There is a life before death: The Wolf Biermann story

John Shreve

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

This is an unpublished manuscript in which copyright subsists. Any further reprinting of its contents must be approved by the author.

Mansfield Library
University of Montana
Date: 1980
THERE IS A LIFE BEFORE DEATH
THE WOLF BIERMANN STORY

by

John Shreve

B.A., University of Montana, 1976

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1980

Approved by:

[Signatures]
Dennis R. O'Connell
Chairman, Board of Examiners

[Signature]
Dean, Graduate School

5-6-80
Date
This study investigates the songs and poems of the Communist writer Wolf Biermann during his years in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). They are examined as products of his orthodox Communist upbringing and his experience in the GDR. Of central interest is the degree to which the songs and poems reflect concrete political reality in the GDR as well as Biermann's democratic political convictions.

This is the first comprehensive study of Wolf Biermann, his writing, and his political views. The basic material for this study was gathered from numerous articles from newspapers, popular magazines, and professional journals. Documentary sources were supplemented by seeing Wolf Biermann in concert on three occasions, listening to him participate in political panel discussions, viewing two films concerning his life and work, studying his recordings and the many interviews he has given, by speaking with people who know and have worked with him, by discussing the "Biermann case" with many workers and professional people in the GDR, and through personal conversations with Wolf Biermann. Using a biographical format, this study examines almost all of Biermann's writings during his years in the GDR as well as his first writings published after his expatriation from the GDR.

A central theme of Wolf Biermann is the paradox that the ruling Socialist Unity Party at once hinders and builds Socialism, by raising Socialist hopes and then not fulfilling them. Biermann is one of the few "all-German" writers. The division of the German people is portrayed in his writings as a national tragedy which can only be overcome by the creation of a united Socialist Germany.

The strongest influence on Wolf Biermann's personal and political development has been the legacy of his father, a Jewish Communist who had been active in the anti-fascist resistance and was murdered in Auschwitz. Biermann's songs and poems are products of two traditions: that of Marxist humanism and the German folk song. Although his writing is based on an unshakable faith in Communism, he is not dogmatic. In his songs and poems he entertains no illusions about the political situation in the GDR, and yet repeatedly reaffirms his belief in a continual process of social development which can, if properly influenced, lead to a democratic Socialist society.
Any quotations which are not footnoted are taken from conversations with Wolf. Without his help and that of Sonja Schwarz-Arendt this thesis could not have been written.

The work put into this thesis is dedicated to Chantal Fourcault, Robert Aquado and Christiane Friedrich.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract............................................................................................................. page i1
Preface................................................................................................................ page vi
Chapter One: The Heritage................................................................................ page 1
Chapter Two: From Berlin to Hamburg.............................................................. page 10
Chapter Three: Beginnings................................................................................ page 20
Chapter Four: The Storm.................................................................................. page 36
Chapter Five: Die Drahtharfe........................................................................... page 61
Chapter Six: Chaussestrasse 131................................................................. page 90
Chapter Seven: The Blues............................................................................... page 97
Chapter Eight: 1968 and West Germany....................................................... page 119
Chapter Nine: Mit Marx- und Engelszungen:
  1 Corinthians 13: 1-3................................................................................... page 122
Chapter Ten: Der Dra-Dra............................................................................... page 145
Chapter Eleven: Daniel, etc. ......................................................................... page 159
Chapter Twelve: Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen...................................... page 164
Song for my Comrades.................................................................................... page 175
Chapter Thirteen: Für meine Genossen......................................................... page 179
Chapter Fourteen: "aaahhh..."................................................................. page 198
Chapter Fifteen: Non-person....................................................................... page 204
Chapter Sixteen: Liebeslieder....................................................................... page 212
Chapter Seventeen: Smoldering Fire............................................................ page 219
Chapter Eighteen: Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod.................................. page 224
Chapter Nineteen: The Prenzlau Sermon..................................................... page 229
Chapter Twenty: Cologne............................................................................. page 234
Ballad of the Prussian Icarus........................................................................ page 238
Chapter Twenty-One: Exile......................................................................... page 240
A Concert: "Aren't your asses cold...?"..........................page 255
Altona.................................................................page 265
Postscript: Deutsches Miserere.................................page 276
Bibliography.........................................................page 286
PREFACE

"Instead of this business of getting loose from the people to devote myself to art, I want to get loose from art to devote myself to the people." Woody Guthrie

1.

Wolf Biermann is a writer and singer of political songs. He was raised by his mother to be a Communist and the first songs he learned were those of the Communist workers' movement. He learned them during the years of the Nazi dictatorship, that is, at a time when they were forbidden. The songs were sung behind closed doors and they instilled a sense of belonging, of solidarity. They were handed down as a part of a legacy of struggle for a better world. Wolf Biermann accepted the Communist dream as a matter of faith and to this day, despite so many setbacks and disappointments, his faith has not been shaken. It is this faith which is at the heart of all the songs he writes and sings and one must bear this in mind if one is to understand why Wolf Biermann sings and why he sings what he does.

Biermann first began writing songs at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four, that is, relatively late. He was moved to writing for political reasons. He came to the conclusion that songs are an effective political tool, a way in which he could promote his political ideals. He is therefore a thoroughly political writer. Or to take it a step further, one could say that he is not a writer who happens to write political songs and poems, but a political activist who writes songs and poems. Among many people the doubt lingers on as to whether it is wise to mix "art" and politics. This question has received particular attention in Germany where it has long been felt that "art" and politics mix no better than do oil
and water. This is not the place to continue such an esoteric debate. Let it only be said that for Wolf Biermann the question presents no problem.

In my case the impulse to write comes from political passions... There are other poets, they come from the opposite direction, from artistic passions to the political...You know, in the end the question of art or politics is a stupid question, a sham question. After all it's all the same thing. It is at most interesting with regard to beginnings, to original impulses and they are in my case unequivocally, one-hundred-percent political.

2.

If music could only bring peace
I'd only be a musician.
If songs could do more than dull the pain!
If melodies could only break these chains!

Pete Seeger

It would be impossible to measure the strength of political songs. Those who believe in their power surely overrate it. Sceptics undoubtedly underestimate it. The fact that such songs come into existence and survive is the strongest testimony that they do have power. Songs inevitably grow out of struggle and crisis. Over three thousand came into being during the French Revolution. The revolutions of 1848 sparked a flurry of song-writing. Black slavery was the seedbed for countless songs. The Spanish civil war, the great depression, the struggle for Chilean democracy, the civil rights movement in the United States, the struggle of women under patriarchal oppression, the working-class movement all over the world, all these struggles were accompanied by songs which gave expression to the people's yearnings and despair and determination. Songs of struggle, political songs are a part of human existence. But what effect do they, can they have? During the civil rights movement singing was an integral part of the fight. We can never know what effect the song "We Shall Overcome" had on the movement as a whole. One can only speculate as to how much its singing strengthened the solidarity of those who marched for their freedom.
One can only guess how much violence its singing prevented and how greatly that suppressed anger might have hurt the movement. The strength of songs? The fear of them and of those who sing them is perhaps the best evidence of their power. Why did the Japanese, when they took over Korea, ban the singing of Korean patriotic songs? Why did the Nazis ban concentration camp inmates from singing "Die Moorsoldaten" (The Peat-bog Soldiers)? Why was Pete Seeger called before the House Un-American Activities Committee? Why did the generals murder Victor Jara? Why did the bureaucrats in East Berlin expel Wolf Biermann from the German Democratic Republic?

Never in the history of man have people stormed barricades because they comprehended that two times two is four...One doesn't risk his life because he knows something, but rather then when there are great passions involved, when, that is, great emotional activity and the ideas are both present. That is the wondrous effect which political songs can have, they offer the feelings, hopes, and passions of the masses in such a handy form that the people can put themselves in a position to profit from their enthusiasm. Therefore, songs are also feared by the rulers. That is, they don't fear the songs themselves, rather the acute passions of the people which latently exist and are provoked by songs and so come to the surface.

3.

Surely human society has never before faced such staggering problems as it does today. The pollution of our environment threatens to destroy the very basis of human existence. Ever more people suffer from hunger. The land we need so desperately to raise food is being misused and abused through sub-division, strip-mining, and other forms of economic development. Our other scarce resources are being studiously wasted to prop up an inflated consumer society. The wealth of our earth, and with it power, is being concentrated in ever fewer hands. And there is the growing threat of a nuclear world war, a war which would mean absolute devastation.

The problems we face are enormous and yet we have probably never had
a better opportunity to solve them. If properly applied the technology which helped us create the problems could likewise help us solve them. But time is growing short. Wolf Biermann is convinced that only a Socialist society could hope to tackle our problems for only a Socialist society could muster and direct the means needed to begin to solve them. Yet the road to a new society is not a straight and narrow path. Socialism is not a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is not an historical inevitability. Socialism will require years of struggle and much suffering and it will meet with enormous resistance from those who seek to defeat and discredit it in order to protect vested self-interests. It requires an act of free will for men and women to free themselves from the slavery to which they have consigned themselves. We have allowed the material world we have created to dominate us. Until we gain control over the economic forces which now control us, we will never be free. Until vital economic decisions are made on the basis of social need rather than profit, until production is planned to assure the survival of all rather than to increase the comfort of the few, we can never be free. The illusory Western idea of virtually unlimited personal freedom must be layed to rest, for in practice it has been a license for the powerful to exploit the weak and an excuse to avoid social responsibility. It is absurd to think that any individual can be free until we have created a free society.

Wolf Biermann's is not a poetry of self-expression. Such poetry, in our time, would be but a luxury. His is instead a poetry of social expression. Wolf Biermann has never longed for the ivory tower. He stands in the midst of the battle. His songs are weapons in that battle. If they are sharp it is because the fighting is intense. If they are effective it is because they are bluntly honest. If his songs are passionate it is because Wolf Biermann is passionately involved in the struggle for freedom.
His story is a part of the story of that struggle.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HERITAGE

Altona was a poor, politically left-wing dockyard community which lies across from the big port of Hamburg. On Sunday, July 17, 1923, the National Socialist S.A.\(^1\) staged, as an open provocation, a procession through the Communist precincts of the town. The demonstration had the approval of the Social Democratic police commissioner of Altona. Only a month before a national ban on all S.A. activities had been lifted by the Reich government in Berlin. A similar ban imposed in 1929 on the Communist military organization, the Red Front, by the state of Prussia, of which Altona was a part, was still in effect. This meant that the Communists could not openly demonstrate against this Nazi provocation. They were forced to resort to other methods. As the Storm Troopers marched through the streets Communist snipers opened fire on the column from the houses and rooftops of Altona, inciting a street fight which left several people dead and many wounded.\(^2\)

The Altona bloody-Sunday proved to be the climax of a virtual civil war which had been raging between the Communists and The Nazis in the streets of Germany's cities. Since President Hindenburg had lifted the ban on the S.A., street-fighting had accounted for 99 deaths and 1125 wounded.\(^3\) The Weimar Republic, the first German experience in bourgeois democracy, was floundering hopelessly, suffering from a chronic lack of German democrats. The Republic had been the illegitimate child of the imperial government which had collapsed in 1918. From the beginning, it had stood on shaky legs. Its representatives had had to accept the
responsibility for signing the hated Versailles Diktat. The government had been responsible for crushing popular revolt. It had been faced with an all too independent military, and the country had been hit by the overwhelming inflation of 1923 and later the Great Depression. By 1930, the Republic was also faced with two strong radical parties, the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and the Communist Party of Germany (KDP), both blatantly anti-republican. In December 1924, these two parties had polled only 12% of the vote. By May 1928, their combined totals had risen to only 13.2% of the total. However, in the election of September 14, 1930, due principally to the drastic rise in the strength of the NSDAP, the two radical parties controlled 31.4% of the electorate. By this time the doom of the Weimar Republic was already sealed, for its parliamentary democracy had ceased to function. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning was able to govern only through the good graces of Reichspresident Hindenburg, for instead of rejecting the violent, irrational appeals of the extremists, the electorate only strengthened them in the next election by giving them an absolute majority of 52%. The Reichstag thus elected met for only a couple of hours on September 12, 1932. The new chancellor, Franz von Papen, already had a dissolution order from the President. He attempted to deliver it, but was ignored by the presiding officer, Hermann Göring. While ignoring the Chancellor's efforts to get the floor (which was a constitutional right he enjoyed at any time) Göring proceeded with a vote on a Communist-sponsored no-confidence measure which the Nazis also supported. New elections were set for November 6.

This combination of efforts by Nazis and Communists was not unique. Despite Communist claims to the contrary, the KPD, in no small measure, contributed to the advent of the National Socialist dictatorship through the party's continual efforts to undermine, for its own purposes, the
already shaky republic. Again and again the Communists, in hopes of creating a revolutionary situation, joined the Nazis to oppose government policies designed to pull Germany out of its disastrous economic situation and, like the National Socialists, they used violent and irrational methods which only tended to further radicalize the politically inexperienced German people.

There was another factor which also did its part to undermine the political situation in Germany. After the 6th World Congress of the Comintern held in Moscow in 1928, Communists were forbidden to work with Social Democrats or unions which belonged to the Second International. Although the KPD and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) had hardly worked as a united proletarian front up to that point, the Social Democrats thereafter became the Communist Party's principal enemy. The Communists spared no efforts to discredit the other proletarian party, going so far as to label the Social Democrats as "social fascists." This was patently absurd, but its constant repetition over a period of years must surely have led many KPD comrades to believe that the most serious fascist threat came not from the Nazis, but from the SPD. This senseless fratricidal warfare only aided the real fascists in their quest for power.

The twelve years of the Communist underground began on the night of February 27, 1933, less than a month after Adolf Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of Germany. During that night the Reichstag building was set on fire. The flames spread quickly and destroyed the central hall and the glass dome. Early on February 28 the press and the radio began informing the nation that the fire had been intended as the signal for a Communist uprising, but that thanks to the efforts of the state the danger had been averted. The responsibility for the Reichstag fire has never been firmly established. Many people outside Germany decided that the Nazis themselves
set the fire, the prime motivation being to discredit the Communists in the upcoming election. The evidence is inconclusive. One thing seems clear and that is that the Communist Party had nothing to do with the fire and had certainly not been planning an uprising. The fact is that Moscow had issued instructions to avoid any such actions. Nevertheless the government's story seemed to be corroborated when it was learned that a half-demented 24-year-old Dutch man, Marinus van der Lubbe, who was arrested at the scene, had once been a member of the Communist Party. The fire signaled the beginning of a reign of terror which swept the county, engulfing not only the Communist but many other political and personal enemies of the Storm Troopers. Many Communists were arrested immediately, taken from their apartments and often straight from their beds. The day after the fire an emergency decree, which had been prepared by the government, was signed by the Reichspresident. The most important civil liberties were suspended until further notice: personal liberty, inviolability of the home, the guarantee of private property, freedom of the press, of assembly, of association, and the privacy of the post. In addition, the death penalty was imposed on several crimes which had previously been subject only to imprisonment. In accordance with the new decree all Communist Reichstag delegates were arrested. The terror was only the first muscle-flexing of the new National Socialist regime, but it had far-reaching effects, as described by Hannah Vogt,

In the cellars and guardhouses, prisoners were beaten and tortured in scenes anticipating later concentration camp practices. Although the victims of these acts of vengeance were bullied into the strictest secrecy, and often made to sign affidavits to that effect, the news filtered through, creating an atmosphere of dread which paralyzed the will of many honest and decent Germans.

Thus began the German nightmare.
Even with the suppression of the KPD and the accompanying wave of terror, the NSDAP was able to achieve only 44% of the vote total and could form an absolute majority in the Reichstag only with the help of the 52 deputies of Alfred Hugenberg's German Nationalist Party. Despite the fact that most of the leaders of the KPD had been arrested, its press silenced, and that the party had been unable to actively campaign, the Communists retained 81 of their previous 100 seats.

When the newly elected Reichstag met on March 23 in the Kroll Opera House for its only working session, the government introduced the "Enabling Act" which was designed to give the Reich Chancellor full legislative power, thereby nullifying the Reichstag. Since this involved a change of the constitution the government needed a two-thirds majority. Chancellor Hitler rose to explain in a very calm fashion the measure before the chamber. The Opera House was surrounded by brown shirts chanting propaganda slogans. The only opposition to the act was voiced by Otto Wels representing the SPD, some of whose members had already been arrested. He declared that the SPD would not vote for the Enabling Act and renewed the party's pledge to the "principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism."10

The Chancellor rose, and with his rage totally undisguised he screamed,

You come late, but yet you come!...You are no longer needed....
The star of Germany will rise and yours will sink. Your death knell has sounded...I do not want your votes. Germany will be free, but not through you.11

There was wild applause from the uniformed National Socialist delegation.

When the vote was taken it was 441 to 84 (the latter all SPD votes). The Nazis broke into a wild celebration and joined the Storm Troopers in singing the "Horst Wessel Song,"

Raise high the flags! Stand rank on rank together,
Storm Troopers march with quiet, steady tread...
The government was able to achieve its needed two-thirds majority only with the help of the Center and State Parties, which had been naively wooed with promises that Hitler would always act legally. But even with the help of the bourgeois parties the Enabling Act would not have been passed had it not been for the fact that the seats which should have been filled with legally elected KPD deputies were all empty. By this time the German Communist leaders were already in prison, in hiding, or in exile.

The Communists were hit hard in 1933. During the summer some 20,000 comrades were arrested and sent to prisons or concentration camps. The Party did not put up a fight. It was in no position to do so, for its leadership had been decimated. The rank and file of the Party had also been reduced by the fact that many opportunists left the KPD to fill the S.A. There were reports that as much as 70% of the S.A. in Berlin was made up of former Communists. But those who remained faithful demonstrated a solidarity and courage that can only be admired. Witnesses tell of meeting Communists in Gestapo prisons in 1944 who had been there eleven years and were unshaken in their faith. Indeed, the Communists organized resistance within the prisons and the camps. They managed to use their position as political rather than racial prisoners to get jobs as office helpers and orderlies. This put them in a position to keep in contact with the other prisoners and encourage them in their will to resist. They were even able to collect weapons, and in some instances prevent the execution of certain prisoners.

In the beginning the Communists placed their hope in the belief that Hitler's seizure of power would inevitably be followed by a popular revolt which would bring a Socialist regime to power. When it became clear that this longed-for uprising would not take place, the Communists began to organize anti-fascist (Antifa) cells in the factories and other places of
work. The membership in these cells was kept extremely small, perhaps three to eight people, and they communicated by way of a courier service. The cells studied and discussed Marxist literature, distributed propaganda by way of underground newspapers, leaflets, chain letters, and wall posters. They also organized industrial sabotage.

The life of Germany's Communists under Hitler was a dangerous one. They lived in a state of doubt and yet were able to retain the faith necessary to continue their political work. The result of all these years of sacrifice was sometimes a hardness, a cold pragmatism molded by the necessity of being selfless and sometimes cruel in order to achieve their humanitarian goal, the faith which fueled the lives of the Communists. The difficult existence led by these people was to mold the post-war Socialist regime in Germany and become a source of both its strength and inherent weakness.

You, who shall emerge from the flood
In which we are sinking,
Think -
When you speak of our weaknesses,
Also of the dark time
That brought them forth.

For we went, changing our country more often than our shoes,
In the class war, despairing
When there was only injustice and no resistance.

For we knew only too well:
Even the hatred of squalor
Makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly. Bertolt Brecht
Notes on Chapter One

1. S.A. = Sturmabteilung, the Storm Troopers


4. NSDAP = Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei

5. KPD = Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands

6. Robert Edwin Herzstein, Adolf Hitler and the German Trauma 1913 - 1945. An Interpretation of the Nazi Phenomenon (New York: C.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), pages 56 and 70. All election statistics are taken from this source.

7. SPD = Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands


9. Ibid., p. 123.

10. Ibid., p. 125.

11. Ibid.


3. Ihr, die ihr auftauchen werdet, aus der Flut
In der wir untergegengen sind,
Gedenkt
Wenn ihr von untern Schwachen sprechet
Auch der finsteren Zeit
Der ihr entronnen seid.
Gingen wir doch, öfter als die Schuhe die Länder wechselnd
Durch die Kreige der Klassen, verzweifelt
Wenn da nur Unrecht war und keine Empörung.

Dabei wissen wir ja:
Auch der Hass gegen die Niedrigkeit
Verzerrt die Züge. (continued)
Auch der Zorn über das Unrecht
Macht die Stimme heiser. Ach, wir
Die wir den Boden bereiten wollten für Freundlichkeit
Könnten selber nicht freundlich sein.

Ihr aber, wenn es so weit sein wird
Dass der Mensch dem Mensch ein Helfer ist,
Gedenkt unser
Mit Nachsicht.
CHAPTER TWO
FROM HAMBURG TO BERLIN

"If Berlin is the capital of the German Reich, then Hamburg is the capital of Socialism." So did the great Social Democratic leader August Bebel describe his home town. Hamburg also produced the man who was to rise from transport worker to become the proletarian leader of Weimar, Ernst Thälmann. The center of Socialism in Red Hamburg was, not surprisingly, the wharves of that port city. On those wharves worked Dagobert Biermann, who'd been a member of the Communist Party since 1921. Through the Communist youth movement he'd met his wife Emma. She'd been a member of the Party since 1919 and had served as Ernst Thälmann's courier during the abortive Communist uprising in Hamburg in the fall of 1923. When Adolf Hitler and his gutter party came to power, Dagobert Biermann was reminded anew that he was not only a Communist, but also a Jew, a fact which had until then played no role in his life. Not long after the seizure of power he was arrested, but because of his political activities rather than his race. He had already begun resistance work, helping publish a Communist underground newspaper, the Hamburger Volkszeitung (Hamburg People's News). Because the Nazis had not yet had time to change the laws, he received only two years, the maximum sentence. By the time of his release the Spanish Civil War was underway, and the Nazis had begun to ship arms to Franco's fascist forces. Inevitably these shipments went over the Hamburg docks. In February 1937, Dagobert Biermann again disappeared into the Nazi prisons, this time never to re-emerge, for he had organized and carried out acts of sabotage against these so-called "peace shipments." When he was arrested
so was Emma's brother. She was spared only because her infant son Wolf
was crying in the next room.

Although Wolf Biermann cannot directly remember his father, that
father was undoubtedly the most important influence during his childhood,
for his mother saw to it that the man was always a part of the boy's daily
life. She spoke of her husband often and it became a custom that every day
the boy would receive something from his father. A nut or a lump of sugar
or a piece of shiny tin-foil was placed in Wolf's wooden wagon, which stood
before the house, and he was told that his father had sent them. Once
Emma Biermann even managed to smuggle her son in to see his father during
one of her twice yearly visits. At the time Dagobert Biermann was in a
labor camp on the North Sea, working in a peat bog. Emma slipped her hus­
band a bag of candy which he then gave to his son. As Wolf Biermann tells
it, this all took place under the eye of a guard. His mother suggested
that he sing his father a song and so he sang a popular song he'd heard on
the radio, a song about bombs falling over England. This must have been
a piece of bitter irony for the man who was imprisoned for his antifascist
activities. The little boy, who was about three or four, gave his father
and mother each a piece of candy, and then offered one to the guard, but
as the man reached out for it, Wolf pulled back his hand. His father said
to go ahead and give the man a piece and so the boy again extended his
hand, only to pull it back again at the last moment and eat the candy him­
self. This was the only contact that the boy had with his father. In 1942,
Dagobert Biermann was shipped to Auschwitz and murdered. This occurred
when the Gestapo prisons were cleansed of their Jewish prisoners who had
been held for political crimes. All of Dagobert's family had already been
exterminated the year before.

Despite the absence of her husband, Emma Biermann never faltered in
her courage. She worked in a large cleaning firm, a firm whose task it was to receive the bloody, torn uniforms of soldiers who had been killed or wounded on the front and clean them for reuse. As Wolf Biermann describes it, she had to cry and yet be pleased when she saw those uniforms. In the plant there were also Russian prisoners of war who’d been pressed into service as a result of the labor shortage. Emma did all she could to help these forced laborers, in spite of the fact that such contact was strictly forbidden.

At home she raised her son to be a Communist in the image of his father. Wolf Biermann has explained it this way,

My mother influenced me, in relation to my father, one could almost say, with a fanaticism, which did however have nothing fanatic about it, with the goal that I, as she expressed it in her language, should revenge my father. That she did, under the difficult conditions of the Nazi period, even keep me alive, with great sacrifice, all that was not based just on this fundamental mother-child relationship, but was also a type of political struggle. She wanted to, against the Nazis, keep a small person alive and raise him, so he would continue to do what his father had done. That sounds perhaps naive and kitsch and romantic and somehow exaggerated, but then it was exaggerated. The times were also exaggerated.

An important part of the boy’s upbringing were the songs of the worker's movement, songs that were forbidden during those years. His mother sang them and taught them to her son and at the same time taught him that they could not be sung outside their apartment. The young boy learned them, and they have influenced him to this very day. Each day he had to spend two hours alone in the apartment. His mother left for work at five-thirty, and his aunt, his mother's sister, who lived in the apartment across the hall, could not come to watch over him until about half past seven. He always spent those hours singing, singing the songs his mother had taught him, singing songs he’d heard on the radio. This was the beginning of his musical education.
Between July 24 and August 3, 1943, Hamburg was the target of seven major air raids. Fifty-five thousand people were killed, over half the city's residences were destroyed, as were 60% of the harbor facilities as well as many schools, hospitals, churches, and industrial facilities.\(^2\)

Not surprisingly, one of the hardest hit areas was the working-class district of Hammerbrook, where the Biermanns lived. The entire section of the city went up in flames. Emma Biermann and her son, who found themselves in the center of the fire storm, managed however to survive. Biermann:

We were in the center of this fire and remained alive. My mother jumped into the canal with me and swam through the water with me. And we ran against the fire and not with it. I don't know if you're aware of what happens when an entire city burns. That is an interesting physiological occurrence. In the center of the fire there forms a vacuum. When an entire city burns the air rushes upward, the hot air, and the cold air streams from all sides into the center. And in a city, the streets, with the tall buildings, work like jets and the little people who run through the streets there below, run against a fire storm that is so strong that entire burned roofs fly through the air and this fire wind drives people ever more into the center of the oven, where they burn. And when the people let themselves be driven because they don't want the heat of the fire in their faces, but rather on their backs, then they burn, then they go ever deeper into the center of the fire. Therefore one must go against the stream, go against the wind. One must suffer the pain of the fire on the face if one is to remain alive. Most did not do that. I don't know why my mother did it thus with me. Definitely not because she knew physical laws. I don't know. In any case we remained alive.

After the air raids Wolf Biermann and his mother were evacuated to Deckendorf in Lower Bavaria, near the Danube. This proved difficult for the boy because he had brought with him a case of asthma contracted during the fire storm, and the fog which rose from the Danube only made matters worse. He should have been sent to the sea or into the mountains but this was not permitted because he was politically "unworthy." Because of his racial and political background the eight-year-old boy was not permitted to receive proper medical care.
In Deckendorf, Wolf Biermann and his mother arrived as bombed-out refugees, and except for the lack of proper medical care they were treated well by the people there. Their Jewish-Communist background was of little importance in the chaos of the war's end. Thus Emma Biermann was able to get a job as a teacher's aid in a school there, and it was this school which her son entered during the last year of the war.

The pair were still in Deckendorf when the Americans arrived in 1945, and Wolf Biermann can still remember the event.

I was surprised because they always had Soviet stars on their tanks, only they were white. But they also had five points, the stars of the Americans. And that confused me very much, that they had Soviet stars which were white.

After the war mother and son returned to a Hamburg which had been changed drastically by the war. In addition to the material destruction, the population had been reduced by almost 750,000 to under one million, as a direct result of bomb deaths, evacuations and emigrations. After the war, however, many Hamburgers returned to their destroyed city, and over 100,000 refugees filtered into the city.³

The Biermanns first found refuge in a huge villa in the Wandsbek district. The villa had been confiscated by the British Occupation forces to serve as a sort of halfway-house for those hungry and sick victims of fascism who had just been released from the prisons and concentration camps. In that they too were victims of the regime, Emma Biermann managed, through the help of her comrades, to find a temporary home there for herself and her son. They lived there a year.

"There it was very nice," recalls Biermann. "There, there was a hen's egg every day for each of us. And what was still better, there stood there a piano." On that piano Wolf Biermann learned to play his first tune, the song of the "Moorsoldaten" (The Peat-Bog Soldiers).⁴ The now famous song
had been written by an anonymous prisoner in the peat-bog camp of Borgermoor. Dagobert Biermann may have heard the song. It was taught to Wolf on that broken-down piano by a man he later referred to as Comrade Walter T. from Hamburg, a man who had fought in the Spanish Civil War and who, at the time, had just been released from a concentration camp. When it was seen how quickly the boy picked up the tune on the piano, it was decided that he should receive piano lessons. With the help of a former piano teacher, who also lived in the villa, the boy received a basic musical education. This was a rare opportunity for the child of a working-class family in Germany.

Later, when the Biermanns moved to the district of Langhorn to live with the boy's grandmother, his Oma Meume, the question arose as to what should be done about little Wolf and his piano lessons, for he no longer had a piano. His two uncles, Kalli and Julus, both dock-workers, had just been fortunate enough to steal a whole sack of Lucky Strikes. Considering that during the first post-war years in Germany cigarettes had become virtually legal tender, then one can imagine that this was a fortune. The two workers sold the cigarettes and purchased a piano for their nephew.

When one considers that people were starving so at the time, one must imagine what it meant that these two workers did not with these cigarettes trade for bread and fat, but instead a piano...What an investment in the future. That was a great good fortune for me. Then I received piano lessons there too.

Wolf Biermann's everyday life as a boy in post-war Hamburg had however other dimensions. In his fifth school year he entered the upper school which leads to the abitur, that exam which qualifies one to study at a university. These schools, usually called gymnasien, are traditionally, and to a great extent still today, bastions of class privilege, and it was rare for a working-class boy to attend such a school. But Wolf had passed an exam at the end of his fourth school year and thus was placed in the upper-class school. What made matters worse is that the school was in a rich neighbor-
hood, so that he was the only working-class boy in his class, and a working-class boy who had been raised as a Communist. There was so much trouble with his teachers and fellow pupils that he got very little learning done, and as a result there was the ever-present danger that he'd be held back. He was a small boy, but very aggressive and was determined to convert his classmates to Communism, something about which he himself had yet little knowledge.

And these discussions always proceeded very quickly to fights... The bad thing was that I never got around to learning. All these stupid boys there, these fat, big, dumb children were all smarter than I. I was always the dumb one. They could do better than I in Latin, better in math than I...There, I always felt as if I were in enemy territory. The parents complained to the school that I was always beating up their children. I got a lot of beatings too. I always had black eyes and busted knees.

As Biermann remembers it, he lived three separate lives in Hamburg. The first was in the morning in school. The second was the street-life in the afternoon where he and his friends had the ruins of Hamburg for a playground. They built little bombs, set fires in the peat bogs in the north of the city, swam, and

...made genuine nonsense...That was a pretty crazy life. Back then there were still a lot of munitions lying around which the children found and played with. Homework, I never did at the time. Then in the evening my third life began.

He went to the meetings of the Young Pioneers, the Communist children's organization, "and made immediate preparations for the world revolution." These young revolutionaries smeared slogans on walls and fought with the police. At the time there were many serious street battles in Hamburg. The consequence of this night life was that he always got to bed late and after a short night's sleep and riding his bicycle like crazy the ten kilometers to the school he, as a result of the lack of sleep combined with his asthma, usually slept through the first two hours of classes.
Soon there came escapes from this enemy territory, from that crazy life. In 1950, he travelled with a group of Young Pioneers to East Berlin to the German Meeting of Youth. A photo from an East Berlin newspaper of the time shows Biermann standing before Wilhelm Pieck, the first and last president of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). After that first visit, Wolf Biermann travelled more often to the Socialist half of Germany. "There I felt at home. Here (in West Germany) I was the outsider and there I was the insider...That was my country." At the age of seventeen he decided that he would prefer to live in the GDR, where the attempt was being made to build Socialism, and so he went. Didn't his mother object to her son emigrating?

As a mother, yes, and as a Communist, no. In that she was already used to forgetting her personal wishes in favor of political purposes, she agreed that I go to the GDR. That was for me the rescue. That is the most important point in my life up to now. That decided everything for me.

He went to the East in May of 1953 and arrived just in time for the short and unsuccessful, yet widespread workers' uprising of the 16th and 17th of June. But the young man experienced little or nothing of that event, for he was in Gadebusch in Mecklenburg, where he was to spend his first two years in the GDR in a boarding school finishing his abitur. This was the first time in his life that the boy had been on his own, the first time he'd been out from under the wing of his mother, to whom he has very strong ties. In that sense, the experience was quite positive, for it opened him up. Too, in Gadebusch, he suddenly ceased being the class idiot. He studied with a passion, he enjoyed his studies and began to be quite ambitious, gobbling up knowledge, "like a starving young animal" and eventually writing a good abitur.

In 1955, Wolf Biermann entered East Berlin's Humboldt University to study political economy, a study which might have led to a career as an
economic functionary. This, however, wasn't the career the young man had in mind and after two years he broke off his studies.

While in Berlin he'd fallen under the spell of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. He decided he wanted to become a theatrical director and was lucky enough to get a position as a dramatic assistant with the Ensemble. Though he never saw the man whom he habitually refers to as "Master Brecht" (Brecht had died in 1956), the epic playwright and poet exerted a dominant influence in Biermann's literary development.

The two years that Biermann spent with the Berliner Ensemble were a happy time for him and he worked and learned with the same enthusiasm and diligence with which he pursues everything he does. His most notable tasks during the period were as Benno Besson's assistant for the production of The Good Woman of Sezuan, as Manfred Wekwerth's assistant for the stage production of The Mother as well as its filming, and his work with Erich Engel in the latter's production of The Three Penny Opera. But then, to the astonishment of his colleagues in the Ensemble, the promising young assistant announced his decision to leave. In part, this was because of the battles which were going on among "Brecht's children," his students. This soured the atmosphere and disturbed Biermann. But his departure had other grounds as well, "I learned at the Berliner Ensemble, among other things, that I must learn more, that I again, in peace, must accumulate a little more knowledge and I wanted to study again." So in 1959 Wolf Biermann left the Ensemble and reentered the Humboldt University, this time to study philosophy.
Notes on Chapter Two


3. Ibid.

4. Peat Bog Soldiers

   Far and wide as the eye can wander  
   Heath and bog are ev'rywhere.      
   Not a bird sings out to cheer us,  
   Oaks are standing gaunt and bare.  

   We are the peat bog soldiers;  
   We're marching with our spades to the bog. 

   Up and down the guards are pacing,  
   No one, no one can get through.    
   Flight would mean a sure death facing;  
   Guns and barbed wire greet our view. 

   We are the peat bog soldiers;  
   We're marching with our spades to the bog. 

   But for us there is no complaining,  
   Winter will in time be past.       
   One day we shall cry rejoicing,    
   Homeland dear, you're mine at last. 

   Then will the peat bog soldiers  
   March no more with their spades to the bog. 

   The prisoners sang the final verse so loudly that the song was banned under penalty of death.
CHAPTER THREE
BEGINNINGS

The years between 1959 and 1964 proved to be much more than a period of peacefully gathering more knowledge. This period saw Wolf Biermann's beginnings as a writer and the first of the political controversies which have surrounded him since. These years also saw the end of whatever idealistic illusions that the young man may still have held about the "real existing Socialism" of the German Democratic Republic.

The most important political event of the period was the construction of the Berlin wall, the "Antifascist Defense Rampart," as it was, and still is, titled in the jargon of the country's Socialist Unity Party (SED).\(^1\) Ever since the organization of the Soviet Zone of Occupation in 1945 and the foundation of the Republic in 1949, the country had been suffering from a massive and extremely damaging emigration in the direction of West Germany. The emigration had, by 1961, cost the GDR one-fifth of its original population.\(^2\) Even this figure does not demonstrate the magnitude of the problem, for those who left were for the most part the elite of society: engineers, teachers and professors, physicians (20% of the nation's doctors), lawyers, and skilled and semi-skilled workers. These represented precisely the social elements needed to make any country work. They represent therefore a much greater loss than their numbers would indicate. They had received their entire education at state expense and their skills were then lost. The economic disruptions caused by the emigration were incalculable. Why did these people leave their homeland? For idealistic political reasons, voting with their feet, as West German propaganda would have us believe?
For many that was surely the case, but the principal motivation was most certainly economic. The fact is that these people could demand higher incomes in the capitalist Federal Republic. To fully understand the problem faced by the GDR it must also be taken into consideration that 25% of all the East-West migrants, during the years 1945 to 1961, were between the ages of 18 and 25. This cost the GDR an irreplaceable human resource whose loss will be felt for generations. The cause for this particular part of the emigration lies directly with political decisions within the GDR. A major reason for leaving was the fact that many of these young people were not allowed to attend colleges or universities, "for reasons ranging from refusal to join the SED to 'bourgeois parentage.'" Until 1956 the children of "bourgeois" parents were systematically excluded from higher education, and massive discrimination for social, political and religious reasons exists to the present day.

So why was the wall built? The fact is that the emigration had increased by 1961 to such a point that the GDR was collapsing from within. The country was unable to consolidate itself either economically or politically. The wall was not built simply to imprison people, but was a matter of national survival, and it should be added, under considerable pressure from the Soviet Union, the true power broker in the GDR. The wall was, from the point of view of the SED leadership, a necessity, and a measure to which many governments might resort if their very existence were so threatened.

For the GDR, the border closure was probably the most important date in its history. It artificially provided the stability which allowed the country to get on its feet economically, at least for a decade. Now that people no longer had the option of leaving for the capitalist West, most decided to make the best of their situation and try to make "Socialism" work.
All excuses and mitigating circumstances aside, the wall remains a brutal symbol of inhuman politics and corrupt practices, and its construction was a trauma for the nation, after which no one could view the GDR the same as before. For Wolf Biermann, the wall became a central image in his writings. The building of the wall was not, however, the only lesson from those years. Nor was Biermann's education purely an academic one. Probably the most decisive experience was the vacation job he had in a factory in East Berlin.

While still with the Berliner Ensemble, Wolf Biermann had been put in charge of an agit-prop (agitation-propaganda) theatrical group in the Electrical Apparatus Works in Treptow (EAW Treptow, earlier known as the Stalin Works). Through this position he came to know many of the workers in the factory and decided that he would like to work there. He began working in the production division where small parts are pressed out, a work which requires the same movement for an entire shift, the mindless work of any factory. Then later, for a longer period of time, he worked in a department called the "Old Burner," where various tasks were performed, for instance the bends in metal forms were heated and strengthened, forged copper was softened in a special oven, or rusty screws were cleaned in acidic baths or tumblers.

In the Old Burner Biermann started out as the helper to the number three man,

Then the first man became sick and then the second was gone and the third showed me exactly how everything had to be done. And I was eager to learn. When such an intellectual comes into the production process, then he wants to show that he isn't just a stupid pig with two left hands. And I learned everything exactly, and when I knew everything, the other man was gone too. Suddenly I was the only expert there and I received helpers to assist me. And I advanced very rapidly to the man of responsibility and had to write the (production) norms. The norms are fulfilled in a two-fold manner, through work and then once more with the pencil, and these weren't always the same thing,
and this instructive difference I experienced with beautiful, fundamental clarity. That time was for that reason a very important one for me.

His experiences at EAW Treptow taught him the realities of economic life in the German Democratic Republic and his writings were deeply influenced by this lesson.

Wolf Biermann's language has remained the language of the working people and he has viewed social problems from the working-class point of view. This has provided his work with a strength and immediacy. It was during these politically formative years, 1959-1960, that Wolf Biermann first began to write. He viewed writing largely as an effective vehicle for influencing others with his political ideas.

I came from the political passions to art. I discovered, sometime or other, that art is a form in which I can practice politics very effectively. This explains the fact that in the time when every upstanding youth writes poems, namely in puberty, I didn't write a single poem. I first began to write something that one puts in lines one under the other or furnishes with rhymes, 1960, or 59, if one is very generous. I was no longer exactly a youthful youth.

From the outset Biermann's work was content and purpose oriented. He never played around with poetic forms or dreamed of being a poet. From the beginning his efforts had a "nonpoetic" political purpose. His works are a rejection of any notion of art for art's sake, and therefore any detached examination of form is rendered inappropriate. As is the case with any good poet, form in Biermann's work is not an end in itself. It is a byproduct of content and purpose and its examination is only important in order to understand how it contributes to relaying the message and how in doing so it becomes a part of the message.

One of the most important occurrences during these early years was the acquaintance Wolf Biermann made with the composer and songwriter Hanns Eisler, a co-worker of Bertolt Brecht. In 1960, to mark the 150th anniversary of the Humboldt University, Biermann and some friends prepared an
"agit-prop-revue" for which Biermann wrote a play entitled **Tue Was!** (Do Something!) In seeking permission to use a Brecht-Eisler composition, the young writer met the composer. A short time thereafter Biermann invited himself to Eisler's apartment so that the latter could hear some of the former's songs. According to Biermann's account the meeting went so: The first song he performed was one called, "Ballad of the Long-Distance Truck Driver Bruno." Bruno it seems had an accident and has to spend the night in a little out-of-the-way Gasthaus. There he meets a girl he'd like to take to bed, but nothing comes of his efforts and the following morning he learns that the girl has died. Bruno believes that this would not have happened had they spent the night together. Eisler listened to the song only unwillingly. He asked why the girl died. Biermann said that he didn't know, didn't desire to know, and thought it irrelevant. Eisler replied that it was a very bad song which sounded as though it had been written by an adolescent. But he asked the young man to sing some more. The remaining songs were love songs which Biermann himself did not rate as highly as his ballad of Bruno, but Eisler liked what he heard. He must have, for he arranged an evening at his home to introduce Wolf Biermann to some influential radio and television people. According to Biermann, Eisler told him on that occasion that he actually thought that the ballad about Bruno was ingenious. In spite of such influential backing the GDR mass-media remained permanently closed to Wolf Biermann. He wrote a song about the experience, "Keine Party ohne Biermann" (No Party without Biermann), in which he mocked the media authorities whose invitations to sing were only to their own apartments.

Wolf Biermann was not to remain anonymous long. In 1961, in order not to drift too far from the theater, which he still planned to make his career, he organized the Berlin Worker and Student Theater, known as the b.a.t. (Berliner Arbeiter- und Studenten- theater). He drew upon his student
friends as well as his agit-prop group from EAW Treptow. He and his friends remodeled an old back-courtyard movie house in the Belforter Strasse on the Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin to be the group's home. Rehearsals were begun on Moliere's *Georg Dandin* and a play written by Biermann himself, *Berliner Brautgang* (Way of the Berlin Bride).

In an article in the *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* the theater was presented as a model of Socialist theater,

Strengthened by the call of Comrade Ulbricht that Berlin should be built up even further as a multi-faceted cultural center, there was founded the Berliner Arbeiter- und Studententheater, called b.a.t. for short...which is to become a cultural center in this thickly populated tenement district.

A photo in another journal from the time shows the student Wolf Biermann, identified as leader of the b.a.t., at a rehearsal of his play *Berliner Brautgang*. With him are Bruno Behnke from the Berlin Brakeworks and the transport worker Walter Brandt from the EAW Treptow. Thus the theater lived up to its title and conception.

Work reached the dress rehearsal stage before the theater was officially disbanded, disbanded until it could reform itself on a more acceptable basis. The reason for the measure was the theme of Biermann's play. *Berliner Brautgang* dealt with the love affair between a worker and a doctor's daughter in the divided city of Berlin. The play defended the wall, but for the wrong reasons. The official rationale for the wall was to keep fascist agents out. Biermann's play defended it for the reason it was actually built, namely to keep the country's skilled workers in. This heretical reasoning, along with other statements by the playwright expressing doubt about the wisdom of the wall's erection, provoked a body of no less importance than the Central Committee of the SED to take yet further action against the dramatist and singer. He was indefinitely banned from public appearances, a ban which was not lifted until June 1963. Thus
ended the brief history of the Berliner Arbeiter- und Studententheater. Biermann had few regrets about the cancellation of *Berliner Brautgang*, for he considered it a play full of insincerities and compromises.¹⁰

The ban on Wolf Biermann tended to sharpen his impudent humor and change his tone to one of defiance. His songs were attacked by some as being anarchistic and/or pornographic. Others, the liberals within the university and Party circles, supported him. Wolf Biermann, at this early point in his career, became a concept in the battle over the amount of intellectual freedom permissible in the GDR. This at a time when his collected works would not have filled even a slender volume.

Wolf Biermann first became known to a wider public in late 1962. During that year Stephan Hermlin, head of the Sektion Lyrik of the German Academy of the Arts, announced that he was inviting unpublished poets to send in works from which he would make a selection to present at a public reading. He received over 1250 poems. On the evening of December 11, 1962, in the assembly hall of the Berlin Academy of the Arts, Hermlin presented a reading entitled, "Young Lyric Poetry - Unknown and Unpublished." Of all the poems he'd received he said that he considered a hundred worth reading. From these he selected about 50 to present.¹¹ Among those presented were works by Wolf Biermann.

One of Biermann's poems which was read on this evening was, "An die alten Genossen" (To the Old Comrades). It is an answer to one of Bertolt Brecht's Svendborger Poems, "An die Nachgeborenen" (To Posterity), a part of which was quoted at the end of chapter one. It was written while Brecht was living in exile in Denmark. In it he bemoans the dark times in which he lived, times during which a smooth forehead was a sign of insensitivity, when it was almost a crime to speak of trees, during which one could be sure that he who laughed had not yet heard the terrible news. And he speaks
of the lives of the revolutionaries who ate their meals between battles, who neglected love, who lived in exile and changed countries more often than they did their shoes.

For we know only too well:
Even the hatred of squalor
Makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But he begs for understanding from those who will emerge from the flood in which they were lost.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.12

Wolf Biermann, a child of those very revolutionaries, those men and women who had sacrificed and suffered so much, had lost his patience with them. He declared himself dissatisfied with the times which had been passed on to him. As Biermann says, the old comrades speak of the bloody victories of our class and he hears these reports with jealousy. They recall the happiness of struggle behind barbed wire.

And yet I myself am not happy:
Am dissatisfied with the new order.

The Present, for you
Sweet goal of all those bitter years
Is for me just a bitter beginning, crying
For change. Full of impatience
I plunge into the class struggle, the new one, which
If not a field of corpses
Does create a wasted field of suffering.

He longs for the pain of love's first embrace on his wedding night with the new age, even if the heart and the loins are still too weak. Yes, much courage and much desire will be required, but he reminds his comrades,
And my heart,  
Red  
Pale  
Full of hate  
Full of love  
Is your own heart, comrades!  
Is only that which you gave me!

Patience? Patience is the whore of cowardice, who prepares the bed for crime.

Set a good end to your work  
In that you leave us  
The new beginning!

The poem is a call to continue the revolution with the same courage and sacrifice demonstrated during those years of struggle. Yes, there would be pain and insecurity, but it would render the satisfaction of love's embrace.

The poems of Wolf Biermann were received warmly by those present, but served to cause only more controversy. Shortly after the reading a young man wrote a letter to the Berliner Zeitung (an East Berlin daily) in which he said that the presentation had pleased him very much and that he would like to read more from people like Biermann. The newspapers were already in the kiosks before word of the letter reached the authorities. To prevent such an heretical letter from reaching the public, police wagons were sent out to gather up the papers.

In 1963, Wolf Biermann was officially expelled from the SED, and yet, despite this and despite lack of official approval of his writings, the ban on him was lifted, and he began to make public appearances almost immediately. On June 15th, he made two appearances at the microphone of the 3rd Poetry Evening held by the central council of the Free German Youth (FDJ) and the Writers' Union. The evening drew a standing room audience that applauded every poem, no matter how bad. In the West German newspaper, Die Welt, it was commented,
Surely many of them were lured by the name of Wolf Biermann. Rumors about him had gone around, and what one heard was of a nature to arouse interest in making his acquaintance.\textsuperscript{15}

An eyewitness gives a good picture of his performance:

The young man with the Rilke-face and the beat-manner, with astonishing non-chalance and self-assurance, sang love songs to his own guitar accompaniment. And one sensed clearly that he was not into what he was doing. Love lyric is not his thing. Yet his pleasant voice and the skill of his fingers on the strings were well received by the audience.\textsuperscript{16}

When he came to the microphone the second time he announced, "I no longer desire to sing any more love songs. Now comes something political."\textsuperscript{17} He sang the "Ballad of the Berliner Brautgang," which was the tragic story of a cook and an inland sailor whose love for one another was frustrated by political circumstances. The sailor eventually drowned while trying to flee the country. It appeared that the applause would never end. Frau Gisela Steineckert, the program director, finally had to call an end to it. To conclude the program the American Perry Friedmann sang two spirituals which were met with much applause. But the real star of the evening was Wolf Biermann, and the evening surely proved to be the foundation of his early popularity.

There is more than just a small amount of irony in the fact that the Communist Biermann, son of anti-fascist resistance fighters, met with such official disapproval. In the late fifties, the first of the so-called Bitterfeld Conferences was held in the city of that name. The outcome of the conferences was the establishment of norms for Socialist writers in the GDR, known as the Bitterfeld Way. The Socialist writer should handle contemporary themes centering around the lives of the workers. One should not, however, only write about workers from a theoretical knowledge, but should go into the factories and get to know their lives first hand. The works should always contain a political point of view and yet they should be written in a style
which is comprehensible to the least educated worker. Biermann was a model pupil. His works fulfilled every tenet of the Bitterfeld Way. He'd worked on farms at harvest time and in a factory and knew the life of the working class first hand, it was after all his own social class. He wrote songs and poems about collective farms, village life, ballads about truck drivers and tractor drivers. His songs were sung to tunes that were bright and easily remembered. Not surprisingly, Biermann's fresh and honest writing began to gain popularity among students and workers, for he wrote about their life and their problems, about their hopes and desires in a realistic way. He was a relief from the majority of the officially approved poetry, which was boring both in its sameness and simple-mindedness. Nevertheless, officials were not pleased, for his work contained mild social criticism, up to that point truly mild. He wrote for instance a cycle of children's songs entitled, "Wir loben die guten Sozialisten" (We Praise the Good Socialists). The song about the family doctor praises him for not going to the West and for speaking his mind in discussions with functionaries. The story of the good functionary praises him because he does not make long-winded speeches, but instead talks with the people, and because he does not try to cover up or justify food shortages, but says honestly, "We can only eat what we plant."

