Don’t Die in the Waiting Room of the Future:
How the East German Punks Participated in Taking Down the GDR Regime

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There were two primary forces that took down the German Democratic Republic for good in 1989. The first of these forces was the plethora of internal troubles, which arose from factors such as the rise of oppositionist groups, a sudden growth of public outcry in 1989 from conformist citizens, neglected environmental issues, corruption, and many more. The other force that weakened East Germany's government was external pressure from both the West and Gorbachev's new reforms in the USSR, *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

The East German punks, also known as "Ostpunks" in Germany (translation meaning "Eastern punks"), were one of these numerous oppositionist groups who operated behind East Germany's iron curtain.[1] It is important to understand that these punks weren't the sole reason why the German Democratic Republic fell, but instead, that they played a role in its downfall. In this paper, the ways that these punks rebelled against the regime will be examined, and then each way that they rebelled will be used to contribute to my argument that they played a role in the dissolution of the GDR. Another thing to note is that these punks didn't only rebel in public demonstrations. They had more subtle tactics of opposing the regime too, such as in the ways that they dressed and fashioned their hair, and this will also be examined as a part of my argument.

The punk rock scene of East Germany can essentially be divided into two eras: the scene before the late 1980s, and the scene during the late 1980s. This is because, in the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s, the GDR punks tended to be more subtle in their acts of opposition, while in the late 1980s, they pushed for more public acts of opposition and protest. The latter happened because by the late 1980s, these punks realized that the regime was getting weaker with every

[1] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.viii.

passing year, and they didn't want to lose this prime opportunity to convince the public to help bring down the GDR.

So, how did the punks even emerge in this closed-off country? Well, the answer is in the global radio broadcasts of the late 1970s. It was incredibly hard for physical copies of music to pass through the Berlin Wall, but it was easy for radio waves to float right on by. The UK's own BBC radio station was a great example, bringing the sound of the Sex Pistols to the Berliners if they had their radios tuned just right.[2] Furthermore, radio waves from West Germany easily flew over East Germany's borders too. This situation proved to be a serious issue for the GDR government, as both Germanies spoke the same language. "West German radio and television broadcasts were received without any problem by the East German public," explained Olaf Leitner, a historian of this region.[3] As a result, it was incredibly easy for those in East Germany to hear what was going on in the West, as there was no language barrier.

The earliest punks in the GDR emerged as a result of these broadcasts. According to Tim Mohr's book, *Burning Down The Haus: Punk Rock, Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, the first punk in East Berlin was Britta Bergmann, but she went by the alias, "Major."[4] This trend of punks making unique nicknames for themselves was an early and simple form of rebellion against the GDR. It was rebellion because the government liked to know everyone's real names, so that they could easily find information about them in their secret files.[5] She, like many punks

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[2] Schmidt, Christian. "Meanings of Fanzines in the Beginning of Punk in the GDR and FRG." OpenEdition Journals. La Presse Musicale Alternative, January 5, 2006, https://journals.openedition.org/volume/636, paragraph 36.
[3] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.21.
[4] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.9.
[5] Ibid., p.25.

of her time, learned of the scene's existence by listening to punk rock from Western radio stations, and it didn't long for her to get hooked. For Major, "a chance encounter with The Sex Pistols meant a shock of recognition so deep that they restructured their whole lives to live as punks—down to the praise and support of anarchy over the current German Democratic Republic."[6] She soon started to dress boldly, she made her hair appear about as abnormal as possible, and she found a way to express her dislike of the East German regime. This was also an early form of opposition to the regime in the scene. After searching and waiting a year or two, she finally met other punks in East Berlin, in 1979.

Here are some photos of GDR punks hanging out. Both photos are from the same website.[8] In the early years of the scene, it was best to either spend time together in underground clubs, or in groups outdoors, which is why you see that both of these photos include punks who are in either of these settings. The conformist public of East Germany weren't too keen on these punks being around, so strength in numbers was a good idea for them.

Major set up a place in her great-grandmother's apartment in 1980, as a hangout place for the punks of East Berlin. Here, punks could, "listen to music, sleep there to take a break

[6] Phelan, Catherine. "Punk Rock and Politics Collide in 1970s East Germany." explorethearchive.com. Algonquin Books, September 12, 2019. https://explorethearchive.com/punk-music-east-germany.

from the oppressive conditions in their family homes, or try to throw off police tails."[7] It was a private club, since punks at this time in the GDR weren't treated with respect by authorities and citizens alike when they were out in public. For example, an article on East German punks explains that, "people were hostile to punks on the street, with some hissing that they "should be gassed.""[8]

The Stasi, a section of the East German government, was the most prominent form of oppression on the East German punks. It is important to understand that in the GDR, "East German police couldn't murder people in the street with impunity."[9] As a result, the Stasi had to get creative with their oppressive tactics. For example, in the early years of the GDR punk scene, punks didn't want to lose their jobs because they could be jailed as "asozial" for not working.[10] At this time, not having a job was a serious offense in the GDR, one that was strictly enforced, and the Stasi used this factor to its advantage by weeding out any punks who were unemployed and punishing them. Furthermore, GDR punks were often hassled by Stasi agents for IDs.[11] Even though the punks and the Stasi hated each other, and the punks were routinely detained for doing nothing illegal, the punks refused to show that they were scared when being arrested. They were routinely beaten by Stasi agents as well, but even then, many refused to give up on the punk scene.[12]

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[7] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.19.
[8] Wünsch, Silke. "'You Should Be Gassed': What It Meant to Be Punk in East Germany." DW.COM. DW.COM, November 8, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/you-should-be-gassed-what-it-meant-to-be-punk-in-east-germany/a-51163866.
[9] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.ix.
[10] Ibid., p.36.
[11] Ibid., p.30.
[12] Ibid., p.31.

