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Hist 133C

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June 13, 2019

Junge Gemeinde

The Junge Gemeinde, or the translated English term Young Congregation, were a Christian youth group in Germany. The Junge Gemeinde act as young Christians who organize community work for their respective church and community. While in East Germany after the end of World War II, the group was under heavy pressure from the state to be incorporated into another youth organization the Free German Youth or FDJ. The Free German Youth was intended to be the Socialist youth organization that would be the overarching youth organization in East Germany. In the 1950s the Socialist Unity Party of Germany saw that the Junge Geminde was a threat to socialist values, which resulted in the Junge Geminde and other church organized groups being prosecuted, while the Free German Youth were being supported by the SED as the overall youth organization of East Germany.

The Politburo, or chief policy maker of the Central Committee of the SED, set policy to slander the Junge Geminde as a group that was against the socialist values of East Germany that would try to undermine the state. The state would then in turn prohibit the continuation of any sort of congressional meeting of German youths. The SED tried to block activities of the Junge Geminde and ban books and writings from the organizations. The policy also tried to attract members to join the Free German Youth in contrast to the prosecution of the Junge Geminde.

The Junge Geminde was not only affected during the time of the youth prosecution. Many Protestant churches in East Germany were attacked during the persecution from the state. As the church suffered from attacks from the state, such as rounding up heads of church and imprisoning them, the Free German Youth would be granted more of an opportunity to expand in the state. The state wanted a single youth group to spread the message of socialism throughout the younger community and did so by implementing programs like parties, community outreach programs, and other beneficial events that youths would be tempted to join. After the years of the persecution from the state the Junge Geminde would still be around after the fall of the wall and the unification of Germany.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

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

* In this documentation translated by Thomas Dunlap, an academic translator, which was originally documented in *SED und Kirche. Eine Dokumentation ihrer Beziehungen,* a German theological study about 19th and 20th century historical religion. The document titled D*as Politbüro des ZK der SED über die Junge Gemeinde* is a documentation on the SED policy about the *Junge Gemeinde* and the FDJ. The report came from the Central Committee of the SED on January 27, 1953. Specifically, the process to root out the other youth organizations that compete with the Free German Youth. The SED helped expand the Free German youth as the organization of East Germany because the FDJ was to spread the ideals of socialism to German Youth. The policy in the document stated that the *Junge Gemeinde* were a western force that was there to undermine the East German state. The course of action that wanted to be followed was the aboltion of *Junge Gemeinde* organizations and the single youth group the FDJ.

2 MIDDLETON, DREW. "SOVIET TIGHTENING GRIP ON EAST ZONE: ABSORBING GERMANS INTO ITS SYSTEM AT MUCH FASTER PACE THAN THE WEST EXPECTED COMMUNISTS STRENGTHEN POSITION PARTY WILL BE "INVIGORATED". *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 23, 1951.

* This newspaper article by the New York Times stated that the Soviet Government was absorbing East Germany into the Soviet Satellite system. The process of the Soviet Government implementing socialists’ standards into the government. The article defines that the East German Government finds no resistance to the Socialist Unity party. Middleton states that the Socialist party will be “invigorated” by Free German Youth and the plan to have these East German youth take over the Russian jobs in the future. The FDJ were youths who had no political experience other than communism.

3 MIDDLETON, DREW. "Bonn Outlaws Free German Youth in First Move Against Extremists: Organization Called the most Dangerous of all Communist Groups--further Ban on Red Party and Radical Right Expected." *New York Times*, Jun 27, 1951. Pg. 8

* A month later, in an article by the same journalist, the New York Times printed that West Germany outlawed the Free German Youth organization from West Germany. The West feared that the state would be influenced by the organization of the FDJ. West German government clause as for the ban was that communist organizations would be prohibited in the state and cease activities when the law would pass.

4 "EAST BERLIN REDS ORDER CRACKDOWN ON CHURCH." *Los Angeles Times* Sep 13, 1951 pg.10.

* Los Angeles Times reported that the East Berlin government started to persecute Protestant churches. The attack would be a first step into dealing with what the East German and Soviet state believed that they were under attack by foreign and western agents. The belief of the church working as a Western agent against the socialist state would help persecute the people of the church such as the one mentioned in the article. The pastor was arrested and jailed for going against the Communist policy.

