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Easter March

The **Easter March** is a political expression of the peace movement in Germany, supported by pacifist or anti-militarist motives, regularly carried out annually in the form of demonstrations and rallies. Their origins go back to British nuclear weapons opponents of the campaign for nuclear disarmament with the "Aldermaston Marches" in the 1950s.^[1]



Peace symbol of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

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Background

The impetus for marching actions are both in Great Britain and in Germany by peace activists of the War Resisters' International / International of the Opponents of Military Service (IdK e. V.) went out. Their commitment to this day is: "War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war either directly or indirectly and to work on the elimination of all causes of war."

The British *Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War* engaged in non-violent actions "to achieve the total renunciation of nuclear war and its weapons as a first step in disarmament by Britain and all other countries" ("to assist the conducting of non-violent direct action to obtain the total renunciation of nuclear war and its weapons by Britain and all other countries as a first step in disarmament"), and was a founding This organized a march from London to the Aldermaston nuclear research center at Easter 1958 and mobilized around 10,000 people against nuclear armament.^[2] From this, such demonstration marches at Easter also developed

in other Western European countries. Only in Germany have they developed a traditional form of expression of the peace movement that still takes place regularly annually under the name of *Easter marches*.

Easter marches in the Federal Republic of Germany

Beginnings

The Hessian Naturefriends Youth organized a forerunner of the Easter marches in 1959 on the occasion of their state youth meeting. The march, still under the motto *fight for nuclear death*, led from Hanau-Steinheim to Offenbach am Main. Co-organizer was Klaus Vack, who was elected State Youth Secretary of the Hessian Naturefriends Youth in 1958, who co-designed and organized eight Easter marches from 1961.^[3]



Easter March 1960 from Hamburg to Bergen-Hohne

In 1960, the first Easter marches were initiated out of the pacifist action circle for non-violence in the Federal Republic of Germany after press releases reported the start of testing of Honest John nuclear missiles near the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Konrad Tempel, like his later wife Helga Stolle correspondent of PEACE NEWS (a pacifist magazine of the peace movement in the United Kingdom^[4]), friends with members of the Direct Action Committee and Quakers, was able to win pacifist groups in Hamburg (see photo), Bremen, Hanover and Braunschweig for a North German multi-day star march. The demonstration ended on Easter Monday 1960 with around 1,200 participants at the Bergen-Hohne troop training ground.^[5]

As a result of this first Easter march, there was a meeting in Hanover, at which it was agreed to organize several Easter marches in the Federal Republic in 1961.^[3]

Easter marches from 1960 to 1970

The then German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer declared on the 5th. April 1957 at a press conference that the new generation of tactical nuclear weapons is "nothing more than the further development of artillery. Of course, we cannot do without the fact that our troops also participate in the latest development in normal armament."^[6] He referred to a new military doctrine of the US Secretary of Defense Charles Erwin Wilson, who, in addition to the use of strategic nuclear missiles ("massive retaliation"), had also formulated a use of tactical nuclear bombs below the "Armageddon threshold" as a strategic option ("staged deterrence").

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had demanded that the USA have sole access to nuclear warheads that were suitable for shooting down by artillery with a range of 15 to 20 kilometers. The Adenauer government tried to enforce this option as part of the rearmament of the Federal Republic. However, the demand was rejected by the Allies, especially the USA. To this day,

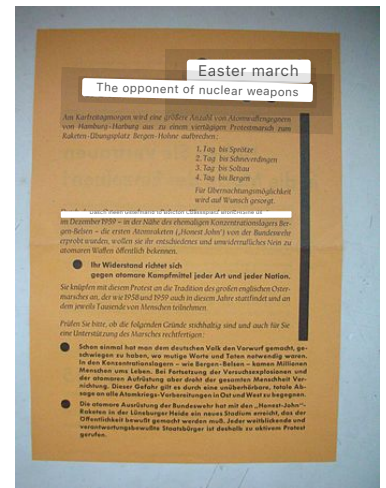
nuclear warheads are jointly guarded by Germans and Americans in Germany (Fliegerhorst Büchel) as part of nuclear participation. Their withdrawal is still a demand of the peace movement to this day.

The campaign to fight to nuclear death was formed against this planned rearmament, with the support of the SPD and the trade unions. But neither the broad rejection within the population, nor the mass actions supported by the churches, the trade unions and the SPD were able to make an armament resolution of the Bundestag on the 25th. March 1958.^[7] On The 17th In April 1958, demonstrations took place in Bremen, Kiel, Munich, Mannheim, Dortmund Essen and Hamburg. In the Hanseatic city, most urban transport stopped for almost an hour to allow their employees to participate. Following this largest political demonstration of the post-war period with well over 120,000 participants, the first German "vigil" took place, with which the Hamburg Action Group for Non-Violence, member of the War Resisters' International (WRI), protested 14 days and nights against the planned nuclear armament (here the term "vigilant") emerged.^[8] In the spring of 1958, the mass rallies reached a total of about 1.5 million participants.