The punks continued to be themselves and oppose the regime, despite severe repression from both the Stasi and the conformist public in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is interesting to note, as it seems that they were treated much more harshly as well, when compared to other oppositionist groups in the country. For example, two members of the punk band Namenlos were imprisoned for roughly two years because their participation in the Halle punk festival in 1983, an event we will visit shortly. Comparatively, a regular GDR peace activist, Hans-Jorg Weigel, only received 18-months of probation when he was detained for acts of opposition.[13] This just goes to show who the Stasi prioritized and found more dangerous, at least at that time.

Even though these punks weren't rebelling violently against anyone, they continued to be treated harshly. Why was this deemed okay? Well, for starters, the punks lived out on the margins of society. Simply put, being socially deviant and anti-conformist was the way of the punk. These punks were playing non-conformist music and were dressing up in wild ways that the regime didn't approve of. Furthermore, these punks weren't being productive citizens, and all three of these factors pushed the Stasi to pester and attack them more and more during the early 1980s.

The punks became targets by simply being themselves, as these punks' very existence was a protest in-of itself. Every time that they went out in public in their punk attire, they were essentially protesting the regime, and this was one of those essential forms of subdued opposition that they used in the early 1980s punk era. Here is a photo of these GDR punks hanging out in

[13] Ibid., p.171.

public, notice their heavy dress styles and their shouty hairstyles.[8] By publicly dressing in strange styles and having flashy hairdos, they exposed the conformist public to a very non-conformist way of thinking and existing. The punks seemed to mock their regime's conformist society, showing the state and its people that things in their country clearly weren't working the way they should've been. During this time, all one had to do was to look at these punks or listen to their music lyrics to realize that their country wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. Another form of subdued protest that these punks engaged in during this era was creating dramatic scenes when being arrested. They wanted to attract as much attention as possible from the public.[14]

As a result of the punks and their oppositionist behaviors, the Stasi morally panicked. Starting in the early 1980s, they tried to suppress the punks as much as possible. The Stasi saw them as a "menacing outsider cult causing more and more kids to opt out of the preordained future the government had in mind for them."[15]

By the spring of 1981, the Stasi planned to solve the punk problem for good by, "eliminating punks from public view."[16] After April, the Stasi implemented a prohibition of punks in various public spaces, such as bars, cafes, and youth clubs. If any of these public spaces were caught letting punks hang around, they could lose their operating license. Still, these punks remained devoted to the scene and refused to back down. Stasi officers often warned them to not hang with other punks, but most just did it anyway. Many of these punks would rather go to jail than leave the scene.[10]

For the punks in East Germany, the issue of, "too much future," was their main enemy. This situation can be compared to the British punk scene and its majority idea of "no future,"

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[14] Ibid., p.37.
[15] Ibid., p.131.
[16] Ibid., p.53.

which was the opposite.[17] The British punks felt that they had no future because the British economy was doing very poorly in the 1970s, while in East Germany, "your whole life was planned out for you almost from birth and it felt unbelievably stifling; there was no space, literal or philosophical, to live outside the system or even to express criticism of it."[18] They simply had too much future.

It's not easy to determine when the first East German punk band emerged on the scene. The dates aren't exactly known, but it seems that they occurred somewhere in the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s.[19] These bands mostly came into existence because these punks wanted to express their anti-GDR sentiments. For example, here is an example of GDR punk lyrics. This song, titled, "Waiting in Line at the Currywurst Stand," was written by a punk named "Kobs," and it's about being followed by state agents. The lyrics read, "Waiting in line at the currywurst stand, I don't turn around—I've already seen you, you are my shadow wherever I go, a dark spot on the sun, If I think too loud, you are there, where's the monitor? Behind the camera, in the bathroom you piss next to me, I may not see you, but you're there, you're breathing down my neck, in the U-Bahn you strafe me with your gaze."[20] These lyrics clearly displayed that prevalent anti-regime and anti-Stasi theme, common to GDR punks. The fact that Kobs was complaining about constantly being followed and watched shows that he, and many others like

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[17] Portwood, Jerry. "How East German Punks Helped Destroy the Berlin Wall." Rolling Stone. Rolling Stone, September 17, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/how-east-german-punks-helped-destroy-the-berlin-wall-722926/.

[18] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.40.

[19] Kleiner, John Paul. "Burning Down the Haus: Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall with Tim Mohr (42)." East Germany Podcast - Radio GDR. East Germany Podcast - Radio GDR, June 27, 2021. https://radiogdr.com/burning-down-the-haus-punk-rock-revolution-and-the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall-with-tim-mohr-42/.

[20] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.39.

him in the GDR, had a longing to be free and independent without the state's constant supervision.

During the first few years of the scene, GDR punk band shows were strictly done in private settings. In East Germany, "all musicians who performed publicly had to be in possession of a performance license, obtained when the musicians and their groups had successfully performed for a special state committee of cultural functionaries and artists," explained Olaf Leitner.[21] Since these punks clearly played unsanctioned music, they were forced to stick to underground gigs. To the right is an image of an East German punk band performing in a squatted cellar.[22] This is a clear example of the things that these punks had to do if they wanted to express themselves without the threat of Stasi suppression.

