

Bringing children up within the family in the spirit of peace and humanism

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ABSTRACT

Living in peace, liberation of humankind from exploitation, securing a job for everyone, equality, social security and extensive social and medical protection for all people, in particular for mother and child, are the basis for the way of life and for bringing up children within the family in the GDR. Women and mothers take part in the peace movement in different ways; 92 percent of them go out to work. This article discusses the humanist policies of society concerning the family. Beginning early with a love of peace and solidarity, bringing up children by action and conveying conclusions and experiences about war and its causes are basic positions of peace education within the family.

In this day and age, when the struggle to safeguard peace has become the crucial issue for the survival of humankind, bringing up the rising generation must be fully devoted to the idea of peace. The family, the smallest cell of society, has been committed to this principle. The family can prosper only in peace. Today men, women and children would be victims of the nuclear holocaust.

In the German Democratic Republic policy and education have the same aim: to give everyone the possibility to live in peace, social security and to develop all his or her talents. The family can settle down in these humanistic efforts, bringing up their children.

Bringing up children in the spirit of peace and humanism is a worldwide aim. The need for children to be brought up in the spirit of peace was particularly stressed in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1959.

Peace policy of the GDR

The German Democratic Republic has been committed to this principle since the very first day of its existence. The vow of the first President of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck, to do everything so that a war never again emanates from German soil, has been taken up millions of times and determines the policies in this country. Today there is the threat of a nuclear war in which there can be neither victor nor defeated. The General Secretary of the Socialist United Party (SED), Erich Honecker, in June 1985 strongly emphasized once more that the GDR has made use of and will continue to make use of all opportunities to bring about a change in the international

situation. It is necessary to put a stop to the arms race on earth, definitely not let it spread to space, and give the peaceful future of humankind a chance. The GDR is a small country with sixteen million inhabitants. However, it is a highly developed state in the middle of Europe. It is strongly linked with the countries of the socialist community of states and supports all efforts made to secure peace in the sense of a coalition of common sense.

The state's clear commitment to peace, in the interests of preserving and developing further the human race, is also deeply rooted in the consciousness of its citizens. The contribution of the individual to developing socialist society at her or his place of work by practising socialist democracy, and by bringing up the children, is regarded as work for peace. Mothers, in particular, feel it their duty to act according to this basic principle: to give birth to new life implies the wish to preserve life. The equality of women has been implemented to the full in the GDR. Today, 92 percent of women go out to work and 87.8 percent of these have completed a course of vocational training; 4.9 million women are affiliated to the Confederation of Free German Trade Unions (FDGB).

The Democratic Women's League of Germany (DFD) plays an important part in the mobilization of women. Nearly 1.5 million women belong to it. The women from the DFD have always done a lot when it came down to bringing the forces of peace together. In 1985 alone, 6,394 peace rallies took place in the towns and villages of the GDR on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the International Women's Day, with the theme "Now more than ever: let's struggle for peace." Here, the women formulated their own

demand for peace, and also in the name of their children, and declared their willingness to carry out humanist deeds.

Peace and humanism are two basic values of socialist society which are inseparably linked with each other. The history of humanism shows that the all-round development of the individual has always been one of the ideals of progressive thinkers. Striving for humanity and a humane form of existence goes along with convictions of the educational and developmental capabilities of people, as well as respect for their dignity and personality. It demands an all-round training, and freed use and development of their creative powers and talents. Humanistic endeavours have always been aimed at the higher development of humankind. Basic demands like the liberation of humankind from exploitation, securing a job for everyone, social security, and the participation of the working people in state politics are fulfilled in the GDR. The humanist character of society becomes especially clear in concrete terms where families are concerned. The fact alone that there is no unemployment in the GDR, that every child has secure prospects and will also get a job after having undergone vocational training, characterises the policy directed towards the welfare of the people.

However, as an expression of humanist conditions, it is also significant for the family that the mothers are free to choose when and how many children they give birth to. Contraceptives are prescribed by doctors free of charge and, if a woman should wish so, a termination of pregnancy is carried out free of charge and under full medical supervision. Extensive social and medical protection for all people, in particular for mother and child, emphasizes the humanistic character of the state. For example, in the GDR, pregnancy leave is twenty-six weeks. After the birth of the second child the mother receives one year of paid holiday, which is increased to one and a half years after the birth of the third and every further child.

Concept for bringing up children

Our concept for bringing up children is also based on these basic prerequisites. The dream of humanists and progressive educationalists of the past "to teach everything to all children," demanded by T. A. Komensky, the famous Czech pedagogue of the sixteenth century, is put into practice in socialist society. Socialist society devotes all its attention to the education of children and young people. Through the integrated educational system it provides an extensive general education in which the polytechnical component particularly meets the demands of scientific and technological progress. The ten-year polytechnical secondary school is compulsory for all

children and oriented towards developing each child to the best extent according to his or her capabilities.

