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## Through the Iron Curtain

# West German Activists and the 1961 San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace

### ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1961 a peace march coordinated by an American non-violent protest organisation arrived in Western Europe on its way to Moscow. This paper tells the story of how West German peace activists helped this transnational peace walk pass through the Iron Curtain. Using archival sources and oral history interviews this paper examines the logistical, organisational, and transnational efforts required for this international peace walk to succeed. Importantly, this paper studies the creation of the transnational social space that allowed this international cooperation to take place.

*Keywords: Transnational protest, anti-nuclear protest, peace, West Germany, East Germany, United States of America, Soviet Union, conscientious objection, nonviolence, civil disobedience.*

In front of the red walls of the Kremlin on October 3, 1961, Reiner Steinweg, a young peace activist from the small West German town of Hohenhausen in North Rhine-Westphalia, handed out hundreds of antimilitary leaflets to a crowd of enthusiastic Russians. Reiner Steinweg, along with peace activists from all over the Western world, had accomplished something no one had ever done before; he had walked through the Iron Curtain to protest militarism and nuclear weapons at the height of the Cold War. The incredible story of this march, known as the American-European March for Peace, highlights the transnational cooperation of peace activists in the United States, Britain, and West Germany in the early 1960s.

This article investigates collaboration between West German peace activists and members of peace organisations outside of West Germany with particular attention to the transfer of information between them, exchange of tactics and methods of protest between each other as well as the many issues that divided them. It also studies the transnational social space that allowed this communication to take place. By examining the cooperation between the organisers of the Committee for Nonviolent Action's 1960–1961 American-European March for Peace, I will demonstrate how the West German, British, and American activists coordinated and developed non-violent protest strategies. While the

West German activists learned from and adopted some of the protest methods of peace organisations in Great Britain and the United States, they created their own culture of protest and with it developed a distinct set of tactics and “rules of engagement” for their organisations.<sup>1</sup>

Research for this article included previously unused archival material as well as interviews with two key members of the West German organising committee, Helga Stolle and Konrad Tempel. The *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* (Hamburg Institute for Social Research) provided a great deal of information on West German activists’ involvement in the march. The interviews with Helga Tempel (*née* Stolle) and Konrad Tempel, as well as Dr. Andreas Buro, allow the voices of these actors to be part of this incredible story.<sup>2</sup> Oral history can be an outstanding resource, but it must be used judiciously. When I interviewed Helga and Konrad at their home near Hamburg, I asked them to reflect on the things they did and the beliefs they held just over fifty years ago. While some details had understandably faded, they had a remarkable memory of the Walk for Peace, particularly their interactions with the American and British organisers. I believe this was because the transnational effort was a product of the years of relationship building between the Tempel’s and key international activists, and represented a major achievement in the development of the West German peace movement.

Helga and Konrad Tempel were peace activists from Hamburg who were the initiators of one of the biggest anti-nuclear protest movements of the 1960s, the Easter March Against Atomic Weapons. They had both survived the war as children and it was this experience that drove them to peace activism. Their first involvement in peace work was in the anti-conscription organisation *Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner* (German section of the the UK based War Resisters’ International). It was through the War Resisters’ International that they met peace activists from around the world.<sup>3</sup> This network had a profound effect on their development as peace activists and directly led to their involvement in the San

- 1 The influence of American forms of protest on the protest movements in the Federal Republic of Germany has been a topic of discussion among German historians. See Martin Klimke: *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties*, Princeton 2010; Holger Nehring: *Americanized Protests?: The British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons and the Pacifist Roots of the West German New Left, 1957–64*, in: Jessica C. E./Gienow-Hecht (eds.): *Decentering America*, New York 2007, pp. 210–252; Philipp Gassert: *Atlantic Alliances: Cross-Cultural Communication and the 1960s Student Revolution*, in: Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht/Frank Schumacher (eds.): *Culture and International History*, New York 2003, pp. 135–156; Wolfgang Kraushaar: *Die transatlantische Protestkultur: Der zivile Ungehorsam als amerikanisches Exempel und als bundesdeutsche Adaption*, in: Heinz Bude/Bernd Greiner (eds.): *Westbindungen: Amerika in der Bundesrepublik*, Hamburg 1999, pp. 257–284.
- 2 Helga Stolle married Konrad Tempel in 1962.
- 3 Konrad Tempel was an active participant in the War Resisters’ International conferences in the late 1950s and early 1960s. “Particulars of voting,” 8<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference, Paris, 1954,

Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace. Konrad Tempel's staunch pacifism was grounded in his Quaker faith, which he and Helga were introduced to through international contacts made in the *Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner*.<sup>4</sup> Konrad Tempel studied the theory and practice of nonviolence and read everything he could get his hands on, including books and papers about the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau. He worked to make many of these writings accessible in German.<sup>5</sup> Konrad Tempel's dedication to pacifism and relationships with peace activists in Britain put him in a position to assume leadership roles in the *Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner*.<sup>6</sup>

Historians have looked broadly at the San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace, this article is a much closer look at the march.<sup>7</sup> One that focuses on its West German portion; specifically the involvement of West German peace activists and the effect the march had on West German protest culture. Furthermore, it explores more deeply the concept of transnational social space and how interaction of peace activists from the United States and West Germany influenced one another.

A number of problems and issues arose during the march. One of the primary issues was the lack of a common discourse about nuclear disarmament and peace. This was due to the fact that each group of activists came from distinctly unique political realities and their views were often based on what they dealt with in their respective countries. Furthermore, the term "peace" meant different things to different people. To some, peace simply meant the absence of war. To others peace meant much more and in some cases "peace" was a word that was used by the communists. For many West German activists, peace was a word that had to be used carefully in the context of nuclear disarmament

Some of the issues were cultural. The West German activists often felt the Americans were recalcitrant when dealing with the authorities, undisciplined on the march, and dismissive of the potential impact the march would have on the peace movement in the Federal Republic. These issues came to a head at perhaps one of the most dramatic moments of the march when on Sunday, 13 August 1961 they found themselves in East Berlin, the epicentre of the Cold War, when the Berlin Wall went up.

International Instituut voor sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, War Resisters' International Records, WRI-6.

4 Interview with Konrad Tempel, Ahrensberg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

5 Letter from Konrad Tempel to Gene Sharp, 12 December 1956, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 100,01-06.

6 Karl A. Otto: Vom Ostermarsch zur APO: Geschichte der ausserparlamentarischen Opposition in der Bundesrepublik 1960-1970, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 70.

7 The most complete study to date is Günter Wernicke/Lawrence S. Wittner: Lifting the Iron Curtain: The Peace March to Moscow of 1960-1961, in: *The International History Review* 21:4 (1999), pp. 900-917. Günter Wernicke and Lawrence S. Wittner provide an excellent overview of the march with analysis of Soviet, Polish, and East German sources.