As stated in Tim Mohr's book, the first public punk show in East Berlin took place in March 1981.[23] One of these early punk bands which rose to fame in the underground scene was Namenlos, which translates to "Nameless." It was formed by Jana, A-Micha, and Mita, and this band created lyrics which not only insulted the GDR, but also went as far as to compare the Stasi to the Nazi SS.[24] They wanted their music to be aggressively oppositional to the regime, as they believed that no reforms would work. Namenlos wanted to show the people of East Germany

[21] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.22.
[22] Wünsch, Silke. "Rammstein: Sons of East German Punk: DW: 26.07.2019." DW.COM. DW.COM, July 26, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/rammstein-sons-of-east-german-punk/a-49746002.
[23] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.45.
[24] Ibid., p.97.

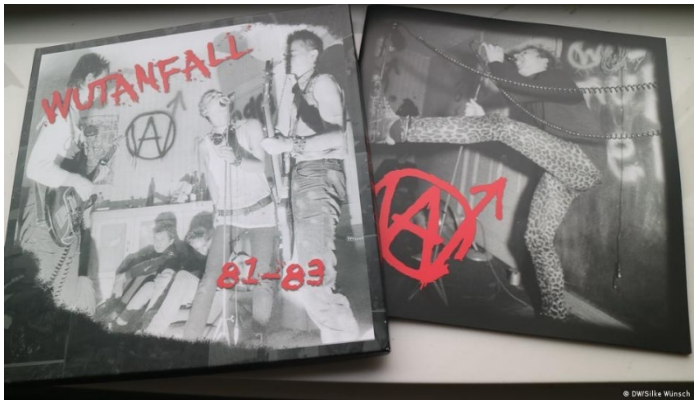
that the destruction of the regime and a subsequent rebirth of the country would be the only way. Here is a photo of Namenlos performing in 1983, with Jana on vocals and A-Micha on guitar.[25] Note the crazy hairstyles, a central part of punk fashion.

The use of graffiti was a prominent form of this subdued opposition in the GDR punk scene. By 1981, the punk scene was exploding in East Berlin, and graffiti was everywhere. It was essentially an unrestricted spread of public expression. Political anti-GDR and anarchist beliefs were topics frequently covered in these spray-painted public statements. The phrase, "stirb nicht im warteraum der zukunft," which translates into, "don't die in the waiting room of the future," was a common one used in the graffiti of East Berlin.[26] This phrase shows how the punks warned the public to take action and make their own future by rebelling against the regime, instead of just sitting around and waiting for it to happen without them. As time went on, the graffiti created by the punks started to become more aggressive. These punks began to use Nazi imagery and anarchist slogans in order to annoy the authorities.[27] An example of one of these anarchist graffiti slogans is shown in Mohr's book. It states the phrase, "destroy what's destroying you," on a wall in East Berlin.[28] This is a good example of the types of anarchist ideals which these

[25] Hamlin, Andrew. "East German Punk Scene Pushed Resistance in an Authoritarian State." The Seattle Globalist. The Seattle Globalist, October 24, 2018. https://seattleglobalist.com/2018/10/24/east-german-punk-scene-shows-power-of-resistance-in-a-dictatorship/77786.
[26] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.68.
[27] Ibid., p.58.
[28] Ibid., p.85.

East German punks held dear, as it was telling the public conformists to take down the regime which was trying to control them.

The use of graffiti wasn't strictly used by GDR punks as a way to express their anarchist beliefs. A popular underground GDR punk band from the early 1980s, Wutanfall, had their first performance in 1981. It was not only incredible to witness, but it also led to their logo being graffitied all over Leipzig.[29] Here are a couple of images of Wutanfall performing in the early 1980s, alongside the classic punk "Anarchist-A" symbols.[8] The images of this band performing in a squatted flat and the anarchist symbols which were drawn on top of these images truly went hand-in-hand for a proper portrayal of these East German punk bands.

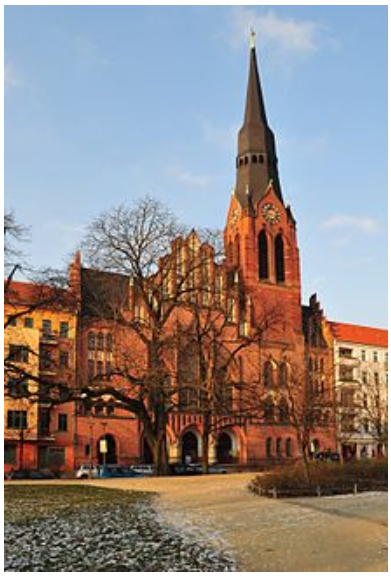


Within a couple years, the usage of graffiti, especially oppositionist-themed graffiti, was seen as a serious threat to state security by the Stasi. In late 1983, a punk group from the minor city of Weimar went around town, spraying graffiti everywhere. Some of the oppositionist phrases they used included, "be realistic, demand the impossible," and, "strike back."Error! Bookmark not defined. These examples of graffiti were trying to tell the public to wake up and right for their rights. Eventually, this punk group was caught, detained, and then interrogated for five months. After that, most of them were sent to prison for half a year. All of this for just spraying some graffiti.

As a result of the Stasi's tightening grasp on the punks during this time, Deacon "Uwe Kulisch," from Pfisgnst Church in East Berlin, started "Open Work." This was was an open

[29] Ibid., p.51.

space, “for use by young people who were not part of the congregation”.[30] To the right is a photo of the Pfingst Church, the first church to harbor the punks of the GDR, as it sits today.[31] It’s also important to note that after a meeting between the East German Church and Erich Honecker in 1978, churches could operate at free spaces for the people.[30] Unfortunately, the punks’ freedom in the church didn’t mean that they were off scot-free. As explained by Olaf Leitner, “whoever left the church building, however, ran into the arms of the authorities, specifically the state security service.”[32]



As Open Work grew in underground circles, the punks started to really interact with other oppositionist groups in Open Work. They both shared and created new anti-GDR ideas, some of which would lead the punks to undertaking some of their most important protest actions later in the decade. Simultaneously, the punk scene continued to grow in size in East Germany. By late the summer of 1982, the Stasi estimated that there were 1,000 true punks in the country, alongside 10,000 punk sympathizers.[33] That’s a lot of oppositionists for a small country like the GDR, and the effects of their existence would begin to surface by 1983.