Education in this country is particularly committed to the concern of bringing up children in the spirit of peace. Education for peace, for international friendship and solidarity—these are tasks that are laid down in the Constitution of the GDR, in the law on the integrated educational system and in the Family Code. The Constitution of the GDR guarantees every citizen equal rights, irrespective of their sex and race, their social background and position, philosophy or religion. One of the basic principles laid down in the Constitution is that the policies of the GDR serve peace and socialism, international understanding and security. Militarist and revanchist propaganda in all forms, warmongering and the manifestation of hatred against creeds, races and nations are punished as crimes (Constitution, Art. 6, para. 5).

The generally accepted rules of international law serving peace and peaceful international cooperation are binding upon the state and every citizen (Constitution, Art. 8, para. 1). On this basis, childrearing methods have developed which on principle break away from the militarist spirit in education. It is the lesson of the two world wars and the knowledge about the consequences of a possible nuclear inferno which have taught the people of the GDR that safeguarding peace is the supreme task of this day and age. The rising generation must also be brought up in this spirit. There is close interaction between the parental home and the school.

Beginning early with a love of peace

One of the basic ideas is that bringing up children to have a love of peace can begin at a very early age. In the kindergartens, which are attended by 95 percent of children aged between three and six, our children have learnt for over thirty years the song about the "little white dove of peace." It tells the story of a little white dove which everyone knows and which flies across the country, linking up the people who want peace. This song, sung in the kindergarten and at school, in the Pioneer organisation and at home, gives rise to questions and discussions. The children see how their parents take part in peace demonstrations themselves; they hear about children in other countries whose lives are in danger. They do completely understand the concern of the song. They show this not only by their words but also by their efforts to do something themselves. And so we reach the second idea which also has some bearing on the bringing up of children within the family: Bringing up children in the spirit of peace and humanism takes place by action.

Bringing up children by action

There are many different activities which children are encouraged to do to give mutual help, solidarity and cooperation while learning and to organize their leisure time nicely. This can be illustrated with an example: The help given by children to the elderly and to mothers with several children is known as the "Timur movement." (Timur is a character from a Soviet children's book. With his friends Timur helped the wives of those fighting in the Great Patriotic War.) Helping in everyday things, accepting responsibilities in their free time, makes children aware that their strength too can be used, that helping others is part of human life. At the same time valuable ties arise between old and young, the visit by the children bringing joy into the lives of the elderly people. Help and daily chores are also part of the bringing-up process within the family. Not only because the children can learn and try out here to manage everyday life, but also because by giving out duties, basic elements of a sense of responsibility are developed without which the future adult citizen cannot fully realize her or his democratic participation in shaping the destiny of the society.

Bringing up children by action has proved its worth in many ways and has shown the children the opportunities that exist for them to take part in the struggle for peace. Thousands of children, for example, collected signatures to free Angela Davis. Exercise books and pencils were collected for the children in Nicaragua. Efforts made by children to collect recyclable materials raise a lot of money every year which is used in the interests of international solidarity. In the children's holiday camps in the GDR, where in summer our children spend their holidays with friends from various countries, the children declare their desire to lead a meaningful life in peace. In school essays which are devoted to giving an idea of their own future, it becomes clear that the children know very well that they can choose whatever career they wish. They write about starting a family and have fixed ideas about life in the future. However, many also declare: "the most important thing is that we still have peace."

Experience and knowledge

A third basic idea which is particularly significant for bringing up children in the spirit of peace and humanism refers to the conclusions and experience conveyed to our children about war and its causes.

In the last forty years children in the GDR have grown up in peace. The thirty-year-olds of today no longer know the hardship of the post-war period. They know about war,

hunger, poverty only from what is conveyed in stories, in lessons, from what they hear and watch on the radio and television about war and devastation in other countries, and from looking back at history. The knowledge of the danger which threatens the world also presents itself to the children; however, it is important to help children to digest the problems so that fear and the pictures of terror are not predominant in the child's imagination.