Wolf Biermann was mentioned only seldom in the press, but in the September 1963 edition of the journal Neue Deutsche Literatur (New German Literature) there was an article entitled, "Problems in Poetic Development since the 15th German Writers' Congress." One paragraph was devoted to Wolf Biermann:

In poems by Wolf Biermann his own political and ideological problematic remains unmastered, the emotion in his sensitive poems appears broken, and the picture of our life is formed subjectively. But we must not overlook that Biermann has a - today all too seldom - strong gift for the ballad and has written a series of artistically and politically good songs.
Meanwhile the singer's appearances began to win him a certain following. He appeared at the FDJ's 4th Poetry Evening, where among other things he sang, "The People's Policeman" and "Wait Not for Better Times," in which he prods those apathetic citizens who complain about the pace of Socialist development while doing nothing to help it along, and declares that the only answer to Socialism is to "BUILD IT, Build It, (build it.)" \(^{20}\)

After seeing Biermann perform on December 5, 1963, only three days after the FDJ appearance, in the Chemist's Lecture Hall in the Hessestrasse in East Berlin, Hildegard Bremner wrote,

> There is always a sorrowful tone in these thoroughly optimistic stories. He had the audience of 400 to thank for the fact that he wasn't silenced. Between the song verses truths were discussed for which there are in the GDR no even nearly comparable forms or possibilities of expression.\(^{21}\)

It will be interesting to note later that he has retained to this day the style of performance which he had in 1963: nonchalance, self-confidence and open discussion in addition to his songs.

Biermann also began to break into print during those early years. Between 1962 and 1964 four anthologies (long since out of print) containing selections by Biermann appeared in the GDR. The earliest was an anthology of love poems collect by Gisela Steineckert and published by Verlag Volks und Welt in 1962, entitled *Liebesgedichte* (Love Poems). It contained forty graphic reproductions and eighty poems by both unknown and established writers. Many of the unknown poets who appeared in this volume were later to establish themselves in their own right. Represented along with Biermann were Rainer Kirsch, Reiner Kunze, Günter Kunert, Bernd Jentzsch and Jens Gerlach. The weekly Sonntag called the collection fresh and unconventional.\(^{22}\)

Five of Biermann's poems were printed, including "6:00 Uhr Sonntag Weckruf" (6:00 O'Clock Sunday Awakening), which is directed to his lover,
and before the coffee
I write quickly
about the mouth
about the poet
about the coffee
all of which are your works23

In 1964, three more anthologies containing Biermann's works appeared, two collected by the same Gisela Steineckert. Nachricht von den Liebenden (News from the Lovers) was published by the Aufbau Verlag and contained "Bildnis einer jungen Frau" (Portrait of a Young Woman), "Die Sonnenpferde" (The Sun-Horses), "In mir ist alle Liebe" (Within me is All Love), and "Die grüne Schwemme" (The Green Puddle). In Musenkuss und Pferdefuss (Kiss of the Muses and Foot of the Horses), from Verlag Neues Leben, Biermann was represented by three variations on the craft of writing poems, "Dichter - Gedichte" (Poet - Poems) and "Wie Lieder gemacht werden" (How Songs are Made), a poem which takes up a theme common in his early writings, that of the lover as co-author.

Your mouth is my quill
Your back is my page24

The Mitteldeutsche Verlag of Halle published an anthology entitled Sonnenpferde und Astronauten, which contained the work of ten poets. The title was derived from Biermann's poem, "Die Sonnenpferde," and a space flight vision by Axel Schulze. The book represented a cross-section of works read at a series of poetry readings, most of which were held at the Kosmos movie house. The anthology is not so interesting because it contained eleven poems by Wolf Biermann, but because it represented a peculiar German Democratic variation on the alphabet. The variation demonstrated to what a ridiculous degree the state feared the largely unknown person of Wolf Biermann. In the collection, the poems were to be entered alphabetically according to the author's last name. This would have meant that Wolf Biermann
would have been introduced first. Since that would never do, the publishing house took liberties. The alphabet was rearranged so that Volker Braun came first, then Biermann, and from there the book proceeded alphabetically to Bernd Wolff.
Notes on Chapter Three

1. SED = Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands


3. Ibid., p.99.


5. A play on the title of the book by V.I. Lenin, Was Tun? (What is to Be Done?)


7. Walter Ulbricht was at the time head of the SED and head of state.


11. Ibid. pages 98-99.


For German text see note number 13 after chapter one.


Und bin doch selbst nicht glücklich:
Bin unzufrieden mit der neuen Ordnung.

Die Gegenwart, euch
Süsses Ziel all jener bittren Jahre
Ist mir der bittre Anfang nur, schreit
Nach Veränderung. Voll Ungeduld
Stürz ich mich in die Kämpfe der Klassen, die neueren, die
Wenn schon ein Feld von Leichen nicht
So doch ein wustes Feld der Leiden schaffen.
Und mein Herz:
Rot
Blass
Voll Hass
Voll Liebe
Ist euer eignes Herz, Genossen!
Ist das ja nur, was ihr mir gabt!

Setzt eurem Werk ein gutes Ende
Indem ihr uns
Den neuen Anfang lässt!

14. FDJ = Freie Deutsche Jugend, the Communist youth movement

15. F.W., "Die Lyrik bleibt gefährlich. Junge Dichter lasen Ost-Berlin -

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Margaret Vallance, "Wolf Biermann: The Enfant Terrible as Scapegoat,"
Survey. A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies, October 1966,
p. 178.


22. Ibid., pages 101-104.

23. Ibid., p.103.

und vor dem Kaffee
schreibe ich noch schnell
vom Mund
vom Gedicht
vom Kaffee
die alle deine Werke sind

24. Ibid.

Dein Mund ist meine Feder
Dein Rücken ist mein Blatt
As mentioned above, the construction of the Berlin wall ushered in a period of economic and political stability in the GDR. This stability carried with it a thaw in the rigid social and cultural standards which had long been a part of GDR life. It was during this period, 1964 and early 1965, that Wolf Biermann was able to sing openly in both the GDR and the Federal Republic and establish his reputation. In 1964, he made a five-city tour of West Germany. It was this tour which made him a name in the West and it was this fame which helped protect him throughout the decade during which he was under official ban.

The tour was sponsored by the Socialist German Student Federation (SDS), but was made possible only because Biermann was given official permission to travel to the West, a privilege certainly not granted to many. Permission was attained through the personal influence of Otto Gotsche, secretary of the Council of State, intimate of Walter Ulbricht, and a writer of some reputation. The December tour took the singer to Darmstadt, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Munich. The audiences which greeted him were invariably as enthusiastic as they were young, brought together by the SDS. The reception was beyond all expectations. Even the Springer paper, Die Welt, reported that Biermann's poems belonged, "to the best which contemporary poetry, regardless of whether in East or West, has to offer." Biermann even appeared before the microphones of the government sponsored radio station, West Deutscher Rundfunk.

The Hamburg concert was typical of the Western appearances. The
Hamburger Studenten Studiobühne made 40 placards reading, "Chansons from the GDR," but the university administrators rejected the posters because the initials GDR had not been placed in quotation marks, which was still standard at the time. With great fanfare the students added quotations marks which looked quite obviously like an afterthought, only emphasizing the issue.

When Wolf Biermann arrived at the university, police were on hand with the declared purpose of protecting him, for they had heard that he was a Communist. He hardly needed protection, for he spoke to the 600 students more openly and freely than anyone might have expected in a country in which there was no legal Communist party. He sang his songs and talked between the numbers, about political problems or about the songs he'd just sung or was about to sing, explaining how he understood it in the light of his experiences in the GDR. He sang "Die Krâhen" (The Crows),

Rose up the crow flock, the black cloth
Into the pale evening sky, oh then!
Tore out the thousand evil witches
The sky's red eye.

Crow, where are you flying?
-where everyone is flying, to the field, to the field.

Crow, where will you rest?
-where everyone rests, in the tree, in the tree.

Crow, when will you cry out?
-when everyone cries, I cry out.

Crow, when will you eat of the seed?
-when the seed is sown.

Crow, when will you die alone?
-when everyone dies, in the snow, in the snow.

So it rose up, the crow flock, the black cloth
Into the pale evening sky, oh then!
Tore out the thousand evil witches
The sky's bloodred eye.

Comrades, I saw such things often in those days.3 Biermann explained, "Without the last line I would throw it away, although it's a very beautiful
song. I'll repeat it for you." Which he did. He tried to explain why it was a risk to sing such a song and yet what changes had taken place in both East and West to make it at all possible. In Hamburg's Die Welt, it was commented,

The existential tension, the confrontation of reality with a desired utopia, which his songs, chansons, ballads pronounce, transport the listener in excitement to the other side of the iron curtain, because they give him hope.

Biermann went to inordinate lengths to defend the GDR, "my fatherland," even to the point of making the statement that he had personally helped build the wall. "I am very happy that this state exists in Germany." But he sang,

My fatherland has one hand of fire
Has one hand of snow
and when we embrace
then it hurts my heart so...
and warm water flows over red, red clay.

He found it necessary to explain that his metaphors were not to be understood simply as clever poetic devices. The image of red clay was political, he explained, indicating the thaw in the GDR. Indeed, Wolf Biermann is a perfectionist who constructs his songs and poems with absolute precision.

He talked and played and sang until his fingers had blisters and his face was drenched in sweat. When he left the stage he was weary but seemed pleased with his performance.

Approval from the West was general and came forth at an unexpected level. This did little to ingratiate the singer with the cultural officials in the GDR, but they were forced to recognize his popularity, and given the pervasive influence of the Western broadcast media in the East, they could be reasonably sure that this Western reception would become known in the GDR, at least in certain circles.

Biermann also began performing with ever greater frequency in the GDR. He regularly received invitations from youth groups and workers' organizations.
For the most part he could sing anything he chose, but there were cases of censorship, as illustrated by a story from Die Distel (The Thistle), where he performed regularly during 1964 and 1965. Die Distel is a satirical cabaret in the Friedrichstrasse in East Berlin. His appearances there had made him an idol of the GDR liberal intelligentsia. Once in 1964, the singer signed a contract to do five songs in a program called "Between Hamlet and Tokyo." Although the contract was entirely legal, higher-ups changed the program to allow him to sing only four songs and among them only one of the original five that had been agreed upon, that being the "Ballad of the Letter Carrier William L. Moore." Rather than submit to the change, Biermann refused to perform. But the censorship imposed at places like Die Distel was largely effective because Biermann allowed it to happen, and he later recognized that fact.

Everytime, when I passed the lighting technician on the way to my appearance, he said, 'Herr Biermann, you know: only these four songs, otherwise I'll have to shut off the light.' At the time it never occurred to me that one can also sing in the dark.

During this period Biermann occasionally appeared with the West Berlin satirist Wolfgang Neuss. Their most notable collaboration was a three-hour concert in the Social Hall at the Frankfurt/Main zoo in the spring of 1965. It was the follow-up to a nuclear disarmament march, and from it came a two-volume live recording, the first volume of which was released by Philips of Germany under the title, Wolf Biermann-Ost zu Gast bei Wolfgang Neuss-West (Wolf Biermann-East as Guest of Wolfgang Neuss-West). The second volume is yet to appear. It was his connection with Neuss which again brought Biermann into direct conflict with the authorities of the German Democratic Republic.

Wolfgang Neuss published a little newspaper entitled Neuss Deutschland. It must be explained that this is a parody of the official newspaper of the SED, Neues Deutschland, meaning 'New Germany.' This alone would have been
enough to have been upsetting, but in addition the little four-page sheet, which Neuss' friends peddled on the Kurfürstendamm, had as its slogan, "Comedians of all Countries, Unite!" In May of 1965, Neuss published, without Biermann's knowledge, a private letter from the East Berliner to himself. The letter read,

```
Much beloved Neuss,
I hope you've realized, in the meantime, that you are, in every sense a persona non grata. By virtue of the very same Communist ambitions which could have brought you into a pleasantly serious disagreement with conditions in West Germany, you were thrown back, a dangerously smelly fish, into the salty dead sea of the homeless Left, into the very medium which appears to us ridiculously unfit for political actions.

Germany's reactionaries know quite well where they are exiling their incorrigible correctors: into the unproductive position of bitterness and desperately obtuse salon revolutions. I have just been reading an observation by Engels, fresh as dew, on the situation of the German poet in 1847:

'On the one hand, being part of German society, he finds it impossible to revolt, because the revolutionary elements per se are as yet undeveloped; on the other, he finds the chronic misery that surrounds him too debilitating to rise above it, to act freely against it, and to mock it, without himself falling back into it. For the time being, the only advice to all German poets with a little talent left is to emigrate to civilized countries.'

We know that any and all criticism against conditions in Germany is ludicrous, because the criticized conditions are below the level of all criticism; and we know that all the untoward circumstances in Germany do not possess the dignity of historically relevant processes. All the conflicts that arise on German soil are automatically farces, because our dear old German Michel has remained the impotent clown of history ever since the suppression of the peasant's revolt. I expect little of Germany, which means, of us. I can only guffaw at the schizophrenic alternative: East and West Germany.

The most devastating effect of the beating we constantly receive is our getting used to it; if this will continue long enough, we shall even lend to our sufferings the appearance of the reasonable and the ordinary, and, missing greater pleasures, shall decorate ourselves with the crown of thorns of the martyr. The black and blue spots on paper are being replaced by those on our asses. We are moving through our musty German territory and, instead of doffing our hats, we doff our trousers and bare our tanned hides. Thus the pose of 'pompously whimpering socialism' is developed in us, that is, in me.

Having no barricades, across the kitchen tables we hurl empty beer bottles at our wives' backs, and, wet with tears and cold sweat, we unload on our closest friends, poor fellows, our petit-bourgeois hangover.
```
Constant revolt against political timidity finally turns us into good German backyard-gardeners, and, if we are possessed by a feeling for art, into plaster garden-dwarfs. Neuss the garden-dwarf with the ceramic ax, Biermann, the garden-dwarf with the plaster violin -- here they stand in the front garden of world politics on their loam legs and cry the paint off their baked clay. 'The World is Bad' -- 'Oh, Man' -- 'Germany, Pale Mother' -- 'We Will Have to Die, Then There Will Be Peace' -- 'Ashes Upon Us' -- 'Woe to All of Us' -- 'Spickenagel, it's All Your Fault!' All my misery is ridiculous; ridiculous as well as justified. Timid bickering between battles.

One has to get used to peace as a musty state of emergency. The thought horrifies me that my fear might grow faster than my hatred. Once that happens, I'm done for.

Good luck, my friend. We're more likely to meet on the moon than in Germany. Or else, you'll have to sing a disgustingly reactionary, revanchist, militaristic tune, - then our bald-headed decision-makers will let you in here, as they let all the others in. Remember at last: It's the heretics who are fried, not the heathen. May my lamenting disgust you and rid you of your own! Greet Grete from me, kiss Jette, kick Brandt.

Yours, Biermann

I include the entire text because it is the only information we have on the nature of Biermann's mood at the time. It is also a reflection of the pessimism that was later to plague him during the years of the ban against him. The sentiments expressed here represented the dark side of his essentially optimistic songs. The negative mood did not please the GDR's cultural functionaries who demand optimism from their intellectuals. They were angered enough to take action. Biermann was forbidden to perform in the GDR and denied permission to leave the country. All invitations from groups within the country were intercepted and turned down by the authorities. The isolation of Wolf Biermann had begun. He could still visit Die Distel, but he had to leave his guitar at home.

Surprisingly enough however, in June, the 7th Workers' Festival of the GDR, held in Frankfurt/Oder, announced that there would be two chanson-evenings featuring Wolf Biermann. He was paid 1500 Marks. It appeared to be a good sign. But just as quickly as hope rose, it fell again. At the last minute the performances were cancelled, presumably due to pressure from East
Berlin. As yet the ban on Biermann had no legal basis. It was enforced by pressure and behind-the-scenes dealings.

The easing of pressure during 1964 and 1965, which provided Biermann with the freedom he did enjoy, had many other manifestations. It was a general thaw which, as mentioned, took place as a consequence of the improving economic and social conditions resulting from the building of the wall. This monstrous construction provided, after the first shock ebbed, the basis for a growing material well-being and with that an increasing degree of freedom. The new freedom was evidenced by youths dancing the previously taboo twist and hully-gully. Rock bands popped up all over and the GDR began to see the beginnings of a counterculture.

The long-standing Communist prudery in relation to sex seemed to be easing as well. There is the famous legend of the girls going to work in the harvest topless. Love scenes on the screen and on television became ever more daring. Films coming out of Defa, the state film organization, were both sexually and politically more frank than those to which the citizens of the GDR were accustomed. A film called Spur der Steine (Trace of the Stones), based on the novel by Erik Neutsch which had a song by Wolf Biermann as a prologue, portrayed a bunch of skinny-dipping workers tossing a People's Policeman into the drink. A playwright by the name of Peter Hacks, like Biermann an immigrant from the Federal Republic, produced a play entitled Moritz Tassow which questioned practices used during the collectivization of agriculture in the late fifties. Another film, Ehe im Schatten (Marriage in the Shadow), dealt with the arbitrariness of German justice in the immediate post-war years.

All this new liberality was not accepted with open arms by many within the power structure, but it found supporters, amazingly enough, in the persons of Walter Ulbricht and Otto Gotsche. It has been speculated that their
motive was largely the hope of preventing unfavorable foreign opinion in relation to the GDR's cultural policy as compared to that of other Eastern-block countries. Despite this certainly not unquestioning approval from on high, the opposition slowly began to make its opinions heard. Films were taken out of circulation or edited, concerts of electronic music were cancelled. In Rostock, Kurt Bartel, a member of the SED Central Committee and a writer known under the name of Kuba, declared, "The counterrevolution is on the march." The true target of these attacks was of course not the singer Wolf Biermann or other writers or the film industry, but rather liberalization in general, for liberalization meant an opening of society that could lead to the growth of an internal opposition, an opposition which might raise doubts about the whole basis of "real existing Socialism."

Increasingly though, Wolf Biermann became the symbol of the "threat." He received ever increasing numbers of invitations to sing, but those who had sent the invitations invariably had to say that plans had to be changed because of instructions from higher-up. A Swiss Communist organization, Kultur and Volk, planned a tour and wrote Biermann to seek his assent. Instead of a reply from the singer, they received word from the "Society for Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries" that Biermann would not be able to accept their invitation because he was booked for performances every day for the rest of the year.

Earlier in the year, an anthology of cabaret songs edited by Helga Bemmen, was brought out by the Henschel Verlag. The first edition of the book contained four songs by Wolf Biermann, but, after pressure on the singer was increased, a second edition was printed which had been, without explanation, purged of his songs. The "people's own recording company" Eterna had been allowed to press an edition of six of Biermann's songs. Sale was however never permitted. The investment was written off to poor planning.
Wolf Biermann's enemies were becoming stronger, but were still not in a position to have him imprisoned or exiled. As suggested above, there were signs of support from within Walter Ulbricht's inner circle. He also received support from another unexpected source, the hardline literary critic Alfred Kurella, who spoke out for an end to the performance ban and, before a group of cultural functionaries, spoke approvingly of a Biermann ballad about the French poet François Villon in which he himself is ironically mentioned. (The ballad will be discussed later.)

October 1965 proved to be a turning point in the Biermann case. In West Berlin the Klaus Wagenbach Verlag published a collection of Biermann's songs and poems written between 1960 and 1965. The title, making reference to the barbed wire of the Berlin Wall, was Die Drahtharfe (The Wire Harp). Although friends of the writer of the book sought a publisher in the GDR, there was never any real chance of success, for the cultural functionaries understood it as an open provocation. At about the same time the recording made by Philips in Frankfurt/Main was released in West Germany. Die Drahtharfe was an immediate success and remains the most popular book of poetry in post-war Germany. West German critics spoke highly of it, but for its political content rather than its "poetic" value. The storm around the author intensified. Dogmatists within the SED called Biermann and "Beatmusik" the Trojan horses of capitalism.

The government's first open show of force against Biermann came on October 31, 1965, as he sought to attend a "Lyrik und Jazz" performance in the Kongresshalle on the Alexanderplatz. For the concert Biermann had received an honorary ticket. That he had received such a ticket, which would have allowed him to sit among the evening's prominent guests, seemed to be a very encouraging sign. When he tried to enter the hall however, he was faced with a cordon of People's Policemen (Volkspolizisten = Vopos).
Biermann called to his friends, who came to his aid by surrounding him. Together they tried to force their way past the police, but instead the Vopos broke their circle, surrounded Biermann themselves, and led him away to a police wagon.

Upon learning that Biermann had been taken away, the participants in the concert refused to begin until Wolf Biermann was in the hall. The performance was delayed a half hour, but then went on, the performers having been assured that the singer had simply been driven home with his own consent. At that moment he was actually being interrogated by police detectives at a nearby precinct. After questioning him the police could find no grounds for criminal charges. They called the State Security Service (the political police known as the Stasi), figuring it must be a political matter. The Stasi claimed to have no interest in the affair, and, after two hours of detention, Biermann was driven back to the Kongresshalle where he'd been picked up.

Again Biermann attempted to gain entry into the hall, but he was met by the director, who read to him from a piece of paper that he (Biermann) had been banned from the hall for the past year. Biermann said, "I don't know anything about that." The director replied, "I just learned about it myself today." Biermann was left with no choice but to walk home. The power of the workers' and peasants' state had been demonstrated once more.

Reactionaries within the leadership began to move for a tightening all along the cultural front. Walter Ulbricht met with writers to discuss the situation. At this meeting Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf opposed, in the long run unsuccessfully, the re-introduction of a Stalinist line in the cultural field. As another indication of the hardening policy, the next meeting of the Writers Union, scheduled to be held in Berlin, was postponed and moved to Leipzig, where the much more rigid Party leadership had openly
attacked Wolf Biermann and opposed the concept of "ideological coexistence."21

Soon a fully unexpected event interceded to bring the tense climate in the GDR to a climax. At 10 o'clock in the morning of December 3rd, only hours before the signing of a new trade agreement that would economically tie the GDR to the Soviet Union for another five years, Erich Apel, chairman of the State Planning Board, sitting at his desk in his office, put a pistol to his head and pulled the trigger. An official bulletin explained, "He suffered from circulatory disorders and nervous strain which, despite all efforts by doctors, led to a nervous breakdown."22 Apel was not only the chairman of the Planning Board but also a candidate member of the SED Politburo and the prime mover behind the "New Economic System" which, after the construction of the wall, had sparked the GDR economy by decentralizing planning and introducing responsible plant management.

The whole truth about Erich Apel's suicide may never be known, but a couple of theories have been put forward. The West German newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau speculated that Apel had been a protege of Moscow and had perhaps been groomed as a future premier, but had fallen out of favor in September when the leadership in Moscow sought promises of more machinery, chemical plants and other finished products, deliveries which Apel feared would burden the GDR economy. It was also reported that Apel was due for criticism at the SED Central Committee plenum scheduled for December 17-19.23

Stephan Thomas, the East Bureau chief of the West German Social Democratic Party, contended that Apel had been cheating the Soviet Union on the delivery of finished goods. He had allegedly been using Soviet raw materials and then selling the finished products on the Western capitalist markets for hard cash, all this in an effort to support the GDR economy.24 Indeed he has passed a confidential memorandum to his closest associates
complaining about the Soviet exploitation of the German economy and calling for a new open economy which would free the way to Western markets. According to Thomas, the Soviets confronted Apel with his deceptive practices at a September 18 meeting in Moscow. The Russians are said to have demanded full delivery of unfilled orders without further shipments of raw materials to the GDR. Apel negotiated unsuccessfully right up to December 3rd, when the new agreement was to be signed. Then he shot himself. Whatever the truth behind Erich Apel's suicide, it indicated a serious crisis within the leadership and it sparked an intense campaign against the nation's liberal elements. This meant a great strengthening of the position of the hard-liners. In an effort to strengthen his position, Walter Ulbricht, one of the more moderate leaders, announced, a few days after the suicide, that from that day forward every second week would only be a five-day workweek and that at year's end there would be a generous bonus for everyone. This was also designed to pacify the population in light of the new hard line to come.

Observers noted that the news of Erich Apel's suicide deeply affected Wolf Biermann. It seemed to break his defiant spirit. It must have been a doubly sharp blow when on December 5 he was personally attacked in an editorial in Neues Deutschland. The attack, written by Klaus Hopke, read in part as follows:

For some time the West German radio and West German newspapers have again and again praised a poet who lives in the capital of the GDR. His name is Wolf Biermann. In West Berlin there appeared a book by him. One of the programmatic texts in the volume carries the title, 'Inaugural Address of the Singer.' In it Biermann dreams that when he 'opens his trap,' panic spreads.

Let us see what is produced when he opens his trap. To the workers and peasants, technicians and agronomists who daily work for the happiness of the people, he has the impudence to say:

'I should sing of happiness of a new time
yet your ears are deaf from speeches.
Create in reality more happiness!
Then you won't need to escape
in my words.'

Let us examine this effusion objectively. Herr Biermann thus refuses to fulfill the beautiful and important mandate of the writer in our Republic, to describe the construction of a new, just social order. Should the working people first build more happiness for Herr Biermann! Perhaps then he would gracefully deign to sing about it?...

It is not surprising that Biermann, in another poem, drivels about the party cutting off its own feet. In reality it is a matter of Herr Biermann's feet of scepticism. He is cutting the ties to the people, the ties to the Party.

He seizes the wire of his harp in order to let resound malicious verses against our Antifascist Defense Rampart and our border soldiers. At the risk of their lives the comrades on the borders of our state fulfill their duty of Socialist patriotism. Also Biermann's peace and well-being are thus preserved. But he, under the guise of irony, pours out hate over it. Is it a coincidence that such verses are published in West Berlin of all places? Our border soldiers are serving Socialism and peace. What does Herr Biermann serve with his botched writings?...

The newspaper (the Frankfurter Allgemeine) which can be most sensitive in its judgment of progressive works of art in matters of human sexual life, also accepts Biermann's passages bordering on pornography. He who is politically perverse may also be sexually...In Biermann there is lacking the 'yes' to the Socialist German state. In return, there is the soothing stroke of the hand of the monopoly-bourgeois critic...

Objectively seen, he (Biermann) stabs the West German humanistic forces in the back...I don't know if Biermann is still capable of consternation about such connections. In any case he will desire to feel thus about them. Yet that will not help him. He who fears nothing more than responsibility, will not be freed from responsibility.

Facts remain facts. Even a radical turnabout cannot change them overnight. But a radical turnabout would be the only possibility to get out of the wake of anti-Communist songwriting.

There is still no indication of this.

Rather Biermann hit the nail on the head concerning his earlier invictives in his 'Self-portrait,' written in 1965. Therein he discloses the nature of his weakness. 'In the bunkers of my scepticism I sit secure,' he writes.

Does he sit as securely as he thinks?

In light of this attack, Biermann, who was not at the time in Berlin, but on the Baltic Sea island of Usedom, said only that he would trust in the "old Communist Ulbricht," and Matthew 22: 45-46.

45. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was talking about them.
46. But when they tried to arrest him, they feared the multitudes,
because they held him to be a prophet.

There was little else he could say, and yet both statements had some basis in reality. As we have seen, it was true that Walter Ulbricht had been the source of some, if not support, at least toleration. And it could be that the fact that Biermann came from an old Communist family had for a time made him immune from the worst consequences. And the limited popularity he had achieved had pushed him far enough into the public eye that any drastic action against him would have had distinctively negative propagandistic results. Yet the question inevitably arises as to why the SED felt the need to attack Wolf Biermann at all. Though he had achieved enough popularity to give him a measure of protection, he was certainly not known to the 'multitudes' in the GDR. No book of his writings had appeared in that country, no record of his singing had been released, and only a handful of his songs and poems had been published in newspapers, magazines, and anthologies. The ironic thing about the press campaign against Biermann, which was triggered by this first attack, is that it made him a nationally known writer for the first time, or to be more accurate, his name became widely known. Most citizens saw the name Wolf Biermann for the first time when they picked up Neues Deutschland on December 5. On December 12, Klaus Helbig published an article attacking the writer in the magazine Forum. BZ am Abend also picked up the attack. The press campaign against Biermann surpassed all those against other writers in recent years, both in its intensity and in its sharpness. In its December 15th issue, the West German news magazine Der Spiegel quoted Biermann as saying, "I will continue precisely as I have up to now." And referring to the press attacks he was reported as saying, "Such language shames me, but at the moment I see no possibility of making a reply." In the December 14, ND, deputy culture minister Alexander Abusch wrote about the "Cult of Doubt," contending that
the origins of scepticism lie in a lack of understanding of the dialectics of development in the building of Socialism, and the propagation by certain individuals of bourgeois ideologies and bourgeois conceptions of art. On the occasion of the opening of the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, Alfred Kurella wrote in ND, "'One' now wears scepticism as 'one' wears hornrimmed glasses - they apparently restrict the field of vision."  

The 11th Plenum, held from the 15th to the 18th of December, proved to be a watershed in the so-called "cultural" history of the GDR. It marked the beginning of a "struggle against liberalism and scepticism," and declared that the ideas of the Bitterfeld Way were the "objective law of the Socialist cultural revolution."  

At the meeting many speakers rose to attack sceptical intellectuals, the prime target being Wolf Biermann. The most important of these speakers was security chief Erich Honecker (now chairman of the Council of State and head of the SED), a member of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, who gave the report of the Politburo.

Our GDR is a clean state. In her there are unshakeable standards of ethics and morals, of decorum and behavior. Our Party decisively opposes the imperialist-backed immoral propaganda which has the goal...of inflicting damage to Socialism... We agree with those who have determined that the source of these examples of immorality, and a lifestyle foreign to Socialism, can also be seen in several films, television programs, plays, literary works, and magazines. Of late there has also been an increase in anti-humanistic representations in the productions of the television network, in films, and magazines. Brutality is portrayed, human relations have been reduced to the sexual drive. We are confronted with examples of American immorality and decadence. This is especially true in the area of the fine arts and entertainment and in individual literary works... What the enemy demands of the GDR's cultural workers is no longer renunciation of Socialism...but merely uncertainty about the correctness of our path toward Socialism.  

After such general remarks, Honecker began to single out individual offenders: Werner Bräunig, Heiner Müller, Stefan Heym, and Wolf Biermann. Thinking perhaps of Biermann's poem "To the Old Comrades," Honecker accused the rebel
singer and poet of undermining "The fighting alliance between the old comrades and the younger generation," and said that Biermann was, by opponents, being systematically put into the position of being the standard bearer of the so-called literary opposition in the GDR, the voice of the "rebellious youth."

Biermann's so-called poems demonstrate his petit-bourgeois, anarchistic behavior, his arrogance, his scepticism and cynicism. Today, Biermann is with his songs and poems betraying the fundamental positions of Socialism. Moreover, he enjoys the benevolent support and sponsorship of several writers, artists and other intellectuals. The time has come to oppose foreign and damaging theses and unartistic productions...We are not adherents of muckraking...but that does not mean that we won't dam the latest effusions of inhibition and brutality from capitalist West Germany, designed to infect our youth.

As the grounds for such mistaken tendencies, Honecker spoke of an unsound knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist world view, subjectivism, philosophical scepticism, and a misunderstanding of the creative character of the resolutions of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In summing up his remarks, Honecker said,

The characteristic thing about all these phenomena is that objectively they stand in agreement with the views of the opponents, through the distribution of immorality and scepticism, especially with the hope of reaching the intellectuals and youth, and in the guise of a so-called liberalization, to weaken the GDR from within.

Only two people disagreed with the new course, two writers, Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf. Anna Seghers, the grand old lady of Socialist literature, was sitting between Erich Honecker and Walter Ulbricht. In criticizing the new line she addressed Ulbricht with the familiar "du" form for the first time, in an obvious attempt to remind him that he too was just another comrade. She declared that taboos for writers should not be permitted and that it was unthinkable that Party officials should determine what is moral and immoral in literature. Christa Wolf, whose problematical novel
Der geteilte Himmel (The Divided Sky) had met with both official approval and commercial success, criticized the SED itself for having created a cultural vacuum in which the youth were left with no where else to turn except to "Beatmusik" and sex films. In regard to the subjectivity which had been so roundly criticized at the plenum, she was quoted on December 18 in ND as saying,

I would like to say that art is built upon special cases and that art cannot in any case renounce being subjective, that is, recreating the signature, the language, the thought world of the artist.

But the last word at the plenum went to Walter Ulbricht, who, like Lenin, felt that the "artist" could attain true freedom only within the context of a Socialist society. Critical literature most certainly had a place in the GDR, but certain people who had pushed this freedom too far had taken advantage of this freedom to advance nihilism, anarchism, pornography, and other "methods of the American way of life."

It is a matter of greater possibilities for the flourishing and effectiveness of artists in our society, art therefore being a part of the Socialist power, of the richness and ideas of the people. We say that through our work, the GDR will ever more become the home of all progressive culture.

Nice words, but the 11th Plenum marked the beginning of a long, cold winter in the GDR, especially for Wolf Biermann who was officially banned from making any public appearances, from travelling outside the GDR, and from publishing or recording any of his works.

The West German literary critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki has speculated as to why the SED felt it necessary to make such a public fuss over a young writer who had never been published in his own country. Would it not have been easier to impose the ban and accompany it with dead silence in the press, thus relegating Biermann to the status of a non-person (which later became the tactic)? The action was taken to a large extent as a result of the
success of Die Drahtharfe. Reich-Ranicki believed that there were circles who had real reason to fear Biermann's songs. For Wolf Biermann's was an ideal Communist biography. He was also the ideal Socialist writer of the Bitterfeld variety. Further, his works are designed for mass consumption and are understandable even to the uneducated. He was in short a product of the SED cultural policy. This, Reich-Ranicki believed, was, from the beginning, why the Party feared him. Reich-Ranicki:

Whose power is actually greater: that of the first worker and peasant state on German soil, which is surrounded by the anti-fascist defensive rampart, that is the German Democratic Republic - or perhaps that of the singer Wolf Biermann? An absurd question. No, the question is not absurd, rather, it seems to me, the situation which points it up.47

After the imposition of the ban, state functionaries destroyed existent tapes of Biermann's singing,48 and withdrew another record from sale. The latter had been recorded at a folk song concert in the East Berlin Kongresshalle. The Minister of Culture ordered it revoked because the singer Manfred Krug49 had sung Biermann's "Ballad of the Letter Carrier William L. Moore," a song which had earlier met with Party approval.50 But Biermann was certainly not silenced. The harassment, not surprisingly, had the effect of only increasing his fame. By the third week of December Die Drahtharfe was in its third edition. In East Berlin it was being sold at prices ranging from thirty to forty Marks (the West German price was less than six Marks,), and dittoed copies of individual poems were being passed hand to hand.51

Support for Biermann came from various circles. The West German "progressive" forces, which Neues Deutschland had charged Biermann was alienating, soon had their say. Heinrich Böll and Peter Weiss published letters of solidarity in the December 17 issue of the Hamburg weekly Die Zeit. ND also claimed that Biermann's friends were distancing themselves.
His reply: "That is wishful thinking, on the contrary, my circle of friends is increasing." Up to December 21, not a single GDR author had spoken out against him and his popularity was demonstrated by the fact that ever more Party and youth groups were requesting performances.

There were public protests as well. The most well-publicized came from Franz Fühmann, a writer who had come to prominence shortly after the war. He had followed the recommended themes for most of his career, had won official recognition in the GDR and was equally esteemed in the Federal Republic. In January 1966, he resigned from the board of the Writers Union to protest, "against the cultural-political line at the Eleventh Plenum." Although similar protests were covered up, Fühmann's fame made that impossible in his case.

The Central Committee of the SED was forced to recognize the seriousness of the situation. This is undoubtedly what led to the dismissal of Hans Bentzien as Minister of Culture. He had not been a strong minister and therefore proved to be a good scapegoat. Bentzien's successor was Klaus Gysi. Gysi was an old Party man (joined in 1931), was totally loyal and yet intelligent and flexible. He had for years been the head of the largest publishing house in the GDR and was therefore adept at dealing with writers. It was his task to mediate with the disaffected writers in the GDR, that is, the vast majority. The Central Committee knew that the opposition of the intellectual community could prove to be a strong one and hoped that Gysi might be able to salvage the situation, so as to avoid the need to take drastic measures which could lower still further the regime's international prestige.

Meanwhile, pressure on Wolf Biermann increased. The problems were however not only a direct result of his conflict with the leadership in the East. Many West German newspapers, especially those of the right-wing
Springer press empire, saw a man they could use for their own ends. They portrayed the life-long Communist, who had but contempt for the capitalist Federal Republic, as a genius and a martyr. This infuriated Biermann: "My difficulties with these comrades in my country are our affairs."

As noted above, Der Spiegel had quoted Biermann as saying that he would make no radical change as a result of the SED attacks, but continue just as he had up to that point. Now, under increasing pressure, he felt the need to clarify his feelings. Writing to Der Spiegel,

I said this sentence neither to you nor anyone else. When you put these words in my mouth it is done for the purpose of dangerously stirring up the already irrelevant and dangerously excited conflict around my person...I have the intention, for a longer period of time, to work in peace, because in ten years no one will be interested in the scandals which were stirred up around my person, but only in what useful texts I can lay on the table.

Biermann was not to prove to be a prophet.

The repressive Party line continued. On January 14, 1966, Neues Deutschland announced that the Writers' Union of the GDR had issued a declaration in line with the 11th Plenum. Stefan Heym, Manred Bieler, and Wolf Biermann were listed as authors "with damaging tendencies in their political work."

He who published views or works of this type in the West, as Stefan Heym or Wolf Biermann, puts himself next to a Robert Havemann and puts his views or his work in the hands of Barzel, Mende, and Springer as a weapon in their struggle against our Republic and strengthens the international reaction.

In February the Council of Ministers issued what proved to be a largely symbolic regulation which prohibited writers and publishers from concluding contracts with foreign publishing houses without receiving prior permission from the Copyright Office. This regulation became popularly known as the Lex Biermann. For many years this inconvenient and ineffective law was simply ignored for the fines were only minimal. On August 1, 1979, however, the government handed down a law tightening the restrictions on
foreign publication. Fines, as in the case of Stefan Heym's novel Collin, have been as high as $5,000 dollars.

For months, articles and letters supporting the new hard line cultural policy filled the GDR press, but not a single well-known writer was among those supporters. Reich-Ranicki summed up the situation quite accurately when he wrote, "It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the talented are bitterly silent, the half-talented stutter in embarrassment, while the incompetent talk on regardless."\(^6\)

Finally, in June 1966, the press campaign against Wolf Biermann came to an end, and for the next eleven years his name ceased to be mentioned officially in the GDR. He became a non-person. But before the curtain fell, another blunt attack was made upon the singer. That came on March 15, in an address by Politburo-member Erich Mückenberger before the Society for German-Soviet Friendship. Alluding to Biermann's poem "To the Old Comrades," he said,

>Biermann is not 'full of hate' against the atrocities of imperialism in Vietnam,\(^6\) is not 'full of hate' against those who have forbidden the Communist Party in West Germany,\(^6\) (against) those who are preparing an atomic war, rather he is 'full of hate' against the Socialist social order, which he insults and slanders.\(^6\)
Notes on Chapter Four

1. SDS = Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund


Die Krähen

Erhob sich der Krähen Geschwader schwarzes Tuch in den blassen Abendhimmel sodann, ach! hackten die tausend verzauberten Hexen Dem Himmel sein rotes Auge aus.

Krähe, wohin fliegst du?
- Wo alle hinfliegen, ins Feld, ins Feld.

Krähe, wo ruhest du aus?
- Wo alle ruhen, im Baum, im Baum.

Krähe, wann schreist du so laut?
- Wenn alle schreien, schrei ich.

Krähe, wann frisst du die Saat?
- Wenn sie gesäet ist.

Krähe, wann stirbst du allein?
- Wenn alles stirbt, im Schnee, im Schnee.

Erhob sich also der Krähen Geschwader schwarzes Tuch in den blassen Abendhimmel sodann, ach! hackten die tausend verzauberten Hexen Dem Himmel sein blutrotes Auge aus.

Derlei sah ich oft, Genossen, in diesen Tagen.


7. Ibid.

Mein Vaterland hat eine Hand aus Feuer, hat eine Hand aus Schnee und wenn wir uns umarmen, dann tut das Herz mir weh... und warme Wasser fließen auf rotem, rotem Klee.
8. Ibid.


12. The text of this song appears in Für meine Genossen with the following footnote: "written for the film Spur der Steine, a contract job for the Defa. After the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED 1965 the film was cleansed of this song and soon thereafter, the GDR of this film."


15. Hermann, "Bänkelsanger der DDR."


17. Hermann, "Der Bänkelsanger der DDR."

18. Alfred Kurella is best known for his article on Franz Kafka in which he declared the latter's works to have no relevance for Socialism: Alfred Kurella, "Der Frühling, die Schwalben und Franz Kafka," Sonntag (East Berlin), August 4, 1965, pages 10-12.

19. Hermann, "Der Bänkelsanger der DDR."

20. Ibid.


23. Ibid., pages 175-176.

24. Ibid., p. 176


27. Anonymous, "Spur der Steine."


29. The poem referred to here is "Ballade vom Mann," Die Drahtharfe, p. 73.
30. in: Neues Deutschland, December 5, 1965.

31. Anonymous, "Zum Vorsingen."

32. This is the East Berlin evening newspaper read by almost everyone. Neues Deutschland, on the other hand, is not very popular among the general public. It's a favorite for wrapping cheese sandwiches.


34. Anonymous, "Zum Vorsingen."

35. in: Neues Deutschland, December 14, 1965.


37. Ibid., December 16, 1965.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Werner Braunig had once emigrated to the West, only to return to the GDR.

41. in: Neues Deutschland, December 16, 1965.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Anonymous, "Spur der Steine"

45. in: Neues Deutschland, December 18, 1965.

46. Ibid., December 19, 1965.

47. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Der Dichter ist kein Zuckersack."


49. Manfred Krug is a jazz singer and actor who later emigrated to West Germany.


51. Reich-Ranicki, "Der Dichter ist kein Zuckersack."

52. Anonymous, "Zum Vorsingen."

53. Reich-Ranicki, "Der Dichter ist kein Zuckersack."

54. Anonymous, "Zum Vorsingen."

56. Ibid.

57. Anonymous, "Spur der Steine."


59. Robert Havemann was a professor of physical chemistry and is a dissident GDR Marxist theoretician. His life and views will be discussed at length below. Rainer Barzel was at the time head of the parliamentary faction of the right of center West German Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Erich Mende was chairman of the West German liberal party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP). He has since defected to the CDU and represents that party in the West German parliament. Axel Caesar Springer is the reactionary press czar of West Germany who controls the vast majority of the country's popular press.

60. in: Neues Deutschland, January 14, 1966.


62. As will be seen, Wolf Biermann wrote several songs and poems opposing the war in Vietnam.

63. The old Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was banned in the Federal Republic because it was judged to be anti-constitutional.

Die Drahtharfe was divided into four parts, "The Buckower Ballads," Portraits," "Berlin," and "Appeasements and Revisions." The Buckower ballads inevitably bring to mind Bertolt Brecht's "Buckower Elegies" written in 1953. Buckow is a small town near Berlin where Brecht had a summer house. His poems are subtle reflections upon GDR reality in the year of the June 17th uprising, reflections from the distance and peace of Buckow. They are poems incorporating a wisdom attained through hard and disappointing experience, and yet in which the hope of earlier times has not been extinguished. "The Tire Change,"

I sit on the roadside  
The driver is changing the tire.  
I'm not happy, where I was.  
I'm not happy, where I'm going.  
Why do I watch the tire change  
With impatience?2

Brecht spoke of the "little people," the nun, two naked men rowing and talking to one another, a one-armed former SS-man, and himself. "Sounds,"

Later, in autumn  
There live in the silver poplars great swarms of crows  
But throughout the summer I hear,  
The area being birdless,  
Only the sounds of people stirring  
I am satisfied.3

The Buckower elegies also reflect an attitude which was to influence Wolf Biermann's work profoundly, namely the uncompromisingly critical view of the state in which he (Brecht) had chosen to reside, the state after the June revolt. These writings are, it seems to me, a product of disillusionment,
that is, the end of illusions through which one had already seen, but which one was reluctant to discard.

Biermann's Buckower ballads, written in 1961 and 1962, are less a direct product of disillusionment and more a portrait of Buckow reality after collectivization, after more than a decade of the building of Socialism. Like Brecht's elegies, Biermann's ballads are views of the Socialist society as it presents itself in Buckow, with all its contradictions, confusions and dynamic. Unlike Brecht's works, these ballads are not subtle, not circumspect, but loud, clear, painted in red, reflecting Biermann's emotional personality.

The action in the songs is not overly dramatic, not world-shattering, but of course that is just the point. In the first song, "First of May," which appears with the note, "to be sung by children in the village," Biermann simply describes the preparations for the May Day celebration in the town. The store orders bockwurst and a hundred cases of beer. Even students come from the city ("where one has such a thing"). It is an innocent enough song, but the point comes at the end, when all the overblown Socialist propaganda is at once blown up (and verified). Biermann sings,

On the cow stall, the slogan in red
With white letters is written:
In the cow stall milk is made
Butter and peace
Butter and peace. (page 9)

Next comes the story of Fredi Rohsmeisl the drainage pipe layer from Buckow. It seems that at a dance at Lene Kutschinsky's Fredi and his fiancee "danced apart," a style not yet allowed in Buckow. The music was hot and the beer was warm and suddenly two fellas grabbed Fredi, dragged him outside, and began to give him a good pounding, but Fredi reacted and layed both of them out. Someone phoned the authorities, who soon arrived, and, as the men and women of Buckow tamely looked on, they proceeded to beat
Fredi until he was half dead. He was tried as a "counter-revolutionary,"
got twelve weeks and, after his release, was filled with bitterness. He
was all too willing to tell his story after his tenth beer. Biermann summed
up Fredi Rohsmeisl's feelings quite clearly,

He is for Socialism
And for the new State
But the State in Buckow
With that one he's had it. (page 13)

That represents the feelings of many GDR citizens, regardless of which town
they come from. The story, however, does not end there, for when a few
years had passed and a few speeches had been given and many things had changed
and the tenth Sputnik had flown, then "dancing apart" too was ok and Fredi
watched the State Attorney who had tried him "dancing apart."

What is the point of this little story? The point is made clear in
the refrain, which is altered after each verse.

Boys, I've already seen dances
Boys, that at times were no longer so nice
But does it hurt us?
No!

Boys, I've already seen people curse
Boys, that was at times no longer nice
But is it of use to us?
No!

And then the final refrain:

Boys, I've already seen people change
Boys, that was at times simply beautiful
But is it of use to us? (yes) (pages 11-15)

In essence it is a song calling for patience. The GDR is on the right
track, but give it time and don't sink into bitterness. It is a message to
those who are dissatisfied, and an effort, indicated by the verse quoted
above, to put that dissatisfaction into its proper perspective, that is, its
proper perspective as Wolf Biermann saw it.

Another Buckower ballad, "The Ballad of the Old Women of Buckow,"
shows how the state personifies itself in the town. It tells of the old women who have been waiting since five o'clock to buy fish at the state store and how in the meantime they curse the state because it provides fish only on Friday. The state?

The State's called Fiete Kohn
a fisherman young and strong.
A young woman from Buckow
sleeps with him until eight. (page 19)

The Buckower Ballads are a good portrait of a small town in the GDR, but the portrait isn't complete without the little song called, "Small Town Sunday" which demonstrates the absolute boredom and tediousness of the life there.

So, shall we go?
Ok, then, let's go,
Nothing doing round here.
Nothing doing round here.
Waiter, one beer!
It's empty here.
The summer is cold.
We're getting old.
Miss Rosa has veal.
It's half past three.
Now let's go, ok?
Yeah, let's go, ok.
And is he in?
Yes, he is in.
Shall we go in?
Yes, let's go right in.
Watching TV today?
Watching TV today.
Are they showing a movie?
They are showing a movie.
Got money left?
Yeah, I got money left.
How 'bout a drink?
Yeah, let's have a drink.
So, shall we go?
Ok, let us go.
Watching TV today?
Yes, I'm watching TV today. (page 20, Eric Bentley translation)

When sung, the song is accompanied by a repetitious and boring guitar which only emphasizes the way of life there, in Buckow, on Sunday.
The second section of the book is a series of six portraits: of Bertolt Brecht, Hanns Eisler, François Villon, Ernst Barlach, Julian Grimau, and William L. Moore. The last two songs are of the sort that one might refer to as "solidarity songs." These are also very reminiscent of Bob Dylan's early work, not only in their social consciousness, but also in their subtlety. Bob Dylan did not write newspaper accounts in song form, but took the problematic a step further, chose not to simplify difficult questions. For instance, when Medgar Evers was murdered there came forth a number of songs extolling him as a martyr and condemning the man who killed him. Dylan took a closer look at the problem in his song, "Only a Pawn in Their Game," pointing out that the murderer himself cannot be blamed, rather the Southern politicians who preach racism for the sake of their own personal gain and the whole Jim Crow system of race hate. They murdered Medgar Evers, not the pawn who pulled the trigger. In his songs Wolf Biermann went a short but decisive distance further than his GDR contemporaries. A song like "Comrade Julian Grimau" appears to follow the typical pattern for optimistic Socialist solidarity songs,

Oh sister!
In Madrid's morning gray
While here the men still sleep in peace
Julian Grimau is dying.

Oh brother!
In Madrid's morning gray
While here the sun of blood rises up
Julian Grimau is dying.

Oh mama!
In Madrid's morning gray
Before we have read the papers
Julian Grimau is dying.

Comrades!
In Madrid's morning red
lives Julian Grimau with us!

but the last line does not fit into the mythical Socialist way of thinking.
He lives and yet is dead. (page 25)

Julian Grimau was not just a Socialist hero, he was a man and he is dead. It is fine to say that he lives on, but forgetting his death would in effect lower the worth of his life as a man. In Socialist propaganda it is all too common an idea that the individual must be sacrificed for the greater good. Yes, the meaning of this comrade's life lives on, but the lines of a song written more than a decade later are here appropriate.

In man's war for freedom there
Are no dead dead
That is as true as dry bread:
- there is a life after death.

And yet the death is most certainly not just a personal matter, for that would ignore the first three verses and they are the political heart of this song. While the men in Germany still slept, as the sun rose, before anyone had read the morning paper, Julian Grimau lay dying in Spain. What is the meaning of solidarity? The simple accusation made in this song is that the fascist dictatorship in Spain was never overthrown, but endured, and so many Julian Grimaus suffered and died while Socialist Germany slept peacefully. In the first three verses Biermann calls out to sister, brother, and mother, but in the final verse, in a call to action and a reproach, he calls out to his comrades, to those who let Julian Grimau die.

During the active years of the civil rights movement in the United States there were many songs and poems written in the GDR rightly, if self-righteously, condemning racism, which has been officially eliminated in the German Democratic Republic. Wolf Biermann's contribution was "The Ballad of the Letter Carrier William L. Moore from Baltimore." William L. Moore was a simple man who, to show his concern for human rights, spent the last week of his life traveling in the South carrying signs on which he'd written, "Black and White Unite!" and "Move toward Peace." A week after beginning
his one-man tour through the Southern states he was shot three times in the head. Biermann's ballad relates the story of this brave man who, "walked all alone." (page 27) Unlike so many songs and poems about the racial problems in America, this ballad showed that the situation was not so cut and dried, that there was not just good and bad, but that there were many in America who, while they did not speak out, were not racists, did not hate.