1983 was the peak of this first scene and era of East German punks, because they began to create and participate in more public and daring protests than ever before. Their actions from

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[30] Ibid., p.54.
[31] “Pentecostal Church (Berlin) - Pfingstkirche (Berlin).” second.wiki. second.wiki. Accessed November 11, 2021. https://second.wiki/wiki/pfingstkirche_berlin.
[32] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.32.
[33] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.75.

this year onward would lead to their very well-orchestrated and public acts of opposition in the late 1980s. Why did their public acts of opposition seem start in this year? Well, it comes down to the fact that these punks started to lose their fear of the Stasi and the regime. This happened because of the many arrests and interrogations which they had to endure. "One of the main sources of fear of the Stasi was the "not knowing,"" explained Mohr.[34] They figured out how the Stasi operated, learned of the not-so-dire consequences they would face, and as a result began to act courageously on a widespread scale.

One of the first examples of punk public opposition occurred in early 1983. A prominent group of punks wanted to show the conformist public that they were on the public's side, that they were only against the regime. Their plans freaked the Stasi out because it was a large-scale public action which would improve the image of the punks in the public's eye, and this went directly against the Stasi's plans for the punks. The Stasi wanted the wanted punks to be projected as the enemy to the conformist public, but in the end, this group of punks got away with their plan. "Let's lay a wreath at the eternal flame to the victims of fascism on Unter den Linden," decided these punks.[35] Unter den Linden was a popular public place, one which was common for tourists to visit. They accomplished their mission in the end, and even though they were arrested, news of their protest demonstration spread across the GDR. As a result, some members of the conformist public started to slowly soften their views of the punks, which would come to help these punks later on in the decade.

Unfortunately, in March of 1983, the influential Pfingst Church in East Berlin was closed for good by the Stasi. As a result, no more Open Work activities were held there.[36] However,

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[34] Ibid., p.184.
[35] Ibid., p.130.
[36] Ibid., p.112.

two upsides arose from this situation in the end. First, the punks founded a "Punkrat," which was basically a punk council. Under this council, the punks could do what they wanted without needing the help of the church.[37] It's the first example of a punk organization in the GDR. Second, now that many Berlin punks no longer had an official place to associate with, many of them made plans to go to Halle, Germany, for an upcoming punk festival.

On April 30, 1983, the first East German national punk festival was held by Seigfried Neher, the minister at Christus Church in Halle.[38] This event was another significant example of early public punk protest, one which would also help to lay the framework for their organized oppositionist future. With punks being both the main performing acts and the main audience, the concert was predictably outrageous, and it became a nationally discussed event in the aftermath. To the right is a photo of an East German punk at a punk rock concert in 1989, possibly mere months before the wall fell.[39] This photo is significant because kids like the punk kid in this photo were likely the majority audience at these shows.

The festival was a huge success for the scene, and Seigfried Neher even planned to hold a second festival in October. However, this April festival created the peak of punk paranoia for the East German government, which bled into the

[37] Ibid., p.113.
[38] Ibid., p.111.
[39] "Face to Face: Wende Museum." The Wende Museum. The Wende Museum. Accessed November 11, 2021. https://www.wendemuseum.org/programs/face-face.

following summer.[40] The Stasi started to see the scene as a threat to national security, and it didn't take long for things to get very rough for the biggest leaders of these punk bands.

Chaos, the lead singer of Wutanfall, quickly became priority number one for the Stasi even before this festival took place.[41] They considered this band to be the most important one in the scene, because punks travelled from across East Germany to see them. By 1983, the Stasi crackdowns on him became commonplace. Things just got worse as time went on. By the end of the year, he was both mentally and physically worn out from the degradation. The Stasi even started to come for him at Wutanfall gigs, and he began to withdraw from the scene after a while. "The best frontman in East Germany was done," explained Mohr.[42]

The summer of 1983, which took place in the aftermath of the Halle punk festival, was a turning point for the Stasi. The leader of the Stasi, Erich Mielke, was done dealing with the punks, and he set a new plan in stone for dealing them. The new goals were to, "ferret out activities that could be punished with imprisonment; to identify and take action against the lyricists and the church, peace activists, environmental activists, "and the other garbage," as well as any international connections the punks had."[43] Mielke believed that there was no reason to treat the punks with restraint anymore, since they were starting to hold public mass protests and demonstrations of resistance to the regime.

The Stasi continued to use the same tactics they used on Chaos with the bands who performed at the 1983 festival, but to an even harsher degree. For example, the leaders of Namenlos, Jana and A-Micha, were both subjected to this abuse of being detained and constantly

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[40] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.119.
[41] Ibid., p.123.
[42] Ibid., p.127.
[43] Ibid., p.148.

interrogated. However, unlike what happened to Chaos, both leaders of Namenlos were imprisoned for roughly two years as well.[44] The Stasi had all of the band members' fingerprints taken as well as their scents (for search dogs), and the Stasi took their mugshots photos too. These two photos are examples of mugshots of GDR punks, which taken by the Stasi. We can also see the typical East German punk streetwear here: the buttons and pins, the crazy hair, the leather jackets, and the dark clothes. These photos support my argument that merely existing in the conformist public was a form of protest that was taken seriously, as it helps to show us how the Stasi treated these punks. It's likely that the members of Namenlos had the same type of mugshots as these two did when they were arrested.