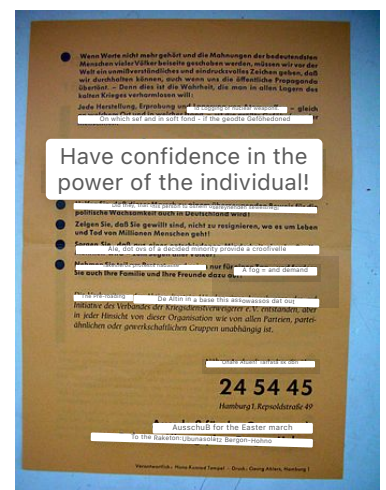
However, the SPD withdrew from the campaign after the CDU held the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia on the 6th. June 1958 by an absolute majority and the SPD leadership sought their salvation in an intensified course of adaptation to the politics of the CDU, which resulted in the adoption of the Godesberg program in 1959 and in the secession of the party-affiliated Social Democratic University Association (SHB) from the Socialist German Student Association (SDS), which excluded SDS members and sympathizers from the party This political vacuum formed the breeding ground for the developing extra-parliamentary opposition (APO), whose strongest force for a long time was the Easter March Movement, which first appeared nationwide in 1961.

The Easter marches were defamed from the beginning as communist infiltrated events and could usually only take place under partly vexatious official conditions. Klaus Vack described what this meant using the example of the first Hessian Easter march, which led from Miltenberg to Frankfurt in 1961.

"Not only the Bavarian police ensured that the Easter march became a closely cared for in accordance with the police regulation. A rule fanaticism in a bureaucratic stale form. Under many other police hair-raising conditions: the banners carried on the demonstration had to be submitted and approved in advance; only on country roads of the 3rd Order was allowed to go; of course, it had to be marching in rows of two; [...] Rallies were only allowed to take place on selected edges; if a federal road had to be crossed, the banners had to be rolled up, the demonstration had to be temporarily



First German Easter March leaflet



Back side

dissolved and the noble, sovereign road had to be crossed individually; loudspeakers, initially only tin bags, were prohibited until 1963; and so on and so forth. We stuck to it and neither did we."

KLAUS VACK: *The other Germany after 1945*, p. 67–68.

The first speaker of the campaign was Konrad Tempel; he was followed by Andreas Buro in 1964. Klaus Vack, who has been managing the organization of the Easter marches since 1961 as secretary of the Association of Conscientious Objectioners from Offenbach, became secretary of the *Central Committee* of the Easter March Movement in 1965.^[9] He headed an office community in which the Nature Friends Youth of Hesse, the Association of Conscientious Objectioners and the Campaign for Disarmament worked together for many years. This had "three rooms, file folders, index boxes, an Adrema, telephone, typewriters, fax, copier and a legendary Rotaprint printer. And it had a politically and organizationally savvy secretary with Klaus Vack - and with his wife Hanne the perfect office manager. If necessary, they could fall back on many volunteers, especially from the circle of Offenbach Naturefriends."^[10] Classical protest campaigns continued to be designed and coordinated there, but just as new forms of protest established in Germany with the student movement (sit-ins, go-ins, teach-ins), new "forms of action arose even in the context of the Easter marches, which also did not despise the gag and were aimed at capturing attention (action "Volkssär"^[11]

The protest was initially directed exclusively "against nuclear weapons of every kind and every nation" in East and West. Based on the experience with the fight-the-atomical death movement, and in order to prevent capture by activists of left-wing organizations, the necessary "trust in the power of the individual" was emphasized in a joint leaflet so that "a decisive minority could become a powerful majority."

In the following years, more and more people took to the streets in more and more places on the Easter holidays to demonstrate for an end to nuclear armament and the nuclear arms race in both camps of the Cold War. Important personalities such as Erich Kuby and Robert Jungk, the member of the Bundestag Arno Behrisch and the theologian Martin Niemöller declared their approval, later came among others. Ernst Rowohlt, Stefan Andres, Erich Kästner, Heinz Hilpert, Robert Scholl, Helmut Gollwitzer and Bertrand Russell. One of the highlights of the Easter March in 1966 was the participation of Joan Baez

Already from the first Easter actions, in addition to pacifists, arms opponents from the workers' movement and religiously motivated individuals participated in the marches. The following cooperation of different currents and the lively internal discussions also lead to increasingly concrete, political demands (e.g. B. the demand for nuclear-weapon-free zones, according to the Rapacki plan). This made it an extra-parliamentary gathering movement, whose annual number of participants rose to 300,000 by 1968. The campaign changed its name from "Campaign for Disarmament" (1963) to "**Campaign for Democracy and Disarmament**" (1968). The peace songs by Gerd Semmer and Fasia Jansen were typical.