The problems and issues encountered during the development and implementation of the peace walk are not unique to this event. In fact, several historians have discussed in detail how protest groups deal with these obstacles. Because of the multitude of “national” activists involved and the states being crossed during the peace walk a common discourse was difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Every activist brought with them the specific domestic and national concerns that made up their protest agenda and political discourse. Holger Nehring argues that international and national dimensions are always at play in “transnational” movements.<sup>8</sup> Activists can never really escape the political realities of their respective countries. When addressing the British and West German antinuclear movements Holger Nehring observed, “both movements related their own aims to global and international problems. But they continued to observe the world from their individual perspectives: national, regional and local forms remained important.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, each country the march entered had its own distinct set of political realities and contexts that influenced the way in which the peace walk’s message was received.<sup>10</sup>

A useful definition of peace movements is that they are “[...] social movements that aim to protest against the perceived dangers of political decision-making about armaments.”<sup>11</sup> The San Francisco to Moscow Peace Walk was a movement that was a product of American society with a specific set of protest tactics; specifically, nonviolent civil disobedience. Political scientist Lawrence Quill observed that civil disobedience was a

[...] form of collective activity [that] constituted an act of uncommon sense. While common sense levelled down political options so that alternatives played out within a field defined by the existing institutional order, civil disobedience (at least in some forms) held out the possibility of rupturing this constructed social and political reality.<sup>12</sup>

Civil disobedience was being employed with success in the Civil Rights movement and while it was not a uniquely American tactic it was not commonly employed in Europe. The use of civil disobedience on the peace walk had the potential to disrupt the cohesion of the marchers because the tactic was unfamiliar to many of the European activists and

8 Holger Nehring: *National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957–1964*, in: *Contemporary European History* 14:4 (2005), pp. 559–582.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 561.

10 Benjamin Ziemann: *A Quantum of Solace?: European Peace Movements during the Cold War and their Elective Affinities*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009): pp. 351–389, p. 388.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 388.

12 Lawrence Quill: *Civil Disobedience: (Un)Common Sense in Mass Democracies*, New York 2009, p. 164.

likely to cause problems in Eastern European countries that had a different view of civil liberties. However, it was necessary for the peace walk organisers to develop a consistent protest strategy if the march was to spread its message effectively along the way because a united strategy can be a tool to bring together activists who are divided culturally and spatially.<sup>13</sup>

A useful way to study the international cooperation, exchange of ideas, formulation of protest strategies, and spirit of united purpose is to view the various “national” activists as members of a transnational social space.<sup>14</sup> Many of the West German participants on the peace walk, often through their involvement in the West German conscientious objection movement, developed and maintained a network of likeminded activists from around the world. These networks are better understood as transnational social spaces. The term “transnational” is applied because they transcend national borders and sovereign states themselves are not part of the network. Social spaces are what links activists in different geographical places, who share common interests, beliefs, moral values, and expectations and ascribe to commonly held codes of conduct.

This event, a walk for peace that protested the nuclear weapons race and militarism, was an attempt to address a very serious issue facing most of the world; the build-up of Cold War tensions that were seemingly destined to erupt in nuclear war between the East and the West on the European continent. The peace walk participants endeavoured to sway the politicians in the United States and European countries to change their respective defence policies and remove nuclear weapons from their arsenals. Knowing the peace walk would have little to no effect on American and European politicians, the organisers focused instead on encouraging the people of each country to demand peace and nuclear disarmament for themselves.

The organiser of the peace walk, the Committee for Nonviolent Action, was formed in the United States in 1957 to protest against the United States government’s nuclear weapons programmes. The Committee for Nonviolent Action was one of the first peace organisations to employ nonviolent direct action, in particular civil disobedience, in the United States. They used nonviolent direct action in their protests against nuclear arms and while they were not the largest or perhaps most influential American anti-nuclear organisation, they were certainly one of the most dramatic.<sup>15</sup>

In the fall of 1960, the Committee for Nonviolent Action planned a peace march through the United States and European, most importantly communist, countries in Eastern Europe such as the German Democratic Republic, Poland, and the Soviet Union.

13 Jackie Smith/Hank Johnston: *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements*, Lanham 2002, pp. 5–6.

14 See Thomas Faist/Eyüp Özveren: *Transnational Social Spaces: Agents, Networks, and Institutions*, Aldershot 2004.

15 Lawrence S. Wittner: *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954–1970*, Stanford/Calif 1997, p. 249.

The marchers would carry signs, leaflet, and talk with locals about unilateral disarmament and peace. If possible, they would demonstrate at military installations. The Committee for Nonviolent Action organisers knew this would take a high level of organisation and international support but they believed in the power of peace and nonviolence and knew that if they could get into the Soviet Union, they would make history.<sup>16</sup>

Around 100 people left San Francisco in December 1961 with the goal to raise awareness of peaceful alternatives to the Cold War policies of military deterrence and promote peaceful, nonviolent solutions to international conflicts and Cold War tensions. They were “walking to stimulate people all over the world to think about the problem of international peace.”<sup>17</sup> Their “programme for peace” was based on the belief that “military power is immoral and will not work” and urged “that people demand and governments adopt moral policies that will lead to lasting peace, not to war.”<sup>18</sup> While admirable, this attempt to create a common discourse about peace and nonviolence was heavily weighted in the context of the American peace movement.

To create a lasting peace, the Committee for Nonviolent Action asked the governments of the world to renounce militarism and nuclear weapons. Militarism, as they defined it, was the reliance on military power to solve international problems. This was attached to a transnational framework that envisioned a world that solved its problems without violence or the threat of violence. The Committee for Nonviolent Action called for unilateral disarmament, the end of conscription, and a universal guarantee of civil rights, among other things.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, they implored people everywhere to encourage their government to take these steps. For example people could influence their government by refusing to pay taxes that supported military programmes, refuse to serve in the military (conscientious objection), protest and demonstrate at military installations and industrial plants, or participate in local and national peace organisations.<sup>20</sup> These appeals reflected the social and political realities of the United States and while they were applicable in parts of the Western world, many of their suggestions were simply impossible in other countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Nonviolence was at the core of everything activists on the Committee for Nonviolent Action American-European March for Peace did. Its leadership emphasised Gandhian nonviolence in all actions. In its most extreme form this meant enduring physical abuse

16 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, Raymond 1966, pp. 2–3.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

19 Committee For Nonviolent Action Bulletin, 10 November 1960, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500,03.

20 Basic Policy of San Francisco to Moscow Walk, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500,03.

and violence without responding with violence in word or deed.<sup>21</sup> The West German peace movement was also influenced by the precepts of Gandhian nonviolence. Theodor Michaltscheff, the influential founder of the post-war German chapter of the War Resisters' International (*International der Kriegsdienstgegner*), studied and wrote extensively on Gandhi's teachings.<sup>22</sup> Theodor Michaltscheff was particularly interested in Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha*, adhering to the truth in thought and deed, and strove to emulate this in his life.<sup>23</sup> He also worked hard to spread Gandhi's teachings in the West German peace movement and because of his efforts, along with those of likeminded pacifists, many West German activists were able to share a common discourse on nonviolence with American Committee for Nonviolent Action members.

The Committee for Nonviolent Action frequently used civil disobedience to achieve their campaign goals. Civil disobedience was a tactic that had been successfully employed in the United States most recently by the Civil Rights movement.<sup>24</sup> It was clear to Committee for Nonviolent Action activists that civil disobedience was a powerful tool that could be used to bring about political change. If the peace walk across the United States and Europe was to succeed, the Committee for Nonviolent Action and participating activists would have to use civil disobedience to change the rules and work outside the traditional sphere of politics. In an outline of the basic policy for the peace walk, the European Committee for Nonviolent Action organising committee in London wrote:

Their aim is to take their message to the people in each country, and they hope to do this with the cooperation of the authorities in each case. But should any country prevent the team's entrance, or should they be admitted, but prevented from handing out their leaflets or carrying their banners, they will have no alternative but to protest through some form of non-violent civil disobedience, such as remaining at the border or facing arrest rather than allow their basic message to be obscured.<sup>25</sup>

- 21 Committee For Nonviolent Action Bulletin, 10 November 1960, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500,03.
- 22 Andrew Oppenheimer: Air Wars and Empire: Gandhi and the Search for a Usable Past in Postwar Germany, in: *Central European History* 45:4 (2012), pp. 669–696, pp. 671–673.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 680.
- 24 On the transfer and implementation of Gandhian nonviolent civil disobedience in the Civil Rights movement see Sean Chabot: *Transnational Roothiss of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire*, Lanham 2012.
- 25 Basic Policy of San Francisco to Moscow Walk, in: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500,03.