As early as in the first decisions to democratize the German schools in 1946 it was provided that any militarist ideas should be removed from lessons and text books. There is no glorification of war. Books written in the GDR, films and other works of art, encourage humanist thought and action. But the history of humankind up to this point was not one of peace. Therefore, it is necessary to teach the up and coming generation to ask about the causes, about those responsible who profited from war. Although, under given conditions, various factors have an effect on war policies and the emergence of wars, the definite basic causes are ultimately of a socioeconomic nature. Nowadays it is, in particular, the most powerful and aggressive monopoly groups of the arms industry, united in the military-industrial complex, who are interested in a war policy. Making the children aware of the causes of war and the threat of war policies is linked to educating them toward all willingness to fight against these causes. The children and young people in the GDR know very well that the struggle for peace can only be successful if people ally with each other, forgetting the boundaries of their countries and their different social systems.

That is why bringing up children to love peace always includes bringing them up to practise international solidarity. Bringing up the rising generation to love peace in the GDR also lets them know about the strength of the peace movement. The school children know about the great efforts made by the USSR and the socialist community of states: for example, the solemn declaration of the USSR never to be the first to use the atom bomb, the numerous proposals for disarmament and a return to the policy of *détente*. And they have strong feelings of solidarity with the forces of the peace movement in all countries.

The boys and girls know about the Soviet disarmament initiatives. They know that the GDR is still ready to act on the proposal submitted by the Swedish government to create a zone in Central Europe free of battlefield nuclear weapons. The young generation is aware of the need for protecting everything that the working people here have achieved through their own work. The young people here are being prepared to defend their socialist homeland. Due to the gen-

eral peace policy pursued by the GDR, this is not inconsistent with their education in the spirit of peace and humanism.

Security in the family

Families in the GDR play a crucial part in bringing the children up in this way. They are particularly important for forming ideas and standards of value and for the development of feelings in the children.

Knowledge about moral standards and feelings results from experiencing social relations within the family, the interrelation between parents and children and between the brothers and sisters. It also results from the way the children experience and assimilate social relations with their neighbours, the social environment and life in the society. It is a determining factor for the child, to know what family members are pleased about at home, what hurts or annoys them, what they sympathize with, what they are indifferent about. Today, as television brings information about the whole world into one's own living room, the task of the family to help their children properly evaluate and classify these diverse impressions is gaining more and more importance.

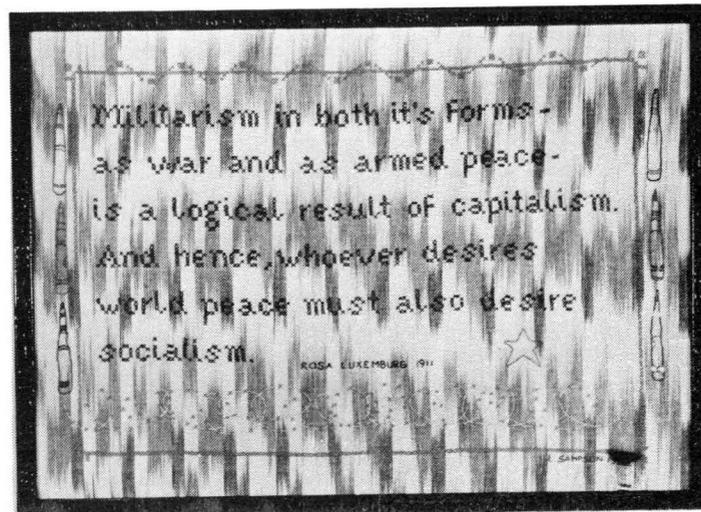
Some people raise the question of whether the upbringing in the family is still important and can have an influence in a country in which 92 percent of the women go out to work, in which by far the majority of pre-school age children attend crèches and kindergartens. Numerous studies made in the GDR have proved that, although the mother works, the

importance of family upbringing has even increased. It is true that the mother does not have so much time to spend with her child. However she puts her whole personality into bringing the child up. If she herself is active in life this will have a productive effect on the upbringing. She can use her own experience of life in many ways in order to prepare the children for their own lives. On the other hand, the father also plays a larger part in bringing up the children. A new sort of sharing of the tasks arises, the old roles losing their basis.

Of course such a development is a complex process. Questions about the proper use of time and opportunities within the family to bring up children are often discussed. But the fact that it becomes clear again and again in the most diverse studies that nine out of ten children and young people feel happy at home is evidence of the security they enjoy within the family.

When Clara Zetkin proposed in Copenhagen in 1910 to have an International Women's Day every year to struggle for equality and peace, she called upon the women to bring up their children in such a way that the "army of progress and peace" would continue to grow larger.

Mothers and fathers in the GDR bring up their children fully aware of the actual threat to the whole of humankind, as well as of the necessity to maintain peace. They can do so on the basis of social security in a socialist country that since its very beginning has taken care of the welfare and peaceful development of coming generations.



MILITARISM, embroidery (18" x 25"), by Leslie Sampson.