Joan Baez at the Easter March 1966 (to the right behind her: Wolfgang Neuss; the man next to her is the American peace activist Ira Sandperl)

Buro later assessed this as follows:

"The basic structure of the Easter March movement avoided ... a decisive blockade for mass learning processes: There were no avant-garde cadres who, like teachers in school, already knew the right learning result and only more or less openly steered the mass movements in the sense of a run-up to this 'avant-garde' to this result. During the Easter March, the organizers themselves were involved in the joint learning process. Learning from one's own experiences first created a willingness to learn independently on a broad basis."^[12]



Information stand with *folk coffins* in Oberursel

The Easter march movement was involved early in resistance to the emergency laws. An example of this is the above-mentioned *action "Volkssarg"* in 1965. The action took place in Hanau, Oberursel and Offenbach, and a preparatory leaflet informed the citizens there that the Bundestag had revived air protection in a law and also passed a *law on the provision of public coffins for the defense case (Federal Coffin Precaution Act)*. The population was asked in the leaflet to purchase a people's coffin and should inform themselves in advance about the officially tested types and their correct use at a public people's coffin exhibition. In fact, public presentations of the

Volkssärge took place in the three places on the dates announced in the leaflet.

As the initiator of the action and self-proclaimed legislator of the *Federal Coffin Upbevoering Act*, the magazine *Der Stern* made Egon Becker and quoted him with the words: "As a physicist, I can get an idea of the effects of a nuclear war. The precautions of the Emergency Act seem even more pointless to you than the layman."^[13] The *Stern* article is recognized as affisant: "What the Easter marchers have not achieved so far because of their sectarian and re-baptist airs has given them Volkssarg-Becker's black humor: the attention of the public. For the first time, one of their actions has also been taken seriously by people of other faiths."^[13]

CDU-related publications spoke less benevolently of the *action "Volkssarg"* and saw it as a "maque action of the neutralist "Eastermarschierers", through which old people in particular were "deceived and put in fear".^[14] And if the CDU/CSU, attached to the Cold War ideology, was outraged, the attention of the authorities was also guaranteed. Becker was charged several times in Frankfurt in 1965: for state slander, for violation of the Assembly Act and for "assignment of office" as a result of the AktionVolkssarg, whereby it was also a question of whether one can assume a non-existent office at all. Fortunately for him, all these proceedings were discontinued, but whether they were also forgotten for the state protection bodies remained open. In 1992, he was therefore one of the signatories of the call for *disclosure of our constitutional protection acts!*.^[15] The action explicitly applied to the information of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution collected in the times of the Cold War and a predominantly administrative-repressive confrontation with the extra-parliamentary opposition (ApO). Reactions of this authority in the sense of the signatories of the call have not been handed down.

Under the impression of the emergency legislation (1968), the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact in the CSSR (1968), the formation of a social-liberal federal government (1969) and the accompanying and intensifying political differences within the movement, the Easter March movement split in 1969 and ended its actions in 1970. In a statement published in July 1970, signed by Andreas Buro, Christel Beilmann, Heiner Halberstadt, Arno Klönne and Klaus Vack, the five founding members of the "Campaign for Democracy and Disarmament" declare their withdrawal from the organization as early as 1969. They considered them "structurally outdated in today's situation" and complained about the no longer given breadth of political directions. Above all, however, they assumed the circles close to the DKP of an "attachability to the campaign" in their adherence to the given structures, which was determined more by party political discipline than by real expectations. On the other hand, they relied on "the possibility of coming to cooperation between the radical democratic and left-wing groups in new forms."^[16] In order to create space for this "new forms of political cooperation"^[16], Klaus Vack, together with Andreas Buro and others, had already founded the "Socialist Office" ("SB") in Offenbach in 1969, an information and organization center for groups of left-wing and undogmatic socialists, which published the monthly magazine on the left.

New upswing from 1979

The Easter marches from 1979 to 1990 experienced their second upswing and climax in the movement against the neutron bomb and the NATO double decision to station short- and medium-range nuclear weapons in the Federal Republic. In 1983, about 700,000 people took part in various actions for peace. The Easter marches were and are always only *one* form of demonstration among the many actions that emanated from the peace movement.