The direct action tactic of civil disobedience, coupled with nonviolence, constituted a dramatic and efficacious protest strategy which the Committee for Nonviolent Action American-European March for Peace utilised in Europe. This is important to note because up to this point, nonviolent direct action—specifically civil disobedience—was not part of the West German protest repertoire.

Along with a central organising committee in the United States, the Committee for Nonviolent Action tapped into their transnational network to coordinate with organising committees in each European country along the route. The Committee for Nonviolent Action quickly realised that organising the European section of the march would be very complex, reached out to European peace activists for help and created a central organising committee for the European portion that would coordinate the efforts of each national committee.<sup>26</sup> These European committees assisted with a myriad of logistical issues from visa applications and correspondence with the local and state authorities to accommodations and food. Another important function of these committees was to contact local antinuclear and peace groups so that they could participate in the march and the various gatherings and protest activities. This contact and cooperation with other international peace organisations provided invaluable opportunities for the activists from each country to share ideas and discuss protest strategies and tactics. The Committee for Nonviolent Action utilised the transnational social space to organise the march and in doing so helped develop it further.

The European central organising committee was based in London and consisted of British activists April Carter, a member of both the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Committee of 100, as well as Hugh Brock, editor of *Peace News*, and Bayard Rustin, American civil rights activist and member of the Committee for Nonviolent Action Executive Committee. In their roles, these activists had oversight of the European portion of the march.<sup>27</sup> The West German organising committee worked closely with Abraham Johannes Muste and the central organising committee in London several months before the march reached the Federal Republic in mid-July. As part of their effort to develop a common rhetoric for the march, the Committee for Nonviolent Action insisted that anyone involved in the walk had to be in full accord with three points: “unilateral disarmament and opposition to nuclear war preparation by any and every country; the commitment in principle for walkers to commit civil disobedience if, where and when necessary; direct appeal to people everywhere to call on their respective governments for unilateral initiative.”<sup>28</sup> Each of the West German organising committee members were

26 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting 6 January 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 24 January 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.



selected because of their experience in the West German peace movement. They had all worked with Carter, Brock, and Rustin in the War Resisters' International and had developed strong relationships. Furthermore, all of the members of the West German organising committee were involved in the West German conscientious objection movement and were members of the *Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner* or the *Verband der Kriegsdienstverweigerer*. They were also all involved in the antinuclear movement known as the Easter March or *Ostermarsch*, and were considered leaders in the West German peace movement.<sup>29</sup> The committee included Helga Stolle, Konrad Tempel, Dr. Andreas Buro, Herbert Stubenrauch, and Heinz Kloppenburg.<sup>30</sup>

These organising committees—the European central organising committee and the national organising committees—along with the Committee for Nonviolent Action leadership, all took part in developing the strategy for the peace walk as it passed through Europe. This strategy—based on an attempt at creating a common discourse about peace and nuclear disarmament and predicated on nonviolent protest tactics such as civil disobedience—was necessary for creating a sense of unity for the marchers. Furthermore, the establishment of a common strategy and the collective actions of the organisers and participants contributed to the advancement of the activists' transnational social space.<sup>31</sup>

The European central organising committee believed it was especially important to include Konrad Tempel and Helga Stolle in the West German planning committee. In a letter to Committee for Nonviolent Action Chair, Abraham Johannes Muste, April Carter and Bayard Rustin wrote

it is essential we get [the] support of Helga and Konrad if [the] March is to have any worthwhile support in W. Germany: their Easter March organisation now includes all the most dynamic and politically sound groups and individuals in North and Central Germany, and has achieved the miracle of bringing the [*Internationale der Kriegsdienstgegner* and the *Verband der Kriegsdienstverweigerer*] together.<sup>32</sup>

- 29 The West German Easter March was closely connected to the British antinuclear march organised by the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament. For more on the connections between the British and West German antinuclear movements see Holger Nehring's work: *Politics of Security British and West German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War: 1945–1970*, Oxford 2013.
- 30 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting April 20, 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- 31 Holger Nehring: *National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957–1964*, p. 576.
- 32 Politically sound most likely meant not communist in this context. Confidential Memo from April Carter and Bayard Rustin to AJ Muste April 22 and 23, 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

Furthermore, Carter and Rustin pointed out that “Konrad represents the most vital and active part of the German Peace movement [and] we decide in working through him especially since he has the confidence of [Martin] Niemoeller and several other older and respected leaders.”<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, the West German organising committee was willing to temporarily adopt the common discourse of the march even though the central demand of the peace walk, unilateral nuclear disarmament of each country they passed through, was not part of their protest rhetoric in the Federal Republic. The Easter March, the primary antinuclear protest movement in West Germany, did not call for unilateral disarmament but simply opposed (American) nuclear weapons for the *Bundeswehr*.<sup>34</sup> Many West German antinuclear activists believed the Committee for Nonviolent Action position was an extreme one that was unrealistic and even dangerous in the political environment of the Federal Republic.<sup>35</sup> This reaction can be attributed to the fact that West Germany did not have nuclear weapons of its own and it was on the frontlines of the Cold War, where a call for unilateral disarmament seemed both hazardous and communist-inspired.<sup>36</sup> Even though the West Germans involved in organising the peace walk accepted the Committee for Nonviolent Action’s protest message, it is not hard to see how other West German activists, let alone the West German public, might not.

When the Committee for Nonviolent Action began coordinating with the West German activists a number of problems arose, all a direct result of the unique political reality of the Federal Republic. Because the organisers of the march had not yet received permission to enter East Germany, the West German activists were concerned about going forward with planning the West German section of the walk. They believed it would be a serious mistake for the walk to enter the Federal Republic unless it had advance permission to enter the German Democratic Republic, and that if the walk was not allowed into East Germany, the resulting publicity would be very harmful to the already tense East/West relationship. The West Germans were also concerned about the effect on the September Federal elections if the march went wrong; they worried the resulting political grandstanding would swing votes in favour of the right.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore,

33 Memo from April Carter and Bayard Rustin to AJ Muste April 13, 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

34 The Easter March Against Atomic Weapons was founded by Konrad Tempel and Helga Stolle along with members of their Action Group for Nonviolence in Hamburg in 1960. After the Social Democrat’s Fight Atomic Death campaign faded into obscurity in the late 1950s the Easter Marches became the primary venue for antinuclear protest.

35 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

36 Holger Nehring: National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957–1964, p. 564.

37 Report on meeting held in Germany, 22 and 23 April 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

if a demonstration was held at the border protesting the German Democratic Republic's decision it would serve only to intensify Cold War tensions between the two German states.<sup>38</sup> Helga Tempel explained that if the march failed to reach the East and the walkers were stopped at the East German border "it would strengthen hostilities and prejudices between the East and West. [Because of this] we were a bit reluctant to have the march come."<sup>39</sup> The West German activists were working to reduce Cold War tensions and open peaceful avenues of discussion and conflict resolution between the two German states; a protest demonstration at the border, in their minds, would only exacerbate the situation.