Tuesday, a day in the train
Many asked William L. Moore
About the sign which he wore
and wished him good luck on his tour.

Saturday, a day, it was terribly hot
there came a white woman to him,
gave him a drink and secretly said:
'I think just as you.' (pages 27 and 28)

The song went beyond the standard propaganda designed to reduce complicated questions to oversimplifications. This is the weakness of totalitarian regimes who believe they can thereby control the opinions of perfectly intelligent people, and it is also a weakness of many well-intentioned songwriters. Only a few, like Wolf Biermann and Bob Dylan, are able to write good songs which do not gloss over that which is simply not smooth.

The portrait section of Die Drahtharfe begins with two poems about Biermann's most immediate teachers, Eisler and Brecht. Hanns Eisler, not only a musical genius but also a rotund man with a shiny bald head, was portrayed in the poem, "Hanns Eisler, or the Anatomy of a Sphere." Biermann equated the endless surface of a sphere with the endless resource of ideas which Eisler left behind.

Astonished yet today, we new ones travel here and there
On this tiny globe. 0 surfaces of the sphere!
0 wonderful nonsense! We find and find
No end. (page 24)

The other poem, "Herr Brecht," is one of Biermann's best as well as being
one of his most "Brechtian," reflecting the strong influence of Brecht's later poetry

Three years after his death
Herr Brecht went
From the Hugenot cemetary
along the Friedrichstrasse,
to his theater.

On the way he met
a fat man
two fat women
a boy.
What, he thought,
those are the diligent ones
from the Brecht archive.
What, he thought,
are you still not finished
with that stuff?

An he smiled
unashamed - modestly and
was satisfied. (page 23)

The longest and most discussed song from Die Drahtharfe is the "Ballad to the Poet François Villon," Biermann's spiritual brother, the mystical 15th century French poet. On first glance it might seem unlikely that there could be much affinity between Villon and the 20th century German Communist Biermann, but indeed a closer look reveals strong parallels. François Villon is known to history largely through the police records of the time, for from the time of his student days until his mysterious death Villon had one run-in after another with the law and spent plenty of time behind bars. But despite his problems with the authorities Villon lived a passionate and intense life.

I, poor peddler from Rennes,
will I not die? Yes, if it please God;
but as long as I have my fun,
I have no fear of honest death.

And while this aspect of the Frenchman's life could virtually be a description of at least one side of Biermann's, it is in another respect that Villon
became a model for the young German. Villon's poetry was extremely personal in a time when such personal poetry was rare. He wrote about his woes and his joys, about the world in which he lived and which affected him. William Carlos Williams wrote of Villon's work,

He was his art and could not be separated from it. His poem was by an extension of its prerequisites himself.16

Wolf Biermann has not imitated François Villon, has not, with the exception of this song, used the latter's writings as a model for his own, but has instead learned the Frenchman's technique; he uses the same personal standpoint to view the German Democratic Republic and his own life within it. For Wolf Biermann's primary topic is Wolf Biermann, his woes and his joys and his world. Biermann is his "art" and cannot be separated from it. It would be impossible to properly investigate his songs and poems without investigating his life. Wolf Biermann the passionate man cannot be separated from Wolf Biermann the passionate Communist, from Wolf Biermann the passionate singer-writer-musician, from Wolf Biermann the passionate German. Yet it would be misleading to think that Biermann is in any way egotistical. He is not. He does not write to attract attention to himself. Rather he uses his case as an example. "There where family affairs overlap with the history of the class is the point where a song is hidden that perhaps others need as well."17 His own experiences becomes another weapon in the struggle.

The ballad to Villon is one of Biermann's masterpieces, for it embodies some of the best examples of his impudent humor, his political irony, his earthy images, as well as his love of the sensuous, all of which are basic to his writing and outlook on life. In this song, time and Villon and Biermann are all confused, and yet not. Villon is dead and yet lives. (This is the earliest published example of the life after death theme which arises again and again in Biermann's writings.) At times it is hard to
tell if Villon is Villon or perhaps Biermann. His "big brother Franz Villon" (page 31) lives with the singer in his room. When people come to snoop around Villon takes a bottle of wine and hides in the closet and, 

Waits until the air is clear
The air is never really clear. (page 31) 18

When a good friend comes to visit, perhaps three beautiful women, Villon climbs out of the closet and drinks all night, and sings perhaps. And when he forgets the text Biermann prompts him from Brecht's poems.

Oh yes, Franz was often locked up, but he could usually sing his way out of jail or the noose with his pleading songs. And old Villon could smell the vanity of the rulers a mile away, and he sang about it, sang unashamed and beautifully like a bird in the forest, but now he only stammers. The vodka from Adlershof gives him a headache and the German in Neues Deutschland throws him into confusion when he tries to read it.

If lovely Marie comes to spend the night, Villon passes the time by taking a walk on the wall, where he drives the guards nuts. They shoot him, but from the holes there flows no blood, just wine, red wine. The impudent little Frenchman then plays a tune on the barbed wire harp atop the wall, while the guards keep time with their rifles. When finally Marie has almost drunk Wolf dry and leaves for work, Villon returns, spits up three pounds of lead, but does not complain. He has understanding for Wolf and Marie. Of course the situation does not go unnoticed.

Naturally the deal came out
Nothing can remain secret
In our land order is as important
As with the seven dwarfs (page 35)

At three a.m., three gentlemen from the People's Police rapped on Wolf's door and said,
Herr Biermann...
You are known to us
As a trusted son of the GDR
The fatherland calls
Admit it, don't be shy
For a year there's been
living with you a certain
Franz Filonk, with red hair
An agitator who night after night
In a most provocative way
Is driving the border guards nuts. (page 35)

Thankfully, the trusted son of the GDR, Wolf Biermann, answers quietly,
"Yes," and explains that this boarder had almost led him astray and he'd saved himself only by reading Alfred Kurella's writings about Franz Kafka and the Fledermaus.

I am a pious son of the church
I wet rag I am
A quiet citizen who sings of flowers
only, in songs, softly sings (page 36)

The men break down the closet to get to the agitator.

The men from the police
Broke down the closet
To find only that thrown up
As it slowly slid down. (page 36)

As mentioned above the ballad contains many elements which distinguish Biermann's writings. In it one can see the GDR's everyday realities portrayed as ironically as in the Buckower ballads. There is also political provocation and what John Flores calls a "Heine-like ironic sentimentality." The ballad was a challenge to the limits of tolerance for literary production in the GDR. Again John Flores (who has written probably the best analysis of the song, from which most of my comments are taken): "It provokes society and stands as proof of its own thesis because of the intolerance with which it was received." Many of the lines in this "impudent" song which describe Villon describe Biermann as well. For it is precisely Wolf Biermann who can smell
miles away, "the vanity of the highest rulers," (page 33) it is Biermann who sang "unashamed and beautiful, like a free bird in the forest," (page 33) and who now sits drinking vodka from Adlershof and reading Neues Deutschland's lousy German. It is Biermann who learned Party-Latin as a youth but has returned to the language of the common people. And it is Biermann who drove the bureaucrats who guard the state crazy.

The whole tone of the song does justice to the memory of François Villon and his rebellious life-style and spirit, but Biermann went even further and drew yet more from the model of his big brother. Five of the song's six sections end with a four-line conclusion which serves a function similar to that of the envoys in Villon's ballads. In section two Biermann spoke of Villon's Bittgesängen, his requestes or songs of mercy with which he sang his way out of trouble on many occasions. Biermann didn't just sing about the requestes, he also incorporated one into the last section when he greeted the police by thanking them for finally coming to get his unwanted guest. The song is certainly one of Biermann's best.

The portion of the book entitled "Berlin" contains eight songs and poems concerning Biermann's life in the city. The oldest among them, "Brigittte," written in 1960, takes up a theme which is still basic to Biermann's writings. A man wanders through the city, seeks satisfaction, comfort, escape, but finds only emptiness and desperation until he looks for comfort in the arms of his woman.

I ran from the cold
over the ice
of the streets to you
who knew none of this. (page 43)"

It is sensuality as an answer to the coldness of society, as a challenge to that society, or perhaps as a model for that society.

Biermann's sensuality takes another turn in the little song, "Ballade
von der beisswütigen Barbara," (Ballad of the Biting-Mad Barbara) which tells the story of a strange relationship with a woman who, when she kissed him, also bit him. He let himself be thus abused for quite a long time, but eventually said so long. The song reminds one of a poem from Brecht's Hauspostille, "Erinnerung an Marie A." (Memory of Marie A.) The speaker had, many years before, loved a woman under a tree and while they had loved, a cloud had passed overhead. When thinking back on that lover he can no longer remember her face, but the cloud, the cloud he can still remember. In Biermann's ballad the wounds from Barbara's bites have long since healed and he enjoys the love of tender Marie, but when he holds Marie in his arms he thinks, HE THINKS, not about Marie. (page 46)

Of quite a different nature is the subtle poem, "Frühzeit" (Early).

This morning, as I lie comfortable in bed a rude bell ringer tore me from sleep. Furious and barefoot I went to the door and opened to my son, who, it being Sunday had gone very early for milk.

Those who come too early are not welcome But their milk one drinks nonetheless. (page 49)

Sundays in Berlin are a problematic time. The stores are not open. One wants milk though, and also wants to sleep long, but in order to get any milk it must be fetched early while it is still available. That is to say, either the milk or the sleep must be sacrificed. That is the simple truth to be faced by every man whose son rouses him from sleep.

The final song in the Berlin section bears the same title, but it could also be called "Germany," or perhaps "The German Misere."

Berlin, you German German woman I am your suitor Oh, your hands are so raw from cold and from fire
Oh, your hips are narrow
like your narrow streets
Oh, your kisses are so stale,
I can never leave you.

I can go away from you no more
In the West stands the wall
In the East my friends stand
The north wind is raw.

Berlin, you blond blond woman
I am your cool suitor
your sky is deep blue
therein hangs my lyre. (page 50)

This poem, more than any other in Die Drahtharfe, testifies to the debt Biermann owes to Heinrich Heine. In mood, style and conception the influence of the man Biermann has called his "cousin, the impudent Heinrich Heine," cannot be mistaken. Heine was a German poet who suffered under the same sickness under which the world of his time suffered. He was a child of restoration Europe, a Europe once again divided after the Napoleonic period, divided most in Germany. Wolfgang Preisendanz has written that the split in the world ran through Heinrich Heine's heart. Heine felt that the heart of the poet was the center of the sick world and therefore poetry was a product of that sickness. It is not surprising then that the writing of this passionate man, who lived most of his adult life in exile in Paris, was quite subjective, drawing its truth from his personal suffering.

So it is with Wolf Biermann. He too is the son of his father, who grew to manhood and literary maturity in divided Europe and divided Germany. His poetry is the product of this division and the heartbreak he has personally felt as a result of it. He sees himself, the writer, at the center of this sick world, just as did Heine, and many are the songs and poems which present Wolf Biermann's truth, a relative truth, yes, but truth. Biermann is a physical and psychological victim of the division of Germany.
My fatherland has one hand of fire
Has one hand of snow
and when we embrace
Then it hurts my heart so

Is this new Heine the sign of a new German misere? Yes and no. The fact that Biermann so closely imitated the poetic form of Heine, the four-line stanzas and ABAB rhyme-scheme (in the original German) suggest not so much a bridge to the past, but the continuation of a tradition which links these two passionate German poets who suffered and suffer from the same sickness.

It is therefore not surprising that the final section of Die Drahtharfe, entitled "Beschwichtigungen und Revisionen" (Appeasements and Revisions), has for the most part a different tone and style from the rest of the book. Gone is the subtlety. In its place surfaces other traits of Wolf Biermann: anger and defiance. All too often, when considering poetry and poets, it is felt that poems must be subtle, obscure writings written by dreamy-eyed social loners. Poetry, it is all too often felt, should be "beautiful" and require close reading to comprehend. But the poet Wolf Biermann is a class-conscious Communist revolutionary and many of his poems are closer to being crystal-clear manifestos than being similar to most of the obscure, individualistic poetry written today. Wolf Biermann has something to say and he desires that it be understood. His works are not just written for aesthetic beauty. If they were, he could justifiably be charged with formalism, but one has to consider just what can be used as a basis of aesthetic judgment when looking at his writings. I suggest that the standard must be the work's use to Socialism. That is why Biermann writes. He came to writing in the first place by way of Socialist politics. It would be improper to examine his writings abstracted from their political purpose. Should his poems be smeared with white paint on red brick walls? Is that their proper place? I'm sure that Wolf Biermann would be pleased
to see his ideas thus broadcast, but that doesn't mean that they are nothing more than manifestos. No, one does not have to spend hours thinking about each poem or song. His poems are not written to make the reader consider the poem. Biermann has learned too much from Master Brecht to write such useless poems. They are designed to make the reader or listener think about the social/political circumstances, and yet not only to think, but also to get off his duff and do something about it. Biermann's works are not appropriate material for salon readings and discussions, they are to be sung or read to large groups of people. They are written to move people. They are revolutionary. Yes, Biermann uses simple rhyme schemes in most of his songs. Because he isn't sophisticated to design more complicated ones? No, because songs and poems with simple, clear rhymes are more easily remembered and passed on. The men and women who've been making up folk ballads for centuries discovered this secret, and Biermann's songs come out of that tradition. He uses whatever devices will make his work more effective. Anger, defiance, impudence are legitimate poetic tools. And of course his works have not been without effect. From the very beginning he upset people in the highest circles in the GDR. The first poem in this section is a good example of Biermann's strongest language. Here is Eric Bentley's translation.

The Singer's Inaugural Address

Who once bravely endured in the face of machine guns
are afraid of my guitar. Panic spreads in all directions
when I open my jaws, and
The sweat of terror is seen on the snouts of the bureaucrat elephants
when I treat a hall to my songs, truly
A monster, a plague, that's what I must be, truly
A dinosaur is dancing on the Marx-Engels Platz
A backfiring shell, a dumpling stuck in the fat neck
of the responsible, who fear nothing so much as Responsibility,
Well then
would you chop your foot off
rather than wash it?! Go thirsty rather than
drink the bitter juice of my truth, O Man!
Undo the belt of fear that binds your chest
If you're afraid your heart might fall out if you do,
Baby!
Let it out two or three holes at any rate
Let your chest get used to breathing freely, shouting freely!
Put up with the internal pressure but not with the external!

Let's really cut loose together!
We were not born to blow our great dreams stealthily
into the world through a handkerchief, you idiot!
Our fathers too, were children of freedom and rebellion.
So let us be true sons of our fathers: irreverently
roll up our rough blue shirtsleeves and sing!
shout!
get fresh and laugh! (page 53)28

The poem is a call to revolution, or more accurately, a call to continue the revolution. The fact that former revolutionaries, former soldiers of the Spanish Civil War, former resistance fighters, former concentration camp inmates fear a singer and his guitar is testimony to the narrow-mindedness of the East Berlin regime. It is the narrowness of all absolute regimes, all regimes whose authority is based on power rather than popular support. Such governments must become resistant to change, for the admission of a mistake or failure could sow the seeds of doubt among the population and therefore undermine the state's authority. Thus the title of this final part of the book: "Appeasements and Revisions." Wolf Biermann calls for appeasements from the rulers, an honest acceptance of and challenge to the real contradictions of a dynamic society rather than sterile, simple-minded propaganda. Such appeasements would however, by their very nature, mean revisions in the very basis of GDR society. This brings up another basic aspect of Biermann's writings up to the time of his forced exile. His works were by and large geared to the Socialist problems of the German Democratic Republic and are admittedly not always understandable to someone who is not familiar with the inner workings of that country. This concern
with his society is a result not only of the fact that Biermann lived in the GDR, but also that he was and is passionately interested in the Socialist development of that country. Comment is often made about the intense love-hate relationship of Wolf Biermann to the land to which he migrated at seventeen. It is perhaps a substitute for his dead father, it has been said. This is problematical. It would seem more accurate to say that his intense feelings toward his chosen homeland are a reflection of the passionate nature of his personality. He is a man whose feelings run deep and whose personal passions cannot be separated from his political. In fact he warns against such a separation. His work is molded not only by his dialectic thought process, but also by the melancholy and the great sadness he feels because the great dreams which have always been part and parcel of the Communist movement have been so completely betrayed.

Wolf Biermann has always stood up and bluntly stated his feelings, and as he wrote in a poem called "Rücksichtlose Schimpferei" (Reckless Abuse),

I persist in the truth,
I the liar. (page 71)²⁹

As a result of his strong personal stand he was accused of the crime of being too individualistic, of cutting himself off from the collective. In the poem quoted above:

I I I
am full of hate
am full of hardness
the head split
the brain trampled.

I want to see no one!
Don't stand there!
Don't stare!
The collective is mistaken

I am the individual
the collective has isolated itself
from me
Don't look at me so understandingly!
Oh yes, I know
You wait with earnest certainty
that I for you
will swim into the net of self-criticism

But I am the pike!
You'll have to mangle me
Mince me, put me through the grinder
if you want me on bread. (page 69)

Individualism? Yes, but is it of use to the GDR? (yes)

Who will carry through the revolution, and when? Biermann took up
this question in the most beautiful and important song from Die Drahtharfe,
"Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten" (Wait Not for Better Times). It is addressed
to those GDR citizens who are dissatisfied with the time in which they live.

Many I hear bitterly say
'Socialism - fine and good
But that set upon our head
Is the wrong hat!'
Many I see, fists clinched
Deep in coat pockets
Cold butts in their lips
And in their hearts, ashes.

To these people he can only say,

Wait for better times
Wait with your courage
Like the fool who day by day
Waits at the river's shore
Until no longer flows the water
Which flows eternally.

That is a chorus filled with no ambiguity. In the third verse he sings,

Many hope that the river's
Water can flow no more
But in spring, when the ice melts
It is just beginning

Many hope to wait out the troubled times as they would a long winter, and
the singer recognizes that they must endure much hardship, but changes the
refrain to tell them,

Wait not for better times
Wait not with your courage...
There are many, he says, who will see to it that Socialism blooms today, not just in some mystical tomorrow. The best remedy for the ills of the GDR's "real existing Socialism?"

is that you build Socialism
BUILD IT!!! Build it! (build it)

Wait not for better times... (pages 65 and 66)31

The song is a recognition of the reality that social processes are never complete and that Socialism is not a goal, but a means, a way of life. Socialism is not the product of some story-book law of history. It is rather an ongoing struggle for justice and democracy, a struggle which does not require that the truth, the difficulties, be swept under the rug, but requires instead that these social problems and contradictions be confronted. It is as Michael Harrington concluded in his book Socialism: "Under socialism, there will be no end to history - but there may be a new history."32

With Die Drahtharfe Wolf Biermann established himself as the German Democratic Republic's leading "uncomfortable poet." His position was best expressed in the poem mentioned earlier, "Tischrede des Dichters" (The Poet's Table Speech):

I should sing to you of the happiness of a new age
but your ears are deaf from speeches.
Create in reality more happiness!
Then you won't need to escape
into my words
Build yourself a sweet life, citizen!
Then my sour wine will appeal to you.
The poet is not a sack of sugar. (page 63)33
Notes on Chapter Five

1. Wolf Biermann, Die Drahtharfe. Balladen Gedichte Lieder (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, 1965). Throughout this chapter page references will be from this edition.


   Der Radwechsel
   Ich sitze am Strassenhang.
   Der Fahrer wechselt das Rad.
   Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich herkomme.
   Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich hinfahre.
   Warum sehe ich den Radwechsel
   Mit Ungeduld?

3. Ibid., p.

   Laute
   Später, im Herbst
   Hausen in den Silberpappeln grosse Schwärme von Krähen
   Aber den ganzen Sommer durch höre ich
   Da die Gegend vogellos ist
   Nur Laute von Menschen rührend.
   Ich bin's zufrieden.


5. Am Kuhstall ist die Lösung rot
   mit weisser Schrift geschrieben:
   Im Kuhstall wird die Milch gemacht,
   die Butter und der Frieden.
   Die Butter und der Frieden.

6. Er ist für den Sozialismus
   Und für den neuen Staat
   Aber den Staat in Buckow
   Den hat er gründlich satt.

7. Junge, ich hab Leute schon tanzen sehn
   Junge, das war manchmal schon nicht mehr schön.
   Aber schadet uns das?
   Nein.

   Junge, ich hab Leute schon fluchen sehn
   Junge, das war manchmal schon nicht mehr schön.
   Aber nützt uns das?
   Nein!

   Junge, ich hab Leute sich ändern sehn
   Junge, das war manchmal schon einfach schön.
   Aber nützt uns das? (Ja.)
8. Der Staat heisst Fiete Kohn
ein Fischer, jung und stark.
Ain junges Weib von Buckow
verschläfht mit ihm bis acht.

9. Kleinstadtsonntag

Gehn wir mal hin?
Ja, wir gehn mal hin.
Ist hier was los?
Nein, es ist nichts los.
Herr Ober, ein Bier!
Leer ist es hier.
Der Sommer ist kalt.
Man wird auch alt.
Bei Rose gabs Kalb.
Jetzt isses schon halb.
Jetzt gehn wir mal hin.
Ja, wir gehn mal hin.
Ist er schon drin?
Er ist schon drin.
Gehn wir mal rein?
Na gehn wir mal rein.
Siehst du heut fern?
Ja, ich sehe heut fern.
Spielten sie was?
Ja, sie spielen was.
Hast du noch Geld.
Trinken wir ein'?
Ja, einen Klein'.
Gehn wir mal hin?
Ja, gehn wir mal hin.
Siehst du heut fern?

Ja ich sehe heut fern.

10. Genosse Julian Grimau

Ach Schwester!
In Madrieds Morgengrau
Wenn bei uns die Männer noch schlafen
Stirbt Julian Grimau.

Ach, Bruder!
In Madrieds Morgengrau
Wenn bei uns die Männer noch schlafen
Stirbt Julian Grimau.

Ach, Mama!
In Madrieds Morgengrau
Vor jemand bei uns noch die Zeitung liest
Stirbt Julian Grimau.

Genossen!
In Madrieds Morgenrot
Lebt Julian Grimau bei uns!
Er lebt und ist doch tot.


   Im Freiheitskrieg der Menschheit gibt
   Es keine toten Toten.
   Das ist so wahr wie trocken Brot:
   - es gibt ein Leben nach dem Tod

12. Dienstag, ein Tag im Eisenbahnzug,
   fragte William L. Moore
   manch einer nach dem Schild, das er trug,
   und wünscht ihm Glück für die Tour.

   Sonntäg', ein Tag, war furchtbar heiß,
   kam eine weiße Frau,
   gab ihm ein' n Drink, und heimlich sprach sie:
   'Ich denk wie Sie ganz genau.'

13. Staunend noch heute, fahren wir Neuren hin und her
   Auf diesem winzigen Globus. O Fläche der Kugel!
   O wunderbarer Widersinn! Wir finden und finden
   Das Ende nicht.

14. Herr Brecht

   Drei Jahre nach seinem Tode
   ging Herr Brecht
   Vom Hugenotten-Friedhof
   die Friedrichstrasse entlang,
   zu seinem Theater.

   Auf dem Wege traf er
   einen dicken Mann
   zwei dicken Frauen
   einen Jungen.
   Was, dachte er,
   das sind doch die Fleissigen
   vom Brechtarchiv.
   Was, dachte er,
   seid ihr immer noch nicht fertig
   mit dem Ramsch?

   Und er lachte
   unverschämt - bescheiden und
   war sufrieden.


16. Ibid., p. xii.

18. Und wartet bis die Luft rein ist
   Die Luft ist nie ganz rein

19. 5
Natürlich kam die Sache raus
Es lässt sich nichts verbergen
In unserm Land ist Ordnung gross
Wie bei den sieben Zwergen
Es schlugen gegen meine Tur
Am Morgen früh um 3
Drei Herren aus dem grossen Heer
Der Volkespolizei
'Herr Biermann' - sagten sie zu mir -
'Sie sind uns wohl bekannt
Als treuer Sohn der DDR
Es ruft das Vaterland
Gestehen Sie uns ohne Scheu
Wohnt nicht seit einem Jahr
Bei Ihnen ein gewisser
Franz Fillonk mit rotem Haar?
Ein Hetzer, der uns Nacht für Nacht
In provokanter Weise
Die Grenzsoldaten bange macht
- ich antwortete leise:

6
'Jawohl, er hat mich fast verhetzt
Mit seinen frechen Liedern
Doch sag ich Ihnen im Vertraun:
Der Schuft tut mich anwidern!
Hätt ich in diesen Tagen nicht
Kurellas Schrift gelesen
Von Kafka und der Fledermaus
Ich war verlorn gewesen
Er sitzt im Schrank, der Hund
Ein Glück, dass Sie ihn endlich holn
Ich lief mir seine Frechheit längst
ab von den Kindersohln
Ich bin ein frommer Kirchensohn
Ein Lammerschwänzchen bin ich
Ein stiller Burger. Blumen nur
In Liedern sanft besing ich.'

Die Herren von der Polizei
Erbrachen dann den Schrank
Sie fanden nur Erbrochenes
Das mäßig niederschrank


21. Ibid., p. 312.
22. Ich rannte vor Kälte
über das Eis
der Strassen zu dir
die all das nicht weiss.

23. Frühzeit

Heute morgen, als ich noch wohlig im Bett lag
riss mich ein grober Klingler aus dem Schlaf.
Wütend und barfuß lief ich zur Tür und öffnete
meinem Sohn, der
da Sonntag war
sehr früh nach Milch gegangen war.

Die Zufrühgekommenen sind nicht gern gesehen.
Aber Ihre Milch trinkt man dann.

24. Berlin

Berlin, du deutsche deutsche Frau
Ich bin dein Hochzeitsfreier
Ach, deine Hande sind so rauh
von Kälte und von Feuer.

Ach, deine Hüften sind so schmal
wie deine schmalen Strassen
Ach, deine Küsse sind so schal,
ich kann dich nimmer lassen.

Ich kann nicht weg von dir gehn
Im Westen steht die Mauer
Im Osten meine Freunde stehn,
de Nordwind ist ein rauher.

Berlin, du blonde blonde Frau
Ich bin dein kühler Freier
dein Himmel ist so hunde-blau
darin hängt meine Leier.


26. Wolfgang Preisendanz, Heinrich Heine. Werkstrukturen und Epochenbezüge

27. Peter Brügge, "Auf Stacheldraht die Harfe spielen," Der Spiegel, December 16, 1964. For German original, see note 7 at the end of chapter four.

28. This translation, as all by Eric Bentley, are from Wolf Biermann, The Wire Harp, trans. by Eric Bentley (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967. 1968) (note continued)
Antrittsrede des Sängers


Also hackt ihr den Fuss euch lieber ab als dass ihr ihn wascht?! Verdurstet ihr lieber als dass ihr den Bittersaft meiner Wahrheit trinkt?! Mensch! Schnallt Euch die Angstriemen von der Brust! Und wenn ihr fürchtet das Herz möcht Euch herausfalln Mensch!

So lockert die Fessel um zwei drei Löcher zumindest Gewöhnt die Brust an freies Atmen, freies Schrein! Gepresst seid nur von innerm Druck und nicht von äusserm! Mit offner Stirn lass uns dem Tag eins machen! Nicht hinterhältig unsere grossen Träume durchs Schnupftuch in die Welt zu schneuzen, sind wir geborn, Idiot! Des Aufruhrs und der Freiheit Kinder sind ja unsre Väter selbst. So lasst uns unsrer Väter wahre Söhne sein: respektlos aufkrempeln die Schlotterhemden und singen! schreien! unverschämt! lachen!

29. Ich will beharren auf der Wahrheit ich Lügner

30. Ich Ich Ich bin voll Hass bin voll Härte der Kopf zerschnitten das Hirn zerritten

Ich will keinen sehn! Bleibt nicht stehn! Glotzt nicht! Das Kollektiv liegt schief

Ich bin der Einzelne das Kollektiv hat sich von mir isoliert Stiert mich so verständnisvoll nicht an! Ach, ich weiss ja schon Ihr wartet mit ernster Sicherheit dass ich euch in das Netz der Selbstkritik schwimme
Aber ich bin der Hecht!
Ihr müsst mich zерfleischen
zerhacken, durch Wolf drehn
wenn ihr mich aufs Brot wollt!

31. Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten

Manchen hör ich bitter sagen
'Sozialismus - schön und gut
Aber was man uns hier aufsetzt
Das ist der falsche Hut!'
Manchen seh ich Fäuste ballen
In der tiefen Manteltasche
Kalte Kippen auf den Lippen
Und in den Herzen Asche

Wartest du auf bessre Zeiten
Wartest du mit deinem Mut
Gleich dem Tor, der Tag für Tag
An des Flusses Ufer wartet
Bis die Wasser abgeflossen
Die doch ewig fliessen

Manche raufen sich die Haare
Manche seh ich hasserfüllt
Manche seh ich in das Wolltuch
des Schweigens eingehüllt
Manche hör ich abends jammern
'Was bringt uns der nächste Tag
An was solln wir uns noch klammern
An was? An was? An was?

Wartest du auf bessre Zeiten...

Manche hoffen, dass des Flusses
Wasser nicht mehr fliessen kann
Doch im Frühjahr, wenn das Eis taut
fängt es erst richtig an
Manche wollen diese Zeiten
wie den Winter überstehn
Doch wir müssen Schwierigkeiten
Bestehn! Bestehn! Bestehn -

Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten
Warte nicht mit deinem Mut...

Viele werden dafür sorgen
dass der Sozialismus siegt
Heute! Heute, nicht erst morgen!
Freiheit kommt nie verfrüht
Und das beste Mittel gegen
Sozialismus (sag ich laut)
ist, dass ihr den Sozialismus
AUFBAUT!!! Aufbaut! (aufbaut)
Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten
Warte nicht mit eurem Mut
Gleich dem Tor, der Tag für Tag
An des Flusses Ufer wartet
Bis die Wasser abgeflossen
Die doch ewig fließen
die doch ewig fließen


33. Ich soll vom Glück euch singen
einer neuen Zeit
doch Eure Ohren sind vom Reden taub.
Schafft in der Wirklichkeit mehr Glück!
Dann braucht Ihr nicht so viel Ersatz
in meinen Worten.
Schafft Euch ein süßes Leben, Bürger!
Dann wird mein saurer Wein Euch munden.
Der Dichter ist kein Zuckersack!
The first years Wolf Biermann spent under official ban were not easy. Funds were limited. Although he had a small income from his book and record, he was forced to live very frugally. He had not yet laid many "useful texts" upon the table. But his material needs were never extravagant, and he had a great many friends to help him through. More importantly his friends and colleagues offered him the moral support he needed so desperately.

In the spring of 1966, a thoroughly unexpected show of support came from an internationally known person. Joan Baez came to East Berlin to film a performance at the Distel for GDR television. On the afternoon before the filming she visited Biermann in his apartment in the Chauseestrasse and he sang his "Preussische Romanze" (Prussian Romance), which he dedicated to her when it was later published. On her way to the cabaret that evening Joan picked up Biermann and they arrived at the Distel arm in arm. Under the noses of the SED functionaries she seated him in the front row. In the middle of her performance she suddenly announced, "The next song I'll sing for Wolf Biermann, who I visited this afternoon." The interpreter, an actor named Gerry Wolf, hesitated before he translated the words into German. Joan sang "O Freedom." The TV tape was never broadcast.

Attempts to isolate Biermann continued long after the press campaign was ended. At the end of 1966, in connection with a series of radio broadcasts in Sweden concerning German literature, two men, Fritz Stroh and Gören Löfdahl, prepared a book called Zweimal Deutschland (Twice Germany), which
consisted or original articles from both German nations and a literary anthology. Upon seeking permission to include works by Wolf Biermann, Volker Braun, and Christa Wolf, they received a letter from the Mitteldeutscher Verlag of Halle which read in part:

We want to take this opportunity to gather more information concerning your project. With the overview we now have we do not believe we...can support your project. In particular it involves the inclusion of works by Wolf Biermann. Through the inclusion of these works the reputation of the GDR would be damaged to a considerable degree...

When the book appeared, the pages intended for the works of Braun and Wolf were blank, except for the text of the letter just quoted.

Soon thereafter Sveriges Radio (Radio Sweden) attempted to interview Christa Wolf in relation to this affair. East Berlin didn't even make a reply to their request. The directors of Sveriges Radio thereupon sent a protest telegram several pages in length to Culture Minister Klaus Gysi. He also made no reply. An attempt was made to call the publishing house in Halle but the connection went bad when the conversation turned to Wolf Biermann.

In June of the following year, a Munich publisher, Scherz Verlag, had a similar experience. Plans were made to publish an anthology of protest poems (Linke Lieder). Permission was sought from the GDR Writers Union to publish, along with works by Biermann, poems by Heinz Kahlau and Günter Kunert. A reply signed by Dr. Horst Eckert stated that in the opinion of the Union it was inappropriate to publish the writings of its members alongside works by Biermann. The publisher then printed thirteen texts by Biermann and none from Kahlau and Kunert.

GDR writers who were allowed to go to the West generally kept their mouths shut about Biermann out of fear that they'd not be allowed to travel West again. Soon after the ban was imposed literary associates of Biermann
from the West, such as Wolfgang Neuss and his publisher Klaus Wagenbach, found themselves unable to enter the GDR.

Knowledge of Biermann's work did however spread. By June 1967, Wagenbach had printed 35,000 copies of Die Drahtharfe, many of which found their way into the GDR to be copied by hand or with duplicating machines. Wagenbach also released a record on which eight of his writers read (or sung) from their works. Biermann was represented by his "Ballad to François Villon." In the fall, the first translation, in Italian, of Die Drahtharfe appeared.

In the GDR, rumors grew up around Biermann from the very beginning. He'd gone to the West to accept a university lectureship in Hamburg; he'd emigrated to Sweden and his mother had rejected him as a result of it; he'd moved to Prague; he was working in a salt mine; a steel mill; driving a tractor on a collective farm. Once, as Biermann took a train to Rostock, a man in his compartment explained to the mustachioed stranger that he worked with Biermann in the same brigade in a fishing plant. "Good colleague! It was hard on him at first, but he's gotten used to it...alright that man!" There were rumors that a state publishing house was about to release a volume of his poetry, that he was in the penitentiary at Bautzen, that he'd been made a member of the SED Central Committee, that he'd been shot at the wall.

Biermann's life in East Berlin during those years was a strange combination of isolation and the famous gold fish bowl.

I am treated like a prominent guest in a good hotel. I won't get the bill until the very last. The poor guest must pay at once for every little thing. But the prominent guest is not presented with the bill until the end.

He did suffer from isolation from a public, but it could have been much worse. Several things kept Biermann above water. His own ironic humor helped, ("Instead of a guitar I am only allowed to hold my tongue.")
as did his obvious intelligence which is combined with a large dose of common sense, his strong contacts with the "common people" for whom he writes, his unshakable faith in Socialism, and his friendship with the chemist and dissident Marxist writer Robert Havemann (which will be discussed later).

The center of Biermann's existence during these years was his apartment at Chauseeistrasse 131. It was a 60 Mark a month two-room apartment in a pre-war apartment house. He'd moved into it in 1958 while still with the Berliner Ensemble. Originally he'd had only one of the rooms, but was granted the other one as well when a dancer who'd occupied it fled to the West. The apartment was filled: with furniture, with musical instruments, books, sound equipment. The walls were covered with paintings and pictures, among them ones of his comrades Che Guevara and Dagobert Biermann. Pictures of his apartment appeared on three of his record covers, "So that it was clear that the attempt to make me a non-person had not been successful." His address, Chauseeestrasse 131, even became the title of his second album.

Biermann's apartment became a sort of political and literary salon in East Berlin. Friends like Robert Havemann and Rudi Dutschke were often there. There were also visits from prominent passers-by, ranging from Herbert Marcuse to Allen Ginsberg. The curious came too. All were made welcome. When in the right mood he'd sing for his visitors. He might sing a new love song or an old song he'd been revising. The visitor would be asked his opinion, and that opinion would be listened to. On his record Chauseeistrasse 131 there appeared a song about these little performances, "Wie eingepffercht in Kerkermauern" (As though Locked within Prison Walls),

Sometimes with friends at night he bellows, openly
A couple of ballads in the cigar smoke
That makes the men act as though drunk
And their beautiful women likewise.
Probably the best account of these private concerts is one related by Klaus Antes:

It's fascinating the way he fingers his guitar, how he jumps about with his voice. He bellows, roars, strokes, whimpers, shrieks, turns the volume up and down. He scorns, mimics hate for a moment, as though his enemies sat directly before him, in a hall packed to the last seat, thereby he sits indolently alone on the arm of his leather sofa, alone with only one listener. Quickly then sentimentality is turned into sarcasm. Jokingly Biermann makes little points, clever formulations. When successful his face brightens and he grins devilishly. This overflowing love of life, this fertile imagination, then the melancholy...Sometimes they are no longer verses, but rather suffocating attacks, the result of a very specific sort of poisoning.

Biermann likes discussions, and the many discussions through the years have sharpened his mind. He has used them to define his views and clarify his thought processes. He is well-informed and ideologically well-versed. But although passionately committed to and absolutely convinced of his political views, he is not dogmatic. Biermann does not seek easy answers or comfortable simplifications. He does not shy away from complexities. His mind considers things dialectically, and as a result he invariably views things within their historical perspective. The numerous interviews he has given show him in almost every case an uneven match for those confronting him. Yet he is always open for criticism and seems to seek it out.

During the many years under the ban the man himself became one of those apparent dialectical paradoxes which he himself enjoys. Again and again it has been noted that Wolf Biermann became obsessed with himself. All discussions with him, regardless of what tangents they might have taken, led back to himself. "I, I, over and over again I," wrote Klaus Antes of Biermann. Yet Biermann is not an egocentric individualist. His whole outlook is based on class-consciousness. He is not self-pitying, but understands his case to be symptomatic of his time and place.
If I now and then
bellow bitter ballads
Songs full of sadness
don't let yourself think
That things go badly for me
That I am sad
That I am full of bitterness.
Remember: it is
Only our sad, bitter, dark,
Our great
And so beautifully active times.
Notes on Chapter Six


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Wolf Biermann, Chauseestrasse 131 (CBS 80798; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main, 1975. From the cover notes.

7. There is a member of the SED Central Committee whose name is Wolfgang Biermann.


12. see liner notes in Chauseestrasse 131.

Mal nachts bei Freunden brüllt er offen
Paar Balladen in Zigarrenrauch
Das macht die Männer wie besoffen
Und ihre schönen Frauen auch


14. Ibid., p. 11.


Zwischenlied

Wenn ich euch nun hin und wieder
bittere Balladen brülle
Lieder voller Traurigkeiten
redet euch dann ja nicht ein:
Mir gings schlecht, und
ich sei traurig
ich sei voller Bitterkeiten
Ihr erinnert euch: es sind doch
nur so traurig bitter finster
unsere ansonsten grossen
und so schön bewegten Zeiten

Und so schön bewegten Zeiten!
From 1961 on Biermann developed a close personal friendship with the GDR's leading and best-known political dissident, Robert Havemann. And there can be no doubt that the older, more seasoned Havemann had a large influence on the highly emotional young songwriter.

Had I not had Robert Havemann they would have probably broken me somehow. It was a stroke of great luck that I found Robert Havemann, because he not only stood by me and encouraged me, but he also always openly criticized me. Our relationship was always very productive.

Until he was expelled from the SED in March 1964, Havemann's was a flawless Communist biography. In 1932, at the age of 22, he became a member of the Communist Party of Germany. Already the year before he had joined the resistance group Neu Beginnen, a group which foresaw the Nazi rise to power and was preparing for illegal activities. When the National Socialists did take power, Havemann, who'd studied chemistry and eventually received his PhD in that field, lost his position at Berlin's Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Physical and Electrochemistry.

In 1938, many of the members of Neu Beginnen were arrested and over thirty of them were put to death. But Havemann's illegal work went undetected. In the same year he became a founding member of a new resistance group, Europäische Union, a group which aided Jews and others persecuted for political reasons. It wasn't long however before Havemann and three other leaders of the Union were arrested. On December 16, 1938, all four were sentenced to death before Roland Freisler's People's Court. All but Havemann were executed in 1944. Friends managed to convince the authori-
ties that he could carry on important war-related research, thus saving his life.

In Brandenburg Prison (one of his prison mates incidentally was Erich Honecker) he again organized resistance, using the small laboratory which had been established for his research to its best advantage. In it he built a radio receiver which allowed him to keep up with events on the outside. The information was passed on by way of a typed newsletter which he distributed among the prisoners. When the Red Army arrived on April 27, 1945, Havemann emerged from seven years imprisonment a very sick man, suffering from tuberculosis and typhus.

However, he soon renewed his active life, becoming administrative director of the same Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute from which he'd been dismissed in 1933, as well as leader of both the Kaiser-Wilhelm Society for the Promotion of Science and the Dahlem Institute. But in 1948 the occupying Americans removed the Communist Havemann as leader of the latter institute and removed him from it entirely in 1950.

Politically too, Robert Havemann remained active, joining the new Socialist Unity Party of Germany already in 1946. In July 1950, he was jailed again for a short period in West Berlin following an anti-nuclear bomb demonstration. His status in the newly founded German Democratic Republic was growing though. In the same year as his arrest he assumed the chair for physical chemistry at the Humboldt University and became a member of the People's Chamber, the legislative body of the GDR. Throughout the fifties he remained an important member of the GDR scientific community as well as a respected Party ideologue, winning the National Prize of the GDR in 1959.

Robert Havemann's problems began during the 1963-64 winter semester, when he delivered a series of lectures entitled, "Natural Scientific Aspects
of Philosophical Problems," a series which criticized the dogmatic political interference in scientific investigations. The lectures, later released in book form under the title *Dialectic without Dogma?*, were widely popular and well-attended. They were Havemann's first step out of a job. He finally lost his job on the occasion of an interview which appeared in 1964 in the Western newspaper, *Hamburger Echo*. On March 13, he was expelled from the SED. But due to the influence within the Politburo of his friend Erich Apel, Havemann was given a research position. He lost even this a year later after writing an article for *Der Spiegel*, an article in which he called for the outlawed Communist Party of Germany (KPD) not to be revived, but rather replaced by a reformed democratic party. Due to this heresy Havemann was pushed aside into the status of a non-person, even being stricken from the membership roll of the Academy of Sciences in April 1966.

Havemann's official downfall, which coincided with Biermann's, promoted him to the titular head of the GDR Socialist opposition. He and his friend Wolf Biermann became the symbols for the hope of a transition within the bounds of the Socialist structure of the GDR.

What is it that Havemann and Biermann desire? Are they merely critical, or do they offer suggestions for positive change? What they advocate is generally called democratic Socialism, as opposed to the Stalinist or "real existing Socialism" of Eastern Europe. The former is currently articulated most clearly by the so-called Eurocommunists of Western Europe. But there are differences between the Eastern and Western democratic Communists in that they face radically different political situations. Whereas the Western European Communists are faced with the necessity of overthrowing powerful capitalist states, the East European democratic Socialists are confronted with the complicated task of transforming closed societies which already claim to be based on Marxism.
It is worthwhile to quickly remind ourselves just what the historical circumstances were that led to the present state of affairs in Eastern Europe. The Russian Revolutionary forces which were able to muster enough strength to take power in 1917 were immediately faced with overwhelming obstacles which prevented them from carrying through their ideals. First, they inherited an extremely backward economy which was only in the earliest stages of its emergence from feudalism. Lenin himself recognized the problem. His turn from "war Communism" to the "new economic program" (NEP) was due largely to a realization of the fact that the nation's productive forces had to be developed before any step toward Socialism could be taken. When Stalin assumed power, scrapping the NEP and introducing the five-year plans, the economic groundwork was laid for present-day Stalinism: rigid centralization and regimentation of and sacrifices by the workers. All of this was necessary to build a sound economic basis in the young Soviet Union, to build "Socialism in one country." In the last phrase lies the key to the other half of the dilemma which was faced by the Soviets. When the Bolsheviks seized power, Lenin expected the revolution to spread quickly to other European nations, particularly Germany. Instead of this outside aid to the October Revolution, there was pressure from every corner, the danger of counter-revolution supported by the West. Essentially, until the Soviet Union achieved atomic parity with the United States, it existed as a beleaguered fortress fighting for its survival. These are, I think, when combined with the personalities of Lenin and Stalin themselves, the essential factors which led to the development of the Stalinist system. In the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany there occurred no revolution. The "Socialist" system was imposed and maintained in power militarily. Eastern Germany suffered therefore from the imposition of institutions which were products of the peculiar Soviet experience, institutions which had little
relevance to German reality.

While all of this can be said to account for the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe, it is, for democratic Socialists, also an explanation of why the system must change. Their argument is that the circumstances which produced the Stalinist system no longer exist and therefore the justification for its continuation has been removed. The "Socialist" countries are no longer economically backward, and the revolution is relatively secure. It is therefore high time to take the second step of the revolution and move toward democratic Socialism. It is generally felt that the first step in the revolution was the destruction of the institution of the private ownership of the means of production and with it the dissolution of the class-system based on economic power. This is the basis for a true Socialist democracy, in that social privilege will have been eliminated and true equality realized through the change in the economic structure of society. Robert Havemann summed up the process in his book Questions Answers Questions:

Stalinism is not a typical form of socialism. On the contrary, it contradicts all the basic requirements and principles of Marxism. It is so contrary to the essence of socialism, that it has not only held back the development in the socialist states, but has hindered the rise of a social order that we can truly call socialist. To be sure, the socialist revolution destroyed the capitalist production relations in those countries, but it has not been capable of creating new socialist production relations. This can be done only when the superstructure is also revolutionized, when a socialist democracy is established that not only preserves the achievements of bourgeois democracy but can actualize the true principles of democracy for the first time. The abolition of private property in the means of production also abolishes the last privileges of a class that is incompatible with democracy. This is a crucial prerequisite for the realization of socialism. But it does not by itself automatically lead to socialism. A no less crucial step is the establishment of socialist democracy. Wherever Stalinism developed, this second step was not taken; the revolution remained standing before the portals of the new age, defrauded of its ideals.

Thus we begin to get a picture of the Socialism which Wolf Biermann
and Robert Havemann are advocating. It would be a Socialism based on the socialization of the means of production and distribution, thereby destroying the economic class structure which makes a farce of bourgeois democracy. It would be a Socialism characterized by a retention of, or establishment of the freedoms of bourgeois society: freedom of speech, the press, freedom of movement, the right to organize and strike, as well as the freedom of political activity, that is, a multi-party political system with peaceful transfer of power according to the results of free elections. Neither of the men are utopians, believing that such a society would end all human conflicts, but as Biermann had said, there might at least be the chance for some new conflicts. Robert Havemann has written, "Socialism is a way, not a goal; socialism is liberation, not freedom, the step-by-step conquest of freedom, the step-by-step bursting of fetters." Wolf Biermann expressed it in the chorus of his song, "Grosse Ermutigung" (Great Encouragement),

Tell me, when do these sufferings
these sufferings, these sufferings
fin'ly have an end
When the new sufferings have come
The old will have an end.

This view of a dynamic revolution, of an endless process, recurs often in Biermann's works, most clearly in his song of prophecy, "So soll es sein - so wird es sein" (So it Should Be - So it Will Be),

It itself - finally! - the revolution
it re-vo-lu-tion-izes itself already
It casts upon itself the first stone.
- so it should be
  so it should be
  so it will be.

All during those years in the GDR, the question arose again and again as to why Wolf Biermann remained in his "Socialist fatherland" when he could not perform there, when it was obviously little more than a cruel dictatorship seemingly far removed from his Socialist ideals, indeed why has
Biermann always contended that it is Germany's better half. Once he was asked what he found so positive about the land in which he lived, that land which he criticized so bitterly,

The positive thing about the GDR is that it makes sense to criticize it...In the GDR the first important step has been taken toward Socialism. That is our basic advantage over West Germany and every other capitalist country, no matter how social democratic it is. The conflict in our country revolves around the second step in the revolution.

That is a discussion under Communists and it is, as you know, carried on not only with arguments, but rather with slander and tanks as well. The second step means the conversion of the Socialist state-ownership and means politically: the conversion of the dictatorship of an elite in the interests of the proletariat into the much heralded dictatorship of the proletariat, which in its completion will be identical with a Socialist democracy. Positive about the land in which I live, is as well, that I live in it.5

This is a rather clear summation of Biermann's case for the GDR at the time. And although he was the regime's most outspoken critic and never wished its brutal reality on any other nation, his analysis could be said to be too optimistic. There are, according to Biermann's understanding of Socialism, two decisive aspects, that is, socialization of the economy and political democracy. When either is not present, there is no Socialism.

It is Biermann's contention that the first step toward Socialism has been taken in the GDR, i.e. socialization of the economy, the implication being that this is the "first" step, that is, it comes before the second step, political democracy. That analysis suffers from two weaknesses. First, in the GDR, as Biermann recognizes, there has been a nationalization of the economy, but most certainly not a socialization. The GDR proletariat has nothing to say about the running of the "people's economy." They have only the right to work. This is compounded by the fact that the prospects for democratic change in the GDR, while still existent and perhaps even growing in that public discontent is growing, are extremely slim. The system is by its very closed nature resistant to change and every thaw in the
three-decade history of the GDR has been followed by a renewed freeze. The GDR proletariat has absolutely no possibility of political input, and all change therefore must necessarily originate within the power structure. This is unlikely to happen. Robert Havemann has given an excellent analysis of the self-sustaining nature of the system.

So long as the functionary unquestionably follows and transmits to those below him all the directions coming from above, his career is assured. A single independent thought which betrays even a trace of doubt in the correctness of official opinion can signify the end of his career. Argus-eyed, his competitors watch his every step and cock an ear to his every word. The permanent pressure from below, from aspirants to hold his position, makes him more popish than the Pope, so as to avoid the least suspicion that he may be a conciliator, a liberal, or even a deviationist. The result is that every step the leadership takes in the direction of a democratization or a "liberalization," no matter how resolute, ends in a new period of retrenchment. Thus the Stalinist structure constantly reproduces itself. Like the Hydra's, the chopped-off heads and members grow again. The automatic tendency to solidification and dogmatization is a structural feature that frequently narrows the freedom of decision of the leadership itself. Only the man at the top of the hierarchic structure can bring about any provisional turns in policy with impunity. But so long as the hierarchic structure, on which his power rests, exists, even his attempts to relax tensions are fated to be temporary. He, too, is a prisoner of the system.

This well illustrates the GDR reality and makes clear how rigid the system really is. While it is clear that a step has been taken in the German Democratic Republic, it is highly doubtful that it is in the direction of Socialism.