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BStU-Kopie MfS SED-KL 1201

In the end, this tactic of attacking band leaders not only proved to be a mistake for the Stasi, but it was also a waste of time and resources. It ultimately didn't help to prevent the punks from becoming a big oppositionist force in the latter half of the decade. The Stasi failed to understand that in the punk scene, it was, "always about bottom-up politics."[45] Everyone had a fair share in the band and in the community, regardless of social status, ethnic background, or position. As a result, even if the leaders were detained or sent to jail, the other members of the bands tended to adapt to their new realities and would sometimes even take up leadership roles.

[44] Ibid., p.171.
[45] Ibid., p.135.

The punk scene as a whole would also react in a similar way, continuing to thrive and grow despite the loss of its biggest bands and leaders in 1983.

Sometimes though, the Stasi used different tactics to get their way. Pankow was the leader of Planlos, another GDR punk band. Before the 1983 festival took place, the Stasi approached him about becoming an informant, but he refused. According to a BBC documentary on East Germany, "No other country in history has spied on its citizens as East Germany has, with 1 in 6 of its population informing on the rest. High up on the watchlist of the state's enemies, was the emerging punk rock movement".[46]

As the mid-1980s grew closer, the actions of the punks started to take hold on the mainstream East German youth. In late 1983, the second national punk festival was scheduled to take place, again at Halle's Christus Church. However, the Stasi wasn't going to let a repeat of the April festival happen. In the end, it still went down, but only a hundred and fifty people were able to make it to the church, as well as a few bands.[47] It was hard to get past the police. Many of these folks who got into the church were beaten by police batons trying to get in, but they still managed to attend the concert. They took a beating and were bleeding just to see a music concert. This gig contributed to a changing feeling for many younger folks in the country, as some of them were punks at this second Halle concert, and they saw other people being beaten just for wanting to attend a music concert. This made them question the state of their society. One fourteen-year-old Halle resident, who wasn't a punk originally, saw what happened at this

[46] "Documentary - The Lost World of Communism Part 1/3 (East Germany)." YouTube. YouTube, September 28, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znb_X48WXUg, 31:25.
[47] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.187.

concert and decided that he was going to be a punk. It turns out that he wasn't alone with this feeling either.[48]

The big bands of the GDR punk scene; Wutan, Planlos, Namenlos, and Schleim-Keim were gone by 1984, even if some of them were gone for just a couple years. Many of their members were either in prison, couldn't travel to other places in the GDR, or were kicked out of the GDR and sent to West Germany. "The concerted action against punk in 1983 and 1984 far exceeded that undertaken against any other opposition group since the installation of dictator Erich Honecker in 1971," explained Mohr.[49]

However, it was too late. After everything was said and done by the regime's forces, the punk scene was still around, and it could even be found in small villages across East Germany. Again, this is because of GDR punk's "bottom-up" structure. It didn't really matter if the big leaders on top were gone, the scene would simply continue to go on from the majority underneath. It didn't take long for the number of punks to start rising again either, with the population growth resuming in 1984.[48] The Stasi may have silenced the loudest and most dangerous voices of the punk scene, but they simultaneously underestimated the lasting impacts that those voices had, especially on the younger generations who were already often on the borders of the scene.[49]

During the mid-1980s, the punk scene was changing in the GDR. It was now a split-up scene. Even though the first-generation punks were still very much around, the loss of their leading bands to the Stasi at this time led to the creation of a new type of GDR punk band. This was known as the officially licensed punk band. This new section of the scene that emerged in

[48] Ibid., p.189.
[49] Ibid., p.194.

late 1983 was led by bands who auditioned for public performing licenses, but at the same time, these bands believed that they operated outside the realm of official GDR music. Even though these new officially licensed bands were inspired by that first generation of punks, the rest of the punk scene saw them as traitors.[50] The original punks didn't like the sanctioned punks because they felt that the sanctioned punks were siding with the enemy, the regime, for personal benefits.

Feeling B was an example of one of these new officially licensed punk bands. Aljoscha Rompe founded the band with Paul Landers, an eighteen-year-old guitarist, Flake, a sixteen-year old keyboard player, and Kriening, a drummer. Here is a photo of the band in the 1980s, with Rompe 2nd from left, Flake in the lower center, and Paul on the top right.[51] The latter two of the three would go on to co-found one of the biggest rock bands in German history, after reunification in 1990s. Feeling B auditioned for an "Einstufung," which was the GDR name for this official performance license, and they got it in the end.**Error! Bookmark not defined.** They didn't want to be a political band. They just wanted to party, and this performing license was their ticket to a good time for years to come. They generally toned down their lyrics as a result. Mohr stated that, "they were happy to live their dreams within the system."[52]

[50] Ibid., p.235.
[51] "Feeling B ." Last.fm. Last.fm. Accessed November 11, 2021. https://www.last.fm/music/Feeling+B.
[52] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.210.

With the Pfingst Church gone, the punk community needed a new place to meet. Soon, a new home base was founded: Erloser Church, in Rummelsburg. This place was nicknamed "Profikeller,"[53] and only unlicensed bands could play here. A-Micha and Jana of Namenlos were released from prison in late 1984, and they quickly joined. These punks who returned from prison were angry, and they were now fully determined to bring the regime down, even if it would cost them everything. Pankow, of the punk band Planlos, felt the same upon being discharged from the army in late 1985. He started to, "shift more and more of his energy into straight up political activities".[54] These punks' newly found determination to bring the system down would directly lead to their public acts of opposition in the late 1980s.

