disseminated this information among Christians<sup>9</sup>. In the same year, protests erupted against Soviet military operations during the ‘Prague Spring’. Subsequently, non-Christians also began gathering in churches, organizing concerts and debate forums. These gatherings addressed topics such as the dangers of war and environmental issues. The government’s

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<sup>6</sup> See also the other below books: Kowalcuk, Ilko-Sascha. (2009). *Endspiel: die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR*, C.H. Beck, S. 291-297. Mählert, Ulrich (interpreted by Izuta, Shunsuke). (2019). *History of the GDR 1945-1990*. Hakusuisha Publishing. p.175 (ウルリヒ・メーラート、伊豆田俊輔訳『東ドイツ史 1945-1990』、白水社、2019年、175頁).

<sup>7</sup> Kaack, Heike. (2016). *Der IX. Pädagogische Kongress am Ende der DDR*. Peter Lang GmbH. Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften. S. 169f.

<sup>8</sup> In the region of the GDR, the majority was Lutheran traditionally, and about 80 % of the people belonged to Lutheran in 1949. Evangelical churches tried to keep independence from the state because of regret for following the Nazis. In this manuscript, “churches” mean evangelical ones. Ichikawa, Hiromi. (1995). Churches and citizens movement in the GDR – roles and limitations of “The church within socialism.” *Historical journal* 546. P.49 (市川ひろみ「東ドイツにおける教会と市民運動—「社会主义のなかの教会」の役割と限界」『歴史評論』546号、1995年、49頁).

<sup>9</sup> id. (2016). “Peace revolution” and churches in the GDR. *Socialism as history -Experiments in the GDR-* Nakanishiya. pp.175-177 (市川ひろみ「東ドイツ「平和革命」と教会」川越修・河合信晴編『歴史としての社会主义 -東ドイツの経験-』、ナカニシヤ出版、2016年、175-177頁).

increasingly repressive interventions in these events only fueled rebellious actions within the churches. However, after the suicide of Pastor Oskar Brüsewitz in 1976, church leaders and the government sought compromise. In 1978, Erich Honecker and Albrecht Schönherr, the chairman of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic, held a conference. At this conference, the government allowed free social activities to take place exclusively within churches, while church leaders had little choice but to accept the government's policies<sup>10</sup>.

This year, the government introduced military practice as a compulsory subject for students aged 14 to 16, as the conflict between East and West deteriorated once again from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Students were neither allowed to refuse this practice nor permitted to choose participation without weapons. This decision provoked widespread resentment among parents, resulting in 2,500 petitions against it. Churches also campaigned for peace education and opposed as part of their broader peace movement<sup>11</sup>.

In the first half of the 1980s, churches had already attempted to promote discussions about the education system, but these efforts failed. In 1987, a commission within the churches focused on work with children and confirmants under the alliance of the evangelical churches in the GDR<sup>12</sup> critically analyzed textbooks. However, they were unable to publish their findings.

### **Movements Supported by the Churches**

Campaigns, especially those for environmental protection and equal rights between men and women, received support from the churches. Towards the end of the GDR, coal became an alternative resource due to a reduction in financial support for oil from the Soviet Union, which led to severe environmental pollution. Additionally, the government withheld information about the Chernobyl disaster, considering it inconvenient, which frustrated the public. However, 'Environment Library (Umwelt-Bibliothek),' which was established in Zion Church in Berlin, published information that contradicted official accounts<sup>13</sup>.

Organized campaigns for women's rights gained momentum following an amendment to the conscription law in 1982<sup>14</sup>. The new law allowed women to be conscripted for military service in emergencies, sparking protests linked to peace

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<sup>10</sup> Murakami, Yu. (2016). The expansion of anti-establishment in the GDR: with a focus on the development of "Open Activities." *Politics Research* 63. pp.74-76 (村上悠「東ドイツ体制批判運動の拡大：「開かれた活動」の展開を中心に」政治研究 63巻、2016年、74-76頁).

<sup>11</sup> Ichikawa (2016). *op.cit.*, p.179.

<sup>12</sup> This organization was "die Kommission für kirchliche Arbeit mit Kindern und Konfirmanden im BEK" in German. Neubert, *op.cit.*, S.775.