Nevertheless, the sustaining hope for Germans who think like Robert Havemann and Wolf Biermann is that now that the traditional class structure and the capitalist economic system have been destroyed in their country (and they have been) it would be a relatively short step to a true Socialist democracy, a step made possible through the introduction of democratic political institutions. It is for that reason that Wolf Biermann and so many others look back with strong but mixed emotions at the great Socialist
experiment of the Prague Spring and its tragic and brutal end. On the one hand, it offers hope in that it was, as far as it went, working. The republic was moving very rapidly toward a pluralistic democracy based on a Socialist economic and social system and the Czechoslovak Communist Party had real popular support. Had the Czechoslovakian people had the opportunity to carry their experiment further, the Prague Spring might have turned out to be an event on a plane with the French or Russian Revolutions and might have overshadowed them both, for it would have taken the supports from under the Russian-dominated Stalinist system and undoubtedly sent a tidal wave through Eastern Europe. It likewise would have been a staggering blow to the capitalist powers, for it would have taken the wind out of the sails of the anti-Communist arguments. Had the experiment had the chance to take its course, it might have been able to prove the truth that democracy and Socialism are not mutually exclusive, but rather that one cannot truly exist without the other. There was euphoria among the Germans who saw in the Czechoslovakian experiment new hopes for Socialism. Wolf Biermann was of course among those who were carried on the tide of optimism. He wrote a song about the events in Czechoslovakia. It is a joyful song, but since it only became known after the Warsaw Pact invasion, it carries a sense of melancholy. It is called, "In Prag ist Pariser Kommune," harking back to that favorite piece of Socialist history,

In Prague is Paris Commune, she still lives!
The revolution frees itself once again
Marx himself and Lenin and Rosa and Trotzky
Stand with the Communists

Communism holds again in its arms
freedom and gives her a child, that laughs,
that will live without bureaucrats
be free from exploitation and despots

The Pharisees, fat, they tremble
and smell the truth, the day is come
stones tumble along the bed of the Moldau
In Prague four Kaisers lie buried
We breathe again, comrades. We laugh
the rotten sadness out of our breasts
Man, we are stronger than rats and dragons!
And had forgotten it and always known

But the Prague Spring, like the Paris Commune, was destined to be a story
of all that might have been, for the tanks rolled and freedom and Socialism
were crushed.

We should nevertheless take a brief look at the background of the
Czechoslovakia experiment. How was its development possible? First, it
was a gradual process, a result not of revolution, but of internal evolution
based on a solid intellectual foundation. In large part too it was the pro­
duct of Czechoslovakia's recent history. Unlike the other East European
satellites, Czechoslovakia has a strong and positive democratic tradition
which has a natural attraction to a people who are as a result tied to the
"European" world more than the other nations of the Soviet camp. In many
respects the Prague Spring was surely a manifestation of the desire to re­
enter the mainstream of that European tradition. Too, there was a strong
national element, a long tradition of national pride, independence, and re­sistance to external domination going all the way back to the Hussite move­
ment. All this combined to win popular support for the reform movement, a
factor which would have undoubtedly fueled the effort for years to come.

A final and decisive factor in the Czechoslovak experiment was the
fact that the reforms originated from elements within the Communist Party,
from people who were in a position to give reality to popular aspirations.
As a result, the Czechoslovak Communist Party became probably the first East
European Communist Party to have the support of the majority of its people.
While this was an apparently positive result, it was also undoubtedly the
crux of the threat which the Czechoslovak Republic represented to the entire
Soviet system, for it offered encouragement to reform-minded Communists in
other Socialist countries. This would have undoubtedly led to a wave of independence which, if left unchecked, might have disintegrated the entire Russian imperialist system. Thus came the invasion, a move made not without the encouragement of certain East European leaders, leaders jealous of their power, among them Walter Ulbricht.

In the GDR, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, which included German elements, resulted in widespread, and open, if not mass protest. The protests took various forms but were in general the actions of individuals or small groups who wanted to show their support for Alexander Dubček and the reform Communists. The actions ranged from passing out leaflets to smearing slogans on walls. Slogans like:

- Long Live Liberal Socialism!
- Solidarity against Intervention!
- Hands Off Red Prague!
- We Too Want a Dubček!

or simply,

- Dubček - Svoboda!

Most of those who expressed such Socialist solidarity were arrested and eventually brought to trial. Among those arrested, tried and convicted were Frank and Florian Havemann, sons of Robert Havemann. They were charged with having painted slogans on the walls of buildings in downtown Berlin and for having distributed copies of Biermann's songs, "In Prag ist Pariser Kommune." They were both sentenced to periods of detention from which they were later pardoned. Frank is now a member of the SED; Florian fled to the West, his flight inspiring a song and a poem by Wolf Biermann, works which embody the spirit of melancholy which overcame Biermann as a result. The poem is called "Fünf Fingerübungen über Florian Havemanns Flucht" (Five Finger Exercises about Florian Havemann's Flight).
again one has tried it again one has made it again
one has put his life on the line again one
has left us again one has broken
through the wall again one has
found a hole again one has
turned his back on the
East again one has in
freedom saved himself
again one has left
everything lying
again one has broken all bridges
behind him
again one
has gone
over

2.

he is gone, he has cut out he has run away he
has broken out he has made it over he
has broken through he has re-
public-flown he has dis-
appeared he has shud-
dered away he has
vanished he has
flipped out he
has gone
over

3.

In the West he will have: experiences money his
happiness children purchase contracts he will
make business trips plans for
the future nonsense sugges-
tions demonstrations
weddings this not
that party's noth-
ing bankruptcy
careers the
plan to
come
back

4.

he left in the East: Wolf Biermann Walter Ul-
bricht Robert Havemann Erich Honecker Anastas
Bootsmann Karl Eduard von Schni Totengräber
Manni Strehlau Erich Mielke Franzi Popow
Thomas Brasch Klaus Gysi Sanda Weigl
Stangel Willi Stroph Bylle Havemann
Jürgen Tscheib Kohlen-Otto die
Dicke Dietrich Pantsch Flar-
rian Havemann
5.

To the sticky waltzes he danced
resoundingly hard rock
yes yes, the earth is round, yes yes
but not on the flat earth!10

The song Biermann wrote was "Enfant perdu," which was eventually released on his album Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten. There is no need to quote the whole text for it expresses largely the same melancholy sadness as the poem, but a few verses might be worth noting, for they evidence attitudes which were basic to Biermann's political outlook at the time.

The flipped-out Have-
Here he was a bold slave
there he's a leftist clown
He who cuts out from the East
has at our expense
cut out from himself

The GDR in the long run
needs neither jails nor wall
We'll take it so far
To us the masses will flee
The people, and calmly
We'll be ready for that.

I shit on my songs
They don't bring back
all, who are lost
In spite of it all, I write
And sing here and remain
for Flori Havechild.11

Wolf Biermann never considered leaving the GDR, although the door would have been opened for him at a moment's notice. And he apparently saw no reason for anyone else to leave, yet he never condemned those who did. No, he didn't condemn those who fled. Instead he felt sorrow, a sorrow akin to that felt at the death of a friend.

Let us consider the flight of Florian Havemann as an example. After his conviction for "slandering the state" he was sentenced to a youth insti-
tution, the former prison at Luckau, where, in addition to continuing
his work toward his abitur, he was obliged to learn the electrician's trade with the Reich Railway. Later he had to go to work in a factory.

He stated in an interview:

After I'd worked every day for eight hours in a factory, I thought a gravestone was descending over me, on which it was written: "Socialism," and under which I had to work, work. And the State threatened and said: you're not permitted to do that and you're permitted to do this and now come into a little basket, be good, put on the blue shirt and the red scarf. Then I left.12

By quoting this statement I don't mean to imply that I especially pity Florian Havemann for having had to work in a factory, but want to demonstrate the sense of frustration and real depression which takes hold of so many people who are unable to do the sort of work they choose, and feel oppressed by the state. They do not all have the strong personality of Wolf Biermann, nor are all so committed to Socialism. Most are simply ordinary people who want the chance to enjoy the fruits of their labors, not just in fifty years, but now. Though it is not always the case, many believe they can enjoy the so-called "good life" immediately after they cross the border. They would ask, what is the point of staying and struggling for democracy in a land which is a brutal dictatorship, in a land in which such a struggle might well be doomed to failure.

At times it seemed that Wolf Biermann did not have a clear understanding of why so many people have fled the GDR, and I don't think this apparent lack of understanding was a result only of his personality and political passions. His social standing might have played a role as well. Though Biermann speaks with pride of the fact that he comes from the street and though he has retained enough ties to the common people to be able to speak their language and express their frustrations, the fact remains that though he was forbidden to sing, he was not forced to work for the rest of his days on the night shift in a factory, he was not sent to jail. He had a regular
income and the free time to pursue his intellectual interests. I contend that in this he was partially cut off from GDR reality. He became, as a result, somewhat encapsulated, (as do all intellectuals in every society) often able to express common frustrations, but just as often too strong in his faith in the potential for Socialism in the GDR to comprehend the conclusions reached by many who chose to flee.\textsuperscript{13}

While I implied that it was a sign of strength that Biermann never willingly left the GDR, it has also been suggested that this was a sign of certain weakness or lack of security. Again and again Biermann said that if he went west he'd lose his legitimacy to speak to the citizens of the GDR and to criticize that country.\textsuperscript{14} While the former argument might be true in that he would have been seen as an "artist" who used his privilege to settle comfortably in the West, it could also be understood as an excuse to justify not leaving, for anyone who speaks from a basis of fact can speak justifiably about the situation in another country. Part of the reason Biermann stayed might also have been his overestimation of his own effectiveness. He is of the belief that his works were always widely distributed and well-known to a reasonably large segment of the population, the typewriter and tape recorder legend. The facts seem to dispute this claim. The fact seems to be (and of course no surveys were or can be taken) that he was known among some students and young workers before he was publicly banned in 1965, but then, except within rather limited circles, faded into anonymity. In the seventies his fame began to grow, but remained extremely limited until his expulsion in November 1976. For the vast majority of the population, the West German broadcast of his first Western concert would be their first introduction to the songs and poems of Wolf Biermann. For many, particularly the young, the name had until then been unknown, the anti-Biermann press campaign of 1965-66 being too far in the past. In the latter
half of 1977 I questioned many students and young workers in the GDR (the elements of the population which make up his main audience in the West) about this very question of familiarity with the writings of Wolf Biermann, and never found grounds to dispute the above statements. In every case the tapes I played for them were their first introduction to the singer.

In the whole question of flight from the Republic, it would be wise to have a look at a poem included in Biermann's book *Für meine Genossen* (For My Comrades), in a section entitled "Mitigating Circumstances." The poem is "Umständliche Aufforderung zur Republikflucht" (A Conditional Invitation to Flee the Republic).

You I want, you
for my land
which does not want me
and which is not my land, nor
your land, leaden ghetto
whose negroes are blond and straw-haired
here then, where you have them, here
sing the blues, the rebellious sorrow
in the midst too of the fresh and happy,
the rosily pressed sauerkraut heads
here sing the blue note
from the black and blue of the bruise
up to the more agreeable shirt blue, but
sing the blues!

Stay here, where the heap of iron old men
still do it to wiry youth, land
whose men are still kept like
diligent bed-wetters, under age land
whose young men become old
in their youth, land, whose women
night after night lie awake longing
for the world

If in the East you
just can no longer stand it, then
remain in the East: because the West
would tolerate you!

Stay, stay here! stay here! And when we
will have made this
half-land halfway livable, then
- in the direction East and without sorrow -
we will calmly leave it, ok?
The four sections of this poem represent four aspects of the question as Biermann apparently sees it. In the final section, one can see the never-dying faith in the process of change, and in the value of working toward that end. Yet, when compared to the song "Enfant perdu," the tone is milder. The masses will no longer be fleeing to the GDR, but the land will be made halfway livable and that will already be a great achievement. Stay and work toward that end, Biermann says, for the West is no alternative. There you would only become lost, tolerated, forgotten, at best play the "leftist clown." In the East you can at least be the "bold slave" and take part in a process which harbors the seeds of future progressive development. But the day to day realities of the East are not so easy to bear, and the second section does not gloss them over. Taken together, the second and the third sections embody the apparent paradox of Biermann's work, his realization that the GDR is a bankrupt regime, the likes of which are not to be wished on anyone, and yet his witnessing that it is travelling the road of the future, that it is breaking trail for the Socialist movement, that it is a land which is, despite all its ulcers, making an effort to build Socialism, "an effort, which in my opinion, all of mankind faces, if it doesn't want to sink into barbarism." If one accepts Biermann's analysis of the situation in the GDR, it would be accurate to say that the apparent paradox in his writing is a reflection of that in GDR society.

That is the dialectic of this historical process, that the Stalinist faction of the GDR is building and hindering Socialism - both at the same time! They provoke Socialist hopes and then don't redeem them.

It is the last sentence which I think can lead to an understanding of the first section of "A Conditional Invitation..." in which Biermann speaks of the blues. The blues are after all a product of the black slavery in America. Men were torn from their homes and condemned to build another land, a land
which was supposedly based on the Christian ethic. For the slaves these ideals were but a dream as they worked, worked. They built a land which did not want them and was not theirs, and so they sang the blues, songs which expressed a longing for an end to their labors, often for Judgment Day itself, where'd be a new beginning, a new day.

Go down Ole Hannah
And don't you rise no more
But if you do rise in the morning
Bring judgment day.

But the blues were not always so otherworldly. Another verse from "Ole Hannah" expresses another feeling, one perhaps most applicable to the "Socialist" countries.

Go down, Ole Hannah
And don't rise no more
But if you do rise in the morning.
Change the world around.

This is probably the best description of the blues of the GDR's blond negroes. "In Germany we sing the blackest blues," writes Biermann in "Prussian Romance." The blues can be understood as an appropriate music for the GDR's "real Socialism," for they bemoan the separation from the essence, from that which makes life worth living. It is often an indescribable, unexplainable feeling.
Notes on Chapter Seven


2. Ibid., p. 129.


7. Compare these lines with Bertolt Brecht's "Lied von der Moldau."

8. Biermann, Mit Marx- und Engelszungen, p. 70.

In Prag ist Pariser Kommune

In Prag ist Pariser Kommune, sie lebt noch!
Die Revolution macht sich wieder frei
Marx selber und Lenin und Rosa und Trotzki
stehen den Kommunisten bei

Der Kommunismus hält wieder im Arme
die Freiheit und macht ihr ein Kind, das lacht,
das Leben wird ohne Büroelephanten
von Ausbeutung frei und Despotenmacht

Die Pharisäer, die fetten, sie zittern
und wittern die Wahrheit. Es kommt schon der Tag
Am Grunde der Moldau wandern die Steine
es liegen vier Kaiser begraben in Prag

Wir atmen wieder, Genossen. Wir lachen
die faule Traurigkeiteraus aus der Brust
Mensch, wir sind stärker als Ratten und Drachen!
Und hattens vergessen und immer gewusst

9. On October 29, 1968, during the trial of Frank and Florian Havemann, the judge said, "To their attitude in opposition to the Socialist order the accused were systematically inspired by Robert Havemann and Wolf Biermann," from the article "Fliesst ein," Der Spiegel, November 4, 1968.

(cont. next page)
Funf Fingerübungen über Florian Havemans Flucht

1.

wieder hat es einer gewagt wieder hat es einer geschafft wieder
hat einer sein Leben aufs Spiel gesetzt wieder ist
einer von uns gegangen wieder hat einer die
Mauer durchbrochen wieder hat einer ein
Loch gefunden wieder hat einer dem
Osten den Rücken gekehrt wieder
hat sich einer in die Freiheit
gerettet wieder hat einer
alles stehn und liegen
gelassen wieder hat
einer alle Brücken
hinter sich abgebrochen wieder
ist einer
hinüber

2

er ist weg er ist abgehaun er ist davongelaufen er ist
ausgebrochen er ist rübergemacht er
ist durchbrochen er ist re-
publikgeflüchtet er ist
verschwunden er ist
abgezittert er ist
verduftet er ist
ausgeflippt er
ist hinüber

3

machen wird er im Westen: Erfahrungen Geld sein
Glück Kinder Kaufverträge wird er
machen Geschäfte Reisen Zu
kunstspläne Unsinn Vor-
schläge Demonstratio-
nen Hochzeiten Dies
nicht Das Partys
Nichts Bankrott
Karriere den
Plan zurück-
zukommen

4

verlassen hat er im Osten: Wolf Biermann Walter Ul-
bricht Robert Havemann Erich Honecker Anastas
Bootsmann Karl Eduart von Schni Totengräber
Manni Strehlau Erich Mielke Franzi Popow
Thomas Brasch Klaus Gysi Sanda Weigel
Stangel Willi Stoph Bylle Havemann
Jürgen Tscheib Kohlen-Otto die
Dicke Dietrich Pantsch Flo-
rian Havemann
Zum Klebrigen Walzer tanzte er
knallharten Rock
ja ja, die Erde ist rund, ja, ja
aber nicht auf der platten Erde!

Der ausgeflippte Have
Hier war er ein dreister Sklave
dort macht er den Tinken Clown
Wer abhaut aus dem Osten
Der ist auf unsere Kosten
von sich selber abgehaun

Die DDR, auf Dauer
Braucht weder Knast noch Mauer
wir bringen es so weit!
Zu uns fliehn dann in Massen
Die Menschen, und gelassen
sind wir drauf vorbereit'

Ich scheiss was auf meine Lieder
Sie bringen ja nicht wieder
all, die verloren sind
Trotzalledem, ich schreibe
Und singe und bleibe
für Flori Havekind


"Die wissen ganz genau wie bedroht sie sind. Wolf Biermann über seine Ausbürgerung und die DDR," interview with Wolf Biermann, Der Spiegel, November 22, 1976, p. 44.

The Blue shirts referred to occasionally are the uniforms of the GDR Communist youth movement, Freie Deutsche Jugend.

Biermann, Für meine Genossen, p. 88.

Umständliche Aufforderung zur Republikflucht für die
Sängerin F.

Dich will ich haben, dich
für mein Land
das mich nicht haben will
und das mein Land nicht ist, noch
dein Land, bleierenes Ghetto
dessen Neger blond sind und strohhairig
hier also, wo du ihn hast, hier
singe den blues, die rebellische Trauer
mitten auch in die frischfröhlichen
die rosig gebügelten Sauerkrautköpfe
hier singe den blauen Ton
vom Schwarzblau des Blutergusses
bis hoch zum genehmeren Hemdenblau, aber
singe den blues!

Hier bleibe, wo das Häuflein eiserner Greise
noch immer auf drahtigen Jüngling macht, Land
dessen Männer noch immer gehalten sind wie
fleissige Bettnässer, unmündiges Land
dessen Jünglinge alt werden
an ihrer Jugend, Land dessen Weiber
achtelang wach liegen vor Sehnsucht
nach Welt

Wenn du es aber im Osten
überhaupt nicht mehr aushalten kannst, dann
bleibe im Osten: der Westen nämlich
würde dich aushalten

Bleib, bleib hier! hier bleibe! Und wenn wir
 dieses halbe Land halbwegs
bewohnbar gemacht haben werden, dann
- in Richtung Osten und ohne Trauer -
werden wir es gelassen verlassen, o.k.?

18. Ibid.
The year 1968 was important for Wolf Biermann not only because of the rise and fall of the Prague experiment. 1962 saw the appearance of a record with four of Biermann's new songs, as well as his second book, Mit Marx- und Engelszungen (With the Tongues of Marx and Engles, or Angels, the German word is the same, see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3). On that little record was a song entitled, "Drei Kugeln auf Rudi Dutschke" (Three Bullets at Rudi Dutschke). The song, not one of Biermann's best, was his first pointed specifically at the explosive political situation in West Germany. The year had seen ever-increasing student unrest in the West. This unrest had grown principally out of the stagnant political atmosphere in West Germany, which was the result of almost two decades of conservative Christian Democratic rule and the apolitical inclination of most Germans. Student activism received its spark from two sources: the American aggression in Vietnam, and domestically, from the formation of the Grand Coalition. This was a coalition of the Federal Republic's two largest political groups, the SPD and the CDU/CSU, and meant the temporary end of all effective political opposition. As a reaction, those on the left who were opposed to the Bonn coalition began to refer to themselves as the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (ApO). This became the rallying point of the student left. Among the student leaders was Rudi Dutschke, a former GDR citizen who'd fled his homeland for religious reasons. In 1968, a Socialist and a former student of Herbert Marcuse, Dutschke became the symbol of the student revolt in the Federal Republic. On April 11, 1968, in West Berlin, Dutschke received
three shots in the head and upper body. He was brought to the Westend Hospital, and his condition was determined to be critical. The police, doctors, and nurses let out little information about his condition. Only his wife, father, and brother were allowed to see him and they said little. There grew up around his condition many dark rumors. There were fears that he'd been reduced to a vegetable state. The first outside visitor to report on his condition was his teacher Marcuse. He reported Dutschke's improvement to a gathering at the Free University. The two, he said, had discussed political events and theory. But Dutschke was not normal. As a result of his brain damage which made it necessary to relearn, with the help of a psychologist, many basic words.

Biermann wrote his song about the incident, and the song excited controversy. In the song he identified the three would-be killers as the Springer press empire, West Berlin mayor Klaus Schütz, and the "noble Nazi" chancellor of the Grand Coalition, the former Nazi Kurt Georg Kiesinger.

Three bullets at Rudi Dutschke  
Were not meant for him alone  
If you do not resist  
You will be the next one

A few men only  
Have killed so many  
Let them not break you  
Instead break their power.

The call for revolt was not upsetting to the western authorities, for it was hardly the first such call, but the personal attacks against government officials such as Schütz and Kiesinger did not go unnoticed. The West Berlin State Attorney opened legal proceedings against the East Berliner for reasons of slander. But then the whole matter was dropped, for the men involved did not press the matter. It was Biermann's first involvement in West German politics. It was destined not to be his last.
Notes on Chapter Eight


Drei Kugeln auf Rudi Dutschke
Ihm galten sie nicht allein
Wenn wir uns jetzt nicht wehren
Wirst Du der Nachste sein

Es haben die paar Herren
So viel schon umgebracht
Stattd dass sie Euch zerbrechen
Zerbrecht jetzt Ihre Macht!

On Christmas eve 1979, Rudi Dutschke died at his home in Denmark. During one of the epileptic seizures he has suffered since the 1968 shooting, he fell and struck his head on a bathtub.
It is impossible to separate Wolf Biermann's poetry from his political convictions, his convictions from his personality. Basic to all is an attitude which can be accurately called "love of life." Yet his isn't a naive, one-sided view of life. He loves it with all its contradictions, its joys and pains. Biermann poses this love of life over against all forces which restrict man, which destroy life, be it war or stagnant social arrangement. The simple things are those which lie at the heart of the good life: the children playing, the women waiting for their men, lovers together. This attitude is demonstrated in the marvelous song, "Frühling auf dem Mont-Klamott" (Spring on the Mont-Klamott) (Mont-Klamott is a Berlin hill created from bomb rubble after the war),

And as we stood on the top
The city lay deep and far away
We'd ridden from our neck
The whole German mess
I laid my hands
On her warm belly
And said: sweet baby
Do you feel the spring too?

The pigeons and the sparrows
The first buds were bursting
On ruins and on scrap-iron
On the Mont-Klamott. (page 54)

Such a small act as laying his hand on her belly represents the whole problematic of the human condition, the simple need to touch on another, to bloom on the ruins of war, just to live. This is the message of Biermann's second volume of songs and poems, Mit Marx- und Engelszung. It is the cry of man in the face of defeat and sadness, a reminder, in the midst of
political struggle, to love and live and be human, and yet the entire volume is humanity and joy tinged with melancholy. It should not be forgotten that this book came out in late 1968, that momentous and sad year of political struggle. The year saw the flowering of the American anti-war movement, the outbreak of the West German student revolt, the student and workers' uprising in Paris, and the great hope and ultimate crushing of the Prague Spring. It was the third year of the official ban on Wolf Biermann. It was not surprising, therefore, that the book opened with a rather melancholy poem.

Oh friend, is it not the same with you?
I can only love
that which I have the freedom
to also leave:

this land
this city
this woman
this life

And that is why few
love a land
some a city
many a woman
but all love life. (page 9)

In that revolutionary year of 1968, Europe's leading revolutionary writer also included in his new book a little poem called, "Kleiner Frieden" (Simple Peace).

Children, who awake
Women, who do the morning wash
Men, who write poems about:

Children
who awake
Women
who do the morning wash
Men
who write a poem (page 41)

It is probably the most revolutionary poem in the book.

But, as ever, the personal is not only tied to the political, they are
dialectically parts of the same process. Therefore, his monologue with the GDR's political leaders goes on. While discussing Die Drahtzarfe, a poem called "The Poet's Table Speech" was briefly mentioned. In Mit Marx- und Engelszungen is a sequel to that poem. I'll quote it in its entirety because it's an example of Biermann's use of sensuous images in his attacks on the cold and lifeless East Berlin regime. "The Poet's Table Speech in the Second Meager Year,"

You, who are not yet drowned, comrades
In the lard barrel of the privileged caste
Oh, how long it's been since I filled your ears!
When, through the night's television sky
The obligatory eunuchs sail through your channels
When, on your blinded screens
The sterilized virgins flicker
When the official sandman hands you
Through the tube, the prescribed sleeping pills
All that we'll let pass, comrades, but:

When they feed you their cursed
Ideologically watered soups, the plumpest cooks
then torment me, I admit it, ravenous hunger
like your hunger, comrades, for something more substantial
a piece of meat in the teeth. Do remember:
Fried without fat, the salt added lastly

So the heavenly juices do not flow out
And my salad with the called-for amounts
of cayenne-pepper, which long after the meal
Still torture the palette, lemons and garlic
slaughtered swimming in the vapor of the olive oil
The red tomatoes arm in arm with the cucumbers
to the wedding in the crisp boats of green salad
And salt and salt! The wisdom of dead seas:
The good tasting, the unhealthy salt!
And! How we then pour the milk indolently into us
The smooth, the good, from bulging cups!
You could learn something you assholes!
Oh, friends, please do remember:
The people have long savored fat oxes
in the pan!
but not in office!

Between you and me: is it true that our next feast of gorging begins, comrades
With the funeral banquet?!
at the grave of the Revolution?! (pages 10-11)
The poem is pure Biermann, with its extravagant images and its irreverence. Most notable is the way it attacks the close-minded policies of the SED. It attacks a society which demands rigid conformity to sterile and mindless political ideologies. Wouldn't it be better to risk the exploration of new and open ideas and new social arrangements? As it is the GDR stifles the individual and thereby much social progress. It is the sort of arrangement which provoked a German friend of mine to say, "In this society it is impossible to develop your personality." In sadness, Biermann addresses "Drei Worte an die Partei" (Three Statements to the Party).

Have you a bloodred calf
In your heart, sister
In that you do not let me
Into your preserve?

Oh, brother, take the knife
Please, away from my breast!
I have long been bled
By sadness.

Take, mother, your hate
Off my shoulders!
I am already burdened
With your love. (page 12)

But he doesn't look at his comrades (indeed he calls them comrades) without understanding. In a poem called "Portraitt eines alten Mannes" (Portrait of an Old Man), he points out the world-changer, who did change the world and whose work is approaching its goal, but who is himself at an end, for he did not change himself in the process. In the poem, the world-changer is compared with the ox in the Chinese wheel, who pumped the water, sewed the fields, and made the rice green.

Thus he strides
forward in circles
and sees before himself nothing, but
many thousands times his own track in the loam.
Year after year he thinks, the lonely one,
that he goes the way of the masses. And he is
only following himself. Only himself
does he meet and does not find himself
and ever remains he who is furthest from himself. (p. 15)
Wolf Biermann does not want to lose himself as he sees the old revolutionaries who are lost to themselves. In this case he is unlike his Master Brecht, whose tongue was distorted by the hate of baseness and who in the struggle for kindness could not himself be so. Biermann has learned from the master. In the poem "Lebenszeichen" (Sign of Life) he declares that after all the love and hate he's received, after all the clamor and nonsense about his case, after all the struggle,

I lay me down to sleep in these dark years. (page 14)

He wants to lie on the paving stones of his state, in the cellar of his nation, in the fields of his friendships, the dunes of his love. He wants to lie down with his Marie under the "eternal cherry trees of our kisses."

And then I want to dive
into ever deeper silence
and invent again:
The Cry (page 14)

Wolf Biermann is a man who has had reason to become pessimistic, but that he has not become. In his songs, he climbs again and again out of the depths of depression and projects hope. His writing is shaped by his sentimentality and his dialectic mind, by his passion for women, his love for children, as well as his commitment to Socialism. He is not a lonely poet, he's a people's poet, he doesn't use stilted literary language, he uses the language of the streets, the bars, the parks, the work place. He speaks to his readers with the familiar German "du" and calls us "friend" and "comrades." His characters (with the major exception of those in his play Der Dra-Dra) have names and addresses and jobs. Biermann is not an abstract writer in any sense. He is a realist whose concern is the historically necessary process of Socialism. He would apparently meet all the criteria to qualify as a writer of Socialist realism, the official literary doctrine of the GDR, but he does not. In fact he does not at all. Socialist realism
reduces people to literary figures, to roles. It abstracts emotions and presupposes conclusions. All of this Biermann does not do. He is a writer of realistic Socialism, a poet of the GDR's "real existing Socialism," who is passionately involved in its process and therefore suffers under it. No, he does not fall victim to pessimism as a result, but to another very human emotion, melancholy. He warns that if we hear him sing bitter ballads, full of sadness, we should not let ourselves believe that it is he who is sad and bitter. No, it is only the bitter, dark, and sad, but active times in which we live. (page 19) Maybe, but when one hears him speak the words on his Chauseestrasse 131 album it is clear that the words and the performance stand in dialectic opposition to one another. Then there is the little poem, "Der Herbst hat seinen Herbst" (Autumn Has Its Autumn). The poem draws its mood from one written at the turn of the 19th century by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, "Halfte des Lebens" (Half of Life), the second verse of which reads,

Woe is me, where do I find, when
It is winter, the flowers, and where
The sunshine,
And the shadows of the earth?
The walls stand
Speechless and cold, in the wind
the weathervanes clatter.

Biermann's poem demonstrates that winter is not necessarily one-sided, that it too blooms, and yet as we face the winter...

The autumn has its autumn
Softly
Snow devours the gardens
From the beeches leaves are falling
And the wind
Effortlessly harvests
Sparrows from bare bushes

The autumn has its autumn
Soon
Winter is blooming
One after the other
With the rosary it prays
And calm nature
We console ourselves that nature is taking its own course and that we must accept it, and yet it is not easy.

The second section of *Mit Marx- und Engelszungen* is entitled "Songs of Agitation against War and in Praise of Peace." The songs and poems progress from a recognition that man is the awful force threatening man, and that man's power of destruction surpasses that of all natural forces, to a recognition that man does long for peace, and that despite it all, life goes on.

It is still taking place
the sunrise
The dark night, still
it is still being presented (page 44)

The first six entries in this section are clearly anti-war songs, pacifist in nature. "The Legend of the Dead Soldier in the Third World War" was inspired by Bertolt Brecht's famous "Legend of the Dead Soldier." In the latter, the Kaiser, having run low on soldiers, exhumes some poor dead "hero," declares him fit for battle, fills him with schnaps, and marches him off to his second "hero's" death. In the blue and beautiful sky of Brecht's legend, one can, provided one wears no helmet, see the stars of the homeland. In Biermann's song too, the stars of the homeland are seen, by a woman as she lies on her back, covered by the soldier made lustful by his murdering. But from the sky, blue and clear, atomic rockets fall like hail, and soon the stars are no longer beautiful, for there is no one left to see them. The angel's wings are burnt, as is god's beard, judgment day is called off, for all the souls are dead, and even as two molecules try to begin anew, they are torn asunder by the heat. The three apocalyptic verses are however posed over against refrains of a quite
different nature.

Now it is winter time
Long and broad evenings
Mourn in the snow
While love lasts we shall find,
Karin, though cold
that all is well. (page 29)

The juxtaposition of the horror of atomic war and the simple peace of two lovers is the Biermann message.

And had the soldier given his gal
A child instead of a war
The heart of the earth would be beating now
And war would be laughed to scorn.

When summer comes we shall
Karin, at last be free
among the flowers.
War shall itself be dead
And when the cherries are red
All will be well. (page 30)

It will be seen that again and again Biermann uses the image of cherries.

In the song, "Lied vom Tod auch des Todes" (Song about the Death Also of Death), death, poor death, sitting upon his pile of corpses, has become weary from all the battles and faces now his own death, for he has no more work, everything is dead. In "Soldat Soldat," Biermann sings,

Soldiers all look the same of course,
Both living and as corpse. (page 36)

Is Wolf Biermann a pacifist? Following "Soldat Soldat" comes the poem, "Genossen, wer von uns wäre nicht gegen den Krieg" (Comrades, Who among Us Would Not Be Against War). But every war? No. The poem is about justified wars, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, wars of necessity, wars fought in the interests of the peasants and the proletariat, in short, class wars. Consider, he asks us, the peasant revolt led by Thomas Müntzer, with all its communistic overtones, or the Red Army's war against fascism, or Ho Chi Minh's war against American imperialism, or,
the beauty of the machine gun
over the shoulder of the guerilla fighter
when he furnishes the Bolivian coolie
with striking arguments against his oppressors
which the latter finally understands (page 37)

The best though is a people's uprising, when the police are lost in the revolutionary flood and join the masses. No, Wolf Biermann is not a pacifist, for he believes in the need for revolutionary struggle. And anyone but the most unrealistically pacifist individual must admit that there is little if any peaceful possibility for overthrowing such brutal regimes as Pinochet in Chile or the Somoza family in Nicaragua. It remains a fact of life that there is still a need for violence in our world. But to make clear his lines of justification, there follows on the next page four "epigrams" concerning Vietnam, texts not designed to blindly agitate against the war, but rather to stir thought about the conflict.

Epitaph for an American Soldier
Sent out as butcher
Ended as the butchered (page 38)

That short little epitaph carries a surprising load within it. It is not a condemnation of the American soldiers, for it is written in the passive voice. The young men were sent out by a government which intended for them to be butchers. In the end the poor fools wound up being just more victims of American aggression. And what of the side effect of the war on the rest of the world? "Devastating Side Effect of the War in Vietnam,"

That there, this war there
presses itself forward
that there, this war there
casts over the world a long shadow
- under whose protection, and merrily,
murdering goes on
torturing goes on
lying goes on

Oh, where, Comrades, is lying?
where torture?
Murder, where still?! (page 38)
Every war casts its ugly shadow and justifies brutality everywhere. He who makes war cannot expect to live in peace. It is, I think, an important poem, not only in an international context, but within the United States itself. Our violent society was the breeding ground for the justification of violence in Vietnam. Those who deplored the rising tide of violent crime and disorder at home while supporting the war effort need only have looked within themselves for the sources of that which they condemned.

Likewise, this poem forces one to ask himself if revolutionary struggle does not also contribute to the continuance of violence. Would non-violent resistance not be a more sensible method to overcome reactionary regimes? Is such resistance realistic? These questions are unanswerable.

As I have said above, this section of Mit Marx- und Engelszungen end in the recognition that, despite all the violence in our world, life goes on. This fact, and the love of life which shows itself all through this volume, is best illustrated in the poem, "Unser großer Gesang" (Our Great Song).

1.
But we live in all the dying
In all the battles, how we do laugh
Completely torn and yet whole
From the lying waters, with slit nets
We still fish for truth. And
Mighty we are in all our weakness
In all our doubt we do not despair
Merrily with thrice shackled hands
We grasp happiness
With muzzled mouths
Come, my friend, let us sing
And especially us
Sing the great song of man.

2.
And light still in all these nights
In all these fires also refreshment
And luscious fruits still in the deserts
There, from the stones, there still grows bread
Despite it all the women still bloom
The orphans in the beautiful rounded body
Freedom, our plucked little bird
Nests yet in the men too.
There, where the dead cry to earth
there, where the living keep silent
Come, comrades, let us sing
And especially us
Sing the great song of man

3.
Over our ship of procreation, lovely
The cosmic bombs travel their path
Under the rain of all the rockets
We'll plant houses for our grandchildren
Day by day, we, the weak, will snatch away
from great Death, a long day
a short year, a small century
In all the transitoriness we loudly praise
The (gone already for many) the future
On the murder-sphere
Come, my love, let us sing
And especially us
Sing the great song of man. (page 40)

It is almost a Communist sermon of the mount. It is a song of hope in the best spirit of Socialism.

The third section of Mit Marx- und Engelszungen is titled after one of the songs contained therein, "Von mir und meiner Dicken in den Fichten" (Of Me and My Baby in the Spruces). The section deals with women. For West German feminists, Wolf Biermann has long been a favorite target. They attack him for his portrayal of women as passive and as objects of his sexual desires. In his work up to now there is little that could be used to refute these charges. Of particular aggravation is the song just mentioned, which is the story of a sexual encounter a couple of steps from the path. (page 49) In the song the woman is mentioned only in relation to her "white flesh," which Wolf lays in the grass to "measure with my measure." In the second and third verses his partner is more or less forgotten. In general, Biermann's attitude toward women has thus far been what can only be called a typical German patriarchal attitude. He refers to his Marie as his "favorite animal to pet," and speaks of "sailing with stiff mast to many beauties." (page 50) It isn't always so blunt. Usually it is simply a picture
of the woman waiting for her man at the window, giving a soldier a paper
flower, (page 34) or as the refuge for the man who struggles. Particularly upsetting to many feminists has long been the text with the multiple
title, "Romance of Rita - Moritat to the Socialist Community - Ballad to
the Plebian Venus." Although it wasn't included in Mit Marx- und Engels-
zungen, it is most appropriately discussed here. It is the story of Rita,
whose husband comes home one day and kills her baby after learning that he
is not the father. He's sent to jail, and Rita's fellow workers pitch in
to help her along by fixing up her apartment. Eventually she begins to pay
back the help with sexual favors, first sleeping with one and then another
and then others yet, with the purpose of getting more things for her apart-
ment as well as simply for pleasure. Things went so far that she became
a sort of community lover. Then the bomb fell, and she learned that her
husband was to be released early. She assumes that if he sees the apartment
he will draw the obvious conclusions. Therefore she sleeps with a high
Party functionary, sleeps with him in exchange for an order to have her
whole apartment house demolished. When her husband returns, they move into
a brand-new apartment in Lichtenberg and live happily ever after. Biermann
has maintained that liberated women should be pleased with the story, but
there seems little justification for that contention. It is hard to see
the song as anything but an insult to women as well as men. Giving sexual
favors in exchange for material reward hardly strikes me as a step in the
direction of female liberation. Have women nothing else to offer Socialist
society? In addition, the song seems to be equally insulting to men, por-
traying them as exploiters, willing to help women, if...

While I think the charges of the feminists are entirely justified,
there is though another side to the coin. As was discussed above, Biermann
feels that human relationships, in particular those between men and women
(when not necessarily between one man and one woman) are basic to all society, at once being a refuge from the political struggles and the proper basis for understanding larger social relationships. In his work, women appear as the sex who, by its nature, understands this basic human truth, who stand closer to what is important in life, who are the real foundation of society. Women who wait at the window as children play in the courtyard are in this sense a positive picture. Women who give paper flowers to soldiers are bringers of peace. In "Romance of Rita" he writes,

Masculine are the organs of power
The organs of society
All the official organs
Are made by men. Against people
A person doesn't help. Against men
Women help. And near Rita the
Longing for power in men died
In the great power of passion

In "Winterlied" (Winter Song) he tells of spending the whole night listening to the stories of the old women. For the wisdom of the old women he has left his young wife at home alone and winter cool. Women do have more to offer than their bodies.

The songs and ballads collected in the final part of Mit Marx- und Engelszungen clearly embody both the melancholy and optimism that are so much a part of Wolf Biermann's writings. His "Bilanzballade im dreissigsten Jahr" (Balance-Sheet Ballad in the 30th Year) is similar in its structure to the "Legend of the Soldier in the Third World War." The verses are full of bitterness and sorrow.

They honored me early on
Emptied night pots over me
and offered the crown of thorns
I left it lie

And thus I got involved
In politics, but it was useless
They brushed me from the table
like a gnat
But the refrain stands in contrast thereto.

And yet: the dandelion blooms
Even in the rain puddle
Still we laugh
Still we tell only jokes. (page 57)25

Yet even the refrain is ambivalent, for the image of a weed blooming in a rain puddle is bittersweet, like the bittersweetness of life in the GDR.

There comes next a trilogy of songs called, "Kleine Ermutigung" (Small Encouragement), "Ermutigung," and "Grosse Ermutigung" (Great Encouragement). They are songs for the modern revolutionary who must live in the cold reality of modern society, with all its overwhelming power over against the individual. They are songs about the "joy in struggle" to which Biermann alluded in his "To the Old Comrades." In "Kleine Ermutigung" he calls to his friends not to despair, for their tears are the rain for the tender flowers, and wouldn't the bush of happiness go dry without suffering's cloudburst? It is perhaps a strange sort of encouragement, but he sings of a life of meaning. It is again the theme of a unity of the personal and political lives. To this he also returns in "Ermutigung."

You, do not become hard
In these hard times
They who are too hard, break
They who are too sharp, prick
and break right off

You, do not be used
Use your time
You cannot hide away
You need us, and we need
All your cheerfulness

We mustn't keep silent
In this time of silence
Green is bursting from the boughs
This we'll show to all
So that they know. (page 61)26

In another verse he reminds his listeners not to become bitter, for if one gets himself behind bars he will still not be rid of all his sufferings.
So when do these sufferings end? "Grosse Ermutigung,"

You, my friend, to you I can say
I am tired, am dog-tired
Yes, tired I am of all the days
Which make me hard only harder
O, my heart is sick of all the
Politics and all the battles

Tell me, when do these sufferings
these sufferings, these sufferings
fin'ly have an end
When the new sufferings have come
The old have an end.

Oh, you my love, yes, my beauty
You with both of your warming arms
You held me tight in all the nights
which brought us only colder cold
Oh, my heart is sick of all the
Politics and all the battles

Tell me, when do these sufferings
these sufferings, these sufferings
fin'ly have an end
When the new sufferings have come
The old have an end. (page 63)27

This is not a pessimistic song, but one which recognizes the reality of social development, Wolf Biermann's interpretation of permanent revolution perhaps. Social development has not and will never come to a halt.

In another little song of two verses Biermann manages to capture the modern German Misere.

The German darkness sets
Over my heart
There is such darkness
In my song

That comes, for I see my Germany
So very deeply torn
I lie in the better half
And know twice the pain (page 77)28

The last two lines clearly represent the singer's view of modern Germany.
But why twice the pain in the GDR? The GDR, Biermann believes, is clearly the preferable of the two German states because of its decisive step in the direction of Socialism. Yet all the Socialist dreams thus spawned have
only been betrayed, and it makes the reality all the harder to bear. The poem is demonstrative of Biermann's all-German way of thinking. Indeed, he is one of the few post-war German writers to approach the topic of the German division. Uwe Johnson, an emigrant from the GDR, and Christa Wolf are also exceptions to the general rule, but they have approached the question from its psychological effects on individuals. Wolf Biermann is the only writer to treat the division as a source of grief for the whole German people.²⁹

Mit Marx- und Engelszungen is a long step away from Die Drahtharfe. The themes are basically the same, but the style and the tone are changed. The songs and the poems are not so impudent, not so aggressive. The three years of the public ban were not without effect. For the passionate revolutionary singer Wolf Biermann the isolation was a source of great sorrow. Sabine Brandt wrote of the works in this volume,

"The new verses are written with tears in both eyes...It is an oppressive thought that a poet who needs the public as hardly another, has for three years had only his tape recorder for a partner, which has meant not only an artistic but also a financial blockade. But this explanation is insufficient. A frustrated Biermann would not be so fruitful, a bitter one not so mature as this volume proves him to be. That which he cries out with the tongues of Marx and Engels is the pain of disappointed love.³⁰"
Notes on Chapter Nine


2. Und als wir oben standen
Die Stadt lag fern und tief
Da hatten wir vom Halse
Den ganzen deutschen Mief
Ich legte meine Hande
Auf ihren warmen Bauch
Und sagte: süsse Dicke
fühlst du den Frühling auch?

Die Tauben und die Spatzen
Die ersten Knospen platzen
auf Trümmer und auf Schrott
am Mont-Klamott

3. ACH FREUND, GEHT ES NICHT AUCH DIR SO?
ich kann nur lieben
was ich die Freiheit habe
auch zu verlassen:

dieses Land
diese Stadt
diese Frau
dieses Leben

Eben darum lieben ja
wenige ein Land
manche eine Stadt
viele eine Frau
aber das Leben alle

4. Kleiner Frieden

Kinder, die aufwachen
Frauen, die Morgenwäsche machen
Männer, die ein Gedicht schreiben ü b e r:

Kinder
die aufwachen
Frauen
die Morgenwäsche machen
Männer
die ein Gedicht schreiben

5. Tischerede des Dichters im zweiten magerer Jahr

Ihr, die ihr noch nicht ersoffen seid, Genossen
Im Schmalztopf der privilegierten Kaste
Ach, wie lang lag ich euch nicht in den Ohren!
(cont. next page)
Wenn durch den nächtlichen Fernsehhimmel
Die obligaten Kastraten in eure Kanäle schiffen
Wenn auf euren erblindeten Bildschirmen
Die keimfreien Jungfrauen flimmern
Wenn die Sandmännchen vom Dienst durch die Röhre
Die euch verordneten Schlaftabletten reichen
Das alles noch mag hingehen, Genossen, aber:
Wenn sie euch abfüttern mit ihren verfluchten
Ideologischen Wassersuppen, die feisten Köche
Dann quält mich doch, ich gebe es zu, Heißhunger
Nach eurem Hunger, Genossen, auf schärfere Sachen:
Stück Fleisch in die Zähne. Wollet euch erinnern:
Fast fettlos gebraten, das Salz erst zuletzt dran
Damit nicht auslaufen die himmlischen Säfte
Dazu mein Salat mit gehörigen Mengen an
Cayenne-Pfeffer, der lang nach dem Essen
Den Gaumen noch foltert, Zitrone und Knoblauch
Im Dampf des Olivöls schwimmen geschlachtet
Die roten Tomaten Arm in Arm mit den Gurken
Zur Hochzeit in knackigen Kähnen des grünen Salats
Und Salz und Salz! Die Weisheit gestorbener Meere:
Das wohlschmeckende, das ungesunde Salz!
Und! Wie wir dann lässig die Milch in uns schütten
Die sanfte, die gute aus bauchigen Bechern!
Da könnt ihr was lernen, ihr Arschlöcher!
O wollet, Freunde, euch bitte erinnern:
Es munden dem Volke die fetten Ochsen
Seit je in der Pfanne!
Nicht aber im Amt!

Unter uns gesagt: Startet denn wirklich unser nächstes
Grosseres Fressgelage, Genossen
Erst beim Leichenschmaus?!
Am Grabe der Revolution?!

6. Drei Worte an die Partei

Hast Du ein blutrot Kalb
In Deinem Herzen, Schwester
Dass Du mich nicht lässet
In Dein Gehege?

Ach, Bruder, nimm das Messer
Doch weg von meiner Brust!
Ich blute ja längst
Vor Trauer aus.

Nimm, Mutter, Deinen Hass
Von meinen schwachen Schultern!
Ich trage ja schon
An Deiner Liebe schwer.
7. Also schreitet dieser voran im Kreise
und sieht auch vor sich nichts, als abertausendmal eigene Spur im Lehm
Jahr für Jahr wähnt er also, der Einsame
den Weg zu gehen der Massen. Und er lauft doch sich selbst nur nach. Sich selber nur trifft er und findet sich nicht und bleibt sich selber immer der Fernste

8. See page 7.

9. Und will dann hinabtauchen in immer tieferen Stille und von neuem erfinden:
Den Schrei


Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde Klirren die Fahnen.

11. DER HERBST HAT SEINEN HERBST
Sanft frisst der Schnee die Gärten
Von Buchen blättert der Rost
Und der Wind mühelos erntet er
Spatzen vom kahlen Gesträuch

Der Herbst hat seinen Herbst
Bald blüht schon der Winter
Eins nach dem andern
Es betet ihren Rosenkranz
und gelassen die Natur

Wir aber
Ja, aber wir

12. Noch findet er statt der Sonnenaufgang
Die dunkle Nacht, noch wird sie veranstaltet

(cont. next page)
Noch ist es Winterzeit
Abende lang und weit
trauern im Schnee
Wenn wir nur lebend sind
Karin, im Kältemwind
ist es schon gut

Und hättest der Soldat der Frau zu Haus
Statt Krieg ein Kind gemacht
Dann schlüge das Herz der Erde noch
Der Krieg würd ausgelacht

Kommt uns die Sommerzeit
Karin, nich nur zu zweit
im Blütenschnee
Nieder mit Krieg und Tod
Reifen die Kirschen rot
dann ist es gut

14. Soldaten seh'n sich alle gleich
Lebendig und als Leich

15. die Schönheit der Maschinenpistole
über der Schulter des Guerilla-Kämpfers
wenn es dem bolivianischen Kuli
treffende Argumente gegen seine Unterdrücker liefert
die sie endlich verstehen

16. Grabinschrift für einen amerikanischen Soldaten
Als Schlachter ausgeschickt
Verendet als Schlachtvieh

17. Verheerende Nebenwirkung des Krieges in Vietnam

Das da, dieser Krieg da
drängelt sich vor

Das da, dieser Krieg da
wirft auf die Welt einen langen Schatten
- in dessen Schutz wird munter
weitergemordet
weitergefoltert
weitergelogen

Ach, wo denn, Genossen, wird da gelogen?
Wo gefoltert?
Gemordet, wo noch?!

18. Unser grosser Gesang

Aber wie wir leben in all dem Sterben
In all den Kämpfen, wie wir doch lachen
(cont. next page)
Gänzlich zerrissen und sind doch ganz
Aus Lügengewässern, zerschlissen die Netze
Fischen wir noch immer Wahrheit. Und
Mächtig sind wir in all unsrer Ohnmacht
In all unsren Zweifeln verzweifeln wir nicht
Heiter mit dreimalgefesselten Händen
Packen wir und Glückseligkeit
Mit geknebelten Mundern
Komm, mein Freund, lass uns singen
Und gerade uns
lass singen vom Menschen den grossen Gesang

2
Und Licht noch in all diesen Nächten
In all diesen Feuern Erfrischung auch
Und saftige Früchte in all den Wüsten
Da, aus den Steinen, wächst immer noch Brot
Trotz allem blühen den Weibern noch immer
Die Waisen in herrlich gerundeten Leib
Die Freiheit, unser gerupfetes Vöglein
Mistet noch immer auch in den Männern
Da, wo die Toten zue Erde schrein
Da, wo die Lebenden schweigen
Komm, Genosse, lass uns singen
Und gerade uns
lass singen vom Menschen grossen Gesang

3.
Über unserem Zeugungsschiff, Schöne
Ziehn ihre Bahn die kosmischen Bomben
Unter dem Regen all der Raketen
Pflanzen wir Häuser für unsre Enkel
Tag für Tag entreißen wir Schwachen
Dem grossen Tod einen langen Tag
Ein kurzes Jahr, ein kleines Jahrhundert
In all der Vergänglichkeit loben wir lauthals
Die (die vielen vergangen ist) die Zukunft
Auf dieser Mörderkugel
Komm, meine Liebe, lass uns singen
Und gerade uns
lass singen vom Menschen den grossen Gesang


20. Wolf Biermann, Die Drahtharfe. Balladen, Gedichte, Lieder (Berlin:

21. Ibid., p. 43.


23. see: "Ein Jahr im Exil," interview with Wolf Biermann, Zitty, November
4-17, 1977, pages 66-67.