The punk council, originally formed after Pfingst Church fell, was now based at Profikeller as well. As a result, the punks started to become a highly organized force in the GDR for the first time. By 1985, Profikeller was known as, "the beacon that had been missing since the closure of Pfingst Church."[55] Subsequently, the Stasi put their surveillance of Erloser under the anti-terrorism branch.[56] After a little while, the Profikeller punks created "mOAning Star", an underground newspaper. I couldn't find any images of this newspaper, but I found out that the letters "O" and "A" were capitalized because they were the initials for "Open Work", the church oppositionist group, in German: "Offence Arbeit."[57] It became a satirical political newspaper for the underground, as its coverage of the regime was provocative and rude. This newspaper was the first of its kind in the GDR. Furthermore, because it was marked as being "for internal church

[53] Ibid., p.214.
[54] Ibid., p.227.
[55] Ibid., p.216.
[56] Ibid., p.221.
[57] Ibid., p.223.

use only,"[58] which basically shielded from legal action by the Stasi. After a few years, this newspaper reached a print run of a thousand copies, further converting old and new punks alike to fight the system.[59]

As the mid-1980s wore on, more aggressive punk bands than ever before formed. One of these new bands was L'attentat, from Leipzig and its members created incredibly explicit lyrics. Lyrics that even other unlicensed punk bands would likely avoid using. For example, the lyrics of their song, "Ohne Sinn," which translates to the word, "Pointless," state, "I'm old enough to go it alone, I don't want to see all this shit anymore. The way you rob me of my future and ask me to fight for things you no longer believe in yourself."[60] These lyrics are aggressively anti-regime, calling out the state for its hypocritical actions during this time. The punk, "Ratte," was a member of this band, and he was incredibly straightforward about his opposition to the state. "If he was interrogated and asked whether he was opposed to the state he would just say, "Ja.""[60] He was also famous for being the punk in this photo, one of the most-well known photos of the GDR punk scene.[17] Here we can see the stark contrast between this new generation of oppositionists, with its punk participants and their heavy fashion styles, and the older generation of conformists, in

[58] Ibid., p.224.
[59] Ibid., p.225.
[60] Ibid., p.229.

the East German society. It wasn't hard to see why the Stasi attacked these punks for just existing in public spaces.

Another band, Schleim-Keim, reformed when its leader was released from prison. This band created a new song, "Prugelknaben," which translated to the phrase, "Baton Boys." It was about kids being beaten by police batons, and some if the lyrics read, "We don't want it the way you want it anymore, we want our freedom, we are the people, we are the power. We demand justice."[61] These lyrics are important not only because of their themes of protest, but also because the phrase, "we are the people," is found. This phrase would become a common call for unification during the East German protests of the Autumn of 1989.

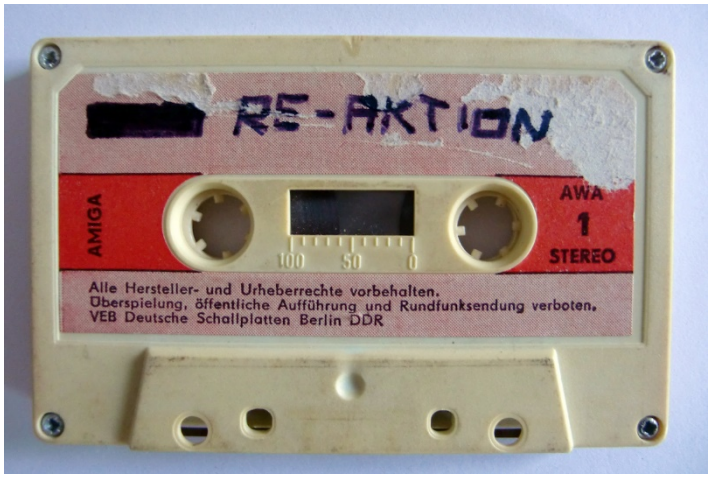
As the late 1980s approached, it seems that the Stasi was starting to slack-off in their efforts to repress the punks. For example, in 1986, thousands of people went to Jugend 86, a three-day church-sponsored music festival. Numerous punk bands played there, and afterwards, a local citizen stated that the authorities were, "afraid to intervene."[62] There was a lack of Stasi presence at this event, especially compared to the second Halle concert in 1983, where punks were beaten by batons for just trying to their favorite bands play. The situation at Jugend 86 only helped the punks to become more courageous in their acts of opposition, as they saw that the Stasi was starting to lose its steam in repressing the scene.