<sup>13</sup> Kawai, Nobuharu. (2020). *Story History of the GDR attempts and failure of the divided state*. Chuokoron Shinsya. pp.224-225 (河合信晴『物語 東ドイツの歴史 分断国家の挑戦と挫折』中央公論新社、2020年、224-225頁).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221.

movements. In response, the opposition group ‘Peace for Women (Frauen für den Frieden)’ was formed to protest against the legislation. One of its leaders, Ulrike Poppe, dedicated herself not only to the women’s movement but also to participating in campaigns against the Ossietzky Affair.

The government had to address these oppositional movements without jeopardizing its international reputation. It managed rebellious people through brief detentions and increased surveillance. Furthermore, the Ministry of National Security (Stasi) infiltrated unofficial collaborators into rebellious communities to disturb their activities<sup>15</sup>. According to Kawai (2020)<sup>16</sup>, the strictness of the government’s response depended on the timing of Honecker’s visit to Bonn. Before the visit, the measures were relatively moderate. After his visit, the government intensified its control, but it was too late to suppress the oppositional movements fully. Additionally, the government’s effectiveness was hindered by Honecker’s excessive optimism, which made him reluctant to consider his policies. There was also internal conflict among politicians about whether they should maintain the status quo.

### **The Ossietzky Affair**

The Extended Secondary School Carl von Ossietzky<sup>17</sup> was located in Pankow, Berlin. Pankow included an area where only political elites could live, and their children attended this school. In the autumn of 1988, the principal set up the wall newspaper *Speakers Corner*, which the government approved<sup>18</sup>. At this location, students and teachers could discuss social issues freely an exceptional measure for that time.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Phillip Lengsfeld, Benjamin Lindner, Shenja-Paul Wiens, and Alexander Krohn participated in a gathering against Nazi tendencies. They displayed placards with slogans opposing fascism and neo-Nazism, which the Stasi soon discovered. The following day, Lindner and Wiens posted a summary of strikes in Poland at *Speakers Corner*. Some students supported the article, while others claimed that the demonstrators in Poland were lazy. Karsten Krenz, the son of Egon Krenz, disagreed with the strikes and removed the article without comment. The next day, he returned it to *Speakers Corner* and proposed holding a student seminar to debate the issue. Although the principal approved the idea, but the Undersecretary of National Education rejected it. On 14<sup>th</sup> September, Kai Feller posted an article questioning whether a military parade was necessary on National Foundation Day. Both students and teachers discussed this topic publicly. Furthermore, Feller collected signatures opposing the parade within the school,

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<sup>15</sup> Mählert, *op.cit.*, p.173.

<sup>16</sup> Kawai, *op.cit.* p.227.

<sup>17</sup> Carl von Ossietzky is a German journalist who worked on an antiwar movement, criticized the Nazis, and received a Nobel Peace Prize.

<sup>18</sup> Grammes, Tolman & Zühlke, Ari. (1995). *Ein Schulkonflikt in der DDR*. Chemnitzer Verlag und Druck. Zwickau. S.7.

without the principal's permission. By the time the principal noticed about 40 signatures had been gathered. Students who signed the list expected the principal to forward it to FDJ and the Ministry of Defense, which he superficially agreed to do. However, he did not condone the unauthorized collection of signatures and reported the activity to school council member, Voß, in Berlin. The Stasi also became aware of the incident.

On the weekend of September 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of National Education, M. Honecker, received the report and decided on the actions to be taken regarding the students involved. She intended to order the students to leave or transfer to another school if they refused to change their stance. Lorenz was tasked with implementing her orders. Voß objected to such strict punishments; however, not only was her opinion dismissed, but her superiors stopped assigning her any other responsibilities. Teachers at the school must have pressured parents of children who had signed the list to convince their children to withdraw their signatures. Nevertheless, Kataja Ihle and Georgia von Chamir refused to comply.