Männlich sind die Machtorgane
Die Organe der Gesellschaft
Alle staatlichen Organe
Sind aus Männern. Gegen Menschen
Hilft der Mensch nicht. Gegen Männer
Helfen Frauen. Und auf Rita
Starb die Gier nach Macht in Männern
An der Grossmachter der Begierden

25. Frühzeiteg hat man mich geehrt
Nachttöpfe auf mir ausgeleert
Die Dornenkrone mir verehrt
Ich hab sie liegen lassen

Ich hab mich also eingemischt
In Politik, das nutzte nischt
Sie haben mich vom Tisch gewischt
Wie eine Mücke

Und doch: Die Hundeblume blüht
Auch in der Regenpfütze
Noch lachen wir
Noch machen wir nur Witze

26. Du, lass dich nicht verhärten
In dieser harten Zeit
Die all zu hart sind, brechen
Die all zu spitz sind, stechen
and brechen ab sogleich

Du, lass dich nicht verbrauchen
Gebrauche deine Zeit
Du kannst nicht untertauchen
Du braucht uns, und wir brauchen
Grad deine Heiterkeit

Wir wollen es nicht verschweigen
In dieser Schweiagezeit
Das Grün bricht aus den Zweigen
Wir wollen das alllen zeigen
Dann wissen sie Bescheid

27. Grosse Ermutigung

Du, mein Freund, dir kann ich sagen
Ich bin müde, hundemüde
Müde bin ich all die Tage
Die mich hart und härter machten
Ach, mein Herz ist krank von all der
Politik und all dem Schlachten
(new stanza cont. next page)
Sag, wann haben diese Leiden
diese Leiden, diese Leiden
endlich mal ein Ende?
Wenn die neuen Leiden kommen
haben sie ein Ende

Meine Liebe, meine Schone
Du mit deinen warmen Armen
Hieltest du mich all die Nächte
Die nur kältere Kälten brachten
Ach, mein Herz ist krank von all der
Politik und all dem Schlachten

28. ES SENKT DAS DEUTSCHE DUNKEL
Sich über mein Gemüt
Es dunkelt übermächtig
In meinem Lied

Das kommt, weil ich mein Deutschland
So tief zerrissen seh
Ich lieg in der bessren Hälfte
Und habe doppelt Weh

29. Sabine Brandt, "Ein Dinosaurier tanzt auf dem Marx-Engels-Platz. Wolf
Biermann, ein deutscher Dichter - Die Drahtarfe/Balladen, Gedichte,

30. Sabine Brandt, "Wenn Biermann bittere Balladen brüllt," Deutschland
In late 1970, Klaus Wagenbach published a play by Wolf Biermann, Der Dra-Dra. Die grosse Drachentüterschau in acht Akten mit Musik (The Dra-Dra, The Great Dragon-killer Show in Eight Acts with Music), in an edition of 20,000. The play is a remake of the fairy-tale comedy, The Dragon, by the Russian author Jewgenij Schwarz. In 1943, the original play was banned under Stalin because of its built-in reference to the Stalinist practices and did not premiere in the Soviet Union until 1960, under the Khrushchev regime.

For an East Berlin production of the play, director Benno Besson asked Biermann to help him write a revised version of the play, but first Biermann's work did not meet with Besson's approval and soon the cooperation ended. Besson went on to produce his own revision of the play and Biermann wrote his own dragon play.

In Schwarz's play, presented as a fairy tale, the knight Lancelot kills the dragon which has been ruling a fictitious city, and thereby frees that city. Biermann's play updates the action to the third decade after the war, gives the play an unmistakably political tone, and considers the problematic within its larger dialectical context.

The action takes place in a fictional city-state in a world ruled by dragons. The city-state too is ruled by a dragon, but he is not called a dragon, rather the Dra-Dra. His subjects know that this is only a transparent cover-up for the truth, but out of fear, weakness, or self interest accept the fiction that their dragon, Dra-Dra, is not a dragon and will protect them from a world "Swarming with dragons." Declares the dragon, "You need not get to know the world, but I know the world. And I tell you:
The world is swarming with dragons." (page 15) To which the people (das Tonbandvolk - tape recorder people), and the presidium (which is unable to do anything other than repeat mindless propaganda slogans) cry, "Down with the dragons!" (page 15) As the play opens, the governor and the presidium are discussing the up-coming "hate-celebration" against the dragons of the world. In that connection, the governor, a spineless eunuch, declares, "Our Dra-Dra is a Dra-Dra," and announces a decree honoring the Dra-Dra, a decree agreed upon after a thorough (and he sings the two words) "democratic discussion." (page 13)

The dragon claims to dislike the Dra-Dra cult (cult of the personality). "I reject this exaggerated love of my person," (page 15) and yet makes it clear that he expects it. The governor introduces a speaker to recite the winning poem in a competition held to honor, "our splendid Dra-Dra." (page 16) The poem consists of the word "ja" (yes) repeated dozens of times. Its title: "I Say Yes." Listening to this declaration of subservience causes, as the stage directions indicate, the presidium to fall "enthusiastically asleep." (page 19) But the subservience is not complete. The speaker, after finishing, steps down from the podium, but then returns and says simply, "No." This arouses the sleeping presidium, which attacks him as he screams, "Noooool" They hack the man to bits and sing the hymn to the Dra-Dra.

Dra-Dra protects us
Dra-Dra loves us
Dra-Dra uses us
Dra-Dra gives us
What he has:
Everything for the father-city. (page 19)⁴

Tomorrow will be, the governor makes known, the long-awaited day to pick the "virgin of the year," the virgin to be sacrificed to the dragon. The governor: "Happiness strikes." (page 19)
The virgin chosen is, coincidentally, Virginia. As the governor announces the choice to the parents and informs them that they, "may sacrifice their daughter to our splendid Dre-Dre (sic)," (page 21) they express their pride and happiness.

Mother: (proud) "Our only child!"

Father: "Who would have ever dared to hope for it!"

Mother: "I've always hoped for it!"

Father: "I've always known it!" (page 22)

But Virginia doesn't care a bit for the honor and slips away, only to be captured by the governor just after singing her song about the sacrifice, "Virginia's Song about the Virgins Who are Disgusted to Death." The title speaks for itself.

All is not lost though, for the hero and dragon-killer Hans Folk arrives in the city, intent upon killing the dragon. He vows to save Virginia. The governor threatens Hans Folk, but to everyone's surprise, the dragon intervenes to scold his lackey. He has been he says, waiting for a true enemy, because after all the city and he need enemies. "A life without enemies is like a breakfast without virgin piss." (page 35) His life, he contends, loses its meaning when there are a lack of enemies. Hans Folk is fed and armed and challenged to meet the dragon the following day in the city square.

Before the battle, the governor, to demonstrate "the alliance of the people with the dragon," (page 37) holds a press conference for a non-existent press. Even though he is asked no questions he manages to stumble over his own words, declaring, "Unser Dra-Dra isst Fleisch von unserem Fleische." (page 37) In German "isst," taken as it sounds, can mean either that the Dra-Dra is flesh of our flesh," or he "eats flesh of our flesh." He tries to extract himself from the ambiguity of the sentence, but finds it impossible.
The apparent paradox is the nature of the dragon's relationship to the city.

In Act III Hans Folk confronts the citizens of the city, telling them to take heart for he has come to free them of their dragon. But the people do not react as might have been expected. The "cynic," who along with the "good one," drives a jack-ass loaded with a huge tort for the dragon's breakfast, complains,

What an awful man you are.
He who's really against the dragons
And who isn't just a stupid swine
He must be for the Dra-Dra. (page 42)

Next comes the "realist" transporting a keg of virgin piss.

The world is unfortunately as it is
I am a realist. (page 45)

The poet, whom Hans Folk finds watering his flowers, only bemoans his own ineffectiveness, but is unwilling to declare his solidarity with the dragon-killer. The "blind one" and the "lame one," who are and are not blind and lame, shrink back at the thought of rebellion, though they claim to be secretly working against the monster. They cry, "without me, without us!" (page 62)

When Hans Folk asks the witch for a special pill against the dragon she gives him only foul water. "For guests the best," she laughs. The vegetable peddler just calls the dragon-killer crazy.

So Hans Folk can expect no help from the city's citizens. He does, however, find allies. He is joined by a pig, an ass, a cat, a goose, and a dog. Immediately, though, the alliance is threatened by a disagreement over tactics and mutual insults. At that moment a huge flea enters and offers the assistance of the flea-masses. The dog, the cat, and ass don't want any part of it. The fleas are parasites and blood-suckers, they argue. But Hans Folk thinks they can be useful. The flea explains that the fleas,
the lowliest of all the animals, want to join the other animals in fighting the "unanimal." (page 81) They can, he claims, act as partisan troops, getting under the dragon's scales.

Hans Folk thinks up a plan. The Dra-Dra will not be met in the square. The resistance fighters will instead occupy his fortress while he is at the square and lay for him when he returns.

At the appointed time the conspirators enter the fortress and are joined by the poet who brings pepper to toss into the eyes of the dragon. Inside the walls they discover Virginia and free her from the cage in which she had been imprisoned. As well, they find the "filosof," the dragon's former personal philosopher who had been lowered to the task of cleaning the dragon's teeth. The poor old man can do nothing else but practice self-denunciation.

The battle against the dragon is quickly won, for the Dra-Dra defeats himself. The occupants of the fortress sing an anti-dragon song which so infuriates him that he leaps into the air and impales himself on one of the turrets of his own fortress.

The end of the play? No. In fact, the death of the dragon occurs only about two-thirds of the way through the play. Things are not so simple, and the things which occur after the defeat are of equal importance. In the euphoria of success, the victors plunder the fortress, gorging themselves and drinking themselves drunk. The pig calls for further action against the dragon's allies so as to secure their triumph, but the others only care to celebrate. All eventually drift off to sleep. In this state the governor and the citizens find them. Seeing his chance, the governor quickly grabs a sword, chops off the head of Hans Folk, and declares himself the true dragon-killer. In reality he seeks to perpetuate the old order and become a substitute for the dragon, going so far as to call himself the
Gou-Gou. He announces,

You see me standing here with the sword, comrades
Take note of that! We travel further our straight
And narrow path. This iron shall not rust
Because the masses need a power to lead them. (page 108)

Thereupon he holds his second press conference, during which he announces a de-dragonization policy, making it clear that he is the dragon's legitimate successor.

The seventh act poses the strength and the regenerative power of the animals over against the sexual inadequacy and the weakness of the governor. The animals, who'd gathered up Hans Folk's parts, catapult the goose beyond the moon to get the "root of life" with which they restore their leader to life. At the same time the governor makes plans to marry Virginia, despite his sexual inadequacy. In order to be up for his wedding night he swallows, on the night before the wedding, a potency pill he'd gotten from the witch. The pill works too soon. Fearing the chance might never come again he goes up to Virginia, who is again imprisoned in the cage. Virginia resists, but after much argument does open the door just a crack. The governor sticks his genitals into the cage, and Virginia slams the door. In order to get loose the governor castrates himself.

The final act is the wedding of the Gou-Gou and Virginia. The scene demonstrates the governor's total degradation. He has the witch prepare a poison pudding for all the guests and then has those same guests beat her to death because there is one bowl too few. Instead of kissing his bride he bites her. Finally, as soon as the animals and Hans Folk arrive, the people turn on the governor. By this time though, the poisonous pudding has begun to do its work. The animals draw the curtains, and it becomes clear that the wedding had been held in the ass of the dragon. As the citizens panic and beg for mercy, the animals sew up the ass. The play ends
when an iron curtain is lowered over the stage.

The most obvious interpretation is that the play is an anti-Stalinist one. That was the initial reaction in the West, and with good reason. It is easy to see the person of Stalin in the dragon, who, like Stalin, was surrounded by a "cult of the personality." Likewise, the governor could be understood as an image of the fearful and weak regimes of Eastern Europe which stepped in to fill the power gap left by the death of the dictator. The de-dragonization declaration at the governor's second press conference cannot help but bring to mind the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The governor declares,

First: The Dra-Dra is dead.
Second: The Dra-Dra was a normal dragon.
Third: The dragon had innumerable murders on his conscience.
Fourth: A conscience the dragon did not have.
Fifth: Despite conflicting rumors we determine: The true victor over the dragon is our splendid Gou-Gou, of whom all people are envious.

In the time of servitude it was our splendid Gou-Gou who was the only one to raise his voice against the regime. He said before the whole world: Unser Dra-Dra ist Fleisch von unserem Fleische (page 111 - see explanation above).

This tactic, by lackeys, of denouncing their former ruler while continuing to employ his tactics in an attempt to retain power is not without parallel in fact in the history of Eastern Europe.

Of course while such an anti-Stalinist interpretation is not inaccurate, it is also far too simple. In a remark regarding presentation of his play Biermann wrote that "revolutionary artists" should direct their efforts against the dragons within themselves. (page 5) It is clear that the world swarms with dragons. In Eastern Europe the principle dragon is Stalinism, in the West, capitalism, but the fact is that we carry the dragon within us as long as we do not raise a hand against it. Biermann has said, "The dragon is a proven allegory for reactionary force, parasitical power, and counterrevolutionary terror." In short, it is an image of all that stands
in the way of democracy and Socialism, regardless of which title those re-
actionary forces might give themselves. In a prologue intended to be sung
by Hans Folk it is written,

Take note: I keep company
with dragons - never. I simply kill them
the dragons in the form of men
in the form of dragons, men. (page 7)

It is usually inappropriate to try to determine which characters represent
which real individuals, but in this case Biermann invites such speculation.
Hans Folk, for instance, is given the aliases:

Dan-i-el (Julij Daniel)
Spart-a-kus (-bund)
Dag-o-bert (Biermann)
Vlad-i-mir (Illych Lenin)
Bron-stein (Trotzky's real name)
Ho-Chi (-Minh)

They are dragon-killers all, but certainly not flawless heroes. Hans Folk,
when called to further revolutionary action by the pig, said, at that point
in his development, that he only killed dragons, failing to recognize that
the citizens were likewise dragons in that they made the dragon's rule pos-
sible. In a manner harking back to the expressionist plays of the 1920's
the citizens are not people with names, but only types or professions: the
cynic, the good one, the blind and the lame, the witch, the workers of the
fist, the city protectors, and so on. Even Hans FOLK and VIRGINia are not
individuals. This all stands in stark contrast to Biermann's songs and
poems in which real people appear, perhaps indicating a desire to universal-
ize the scope of the play. For whereas the vast majority of the songs and
poems written while in the GDR deal directly with that country, Der Dra-Dra
most certainly breaks those bounds.

Nor is it coincidence that those who ally themselves to the dragon-
killer are animals, the lowliest creatures in society (the proletariat?).
Which animals? The pig, the ass, the goose, the dog; not to forget the fleas, the lowliest of all animals. In a note on the play Biermann says,

Among the animals there are clearly distinguishable groups which correspond to the levels of society. Socially: white collar workers - blue collar workers - unemployed - asocial. Politically: revolutionary - anarchist - liberal - antiauthoritarian. The pig is more radical than the dog: the dog lives in the house of the Burger, the pig in his stall is made ready for butchering. The ass has a sense for the good and the beautiful...The cat, who is least bothered by the productive pressures of society, favors sectarian anti-authoritarian attitudes. (pages 140-141)

All of the societal elements which have been reduced to the level of animals form a union against the dragon. It is class struggle. In this image of a united front, a popular front, one can, I think, see Biermann's view of the German political scene. And I emphasize the "German" political scene rather than just East or West German, for Biermann does think in all-German terms. There are two dragons in Germany: Stalinism and capitalism, neither better than the other. It is the existence of these two dragons which prevent the union of the German states in a democratic Socialist nation, a long-term hope in Biermann's thinking, despite his internationalism. That is not to imply that this play is limited to the German political reality. In so seeing it we would simply be denying our own dragons. At the time the play was written, one major dragon was the United States and its imperialist war in Southeast Asia. In an interview given after the publication of Der Dra-Dra, Biermann pointed out this dragon in no uncertain terms.

When I see that the Americans, instead of finally going home, are transforming all of Southeast Asia into a Super-Auschwitz, it becomes clear to me that Adolf Hitler was unfortunately not the 'Greatest Dra-Dra of all Times.'

"The world is swarming with dragons." (page 15)

In this play Biermann is equally unmerciful in his treatment of the dragon's bourgeois lackeys. When Hans Folk first confronts them they show
themselves to be weak and rather pathetic creatures. They are presented as unsavory beings who fall in line behind one leader after another. This is most graphically presented in the final scene when the governor appears wearing a large bandage, the result of his self-castration. The people appear puzzled by the bandage until the "filosof," whose allegiance has been switched to the Gou-Gou, explains that it is the latest style, whereupon all the citizens likewise decorate themselves. There is only one possible solution. As the witch's poison begins to act, the animals sew up the dragon's ass. "Must we die?" ask the people pleadingly. "You've long been dead," replies Hans Folk. In the final scene one hears,

So it should be
with the rulers all
The servant
too must fall. (page 138)14

In an interview in October 1975, with Wolf Biermann and his friend Robert Havemann, the singer expressed the same sentiment in more concrete terms. Asked what they considered to be the most important criteria of a true Socialist society, Havemann mentioned freedom of speech, information, and movement. Biermann took it a step further:

In addition, the lack of freedom to let others work for you; the lack of freedom to secure privileges for yourself, to organize a privileged caste; the lack of freedom to hinder people's personal development with the help of an apparatus of suppression. Not the freedom to restore the bourgeois property and power relationships. In short, not the freedom to turn the whole business around historically.15

Der Dra-Dra had a double premiere on April 20th (appropriately, Hitler's birthday) of the following year in Wiesbaden and Munich. The Wiesbaden production, under the direction of Alfred Erich Sistig, received little attention and generally weak reviews complaining of naivete and confusion. While the Munich version was no great theatrical success, the production in the Munich Kammerspiele did stir up quite a bit of controversy.
First, the group's dramatic consultant, the playwright Heinar Kipphardt, wanted to print twenty-four photos in the program representing a "thinkable selection of dragons in the sense of the play." Among those to be pictured were Bavaria's number one politician, Franz Josef Strauss, as well as Cardinal Döpfner, Josef Neckermann, and Günter Grass. Grass reacted angrily by writing in the Süddeutsche Zeitung,

If young people take Kipphardt at his word and throw Molotov cocktails on 'dragons' they'll be locked up and Kipphardt will still run around free.

All this provoked concern by the theater's superintendent, Everding, who feared legal action. Kipphardt defended himself by explaining that it wasn't the people themselves whom he was attacking, but rather the functions they represented. Nevertheless, the program appeared with two blank pages and, despite a declaration of solidarity by 56 members of the company, Kipphardt's contract was not renewed by the city of Munich's Culture Committee.

The actors too tried to fulfill their role as revolutionary artists. In the last few days before the premiere, members of the company went to school yards, sang Biermann's songs, and urged the pupils to locate their own dragons. What the actors called "action theater" did not last long, for inevitably the pupils pointed to their teachers and school directors who just as inevitably broke up the presentations.

The director of the Munich premiere was Hansgünter Heyme, known for his controversial productions in the Cologne Playhouse of the German classics, Goethe, Schiller, Hebbel, intense presentations designed to reveal the Misere of the German classic. His production of the Dra-Dra was designed to expose the dragon of capitalism. The stage was wildly decorated with wrappers and other waste from Western consumer society, and the actors were clothed in the everyday clothing of that society. The dragon, which over a microphone had the voice of the famous Brechtian actress Theresa Giehse, had a
distinct resemblance to the West German federal eagle. At one point the actors waved Mao's red bible and confronted the front rows with their own dragonhood.

The audience's reaction was not overwhelming. The only noteworthy reaction being the mass walkout of a group who objected to the obscene nature of the scene in which the governor castrates himself. But that was not the only element bordering on the obscene. For no discernible reason, the witch appeared with bare breasts and a rubber silver penis. Indeed, three members of the ensemble had refused to participate in the production, not only because it promoted revolution, but also because they considered some of their lines indecent.

On the whole, the reviews tended to be negative. While there was almost universal praise of Biermann's songs, no one seemed to feel that his play was of any great quality, most dismissing it as too confused and poorly constructed.20 Friedrich Luft, writing for the Springer paper, Die Welt, felt that the songs were the only good thing about the play. Der Dra-Dra "is not a good play." Of Biermann he wrote, "A dramatist he is not."21 Ivan Nagel, in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, largely agreed,

The plot was taken from Jewgenij Schwarz's fairytale play The Dragon, that is, more weakly and sloppily retold. Biermann assuredly cannot write a play, and surely he doesn't want to.

But in concluding his review, he looked at the Munich production from a different angle.

A good play? A notable production? An important political provocation? All of these Der Dra-Dra is not, but is a powerful, daring theatrical experience, which it pays to participate in.
Notes on Chapter Ten


4. Dra-Dra schützt uns
Dra-Dra liebt uns
Dra-Dra nützt uns
Dra-Dra gibt uns
Was er hat:
Alles für die Vaterstadt

5. MUTTER stolz: Unser einziges Kind!
VATER: Wer hatte gewagt, das zu hoffen!
MUTTER: Ich habe es immer gehofft!
VATER: Ich habe es immer gewusst!

6. Was für ein schlechter Mensch du bist!
Wer wirklich gegen die Drachen ist
And is dabei kein dummes Schwein
Der muss doch für den Dra-Dra sein!

7. Die Welt ist leider wie sie ist
Ich bin Realist

8. Ihr seht mich hier mit dem Schwert, Kameraden
Merkt euch das! Wir gehen weiter unseren graden Weg. Dies Eisen soll nicht rosten
denn die Massen brauchen eine Kraft, die sie führt


10. Erstens: Der Dra-Dra ist tot.
Zweitens: Der Dra-Dra war ein gewöhnlicher Drache.
Drittens: Der Drache hat unzählige Morde auf dem Gewissen.
Viertens: Ein Gewissen hatte der Drache nicht.
In der Zeit der Knechtschaft war es unser herrlicher Gou-Gou, der als einziger seine Stimme gegen die Gewaltherrschaft erhob, er sagte vor aller Welt: Unser Drache ist Fleisch unserem Fleische.

12. Merkt euch: ich bekehre
die Drachen -- nie. Ich töte sie halt
die Drachen in Menschengestalt
in Drachengestalt, die Menschen


14. Es solln auch
mit den Herren
Die Knecht
zugrundegehn!

15. Robert Havemann, Berliner Schriften (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch
Verlag, 1977), p. 94.

16. see: Hippen, Reinhard, "Wer kann Wolf Biermann nicht verkraften?"
in Klaus Antes, u.a., Wolf Biermann (München: edition text + kritik,

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 148.

19. Volker Caneris, "'Uraust' - ein Drama des Sturms und Drangs?"

20. see: Ivan Nagel, "Ein paar lustige Polit-Nummern. Wolf Biermanns
Drachentöterschau 'Der Dra-Dra' in Münchner Kammerspielen uraufgeführt,"
Süddeutsche Zeitung, April 24/25, 1971.


22. Nagel, "Ein paar lustige Polit-Nummern."

There premiered during the same week in Munich an opera, Lancelot,
likewise based on Schwarz's play. The music was written by the GDR
composer Paul Dessau, the libretto by GDR author Heiner Muller. Paul
Dessau, a friend a co-worker of Bertolt Brecht, composed the music
for two of the latter's most important plays, Mother Courage and The
Caucasian Chalk Circle.
In 1972, there appeared in West Germany a slender volume of poetry by the Russian dissident Julif Daniel, *Berichte aus dem sozialistischen Lager* (Reports from the Socialist Camp), which Wolf Biermann had "brought" into German. That is, they were not precise translations, but rather a sort of rewrite of Daniel's poems in German. The poems had been written during a sentence which the poet had served in a labor camp. On February 14, 1966, Julif Daniel was sentenced to five years at hard labor. The trial had determined that he had published four novellas in the West under a pseudonym, the contents of which were alleged to be anti-Soviet in nature.

Taking some of Daniel's own lines, Biermann, in an introductory poem, characterized Daniel's soul as consisting of Russian melancholy and Jewish sorrow. (page 347) Daniel:

On your stone streets my dreams are bleeding
I have wandered and never arrived. (page 353)

The poems are pieces of Daniel's soul, for they express not only feelings of melancholy and sorrow, but also guarded hope and quiet determination. The sentiments reflect many of those which Biermann himself expresses. One poem, "Neujahrssbotschaft" (New Year's Message), brings to mind Biermann's song "Ermutigung."

Do not let yourself fall into rotten bitterness
Don't throw away your faith in people.

See that you find new paths
In this unknown known land.

Guard your clear view, be impudent and gay
And they who will survive are they who will endure.
And you are right, with troubled soul forget not
How the world turns in your direction. (page 352)

It is not surprising that Wolf Biermann was attracted to the poems of
Julif Daniel, for Daniel experienced in reality many of the things which
Biermann only feared. The interest must have arisen too from the fact that
the Russian's poems are as passionate and personal as those of the German,
and just as Wolf Biermann writes about himself and his passions rather than
some abstract "I", so Daniel writes about Julif Daniel.

For me there can be no victory
Have pity on you, Daniel. (page 361)

There is not, however, just self-pity, but also a determined, quiet courage.
Yes, the poet is weak and those against him are strong. He cannot escape
his own mortal weakness and the frailty of his work,

Verses, how shall they break the ring of iron?
They will be trampled. (page 355)

and yet he recognizes, strangely enough, that he is considered to be dangerous by the state,

All the radios
have warned of me (page 361)

Like Biermann, Julif Daniel speaks of nature, of sensuality as a freeing, renewing force. Of spring he writes,

Notice how the beauty of the beautiful again blooms?
From colleagues come again women in scarf and dress. (page 356)

On the other side of the coin he writes too of the degradation of men and
women. In a poem called "Der Wachposten" (The Guard), and dedicated to the
memory of the suicide victims, he, as a prisoner in a Siberian camp, imagines
a talk with the young, pimple-faced and bespectacled guard who stands in the
tower above. He asks how the young man could have sunk so low. Would he
really kill if Daniel took, "a short walk in the death strip?" (page 357)
But orders are orders. He imagines the guard on a visit home to Moscow, buying his girl an ice cream and forgetting those who hang suspended in the barbed wire, having committed a desperate suicide. Then he admits that the talk was not real. Only the suicide had not been dreamed up, and a feeling of despair sets in. To what level have we been reduced, the prisoners as well as the guards?

Will anyone ever again look unsuspectingly into a pair of eyes? There, this man, or there, that man? (page 358)

In another poem he speaks with great sorrow of the women prisoners who willingly lower their pants for a dish of porridge. (page 381)

No longer death - I fear only
A life on my knees. (page 383)

It is only appropriate that Wolf Biermann brought these poems into German, for whatever his weaknesses, Biermann too is a passionate man, an idealist who has never shrunk back from risk. In a sense these are his poems.

Biermann has done many other translations as well, though the Daniel poems are the only ones published up to now. Those who know the French folk songs which he has brought into German consider them to be the best translations ever done of those songs. Along with French folk songs Biermann has translated works by Pierre-Jean de Béranger and Georges Brassons. Both songwriters were important influences upon Biermann. Béranger's song "Le roi d'Uvetot" was the seed for "Kleines Lied von den bleibenden Werten" (Little Song of the Lasting Values), and "So soll es sein - so wird es sein" (So It Should Be - So It Will Be) is also based on a song by Béranger. Likewise, Biermann has created German songs from Swedish, Greek, Latvian, Irish, English-American, and Russian songs, among them songs by Bulak Achuchava, whom he met in the Soviet Union during a trip there. His translation
of the American folk song "The Riddle Song" appeared on his record Der Friedensclown (The Peace Clown). Does Biermann speak all these varied languages? No, he only reads English (and is learning Spanish). He himself sees this as no hinderance, perhaps even an advantage. Biermann has very strong feelings about the translation of songs, and when I asked him how he was able to translate French folk songs if he spoke no French, he gave me a full explanation of his ideas on the subject. Why has he been successful in translating songs into German?

Because I can speak German. The problem in translation is that one must understand his own language, because a word for word translation, a raw translation can be made by anyone you find on the streetcorner. I have always taken as a basis a raw translation from a person who speaks the worst possible German... so that I get, if possible, all the oddities, peculiarities, all the idioms of the original in German. I don't want to have slick German. And then I make a German song from that. Because in the end it is not important whether one has been true and slavish to the original, but rather in the end it is a question of whether one has made a living song. There is the saying, which you surely also know, that a translation can never be as good as the original. That I consider to be one of the dumbest sayings there is, that is of course, the saying is correct. A translation can definitely never be as good as the original, but it can be better. And that doesn't depend on whether one understands the foreign language, but rather whether one understands his own language. My poems were translated into English by Eric Bentley. Eric Bentley translated them correctly and my poems were also translated into Italian by an Italian German professor and into French by a French German professor. As a rule it is so that these German professors, who speak German so well, believe they must translate the poems because they speak German so well. Actually it is just the reverse. Someone must translate poems who has a mastery of his own language. And whether he speaks German is not so important...In any case I would prefer that some young American who has mastered his own language, that he translate my songs rather than someone who speaks very good German, but his own language very poorly. And it doesn't matter how true the translation, but whether it becomes a real, living English, American song. That is important. Therefore it is, especially in the case of a song, best when it is done by someone who knows what it means to sing a song, and before an audience and not just in a room. I would find it preferable if Phil Ochs or Bob Dylan translated my songs, both of whom probably speak no German."
Notes on Chapter Eleven


2. Verblutet sind auf deinem Pflaster meine Träume
Gewandert bin ich und nie angekommen

3. Du, lass dich nicht falln in faule Bitterkeiten
Den Glauben an Menschen schmeiss nicht weg

Sieh, dass du neue Wege findest
In jenes unbekannt bekannte Land

Bewahr dir klaren Blick, sei frech und fröhlich
Und überstehn wird nur, wer besteht
Und hast du Recht, vergiss nicht schmerzvoll
Wie sich die Welt in deiner Richtung dreht

4. Ein Sieg is für mich nicht drin
Hab Mitleid mit dir, Daniel

5. Verse, wie solln die den Eisenring durchbrechen?
Man wird sie zertreten

6. Alle Rundfunksender
Haben vor mir gewarnt

7. Merkt ihr, wieder der Schönen Schönheit wieder blüht?
Aus Kollegen werden wieder Frau in Tuch und Kleid

8. Wird jemals jemand wieder arglos in paar Augen sehn?
Dort, dieser oder dort je jener Mann?

9. Den Tod nicht mehr - ich fürchte nur
Das Leben auf den Knien.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DEUTSCHLAND. EIN WINTERMÄRCHEN

Wolf Biermann published two other books in 1972. One was Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen (Germany. A Winter's Tale). The book, which he wrote in 1965, is, in verse form, the story of his December 1964 trip to Hamburg to visit his mother. This was the first leg on his tour of West Germany. Much more than just the account of a trip, the book is an attempt on the part of the author to come to grips with his divided Germany. The book is evidence again of the influence of Heinrich Heine. In January 1844, Heine wrote a book with precisely the same title. As mentioned above, Biermann has recognized the surprising modernity of his "impudent cousin." Heinrich Heine and Wolf Biermann are both all-German writers, forbidden in their homeland, forced into exile (this all being a bit more complicated in Biermann's case). Both are non-religious Jews suffering from the German Misere. Heine's Wintermärchen describes his trip, in November 1843, from his home in exile in Paris to visit his mother in Hamburg. In 1843, Germany was divided into thirty-six separate states with Prussia already being the dominant force. These little countries were united in a customs union (Zollverein) which provided the external framework for a united Germany, the feeling at the time being that the nation would eventually be united under a common, probably Prussian monarch. Heine, who longed for German unity, did not, however, desire such a unification. His hope was for a republican Germany and his model was the bourgeois July monarchy of Louis Philippe in France. It should be mentioned too that Heinrich Heine, who was acquainted with the young Karl Marx, had Socialist leanings. His Socialism was, though,
not of the egalitarian nature envisioned by Marx. His political views were
based on a modified version of the philosophy expounded by the utopian
Socialist, Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825). Saint-Simon sought a society
free of all exploitation and based on a hierarchy of talent, with scientists
and "artists" carrying the largest burden of social responsibility. Heine,
it seems feared that a thoroughly egalitarian social arrangement would have
a levelling effect, negating many of the achievements of man. Yet he recog­
nized that a proletarian revolution might be the only way to destroy those
social institutions based on exploitation and whose destruction is a pre­
requisite for the establishment of a just society. But Heine never had a
party orientation. In his Wintermärchen, when asked by his mother to which
party he belonged, he replied,

The oranges, my dear mother
Are good, and with true pleasure
I swallow the sweet juice
And leave the peelings lie.2

The fact is that Heine's political views always remained a very personal
matter. He took the juice from the various viewpoints and left the dogma­
tic baggage behind.3

Wolf Biermann's Wintermärchen is the product of a different but still
divided Germany and of a much more definite political point of view. Bier­
mann made his trip from his "Socialist fatherland" to his home town in West
Germany. It is this strange arrangement which contrives to make Wolf Bier­
mann an exile in his own home, regardless of which German state he calls
home. In his political views there is little ambiguity, which nevertheless
does not mean that he is a promoter of any sort of narrow party politics,
as we have seen.

Biermann's Wintermärchen is not simply a modern rewrite of Heine's
work. Although he used the ironic tone of the original and the same basic
four-line ABAB form, which gives both works a folk song quality, there are
great differences in the two books. Biermann made alterations for instance
in the form. Into the basic structure the song-writer inserted five songs.
They have the double function of destroying the illusion of the work, in a
Brechtian manner, as well as completing the picture. However, the basic
folk structure was used by Biermann for much the same reason that it was
used by his predecessor. The form lends itself to a down to earth use of
the language and is flexible enough for the introduction of new developments
in the language. For Heine this became a tool to explode the romantic writ­
ing of his time. For Biermann it serves as a vehicle for his anti-agitprop
writing as well as for his distinctive earthy imagery. In the first chapter
of his Winternächten he refers to Germany as the ass of the world, Berlin
being the hole. The hairs in the crack are barbed wire. (page 6)

Wolf Biermann presents a picture of his Germany. Leaving West Berlin
by train he noted,

And because the train headed west
We were soon again in the East
That is the German geography. (page 10)

In the course of the book he takes up the themes of Germany's division, the
GDR's Prussianness, the Red Army, reactionary forces in the GDR, capitalism
in the West, his home town of Hamburg, and Stalinism. But while Heinrich
Heine used parody to mock the Prussian reaction, Wolf Biermann attacks in­
stead. Throughout his trip he carries his "machine gun" packed in his
guitar case. While Heine found himself followed by a shadowy figure with
a hatchet, who carried out his thoughts in deed, Biermann prefers to be his
own executioner.

(The division of labor: head and hand
Is now insufficient) (page 15)

Throughout the trip to Hamburg he reflects upon his Socialist fatherland.
As a symbol of the Prussianness he hates so much, he picks East Berlin's Neue Wache, the little structure on Unter den Linden which houses the memorial to the victims of militarism and fascism, and he finds it a bitter irony that that memorial is in that building, that leftover from Prussia.

A renovated freedom-coffin
On which the dogs piss.

As the high point of the architecture
A great hole in the roof
An image of soldiering. (page 11)⁶

So what to do with these uniforms and such? When the art of war is bankrupt, all these rags can be gathered up and recycled. And from them can be made paper, for his songs.

Biermann defends in his way too some of the indefensible sides of GDR reality. He defends them from a Communist perspective, a perspective almost not understandable to a non-Communist. The wall he says, "I helped build it." (page 18) It is an oft forgotten truth that many Communists in the GDR welcomed the construction of the wall as a temporary measure to prevent their country, the country in which they hoped to build a just Socialist society, from being bled white by the massive emigration to capitalist West Germany. Before their eyes they watched their hopes and dreams shrivel from within until they could accept the wall as an evil necessity, though few would be willing to defend its long-term existence.

The trap of concrete and wire
Is long and a sin
Anger, dreams and many reasons
I myself built therein. (page 18)⁸

Likewise he praises the Red Army soldiers whose misfortune it is to stand at the ass of the world. Their fathers freed Germany from the fascists, pulled the canines of the "Heil-Hitler-Volk," and, after twelve years of fascism, turned the country in the red direction. With them they brought
"abstract humanity and Stalin's cudgel." The Russian bear has a heart and a head and testicles as well: emotions, intelligence, and potency.

Inwardly I saluted
The shaven-headed friends
You are the backbone of our power
You I will never slander

... The Russian bear, I love him more
Than Greater Germany's hyenas. (pages 21-22)

It is precisely such statements which throw Biermann's reactionary West German "supporters" into such a confusion. They do their best to see in him an anti-Communist martyr and prove themselves only to be opportunists who have little understanding of his ideas. As often and as heftily as Wolf Biermann attacks the "real Socialism" of the GDR, he still holds his republic to be the preferable of the two German states, for it has turned in the direction of what he perceives to be man's only hope. Thus he loves the Russian bear who made the change of direction possible, despite Stalin's cudgel, which still makes itself mightily felt.

West German reactionaries are also confounded by Biermann's marked all-Germanness. German unity has become an almost forgotten, although still vital question. In the West it is taken for granted that if that unlikely goal is ever achieved, it will mean an incorporation of the GDR into the Federal Republic. Biermann sees it in a different light.

All Germany will be a red land
- To make that finally clear:

German unity will be! But only
In the spirit of the prophet
Karl Marx and in the class struggle
Of the peasant and the prolet. (page 26)

In all respects Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen is a piece of Communist literature. The entire German question is considered from a Communist perspective. It is therefore not surprising that the Klaus Wagenbach Verlag
began to include in each of Biermann's books a little slip with the heading, "Instructions for Use for Readers in Capitalist Countries," for it is clear that in the Federal Republic many of Biermann's works are unintelligible if a basic knowledge of the situation in the GDR is lacking. And it is a pathetic truth that for most West Germans the German Democratic Republic is a more mysterious land than China.

In Chapter X Biermann touches briefly upon the situation of the Communists in West Germany. The scene is his mother's kitchen. In 1964 there was no legal Communist party in the West. The old KPD had been banned, and the new German Communist Party (DKP) had not yet come into existence. How were things, the son asked his mother? And her words well-described the entire situation of the West German Left at the time. Most generally everyone sat before the boob-tube, but sometimes,

We sometimes drink illegally
Coffee and eat cake
And discuss politics
Only words. Words, words...

It's the old song, my son
We stew in our own juices
The young are crazy for money
The old lack the strength (page 38)

The Nazis had tortured them, but the Party had lived on. Now they die bit by bit because they're fed sugar. When Emma goes to the neighbors to agitate, they throw Stalin and the wall in her face. Yes, the situation in the West is sad. The old Nazi bunch, she says, lies stinking in the refrigerator of the Wirtschaftswunder.

The heart of the book, however, is Biermann's treatment of Stalinism, for it is the Stalinist heritage probably more than anything else that has hindered and continues to hinder the development of Socialism in both German states. After being fed by his mother, Biermann becomes restless and goes to search for that Hamburg goddess who spread her legs for Heine, Hammonia.
But he doesn't find her, only a low woman and lady mud wrestlers.

Stumbling forlorn, cold, and broke through Hamburg's streets as even the neon lights begin to die off, he finds a little construction tent at the foot of the Bismarck memorial. There he thinks he might take refuge, crawling in only to fall into the sewer of Hamburg, where he has to swim for his life among the garbage of that city. As body and spirit weaken and he's ready to give up, a hand pulls him out. He believes it to be life after death as his savior washes him and provides him with dry and warm and moth-eaten clothing. It is a Red Front uniform, and when he looks closer at the man who saved him he sees clearly that it is none other than Teddy Thälmann.

"Tell me Teddy, are we dead?
Or are we still living?"
"Immortal are those men, who
sacrifice themselves for humanity."

"And why do you vegetate,
in the sewer? (page 50)"

Teddy explains that he's waiting for the start of the world revolution and doing what he can to prepare. He spends hours every day fishing in the sewer to retrieve kitchen knives and jewelry, anything that might be of value to the revolution.

I collect arms and munitions
Provisions from everywhere
Also uniforms, boots and schnaps
And warm underwear. (page 50)

He even has four Krupp machine guns and a whole forest of red flags.

Comrade Thälmann shows his guest into a room in which there hangs, illuminated by two candles, an oil portrait of Stalin. It's surrounded by a wreath and draped with flags. Before it stands a sort of altar upon which rests an ancient telephone, his direct line to the Kremlin, Teddy proudly explains. "When did you last use that thing?" asks the young visitor and
then proceeds to inform the old fighter of the truth of the great Stalin. Thälmann, however, refuses to believe such rumors and decides to execute this young heretic, that is, as soon as he rings up Moscow to get the go-ahead. The sorry old phone sputters and crackles, but Teddy doesn't get through. "Sometimes the membranes rust through." "Ach Teddy, don't you see? You are yourself totally rusted."

Your streetfighting gear
Is ridiculous and useless
Socialism is no longer
As then, powerless, helpless. (page 56)15

Thälmann's view of Socialism is out of date, for he'd spent too long in the sewer while Socialism and the world changed. But though it pains him, he accepts the fact that the truth is the truth and must be faced.

Old as I am, dead as I am
We must both begin then
At the beginning...

For our dream for man remains
Despite all reverses
And if we fail, then we'll
Try again and once again. (page 59)16

So does Wolf Biermann express his dream that the young and the old comrades can shed the burdens of the past by knowing its truth and try anew to build their dream for humanity.

Teddy and Wolf climb up into a fish packing house which belongs to the Party, and there, packing fish, Biermann finally discovers his long-sought Hammonia. He recognizes her wide ass. After a bit she too remembers him. They'd once gotten loaded together at the Silbersack Bar. She wants him to sing a song, one from the old days about the new time ahead. So he sings the idealistic "Thälmann-Lied" with its images of Ernst Thälmann marching with red flags into Hamburg to build a better Socialist Germany. Hammonia, though, wants to hear a song about herself, not like the old one
with so much about "gloriaaa." Tell it honest, she says, she's just a fishpacker. The song, though, should speak of peace and freedom, the real peace and the true freedom, "for our kind." (page 65) Wolf scribbles notes, but wants something for his labors, a glance like Heine back then, into Germany's future. Hammonia explains that she herself cannot know the future. Heine dreamed all that up. So Biermann gets no look at the future. He needs none. "The future, friends, has long since and painfully broken upon us." (page 66) But he wrote Hammonia a song, "Gesang für meine Genossen" (Song for My Comrades).
Notes on Chapter 12


'Die Apfelsinen, lieb Mutterlein
Sind gut, und mit wahren Vergnügen
Verschlucke ich den süßen Saft,
Und ich lasse die Schalen liegen.'


4. Und weil der Zug gen Westen fuhr
Warn wir bald wieder im Osten
Das ist die deutsche Geographie

5. (Die Arbeitsteilung: Kopf und Hand
Genügt uns heut nicht mehr)

6. Ein renovierter Freiheitssarg
An den die Hunde pinkeln

Als Gipfel der Architektur
Ein grosses Loch im Dache:
Ein Sinnbild des Soldatentums.

7. Das deutsche Proletariat
Hat wahrlich bessre Tradition
Es lief ja auch nicht nackt herum
Das Thälmann-Bataillon

8. Die Falle aus Beton und Draht
Ist lang und eine Sunde
Ich hab in sie mit reingebaut
Zorn, Traume und viel Grunde

9. Ich salutierte innerlich
Den kahlgeschornen Freunden:
Ihr seid das Rückgrat unserer Macht
Euch werd ich nie verleumden!

... Den Russenbar, ich lieb ihn mehr
Als Grossdeutschlands Hyanen

10. Ganz Deutschland wird ein rotes Land
-Damit das erst mal klar ist:
(new stanza cont. next page)
Die deutsche Einheit kommt! Doch nur
Im Geiste des Propheten
Karl Marx und im Klassenkampf
Der Bauern und Proleten!

11. Wir trinken manchmal illegal
Kaffee und essen Torte
Und reden über Politik
Nur Worte, Worte, Worte...

Es ist das alte Lied, mein Sohn
Wir schmorn im eignen Saft
Die Jugend ist verrückt auf Geld
Den Alten fehlt die Kraft

12. The Wirtschaftswunder refers to the economic upswing which took place in West Germany in the 1950's.

13. 'Nun sag mal, Teddy, sind wir tot?
Oder sind wir noch am Leben?'
'Unsterblich sind die Menschen, die
Sich für die Menschheit geben'

'Und warum vegetierst du in
Der Kanalisation?'

14. Ich sammel Waffen, Munition
Und Proviant in Dosn
Auch Uniformen, Stiefel, Schnaps
Und warme Unterhosen

15. Dein Strassenkampfgerumpel hier
Ist lächerlich und nutzlos
Der Sozialismus ist nicht mehr
Wie damals macht- und schutzlos

16. So alt ich bin, so tot ich bin
Dann müssen wir beide ebn
Von vorn anfangen...

Denn unser Menschheitstraum, er bleibt
Trotz all der Niederlagn
Und scheitern wir, dann werden wir
Es noch und nochmal wagn!
Song for My Comrades

Now I sing for my comrades all
the song of the betrayed revolution
for my betrayed comrades I sing
and I sing for my comrade betrayers
The great song of the betrayal I sing
and greater song of the Revolution
And my guitar moans from shame
and my guitar rejoices from happiness
and my doubting lips pray full of fervor
to Man, the god of all my faith

I sing for my comrade Dagobert Biernann
who became smoke from the chimneys
who rose again, stinking, from Auschwitz
into the ever-changing sky of this earth
and whose ashes are ever scattered
over all seas and among all peoples
and who every day is murdered anew
and who every day rises again in struggle
and has risen again with his comrades
in my smoky song.

And I sing for Eldridge Cleaver
Comrade in the concrete jungles of San Francisco
as he shows the blacks, black on white
that the enemy is not black or white, but rather
black and white, that I sing to you
when Eldridge plants his monumental black ass
over Washington and the White House
And how the BLACK PANTHERS broke out of the menagerie
out of the bourgeois circus, panic in the public
I sing of the pigs and how they flee from their box seats

One last song for Comrade Dubček
now but an obedient lap dog
who should have rather followed
the crooked path under the ax
or the straight way under the tanks
or should have swam among his people
Like the famous fish of Comrade Mao
And therefore I sing the curative arrogance
of the trod-upon against all reaction
against the counter-revolution of 21 August

I cried and cry the prose of Vietnam
I sing of hypocrisy, of exotic pity
of political bombast, of peace and freedom
I sing of the skimpy beard of Uncle Ho,
to whom it was spared, to live out this war
which he had long-ago won, this war
which rages on in the cell of Muhammed Ali
which is daily mocked by joyous charity drives
and the officially decreed solidarity,
trafficking with the revolutionary sins.
And I still sing of my love
to my night - nocturnal virgin
to my holy comrade
who leads me into battles and saves me
in the higher justice of her smile
who still softly kisses away all the wounds
from the brow, which I beat for her
Yes, I sing of the class struggle of the sexes too
of the liberation from the patriarchal clinch
from the bondage of our bodies.

And I sing of all my confusion
and of all the bitterness between the battles
and I don't conceal from you my silence
oh - in nights filled with words, how often I concealed
my Jewish fear, that which I claimed
to have - and which I fear
will once have me, this fear
And I sing loudly in the dark forest of man
and beat time with my bones
on the singing belly of my guitar.

I sing of peace in the midst of war
But I sing also of war in this
murderous thrice-damned peace
which is a peace of the silent graveyards
which is a peace under the cudgel
and therefore I sing of the revolutionary war
for my thrice-betrayed comrades
and still too for my comrade betayers:
In unshaken humility I sing of Revolution
Gesang für meine Genossen

Jetzt singe ich für meine Genossen alle
das Lied von der Verratenen Revolution
für meine verratenen Genossen singe ich
und ich singe für meine Genossen Verräter
Das grosse Lied vom Verrat singe ich
und das grossere Lied von der Revolution
Und meine Gitarre stöhnt vor Scham
und meine Gitarre jauchzt vor Bluck
und meine ungläubigen Lippen beten voller Inbrunst
ZU MENSCH, dem Gott all meiner Gläubigkeit

Ich singe für meinen Genossen Dagobert Biermann
der ein Rauch ward aus den Schornsteinen
der von Auschwitz stinkend auferstand
in die viel wechselnden Himmel dieser Erde
und dessen Asche ewig verstreut ist
über alle Meere und unter alle Völker
und der jeglichen Tag neu gemordet wird
und der jeglichen Tag neu aufersteht im Kampf
und der auferstanden ist mit seinen Genossen
in meinem rauchigen Gesang

Und ich singe für Eldridge Cleaver
Genosse im Beton-Dschungel von San Francisco
wie er den Schwarzen schwarz auf weiss macht
dass der Feind nicht schwarz ist oder weiss, sondern
schwarz und weiss, das singe ich euch
wenn Eldridge seinen monumentalen Niggerarsch
über Washington auf das Weisse Haus pflanzt
Und wie die BLACK PANTHERS ausbrachen aus der Manege,
aus dem bürgerlichen Zirkus, Panik im Publikum
ich singe die Schweine, wie sie aus den Logen fliehn

Und ein Abgesang auf den Genossen Dubček
der jetzt auf dem türkischen Hund ist
und der lieber hätte gehen sollen
den krummen Weg unter das Hackbeil
oder den geraden Weg unter die Panzer
oder hätte schwimmen sollen in seinem Volk
wie der berühmte Fisch des Genossen Mao
Und darum singe ich den heilsamen Hochmut
des niedergeworfenen gegen alle Reaktion
gegen die Konterrevolution vom 21. August

Ich schreie und schrei die Prosa von Viet-Nam
ich singe die Heuchelei, das exotische Mitleid
den politischen Schwulst von Frieden und Freiheit
Ich singe den schüttenern Bart von Onkel Ho
dem erspart blieb, diesen Krieg zu überleben
den er langst gewonnen hatte, diesen Krieg
der weiterhobt in der Zelle von Muhamed Ali
und der täglich verdornt wird im Spenden-Rummel
in der behördlich verordneten Solidarität
im Ablashandel mit den revolutionären Sünden
Und ich singe noch immer auch meine Liebe
tzu meiner nacht - nächtlichen Jungfrau
tzu meiner heiligen Genossin
die mich in die Schlacht führt und rettet
inder höheren Gerechtigkeit ihres Lachelns
die mir noch immer auch alle Wunden sanft
aus der Stirn küsste, die ich ihr schlug
Ja, ich singe den Klassenkampf auch der Geschlechter
die Befreiung aus dem patriarchalischen Clinch
aus der Leibeigenschaft unserer Leiber

Und ich singe also meine Verwirrung
und alle Bitternis zwischen den Schlachten
und ich verschweige dir nicht mein Schweigen
- ach, in wortreichen Nächten, wie oft verschwieg ich meine jüdische Angst, von der ich behaupte dass ich sie habe - und von der ich fürchte dass einst sie mich haben wird, diese Angst
Und ich singe laut in den dunklen Menschenwald
und schlag mir den Takt mit meinen Knochen
auf dem singenden Bauch der Gitarre

Ich singe den Frieden mitten im Krieg
Aber ich singe auch Krieg in diesem
dreimal verfluchten mörderischen Frieden
der ein Frieden ist vom Friedhofffrieden
der ein Frieden ist hinter Drahtverhau
der ein Frieden ist unter dem Knuppel
Und darum singe ich den revolutionären Krieg
für meine dreimal verratenen Genossen
und noch auch für meine Genossen Verräter:
In ungebrochener Demut singe ich den Aufruhr.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FÜR MEINE GENOSSEN

With "Gesang für meine Genossen," Wolf Biermann opened his third volume of songs and poems, Für meine Genossen (For My Comrades). The book concludes with the song of Socialist prophecy, "So soll es sein - so wird es sein" (So It Should Be - So It Will Be), in which Biermann gives glimpses of the Socialist democracy his heart envisions. It would be a society in which peace would be more than "just another word for mass-murder," in which man would be freed from "freedom demagoguery" and in which even the liberals would be liberated, a society in which lovers would not be forced into the bonds of life-long marriage, in which informers would be the only ones out of work, a revolutionary society which would cast upon itself the first stone. The two poems embody the tone of the collection, ranging from sorrow and even bitterness over the betrayed revolution as it has been realized in the GDR, to the never dying hope for the new society, and the determination to work for it. The concluding song is framed in a verse which reads,

So or so, the earth becomes red
either life-red or death-red
We get involved a little.

