

Hierbleiber, Protestant boycotts, and rallies: How important was the role of conscience and dissent in the run-up to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

The paper is concerned with examining the thesis that the fall of the Berlin Wall was precipitated by popular expressions of conscience and dissent. It examines elements of popular consciousness in the GDR, such as the birth of the *Hierbleiber* as a developing form of civil society. It also analyses the environment used by regional oppositional movements to evade, such as Protestant churches and concerted boycotts organized by activists in the run-up to the 1989 communal elections. The paper further argues that expressions of dissent and conscience were pivotal to the fall of the Wall by highlighting the November rally which saw 500.000 people demanding freedom of speech and the renunciation of the SED's leading role. In spite of the GDR's efforts to conceal and to crush political discontent, popular ideological conformity was replaced with a feeling of distrust and betrayal by the Party. The methodology of the paper makes use of both primary and secondary evidence which ranges from counts of protesting groups in areas like Leipzig and Berlin, church grass-roots initiatives and Vaclav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless*.