The West German organisers also feared the consequences that might arise if the march was allowed to enter East Germany. They believed that if the march was allowed to enter the GDR and was welcomed by the Peace Council, an organ of the East German government, the West German peace activists and their respective organisations could be labelled communist sympathisers by the West German press. The West Germans were also very concerned about the possibility of the East German Peace Council attempting to hijack the march in order to promote their own message and attack the policies of the Western governments.<sup>40</sup> This was a very real concern as Tempel, Buro, and Stolle had dealt with a similar situation with communists attempting to hijack the message of the *Ostermarsch* in West Germany.<sup>41</sup>

West German peace activists found themselves in a particularly difficult situation when it came to their rhetoric. In the Federal Republic, due in part to its position as a frontline state in the Cold War and the nature of its post-war occupation, the term "peace" was considered by many to be a communist term. This was because the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union had characterised Konrad Adenauer and his policies as militaristic and had portrayed the Eastern Bloc as the peace camp in their propaganda.<sup>42</sup> This meant that every time West German peace activists employed "peace" rhetoric they were confronted with accusations of communist influence. Furthermore, their position at the frontlines of the Cold War in Europe meant that their political reality was very different from the American and British situations and this considerably restrained their field of action.<sup>43</sup>

38 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 23 May 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

39 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

40 Report on meeting held in Germany, 22 and 23 April 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

41 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

42 Holger Nehring: *Americanized Protests?: The British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons and the Pacifist Roots of the West German New Left, 1957–64*, p. 218.

43 Holger Nehring: *Politics of Security British and West German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War: 1945–1970*, p. 32.

When Konrad and Helga joined in organising the march, it seemed to them that everything had already been decided. They often got the impression that the Americans were not careful enough to listen to their European counterparts and did not include their concerns in the decision making process. Helga recalled, “When we heard about it [the Committee for Nonviolent Action March] we only had the possibility to help when they came through West Germany rather than plan anything about the march.”<sup>44</sup> April Carter and Bayard Rustin recognised the discomfort of West German activists and informed the Executive Committee that

it was clear that the German group felt that the American Committee should have consulted in advance with European Pacifists who would be directly affected by the March, and should take into account the advice and fears of National Committees who would have to bear the repercussions of the March on their movement after the Americans had returned home.<sup>45</sup>

However, the West Germans understood that the Peace Walk was coming to Germany even if they did not provide organisational assistance, “the only other option was to say no and leave them in the street. So we helped organise the march in Germany but we were a bit afraid of what might happen at the border.”<sup>46</sup> This episode encapsulates one major problem facing transnational activism: activists have difficulty leaving their particular national perceptions behind. The American activists were often unable to see beyond their immediate protest rhetoric and goals to consider the implications of their actions in a very different political environment, particularly on the local peace movement.

Helga and Konrad Tempel handled most of the correspondence and West German promotion for the march; they sent a number of flyers advertising the march to peace organisations and activists, asking for support and donations.<sup>47</sup> Their goal was to raise enough money to support each West German activist on the march in full and pay back the Committee for Nonviolent Action for the funds spent in preparation for West German participation.<sup>48</sup> The West German organising committee felt that it was very important to completely support its activists. In its view, securing adequate funding

44 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

45 “Report on meeting held in Germany,” 22 and 23 April 1961, CNVA Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series 6, Box 14.

46 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

47 Letter from Helga Stolle to West German peace workers and peace organisations June 1961, TEM 600,03.

48 Each of the West German participants needed around 800–1000 DM for the march from the Federal Republic to Moscow. Interestingly the organisers wrote that it would be embarrassing if they could not support their marchers despite the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Letter from Helga Stolle to West German peace workers and peace organisations June 1961, TEM 600,03.

for protest actions prior to the events was an important element of a successful protest campaign. The West German organising committee had helped prepare the march route by securing permission to hold gatherings and leaflet in the towns and cities they would pass through.<sup>49</sup> In each town along the way the committee had also arranged for a local peace activist to assist the marchers. These local activists helped coordinate logistical issues such as food and housing as well as organising meetings and demonstrations.<sup>50</sup> Many opened their homes to the marchers and gave whatever assistance they could.

Another important role for the West German organising committee was the recruitment and training of West German march participants. The European organising committee wanted to ensure that the new marchers were well versed in a number of nonviolent tactics such as “ [facing] arrest non-violently, the use of a silent vigil, the effectiveness of fasting in a given situation, and attitude toward Police.”<sup>51</sup> They also wanted to make sure that all were familiar with the pacifist writings of Henry David Thoreau and Gandhi.<sup>52</sup> Konrad Tempel was put in charge of West German march participants’ training. His training sessions included: self-discipline, cooperation, and accepting or not accepting leadership.<sup>53</sup>

Konrad Tempel’s training sessions dealt with some of the nuance of Gandhian nonviolence. According to Konrad, it was not enough to be willing to suffer abuse for your cause in a spirit of nonviolence. Konrad taught that nonviolent action, which could involve painful sacrifice, required intelligent action. One’s actions must have purpose; blindly following orders was not part of Gandhi’s concept of *satyagraha*. Nonviolent action, based on Gandhian principles, was not the same as passive resistance. Gandhi wrote that *satyagraha* consisted of three elements “Satyagraha is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatsoever; and it ever insists upon truth.”<sup>54</sup> Konrad also sought to instill the basic elements of what Sean Chabot calls the Gandhian repertoire, a set of rules of conduct for protest actions. Sean Chabot describes both the individual and organisational levels of the Gandhian repertoire,

49 Dr. Andreas Buro, interview by author, Grävenwiesbach, Germany, 16 July 2013.

50 Jerry Lehmann: *We Walked to Moscow*, Raymond 1963, p. 47.

51 Training for Team Members, 28 April 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

52 Ibid.

53 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

54 Mahatma Gandhi: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. 19, New Delhi 2000, p. 350.

At the individual level, the Gandhian repertoire outlined a code of discipline for participants in direct action campaigns. Everyone was supposed to suffer the anger of an opponent without retaliation, avoid the use of insults or any form of violence, willingly submit to arrest or punishment, and obey the orders of group leaders.<sup>55</sup>

Konrad specifically focused on each of these components of the individual's responsibility in his training sessions. The application of the repertoire at the organisational level required a different set of responsibilities, "At the strategic and organizational level, the Gandhian repertoire emphasized self-reliance, honorable negotiation with the authorities, self-discipline, and openness in communication."<sup>56</sup> While there were no formal training sessions for the march organisers, all were well read on the principles of Gandhian nonviolent action, and throughout the peace walk they adhered to the Gandhian repertoire.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, a number of West German peace activists joined the march. These included a number of young student activists who had been chosen to participate by the West German committee. They all spoke English and had proven track records in peace work in West Germany.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, each of the West German members selected by the planning committee had participated in two weekends of mandatory training to prepare them for the various political and social issues they might encounter on the march as well as train them in the basics of Gandhian nonviolent action.<sup>58</sup> Their language skills proved invaluable to the peace walk as they were frequently called upon to translate during meetings, demonstrations, and impromptu gatherings.<sup>59</sup> They were also essential when dealing with the government and police in East and West Germany.