So it should be
So it should be
So it will be. (pages 91 and 92)

It is a verse based on that thought of Karl Marx which Biermann finds occasion to refer to again and again, namely, that man must either find his way to Socialism or sink into barbarism, and so the world will become either Communist-red or blood-red. In Für meine Genossen one finds beautiful
examples of Biermann's biting ironic humor and his innate optimism, but the
general tone is one of sadness, bitterness. Faced with the harsh realities
of his Socialist fatherland, he strikes back with his most strident attacks
on the GDR. But one should not confuse anger and bitterness with rejection
and hate. "Without love there can be no indignation," Biermann has said.
Like his works in *Mit Marx- und Engelszungen*, these songs and poems are the
products of disappointed love, but love nonetheless.

The volume is divided into five "paragraphs" corresponding to the
legal code of the GDR: criminal offenses, slander, agitation, irresponsi-
bility and finally "extenuating circumstances," a division which is appro-
priate, considering the criminal poems therein. Each paragraph is intro-
duced by quotations from Marx, Lenin, or Rosa Luxemburg, quotations expres-
sing sentiments or ideas which would be suspect if expressed openly under
the "real existing Socialism" of the GDR. The quotations are inserted so
as to put Biermann's own writings in the perspective in which he prefers
to see them, writings for the revolution, critical writings, but ones of
critical solidarity, songs of that revolution which casts upon itself the
first stone. "I am fed up!" he cries, with that whole useless pack of
bureaucrats; with those German professors who are cowardly, fat, and tri-
vial; with those teachers who educate perfect subjects rather than citi-
zens; with those poets and their sweaty hands which rhyme that which doesn't
rhyme; yes, and fed up too with the "legendary little man,"

who always suffered and never won
who accustoms himself to any filth
as long as he has something to eat
who, in his bed, dreams of assassination (page 38)³

Yes, Biermann is fed up with all those who hinder the revolution, with those
who actively or passively support that deformed Socialism which presents
itself in the GDR.
In "Das macht mich populär" (That Makes Me Popular), he lashes out at the bureaucrats with their ass ends so fat and filthy. In particular he attacks Paul Verner ("a sparrow's brain with a lion's mouth" page 47) and Horst Sindermann⁴ ("Oh, Sindermann, you blind man" page 47) and laughs at them for causing what they sought to prevent ("You put out the fire with gasoline." page 48), namely, increasing his popularity. He recommends, if they want to destroy him, that they, who are so beloved by the people, should praise him, award him the National Prize, first class of course. That'd do the trick.

Biermann laughs at the Stasi agents who follow his every step and hear his every word, whether in the kitchen or in the can. They and only they know how devoted he is to the cause, and he imagines they must sing his songs in their sleep. In the song, "In China hinter der Mauer" (In China behind the Wall), he describes that land behind the wall where optimism is obligatory and where good Communists are locked up if they won't cry hallelujah, that land where the artists self-critically wet on their left legs, that land so far away, that land behind the wall.

One of the most talked about of Biermann's songs is the rollicking "Acht Argumente für die Beibehaltung des Namens Stalinallee fur die Stalinallee" (Eight Arguments for the Retention of the Name Stalinallee for the Stalinallee),⁵ the recording of which appears on the album Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten. The song deals with the long and wide street which runs from the Alexanderplatz almost to the eastern edge of East Berlin. Before the war it bore the name Frankfurter Allee. After the war it was renamed and rebuilt as the Stalinallee. In November 1961, the street was again renamed, part of it becoming the Karl-Marx-Allee and part regaining the old name of Frankfurter Allee. In his song, Biermann argues, both ironically and seriously, for the retention of the name Stalinallee, for in this street he sees
the embodiment of the Stalinist GDR and believes the street should retain
the name it has earned. Biermann was not the first to see in the Stalin-
allee the symbol of the new Socialist Germany. In the early fifties, as
work on the street had just begun (construction lasted from 1951 to 1965)
it was widely seen as a symbol of the new society to be constructed from
the ruins of fascist Germany. At the second party conference of the SED,
Walter Ulbricht said, "The Stalinallee is the cornerstone for the construc-
tion of Socialism in the capital." This statement proved to be all too
ture, but not in the sense that Ulbricht had intended. It had become clear
long before work on the Stalinallee began that Germany's path to Socialism
would be determined within the context of the Stalinist hegemony over
Eastern Europe. Terror, brutality, enforced conformity, and rigid order
were its trademarks. It is for all these reasons that Biermann feels the
name Stalinallee should be retained, because all these trademarks still
characterize the Socialism of the GDR.

In the first verse he sings, "There is in Berlin a street/ It is also
in Leningrad/ It is likewise in many/ other great cities." (page 41) And
the chorus quickly chimes in, "And therefore it too is called Stalinallee." The many Stalin streets and squares and theses and thats which appeared
after the war were more than just a symptom of the hegemony of the Soviet
Union over her satellites, they became also images of the conformity en-
forced by tanks, of suppression of all deviationist tendencies, and of the
fully stifled political life in those European nations. The official terror
reached a highpoint in Germany in 1953 with the suppression of the workers'
revolt. The uprising had begun as a protest against higher work norms by
the construction workers in the Stalinallee. It was crushed by Soviet tanks.
Biermann sings,
And as on June 17th
many a worker screamed
heavily armed with bottles
there flowed not only beer. (page 41)8

This too is a part of the story of the Stalinallee. The result is that already by nine-thirty in the evening there reigns the stillness of the grave, and even the trees stand rigidly in line.

Biermann not only criticizes the Stalinism inherited from the Soviet Union, but also the superficial and entirely incomplete de-Stalinization in the GDR after the 20th and 22nd congresses of the Soviet Communist Party, when Khrushchev denounced Stalin. These revelations caused many, as Biermann sings, to dirty their pants and, under the cover of darkness and fog, tear down a monument. But in the Stalinallee, the symbol of the new Germany, the buildings will stand eternally "in need of repair." (page 42) No, the GDR's de-Stalinization never went too far, not much beyond changing a few street signs. Changing street signs however does not change streets.

Karl Marx the great thinker
What did he do
that his good name
Should be written on those tiles. (page 42)9

The talk should not be to build more Stalinallees and give them false names, but to build streets that symbolize what the new Germany should be, which make it clear that there are other streets leading to Socialism. For these streets there are enough good names to use.

then we'll build a Karl-Marx-Allee
then we'll build a Engels-Allee
then we'll build a Bebel-Allee
then we'll build a Liebknecht-Allee
then we'll build a Luxemburg-Allee
then we'll build a Lenin-Allee
then we'll build a Trotzky-Allee
then we'll build a Thälmann-Allee (pages 42-43)

Maybe there'll even be room for a "Biermann-Strasse." But things are not
yet so far. The last line of most of the refrains reads, "Those times are passé." But the final refrain...

You must understand
Those times are passé
The old times are passé (page 43)\textsuperscript{10}

He doesn't leave it at that though. In the book and on the recording he backs up, scratches out the last "are" (German singular "ist"), and substitutes the word "were" (German singular "war"). The change reflects the truth that, regardless of which words one uses, the Stalinist times are still with us, broken monuments and destroyed street-signs aside.

Despite the levity of many of the songs there surfaces personal doubt about the usefulness of his work. Is he, the harder he tries, not sinking ever deeper into the swamp?

The world, God, is easy to save!
Man, but who saves the saviors?! (page 16)\textsuperscript{11}

And the writer, is he of any use at all? "Irony is insufficient," writes Biermann. So too is anger, and understanding, and caution. "The words twist themselves in the words the mouths twist themselves." (page 16) "Words denote only words," and can be of little use, for

Canons have no ears, and
Pencils don't shoot lead:
Plays on words. The words play
still, like children in the gas chamber

and yet,

the clear language of rifles
is understood only by those shot dead. (page 17)\textsuperscript{12}

So of what use is this little Biermann with his angry songs? Shall he do a turnabout and sing only of the good, as many advise him? Has he not gone too far? There was after all a time when he was much more positive, when he,
shamelessly displayed the dreams
the luxurious illusion still uncracked
blabbering honest lies and hiding
the great disappointment of the disappointed
the great questions of the little people
cashiered with their little joys
tears of old women and fears of children, yes
then it all appeared to be nobly simple
then the flags burned in the red light of the metaphor. 13 (page 22)

But too many years had passed, and so much had come to pass during those years. Wolf Biermann had long ago lost his patience, that whore of coward-ice. "I don't write anything I don't mean," he told me, and this is, I think, absolutely true.

How should one understand all the doubts, all the frustration expressed in these verses? One can only see them as the product of an active man held down, of a passionate man starved of satisfaction. Yes, he did by this time repeat himself, for which many have criticized him, and yes, there crept much sentimentality into his writings. But then Wolf Biermann is a sentimental man, and during those years of the ban he was forced to turn ever more inward. He is also not just another writer. He is a Communist writer whose life is devoted to the great cause. We cannot sit back and judge him as though he were an abstraction. This is done all too often when a writer is being discussed. The years under the ban were hard on Biermann personally. "All those eleven years seem like one great big lump," he told me sadly. He was and remains a strong person, unafraid to stand up to his enemies, but a man who was, during those eleven years, plagued by doubts and frustration and melancholy, and he wrote what was in his heart and mind. Yet melancholy did not overcome him. He didn't lose sight of the larger purpose or the real truth. If as he sings, his songs washed the burning wounds, who inflicted those wounds? Not he. If he found ulcers on the ass of the state, then he didn't invent them.

And am I, damn it, a criminal
Because I report our crimes? (page 59)
What of the charges that his songs serve the class enemy?

You guess: Who benefits, the class enemy
Or perhaps the proletariat
When everyone who kisses the truth
Is immediately muzzled? (page 59)

But what of the charges that he's gone too far, become too extreme in his attacks? Yes, he's done that, he admits. But why?

We've gone a little too far
Perhaps a bit of vanity -
My friend, it's a result of the division of labor:
One keeps silent, and the other cries out
When some as you don't go nearly far enough
Then others of course go a bit too far. (page 59)

Biermann has lost none of his strength, none of his determination, but there are unmistakable signs of resignation and hopelessness and sadness.

One of the reasons for his sorrow was all the people he saw fleeing the Republic, going under and going away. There was the very personal case, discussed above, of Flori Havemann. This hurt Biermann, and he considered that each who left was to be mourned, for they were often the very best.

Biermann was urged by many to leave himself to go to the West where his talent could be put to use, where he could sing and speak openly. He wrote a poem about his distressed friends.

Several distressed friends, again and again they press me
To flee this land: Man, escape
Into the world: A singer must sing! Even the West
Becomes eastern. Communists are in short supply, and where
Is there already Communism?
Save your contemporary art for those who come after us
Take your bundle of papers into security and
Protect your 140 pounds from the grasp of those
Whose property is the people. Man
Up to now they've not put you away only
Because it is too costly for them! What happens
When it is too costly not to put you away?

2.
Ach, those who talk so
Do not need me
As bad as before
They can continue as well
Also without me

They handle me worse
Than they handle a piece of dried bread

What sort of talent must so urgently
Be saved for the world, little friend
That is superfluous for you? Comrade
Which artworks shall be
Let loose on humanity
Which you do not need like bread?
This I give you in writing: If you
Don't need me
Here, of what use am I
To the world?
But if you do need me, what
Use is the world to me?

No! The world needs me
And posterity needs me

3.
Good, say my distressed friends, relieved:
Give us in writing
-three carbon copies
-of the poem
-about the distressed friends
for distribution! (pages 86-87)

His opinion that one should stay in the East was based on his belief
that the Socialist experiment there, despite all the problems, is so impor­
tant that the capitalist West can offer no alternative. The alternative to
the sad state of Socialism in the GDR is not the capitalism of West Germany,
but Socialism, the democratic Socialism of the Prague Spring.

There was never any thought by Biermann of leaving the GDR of his own
free will. There was, however, always the fear, as it turns out justified,
that he would be forced to leave. In "Ballade vom Traum" (Ballad of the
Dream), he betrayed his fear that one day the moving van would roll down
the Friedrichstrasse, stop before his door and take him, his books, his
rubber tree, and eight guitars to West Berlin and dump him on the
Kurfürstendamm and he'd not be able to get home. In that dream he frantically searched for his passport, and ran to the wall and bit his way through the barbed wire, only to be shot down. But when he awoke in fear, Eva-Marie was there to comfort him, to ease his mind.

Again and again Biermann's girlfriend Eva-Marie Hagen turns up in his songs, as a refuge from the battles, as she who kisses away his wounds, or eases his fears. This is particularly clear in the song "Nicht sehen - Nicht hören - Nicht Schreien" (See Not - Hear Not - Shout Not). As his mother's only son opened his eyes he saw night in all the daylight, he saw the darkest despotism, but he also saw the soft, white knees of Eva-Marie. It hurt to hear the people screaming in silence, and yet he enjoyed hearing the lovely songs of his woman. And though he cried out the truth in all the darkness, he also didn't mind keeping silent long enough to down Eva-Marie's potato pancakes. Finally, in an "elastic hint on the moral" he sings,

The rule: see not, hear not, shout not
It comes from the holy monkeys, the three
The three have sold out to the bourgeoisie!!
- that my mother's son tells you
The thrice-damned rule of the three
Is valid at best and sometimes when people are too near
- and we embrace - for: Eva-Marie (page 46)

In any person the personal and the political lives are inseparable Biermann contends. A tender and loving personal life prepares one for a passionate and caring political struggle. Biermann condemns his comrades for neglecting injustice as they neglect their wives.

There also appears again in Für meine Genossen the theme of the living and the dead. In "Die Lebenden und die Toten" (The Living and the Dead), he says squarely,

The dead are dead, and who lives, is right.
Comrades slay their comrades, despite it all:
How overdead are for us these living, ach
In us: how alive the slayed! (page 61)
The murderers say let the dead rest, what's past is past, time heals all,
but Biermann cannot forget,

What is past, is not past
What we have behind us, we face (page 61)\(^1\)

The question of life and death is handled best in the beautiful song of the Hugenot Cemetery. The Hugenot Cemetery lies in the Chauseestrasse, just a short distance from Biermann's former apartment. He made a habit of taking walks there, just as he now walks along the Elbe. In that cemetery lie buried such people as Hegel, Brecht, Hanns Eisler, and John Heartfield. Wolf and Eva-Marie often visited these men during the noon hour. They would visit Brecht and Helene Weigel and,

Then laugh and go on
And think as we kissed:
How close are many of the dead, yet
How dead are many who live. (page 13)

They often ran into the old lady caretaker, and she told them tales of the 1918 Revolution and of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and how they fled for their lives.

Living and murdered
I saw the both of them. (page 13)

The graveyard, that place of death, is pictured as an oasis of life in the midst of Berlin.

The sun stands high above
Sparrows chase wildly about
We hold one another tight and dance
Through this green picture. (page 14)\(^2\)

For its images and dialectical construction "Der Hugenottenfriedhof" is one of Biermann's best songs.

One more poem and two songs should be mentioned, not only for their quality, but because, taken together, they sum up the mood of Für meine Genossen.
The poem, again going back to Brecht's "An die Nachgeborenen" (To Posterity), is "Brecht, deine Nachgeborenen" (Brecht, Your Posterity). It opens with a line from the former work, "You who will emerge from the deluge in which we perished..." The poem is a message from apprentice to master about those who survived that deluge.

Yes, they've emerged from the deluge in which
You went down and now can see no land (poem on pages 33-37)

These survivors have learned to endure in their bitterness. For Biermann, a man who, for all his optimism, is plagued by doubts, it is just a more subtle way of inflicting pain. These men who were to do better than Brecht and his generation,

Make the other's cause look better and better
And in these bleak times have settled down
Smugly and snugly to live with your poems

Biermann expresses the sentiments of the frustrated revolutionary, who, like the frustrated lover, must wait before the door while she lies with an old flame grown cold and hard.

Broken bits, dreams laid out in front of me
Rubble, expectations piled up in front of me
Refuse of earlier passions they pour out for me
Strew on my head the ashe of earlier fires
Sparse remains on the armchair facing me
Branded with the stamp of bureaucracy
Clamped into the thrumb-screws of privileges
Chewed up and spat out by the political police
Brecht, your posterity
From time to time they
punish me.

Those too, master, are - and in prose - your Posterity: post-deceased pre-deceased people
Full of indulgence only for themselves
Changing convictions more often than their shoes
That's right: their voices are no longer hoarse
- since they have nothing more to say
Their faces are no longer distorted, right:
For they have grown faceless. At last
Man has become a wolf to wolf
Brecht, your posterity
From time to time they
punish me.
Biermann has not forgotten to love in the midst of struggle, and yet certain truths do not change. His voice did grow hoarse, and his features were distorted, for he is an emotional person, who, like Heinrich Heine, feels the pain of Germany in his own heart.

If finally then the guests, drunk with the misleading Truth of my ballads, inflamed by the false logic Of my poems, if they go, armed with confidence, then

I stay behind: ash of my fires. Then I stand there: a raided arsenal. And Knocked out I hang in the strings of my guitar.

And I have no voice anymore and no face And am as though deaf with speaking and blind with looking And am afraid of my fear and am

Brecht, your posterity From time to time I punish myself

The first of the two songs, "Das Hölderlin-Lied," makes reference to yet another German writer, the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. A contemporary of Goethe and Schiller, Hölderlin, who lived to be 73, wrote for only about a decade and a half before losing his sanity. He was a supporter of the French Revolution with all its high hopes of brotherhood, freedom, and equality, and he suffered great disappointment when he saw those ideals betrayed. In his later years of sanity his work, affected by those betrayed ideals as well as failure in his personal life, took on a melancholy tone. It is this tone of disillusionment and coldness that Wolf Biermann struck in his Holderlin song. It too expresses the feelings of a man who has seen his ideals betrayed. Too, it is a song for all Germans.

In this land we live like strangers in our own house
Our own language, as it confronts us, we do not understand nor understood are we by those who speak our language

In this land we live like strangers
In this land we live
like strangers in our own house
Through the nailed windows penetrates nothing
neither how good it is, when outside it rains
nor the winds exaggerated news
of the storm
In this land we live like strangers

In this land we live
like strangers in our own house
Burned out are the fires of the revolution
earlier ashes lie on our lips
cold, ever colder cold sinks into us
Over us there falls
such peace!
such peace
Such peace. (page 19)

Finally there is the song "Selbstportrait für Rainer (sic) Kunze"
(Self Portrait for Rainer Kunze). Reiner Kunze is a former GDR poet (he now lives in the Federal Republic) with whom Biermann has long been friends. Kunze is a very sensitive man who writes quite personal poetry which is essentially non-political. Not that the political situation in the GDR has not been reflected in his work, but, unlike Biermann, he does not use his poetry as a vehicle for propagating any particular political ideology. He resigned from the SED in 1968 and is pessimistic with regard to the possibility of positive political development in the GDR. The song is a simple call not to let oneself be beaten, not to forever play the part of the martyred hero, to have courage in the face of trouble.

It is so dark and so light
Live well and die well
We'll not let this mood
Nor any grief destroy us. (page 89)
Notes on Chapter 13


2. **So oder so, die Erde wird rot:**
   Entweder lebenrot oder todrot
   Wir mischen uns da bisschen ein

   - so soll es sein
   - so soll es sein
   - so wird es sein

3. **Der legendäre Kleine Mann**
   Der immer litt und nie gewann
   Der sich gewöhnt an jeden Dreck
   Kriegt er nur seinen Schweinespeck
   Und träumt im Bett vom Attentat

4. Paul Verner is SED security chief. Horst Sindermann was at the time Party boss in Halle and is now president of the GDR parliament.

5. **Allee = avenue**

6. **Protokoll der II. Parteikonferenz der SED, 1952.** p. 80.

7. **Es steht in Berlin ein Strasse**
   Die steht auch in Leningrad
   Die steht genauso in mancher
   Andern grossen Stadt

   Und darum heisst sie auch STALINALLEE

8. **Und als am 17. Juni**
   Manch Maurerbrigadier
   Mit Flaschen schwer bewaffnet schrie
   Da floss nicht nur das Bier

9. **Karl Marx, der grosse Denker**
   Was hat er denn getan
   Dass man sein' guten Namen
   Schreibt an die Kacheln dran?!

   Many buildings of the Stalinallee were built of rather ugly clay tiles, a good number of which have returned to the earth.

10. **Mensch, Junge, versteh**
    Und die Zeit ist passe!
    Die alte Zeit ist passe!

11. **Die Welt, Gott, ist leicht zu retten!**
    Mensch, aber wer rettet die Retter?!
12. Kanonen haben keine Ohren, und
Bleistift verschiessst kein Blei:
Wortspiele. Die Worte spielen
Wie Kinder noch in der Gaskammer

Die deutliche Sprache der Gewehre
verstehen immer nur die Erschossenen

13. schamlos die Traume zur Schau gestellt
die uppige Illusion noch ungeknackt
wahrhaftige Lugen geplappert, vertuscht
die grosse Enttauschung vor den Enttauschten
die grossen Fragen der kleinen Leute
kaschiert mit ihren kleinen Freuden
Altweibertranen und Kinderangste, ja
da noch schien mir der Schein in edler Einfalt
da noch brannte die Fahne im roten Licht der Metapher

14. Und bin ich, verflucht nochmal, ein Verbrecher
Weil ich auch von unsern Verbrechen bericht?

Du, rat mal: Wem nutzt es, den Klassenfeinden
Oder etwa dem Proletariat
Wenn jeder, der hier mal die Wahrheit kusste
Sofort einen Knebel im Zahnfleisch hat?

Wir seien nur bisschen zu weit gegangen
Womöglich auch bisschen aus Eitelkeit -
Mein Lieber, das kommt von der Arbeitsteilung:
Der eine schweigt, und der andere schreit
Wenn solche wie du entschieden zu kurz gehn
Dann gehn eben andre ein bisschen zu weit!

15. Über bedrangte Freunde

Einige bedrangte Freunde, immer wieder drangen mich diese
Dies Land zu fliehn: Mensch, rette dich
In die Welt! Ein Sanger muss singen! Auch der Westen
Wird ostlich. Kommunisten sind Mangelware, und wo
Gibt es schon Kommunismus?
Heb deine Tageskunst auf fur die nach uns kommen
Deine Papierbundel bringe in Sicherheit und
Schutze deine 140 Pfund vor dem Zugriff derer
Deren Eigentum das Volk ist. Mann
Sie haben dich bis jetzt nur nicht eingelocht
Weil ihnen das zu teuer ist! Was aber
Wenn es zu teuer wird, dich nicht einzulochen?

Ach, die so reden
Brauchen mich nicht
So schlect wie bisher
Konen die gut weiterleben
Auch ohne mich

(New stanza cont. next page.)
Schlechter behandeln die mich  
Als sie ein Stück trocken Brot behandeln  

Was also für ein Talent ware da so dringlich  
Für die Welt zu retten, Freundchen  
Das dir entbehrl ich ist? Genosse  
Welche Kunstwerke sollen da  
Auf die Menschheit losgelassen werden  
Die du nicht brauchst wie Brot?  

Das geb ich euch schriftlich: Wenn ihr  
Mich hier nicht  
Braucht, was soll da die Welt  
Mit mir?  
Brauchtet ihr mich aber doch, was  
Brauche da ich die Welt?  

Nein! Die Welt braucht mich  

Und die Nachwelt braucht mich hier  

jetzt!  

3  

Gut, sagen erleichtert die bedrängten Freunde:  
Das gib uns schriftlich  
-drei Durchschläge  
-vom Gedicht  
-über die Vedrangten Freunde  

zur Verbreitung!  

16. Die Regel: NICHT SEHEN - NICHT HÖREN - NICHT SCHREIN  
Die stammt von den Heiligen Affen, den drei'n  
Die Drei sind gekauft von der Reaktion!!  
das sagt euch meiner Mutter Sohn  
Die dreimal verfluchte regel de tri  
Gilt höchstens und manchmal wenn Leute zu nah sind  
-und wir uns umarmen - für: Eva-Marie  


18. Die Toten sind tot, und wer lebt, hat recht.  
Genossen erschlagen ihre Genossen, trotzalledem:  
Wie übertot sind uns diese Lebenden, ach  
In uns: wie lebendig diese Erschlagenen!  

Was vorbei ist, ist nicht vorbei  
Was wir hinter uns haben, steht uns bevor  

19. Dann freun wir uns und gehen weiter  
Und denken noch beim Kussengeben:  
Wie nah sind uns manche Tote, doch  
Wie tot sind uns manche, die leben  

Lebendig und totgeschlagen  
Hab ich sie noch beide gesehn!
Die Sonne steht steil in den Buschen
Die Spatzen jagen sich wild
Wir halten uns fest und tanzen
Durch dieses grüne Bild

20. Ja, aufgetaucht sind sie aus der Flut, in der ihr
Untergegangen seid und sehn nun kein Land
Machen die Sache anderer Leute immer besser
Und haben sich in den finsteren Zeiten
Gemütlich eingerichtet mit deinem Gedicht

Scherben, vor mir hingebreitete Träume
Trümmer, vor mir aufgetürmte Erwartungen
Abfall früher Leidenschaften tischen sie mir auf
Schale Reste früherer Zorns schenken sie mir ein
Streun mir aufs Haupt früherer Feuer Asche
Karger Nachlass hangt mir da gegenüber im Sessel
Gebraunt mit den Stempeln der Burokratie
In die Daumenschrauben eingespannt der Privilegien
Zerkaut und ausgespuckt von der politischen Polizei

Brecht, deine Nachgenorenen
Von Zeit zu Zeit suchen sie
mich
heim

Auch das, Meister, sind — und in Prosa — deine
Nachgeborenen: nachgestorbene Vorgestorbene
Voller Nachsicht nur mit sich selber
Oft er noch als die Schuhe die Haltung wechselnd
Stimmt: ihre Stimme ist nicht mehr heiser
— sie haben ja nichts mehr zu sagen
Nicht mehr verzerrt ihre Züge, stimmt:
Denn gesichtslos sind sie geworden. Geworden
Ist endlich der Mensch dem Wolfe ein Wolf

Brecht, deine Nachgeborenen
Von Zeit zu Zeit suchen diese
mich
heim

Gehn dann endlich die Gäste, betrunken von der irreführenden
Wahrheit meiner Balladen, entzündet auch an der falschen Logik
Meiner Gedichte, gehn sie, bewaffnet mit Zuversicht, dann

Bleibe ich zurück: Asche meiner Feuer. Dann
Stehe ich da: ausgeplündertes Arsenal. Und
Ausgeknockt hänge ich in den Saiten meiner Gitarre

Und habe keine Stimme mehr und kein Gesicht
Und bin wie taub vom Reden und wie blind vom Hinsehen
Und fürchte mich vor meiner Furcht und bin
(cont. next page.)
Brecht, deine Nachgeborener
Von Zeit zu Zeit suche ich mich heim

This translation is by Michael Hamburger as it appeared in German Poetry 1910-1975 (New York: Urizen Books, 1976). I've made one correction in the final refrain. In Hamburger's translation it reads as do all the other refrains. In the German original it changes as one can see above. The change is very important.


22. Das Holderlin-Lied

In diesem Lande leben wir wie Fremdlinge im eigenen Haus
Die eigne Sprache, wie sie uns entgegenschlagt, verstehen wir nicht noch verstehen, was wir sagen die unsre Sprache sprechen
In diesem Lande leben wir wie Fremdlinge

In diesem Lande leben wir wie Fremdlinge im eigenen Haus
Durch zugenagelten Fenster dringt nichts nicht wie gut das ist, wenn draussen regnet noch des Windes übertriebene Nachricht vom Sturm
In diesem Lande leben wir wie Fremdlinge

In diesem Lande leben wir wie Fremdlinge im eigenen Haus
Ausgebrannt sind die Ofen die Revolution früherer Feuer Asche liegt uns auf den Lippen kälter, immer kältere Kalten sinken in uns Über uns ist hereingebrochen solcher Friede!
solcher Friede

Solcher Friede.

23. Es ist schon finster und schon licht
Gut leben und gut sterben
Wir lassen uns die Laune nicht Und auch kein Leid verderben
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"aaahhh..."

One often hears the criticism of writers of political songs, that they offer criticism in their songs, but no concrete proposals for change. This view betrays a lack of understanding for the song media. Songs are not, and cannot be, political programs, and it would be foolish to make such demands of them. Songs are unlike any other form of written or musical composition. Unlike straight musical compositions, songs can deliver a message. And, as opposed to musical compositions, too much sophistication can be detrimental. Simplicity is a distinct asset to any song. For instance, Pete Seeger has written of Woody Guthrie's songs,

Above all else, Woody's songs show the genius of simplicity. Any damn fool can get complicated, but it takes a genius to attain simplicity. Some of his greatest songs are so deceptively simple that your eye will pass right over them and you will comment to yourself, 'Well, I guess that was one of his lesser efforts.' Years later you will find that the song has grown on you and become part of your life.

That is the strength a song can have. Songs can have an emotional impact which poems and prose cannot achieve. No, they cannot explain complex political programs. They can in fact be more effective than a political program. Only a fool would try to make anyone believe that Karl Marx's Das Kapital directly influenced as many people as did the "International." Biermann has explained it this way:

Never in the history of man have people stormed some barricades because they comprehended that two times two is four...One doesn't risk his life because he knows something, but rather then, when there are great passions involved. When, that is, great emotional activity and the idea are both present. That is the wondrous effect which political songs can have, they offer the feelings, hopes, and passions of the masses in such a handy form that the people can put
themselves in a position to profit from their enthusiasm. Therefore, songs are also feared by the rulers. That is, they don't fear the songs themselves, rather the acute passions of the people which latently exist and are provoked by songs and so come to the surface.2

Songs can reach a mass audience. That has always been true and it is an even more important attribute in the modern world. Records, radio, and television have made the song one of the potentially greatest forms of communication that has ever existed. This great potential can be abused or used, effective or ineffective depending on whether a song is true and offers something of value. Songwriters such as Bernie Taupin and John Denver have reached millions. Unfortunately, they have never had anything to say. On the other hand, an outstanding writer such as Bob Dylan has effectively used the media of song to distribute his ideas, making him one of the most influential writers in history.

Like Woody Guthrie, Wolf Biermann's greatest strength is undoubtedly the essential simplicity of his style and his strong ties to the common people. "I come after all from the street, I come from below...I am myself the people."3 Biermann wrote about everyday life in the GDR, but his works have never lacked a political message. In songs like the "Ballad of Fredi Rohsmeisl" he, in simple language, is able to express popular sentiments in a straightforward manner. Biermann was the writer of the common people during his GDR years. His songs do not fall into the trap of political mumbo jumbo. What he has to say is clear. "I haven't become a theoretician, thank God."4

Biermann has not become professional or slick. The long years of isolation surely did their part in preventing such a personal decline. His contacts remained down-to-earth, like that with a barmaid who'd tell him she liked his latest song, or a stranger who'd tap him on the shoulder in a train and tell him to keep up the spirit, or the young workers who came
to visit him from various parts of the GDR. It pleased him when a sales­
lady greeted him as 'Herr Biermann.' When he ran into the old lady in the
Hugenot Cemetary, he asked her many questions, but talked little of him­
self. He wanted to learn, and human contact was his greatest teacher.5

On a more formal level, a major influence was the work of Hanns Eisler,
who wrote much of the music for Bertolt Brecht's later songs and whose
friendship Biermann cherished. Biermann has described what he learned from
Eisler:

The music is not there...to present or even copy the text, rather
it should if possible interpret it. That is, in a certain sense
the music should stand in opposition to the text. In any case it
should offer something which the text does not have. A good song
lyric must be in a certain way incomplete. That is formulated a
little confusingly, for it could give the impression that a bad
poem is a good song lyric. I'm not speaking of this sort of in­
completeness, one which is difficult to produce. A good poet
equisps his verses completely, one could say, with a melody, with
a rhythm. The song text should itself be unmusical, uneven, out
of balance, then when one sees that which is necessary for com­
pletion, he can achieve something with the music. An example:
when I, in the "Grossen Ermutigung," in the refrain write, "Tell
me, when do these sufferings/ these sufferings, these sufferings/
fin'ly have an end," then that is a text, which in a literary
sense, as one says, doesn't work. It is weak, it can't stand by
itself. The music is there to balance that. It delivers the
indignation, it attacks the words with all cannons, one can,
if one writes the correct music, say things in a song lyric that
one cannot say in a poem.6

I asked Biermann about the American singers and songwriters who inter­
est him. The most important, of course, is Bob Dylan. "He is the greatest
poet of our time. I love and honor him, absolutely." There is also Woody
Guthrie, whom he calls a very "fundamental man" for all songwriters. Then
there is the blues of Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, and Big Bill Broonzy. (Bier­
mann: "I also sing a sort of Prussian blues.") Yet one should not exag­
gerate the American influence on Biermann.

I find it good, too, that I was not too preoccupied with the
American model. My music is very, very German. I am closely
tied, and that is a fruit of my political upbringing, to the
German worker's song of Hanns Eisler and to the German folk-song. Most young people of my generation and those who came after, all this was in their heads much less, this German tradition, this European tradition. And then when the American high culture in the form of blues, of jazz, of folk music, broke in over them, they were completely molded by it. In my case it was only a small element...If I'd grown up in West Germany, it would have perhaps been the same with me. But in that I was a little further eastward all that didn't mold me so much. I think that is very good. A song like "Der preussische Ikarus" (The Prussian Ikarus - text on page 238), that can't be written in the tradition of Woody Guthrie.

It is not surprising that Biermann chose the guitar as his principle instrument of accompaniment, for it has several qualities which lend themselves to his purposes. First, it is portable, which makes it possible to perform in many places that would be inaccessible if one were to rely on a piano. Secondly, the guitar is closely associated with the "folk culture," as well as the tradition of the political cabaret, and is not identified with the bourgeois "salon culture." But while the guitar comes from the folk music tradition, Biermann's musical development and his virtuosity with the instrument have long since pushed his work past the traditional folk stylings. He has in fact developed an approach to his songs which is matched by few other songwriter-singers, perhaps only one other, that being Bob Dylan. To understand Wolf Biermann and his songs one must look at the totality, for an examination of one or the other aspect would be incomplete. When looking at his songs it is, as we have seen above, improper to consider only the text or the music, or for that matter both, unless one also takes into account the performance as well, that is the musical accompaniment, the singing, the pauses, the extraneous noises, the sighs, the asides. His songs are not complete when he has written the words and the music. The musical notation is only a skeleton of the music produced when he sings the song. The completion of Biermann's songs consists of his learning them over a period of several months until he has worked out every vocal inflection,
every pause, every sigh, every aside. Only then is the work complete. Therefore the amazing atmosphere of spontaneity which is in evidence in Biermann's recordings is not what it first appears to be, but is evidence rather of an "artist" who is in absolute control of his media. Consider two examples from his album Liebeslieder (Love Songs). "Die Elbe bei Dresden" (The Elbe at Dresden) occupies seven minutes and fifty-five seconds of the record, not as a result of a terribly long text, but because of the groans, yells, moans, and pauses. Biermann holds the last note of the final refrain for over thirty seconds. The song, "Der schwarze Pleitegeier" (The Black Bird of Bankruptcy) is probably the best example of this totality of performance. The whole is recorded to sound like a scratchy old 78rpm and is backed by a rinky-tink piano. The song begins with Biermann oohing and ahhing and oohing. Before repeating the first two lines of the first verse there is an interlude. Biermann: "aaahhh..." The clinky piano sets off again, backed up now by a triangle, a kazoo, and a child's voice. He finally ends up with a series of ridiculous noises which give one the impression that he's being beaten up or choked, at any rate muzzled.

It is obvious that much of what Biermann accomplished on record could never be reproduced in a stage performance, but until he was exiled, recordings were his only public outlet. Now that he performs regularly before audiences, he uses his concerts to develop his songs. In this way the reaction of his audiences helps him finalize the version which he eventually puts on record. His first record released containing, with one exception, songs and poems written in West Germany, which is also his first record recorded in a studio, Trotz Alledem (Despite It All), displays a very simple style which could easily have been a live performance. One will have to wait and see how his future recordings develop before an estimation can be made of the effect of his Western experiences.
Notes on Chapter Fourteen


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 23.

5. Ibid., pages 13-14.

6. Ibid., p. 25.


8. Ibid., pages 109-110.
Chapter fifteen
Non-Person

The years from 1970 until his expatriation were for Biermann very active years. In addition to the books already discussed he released five record albums and a single. A bootleg album has also surfaced. In 1970, he edited a new edition of Christian Morgenstern's Galgenlieder (Gallowsongs), which was however never published. A children's book of his fairytale Das Marchen vom kleinen Herrn Moritz (The Tale of Little Herr Moritz) was published in Munich, and French, Danish, Greek, Swedish, and English translations of his earlier works appeared. He laid many useful texts on the table, but the controversy around his person only increased. With the fall of Walter Ulbricht and the ascension of Erich Honecker as Party chief and head of state, it appeared as though there might be a new cultural thaw on the horizon which might benefit Biermann. There did indeed come a period of cultural relaxation. Honecker declared, "If one works from the solid position of Socialism there can be in my opinion no taboos in the field of art and literature." The atmosphere did improve for many writers. Not for Wolf Biermann. There came no easing of the ban. He didn't, however, allow himself to be silenced. In addition to his publications and recordings there were many interviews, West German television programs, and much indirect political involvement. For example, in 1973, during a Hamburg conference on Berufsverbote (professional bans), Biermann (in abstentia) and Rudi Dutschke declared that along with professional bans in the Federal Republic there should also be discussed the "Question of professional bans, purges, and persecution of Socialist and Communist dissidents in the countries
205

of 'real existing Socialism,' namely the ČSSR. Biermann also openly wel­
comed the foundation, on December 15, 1973 in Hamburg, of the Committee
against Repression in Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe (now known as the
Socialist Eastern Europe Committee) whose purpose it is to publicize re­
pressions in Eastern Europe, to lend support to the victims, and discuss
the reasons for such repressions. Biermann was criticized by ultra-leftists
who saw in his support for such causes rightist tendencies.

In general, 1973 was an important year for Biermann. It was during
that year that he made his first visit to Hamburg since the imposition of
the ban. It was a thoroughly private four-day trip to visit his dying Oma
Meume. Also in 1973, after the split of the Klaus Wagenbach publishing col­
lective, the singer switched record companies. Up to that point Wagenbach
had released Biermann's records as well as his books. Now the singer signed
a contract with CBS. For signing with this great capitalist concern he was
inevitably criticized, but he largely waved off the criticism as irrelevent,
seeing no qualitative difference between the little "capitaleft" Wagenbach
and the big capitalist CBS. A good part of the reason he signed with CBS
is that most other firms did not want to deal with him. CBS is one of the
few major record companies which doesn't deal with the GDR and is therefore
free from pressure. Biermann's contract gives him total control over his
records, right down to the covers. One of his first releases with CBS was
his so-called "Chile single." It contained two songs, "Ballade vom Kameramann" and "Commandante Che Guevara." The proceeds from the record went to
a special solidarity account in the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft in Hamburg,
account number 1-244 300 0. Biermann explained that the money was to be
used to help political refugees of the Unidad Popular, who were stranded in
Argentia, to travel further, and to help "my persecuted comrades in Chile."

The Guevara-song, a song about the myth of Che, had been written earlier
that year and submitted to the song commission of the World Youth Festival held that year in East Berlin. To insure that it was looked at, Biermann sent a copy to Erich Honecker, just as he'd once sent a copy of his "Vietnam-Lied" to Walter Ulbricht. The song of the cameraman is based on fact. During the first putsch against the democratically elected Allende regime, an Argentine-born Swedish cameraman was killed while filming the military's illegal actions. The song tells the story of that film and what it portrayed and goes on to draw the lessons of the Allende experiment: worker-power comes not only from good words, but also from guns. The jacket of the single carried the last picture the cameraman was able to film.

The year 1973 also saw Biermann's first public appearance since 1965. It came during the World Youth Festival held in July-August. On the next to the last evening of the festival, Biermann, umbrella under his arm, was among the lingering crowd on the Alexanderplatz. About 11 o'clock, near the world time clock, he was recognized, and people began to gather to talk with him. They'd heard a rumor about the Guevara-song and wanted to hear it. "I'll catch shit," said Biermann. He held out his umbrella, indicating he had no guitar. But the crowd wouldn't let him go. "With quivering voice and weak knees I then sang." He was afraid some loyal Free German Youth would make trouble, but the spontaneous nature of the thing seemed to prevent any interference. After the song, a discussion of sorts took place concerning why Biermann was not allowed to perform. An old man called out, "This is how the counter-revolution always begins. Always these artists, that's how it was in Poland, in Hungary, in Prague. We can't allow this Biermann to perform here. Such a thing causes, one can already see it here on the Alex, the whole GDR to totter." There was laughter. An older member of the Communist youth piped up to contend the old man's ideas. "Nonsense, the GDR tottering. Our republic isn't that weak, on the contrary. If this
Biermann were to appear publicly not a single person would even listen."
Again there was laughter. A West German Communist spoke up criticizing the
singer because his song "Soldat Soldat" was too pacifistic and lacked any
class perspective. Another asked, "What do you have to say to our National
People's Army?" Biermann replied by singing, "Mein Junge, du fragst mich
ob du zu den Soldaten gehen solltest?" (My Boy, You Ask Me If You Should Go
to the Soldiers?), the final stanza of which goes,

My boy, there are men
They prepare for war
Against the workers' states
Therefore I can only advise
Go to our soldiers.

Then someone criticized him because his songs were released by the class
enemy. Biermann said that he too felt it a disgrace that his songs were
brought out in the West, but not his disgrace. "I can only choose from the
possibilities which I have, and not from among those which I would wish my­
self."

Biermann not only lost his fear, "I would even say that it became the
best concert I have ever given. The people forced me directly to give them
what they need! A fundamental process of great political beauty." The
whole performance lasted about two and a half hours. At the conclusion,
the crowd requested "Commande Che Guevara" once again. Biermann sang it
once more, but this time without any fear and in full voice. "Then I no­
ticed, it was even an advantage that I didn't have a guitar, it would have
falsified the political nature of the situation and made it concert-like."

Although Biermann was, up until his exile, a GDR writer in sympathy
as well as in subject matter, he was never widely known in his political
fatherland. On the other hand, his reputation grew steadily in the Federal
Republic, that land he rejected, but in which he was published, openly read,
and heard by way of his recordings. He has been, from 1965 onward, a part
of the West German literary scene, if not always an uncontroversial part.

In March 1969, Biermann was awarded the Berlin Art Prize for Literature (the Fontane Prize). Accompanying the prize was a substantial cash award. Instead of taking the money himself, Biermann instructed his publisher Klaus Wagenbach, who accepted the prize for him, to give it to the lawyer Horst Mahler, who represented the leftest Extra-parliamentary Opposition (ApO). The money was intended to help the revolutionary movement in the West by defraying legal costs incurred by members of the opposition. "Since the money was raised by West Berlin taxpayers, it should also do West Berlin some good," said Biermann. 

When it was learned that the writer had so used the prize money, there were complaints in the Berlin Senate that in the future the prizes should only be awarded to "artists" who supported the democratic order. Biermann released a statement which read, "The Fontane Prize...is for me an honor. But the money from the Berlin Senate would have been a sin had I not in some sensible way misused it." 

In 1974, Wolf Biermann was again awarded a West German literary prize, the city of Cologne's Jacques-Offenbach-Preis. The prize is awarded every three years to a French or German "artist" who has been outstanding as a composer, lyricist, or interpreter in the field of operette, musicals, or chansons. The award carried with it 20,000 Marks. This time Biermann didn't reject the money, but sent a telegram to one of the jury members who had picked him for the award:

And I misunderstand this distinction as well as I can as an appreciation of the GDR. This German Republic I thank for my talent. Here I have been both: kindly promoted and painfully promoted."

A year later, Biermann won the German Phonograph Record Award for his album aah-ja!
The GDR citizen also became a West German television personality. On June 27, 1972, The German Second Program (ZDF) broadcast a television portrait of Biermann, "Die hab' ich satt..." (I'm Sick of Them...) which had been produced the year before by a Dutch film team. The program, edited down to forty minutes, featured the singer singing his songs and commenting upon them. Two years later, a not dissimilar, but poorly made special was broadcast by the First Program (ARD). Biermann was also occasionally the topic of several news analysis programs, such as "Aspekte."

In late 1975 and early 1976, he was involved in quite a different West German television project. After being approached by the Saarland-Television, he agreed to write and record three songs for the television film, Liebe mit 50 (love at 50), which the station was producing. Liebe mit 50 is about a man who seeks to break out of his petit-bourgeois existence and start a new life with another woman. The film was broadcast on February 17. Biermann was unable to view the film in progress and had only read the script by Englishman Brian Phelan. The film as well as Biermann's songs, which he had recorded with wife Tine, received good reviews.

Biermann would have probably played an even larger role in the West German political scene had he been able to move about freely. In the fall of 1975 it appeared as though that might be possible, but the glimmer of hope faded as fast as it had flared up.

As the end of the old fascist Franco in Spain began to be ever more apparent, several anti-fascist groups organized a demonstration in Offenbach for October 18. Wolf Biermann was invited to sing. He applied for a travel permit, and to everyone's amazement, it was granted. But when he went to pick it up, a couple of days before the demonstration, he was informed that permission had been revoked without explanation. For Biermann it was yet another bitter disappointment, considering the nature of the
proposed appearance, even more bitter than others. He wrote an angry com-
ment on the travel ban:

I hold this new ban to be a provocative affront to all Communists and anti-fascists, who have prepared this mass demonstration in Offenbach against the Franco-regime for the day after tomorrow. This act of disregard will embitter many Socialists in the GDR and in West Germany..."12

But he made it clear once again that that should not be misunderstood as a rejection of the GDR.

I hold the GDR, despite all adversity and despite all difficulties in my personal fate, for the better German state.13

It is quite likely that the revocation of the travel permit was due to pressure from the West German Communist Party (DKP), who did not care to have the famous Biermann stealing the spotlight in their own territory.

The Offenbach demonstration drew three thousand participants. Rudi Dutschke spoke, declaring that the German Misere had doubled, and that evidently both Germanys sought to be the most reactionary states in their respective power blocks.14 Biermann also managed to be present, by way of a tape recording. He read his declaration concerning the travel ban and sang three new anti-fascist songs which he'd written for the demonstration.

Through all the ups and downs, Biermann continued to work, and his production was prodigious. The ban imposed on him had the side-effect of allowing him a great deal of time to work in peace.
Notes on Chapter 15


2. See bibliography.

3. Quotation from the slip, "Gebrauchsanweisung für Leser in kapitalistischen Staaten," included in Für meine Genossen.

4. Berufsverbote: In West Germany one can be, regardless of his professional qualifications, barred from a public service job, which there ranges from teachers to mailmen and railroad engineers, if one belongs to or sympathizes with an organization which the state considers to be opposed to the constitutional order. In practice this law is enforced quite arbitrarily and directed almost exclusively against leftists, those on the extreme right going largely untouched. Even members of, or sympathizers with the German Communist Party (DKP), a party legally recognized by the constitutional court, are banned from practicing their chosen profession.

5. ČSSR = Czechoslovakia.


6. Ibid., p. 616.

7. "Rückschläge in finsterste Zeiten denkbar. Der Ost erliner Liedermacher Wolf Biermann über Entspannungschanzen in der DDR," Der Spiegel, October 22, 1973. The entire story of Biermann's appearance on the Alexanderplatz, which here follows, is quoted or paraphrased from his account, which he related in this interview.

8. Mein Junge, es gibt Herren Sie rüsten für den Krieg gegen die Arbeiterstaaten, darum kann ich dir nur raten, geh zu unseren Soldaten


13. At the same time Biermann let it be known that it had been, a year before, officially suggested that he leave the GDR.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LIEBESLIEDER

Two record albums by Wolf Biermann appeared in the fall of 1975. One was a remake of his Chauseestrasse 131 record, this time with the street sounds, which had given the original Wagenbach recording its distinctiveness, artificially dubbed over, and a black and white "Biermann poster." The other album was a new recording with the title, Liebeslieder (Love Songs). The songs tell the story of Biermann's relationship to Christine Bark, the young medical student whom he eventually married. Tine is the daughter of the Party official who was project director for the construction of the new parliament building, the Palace of the Republic. Her relationship to Biermann gave rise to problems not only for herself, but, as is common in the GDR, for her father as well. She was threatened with expulsion from her studies and he with loss of his position if the couple did not split. Eventually Tine did not only leave Biermann, but turned against him. They were separated for about three-quarters of a year. It was during this time that most of the songs for this record were written. By the time the album was released however, the couple was back together, and Tine was allowed to continue her studies. They married shortly thereafter when Tine gave birth to their son Benjamin.