5 "COMMUNIST PARADE AT FREE GERMAN YOUTH CONVENTION IN LEIPZIG." *New York Times*, Jun 23, 1952. pg. 5.

* This short illustrated article in the New York Time described the Free German Youth parade for the Soviets. The connection that the Soviet state had with the FDJ was considerable since the FDJ was a communist tool for the state to control the people.

6 "Junge Gemeinde" – Tarnorganisation für Kriegshetze, Sabotage und Spionage im USA-Auftrag, *Junge Welt,* April 1953, p. 1

* This German newspaper states that Junge Gemeinde was an organization acting as a spy for the U.S. and West German governments. The newspaper has testimonies from various of youths that were in the church communities that had a presence of Junge Gemeinde. The article slanders the organization, calling the Junge Gemeinde war criminals and spies for the US government. At the expense of the Junge Gemeinde, the Free German Youth are elevated as the group for the youth among East Germans. Ironically, the *Junge Welt* was the daily newspaper publication for the Free German Youth, giving the FDJ a front to spread propaganda.

7 Fried, Paul G. “The Impact of Communist Rule on the Protestant Church in East Germany”. *American Theological Library Association*. Apr 1, 1958.

* This article published by the American Theological Library Association gives information that the unification of Germany. The division between the two states has issues with the church being divided in the states. The church in East Germany is under the rule of SED state and is being persecuted by them. The article delves into the persecution of members of the Junge Gemeinde and how they are expelled for the irreligious affiliation, arrested and imprisoned, and funds of the church were withheld by the state.

8 Smith, Roland. “The Church in the GDR”. *German Life and Letters*. Vol 39 Issue 1. Oct 1985. Pg.76-89.

* Another article in published in the *German Life and Letters* journal portraying that the Junge Gemeinde suffered horroible treatment under the Communist state. The article talks about the experiences that the members of Junge Gemeinde were not only verbally and physically attacked, but they were attacked by the Free German Youth. The Free German Youth saw the group as a rival group to the state youth program.

9 Wentker, Hermann. ""Kirchenkampf" in DDR. Der Konflikt Um Die Junge Gemeinde 1950-1953." *Vierteljahrshefte Für Zeitgeschichte* 42, no. 1 (1994): 95-127. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30197649>.

* In a German published article, the overall argument as detailed in the translated abstracted, explains of the conflict between the youth groups of the Protestant churches. The Free German Youth saw the Junge Gemeinde as rival to the official youth group of the state, so the SED leadership decided to expel members of the group in school. The article states that 712 students were eventually expelled, but even with the ongoing persecution form the SED and the Free German Youth orders from the Soviets refrain the state to continue the persecution of the Junge Gemeinde, effectively ending the conflict.

10 McDougall, Alan James. *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement, 1946-1968*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2004.

* This book is more on the issues of how the Free German Youth is policed by the government and the effects that politics played in the roles of transforming the youth in East Germany. The Organized youth in East Germany lives is stated is in a totalitarian state that the government represses the role of the people to control most aspects of their lives. Given by the reviews of the book, most of the arguments of the dissent in the German youth at the time comes from the totalitarian rule of the government, which gives indication of the role that had on the Free German Youth in relations to the Junge Gemeinde.

11 Anna Saunders. Book Review: „Junge Gemeinde im Konflikt. Evangelische Jugendarbeit in SBZ und DDR 1945-1961“, *German History*, Volume 23, Issue 1, January 2005, Pages 137–139, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026635540502300125>

* The review of Ellen Ueberschar’s *Konfession und Gesellschaft* takes on the reason for the persecution of the Junge Gemeinde. The East German secular state gave indication that the Protestant Church was needed for more youth work in the religious sphere. Anna states of Ueberschar’s book the process of how the persecution of the Junge Gemeinde changed after 1953. While the Junge Gemeinde were still considered a threat to the Free German Youth, the actions of the FDJ were less violent in nature. There was less repression of the religious communities and more upbringing on teachings and improving standards in the communities. By 1961 the Junge Gemeinde was not the primary focus of the SED.