The international cooperation efforts during the march also highlighted significant differences in the way the West German and American activists planned and executed protest actions. From the beginning, the West German activists were shocked by the way the Americans dealt with people in positions of authority. They were also shocked by what they believed to be an irresponsible lack of planning for the march. The fact that

55 Sean Chabot: *Transnational Diffusion and the African-American Reinvention of the Gandhian Repertoire*, in: Jackie Smith/Hank Johnston (eds.): *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements*, Lanham 2002, p. 101.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *History of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500,03.

58 Letter from Helga Stolle to West German peace workers and peace organisations June 1961, TEM 600,03.

59 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, p. 111.

the Americans had not worked out a detailed written agreement with the government of each country on the march route or that the Committee for Nonviolent Action had not collected enough money to finance the march beforehand stunned the West Germans.<sup>60</sup>

This difference in attitude was highlighted a number of times during the march. To the horror of the West German activists, the Americans often operated by the policy of “it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission” when dealing with the complex regulations and prohibitions in the West German towns and cities. The West Germans felt everyone should march with dignity and respect for the local community and maintain a sense of cohesiveness. They also preferred that the marchers ask permission to stop for lunch and short breaks. At the same time the American activists could not believe their eyes when a West German marcher would stop the first policeman they saw when entering a town and ask “whether we could have three, two or one leafleter on each side of the street; whether we could cross the street to get more leaflets; how often pedestrian crossings were provided; whether we should walk on the sidewalk or on the pavement edge; whether we should proceed in ones or twos.”<sup>61</sup> It is not surprising that activists from different parts of the world had different approaches to conducting a protest march. While it is clear that specific national concerns heavily influenced the participants’ political objectives, their respective cultural traditions also influenced their behaviour.

Each time the marchers were confronted with restrictions by the local authorities they refused to be intimidated or dissuaded and ultimately got their way. For the West German activists this regular confrontation with authority was undoubtedly an enlightening experience. The American activists put the Gandhian repertoire in action during these encounters with the local authorities. The West German activists, who were familiar with the Gandhian repertoire through their training with Tempel, were able to witness first-hand how *satyagraha* was a position of strength. This lesson was soon emphasised to a higher degree when civil disobedience was employed.

While the West Germans were often uncomfortable with the way the Americans dealt with authority, they respected their passion for the movement and were very impressed with their nonviolent direct-action tactics of civil disobedience. Because the marchers had not been allowed to demonstrate at any military establishments in the Federal Republic they decided to defy the authorities and stage demonstrations before they left. There was some discussion within the group and with the organising committees about how many demonstrations should be attempted and where. The Committee for Nonviolent

60 Jerry Lehmann: *We Walked to Moscow*, p. 44; Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

61 Jerry Lehmann: *We Walked to Moscow*, p. 44.

Action chairman, Abraham Johannes Muste, did not want to risk losing the march before reaching a communist country if the marchers were deported or imprisoned so he advised only one demonstration.<sup>62</sup>

The group eventually decided on four demonstrations on 4 August; the Defense Ministry in Bonn, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization barracks at Dortmund-Brackel, the Niedersachsen recruiting headquarters in Hannover, and the rocket base at Bergen-Hohne.<sup>63</sup> Each location was chosen for its connection to either the West German military or North Atlantic Treaty Organization; the Bundeswehr installations were selected to convey the message of unilateral disarmament in West Germany while the North Atlantic Treaty Organization locations were chosen as the representatives of the international body that was responsible for the preservation of peace or the escalation of violence in Central Europe. The rocket base at Bergen-Hohne was of particular significance for the peace walk because of its proximity to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The West German activists, who also chose Bergen-Hohne as a focus point of their Easter March antinuclear protests, drew clear parallels between the development of nuclear arsenals with the possibility of a nuclear war and the mass killing of the Holocaust. This provocative position left no doubt about the activists' opinion of nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic.<sup>64</sup>

The marchers sent a press release to news outlets and wrote to the police in each location notifying them of the demonstrations that would take place that Thursday, detailing exactly what they were planning to do.<sup>65</sup> They explained that the demonstrations would be peaceful and nonviolent; every demonstrator would be governed by a discipline of nonviolence in word and deed.<sup>66</sup> This too was part of the Gandhian repertoire; honourable negotiation with the authorities and openness in communication.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, by announcing their intention to stage protests and providing the authorities with specific

62 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, pp. 112–114.

63 The influence of the West German activists can be seen in the selection of the demonstration locations. The military base at Bergen-Hohne and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization barracks at Dortmund-Brackel were both locations that the 1961 *Ostermarsch* had focused on just a few months earlier. Protokoll über die Arbeitssitzung des Zentralen Ausschusses für den Ostermarsch, 20/21 January 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 200, 02.

64 *Warum Wir Marschieren*, Easter March of Atomic Weapons Opponents, Hamburg Work Group, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 100,04.

65 Report, Dortmund-Brackel Protest demonstration, 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, SCPC.

66 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, pp. 114–115.

67 Sean Chabot: *Transnational Diffusion and the African-American Reinvention of the Gandhian Repertoire*, p. 101.



information on when, where, how, and why they were protesting the march organisers helped dispel the threatening nature, unpredictability, and most importantly the chaos often associated with protest events.

The demonstrations at the rocket base at Bergen-Hohne and the recruiting headquarters in Hannover went smoothly and were unhindered by the police. The demonstrations at the Ministry of Defense in Bonn and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization barracks in Dortmund were a different matter. In Bonn the activists were apprehended by the police as soon as they left the house where they were staying. The police asked them to get in a waiting van and instead of cooperating with the police they sat down and had to be carried into the van. At the police station an officer questioned them and asked them if they knew that the planned demonstration at the Defense Ministry was forbidden. The marchers said they were aware and were then informed that they would be punished if they proceeded with the demonstration. Much to their surprise, the activists were released and all their leaflets and signs were returned to them.<sup>68</sup>

The marchers then went to the square in front of the West German Ministry of Defense and began to tell the crowd why they were there and what they were about. As soon as they raised their signs they were confiscated by the police and the marchers were arrested. In front of a large crowd of onlookers and German press they went limp in the hands of the police and were once again bodily loaded into the police van. At their trial the marchers received a sentence of a 25 DM fine each or one day in jail. They refused to pay the fine and after some confusion the court decided to simply let them go free.<sup>69</sup> Apparently the police and the court could not understand why the activists would willingly disobey an order against the demonstration even though they knew they would be punished. One of the marchers, American Barton Stone, remarked

in my opinion it is of great urgency that direct action and the concept of civil disobedience be made commonplace in the minds of the German people. For this reason I greatly respect and appreciate the German citizens who participated in the four demonstrations here at the risk of much greater punishment than the foreigners, and the many other German people who have courageously helped us.<sup>70</sup>

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization barracks at Dortmund-Brackel the situation played out a bit differently. When the marchers, along with a local march supporter, approached the main gate and began the demonstration they were immediately stopped

68 Letter from Jack Smith to Neil Haworth 3 August 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 15, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

69 Demonstranten gegen Aufrüstung in Bonn zu Geldstrafen verurteilt, in: Westdeutsches Tageblatt, 4 August 1961.

70 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, pp. 117–118, quote from p. 118.