The album is undoubtedly the most imaginative one that Biermann had yet done. On it one not only hears his guitar and harmonium, but also flute, piano, and salt and pepper shakers. As mentioned above, the song, "Der schwarze Pleitegeier" was recorded with a rinky-tink piano in such a way that it sounds like an old 78rpm recording. The songs range from ones
demonstrating the beautiful innocence of love, to the destruction of that
love, the disappointment at betrayal, and the end of the longing as even
the feeling dies. But the album is not just the story of his relationship
to Tine. Like every Biermann recording it has its political side as well.
It was after all the political situation which damaged the love relationship.
Indeed, that is the larger point of these songs, as Biermann himself says,

That is after all the polemical of these love songs, that societal relationships are attacked because they seek to
destroy human relationships - and that on top of everything else under the sign of Socialism.3

Although this is surely Biermann's most personal album, it is also,
and perhaps for that very reason, the work which most clearly touches upon
the everyday reality faced by all GDR citizens. The great political ques-
tions are reduced to the fact that one's personal life is not his own. At
school one is observed, at work one is observed, at home one is watched,
and one's actions and opinions are noted down and filed, and any effort to
"dance out of line" is quashed almost immediately. The state considers
love affairs between the wrong people to be just as much its affair as the
production figures for the nation's heavy industry, which just might be
why the GDR's economy is such a chaotic mess. Thus Liebeslieder is probably
Biermann's most German Democratic record, the subtleties of which can be
best understood by someone intimately familiar with that society. At the
same time, it is his most universal work, for such outside pressure on the
personal life is a situation faced, in one way or another, by every one of
us, whether the outside pressure be exerted by a government or simply by
that abstract concept called society. It is the real strength of Biermann's
writing, and a secret to understanding it, I think, that he is able to demon-
strate by way of personal experiences and personal feelings, larger social
relationships, greater truths. It is after all not through abstract theory
or statistical analysis that the inner workings of a society can be understood, but through the experience of one human being in that society, in this case Wolf Biermann.

Two songs most clearly demonstrate the nature of the record. These are "Die Bibel-Ballade" (The Bible Ballad) and "Die Elbe bei Dresden." They are both long, slow songs, in part spoken. The former is, in condensed form, the story of Biermann's relationship to Tine. It begins and ends with spoken pieces.

The red flags hang all gray and ill
In the rainy sky. From many a windowsill
The red cloth vomited from shame its last red
Then you came dancing by, and wore no shoes
You devoured me, a piece of discarded bread
In this land where everyone is full. And you
You were my new Germany and my old dream
Of kissing under the big cherry tree.

Unmistakable is the sadness and also the bitterness with which Biermann was filled at the time. But the bitterness does not gain the upper hand in the song. He is still clearheaded enough to take a close look at the circumstances which caused the sadness. It is a society in which the leadership pits one person against another, "And believe they do good - when they do evil." The result is a people under which,

No one believes his neighbor!
No one depends on princes

a society in which one must, and this is the deepest cut,

Guard the door of your mouth
-from her, who sleeps in your arms!

The political leadership actually tries to break up "false" love affairs and has apparently no idea of what enormous damage they are doing, destroying the very basis of the society they are attempting to build. The bitterness is heard in the song's refrain, which varies slightly after each verse.
The second refrain as an example:

that I know very well, the bullet, you know it
oh the poor bullet, no it can't help it. And
yet! It is after all the thrice damned
the bullet, which in my belly I feel. Ach
oh why, oh why, why does she
my dearest lover against me
so prompt the bullet become
-so quickly swallow their bait?! from love
comes, that is painful, from love
comes so prompt the blindness of hate

He was not alone though in his pain and he dared not forget that it is a
symptom and not the sickness.

I turned and saw all the injustice
There was under the sun. And look
There were such tears from those who suffered so unjustly
And found no comfort.
And they who did them wrong - were too powerful
So that they could not be comforted!

A page from the book of Socialism must be taken, a lesson in coopera-
tion must be learned by all. Despite vanity and selfishness, when one wor-
er falls he is supported by his buddies. This is not just a bit of nice
sounding theory, but everyday reality in the GDR. The close bonds among
coworkers has formed a close, warm stratum in that cold society. One need
not suffer alone. He can depend on the help of his colleagues. And so it
is on an even more basic level.

When two lie beside one another
They warm themselves. How
Can a loner become warm? One
Can be overpowered. But two
Might resist.

Biermann is returning to what is essentially an old theme. He ends the song
by saying:

Do you know me still? I no longer know myself
Since you became silent I am emptied of life
And see not, cannot, will not, want not, and yet do see:
Ripe is the year. The cherries burst with joy
And I lie walled up in this hole here
And hold my heart in my opened breast
So that it doesn't leap into the street and scream, when you
Here, in blue shirt, march by, with sand in shoe. 4

The song, "Die Elbe bei Dresden" is interesting not so much for the
story it tells as for the images Biermann uses.

In Dresden stands the Elbe so still
And the city flows so lazily past

The entire song is centered around the image of the river. Tine has left
him, and the river seems to have stopped its flow: the impossible has ap­
parently happened. While they were together, the river had taught them the
eternal truth that everything flows on forever.

My love, my love, now I am alone
Now this stupid river tries to tell me
Everything remains as it is. 5

It is a feeling that most have felt after a love was lost, or in the face of
any great disappointment. But the river does flow on, that truth does not
change. The song is likewise a political statement. Despite the appearance
that a particularly repressive government seems to have a stranglehold on
the people, that all hope of change has vanished, the society, like the river,
flows on and is ever changing.

With Liebeslieder, Biermann demonstrated that his abilities had devel­
oped vastly since he'd first taken up his themes. In the small space of a
song he is able to express the dialectic of an entire society.
Notes on Chapter Sixteen

1. The Palace of the Republic is a rather unattractive steel, glass and marble construction which stands on the Marx-Engels-Platz, the former site of the royal palace, which was, in 1951, dynamited for ideological reasons.

2. One of the songs, "Die grüne Schwemme," was written in the early sixties. The other is from a text by Heinrich Heine, "Wie schändlich du gehandelt."


Die roten Fahnen hingen alle grau und krank
Im Regenhimmel rum. Aus mancher Fensterbank
Erbrach das Fahntuch vor Scham sein letztes Rot
Da kamst du hergetanzt mit unterm arm die Schuh'
Verschlugen hast du mich, Stuck veggeworfen Brot
In diesem Land, wo alle satt sind. Aber du
Du warst mein neues Deutschland und mein alter Traum
Von Küssen unterm grossen Kirschenbaum

Niemand glaube seinem Nächsten!
Niemand valasse sich auf Fürsten
Bewahre die Tür deines Mundes
- vor der, die in deinen Armen schlaft!

das weiss ich doch selber: die Kugel, du Kluge
die arme Kugel, sie kann nichts dafür. Und
trotzdem! es ist ja die dreimal verfluchte
die Kugel, die ich jetzt im Bauche spur. Ach
warum, warum musste sich
mein liebes Liebchen gegen mich
so prompt zur Kugel machen
- zur Kugel machen lassen?! aus Liebe
kommt, ach das tut weh, aus Liebe
kommt das blinde Hassen

Ich wandte mich und sah an alles Unrecht
Das geschah unter der Sonne. Und siehe
Da waren Tränen derer, so Unrecht litten
Und hatten keinen Tröster.
Und die Ihnen Unrecht taten - waren zu mächtig
So dass sie keinen Tröster haben konnten!

Wenn zwei beieinander liegen, wärmen sie sich. Wie
Kann ein Einzelner warm werden? Einer
Kann überwältigt werden. Aber Zwei
Mögen widerstehn.
Kennst du mich noch? Ich kenn mich selbst nicht mehr
Seit du mir schweigst, bin ich von allem Leben leer
Und seh' nicht, kann nicht, mag nicht, will nicht und seh' doch:
Reif ist das Jahr. Die Kirschen platzen auf vor Lust
Und ich lieg eingemauert hier im Loch
Und halt mein Herz fest in der aufgebrochenen Brust
Dass es nicht auf die Strasse springt und schreit, wenn du
Im Blauhemd hier vorbeimarschierst! mit Sand im Schuh.


In Dresden, da steht ja die Elbe so still
Und die Stadt fliesst so träge vorbei

Mein Lieb, mein Lieb, jetzt bin ich allein
Jetzt redet der dumme Fluss mir ein:
Es bleibt alles, wie es ist
In the summer of 1976, a conference took place in Berlin which raised hopes, among many German Communists, for a liberalization of the GDR political atmosphere. It was the Conference of European Communist and Workers' Parties, which had been initiated by the Soviet Union and had been two years in preparation. There was much speculation about the Soviet's intention in staging the affair. It might have been that the Moscow party hoped to reestablish their traditional leadership role within the movement; it might have been that they sought to win back or discipline the strong Eurocommunist parties of France, Italy, and Spain. Whatever the case, the conference proved to be a showcase for the Eurocommunist parties and effectively ended the myth of the leadership role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Italian leader Enrico Berlinguer declared, "There is not and cannot be a leading party or state." Santiago Carrillo of the Spanish party said, "There is no doubt that the Communists have no center of leadership today and are not bound by any international discipline." All of this was an occurrence of no small importance. Not only did it enhance the status of the democratic Western parties, but it may have the long range effect of increasing the possibility for independent action, for change among the parties within the Soviet orbit. This was the hope, for instance, of Havemann,

The great importance of the Berlin conference lies in the fact that it created the conditions for breaking out of the devilish circle of isolation and, in common with the Communist parties of Western Europe, to begin a new Communist politics in the Socialist countries. The greatest obstacle to a democratic evolution in Eastern Europe has
always been and remains the potential interference of the U.S.S.R. One need only point to the five Warsaw Pact nations' invasion of the Czechoslovak Republic, an event still on the minds of many at the Berlin conference. There were people in attendance like Spanish First Secretary Santiago Carrillo who had not only condemned the invasion, but has said that he would have approved of armed resistance. Many pessimists in the Eastern parties, who might otherwise advocate a democratic evolution, feel that such an effort is simply pointless in the face of the Breschnev doctrine, with which the Czechoslovak invasion was justified. Yet many things have changed since then. Now it would be much more difficult for the Kremlin to make such a move. Even in 1968 it would probably have been impossible if it had not been for the support of the five other Warsaw Pact nations. Walter Ulbricht, undoubtedly fearing for his own position, was one of the leading advocates of the move. Today Ulbricht is dead, and Gomulka, the Polish leader in 1968, was forced out of power by popular riots. Today there are liberalizing forces in all the satellite countries. Eastern Europe has undergone vast changes since 1968.

The influence of the Eurocommunist ideas should not be underestimated, for they certainly nurture anti-Stalinist fifth columns in the so-called Socialist countries. The Berlin conference provided many East European Socialists with their first opportunity to read, first hand, statements of policy by the French, Spanish, Italian and other Western comrades. This was possible because Neues Deutschland was obliged to print verbatim the speeches of the Western Europeans. Thus there appeared on July 1st, on page nine of Neues Deutschland, a paper with circulation throughout Eastern Europe, the following statement by French party chief Georges Marchais:

The Socialism for which we struggle will be a deeply democratic Socialism because it will rest on the public ownership of the large means of production and exchange, as it will on the power
of the masses, in which the working class plays a decisive role. It will be deeply democratic, not only because it will assure the laborers the indispensable conditions for their freedom through the elimination of exploitation, but also it will guarantee, develop and expand all the freedoms for which the people has struggled. Be it the freedom of thought and expression, the freedom of creation and publication, the freedom of demonstration and assembly, and the freedom to organize, the freedom of movement for people within the country, and in foreign countries, the religious freedoms, or the right to strike. Be it the recognition of the results of general elections (with the accompanying possibility of a democratic change), be it the right of existence and activity of political parties, the independent and free activity of the unions, the independence of the justice system, or the renunciation of any official philosophy.

By Eastern European standards these are revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) statements.

Another international event of the previous July which clearly had an effect in the Socialist states was the Helsinki Conference and the human rights guarantees which were included in its charter. Throughout the Socialist camp, even in the Soviet Union, human rights organizations sprang up. The one excepted country was the German Democratic Republic. There, due to the peculiar German political situation, the reaction to the Helsinki Conference took a different form. Tens of thousands of people began to apply to leave the country legally, most basing their applications on the Helsinki declaration, which their government had signed. Estimates of the number of those applying to emigrate to the Federal Republic by the end of 1976 range from 100,000 to over 200,000. In addition, individuals and groups within the GDR sent petitions to the United Nations accusing their government of abusing human rights as guaranteed by the United Nations charter.

As a result of the Helsinki Conference and the Berlin Conference of Communist Parties, discussions of the possibility of democratization arose in many levels of society, including elements within the SED itself. It is now clear that certain groups within the GDR had begun to stir, and that the potential for change existed.
In the midst of this situation a protestant pastor in the city of Zeitz, Oskar Brusewitz, burned himself to death in the city square to draw attention to the inordinate influence over the education of youth by the state and to the overall relationship between church and state. The act shocked many people and most certainly attained its intended effect. As well, writers and intellectuals began to express themselves more openly, by way of the only public outlet available to them, the West German press. Among the most vocal critics was Robert Havemann. Havemann, whose loyalty to the GDR cannot be questioned, made it clear that he had no illusions about the desperate need for change when he wrote that, "The political term 'Socialism' has been by no one more profoundly discredited than by the countries of real Socialism." But he did not simply offer criticism. He also made suggestions designed to lead to a gradual democratization of the German Democratic Republic. He called for the gradual lowering of the age limit for travelling to the West; a general amnesty for all political prisoners, including border violators; elimination of paragraph 106 of the criminal code which relates to anti-state agitation and stands in direct conflict to article 27 of the GDR constitution; a reintroduction of the right to strike; additional candidates for each People's Chamber mandate, specifically candidates independent of the National Front; the introduction of an independent press with the freedom to offer criticism; and finally the creation of at least one independent opposition party. This was a program which would probably meet with the approval of most GDR citizens, but it was a proposal in a vacuum for it never had the chance for serious consideration.

The entire ferment which began to manifest itself so openly in the GDR in 1976 was doomed to a short life, as have been so many periods of apparent liberalization in the German dictatorship. Again, as in 1965, the symbol of the new repression would be Wolf Biermann.
Notes on Chapter Seventeen


3. Ibid., p. 89.

4. in Neues Deutschland, July 1, 1976, p. 9.


7. Whitney, New Spirit of Independence Spreads in East Germany."


9. In the German Democratic Republic there are several token political parties. These parties are united in the National Front which presents a single list of candidates in all elections. These token parties have absolutely no political independence.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ES GIBT EIN LEBEN VOR DEM TOD

In March of 1976 Wolf Biermann released the record album, Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod (There is a Life before Death). The record is a collection of anti-fascist songs. That the songs hang together is interesting in itself, for they were gathered from a number of sources and written over a period of many years. Four of the songs come from the time of the Spanish civil war, two are songs about those first four, two songs were written for the Offenbach anti-fascist rally, two are taken from the Chile-single, two are older compositions by Biermann, one is from Der Dra-Dra, and there are two others. It is the inclusion of the last two, "Ballade von den Spaniern im Dresdener Exil" (Ballads of the Spaniards in Dresden Exile) and the title cut, which draws into focus all the songs and gives the record its direction. Biermann always refers to this record as his "Spanish-LP," but that is not only because it contains songs from and about Spain, for it also contains songs which do not directly deal with Spain. The record appeared at a time when Spain was, with and despite King Juan Carlos, just beginning to crawl out from under the institutions and traditions which the fascist Franco had left as the heritage of his 40-year dictatorship. Spain was most certainly not yet a democracy, but a beginning had been made and there was reason for hope. Yet as Biermann reminds us in his "Franco-Lied," the old monster did not fall as a result of popular revolution, but went to sleep in peace, after four decades of brutal rule. Franco's bourgeois dictatorship is, however, not the only Spanish heritage. The album's four songs from the civil war remind the listener of the fact, and Biermann did not let these lovely
old songs, songs from the International Brigade, go without comment. He wrote two songs which place the older songs in their proper context. One of those songs he wrote is "Bedenkelied" (Consideration Song),

Consider the war against Franco
When you debate in the salon
That pig won all of his battles
- and what have we? We have

Songs
The beautiful songs
The sorrowful songs
From it we have songs
- only songs therefrom

The working class fought the war and they lost it and they are still losing it, for the social order which Franco sought to preserve is still in existence. With the exception of the Soviet Union, and then only during the civil war, no nation lifted a finger to help the Spanish working class defend their republic or struggle against fascism once it had established itself on Spanish soil. During the forty years of Franco's rule no nation, capitalist or Socialist, made an effort to support the Spanish people.

Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod was also released at a time when Chile was falling ever deeper into a fascist darkness, the beginnings of which had been encouraged by the capitalist West. In the United States now there are official protests against human rights violations, and in the so-called Socialist countries there are official solidarity campaigns, but little else. This is not so much a record about Spain as it is one about Chile. It is about the old lesson of Spain as well as the new lesson of Chile, and the relationship between the two. The connection is drawn simply, but clearly in the "Ballade von den Spaniern im Dresdener Exil." The song is based on a painting by Nuria Quevedo which hangs in a museum in the Karl-Marx-Stadt, GDR. It is entitled "Thirty Years of Exile," and pictures nine adults and one young boy, all in shades of gray. As Biermann describes the painting, the strange, darkly distorted faces express the longing to return home,
the pain of exile. Then the song about the Spaniards takes a turn in the final verse.

What can I do? And what can you
Still do, that these comrades here
From Chile - who are now with us
With man - man - woman - woman - man and child
What to do? that these people don't
Soon too with a stone face
Remain here (forty years!)
Because Pinochet was stronger
(Comrades, understand!)
Because Pinochet was still stronger
Than our good and mighty word
- s o l i d a r i t y

Like the song "Julian Grimau," discussed above and also included on this album, this is a call for real solidarity, the sort which helps people overthrow repressive regimes, and not just endure them in silence. Or shall Pinochet's bloody rule continue for forty years like that of his model Franco? Biermann is no pacifist and advocates armed struggle when it is necessary. Take a look for example at the two songs from the Chile-single The "Ballade vom Kameramann" draws the conclusion that the working class struggle must be carried on with guitar and machine gun. He refers to Che Guevara as Jesus Christ armed. And this too is a part of the idea of a life before death. In the title song Biermann makes it clear that there have been enough martyrs, from Jesus down to Dagobert Biermann, and although they have been resurrected in struggle, that is hardly enough.

In man's war of freedom
There are no dead dead
That is as true as dry bread.

Although Wolf Biermann has from his earliest writings made it clear that there is a life after death, he here finally poses the larger question, whether there can be a life before death. Are dead heroes the only living, or shall we live to struggle and struggle to live, before death? That put very precisely is, I think, what Wolf Biermann is all about, what Socialism
is all about. Rather than the Christian afterlife, Socialism seeks to allow man the chance to live here and now. Thus one must struggle against the Francos and the Pinochets, as well as the Honeckers, and for men and women. The concept is simple the struggle more difficult.
Notes on Chapter Eighteen


   **Bedenkelied**

   Bedenkt auch beim Krieg gegen Franco
   Wenn ihr debattiert im Salon:
   Das Schwein gewann alle seine Schlachten
   - und was haben wir? Wir haben
   Lieder
   Die schönen Lieder
   Die traurigen Lieder
   Und wir haben Lieder davon
   - nur Lieder davon

3. Ibid., p. 56.

   Was kann ich tun? Und was konnt ihr
   Noch tun, dass die Genossen hier
   Aus Chile - die jetzt bei uns sind
   Mit Mann - Mann - Frau - Frau - Mann und Kind
   Was tun? dass diese Menschen nicht
   Bald auch mit solchem Steingesicht
   Hier liegen bleiben (vierzig Jahr!)
   Weil Pinochet doch stärker war
   (Genossen, ihr versteht!)
   Weil Pinochet noch stärker war
   Als unser gutes starkes Wort
   - Solidarität

4. Ibid., p. 43.

   Im Freiheitskrieg der Menschheit gibt
   Es keine toten Toten
   Das ist so wahr wie trocken Brot.
CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE PRENZLAU SERMON

In a September 1976 open letter to his mother, Biermann wrote,

Emma, dear Mother, dearest comrade, now don't laugh out loud
and don't scream right off: Nearer my God to Thee! A few days
ago I sang in a church in Prenzlau.

Biermann's second public appearance after 1965 came on September 11 of 1976. Unlike the impromptu command performance on the Alexanderplatz during the World Youth Festival, this concert was planned.

The Nikolaikirche, an evangelical church in Prenzlau, District Neubrandenburg, where Biermann sang, is a big old church without a steeple in the Heine-Strasse. Biermann had been invited by the youth group of the church to participate in the religious services, that being, obviously enough, a front for a concert, a front allowing the church officials to bypass the need for a police permit. On the evening Biermann appeared, the church was jam-packed with young people. The church leaders thanked the Communist singer, for they hadn't seen the church so full in years. The pulpit was partitioned off by a cardboard divider, and a sort of podium was built over the benches below the pulpit.

Before Biermann, there appeared a local rock band which performed a couple of tunes, suffering terrible feedback from the GDR-made Vermona sound equipment they were using. When Biermann came forward he had the sound system shut off and asked the audience to come closer.

And so the young heroes climbed onto the stage and pressed themselves into the front rows, sat on top of one another and on the arm rests and prayer book tables, a knot of people all around me.
Microphones stared at him, those of the church's sound man, those of the long-haired youths, and of course those of the Stasi.

Biermann talked and sang and interrupted his songs to talk more. He talked about the idea of fleeing the Republic and expressed his regret that the best and most talented left. He then sang the song about the flight of Flori Havemann, "Enfant perdu." But when he reached the verse which states that there will come a time when the masses will come to the GDR, he stuttered. "I can no longer sing that all-too-utopian text." He took the chance to talk about the differences between true Socialism and that practiced in the GDR, about how, were true Socialism a reality in the GDR, then it could truly be a utopia. There are three ways to leave the Republic, he said: emigration to the West being the first. The second was an emigration into oneself, that is, into a private idyll, into an official career, or into religion. He criticized the GDR-Jesus people.

For them the gospel has been reduced to the miserable sentence: Jesus loves me. Of what concern to me (they say) is the terror in the school, the barbarism of the police, the daily grind of work, of what concern is this shitty world to me - Jesus loves me, and all of you can kiss my ass.

And there is a third way to flee the Republic, through death. This shocked the audience, and they must have been reminded of Oskar Brusewitz. The motto for the evening gathering was the 86th Psalm he found a parallel to escapism through death.

But I, O Lord, cry to thee;
in the morning my prayer comes before thee.
O Lord, why dost thou cast me off? Why
dost thou hide thy face from me?
Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer thy terrors; I am helpless.
Thy wrath swept over me; thy dread assaults destroy me.
They surround me like a flood all day long,
Thou hast caused lover and friend to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.

He sang his song about his grandmother, "Grosses Gebet der alten Kommunistin
Oma Meume in Hamburg," (Great Prayer of the Old Communist Oma Meume in Hamburg) in which she prays to god to let Communism be victorious. During the drive to the performance Biermann said he had thought,

> What can I after all say to these GDR-Christians? Should I speak about what we have in common? Why in all the eleven years of my professional ban I have rejected the many invitations to appear in the church? Why have I accepted now for the first time? Will I be able, under the skirt of the church, to get enough air to sing? Is that a substitute for me? Does it make sense for me, for them?

If the church is to be of any use to the GDR, then, he felt, only if it were a sort of Red Church, concentrating on the communistic aspects of the gospel, and if it exercised a sort of Christian-Communist criticism of society. He recited then, because there was no harmonium on which to play, his song about the resurrection of Christ, "Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod." He related the story of a young female theologian who'd come to visit him and immediately declared that she didn't believe in god. Biermann reasoned, however, that she was knowledgeable in certain areas, and tried to discuss the idea of the resurrection with her. She simply waved off the question by declaring that the whole resurrection story was a ridiculous lie. The crowd laughed as he explained how he tossed the woman out. People in the GDR, he believed, must be resurrected in all their actions.

He sang his songs "Ermutigung" and "Grosse Ermutigung" as well as a new song, "Ich möchte am liebsten weg sein - und bleibe am liebsten hier" (I Would Most Like to Be Gone from Here - And Here I Most Want To Be),

> And as we came to the shore
> And sat so long in the boat
> It was that we saw the heavens
> loveliest in the water below
> and through the pear tree there flew
> pair of fish. The airplane swam
> crosswise through the lake and shattered
> against the willow branch
> -the willow branch
What will become of all our dreams
In this torn and divided land
The wounds they will not heal
Under the dirty band
And what will become of our friends
And what too of you, of me -
I would most like to be gone from here
And here I most want to be
-most want to be 2

All this had lasted from 7:30 to about nine. There was then a break.

Biermann reported that during the pause people ran around the church
eating bockwurst and buying books from a little stand. In one corner a mar­
et was established to trade valuable little items: dolls, chains, books,
graphics, stones, wood carvings, old records, colorful scarves, beer bottle
caps, other assorted junk.

About ten, Biermann began to sing again. For about an hour he did
requests. Someone called out, "Die Bibel-Ballade," but he was unable to
do it. A few other songs also gave him trouble, and he had to explain that
it had been eleven years since he had sung openly and therefore it was dif­
ficult to play any but the newest songs. It was usually the guitar which
gave him difficulty. Through the first verse of "Grosse Ermutigung" he had
trouble remembering the fingering, but by the second verse he had it perfect
and the crowd was doubly pleased. To finish up the evening several people
requested the Che Guevara song, and when Biermann sang it the audience
joined in on the refrain. Biermann was overjoyed.

He saw in the fact that the authorities did not prevent his Prenzlau
performance a very positive sign:

Perhaps things are beginning to move. The Berlin Conference
did perhaps cause a few old comrades to become reflective.
In any case many young people are discussing with passion the
speeches of Comrades Berlinguer, Carrillo, and Marchais, which
Newes Deutschland had to make public.

And maybe a few stubborn but honorable people became puzzled,
when, in the course of duty they listened to my new Spanish-LP.
For me in any case this Prenzlau sermon was a worldly blessing,
now I know again better: 'There is a life before death!'
Notes on Chapter 19


Und als wir ans Ufer kamen

Und als wir ans Ufer kamen
Und sassen noch lang im Kahn
Da war es, dass wir den Himmel
Am schönsten im Wasser sahn
Und durch den Bierbaum flogen
Paar Fischlein. Das Flugzeug schwamm
Quer durch den See und zerschellte
Sachte am Weidenstamm
- am Weidenstamm

Was wird bloss aus unseren Traumen
In diesem zerrissnen Land
Die Wunden wollen nicht zugehn
Unter dem Dreckverband
Und was wird mit unseren Freunden
Und was wird noch aus dir, aus mir -
Ich mochte am liebsten weg sein
Und bleibe am liebsten hier
- am liebsten hier
CHAPTER TWENTY

COLOGNE

It appeared in 1976 that for Wolf Biermann the door of the GDR might be opening a crack. First, there was the Prenzlau concert, which provoked no immediate reprisals. Secondly, his friend, the singer and songwriter Gerulf Pannach had begun to sing several of his songs openly. In his performances Pannach included "Commandante Che Guevara," "Ballade vom Kameramann," "So soll es sein - sor wird es sein," and "Soldat Soldat." At a solidarity rally for Chile, another of Biermann's friends, the writer Jürgen Fuchs, recited the Cameraman ballad, and it was rumored that the text of that song might be printed by a GDR publisher in a book of songs and reports about Chile. It was not, but the Berlin publishing house Volk und Wissen did mention Biermann for the first time in their history of GDR literature. Changes seemed to be in the air.

In May, on the initiative of four professors from the West German Ruhr University in Bochum, a "Committee for Free Travel for Biermann" was organized. The professors hoped to win the singer for a presentation in Bochum. The document issued by the committee found 249 supporting signatures, including those of West Berlin governing mayor Klaus Schütz, Rudi Dutschke, Egon Bahr, Ernst Bloch, Heinrich Böll, and Günter Grass.

Later in the year, Biermann received still another invitation to perform in West Germany. This came from the youth branch of the Industrial Union-Metal Workers (IG Metall). A tour, including concerts for both IG Metall and the Bochum group, was organized, and Biermann applied for permission to travel. It was granted without delay. During the second week
in November, Biermann left East Berlin for a two-week stay in the Federal Republic. He was to appear in Cologne on the 13th, in Bochum on the 19th, in Fellbach-Stuttgart on the 21st, in Recklinghausen on the 22nd, in Munich on the 24th, and the tour was to end on the 27th in his home town, Hamburg. There were worries that once he'd been let out he might never be let back in, and so to prevent any excuses for such an action there were to be no press conferences, and his places of entry, exit, and residence were to be kept secret.

The Cologne concert was Wolf Biermann's first in West Germany since 1965 and therefore attracted national attention. The Sporthalle, which was equipped for bicycle races, filled up with a crowd of 7,000 young and enthusiastic people. On the stage were a stool, a music stand, a harmonium, and television cameras, for the concert was being filmed. West German Radio (WDR) made a live broadcast. Biermann appeared on stage wearing a baggy shirt and a pair of dumpy trousers. He was nervous, afraid his fingernails would break playing the guitar, that he would become hoarse, that he'd be unable to endure such a long concert after so many years, that he'd forget the words to his songs. The concert seemed meandering and spontaneous. (It wasn't, for he had an exact program worked out including jokes and asides.) It lasted fully four and a half hours, Biermann admitting later that he had completely forgotten the time.

The first song was a mammoth new version of "So soll es sein - so wird es sein," that song of Socialist prophecy. He'd added new verses, some geared specifically to the West. He sang, "The FRG needs a CP," and then he paused, letting that sink in, "As I see it grow and mature..." he paused again, smiling, "In Italy's bright sunshine/ So it should be/ So it will be." Turning back to the East he sang, "The GDR needs it finally and how!/ Rosa's red democracy^/ If you agree with me/ Then join with me/ So it should be/
So it will be." The concert consisted of songs, political discourses, exchanges with members of the audience, and poems. He recited several of his own works as well as Brecht's "To Posterity" and Hölderlin's "Half of Life." The crowd kept up an enormous applause and often sang along. At various times Biermann had trouble with his guitar, the harmonium, and song texts, but he explained that he was out of practice and wasn't yet a "concert gangster." In the course of the evening he defended the use of Soviet tanks during the 1953 uprising, spoke out against those GDR citizens who sought to emigrate to the West, and declared his solidarity with the man he described as his friend but not comrade, Reiner Kunze, who'd recently been expelled from the Writers Union as a result of his book about the sufferings of the young in the GDR.4

As is the German custom, Biermann was given a bouquet of red carnations. He tossed one to his mother who was seated in the second row. When he left the stage he was exhausted, but pleased, it being obvious that the long concert had been a success. A new beginning had been made. One reviewer wrote, "He gave the impression of being that rare combination, an idealist with a sense of humor."5
Notes on Chapter 20


2. Rosa Luxemburg was one of the co-founders of the Communist Party of Germany.


Ballad of the Prussian Icarus

1. There where the Friedrichstrasse bends
   A step over the water extends
   hangs over the river Spree
   The Weidendammer Bridge. Lovely
   Prussia's eagle there you can see
   when I stand in the rail there

   then there stands there the Prussian Icarus
   with gray wings of iron wrought by us
   his arms ache throughout the long day
   he flies not away not crashes down
   makes not a wind and not a sound
   on the railing over the Spree

2. The barbed wire band it slowly grows
   Deep into the skin, breast and bone
   into the brain's cells of gray
   Girdled with a barbed wire band
   Our country is an island-land
   with shores beaten by a leaden wave

   there stands there the Prussian Icarus
   with gray wings of iron wrought by us
   his arms ache throughout the long day
   he flies not away nor crashes down
   makes not a wind and not a sound
   on the railing over the Spree

3. If you will go, you must go
   I have seen many leave us so
   leave our land, this half-land
   I'll hold here tight until he coldly
   This most hated bird claws me
   tears me from where I stand

   then I am the Prussian Icarus
   with gray wings of iron wrought by us
   my arms ache throughout the long day
   I fly so high and then crash down
   make some wind but not a sound
   on the railing over the Spree
Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus

1. Da, wo die Friedrichstrasse sacht
   Den Schritt über das Wasser macht
da hängt über der Spree
Die Weidendammerbrücke. Schön
Kannst du da Preussens Adler sehn
   wenn ich am Geländer steh

dann steht da der preussische Ikarus
mit grauen Flügeln aus Eisenguss
dem tun seine Arme so weh
er fliegt nicht weg - er stürzt nicht ab
macht keinen Wind - und macht nicht schlapp
   am Geländer über der Spree

2. Der Stacheldraht wächst langsam ein
   Tief in die Haut, in Brust und Bein
   ins Hirn, in graue Zellen
   Umgürtet mit dem Drahtverband
Ist unser Land ein Inselnd
   umbrandet von bleiernen Wellen

da steht der preussische Ikarus
mit grauen Flügeln aus Eisenguss
dem tun seine Arme so weh
er fliegt nicht weg - und stürzt nicht ab
macht keinen Wind - und macht nicht schlapp
   am Geländer über der Spree

3. Und wenn du wegwillst, musst du gehn
   Ich hab schon viele abhaun sehn
   aus unserm halben Land
   Ich halt mich fest hier, bis mich kalt
Dieser verhasste Vogel krazlt
   und zerrt mich übern Rand

dann bin ich der preussische Ikarus
mit grauen Flügeln aus Eisenguss
dann tun mir die Arme so weh
dann flieg ich hoch - dann stürz ich ab
macht bisschen Wind - dann mach ich schlapp
   am Geländer über der Spree
On Tuesday, November 16, 1976, the GDR government announced that Wolf Biermann's citizenship had been revoked and that he would not be allowed to return home. The following day Neues Deutschland carried a short article making the decision public. The article did not specify the reasons; that was left to "Dr. K." who wrote a comment. The reason for the action, he wrote, was the program the singer had presented in Cologne, a program,

...that was very consciously directed against the GDR and against Socialism...What he sang there, recited, and said were massive attacks against our Socialist state, against our Socialist social order. There was a call to eliminate this social order in the GDR.

The commentary went on to quote Biermann out of context as saying, "I'm ready to commit any sin," not mentioning that this was his reaction to a request for a song that was not part of his planned program. The banned singer was attacked for having lived ten years in the GDR without having worked. That he had been forbidden to work was forgotten. Also forgotten was the fact that he had been, by the government, paid a salary as an "artist," a salary taken from the valuable foreign currency which the singer had brought into the country through royalties. There were other cheap shots, typical examples of SED gutter journalism, but the pattern can already be seen, a pattern of lies, quotations taken out of context, and empty propaganda. Biermann, it was said, is just another anti-Communist heckler.

Biermann got the news on Tuesday at 4pm, just as he was leaving the home of Professor Günter Ewald in Bochum to test the sound system for his
scheduled appearance at six at the university. He immediately cancelled his performance and drove to Cologne to discuss the situation with Heinrich Böll and other friends. The planned evening at the university went on, but it took on the nature of a protest.

Whatever the reasons given publicly, two things seem clear: the decision that something had to be done about Biermann had been reached before the sixteenth, and the prime motivation was to strike a blow against the growing internal opposition which could have potentially begun to organize itself with Biermann as real or symbolic center. Many felt that the action taken against Wolf Biermann, coming when it did, was a result of his appearance in Prenzlau, and the fact that the appearance was in a church just might have played as big a role as the fact that the appearance was for the crystalization of a part of the formless resistance which is most certainly present in the GDR, particularly among a very frustrated youth. It is not that there is any sort of great religious revival in the GDR. Rather, as in the case of the Biermann appearance in Prenzlau, the church is acting as an umbrella for groups of people who want to discuss political questions as well as personal problems which are either brought about and/or aggravated by the political situation. As one young German told me, "The church is the last place where one can freely speak his mind." The SED Politburo could not forget the protest and the death of Pastor Brusewitz, and although it is a different type of problem, nor, could it forget the difficulties faced by their Warsaw comrades in the face of the national Catholics. And they could not have been pleased with Biermann's open letter to his mother, in which he spoke of a "Red Church" based on the communistic principles of the gospel. The West German news magazine Der Spiegel speculated that the Politburo was faced with the choice of bringing charges against
Biermann and then suspending the sentence so as not to make a martyr of him, or expelling him. When he applied for a visa to perform in the Federal Republic it provided the SED leadership with the perfect opportunity to carry through the latter course of action. In full knowledge that Biermann might not be allowed to return, the visa was issued immediately. The pros and cons of the action were weighed in the Politburo. Some leaders saw possible foreign policy complications, among others, problems with West Germany, whose economic cooperation is absolutely necessary for a healthy GDR economy. But the need to strike a blow at the internal opposition was evidently considered important enough to outweigh other considerations, for the final decision to revoke the singer's citizenship was unanimous. It is known that there were elements within the Politburo who had hoped to try Biermann for high treason and put him behind bars for several years. Apparently it was Erich Honecker, who, under the Nazis, had himself spent eight years in Brandenburg prison for planning acts of high treason, who pushed the idea of deportation and loss of citizenship, fearing the adverse effect of "Save Biermann" committees springing up in the West.

Upon announcement of the decision against Biermann, the furor began almost immediately, and the protests came not only from the Federal Republic and Western Europe, but also from within the GDR itself. It was the first time since August 1968 that open opposition to a government action had been expressed. In 1976, it was above all a protest from the intelligentsia. Originally thirteen and eventually over a hundred GDR intellectuals and "artists" signed a letter of protest which openly called for the government to reconsider its decision. The letter read,

Wolf Biermann was and is an uncomfortable poet - this he has in common with many poets of the past. Our Socialist state, mindful of the words of Marx's '18th Brumaire,' according to which the proletarian revolution constantly criticizes itself, must, in contrast to anachronistic social orders, be able to
calmly and thoughtfully bear such discomfort. We do not identify ourselves with Wolf Biermann's every word and action and distance ourselves from the efforts to misuse against the GDR the events surrounding Biermann. Biermann has himself never, also not in Cologne, expressed doubt as to which of the German states he, despite all criticism, supports. We protest against the revocation of his citizenship and request that the measures taken be reconsidered.5

It was signed by Christa Wolf, Voker Braun, Franz Fühmann, Stephan Hermlin, Stefan Heym, Günter Kunert, Heiner Müller, Rolf Schneider6, Gerhard Wolf, Jurek Becker, Günter de Bruyn, Ulrich Plenzdorf and many others. For anyone at all familiar with the GDR literary scene, it is clear that the list includes almost every prominent GDR writer. Among the signers were also many who were not writers. Movie stars Jutta Hoffmann, Angelica Damröse, and Manfred Krug signed as well, as did pop singer Nina Hagen, jazz musician Klaus Lenz, and composer Tilo Medek. The original thirteen signers sent the letter to Neues Deutschland. After waiting in vain for some sort of reply, they made copies available to the British and French news services.

The protest took other forms as well. As soon as he learned of the move against Biermann, Peter Schwarzbach, the son-in-law of the sculptor Fritz Cremer, one of the original signers, posted a note outside the Märkischen Museum, where he worked: "I protest the expulsion of my friend Wolf Biermann." Shortly after he left home the following day with the intent of driving first to the garage to have his car worked on and then to the museum, members of the State Security Service came to speak to his wife. Schwarzbach made it neither to the garage nor the museum. It wasn't until Thursday that his arrest was announced.

In Jena, a group of students drew up a petition of protest and went to the gates of the Zeiss Optical Works and collected over 100 signatures. Forty of the students were arrested.

In East Berlin, protest slogans were painted on buildings and walls,
petitions were passed, signatures were gathered on the Alexanderplatz, and students at the Humboldt University demanded an open discussion of the case. The most quiet protest took place on the Weidendammer Bridge with its wrought-iron railings. Below the Prussian eagles, about which Biermann had sung in his song "Ballade vom Preussischen Ikarus" (Ballad of the Prussian Icarus), people spontaneously layed flowers. The police were kept busy removing them.

Robert Havemann called upon the Italian, French, and Spanish Communist Parties to appeal to the SED to reverse its decision against Biermann. He also sent an open letter to party chief and head of state Erich Honecker, his former prison mate, asking him to reverse the decision. Direct appeals by Havemann to Honecker had in the case of other dissidents been effective. Havemann called the charges against his friend "downright ridiculous," and wrote that,

Wolf Biermann exercises criticism, hard and sharp criticism. But wasn't it always so, that precisely the best comrades have wielded the weapon of criticism with merciless sharpness, and especially when it is a matter of uncovering our mistakes and our errors. This type of criticism, Communist criticism, Wolf Biermann exercises. He who cannot bear it already admits that he has nothing with which to oppose it but force...Can't you imagine that you have now made him a model for millions of young people in the GDR. He embodies today, in a paradoxical way, a sort of last great hope for a Socialism about which they have already ceased to dream. Don't destroy this hope.

The growing internal dissent caused SED security chief Paul Verner, who'd long feared a creeping counter-revolution, to order counter measures. There is even speculation that the house-cleaning which followed was conducted under heavy Soviet pressure. On Thursday evening at 8:15, the telephone of Christine Biermann was disconnected. Half an hour later so was Robert Havemann's, for reasons of state security, Havemann learned later by mail. On the following morning at ten, Robert Havemann's car was stopped by police in the Berlin suburb of Erkner. The writer Jürgen Fuchs, who'd been living with Havemann in Grünheide, and who had written several things
very critical of the GDR and the National People's Army, was in the car. The police demanded that Fuchs leave the car and come with them. On Sunday, two more members of the Biermann-Havemann circle were arrested, the singers Gerulf Pannach and Christian Kunert. There were fears that the 66-year old Havemann would be next.

Meanwhile the Biermann case was developing further. On Thursday and Friday the West German First Program (ARD) treated their GDR viewers to extensive broadcasts on Biermann. On Friday evening those viewers were able to see the Cologne concert in its entirety so they could judge for themselves whether or not the charges brought by Neues Deutschland were accurate. Interest in the broadcast was intense. It was noted that East Berlin's streets were as empty as they are when a soccer championship is broadcast, and that many lights burned until late into the night. The broadcast infuriated the SED leadership who promptly threatened to close the ARD's East Berlin office. The Bonn government immediately countered that such a move would seriously damage East-West relations.

In the West too expressions of solidarity for the expatriated singer were forthcoming. Among the most important, from Biermann's point of view, were the declarations of solidarity by Western Europe's Communist parties. The papers of the French, Italian, and British Communist Parties criticized the expulsion of Biermann, as did the Belgian and Danish parties. Even among the splintered and hopelessly radicalized West German left there were pockets of support. Members of the Social Democratic Marxist youth group, Jusos, staged a torchlight march before the diplomatic offices of the GDR in Bonn. In Marburg, electorally the most Communist city in the Federal Republic, a large group of members of German Communist Party (DKP) rebuked the official party line and protested the measure against Biermann. Some of the signs were of a more practical nature. Professor Dieter Biallas,
one of Hamburg's sub-mayors, offered Biermann a year-long stipend to come and live and work in his home town. The stipend, which Biermann initially wanted to accept but eventually turned down because of the impression it would create, amounted to a thousand tax-free dollars a month and a free apartment. In Copenhagen, a left-wing member of the Danish parliament suggested to the Minister of Culture that the German singer be invited to live in Denmark if his efforts to return home were unsuccessful. In Austria, the Education Minister Sinowatz formally invited Biermann to Vienna to discuss the possibility of him continuing his work there. Throughout Western Europe groups and individuals protested the Biermann expulsion. The list included such names as Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Max Frisch, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, and Joan Baez.

While there was support from elements of the West German left, none of the many small Communist groups officially supported Biermann. A leaflet from the KPD/ML (Communist Party of Germany/Marxist-Leninists) passed out on the occasion of the Bochum concert, stated bluntly, "Biermann or Honecker - Plague or Cholera!" The East Berlin oriented DKP hoped to discredit Biermann by way of the categorical "support" given him by the right-wing Axel Springer press, a "support" which was in every way opportunistic and self-serving. In the November 20 issue of the DKP newspaper UZ (Unsere Zeit - Our Times), it was stated that, "It should give cause for reflection that those reactionary forces who are applauding Biermann are the same for whom the existence of the GDR has long been a thorn in the side."

Wolf Biermann made his first public appearance after his deportation on November 26 in Bochum. Under a banner which called for the "Free Return for Wolf Biermann to his Home, to East Berlin in the GDR," the concert involved more discussion than singing, this with the consent of the audience. Biermann:
What is at stake is whether Communists of different opinions can openly express their opinions, or whether they will mangle one another to the joy of the bourgeoisie.  

He also addressed himself to the accusations in UZ. "I have for many years heard warnings about false friends...I have no fear of false applause."  

In the GDR, Biermann's case had quickly taken on wider dimensions. The protest of over 100 of the country's most prominent intellectuals, along with shows of support from other quarters, suprised the SED leadership, for it pointed up a growing wedge of discontent within the country. The SED began an aggressive counter-attack. Hundreds of workers were called in for questioning and their statements were entered into those odious files which accompany every GDR citizen throughout his life. Several of the writers who'd signed the protest letter were harrassed, houses were observed, phones tapped. Certain writers were removed from their leadership positions in the Writers Union, some were expelled from the Party. Several of the signers of the letter were approached in an effort to persuade them to revoke their signature. One did, the sculptor Fritz Cremer. He was visited personally at his hospital bed by Culture Minister Hans-Joachim Hoffmann and informed that if he withdrew his signature his son-in-law Peter Schwarzbach would be released from jail. Cremer, who only weeks before had received a national award for his service to Socialism, agreed to this. Thereupon his daughter added her name to the protest list. Two other writers, Volker Braun and Stephan Hermlin, expressed self-criticism, criticizing the fact that the letter had been given to the Western news services. And on the Friday following the broadcast of the Cologne concert, action was taken against Robert Havemann. He was taken to the Furstenwald court and learned there that he was under house arrest. From then until May 1979 his house was surrounded day and night by as many as 200 policeman.  

The SED counter-attack also involved seeking out letters of support
for the anti-Biermann action. On two successive days *Neues Deutschland* devoted three and a half pages to comments by more than 230 intellectuals, workers, and others who expressed varying degrees of support for the Party's decision or disapproval of Biermann, although it was clear that many of the statements were obscure and hardly what the SED would have desired. Anna Seghers, president of the Writers Union wrote,

> I have never agreed with the letter in the Biermann case, which several writers gave to a Western news service. The assertion by Western newspapers that I had given supplemental agreement is false and only serves to confuse. The German Democratic Republic has been since its founding the country in which I want to live and work.

She essentially skirted the real issue. The last sentence Biermann himself could have written. The composer Paul Dessau wrote,

> The GDR, in which I have worked since its founding, is an historical reality and not an experiment. For the fact that we are a widely recognized, highly developed state we must thank those who have never slackened in their unshakeable conviction and in their politically based struggle for peace and progress. With knowledge and pride I can say that our artists, each in his own way and with the understanding support of our state, has contributed to this development. It is our duty to see through and with resolve oppose the dirty methods of the class enemy.

Again, no mention of Biermann, or?

Again and again Biermann was attacked for having criticized the GDR in capitalist West Germany and for having used the Western mass-media to spread his message. Naturally no mention was made of the fact that he had, for eleven years, been denied any opportunity to make a statement within the borders of the GDR.

The fact that *ND* claimed that "thousands" of letters of support for the government action had been received, it could not change the fact that since the Helsinki Conference many thousands of people had requested to legally emigrate from the GDR, most basing their case on the Helsinki accord.
There were so many applications in spite of the fact that applicants faced official harassment, including loss of job, expulsion from institutions of higher learning, loss of apartment, and in some cases even arrest. That in a closed society, where there is a long history of official terror, where even the bravest people are afraid to speak their minds, there were so many emigration applications, is astonishing. Such discontent speaks for itself.

The Biermann expulsion also pointed up conflicts within the highest echelons of the SED leadership, including speculation that party-boss Erich Honecker might be in trouble. Indeed, Honecker is faced with so many conflicting pressures that it is impossible for him to establish a strong leadership position. On the one hand, he faces increasing domestic pressure to raise the general standard of living and increase the production of consumer goods, on the other, the reality that the GDR is tied in an economically subordinate position. At home he must confront a smoldering anti-Soviet feeling based on the well-founded belief that the Soviet Union is exploiting the stronger GDR economy, and increasing demands for more human rights and freedom of movement. But in order to prevent Soviet interference in GDR affairs he must keep the rising aspirations of his people in check. This however he cannot do with too strong a hand because that could interfere with the carefully constructed relations with the West German Federal Republic, from which the GDR needs expanded economic credits and good trade relations to fuel its sluggish economy so that it can keep up with economic demands from the East and at home. Yet he cannot take relations with the Federal Republic too far without upsetting the Soviet Union, which fears that such a relationship might rekindle the hopes for German unity. It is what the German's call a Teufelskreis (a devil's circle).

These pressures made Honecker's position within the Politburo very vulnerable, and it is known that he faces a hard-lining faction represented
by Paul Verner. (In 1976 this faction also included the late Werner Lamberz.15) It was these men who apparently sought to put Biermann behind bars, who had the poet Reiner Kunze thrown out of the Writers Union, and it was Verner who imposed the house arrest on Robert Havemann. Although Honecker's moderation seems to have won out in the case of Biermann, it is clear that the hard-liners are in a much stronger position within the Politburo. This is witnessed by the on-going atmosphere of repression that has been abroad in the GDR ever since Wolf Biermann was forced into exile.

Biermann himself feels that the new hard line and his expulsion represent a reaction by a weak and fearful leadership to a basically positive development.

I have actually always suspected that they would one day lock me up or lock me out, namely then, when the political forces which work toward a Socialist democratization in the GDR become so strong within the GDR itself, when the ideas which I too express in my songs become material power, as I could only wish...

I see that in the recent past, especially in the last year, a noteworthy and gratifying change has been taking place. It isn't connected with the Helsinki agreement, as is presumed in the West, rather I think with the Berlin Conference of Workers' Parties of June 1976, thus with the fact that the Communist parties of France, Spain, Italy, and other countries took a clear step in the direction of "Socialist democracy." That is a weighty change which therefore has a deep effect on GDR reality and on the people in the GDR. This is the dialectic too of this historical process, that the Stalinist faction in the GDR builds and hinders Socialism - both at once! They provoke Socialist hopes and then don't redeem them.16

As it is impossible to take an opinion poll in the GDR, it is likewise impossible to measure the accuracy of Biermann's contention. For those thousands who seek to leave, many of whom based their applications on the Helsinki agreements, the hope for a better, more democratic Socialism must not have aroused great feelings. It is one thing for the French Communist Marchais to speak in East Berlin of a Socialism under which all democratic freedoms are guaranteed and quite another to search for any such trend in the GDR. It at best raises hopes which are, in the near future, most
certainly unattainable and, at worst, cause ever greater frustration among those dissatisfied with the system, and perhaps even a self-protecting hardening of that system. It seems that Biermann underestimates the initial effect of the Helsinki accord in the GDR. Not only did it encourage many to apply to leave, but aroused guarded hope for change at home. For here was a document signed with much fanfare and in full view of the international community, signed not only by the German Democratic Republic, but also by the Soviet Union. Could the SED leadership continue to ignore completely all of the human rights which were guaranteed in the document? Would at least some moderate changes take place, and might these changes not be a first small step toward a more open society? Surely these are some of the questions which discontented Germans must have asked themselves. It soon became clear however that the SED state did intend to ignore the human rights elements of the Helsinki accord and that the first steps toward a democratic society were not yet to be taken.