Another factor which led to the public punk demonstrations of the late 1980s was that punk bands started to arrive in Berlin from all over the country. They wanted to become members of what was essentially the biggest city in the scene, and many joined Profikeller as

[61] Ibid., p.232.
[62] Ibid., p.242.

well. This happened because, by the mid-1980s, not having a job wasn't a big threat anymore. The state largely stopped prosecuting the unemployed during this time, and as a result, "more and more people simply left the provinces and made for Berlin."[63]

The late 1980s finally arrived, and for the punks, it all started with the emerging mass circulation of underground music cassettes. These cassettes could be easily duplicated, unlike vinyls, and cassettes were also able to be played back as soon as recording was finished. Since there was no official government system for the distribution of these cassettes, they became huge in the underground punk scene.[64] For the punk bands, cassettes basically, "changed the game."[65] It allowed underground music to create a huge audience easily and quickly, and this also led to an important side-effect. As the number of cassettes grew in circulation, non-punks got ahold of them as well. Many of these non-punks had never listened to this music before, and when they heard the oppositionist lyrics, it made some of them start to question their lives and the regime too. This only helped to grow oppositional force within the country. For example, shown here is a photo of a tape by the punk band Re-Aktion. This tape had songs with anti-regime lyrics, and they simply read, "Say good-bye to the Party, shout opposition!"[66] It's not hard to see how members of the public who got a hold of these taped and listened to them may started to feel against the state. Furthermore,



[63] Ibid., p.245.
[64] Ibid., p.237.
[65] Ibid., p.239.
[66] Ibid., p.238.

according to the Stasi, by 1988, "three quarters of all music released in the GDR originated outside the state-controlled media system," which just goes to show how far-reaching these cassettes had become.[65]

Some of these punk cassettes also got to the non-punks through radio waves. In 1986, the official youth radio station of the GDR, called "DT64," began to play songs from licensed punk bands. For the first time in history, East Germany's own punk bands were reaching the masses via the radio. It broadcasted music 20 hours every day, beginning in winter 1987-1988.[67] Even though this radio station only broadcasted licensed punk bands, this didn't mean that the traditional punk oppositionist themes couldn't get through. For example, the members of Feeling B, one of the most popular licensed punk bands of the time, were able to sneak in their political views by using clever lyrics. It didn't take a genius to decipher these lyrics either. For example, the lyrics of Feeling B's song, "Artig," read, "We always wanted to be nice, because that's the only way they like us! Everyone lives his life alone, and that's why the stars are silent."[68] The band was making a statement here about how they had to change their lyrical outlooks into positive ones, in order to perform publicly. This was done just to keep the regime off their backs. Of course, the Stasi noticed the danger of licensed punk bands reaching radio waves, as one of their reports from the time stated that, "Amateur licenses are easily procured… which has fostered an independent scene in Berlin… a scene also propagated on youth radio… as a result, the number of punk sympathizers has risen."[69]

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[67] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.27.
[68] "Feeling B Artig Translation of Lyrics." Feeling B Artig translation of lyrics. My Favourite Lyrics. Accessed November 24, 2021. https://en.myfavouritelyrics.com/feeling_b/artig/.
[69] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.240.

From June 24 to 28, 1987, East Berlin's Lutheran Church planned to hold a national conference. This conference was going to coincide with Berlin's 750th anniversary in 1987, and in order to gain support from the regime in holding this conference, the church finally turned its back on supporting and fostering the underground oppositionist groups. This action by the church was seen as a betrayal, and as a result, the punk scene, "had little trouble finding supporters for an alternative conference."[70] In the end, they decided to create an event that would happen at the same time as the church's conference, the "Church Conference from Below."[70] The organizers of this event were mostly the punks from Profikeller, and after a period of going back and forth with the church, they were able to secure two churches for the event, Pfingst church and Galilaa church, which were near each other.[71]

In the end, this event was a huge success for the punks. Mohr explained that, "On Saturday, the day of the main event, as many as four thousand people were on the grounds of Pfingst Church at any given time."[72] Furthermore, the overall attendance had, "surpassed six thousand, tripling expectations."[72] As with what happened in Jugend 86, the Stasi didn't do much to stop the Conference from Below from happening either. This event was significant to the punks' path of playing a role in taking the regime, because it was the first time that the scene had held such a massive public event of opposition. They were finally making protest demonstrations on a mass public scale, and their ability to organize this event would lead them to create their most impressive act of opposition, just two years later.

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[70] Ibid., p.251.
[71] Ibid., p.258.
[72] Ibid., p.259.

But first, these punks needed to create a new punk headquarters. Profikeller was too crowded at this point, so they formed the "Church from Below" at a temporary building, after Conference from Below was held.[72] The Church from Below was essentially a punk organization which helped to create collaboration among numerous oppositionist groups. At this point, it didn't matter which oppositionist group one was in, because in the end, all of these groups were more or less fighting for the same cause: taking down the regime once and for all. After this punk church was formed in 1987, things would go quickly for the scene, because now, the punks had an organized structure which could easily carry out numerous protest demonstrations with ease. Furthermore, they could work on creating demonstrations alongside other oppositionist groups, making protests larger in size. To the dismay of the Stasi, this only furthered their oppositionist influence on the public, who was witnessing it all go down.[73]

In early 1989, the Church from Below moved into a new permanent home on the grounds of St. Elisabeth Church. This new location provided the scene a nightclub, a mini-concert hall, and an intellectual salon.[74] At this point, this organization operated as an independent national communications hub for oppositionist groups.

According to an official East German government report from January 1989, punk was identified by authorities as the top problem. It stated that, "The Church from Below—with its anarchist mode of operation—has become a catchment basin for these punks."[75] 1989 was the year where the punks were at the zenith of their oppositionist power, and they had a clever plan in mind for the elections in May. Historically in the GDR, the new leader officially always got

[73] Ibid., p.262.
[74] Ibid., p.295.
[75] Ibid., p.299.

the majority vote. There were no political parties to oppose the pre-determined leader of the country, and when voter ballots didn't support him, the vote counters would simply twist what they wrote into supporting the party.[76] With the 1989 elections, the Church from Below planned to, "monitor the vote-counting at a large number of polling stations."[76] They were 100% successful in the end, bringing clear evidence of election fraud to the public eye. They did this by making a public demonstration about it, and subsequently, Western media, who were in East Berlin at the time, caught it on tape. Then, it went on the Western news, and East Germans heard it on their radios.[77] The punks had just executed their finest example of public demonstration ever, participating alongside other oppositionist groups and showing the people of East Germany that they had little or no say in choosing who was to rule over them.