→ *Main article:* *New peace movement*

Easter marches in the GDR

Similar to West Germany, it was above all the Protestant church in the GDR that opposed militarization at an early stage. But while the protests against the rearmament of Germany and against the nuclear policy of the Adenauer government in the Federal Republic were carried out openly from the beginning (campaign "Fight for nuclear death" of the trade unions and the SPD in 1958, Easter marches from 1960), it should take decades in the GDR for open protest to become possible.^[17]

Easter marches in reunified Germany

Since the end of the Cold War between East and West, the work of the peace movement has changed fundamentally. Since that time, the respective main topics and demands of the peace movement have been presented at the Easter marches and the planned activities have been announced. The Fukushima nuclear disaster caused a new influx of the Easter marches in 2011. In the same year, the 25th was also commemorated. Anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Easter marches are organized and carried out by peace groups at regional and local level. Therefore, the main topics of the calls and speeches vary from city to city.

Long-time spokesman for the former nationwide Easter march office in Frankfurt am Main was Willi van Ooyen.^[18] In recent years, the Network of Peace Cooperative in Bonn has acted as a coordination office.^[19]

Also in 2018, 60. Years after the first Easter march in 1958 in England, the vision of a nuclear-free world is a very important concern for many people. Therefore, many activists demanded the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Büchel and Germany's accession to the "UN Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty."^[20]

Other main topics in 2018 were the increasing armament of Germany, the threat of nuclear weapons, German arms exports, the conflicts in the Middle East, especially in Syria, as well as the demand for a new policy of détente towards Russia.^[21]

In 2019, Easter marches took place in around 100 cities over Easter. Central demands were military disarmament, a nuclear-weapon-free world and the stop of German arms exports. New Easter marches were added and the number of participants increased again.^[22]

Due to the corona crisis and from 22. March 2020 applicable "comprehensive contact ban"^[23] to reduce social contacts, the Easter marches 2020 did not take place as usual. There were alternative actions in many cities instead of the traditional marches and rallies, such as B. the domestic hanging of the peace flag, flower planting campaigns or newspaper ads were placed and the messages of the peace movement were spread via social media.^[24] Several organizations (including IPPNW Germany, the German Peace Society, pax christi Germany and the Network Peace Cooperative)^[25] called formed as "Alliance Virtual Easter March 2020" in the 60th Anniversary year of the Easter marches in Germany for the first virtual Easter march.^[26] In a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1PpbqTb8dA>) on YouTube, speeches and music were broadcast in a live stream on Holy Saturday by Konstantin Wecker, among others. A propeller plane moved into Baden-Württemberg with the words "Dearment now! Easter March 2020" labeled banner and flew over the federal state with it.^[27] In addition to the traditional themes of the Easter March, there was the admission of refugees from the camps on the Greek islands as well as calls for a climate protection policy that corresponds to compliance with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.



First all-German Easter march at the former Heinrich-Heine-Straße border crossing in Berlin, 1990



Klaus the Violinist on the Easter March 2006 in Düsseldorf



Easter March Munich 2006

In 2022, in the context of the Russian attack on Ukraine, however, criticism was also voiced of the radical pacifist conception of the Easter marches: The political scientist Albrecht von Lucke demanded more self-criticism from the peace movement and a departure from simple slogans with regard to the ongoing war of conquest, while the politician Marina Weisband (Alliance 90/The Greens) lamented^[28] The President of the Bundestag a. D. Wolfgang Thierse (SPD) spoke of an "arrogance of an unbearable nature" towards the people of Ukraine with regard to the often tried slogan "creating peace without weapons."^[29] Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, MdB (FDP) described the Easter marches in a "Zeit" column as the "fifth column of Putin."^[30] The Ukrainian ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, criticized that the moves have "neither (*sic*) to do with Easter, nor with peace. A Parallel World."^[31] Two competing Easter marches therefore formed for the first time in Berlin; the event running under the name "Alternative Easter March" deliberately refrained from criticism of arms deliveries to Ukraine and the rejection of the right to (also military) self-defense.^[32] In response to this criticism, the Network of Peace Cooperatives relativized its position that Ukraine's right of self-defense is "completely out of the question"; rather, one is skeptical of the supply of heavy weapons and completely opposed to the planned increase in the military budget.^[33]

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Easter March Munich 2006



Eugen Drewermann on the Berlin Easter March 2018, Turmstraße



Easter March 2022 in Berlin - Members of the International of Opponents of Conscientious Warfare (IDK)

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Web links

Wiktionary: Easter March - explanations of meaning, word origin, synonyms, translations

Commons: Easter March (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ostermarsch?uselang=de>)- Collection of images, videos and audio files

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