But if the fact that the Helsinki agreement and the fresh air of Euro-communism have not wrought visible positive changes under the German dictatorship and have in fact caused a tightening of government controls, it seems to prove that Wolf Biermann is right on target when he speaks of the growing internal opposition. Speaking of the SED authorities he has said,

They know exactly how threatened they are because they have the state security apparatus which reports everything the people think. Things are worse for them than I can imagine in my worst dreams. That which I only suspect, they have in black and white. 17

In his book, Questions Answers Questions, Robert Havemann considered the role of the questioning opposition in an absolutist state.

The power of Stalinism, to not an inconsiderable degree, is based on credulity. But not only upon that, of course. It is also based upon the belief in power. Whoever impairs this belief, impairs power itself. Doubt, therefore, is the revolutionary's most effective weapon. All established systems
are sensitive vis-a-vis doubters and mistrustful of them. And rightly so. Systems require blind faith in the ruling power, because it is an analogue to the fear of God. Doubt abolishes the fear, makes the system of power transparent, and makes its representatives look ridiculous.  

To a greater extent than any other of the so-called Socialist countries, the German Democratic Republic suffers from a severe credibility gap. The existence of West Germany being that which so seriously aggravates the situation. By way of West German radio and television, as well as West German relatives, GDR Germans are without doubt the most well-informed people in Eastern Europe. So the gap between the people and the state, already wide as a result of daily reality, widens to a chasm, a chasm which is an ongoing source of political and social tension. Again Robert Havemann: "Ideological training and mass education cannot produce a consciousness that does not conform to reality." Thus the German Democratic Republic, long considered the strongest bastion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, is in fact probably its weakest link and is most certainly one of the most volatile spots in present-day Europe. Out of this conflicting situation came Wolf Biermann's expatriation.
Notes on Chapter Twenty-one

1. Dr. K. = Günter Kertzcher

2. in: Neues Deutschland, November 17, 1976.


6. Rolf Schneider has since written a novel entitled November, based on the events surrounding the expatriation of Wolf Biermann.

7. Anonymous, "Die Firma verhaftet."


11. Ibid., p. 16.

In his Stuttgart performance, Biermann referred to the minister-president of Baden-Wurttemburg, Hans Filbinger, as an "old Nazi," and accused him of having sentenced at least one sailor to death for desertion, this very near the end of the war. Filbinger threatened a law suit. He claimed that he had used his office as naval judge to prevent many death sentences and had been opposed to the National Socialist regime. Through an attorney, Biermann withdrew his statement, explaining that he had been thus informed by friends just before the concert. Since that time the accusations against Filbinger have been proven true and he has been forced from office.

12. The Neues Deutschland carrying the letters sold out before noon. This hadn't occurred since ND published the speeches of the Eurocommunist leaders during the Berlin Conference.

13. in: Neues Deutschland, November 22, 1976.


15. Werner Lamberz was killed in 1978 in an air accident in Libya.

17. Ibid., p. 39.


19. Ibid., p. 120.
About six o'clock the crowd began to gather before the ice rink. Tickets had been sold out for at least ten days in advance, but many still hoped to get in. The hall itself was cold. Panels had been laid over the ice, but with the exception of a few spectator seats around the edge there were no chairs. At about quarter past six Pannach and Kunert made their way through the crowd and were let in through the front door. Each carried a guitar case. The two had been released from an East Berlin jail in August. Meanwhile it had begun to rain and the crowd outside had no shelter. Despite the fact that the hall officials had ordered extra security police there was in the course of the evening no trouble, and the police sat in the locker rooms in their riot gear to no purpose. While the hall was still empty Gerulf and Kuno came on stage and tuned their guitars. The concert promoters told me that Biermann was a bit on edge because his girlfriend Sibylle Havemann had called from Hamburg to say that she was going into labor with their second child. (A girl was born. She was given the name Nelli.)

At half past six the doors were opened and the hall soon filled up. The faces were similar to those I'd seen at a Communist demonstration only a few days before. Almost all were young, almost all were students;
probably no working class people, that is, none of the people Biermann claims to represent, none of the people the left-wing students claim to represent. The girl who sat next to me rolled a cigarette, the current fad among young West Germans, and read one of the leftist newspapers which were being hawked through the hall.

Biermann, Pannach, and Kunert appeared on stage all together, and there was no introduction. A sort of disoriented applause died away as the three performers wandered about the stage, Biermann shedding his jacket and rolling up his sleeves as he looked through some papers on top of the harmonium.

Biermann took his place behind one of the microphones, resting his foot on a music case of some variety. He smiled at the crowd and squinted into the darkness. Calls came from the audience, and he tried to understand them. More calls, It seems there were people outside waiting to get in, people who'd been unable to get tickets. Biermann looked off into the back of the hall, "Let those outside in." (No reaction on the part of the hall officials.) Then he grinned that silly grin of his, "Aren't your asses cold sitting on that ice? Cold asses and hot heads!" More calls from the crowd. It seems the people outside were not being let in. "Shall I go let them in?" Applause. He turned to go, then turned back, "You know this will throw our whole program off, but maybe my friends can sing a couple of songs," whereupon he disappeared from the stage.

Looking quite nervous, Pannach came to the microphone and Kunert sat himself down at the piano. Pannach sang his German translation of the song "Against Fear," which was written by the Catalanian Raimon.

Now I'll call the thing by its name:
If we do not break the walls of silence,
We will end in silence.
Against fear don't be silent!
Against fear come forward!
Against fear, we are many
Against fear, without fear.

His voice is deep and strong and his singing style shows the strong influence of his friend Biermann, reaching great heights of volume and intensity. Kunert sang the next song, accompanied by Pannach. His voice is softer, milder. "The applause is so good," said Kunert. Kunert then sang a song about the National People's Army, and Pannach followed up with a song about a union official who sold out the very people he was supposed to represent. This was only the second appearance by the pair since they'd been forced to leave the GDR, and Pannach's nervousness showed in the way his leg shook while he sang.

Biermann returned to the microphone announcing that those who had been outside were now inside. He introduced his friends Pannach and Kunert and explained that they hoped to trade off throughout the evening. "Usually the 'warmers' come first in a concert, sing a few songs, and then the star appears," he said mimicking a stereo-type star. "But we want to keep a balance." Biermann introduced his portion of the concert with "Ballade vom preussischen Ikarus," and after Kunert had sung again, he introduced three short new songs, poems by Bertolt Brecht which he'd recently put to music.

The sharks I outran
The tigers I did in
Eaten I was
By the worms

This short little song he repeated twice to be sure that it was clearly understood. He followed up these short pieces with his major new song about his exile. "Deutsches Miserere" (German Miserere), also known as the "Bloch-Lied," for he was able to discuss the song with Ernst Bloch before the
As he sang of the differences between East and West he almost cried. At several points he interrupted the very long song to comment on various aspects of it and that which is discussed by it, this at one point prompting a remark from the audience, "You mean you don't like it here in the West?" Biermann fell silent and stared in the direction from which the voice had come. "Yes, I like a great deal here. I like the fact that I can visit my mother. I like the fact that I don't have to keep my mouth shut. I like the fact that I can speak openly. But one doesn't make political judgments on the basis of such things." Throughout the song he looked pointedly in the direction of the voice every time he sang a line critical of the West. Again and again the song was interrupted by applause, particularly at Biermann's denunciation of the development of atomic energy plants in both East and West:

I shit on such progress.4

After that marathon song Biermann took a break, and Pannach and Kunert sang several songs, including a little song in Saxon dialect.

When Biermann returned to the microphone he sang his old song, "Die hab' ich satt!" and discussed the necessity of uniting one's political passions with one's personal life, commenting that it makes life so much fuller. To illustrate his point he speculated as to which of the various leftist splinter groups in West Germany produced the most babies. "There's no time for such things," someone called out from the audience. That was precisely
the problem according to the singer. Such an attitude, he contended, leads to a separation of politics from reality. Thereupon he sang his song of Mont-Klamont, about picking berries and making love on a spring day.

Biermann clearly enjoys being on stage and performing before an audience. He sang a short Swedish song and then two children's songs. The first of the two children's songs was about a parrot who fell into the oatmeal and a dog who made fun of him, Biermann using his hands as puppets. The second song concerned the nonsense put across when people explain the facts of life to children, explanations which leave the child able to reply only, "That's as clear as ink."

Pannach and Kunert brought the concert back to a more serious level, singing four songs about Chile, including their version of Biermann's "Ballade vom Kameramann." From political repression in South America Biermann shifted the focus to political repression in the Federal Republic by reading his poem about the murder of industrialist Hans Martin Schleyer and the suicide of three terrorists in Stammheim prison near Stuttgart. Several members of the audience tried to defend the murder of Schleyer, but Biermann condemned the terror and said that if nothing else it was very bad tactics, giving the German left an even worse reputation than it already had. Such terror was not only counter-productive, but also foreign to the spirit of Socialism.

Ach Stuttgart, you wet, you beautiful
You ugly city of rain!
The heavens are crying out their eyes
Over many a fresh grave
Even the clouds high above
Have divided hostilely
Many clouds rain onto Schleyer's grave
And one cries quickly onto the other
Before it flees

And as I in the morning, alone
Climbed up the narrow streets
My things under my arm, I started
I sensed it in my neck
And noticed it from the side
I sensed that oppressive look
From cautious, narrowed eyes

Ach Baader! Ach Ensslin! Ach Raspe!
Ach Schleyer! you've done it you have
You so clouded the cleft
That gapes between the classes
Those below like those above
Have buried the old bitterness
There spreads itself a deadening
Dangerous brotherliness

No more about price and wage struggles
Shrinking of the job market's size
In its stead the joy of the hunt
For all those who sympathize
And the streets full of uniforms
And blue light, identity checks
He arms himself massively
The German garden dwarf

Ach Stuttgart, you wet, you beautiful
You ugly city of rain!
The heavens are crying out their eyes
Over many a fresh grave
Even the clouds high above
Have divided hostilely
Many clouds rain onto Schleyer's grave
And one cries quickly onto the other
- before it flees.

He then let a speaker for the West Berlin Agit-Druckerei (Agitation Press) read a resolution denouncing the arrest of four of his co-workers for allegedly supporting the terrorists. The big demonstration of a few days previous had called for these printers' release. Biermann then sang two more songs, "Der Hugenottenfriedhof" and "Das Barlach-Lied." The latter song had been written in 1965, but Biermann explained that he still sang it because, in the current German political atmosphere, it was still all too appropriate. Here is Eric Bentley's translation:

Oh mother close the window do
The rain is surely coming
And yonder is a bank of clouds
That wants to fall upon us
What is in store for us?
We have so much to dread
And down to earth from heaven
Angels are falling dead

Oh mother close the door do
The rats are surely coming
The hungry ones are out in front
Those that have eaten follow

Oh mother close your eyes, please do
The rain and rats are coming
And through the cracks that we forgot
They all will soon be crawling

What is in store for us?
We have so much to dread
And down to earth from heaven
Angels are falling dead

After Pannach and Kunert had sung three more songs, among them two more from Raiman, Biermann announced that the money from the concert was going to help those who had recently been exiled from the GDR. He began the "Franco-Lied," which expresses regret that Franco died peacefully instead of as the victim of a violent revolution, but he broke off the song. "Where does revolution end and terrorism begin? That is a difficult question. My friend Robert Havemann doesn't like this song because it isn't clear on that question." This again started the debate on the Schleyer murder. Biermann argued that the murder only helped the German bourgeoisie. When the radicals in the crowd continued to press him he became exasperated and said, "I'm not a wiseman. I can only say what I think and feel." Pannach and Kunert joined him to sing his new song about the legalization of the Spanish Communist Party, "Der Verbot ist Tod" (The Ban is Dead), Biermann singing the choruses in Spanish and Swedish. A girl in the back of the hall began a tirade about the Party in Spain, saying that the comrades had given up their revolutionary ideals in favor of a slice of legality and cooperation with the monarchy.
Biermann defended his party by saying that they were pursuing a radical leftist line in that they wanted to make basic changes in society, but had to pursue a sensible policy in the face of political realities, in particular the fact that they had only recently become legal. The same girl challenged that the radical left-wing anarchist Communists were still not legal. This, Biermann said, he regretted. The Party, he explained, was making every effort to bring these comrades into legality as well. Biermann indicated that he would be happy to discuss these matters with those present if they would arrange a meeting, but that now he would like to sing. And so he began a communal singing of the "International," but broke off that song as well at the verse which speaks of the final battle. "We now know that this last battle is false theory, but we still sing this song because it is our song, expressing our hopes." Instead of continuing he was joined by his two friends to sing his own, "Lied vom roten Stein der Weisen" (Song of the Red Stone of the Wise).

The red stone of the wise, admit it
It doesn't exist. Comrade, and you
It doesn't exist, comrade, and you
you have not found it."

They all left the stage, but returned to do an encore. Pannach and Kunert sang one of their songs, then all three sang the "Che-Guevara-Lied" and Biermann finished off with "So soll es sein - so wird es sein." Pannach and Kunert left the stage, but Biermann remained for some time talking with members of the audience.
Notes on A Concert


Nun denn, ich nenn die Sache gleich beim Namen:
Brechen wir nicht des Schweigens Wände,
Wenden wir im Schweigen enden.
Gegen die Angst seid nicht stille!
Gegen die Angst kommt hervor!
Gegen die Angst, wir sind doch viele,
Gegen die Angst, ohne Angst.


3. Den Haien entrann ich
Die Tiger erlegte ich
Aufgefressen wurde ich
Von den Wanzen


Und als ich von Deutschland nach Deutschland
Gekommen bin ich in das Exil
Da hat sich für mich geändert
So wenig, ach! und so viel
Ich hab ihn am eigenen Leibe
Gemacht, den brutalen Test:
Freiwillig von Westen nach Osten
Gezwungen von Ost nach West

4. Ibid., p. 200.

Ich scheiss was auf solchen Fortschritt

5. Ibid., pages 152-153.

Ach Stuttgart, du nasse, du schöne

Ach Stuttgart, du nasse, du schöne
Du hässliche Regenstadt!
Der Himmel weint sich die Augen aus
Über manchen frischen Grab
Es haben sogar die Wolken
Feindselig sich zerteilt
Viel Wolken regnen auf Schleyers Grab
Und eine weint schnell auf das andere
Eh sie enteilt

Und als ich den Morgen alleine
Die steilen Gassen hochstieg
Mein Zeug unterm Arm, da erschrak ich
Ich spürte den stummen Krieg
(Cont. next page)
Ich merkte ihn von der Seite
Und ich spürte ihn im Genick
Aus scharfgekniffenen Augen:
Ich spurte den Fahndungsblick

Ach Baader, ach Ensslin! ach Raspe!
Ach Schleyer! ihr habt es geschafft
Ihr habt ja die Kluft so vernebelt
Die zwischen den Klassen klaft!
Die Unteren wie die Oberen
Begraben der alte Streit?
Es macht sich breit eine dumpfe
Gefährliche Brüderlichkeit

Kein Wort mehr von Teuerung, Lohnkampf
Vom fehlenden Arbeitsplatz
Stattdessen des fröhliche Jagen
Die Sympathisantenhatz
Und Strassen voll Uniformen
Und Blaulicht. Und Sichtvermerk
Es rüstet sich auf zum Riesen
Der deutsche Gartenzwerg

Ach Stuttgart, du nasse, du schöne
Du hassliche Regenstadt!
Der Himmel weint sich die Augen aus
Über manchen frischen Grab
Es haben sogar die Wolken
Feindselig sich zerteilt
Viel Wolken regnen auf Schleyers Grab
Und eine weint schnell auf das andre
Eh sie enteilt


Den roten Stein der Weisen, gib zu!
Den gibts doch nicht. Genosse auch du
Den gibt es doch nicht, Genosse, auch du
du hast ihn nicht gefunden.
He seemed annoyed and preoccupied when we began our conservation and he began to loosen up only toward the end of our talk. Wolf was preoccupied because he was in the midst of composing, for the Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit*, an open letter to the authors of the so-called "manifest" of the GDR opposition group which calls itself the Federation of Democratic Communist of Germany (German initials: BDKD). The "manifest" had appeared in the first two 1978 issues of the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. And yet although busy, he did not hurry things, he answered all my questions at length. Sibylle Have-mann brought us coffee, and all the while we could hear their son Felix playing in the other room. Wolf looked tired. His hair was uncombed and a little greasy. He was very pale. I like Wolf Biermann. He is honest. He plays no role other than that of the human being he is. Does he see himself as a Socialist hero, I asked.

The real heroes are usually very soft, weak people. Usually they are (heroes) unwillingly. I've never considered myself a hero. The people who don't stand in the limelight, no one speaks of them...My father died in some dirty corner in Auschwitz. No one cared. Most people died somewhere in the wings, and afterward no cock crowed. I don't know what a hero is. I was luckier. That is perhaps the difference. I was lucky I was able to get a university education, that I could learn music, a little bit, that I went to the GDR, that I didn't become a bureaucrat, that I was young at the time when the Stalin-period ended. Had I begun a few years earlier I would have been beaten down so bad that I would never have come up again. I was always lucky. And one shouldn't call that heroism.

While still in the GDR, Wolf Biermann often said that if he were shipped to the West, it would be the end of him as a writer. On the day I visited him
in Hamburg it had been precisely fourteen months since he'd been locked out of the GDR and his prediction had fortunately proven false. He has written a great deal since his expulsion, and in the final section we'll look at his first Western writings and recordings. After the media barrage of November '76 he pulled back to a great extent, and yet has never been long out of the public eye. All his previous works have been rereleased by his new publisher, Kiepenheuer & Witsch. An album of children's songs, which he recorded in the Chauseestrasse, was released, as was a live documentation of the now historic Cologne concert. In addition, a documentary film has been making the rounds of West Germany's and West Berlin's movie houses. The biggest change in Biermann's personal activities however is the fact that he is now a regular concert performer. Many have discussed the style of his performance, the informality, the openness so uncommon among popular performers. This too is a product of his personality. Biermann is what he is, no matter where he is. He has performed all over Western Europe, the invitations coming mainly from unions and Communist parties. As well, he does charity concerts for causes he feels he can support, even giving a concert in October 1977 for the American Indian Movement. Is he earning a lot of money? Yes, it seems quite a bit, but never enough, for the more money he earns, the more he has to support the political struggle which is the center of his existence. He does not lead a luxurious life, despite the fact that he has traded his bicycle for a red VW Rabbit and now has an electric typewriter to prevent breaking his fingernails.

The troubled German Democratic Republic which Biermann left behind is even more troubled now than it was when he travelled to Cologne. As it turned out he was only the first of many GDR writers, singers, actors, and intellectuals to leave. Already in December 1976, the pop singer Nina Hagen, daughter of Eva-Marie Hagen, came over. She had grown up in the Biermann
apartment and is virtually his step-daughter. Since then Reiner Kunze, Sarah Kirsch, Thomas Brasch, Hans Joachim Schädlich, Günter Kunert, Jurek Becker, Manfred Krug, Tilo Medek and Wolfgang Harich have left the GDR. In August 1977, Jürgen Fuchs, Gerulf Pannach, and Christian Kunert were released from jail on the condition that they leave. All three are now living in West Berlin. Many other lesser known people are also in the West. Those who remain are seeing their country go through what is probably the most serious crisis since its founding, a crisis which will not soon go away. Dissatisfaction and frustration have been growing among large sections of the population. One of the most immediate sources of conflict is the curious system whereby certain sections of the population are able to acquire Western consumer goods, either in special shops where hard currency certificates, obtained at banks in exchange for Western currency, are accepted, or through "exquisit" or "delikat" shops where many, but not all, of the goods available in the currency shops (Intershops) can be purchased for exorbitantly high prices, prices sometimes three or four times their Western price. The Intershops were established to bring in the Western currency so desperately needed to meet the massive balance of payments deficit in the West, this a result of Erich Honecker's policy to drastically raise the GDR material standard of living with the purpose of easing discontent. His policies have raised the standard of living, but have caused a disastrous economic situation as well as ever greater discontent among those elements which either have no access to Western currency (which is generally begged from West German relatives) or incomes too small to shop in the exquisit shops. The situation has given rise to strikes in Karl-Marx-Stadt and East Berlin by workers demanding a portion of their salary in West German marks. In Wittenberg and Weimar there have been open demonstrations protesting the inequality which the system manifests.
On October 7, 1977, the wide discontent among the young was dramatized when, on East Berlin's Alexanderplatz, over 1000 young people rioted after police had abruptly ended and open-air concert when a ventilator on which several people had been seated collapsed, and efforts by first aid units to get through the crowd had been frustrated. One girl died in the ventilator accident. As a result of the riot four People's Policemen were killed, approximately 200 rioters were injured and 700 arrested. The police had immediately sent for reinforcements and had waded brutally into the crowd with dogs and clubs. The rioters fought back. There were reports of policemen being hit over the head with full cases of beer and at least one policeman fleeing the scene stripped naked. Although the riot had not been politically sparked, it soon took on a political nature. Members of the crowd hollered: "Russians Out!" "Germany Awake!" "Bring Biermann Back!" The riot was serious enough that Erich Honecker was called away from a state reception. The riot on the Alexanderplatz has been the largest and most publicized disturbance, but it has not been the only one. It is only symptomatic of the widespread anger and frustration felt by most young Germans, an anger which will make the GDR unstable for many years to come.¹

There have also been much more formal, organized signs of opposition. In the summer of 1977, a minor functionary named Rudolf Bahro published a book entitled Die Alternative. His book criticized the economic practices of "real Socialism" from a Communist point of view and proposed needed changes. The study found a wide audience in both East and West, but as a result Bahro was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison.²

Bahro's book was the first sign of open opposition within the SED itself. In January 1978, as mentioned above, there came to the surface new evidence that Bahro was not alone. In its first two issues of the year Der Spiegel published what it labelled a "manifest" by a group calling
itself the Federation of Democratic Communists of Germany, whose members claimed to be higher level functionaries within the SED, though they kept their specific identities secret. They charged corruption at all levels of the government in the GDR, attacked the Soviet Union as a fascist state, and asserted that the "real Socialism" of the GDR was nothing more than a form of late capitalism. These charges alone were radical enough, but the proposals for change made the document truly revolutionary. The authors, and it was clear from the various styles found within the statement that there were several writers, declared themselves in opposition to the one-party dictatorship which is in actuality nothing more than the dictatorship of a clique within the Politburo. There was a call for a multi-party system with a freely elected parliament, an independent judiciary, and a society which enjoys freedom of the press, of assembly, of organization, and freedom of conscience. All these were ideas which had long been widely discussed. Among others, Wolf Biermann and Robert Havemann have made such proposals. The authors of the declaration went even further. They called for the elimination of Marxism-Leninism as official state doctrine, for a government tied in no way to the apparatus of any party. They went so far as to oppose that sacred cow, the dictatorship of the proletariat, calling it the "dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the proletariat and against the whole people."³

All of this caused a storm in the GDR, but the document contained other proposals which stirred an all-German storm, provoking much discussion and annoyance among West German politicians. The democratic Communists supported the idea of a reunified Germany, a Germany reunified as a neutral, Socialist land. The almost forgotten goal of reunification has since the publication of the "manifest" again become a current topic. West German politicians have long since, except as a rhetorical device, abandoned talk
of unity for the sake of normalizing relations with the other German state. Many feared that raising the old ghost could possibly upset the carefully constructed relationship which has been built up over a period of many years. Several leading West German politicians denied belief in the authenticity of the document and referred to it as disruptive of detente. But the mini-storm raised in the West was only a passing one compared to that which struck the East. The SED, which vehemently denied the authenticity of the declaration and charged Der Spiegel with undue interference in the internal affairs of the GDR, reacted initially by closing down the East Berlin office of the magazine. Then larger wheels were set in motion. There had long been talk that Erich Honecker might be on his way out as a result of his chaotic economic policies and discontent in Moscow over the growing signs of opposition within the GDR, the Soviet Union's most important satellite. The most commonly mentioned successor has been Minister-President and Moscow favorite Willi Stoph. The seriousness of the challenge was demonstrated when a Soviet diplomat stated that his government was prepared to send tanks to the Alexanderplatz if things were to get out of control in Germany. The result of all this has been a power struggle within the SED which has involved arrests and interrogations. Honecker has sent out the State Security Service (the Stasi) to locate the anonymous opposition leaders, and has used the excuse to put pressure on his political opponents. It is impossible to tell which way things will turn in the GDR, but it is clear that there are many troubled years ahead.

All of the above is taking place in the German Democratic Republic, but Wolf Biermann is living in the Federal Republic of Germany, and it is that society with which he must involve himself. The Federal Republic is a very repressive society. This is something which is often forgotten in the United States, where we are inclined to think of the GDR as the bad
guys and West Germany as the good guys. West Germany is a "democracy" more deeply flawed than most in the Western world. It is the land of the odious Berufsverbot or professional ban, under which people who are members of or sympathizers with organizations considered to be opposed to the constitutional order are unable to enter any sort of government service. In West Germany this ranges from teachers to railroad engineers and postmen. The careers of many well-qualified people have been destroyed by this ban, a ban which bears an obvious resemblance to that imposed on Biermann in the GDR. In the West, Biermann can sing, but were he to try to be a music teacher or a mailman, he'd be banned. In practice the occupational bans are imposed quite arbitrarily. For instance, the German Communist Party has been officially recognized by the Federal government as being a constitutional party, yet its members, and former members, fall under the ban.

West Germany is also a land with continuing rightist tendencies. The most widely read newspapers are in the strangle hold of the rightest Axel Springer Verlag and have been reduced to nothing more than simple-minded scandal sheets. In West Germany, SS-organizations still meet openly, often with police protection, while leftist demonstrations are broken up by riot police. In general, the police in the Federal Republic have a well-deserved reputation for arbitrariness and brutality. Of this I, unfortunately, have seen much first hand evidence.

Radical terrorism has also been on the increase in West Germany in recent years. The reaction to that has not been to challenge the causes of that reaction, but instead to enact openly reactionary laws which impair the constitutional rights of all West Germans. An example is the isolation law whereby prisoners charged with specific crimes can be put in total isolation, even being denied contact with legal counsel. In West Germany one
can still be taken to court for slandering the state. Charges were brought
against the Reverend Martin Ensslin, father of Gudrun Ensslin, one of the
Red Army Faction terrorists who committed suicide in Stammheim prison, be­
because the former expressed doubt that his daughter committed suicide.
Charges were brought against Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll because he
expressed doubt about the accuracy of a decision by a Hamburg court. In
neither case were there convictions, but the fact remains that there was
official harassment of people with "undesirable" opinions. In the same
Federal Republic recent studies have shown that a majority of the population
is opposed to further prosecution of Nazi war criminals. Friedrich Rathje,
who was recently convicted of complicity in the murder of 900 Jewish men,
women, and children received a two years suspended sentence and a fine of
approximately 2,500 dollars.

The West German educational system is likewise hardly a model of
democracy. Its channeling system tends to perpetuate the inequality of
class-structure and makes it very difficult for a working class child to
get a college education, not impossible, but difficult. Yet efforts at
reform have been met with stiff resistance.

This then is the society in which Wolf Biermann now lives. And he
has continued to involve himself. He's written and sung songs dealing with
the problems which face West Germany. He's sung in the streets and parti­
cipated in political discussions. The man who, while in the GDR, helped
political dissidents of any persuasion, has not shrunk back in his new
home. He has however chosen not to associate himself with any of the many
Communist factions which make up the miniscule West German left. Instead,
in June of 1977, he became a member of the Spanish Communist Party, with
membership number 042477.

Upon finishing our conversation we went into the other room and found
Felix sitting on the pot. The room was filled with books and musical instruments. On the piano I noticed a record by Phil Ochs. He picked up my dulcimer, which I'd brought along, and played a song, a song he'd just finished for his daughter Nelli. The song is in low-German, the language of Biermann's childhood.

Nelli, I'll tell you something
We can't complain, we can't
It is my father-city
In a foreign land.

He asked me if I'd like to join him on a walk down to the Elbe and I agreed. Sybille packed up Felix and came along. We stood on the docks and watched the tugs and the ships going by. From Altona, where Biermann now lives, one can look over the river and see the big Hamburg harbor. "That's where my father worked," he said. We talked of East Berlin, where I was spending a great deal of time while writing this book. I told him of my friends there and the frustration they feel and passed on news from a brigade of workers who'd ask me to tell him they'd expressed solidarity with him in a meeting of the workers in their plant by refusing to sign a declaration of solidarity with Chilean Luis Corvalan unless they could also sign a declaration of solidarity with Wolf Biermann. "They are risking so much," Biermann said. He sang some songs in English and recited a lovely poem about Hamburg, a passage from his Wintermärchen. Then we walked back.

I don't know any longer if I'm in exile here. Yes and no, both... When, in the GDR, I thought of Hamburg, and that was not so often, then I longed for the smell of the water in the harbor on the Elbe. The water here has a special smell. I go down there sometimes just to carry my nose to the water. And when I then smell the water, then I think of how I longed for this water while in the GDR. Crazy, isn't it? The water here smells, is a mixture of rotting wood, mud, tar and oil and fish and I don't know what else, a smell which was so deeply a part of my childhood nose that it moves me deeply in my soul, and which now also smells of the GDR, because I always thought of it in the GDR. I'm astonished at how complicated all that is in people, and how little things make clear their real passions. That is the smell of the
water. Sounds like a literary invention. But that's the way it is.

When someone in the GDR asked me where I was from, then I said I am from Hamburg, and when someone from Hamburg asks me, where?...GDR. For me, in my coordination system, Hamburg lies in the middle of the GDR.
Notes on Altona

1. For further information on the disturbance on the Alexanderplatz see Der Tagesspiegel (West Berlin) from October 9, 1977 to October 15, 1977.

2. Rudolf Bahro was released from prison in October 1979 and shortly thereafter went to West Germany.


5. Altona is now part of the city of Hamburg.
This West! Had I suspected that they would not let return,
I wouldn't have gone. Had I suspected what blossoms for me
here, maybe I would have gone after all. If I had suspected
all that took place in the GDR after my expatriation I would
definitely have left.¹

The intent of this work has been to tell the story of Wolf Biermann's
years in the German Democratic Republic, the songs and poems he produced
there, and his expatriation from his Socialist fatherland. But, like every­
thing, there is no beginning nor any real end to the story. One must arbi­
trarily draw lines. So this last section will discuss only very briefly
Wolf's first published West-writings. It will serve as a postscript to the
story of the GDR-writer Wolf Biermann, and may perhaps be the prologue to
the story of the West German writer Wolf Biermann.

In late 1978, almost two years after his expatriation, the book en­
titled Preussischer Ikarus (The Prussian Icarus) was published by Kiepen­
heuer & Witsch and the West-record Trotz alledem! (Despite it All!)²
appeared.

When this book appears, I shall have wound up exactly two
West-years. The typesetter already has the manuscript: the
last East-texts and the first West-texts are to come between
a pair of book covers and in the middle a wall, a blank page.
(page 108)

Among the East-texts were only a few which hadn't appeared previously in
some form or another. What strikes one about the more than thirty West­
texts are that they are truly West-texts. That is, not only were they
written in the West, but they take up West European, West German, or all­
German themes from what is a Western perspective. None deal exclusively
with the GDR. It seems that Biermann has consciously made the jump from East to West. In his low-German children's song, "Nelli," the song for his daughter, which he sang for me and played on my dulcimer when I visited him in Hamburg, he sings,

Nelli, ik sagg di wat
Wi hefft noch Swin bi hatt
Is jo min Vadder-Stadt
   int fremde Land.

Nelli, I tell you what
We are lucky we are
It is my father-city
   in a foreign land. (page 133)

And too, in his massive balance sheet song called "Deutsches Miserere-Das Bloch-Lied (appro: The German Lament - the Bloch Song) he uses his peculiar exile status to illustrate the hard and brutal German unity which has already been achieved.

Here they fall onto their backs
There they crawl on their bellies
And I did come
   Oh! come I did
   from the rain into the sewer (page 199)

In verse after verse he compares West and East:

And in the West the newspaper writers
They lie shamelessly as they would
But their colleagues in the East
They lie correctly as they should

And atomic plants in Saxony
And atomic plants on the Rhine
And here as there the hypocrites
Say they have progress in mind

And who in the West has the money
With it he has power as well
But who has the power in the East
Attains a wealth that tells (page 200)

He invites the listener to draw his own conclusions.

Jürgen Fuchs has described Wolf Biermann's embrace of Western themes, his singing of songs which serve the Western left, as highly problematical.
Has the jump not been made too quickly? Won't the singer lose his orientation by jumping too soon into the Western fire? Has he not perhaps tried too hard to become a Western Leftist? Biermann's view was stated in the "Forewords" which he wrote to introduce his West-texts:

As soon as possible to come into combustion with this society. Ally myself with the progressive forces in the West...Whether I like it or not I am a leftist in the FRG. And I will only go back through the wall when this human trap no longer exists. I don't want to waste my time though waiting for that day, and I don't want to lick my wounds until then. (pages 115 and 125)

I think he is right, but the switch, necessary, is not easy. There is much to be learned and many mistakes to be made. For instance, in order to do his part for the West German working class, Biermann wrote a song, "Euro-Kai," in support of the Hamburg longshoremen's strike. The longshoremen's union declared openly that they did not identify with Herr Biermann or his Communist political views. The West German working class has had after all thirty years of anti-Communist propaganda, as well as thirty years to observe the deformed Socialism of the GDR. But as difficult as the way has been for the GDR-exile, so necessary is it also. Despite all the fame, and all the attention paid by the West German press Wolf Biermann had, in the GDR, faced the danger of becoming a caricature of himself, an eccentric who sang of the hope for change, but whose situation embodied hopelessness. Truly the limits of singing in his apartment in the Chauseestrasse had an intellectually stagnating effect. Now in the West, the exile could continue singing indefinitely about the GDR, but what would that accomplish? He would be reduced to a bad joke and become even more isolated than he had been in East Berlin.

In the West he has travelled widely and broadened himself both intellectually and musically. His experience as a member of the Spanish Communist Party has placed him in the midst of a new political landscape and
from it have come several songs which appear in *Preussischer Ikarus*. He has plans to record a whole album of songs written outside of Germany. Too, the West German folk music revival has added new dimensions to his music. This influence however must be seen in its proper perspective. Biermann's music and songs have always been rooted in the German folk tradition. While West German musicians spent the fifties and sixties diligently imitating the American folk tradition, Biermann was learning from and extending the German. Now, those same West German musicians, who by way of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan found their way back to their own cultural heritage, are creating a fertile soil in which all German musicians, including Wolf Biermann, can grow. On his record, *Trotz alledem*, as well as on the new album of his fellow GDR-exiles Gerulf Pannach and Cuno Kunert, the traditional German folk stylings are to be heard among many other influences. Biermann's masterful song against the Gorleben nuclear reprocessing plant combines folk guitar, tambourine, accordion, and fiddle to extend the long tradition of the German political folk song.

God knows, there is enough for a Socialist to do in West Germany. After overcoming an initial desire to emigrate from Germany entirely, live perhaps in the Netherlands, or Spain, or Greece, Biermann decided that he could not run away.

The chain with which I have personally bound myself to this double-land, was much too tight and much too short. Soon I had to accept how small my degree of freedom is, I couldn't run away. The situation in the FRG tugged at me - and soon I did at it. Quickly I fell into the tumult. Since I've lived here the situation has changed more than I would have thought and other than I would like. German unity has made horrible strides. The two German states learn from one another. (page 125)

In his new writings Biermann concentrates principally on the weakness of the West German left and the problems which manifest themselves as a result: namely the terror scene (from the radical left as well as the state) and
the hopeless splintering of West German Socialists and Communists into numerous miniscule and dogmatic sects.

The terrorist problem in West Germany has poisoned the whole political atmosphere. The state, the press, and most of the citizens have fallen into a mood of dread and thoughtless reaction. The terrorists are the products of a society which has all too few real outlets for political change. The seedbed for the Red Army Faction has been the swollen and overfed German middleclass. The "bloody bourgeois children" (page 146) are idealists who reacted like a steam boiler on which the safety valve is jammed, they exploded and did more to discredit their cause than to help it. But it has been easier for the German people to shift the blame to the victims of their society, that is, the terrorists, rather than examine their own not uncomplicated guilt. The result has been a campaign of harassment and terror against not only the terrorists but also all real and suspected sympathizers.

They get the German, the new
The sign of shame branded on them:
Oh, that, which only yesterday was the Jew
- that here the sympathizer becomes. (page 143)7

The oppressive atmosphere was portrayed by Biermann in his Stuttgart poem, which was quoted in an earlier section.

No more about price and wage struggles
Shrinking of the job market's size
In its stead the joy of the hunt
For all those who sympathize
And the streets full of uniforms
And blue light, identity checks
He arms himself massively
The German garden dwarf (page 152)

But Biermann is furious at the RAF for that which they have wrought in the name of world revolution:

Ach Baader! Ach Ensslin! Ach Raspe!
Ach Schleyer! you've done it you have
You've so clouded the cleft
That gapes between the classes
Those below like those above
Have buried the old bitterness
There spreads itself a deadening
Dangerous brotherliness (page 152)

Particularly in the case of the kidnapping and murder of the industrialist Hans Martin Schleyer one can see the result of this misguided clique of terrorists. Biermann complains that, when he saw the photo of the RAF prisoner Schleyer, he could only feel sympathy for this man. And that made him furious, for Schleyer was an entirely unscrupulous capitalist who, during the Third Reich, had mobilized the economies of Bohemia and Moravia to serve the Nazi war machine, and after the war had pursued his profit while actively opposing the working class by the use of lockouts. Assassination and terror are not weapons in the arsenal of the revolution, says Biermann on his record Trotz alledem. A man like Schleyer would have done the cause more good alive than dead. There is an admittedly fine line between revolutionary struggle and terrorism, a line which becomes quickly indistinguishable, but which must be perceived.

A whole section of Preussischer Ikarus is devoted to the sectarianism and impotence of the West German left.

There are many sick leftists here
In the West, they make me feel ill
They sit as though they had grown there
In the waiting room, waiting still. (page 161)

The leftists in the Federal Republic are to be found principally in the universities and they are people who have never known real suffering or direct oppression. Their own suffering is second hand.

Second hand suffering
How you nourish yourself with it
You decorate yourself with the wounds
Which you don't even have (page 120)
The "commitment" is as a result rather fadish and often the consequence of a lack of self-respect. They play at revolution in order to overcome their middle-class guilt.

And many can only love the cause, and have
For themselves only the worst hate. (page 162)

Unable to love themselves they are unable to love others and so their revolution remains an abstraction, and terror and assassination can be easily justified for the sake of the cause. There are leaflets and discussions, largely among themselves, but few positive deeds, no sign of the patience hard-won in struggle. Like the spoiled children they are, they want what they want and they want it now.

And so we make the world-revo-lu-tion
At once and right from the book
- or not at all! And yet on the long march
Just barely a step we took

And we love all of humanity so much
But individuals hardly
We dream the Garden of Eden is red
But don't plant a single tree. (page 161)

In West as in East, Germany suffers from a chronically limping political atmosphere, and Wolf Biermann has come to know both halves of that German Misere all too well. Thus his first West-texts are actually a continuation of that which came before. Yet despite all the pessimism, despite all the set-backs, the red dream of a new and better Germany, a new and better world, is still there. That will not change, despite it all.

And if we must freeze then we will
Shiver, (but only from the cold)
We'll walk upright, despite it all. (page 196)

As ever, one hears the melancholy which has pervaded all of Biermann's writings, the mark of disappointed love. But that doesn't stop the struggle or the flow of words, for Wolf Biermann is a passionate revolutionary with brains, and a heart, and guts.
And if for me it be hard - or for me it is easy
I travel our road with yearning and anger
- can be, that when I have achieved everything
I have achieved nothing, but a new beginning (page 226)
Notes to Postscript


3. This song is named for Ernst Bloch. While writing the song Biermann visited the old man. As a result of the meeting changes were made which produced the present form.

4. Hier fallen sie auf den Rücken
   Dort kriechen sie auf dem Bauche
   Und ich bin gekommen
   ach! kommen bin ich
   vom Regen in die Jauche

   Und im Westen die Zeitungsschreiber
   Sie lügen frech, wie sie wollen
   Aber ihre Kollegen im Osten
   Die lügen korrekt, wie sie sollen

   Und Kernkraftwerke in Sachsen
   Und Kernkraftwerke am Rhein
   Und hüben und drüben heucheln sie
   Das soll für den Fortschritt sein

   Und wer im Westen das Geld hat
   Der hat damit auch die Macht
   Aber wer im Osten die Macht hat
   Der hat es zu Reichtum gebracht!


6. In the fall of 1977 Wolf Biermann was finally forced to apply for a West German passport, thereby acknowledging his West German citizenship. The fact is that he had tried in vain to get Dutch alien papers in order to theoretically retain his GDR citizenship. He was forced to give up his GDR passport because it was filled up with visas from his many travels.

7. Die kriegen das deutsche, das neue
   Das Schandzeichen aufgebrannt:
   Ach, das, was grad gestern noch Jud war
   - das wird hier der Sympathisant.

8. See: "Altona" notes for German original.

9. Es gibt soviel kranke Linke hier
   Im Westen, die machen mich drank
   Die sitzen wie festgewachsen auf
   Der ganz grossen Wartebank
10. Ach an den Leiden aus zweiter Hand
   Wie ihr euch daran labt
   Ihr schmückt euch mit den Wunden
   Die ihr ja gar nicht habt

11. Und manch einer liebt nur die Sache und hat
    Auf sich selber den schlimmsten Hass

12. Und wir machen die Welt-revo-lu-tion
    Sofort und auf einen Ritt
    - oder gar nicht! Doch auf dem langen Marsch
    Gingen wir kaum einen Schritt.

    Und wir lieben die Menschheit im Ganzen so sehr
    Aber einzelne Menschen kaum
    Wir träumen vom Garten Eden in Rot
    Aber pflanzen nicht einen Baum.

13. Wenn wir frieren müssen, werden wir
    Wohl zittern (doch vor Kälte bloss!)
    Und aufrecht gehn, trotz alledem.

14. Und ob es mir schwer wird - und ob es mir leicht ist
    Ich geh unsern Weg, geh mit Sehnsucht und Zorn
    - mag sein, dass ich einmal, wenn alles erreicht ist
    Erreicht habe nichts, als ein' Anfang von vorn.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
of materials used in this thesis

A. Primary Literature

1. Books


2. Recordings

Wolf Biermann (Ost) zu Gast bei Wolfgang Neuss (West). (Philips twen-serie 42; = Stereo 843 742 PY) Hamburg (Phonogram) 1965.
contains:
   Keine Party ohne Biermann
   Kunststück
   Was verboten ist, das macht uns gerade scharf
(Cont. next page.)
Das Familienbad
Soldatenmelodie
Ballade vom Drainageleger Fredi Rohsmeisl
Ballade von der Buckower Süßkirschenzeit
Kleinstadt-Sonntag

Acht Autoren lesen aus ihren Quartheften, angesagt vom Verlager. (Wagenbachs Quartplatte 1) Berlin (West) Wagenbach 1967. contains:
Ballade auf Villon

Wolf Biermann 4 neue Lieder. (Wagenbachs Quartplatte 3) Berlin (West) Wagenbach 1968. contains:
Drei Kugeln auf Rudi Dutschke
Ermutigung
Es senkt das deutsche Dunkel
Noch

Chauseestrasse 131. (Wagenbachs Quartplatte 4) Berlin (West) Wagenbach 1969. contains:
Die hab ich satt!
Das Barlach-Lied
Deutschland. Ein Wintemärchen, 1. Kapitel
Ballade auf den Dichter François Villon
Wie eingepfertch in Kerkermauern
Zwischenlied
Frühling auf dem Mont-Klamott
Moritat auf Biermann seine Oma Meume in Hamburg
Grosses Gebet der alten Kommunistin Oma Meume in Hamburg
So soll es sein - so wird es sein

Der Biermann kommt. (unauthorized pressing, ca. 1970) Opportunistenparade 1963
Ballade vom dem Mann, der sich eigenhändig beide Füsse abhackte
Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten
Ballade vom Prügelkriegen
Acht Argumente für die Beibehaltung des Namens "Stalinallee"
für die Stalinallee
Meine Mietskasernenbraut
Lied auf das ehemalige Grenzgängerfreudenmädchen
Die Ballade vom dem Mädchen mit dem sehr roten Kleid
Der Hausarzt
Die Verkäuferin
Wir loben den guten Verkehrspolizisten
Sechs Lagen Bockbier auf den guten Funktionär, der gut funktioniert
Die grüne Schwemme
Die Ballade vom Bauern und vom Bullen und vom Rucksackbullen
Die Ballade vom Traktoristen Kalle
Soldatenlied
Herr Brecht
Frau Brecht
Ernst Thälmann
Warum ist die Banane krumm? (Wagenbachs Quartplatte 7) Berlin (West) (Wagenbach) 1971. contains:
Erster Mai
Das Märchen vom Märchenerzähler, der sein allerletztes Märchen erzählen musste

Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten. (CBS 65 753; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1973. contains:
Bilanzballade im dreissigsten Jahr
Der Hugenottenfriedhof
Enfant perdu
Lied von den bleibenden Werten
Acht Argumente für die Beibehaltung des Namens "Stalinallee" für die Stalinallee
Ballade für einen wirklich tief besorgten Freund
Nicht sehen - Nicht horen - Nicht schrein oder Ballade von meiner Mutter einzigem Sohn
Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten

Chile - Ballade vom Kameramann Commande Che Guevara (CBS 1903 Stereo-Single) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1973. contains:
Ballade vom Kameramann
Commande Che Guevara (frei nach Carlos Puebla)

aah-ja! (CBS 80 188; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1974. contains:
aah-ja!
Kleine Ermutigung
Ermutigung
Grosse Ermutigung
Die Stasi-Ballade
Selbstportrait für Reiner Kunze
Das macht mich popular
Vorfrühling
Von mir und meiner Dicken in den Fichten
In China hinter der Mauer
Das Hölderlin-Lied

Chausseeestrasse 131. (CBS 80 798; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1975. remake of original, same titles.

Liebeslieder. (CBS 80 982; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1975. contains:
Die grüne Schwemme
Das Frühstück
Der schwarze Pleitegeier
Einschlauf - und Aufwachelied
Die Bibel-Ballade
Kuckuck Kuckuck
Steine-Lied
Wie schändlich du gehandelt (Text; Heinrich Heine)
Die Elbe bei Dresden
Bin mager nun und fühl ich
Herausgegeben vom Frankfurter Kulturzentrum e. V. (=US 12/L84) München (Trikont-Verlag) 1976. contains:
Wolf Biermann: Das Franco-Lied

Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod. (CBS 81 259; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1976. contains:
Das Franco-Lied
Ballade zur Beachtung der Begleitumstände beim Tode von Despoten
Ballade von den Spaniern in Dresdener Exil
Im dem Tal dort am Rio Jarama
Bedenkelied
Jaramafront
Preußische Romanze
Genosse Julian Grimau
Chile - Ballade vom Kameramann
Die Herren Generale
Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod
Wir sassen am Feuer im Dunkeln
Lied vom roten Stein der Weisen

Das geht sein' sozialistischen Gang. (CBS 88 224; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1977. contains:
So soll es sein (neue Fassung)
Ich möchte am liebsten weg sein - und bleibe am liebsten hier
Fritz Cremer, Bronze: Der Aufsteigende
Warte nicht auf bessre Zeiten
Du, lass dich nicht verhärten
Das kann doch nicht alles gewesen sein
Flori Have
Diskussion über sowjetische Panzer (Sprachteil)
Das geht sein' sozialistischen Gang
Ballade vom Mann, der sich eigenhändig beide Füsse abhackte
Porträt eines Monopolbürokraten
Das Land ist still - noch
Ballade von der alten Stadt Lassan
Das Kunze-Lied
Ballade vom preußischen Ikarus

Der Friedensclown. Lieder für Menschenkinder. (CBS 82 262; Stereo-LP) Frankfurt/Main (CBS) 1977. contains:
Andre François, der Friedensclown
Der nette fette Vater
Das Märchen von dem Mädchen mit dem Holzbein
Gross-Manne - Klein Manne
Rätsel-Lied
Guten Morgen, Erster Mai!
Puli-Schnul ist Mamas Kind
Hofhund und Papagei
Tanz was kleine Puppi
Muschi Man
Drei hungrige Kerle
Frühjahrslied der Eisenbahnerin
Der Alte sprach zur Alten
Stillepenn Schlafflied

Trotz alledem! (CBS 83 975; Stereo-LP) CBS Schallplatten, Germany, 1978. contains:
Ballade vom preussischen Ikarus
Nelli, min Appelsnut
Hanseatische Idylle
Kommentar/ Mangelsdorf
Deutsches Miserere
Gegen die Objektiven
Trotz alledem
Mag sein, dass ich irre
Jetzt klagen sie gross über Terror
Madchen in Stuttgart
Collage Frankfurter Rundschau
Ach Stuttgart, du nasse, du schöne
Streikposten vor Euro-Kai
Gorleben soll leben
Lied des Bundes

Auf dem Friedhof am Montmartre
Ein Weib
Wo ich dich gestern liebte
Die Wolkenschiffe
Der wilde Wein
Was an dir Berg war
Willkommen, kleine Bürgerin
Lene Levis Fall in den Fluss
Weltende 1904
Wie ich ein Fisch wurde
Beim Lesen des Horaz
Hälfte des Lebens
Ich träumte
Robert, mein Lieber
Ich bin der Weggehetzte
Die Karyatiden
Ziffels Lied
Wenn das Haus eines Grossen
Viele von uns sitzen noch
Freunde, was erwartet ihr
Das Schlimme ist nicht
Den Haien entrann ich
Alter Kommunist F.
Gebet einer Frau
Die März-Lieder
   a. Das Lieben
   b. Der Schnee
   c. Das Schweigen

Bentley, Eric. Bentley on Biermann. Accompaniments by Allan Miller. (Broadside Records BRS 432) contains:
The Song of the Worst Thing
Ballad of the Poet François Villon
Ballad of the Letter-Carrier William L. Moore
The Barlach Song
Nothing to it!
Comrade Julian Grimau
Ballad of the Man
Legend of the Soldier in World War III
Ballad of Fredi Rohsmeisl
Do not Wait for Better Times!
Early Morning
The Singer's Inaugural Address
Toys
To the Old Comrades
Reckless Abuse
Germany: A Winter's Tale
December 1965
Question and Answer and Question
Morning Dictum of Vice-President Ky
Vice-President Ky's Dream
Soldatenmelodie

3. Songs and Poems


4. Other Writings


5. Interviews


B. Secondary Literature

1. Books


2. Articles


3. Miscellaneous


Protokoll der II. Parteikonferenz der SED, 1952.