The influence of this event didn't take long to surface. There was an immediate protest of around 1,000 people in Leipzig.[77] As the summer came by, these protests began to not only occur on a regular schedule, but they also grew in size. The Stasi also messed up on a church-grounds protest from July 7, arresting and beating innocent bystanders who attended this protest.[78] This only contributed to the growth in protests across the nation. The majority of conformist citizens finally realized that these punks were onto something this whole time, since these conformists were now also suffering blows from the Stasi, alongside the underground groups. By the end of September 1989, protests were getting out of control. Thousands now attended these regularly scheduled protests near the end of the month, and several of them were beaten to the point of being hospitalized.[79] All this time, punks and other oppositionist groups helped to lead these

[76] Ibid., p.304.
[77] Ibid., p.305.
[78] Ibid., p.318.
[79] Ibid., p.320.

repeating protests on church-grounds. They started to chant, "we're staying here,"[79] alongside members of the conformist public, all of them reminding the government that they weren't going to settle for moving to the west. They wanted to stay in East Germany and replace the regime.

A-Micha, of the band Namenlos, realized that revolution could easily happen as October began, as long as the flame remained lit. He tried to contribute in any way that he could, even making fliers for the public to see. These flyers read, "We cannot let up now! We cannot abandon the political prisoners to their fate! You can help us determine the way forward! Together with Leipzig, Dresden, and other cities we will enforce our will! KEEP THE PRESSURE ON! INTO THE STREETS!"[80] The subject matter of this flyer vividly shows a yearning to convince the people of East Germany to go out and protest as much as possible.

During the GDR's official celebration of its 40th anniversary, on October 7, protests went down all over the country. The Stasi tried again to brutally repress these demonstrations, and one participant even died. By this point, the conformist citizens were sick of the violence which the police used on the peaceful protestors of the GDR, witnessing it for themselves in some form or another.[80] Protests only continued to grow larger throughout the month, and on November 4, half a million people gathered in East Berlin to protest the regime. The final sentence of the fall issue of the mOAning Star stated, "Neither Stasi chief Erich Mielke nor dictator Erich Honecker can halt the progress of anarchy any longer."[81] In typical oppositionist fashion, this punk-run magazine mocked Erich Honecker and his regime.

[80] Ibid., p.322.
[81] Ibid., p.326.

Everyone knows the story of how the wall fell: a mass-misunderstood GDR broadcast stating that folks could now apply for travel passes to visit the west led the East Germans to show up in mass numbers at the Berlin wall, eventually pushing their way through and entering West Berlin for the first time, and then partying all night with the Westerners. They thought that the border was simply no longer in-effect. So, let's add a humorous punk twist to this historic event. The evening that it came down, officially licensed punk band Feeling B played a concert in West Berlin, and they were very much under the influence of alcohol.[82] The band members were confused until the end of their show, drunk and not understanding why they were suddenly seeing so many East German friends in the audience. They couldn't believe it when they found out that the wall came down. For the time being, the East German punks could celebrate being one of the oppositionist forces which, through their direct involvement, helped to bring an end to the GDR regime.[83]

However, not all of the punks were happy with what was to come. The fall of the wall was a bittersweet moment for some. It's important to keep in mind that many GDR punks hated the west almost as much as they hated the GDR regime. They didn't want to replace their government with a Western democratic one. Instead, their goal was to stay in the east and fix their country. There were even times where these GDR punks were offered by Stasi agents to leave the country and emigrate to the west.[84] However, even when offered the ability to leave, many punks refused to do so. For example, Pankow the lead singer of Planlos, was never

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[82] Ibid., p.329.
[83] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.19.
[84] Mohr, Tim. Burning down the Haus : Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall First edition. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018, p.218.

interested in the west. He only wanted to stay in the East, take down the system, and replace it with a better one.[85] Also, it's important to note that, "capitalism was judged by many in the GDR to be overpoweringly inhuman," according to Olaf Leitner.[86] When Germany reunified in late 1990, and the whole country became westernized, some of these punks were disappointed as they didn't support this reunification. The GDR punks weren't alone in this feeling too. Bärbel Bohley, an East German oppositionist figure, reflected on this subject in 2007. She stated that, "Although many people had yearned for the day of reunification, many now realized that this day also spelled the end of the "fall of 1989" and its promise of social self-determination."[87]

Still, all was not lost for these punks. For example, some of the members of these East German punk bands encountered large success after reunification. Feeling B was one of these bands. Paul Landers, the guitarist, and Flake, the keyboardist, helped to form the metal band Rammstein in the 1990s, alongside singer Till Lindemann, who was the front man of another East German punk band, "First Arsh."[22]

The GDR punks played a role in the fall of the GDR by staying in their country and fighting the system. These punks not only participated in opposition by helping to lead public events, they also played a role in the dissolution of the GDR by simply being themselves. No matter how hard the Stasi tried, they couldn't get rid of the punks once and for all. These punks played their own music, bravely dressed how they wanted, organized their own oppositionist headquarters, and proudly stood by their anti-regime ideals in the face of danger.

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[85] Ibid., p.134.
[86] Ramet, Sabrina P. Rocking the State : Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p.36.
[87] Bohley, Bärbel. "'UNDER OPEN SKIES': REFLECTIONS ON GERMAN UNIFICATION." *Bullletin of the German Historical Institute*, no. 42 (2008), p.30.

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