by waiting police. The police said that they were on base property and that it was forbidden to demonstrate. The marchers pointed out that they were on a public road and cars and pedestrians had been going past the main gate all morning. To this the police responded that they had special orders to not allow anyone with signs or leaflets to demonstrate at the gate, but they could not produce any written order or regulation supporting their claim. When the activists decided to disobey the police and continue with the demonstration, the men were taken by the police and loaded into the police van. The rest of the group immediately sat down and all signs and some leaflets were confiscated. After sitting in protest for an hour, the remaining women attempted to continue on to the main gate of the base. All of their leaflets were confiscated before they reached the main gate but they were allowed to stand in silent vigil.<sup>71</sup>

After their interrogation at the police station, the men were informed that they could stand at the gate but they were not allowed to hold signs or hand out leaflets. This did not deter the men and as soon as they could they returned to the base with new signs and more leaflets. These were immediately confiscated by the police and after several more attempts to hand out leaflets one of the demonstrators was again arrested and his limp body was loaded into the police van. This process was repeated and eventually the police allowed the demonstrators to hand out their leaflets to the passing pedestrians and soldiers. With all of their signs confiscated the demonstrators made cloth signs and attached them to their jackets in defiance of the police orders. At this point the authorities had had enough and they were all arrested and carried by hand into the police van to be transported to the police station where they were detained until later that evening.<sup>72</sup> All the while the German press filmed and took photos of the demonstration and the acts of nonviolence during arrests.<sup>73</sup>

The demonstrations at the Defense Ministry in Bonn and the military base at Dortmund-Brackel were successful in a number of ways. First, the marchers were able to create dramatic scenes with their nonviolent direct-action tactics of civil disobedience that were witnessed by a large number of onlookers and German press.<sup>74</sup> This was exactly the kind of attention the activists wanted. Second, their civil disobedience coupled with nonviolence surprised the West German authorities and in a way forced them to

71 Report, Dortmund-Brackel Protestdemonstration, 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

72 Ibid.

73 Polizei verhinderte "Demonstration" von Atomwaffengegnern in Brackel, in: *Dortmunder Tageblatt*, 4 August 1961; Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, pp. 120–121.

74 Demonstranten gegen Aufrüstung in Bonn zu Geldstrafen verurteilt, in: *Westdeutsches Tageblatt*, 4 August 1961.

reconsider how they viewed peace activists.<sup>75</sup> Third, and perhaps most importantly, the efficacy of nonviolent civil disobedience had a significant impact on the West German activists involved. The experience taught Reiner Steinweg that civil disobedience worked and that the actions of just a few could shatter the indifference, blind belief in authority, and lack of moral courage to stand up for one's beliefs that seemed to paralyse West German society.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, the success of the nonviolent tactics used in the demonstrations resounded through the rest of the West German peace movement, as well. In a report to Hugh Brock, editor of *Peace News* in London, Helga wrote "the impressive non-violent behaviour in the civil disobedience actions in Bonn and Dortmund will have impressed our pacifists too. Maybe after that we will find a better echo in demanding more actions of this manner."<sup>77</sup> These protest events exemplify the significance and importance of transnational cooperation to the development of West German protest culture. The American marchers showed the West Germans how nonviolent civil disobedience could make even a small protest action have an impact and, thanks to the media, communicate its message to thousands of people.

When the march crossed over into the German Democratic Republic at the Helmstedt-Marienborn border crossing on August 7, the activists were excited and a bit apprehensive about going behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>78</sup> The East Germans welcomed them as a group but East German authorities were not very happy to host activists from West Germany. It seems that the East German authorities were worried about the presence of the West German activists and often insinuated that they were sent as spies for the Adenauer government. One American marcher wrote that, "GDR officials were also very much against having Konrad Tempel around—a West German Quaker and student who had done a lot of organising for us, and had obtained an East German visa on his own and joined us. He understood East Germans and spoke in their idiom far too effectively for the official's comfort."<sup>79</sup> The other West German marchers were also closely watched but none were individually detained or arrested while they marched through the GDR.<sup>80</sup>

75 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, p. 118, p. 121.

76 Rainer Steinweg: *Der Grosse Marsch Von San Francisco nach Moskau, Hohenhausen bei Lemgo 1968*, p. 8.

77 Letter to Hugh Brock from Helga Stolle August 16, 1961. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500, 03.

78 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting August 21, 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

79 Jerry Lehmann: *We Walked to Moscow*, p. 51.

80 Bulletin Copy East Germany, CNVA Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series 6, Box 16.

At times the West German organisers were concerned that the Americans became too emboldened by their success in dealing with the authorities and that they would eventually push too hard and seriously jeopardise the march. In the GDR the marchers pushed the authorities to the limit and the concerns of the West German activists were confirmed.<sup>81</sup> The march was plagued with problems in the GDR that primarily came from the state-sponsored German Peace Committee.<sup>82</sup> The German Peace Committee was eager to join the march and capitalise on the moment to push their message for peace, often carrying their own signs and passing their own leaflets around.<sup>83</sup> The problem was that the East German message of peace called for West German disarmament and condemned the “militarism” of the Federal Republic and the United States while at the same time not saying anything about the nuclear weapons and military build-up in East Germany and other communist countries.<sup>84</sup>

This was part of a struggle for the legitimacy of the politics of peace that had been going on for more than a decade between peace organisations in the two Germanies. In the GDR the state-sponsored German Peace Committee was the only peace organisation allowed to exist and it was strictly controlled by the East German Socialist Unity Party (SED). The traditional German peace organisation, the German Peace Society (DFG), was banned in the GDR in 1949 and consequently all peace rhetoric coming out East Germany was dominated by the agenda of the communist state.

The activists could not abide the hijacking of their march and they constantly objected to the East German participants’ actions. The marchers believed that the integrity of the peace walk was being compromised and they frequently resorted to non-cooperation and would sit down and halt the march in protest.<sup>85</sup> This action would earn them a brief respite from the East German signs and leaflets but they always came back. By the time the march reached the outskirts of East Berlin on Sunday, 13 August, the tension between the Peace Committee of the GDR and the marchers was nearing the boiling point.

Geopolitical tensions were also nearing a boiling point in the contested city of Berlin. The current Berlin Crisis had been ongoing since the fall of 1958 when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech in which he demanded that the Western powers

81 Letter to Hugh Brock from Helga Stolle August 16, 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung TEM 500, 03.

82 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, pp. 130–133.

83 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013; Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 21 August 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

84 Letter to Hugh Brock from Helga Stolle August 16, 1961. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500, 03.

85 Bulletin Copy East Germany, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

pull their forces out of West Berlin. This ultimatum sparked a three year crisis over the future of the city that culminated in early August of 1961, the very same moment the San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace entered the city. In the summer of 1961, President John F. Kennedy met with Khrushchev in Vienna to address the ongoing issue of Berlin but they were unable to reach an agreement. Following the conference Khrushchev once again demanded the Western powers withdraw from Berlin. Kennedy responded by activating 150,000 reservists and increasing defence expenditures, in preparation for a potential conflict over the future of the city.<sup>86</sup>

At the core of the crisis was the difficult question of what to do with Germany in the long term and the Committee for Nonviolent Action leadership was well aware of this. Prior to the march reaching Europe, the Committee for Nonviolent Action executive committee had decided to avoid the issue of German reunification and only generally make reference to it in regard to the need for disarmament.<sup>87</sup> They believed the issue to be “too politically complex” to broach on the peace walk.<sup>88</sup> Unbeknownst to them, the march would find itself at the centre of a “politically complex” and extremely dangerous crisis that became a defining moment of the Cold War.