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, Lengsfeld, Lindner, and Richter published a poem that had been carried in 1986 in the newspaper *The People's Army*. The poem meant as praise for automatic rifles was intended to be ironic. The next day, Feller, Ihle, Lengsfeld, Wiens, and Lindner were pulled out of their class and interrogated by the principal and officials. The following day, Krohn and Richter were also interrogated. The principal and officials questioned these students about their political beliefs and loyalty to the state, threatening them with expulsions if they did not change their views. Eventually, the Ministry M. Honecker decided that Feller, Ihle, Lengsfeld, and Lindner must leave the school and FDJ<sup>19</sup>. If two-thirds of their classmates agreed, the expulsions from the FDJ would be enforced. Consequently, a vote was held in their classes. While some students opposed the measure, but in three of the classes, excluding Lindner's class, over two-thirds of classmates voted in favor of their removal. However, Lindner left the FDJ voluntarily. Leaving the FDJ had a significant negative impact on the students' careers, including the forfeiture of opportunities to attend university. Even those who voted against the punishment risked similar consequences. Despite this, some students voiced objections to the treatment. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, the principal announced the punishments at a school assembly. In addition to the aforementioned four students above, Chamier and Wiens were also ordered to transfer to another school, while Krohn and Richter received reprimands. These decisions had been communicated to the students in advance. During the assembly, they were not permitted to protest the punishments and were required to leave the school immediately. Some students expressed dissent over the decision to combine leaving the FDJ with being forced to leave the school, as they had not anticipated that both consequences would be enforced together<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend) is a political organization that most people from 14 to 25 years old joined at that time.

<sup>20</sup> See the book in terms of the outline of the Ossietzky Affair above; Kalkbrenner, Jörn. (1990). *Urteil ohne Prozeß Margot Honecker gegen Ossietzky-Schüler*. Dietz Verlag. Berlin,

Although the government approved discussions at the *Speakers Corner*, Ministry M. Honecker punished the students involved. These strict and immediate measures were taken for two main reasons. First, high-level officials addressed the incident because E. Krenz's son was involved<sup>21</sup>. K. Krenz opposed the strike in Poland, however, he also proposed holding the debate at the school. This could have made him appear anti-government, similar to the punished students. Second, Lengsfeld was associated with the 'anti-government' activities, prompting the Stasi to intervene in the matter<sup>22</sup>. His mother participated in a demonstration during the ceremony for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1988, which led to her arrest by the police. Afterwards, she fled to England, and since then, Stasi closely monitored Lengsfeld in Berlin<sup>23</sup>.

Initially, M. Honecker decided firstly to expel Wiens from school, but he was only transferred to a different school. This was due to the intervention of Otto, a member of the school council, who advocated for a reduced punishment, considering Wien's family background. His grandfather was an anti-fascism poet who had been imprisoned in a concentration camp, and his mother was a member of the writer's league. The government anticipated that she might protest strongly against a harsher punishment, and she did oppose the penalty that was ultimately imposed<sup>24</sup>.

Before the punishments were officially announced at the school, officials and the principal sometimes objected to the decisions, but their objections were rejected. For example, during a consultation led by Lorenz, the head of a commission for school dismissals, Dr. Peter, pointed out that the interrogation process was one-sided, and that the evidence of the students' guilt was insufficient. In this consultation, the principal proposed holding a second hearing. Lorenz dismissed their opinions and instructed Dr. Peter to proceed with the expulsion process immediately<sup>25</sup>.

Children of politically or socially influential figures attended the school of Carl von Ossietzky, which created a freer environment compared to other schools. However, the government needed to address anti-establishment activities quickly to prevent their influence from spreading throughout the country.

### **Reactions of the People to the Ossietzky Affair**

After the punishments were carried out, students in the school discussed these actions. Some of them protested, arguing that the practice was premature and unfair.

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S. 10-57.

<sup>21</sup> Neubert, *op.cit.*, S.774.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Kalkbrenner, *op.cit.*, S.10f.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, S.42f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, S.45.

However, K. Krenz disagreed, claiming that his father had given the matter considerable thought<sup>26</sup>.

Although the government did not immediately make this incident public, it caused responses from churches both within and outside Berlin. They held services where participants prayed for the punished students and criticized the government's actions. The participants included members of anti-establishment groups and journalists from Western countries. Attendees argued that the students were merely exercising their right to discuss social issues at *Speakers Corner* and demanded that the government reverse its actions. In response, the government temporarily detained some activists, such as Ulrike Poppe and advised a bishop to refrain from organizing similar events, aiming to prevent the church's involvement in political matters.