Early in the morning on Sunday, 13 August, East German workers under police guard sealed off the borders of West Berlin with barbed wire. This action, ordered by East German leader Walter Ulbricht, was an attempt to stop the flood of people fleeing the GDR to West Berlin and to solve the “Berlin question” that had plagued the East-West relationship.<sup>89</sup> The heightened tensions between the East and the West were coming to a head in Berlin and many feared war between the superpowers. West Berliners gathered in protest at the border at the Brandenburg Gate, the very place the Committee for Nonviolent Action had planned to march a few days later to symbolise the walk’s crossing into the communist East.<sup>90</sup> At the same time many East Berliners congregated and protested the closing of the border.<sup>91</sup> The members of the walk for peace found themselves

86 For more on the Berlin Crisis see Gerhard Wettig: Chruschtschows Berlin-Krise 1958 bis 1963: Drohpolitik und Mauerbau, Munich 2006; Kitty Newman: Macmillan, Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis 1958–1960, London 2007; Frederick Kempe: Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth, New York 2011.

87 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting March 16, 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

88 Ibid.

89 By the time the border was closed almost 160,000 people had fled to West Berlin in 1961 alone. Dennis L. Bark/David Gress: A History of West Germany, vol. 1, From Shadow to Substance: 1945–1963, Oxford 1989, pp. 464–470.

90 Pertti Ahoen: Death at the Berlin Wall, Oxford 2011, pp. 21–22; Jerry Lehmann: We Walked to Moscow, p. 52.

91 Around 60,000 East Berliners worked in West Berlin and almost all of these *Grenzgänger* were cut off from their places of employment literally overnight. Pertti Ahoen: Death

in the middle of a very tense political situation. To make things even more difficult, their only source of information was the German Peace Committee leaders with whom they had been having so many problems.<sup>92</sup> It was not until later that night that the marchers were able to get in contact with Abraham Johannes Muste who advised them that the situation was very dangerous and to not try and walk from East Berlin to West Berlin. Abraham Johannes Muste asked them to stay where they were and that he would try to reach them the next day.<sup>93</sup>

That same night a representative from the East German Ministry of the Interior arrived to meet with Bradford Lyttle. He outlined the situation in Berlin and said that under no circumstances would the march be allowed to enter Berlin. Furthermore, the government would send buses the following morning that would take them to Stalinstadt on the East German-Polish border where the marchers would cross into Poland and continue the walk for peace. After talking with the team, Lyttle informed the government representative that they rejected the East German government's proposal and offered to walk around Berlin instead of entering West Berlin through the Brandenburg Gate.<sup>94</sup> The representative from the East German Ministry of the Interior flatly refused to negotiate and informed the marchers that buses would arrive in the morning to take them to the Polish border. When the buses arrived the marchers refused to board them and once again their limp bodies were carried into the waiting vehicles as they practiced nonviolent non-cooperation. Because they would not comply, the East Germans decided to deport the marchers back to West Germany instead of taking them to Stalinstadt near the Polish border.<sup>95</sup>

At the time it seemed that the march was over. They did not know if the Polish government would allow them to enter the country to continue the walk and, based on the response of the East German authorities, the marchers feared that their goal of reaching Moscow was in jeopardy.<sup>96</sup> The West German activists on the march felt that the Americans had pushed the East German authorities into an impossible situation.<sup>97</sup> West

at the Berlin Wall, pp. 21–22.

- 92 Bulletin Copy East Germany, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- 93 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, p. 138.
- 94 Bulletin Copy East Germany, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- 95 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 21 August 1961. CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection; Report of telephone conversation with A.J. Muste in West Berlin, 16 August 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- 96 Bulletin Copy East Germany, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 16, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- 97 Letter to Hugh Brock from Heinz Kraschutzki, 15 August 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 600, 06.

German activist Andreas Buro spoke with the team and got the impression that "...the group did not understand the really difficult and explosive situation in Berlin and the DDR."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, because of this lack of understanding, the group's perception of the East German authorities, and their treatment of the marchers, was inaccurate. Helga reported, "It seemed to him [Buro] as if the group understood the behavior of the officials from the [East German] Peace Council and the police as a special oppression against the March itself, and not as an outcome of the really new and unforeseeable situation."<sup>99</sup>

This inability to fully grasp the situation was due in part to the fact that the American marchers came from a different political reality.<sup>100</sup> Germans, from both the FRG and the GDR, recognised more fully the gravity of the situation because they, to varying degrees, lived in a state of constant fear of war. The Germans thoroughly understood that they lived on the frontlines of the next war and that Berlin was the flashpoint. This belief was even more pronounced for German activists who "imagined the Cold War arms race as a constant pre-war situation."<sup>101</sup> This belief, coupled with their personal experiences and memories of the Second World War, something the American activists lacked, dictated the German response to the situation that Sunday.

The West German organising committee felt very strongly that marchers had been "too inflexible" and that this was because of a lack of preparation. The West German committee "often got the impression that their knowledge of the Eastern countries and their understanding of their way to live and to act was too small to react adequately to the political possibilities without obscuring the idea of the march or jeopardising to complete [sic] the March to Moscow."<sup>102</sup> Unlike many of the activists on the peace walk, each of the West German team members had experience in peace work and had been specifically trained in preparation for this march. The Americans, however, did not seem to be prepared to deal with potential issues that could, and often did, arise on the march. The West German committee reported:

The team members were not all experienced in peace work as they were said to be. Most Americans and some Europeans had not been trained or briefed by their National Committees, so they came without any certain expectations while those trained had

98 Letter to Hugh Brock from Helga Stolle, 16 August 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung TEM 500, 03.

99 Ibid.

100 Holger Nehring: *National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957–1964*, p. 561.

101 Holger Nehring: *Politics of Security British and West German Protest Movements and the Early Cold War: 1945–1970*, pp. 11–12.

102 Letter to Hugh Brock from Helga Stolle, 16 August 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 500, 03.

learned to demand a certain behavior from themselves and therefore had certain ideas about the way the group and individuals should act, what knowledge they ought to have, and how decisions should be found. In fact there was a serious lack of willingness to learn about [...] the special conditions of the foreign countries and to act according to these conditions.<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, the committee wrote that in some cases the marchers chose not to utilise the experience of the West German activists: “Those who were experienced in the march were not willing to listen to the opinion of the new comers, who often knew the situation in their own country better than the veteran walkers.”<sup>104</sup> The combination of inadequate training and a willingness to defy the authorities when they believed the integrity of the march was at risk could, at times, end up putting the whole project in jeopardy. In short, the West Germans believed that while the group was in the GDR they “demanded too much from the officials, overestimated their own power and meaning and underestimate[d] the difficult situation of the authorities in a communist totalitarian state.”<sup>105</sup>

After several days of negotiation the marchers secured visas to enter Poland and continue the walk for peace.<sup>106</sup> The team had learned their lesson and decided to be more compliant with the authorities for the rest of the march.<sup>107</sup> They would not practice civil disobedience for the rest of the walk but would always work to resolve any issues with nonviolence and reasonable discussion. Upon reflection, the team realised that civil disobedience simply did not work in the East because there was no audience for the act and, instead of imprisonment for their actions, they were simply deported out of the country.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, direct action protest tactics such as civil disobedience were concepts that worked in Western democracies but had limited cogency in dictatorships. As it turned out the marchers did not encounter the same problems in Poland and the Soviet Union as they had in France, the Federal Republic of Germany, or the German Democratic Republic. The Soviets, not wanting to seem hostile to the international peace movement, welcomed the marchers to campaign in the Soviet Union and influenced Poland to do the same.<sup>109</sup>

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Minutes of Executive Committee meeting 21 August 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

107 Bradford Lyttle: *You Come with Naked Hands: The Story of the San Francisco to Moscow March for Peace*, p. 149.

108 Report of telephone conversation with A.J. Muste in West Berlin, 20 August 1961, CNVA Papers, Series 6, Box 14, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

109 For an excellent overview of the march with analysis of Soviet, Polish, and East German sources see: Günter Wernicke/Lawrence S. Wittner: *Lifting the Iron Curtain: The Peace March to Moscow of 1960–1961*.



The members of the American-European March for Peace were able to achieve their goal and enter the Soviet Union in late September, 1961. During their march across the Soviet Union they were met with friendly curiosity from the local peasants and had a number of opportunities to talk with the people about peace and nuclear disarmament.<sup>110</sup> After 5000 miles, seven countries, and ten months of walking, the march reached Moscow on 3 October, 1961. There they handed out thousands of leaflets and spoke to large crowds every night. They were shuttled around by Soviet officials the entire five days they were there but for the most part they were allowed to speak about their cause without restriction.<sup>111</sup> They found the Russian people to be very welcoming and quite curious about their message. The activists were delighted to discover that even behind the Iron Curtain people were eager to hear their message of peace and disarmament.<sup>112</sup>

At the same time, the march proved to many West German activists that transnational cooperation was possible and could be a very effective way of promoting a message. This was the first time that many of them had interacted with American peace activists on a personal level and after walking and doing peace work together for nearly five months across four countries, they believed that they had achieved something great and had raised the bar for international cooperation. While they did not always agree with the methods and tactics of the American activists, the West Germans could not deny the efficacy of nonviolent direct action and were particularly impressed with the civil disobedience tactics employed by the Americans. Helga Tempel was particularly influenced by the Americans' flexibility, especially after they had passed through the Iron Curtain, "Their willingness to adapt to the changing situation in the East was impressive."<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Andreas Buro, one of the West German organisers, felt, somewhat paradoxically, that the Americans' lack of political awareness was actually something of a strength because it helped them focus on a common goal; no atomic weapons regardless of existing political factors.<sup>114</sup>

The efforts undertaken by the organisers of the march to create a common discourse on peace and nuclear disarmament were fraught with difficulties. Most of these difficulties stemmed from the multitude of national and regional perspectives which the marchers brought with them. The peace walk also highlighted an important function of a transnational social space: the ability to transfer ideas. Up to this point, neither the conscientious objection groups nor the *Ostermarsch* movement had used civil disobedience as a protest tactic. The primary methods of protest employed by these activists were organised vigils, such as the protest vigil against atomic weapons *Mahnwache*

110 Rainer Steinweg: *Der Grosse Marsch von San Francisco nach Moskau*, pp. 18–19.

111 Günter Wernicke/Lawrence S. Wittner: *Lifting the Iron Curtain: The Peace March to Moscow of 1960–1961*, p. 914.

112 Rainer Steinweg: *Der Grosse Marsch von San Francisco nach Moskau*, pp. 24–26.

113 Konrad and Helga Tempel, interview by author, Ahrensburg, Germany, 24 July 2013.

114 Dr. Andreas Buro, interview by author, Grävenwiesbach, Germany, 16 July 2013.

in 1958 organised by the *Aktionskreis für Gewaltlosigkeit* under the leadership of Helga and Konrad, leafleting campaigns, such as the *Aktion 4/3* campaign by the *Verband der Kriegsdienstverweigerer* to raise awareness about the constitutional right to conscientiously object to military service, and protest marches, best exemplified by the *Ostermarsch* events of 1960 and 1961 against nuclear weapons. In every case the protest organisations operated within the boundaries of law and were careful to comply with local authorities. This was important to the conscientious objection organisations and the *Ostermarsch* movement because they did not want to be branded as lawless hooligans and lose their potential for influence in the public sphere. Nonviolence was always a part of their protest culture but civil disobedience, possibly because they had not yet seen it employed, was not a common tactic used by the West German peace movement.

The ideas of direct action through nonviolent civil disobedience that were put to use during the San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace had a strong effect on the West German peace activists.<sup>115</sup> In fact, the Executive Committee of the *Verband der Kriegsdienstverweigerer*, including Helga, Konrad, and Wilhelm Keller, met in Hamburg on 10 September, 1961 and decided to set up an initiative committee to attempt to found a German *Komitee der 100*.<sup>116</sup> This group was based on the British “Committee of 100” that was organised in 1960 by the famous British pacifist Bertrand Russell and other anti-war activists. The organisation would be dedicated to the use of mass nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience and had worked with the West German peace activists to coordinate events. The goal was to found a West German organisation that was interested in direct action and could explore the possibility of employing nonviolent civil disobedience.<sup>117</sup> Karl A. Otto, in his history of the German Easter Marches, argued that the creation of the *Komitee der 100* would give West German pacifists a vehicle to reassert their dominance within the Easter March.<sup>118</sup> At the demonstrations in Bonn and Dortmund-Brackel during San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace the West German activists saw first-hand how powerful nonviolent civil disobedience could be. Furthermore, they recognised that—when civil disobedience was performed in a spirit of nonviolence—it was not identified as dangerous lawlessness but rather as a peaceful way of drawing attention to their message against war and nuclear weapons. It could help them overcome the rigid boundaries of politics and allow the West German activists to influence policy making from outside the traditional realm of political parties.

115 Letter from Christopher Farley to Helga Stolle, 8 October, 196, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 100, 01.

116 Letter to Bertrand Russell at the Committee of 100 from Helga Stolle and Wilhelm Keller, September 10, 1961, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, TEM 700, 02.

117 Ibid.

118 Karl A. Otto: Vom Ostermarsch zur APO: Geschichte der außerparlamentarischen Opposition in der Bundesrepublik 1960–1970, pp. 113–118.

Activists can never really escape the political realities of their respective countries. However, these struggles illustrate the protest culture of the West German peace movement and offer insight into the unique character and immediate concerns of the movement. Ultimately, the march highlights the development of the peace movement in West Germany, from early opposition to rearmament and conscription in the mid-1950s to the major national and transnational protests against nuclear weapons and war in the 1960s, and illustrates how the movement became a political as well as social force in West German society.

This march also confirmed for the West German activists the importance of careful planning and thorough training. Even though the march was not terminated just outside of East Berlin, it very well could have been and that was the kind of risk the West Germans did not want to take. Most importantly, the San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace was an excellent opportunity for the West German activists to establish and develop personal and institutional connections like never before. Those who participated in the organising and coordinating efforts of the march gained valuable experience in transnational cooperation that would pay dividends for the West German peace movement. The five West German activists who walked from the West German-French border in Aachen all the way to Moscow learned a great deal about their neighbours to the East and discovered first hand that peace was a genuine concern for those living on the other side of the Iron Curtain. After returning to West Germany, these activists, when confronted by cynics telling them to go preach peace and disarmament to the Soviets, could have confidently answered “We have gone to the Soviet Union and we protested for peace and disarmament in front of the Kremlin!”

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