However, despite the advice, the pastors, the activists, and the journalists met to discuss issues concerning National Education. The number of participants in the services grew significantly. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, about 1,000 people attended the Savior Church, including delegations from the IPPNW<sup>27</sup> in West Germany and the Netherlands<sup>28</sup>. After the service, they held a meeting with a member of the GDR Academy of Education Study<sup>29</sup> where they declared their intention to persuade the media in West Germany to report on the Ossietzky Affair. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, churches within and outside Berlin convened a gathering. Although the Stasi intervened in these events, more than 1,200 people attended, collectively demanding reforms to the education system. The Ossietzky Affair was widely regarded as a symptom of the country's underdeveloped institutions. The following day, these gatherings received media coverage in Western countries. From December 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, the teachers' unions from East and West Germany met in East Berlin,<sup>30</sup> where the Ossietzky Affair became a central topic of discussion. This led to another meeting involving a delegation from West Germany and 'reactionary' pastors. Poppe and other invited participants also attended to report on the Ossietzky Affair and discuss necessary education reforms in both countries. From the Stasi's perspective, this discussion resulted in explicit demands from the churches to be addressed at the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference.

### **Petitions Towards the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference**

The Ministry of National Education organized the Education Conference annually until 1949. After that, it was held intermittently until the 9<sup>th</sup> conference in 1989. Its goal was that 'people reflected on achievements of the year and open new prospects

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, S.60.

<sup>27</sup> IPPNW is the abbreviation of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

<sup>28</sup> Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv. Nr.508/88.

<sup>29</sup> This organization is „Akademie der Pädagogischen Wissenschaften der DDR“ in German.

<sup>30</sup> Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv. Nr.557/88.

for the next school year<sup>31</sup>. Attendees discussed topics such as the education plan based on the party's policy.

In January 1988, the government announced that the 9<sup>th</sup> conference would take place from June 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>. Ministry Margot appealed to educators to submit ideas for the development of National Education. People expected her to be ready to reform the education policy and sent petitions,<sup>32</sup> which were a legal way to voice complaints to the government and required a formal response<sup>33</sup>. Lisa Nüßner, head of the petitions department, documented not only the dates on which petitions were received and the names of the senders but also their concerns and professions, which were forwarded to Margot. About one-third of the petitions received no response and were instead sent to the Stasi. Most of these came from churches and anti-establishment groups supported by the churches. Meanwhile, parents and educators without church affiliations demanded improvements to the practical aspects of the education system, such as introducing a five-day school week and separating talented students from average ones. However, church members called for reforms to the ideological nature of socialist education, such as the abolition of censorship and the separation of schools from political organizations.

According to Kaack (2016), members of the churches referred to the Ossietzky Affair to strengthen their position on education policy. Not only the churches but also anti-establishment activists used this incident. For example, during a meeting on November 27<sup>th</sup>, some participants issued a statement that included the sentence; 'It is time to discuss the actual condition of the education system of the GDR'<sup>34</sup>. The Stasi regarded this meeting as the starting point for broader discussions involving all social groups.

In 1989, activities within the churches that posed a challenge to the government increased. These activities included the use of unauthorized copy machines, which enabled educators to discuss issues related to National Education publicly. Moreover, these efforts led to the formation of organizations in Berlin and Wittenberg that focused on the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference. These groups organized the 'conference from the bottom'<sup>35</sup> as an alternative to the official conference. Similar gatherings were held in various regions, including Potsdam. At these events, participants not only criticized the government's education policies but also drafted resolutions for the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference.

As a result of these movements, petitions from people in the GDR and neighboring countries "continuously (anhaltend)"<sup>36</sup> submitted to political organizations and educational institutions. For example, the Kurt Schumacher club<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Yoshid, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>32</sup> Kaack, *op.cit.*, S.109f.

<sup>33</sup> Kawai. *op.cit.* pp.193-194.

<sup>34</sup> I translated the part from German to English. Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv. Nr. 183/89.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The club was an organization of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, gathering

sent 250 copies of a letter condemning the education policy of the GDR to extended secondary schools.

Which petitions received a response remains unknown. Some claims regarding petitions that received a reply overlapped with those of petitions that were ignored. Petitions sent to the Stasi were regarded as an attack on National Education<sup>38</sup>.

### Reactions After the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference

The content of this conference betrayed the expectations of those who anticipated M. Honecker would propose reforms. Instead, she emphasized the success of the education policy, particularly its praise of socialist ideology and showed no inclination to reform it. Although the government responded to some petitions, they were largely ignored during the conference. Criticism was especially directed at the promotion of hostility towards Western countries, despite the détente of the Cold War and the contradiction between encouraging harmonious relationships between parents and children and the demand for full employment. Some people requested responses to the petitions, but these demands went unfulfilled<sup>39</sup>.

Members of educational institutions and participants in party and union meetings assessed the content of the education conference. While some appreciated the achievements since the country's foundation, others refrained from public criticism but privately condemned M. Honecker's argument. Many were disappointed, particularly because the conference failed to propose solutions to the pressing issues in National Education<sup>40</sup>.

Teachers and students also discussed the conference in their respective schools and opinions were divided between agreement and opposition. Negative evaluations were varied: while older teachers objected to personal systems, such as the unfair distribution of salaries and jobs, younger educators called for respect for students' individuality and the encouragement of their free development. These discussions subsided by the end of the semester, but anti-establishment groups continued their criticism even during the semester break.

When the new semester began in September, the political executive could no longer ignore the crisis of authority. While the executive debated E. Honecker's resignation in the mid-October, teachers who had been publicly loyal to the government began to voice cautious criticism. Students, informed by media from Western countries and anti-establishment groups, raised issues that, when combined with official government narratives, posed challenges for teachers to address<sup>41</sup>. At the Carl von Ossietzky school, teachers decided at the end of September to request

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detained people from the GDR. However, "Neue Ostpolitik (new eastern policy)" resulted in an outflow of many members. Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv. Nr. 183/89.

<sup>38</sup> Kaack. *op.cit.*, S.146ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, S.181ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, S.184ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, S.190f.

the withdrawal of penalties for leaving the school, but the authorities ignored their appeal.

Several days after the announcement of E. Honecker's resignation, M. Honecker offered her resignation from the Ministry<sup>42</sup>. The new government led by E. Krenz attempted to engage in dialogue with anti-establishment groups as public demand for social reforms grew increasingly stronger. The Department of Inspection of Primary Schools advised her to take the opinions raised at the education conference, and she ultimately acknowledged the necessity of reform. However, the new government began drafting reform plans only after her resignation was announced in early November.

At the time of E. Honecker's resignation, journalist Klaus Flemming was prepared to report on the Ossietzky Affair in a television program. Although the government initially approved the broadcast, the decision was later reversed. Nevertheless, the authorities were unable to repress his protest as the momentum for systematic change had become unstoppable. As a result, the program aired in November<sup>43</sup>. By December, the principal announced the rehabilitation of the punished students. Furthermore, a commission of inquiry was established to investigate the matter, questioning the principal, teachers, and involved officials<sup>44</sup>.

## Conclusion

Before the Ossietzky Affair, the churches criticized National Education for its militarization and discrimination against Christian children. Their efforts were rooted in their religious beliefs. The campaign against military training as a compulsory subject was regarded as part of their broader peace movement. The churches also attempted to engage in discussions about the education system, but these efforts were largely unsuccessful. For example, the church commission was unable to publish its analysis of textbooks, and its initiatives failed to gain traction in society.

The Ossietzky Affair occurred as public demonstrations grew increasingly frequent. This event reminded people of the repressive nature of the education system, prompting many to attend church services to express their opinions on the affair and National Education. Participants called for the withdrawal of punishments and the democratization of the education system. Members of anti-establishment groups and journalists from Western countries actively participated in these events. Western media coverage of the Ossietzky Affair led to criticism of the system from abroad. During church activities in the churches, attendees drafted petitions and statements addressed to the 9<sup>th</sup> Education Conference, urging the government to reform and rebuild the education system.

The people who sent the petitions were disappointed with the content of the conference, during which M. Honecker proclaimed the maintenance of the status

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, S.32.

<sup>43</sup> Kalkbrenner, *op.cit.*, S. 89f.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* S.111f.

quo. Eventually, teachers who had previously been obedient to the government publicly expressed negative opinions about the conference. After the resignation of E. Honecker and his wife, the government began working on the reform of National Education. The principal of the Carl von Ossietzky school announced the withdrawal of punishments after a journalist reported the Ossietzky Affair on television.

This affair significantly contributed to the development of the discussions about issues of National Education. Churches, wielding greater influence on education policy, took up the matter. The reform of the education system was part of a broader political movement, but the reactions to the affair should not be overlooked. The affair exposed the dysfunction of the government and sparked concerns, even from abroad. It also served as a reminder of how repressive National Education had been. The criticism by the people led to the democratization of National Education.

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