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**B**y the beginning of 1981, as punks became more visible, the authorities concluded they needed to get more aggressive. The *Kriminalpolizei's* political division, K1, and then the Stasi's *Abteilung XX*—Department XX, the division responsible for subverting underground political activity—stepped in to institute a cohesive policy of repression.

Groups of punks started to attract attention from security forces everywhere they went. When caught in public they were subjected to threats, physical intimidation, and arbitrary detainment. Many were expelled from schools, training programs, and jobs, all of which led to strife at home. More and more of them sought out living space between the cracks, occupying legal apartments illegally or squatting in Prenzlauer Berg or Friedrichshain. In order to live outside society, as they were being forced to do, they had to create space beyond the dictatorship's web of do-gooders and their snooping ears and eyes. Many of the punks started to receive regular summonses to police stations, where they were questioned about their political beliefs, the slogans written on their buttons and clothes, and their circle of friends. Over and over again.

One fourteen-year-old girl was kicked out of school and told she could return the following school year only if she wore “normal” clothes. Her parents told her she would alter her look or they would have her committed to a juvenile detention home. When she would leave the house, they would insist on first seeing the ID papers of whatever friends she was going to be

with—presumably to pass the details onto the cops. After all, they told her, “We’re not going to end up in court because of you!”

She told her parents she’d rather *die* than be “standardized.”

About 250 punks were forced to sign documents identifying themselves as potential criminal elements, which automatically added them to a registry of such elements. They were ordered to stay away from other punks and warned about consequences if they didn’t. Most chose to ignore these warnings.

A-Micha had finished his training program and started working as a janitor. He had been forced to sign one of these documents stating that he was a potential criminal element and told he could not fraternize with a long list of people—basically every punk the security forces knew about. He thought about the ultimatum for two days and then decided: *Fuck it, I’d rather go to jail than stick to it.* He kicked himself for being so naïve as to report to the police station in the first place. From then on he knew better; he just ignored the summonses. If they wanted him, they could come get him.

And then one day the *Kriminalpolizei* did pick A-Micha up at work—he had ignored a summons—and took him in for an interrogation. When they dropped him back at work a few hours later, his boss fired him.

A-Micha knew he needed to work or else they could send him to jail as *asozial*—for not working. He was becoming increasingly reconciled to the idea that he would probably go to jail at some point, but he wanted to go for the right reason, for something he valued—for voicing his political opinions—not for some stupid bullshit. He started to go to the central post office at the main train station. The postal service hired day labor. A-Micha went each day at seven, and when he was lucky he was able to get a day’s work. This kept him legally employed and put money in his pocket.

It wasn’t long before the police did indeed try to pick him up as *asozial*. But A-Micha told them he had been working at the post office, go check it out. And sure enough, he had signed in on many occasions and a post office administrator told the investigators that A-Micha had worked hard. The police found a solution: the next time A-Micha went to the post office, the personnel director said he had been barred from hiring A-Micha ever again.

Now A-Micha was really in a vulnerable spot. He had only a few

weeks to find something again or he would almost certainly get thrown in jail. Desperate, he finally landed a job as a gravedigger in a cemetery in Baumschulenweg, not far from where he had grown up. Crisis averted. But not for long: the boss at the cemetery was an old Nazi who rhapsodized about the German Forest and the German Oak and told anti-Semitic jokes. And as a manager he was so spiteful and petty that one person on A-Micha's shift eventually tried to kill the guy with a shovel, chasing him all over the cemetery.

Pankow sometimes got hauled in multiple times over the course of a single day. He'd be detained, and then once he was released, the first cops to drive by would take one look at him and stop. "Papers, please." Off to another police station. He soon realized that in a place like Alexanderplatz he had some leverage. The police mostly wanted the punks—who with their ripped clothes and safety pins and outlandish haircuts stood out so provocatively against the conformist masses—out of sight. Especially out of sight of tourists, and Alexanderplatz was full of tourists. Typically a couple of plainclothes officers would walk up and clamp a person's elbows and then walk them away. Most people went quietly, allowing arrests to happen without much of a commotion. But as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*, his famous 1973 exposé of the Soviet Union's institutionalized system of repression, "You really can and you really ought to *cry out*—to *cry out* that you are being arrested!" Pankow did just that. He would cry out when the police grabbed his arms. He would go limp or flop to the ground. He would do everything to draw attention to what was happening. They would have to drag him, screaming, across the wide-open space. And Pankow found that when he created a scene, sometimes the arrest would be aborted.

Ordinary citizens also continued to attack punks. One night Pankow, Colonel, Fatzo, and another punk found themselves alone in FAS, the club in the Lichtenberg district. The place was packed with soccer hooligans. At one point the DJ came over to Pankow and whispered to him.

"Something's up," he said. "You guys better get out of here."

Pankow and the other three left the club. But just behind them the door slammed open again and a horde of hooligans came racing out, looking

to chase down the punks and beat them to a pulp. Pankow and the others ran for their lives, eventually hiding in a dark courtyard to evade the fifty or so would-be keepers of the socialist order. The following week Pankow returned. He and about fifty punks strutted down Frankfurter Allee, went into the FAS club, and trashed the place. A-Micha arrived at FAS later that same night, after his friends had left. When he walked in, the crowd parted—nobody wanted a piece of a punk after the show of force Pankow had mustered.

Shit was getting out of hand.

Meanwhile Pankow's band, Planlos, started to rehearse and write songs. You might say they were disciplined—they practiced every day. But then again it was fulfilling a need. This was the music they wanted to listen to when they hung out, and they couldn't make that music without each other. This was their gang, these were their best friends. They hung out together constantly, whether it was at PW, the fountains at Alexanderplatz, or their rehearsal space. It was all about camaraderie and solidarity.

The band had a melodic quality that distinguished them from the chugging discord of a lot of the other garage bands. In part this was because Kobs, their guitarist, turned out to be a gifted musician and had an ear for a catchy tune; in part it was because the entire band seemed to have set themselves a high standard. There were bumps along the road. Lade couldn't keep time very well, and still seemed to want to sing. At some point he came out from behind the drum kit and Pankow played the drums. Kaiser and Kobs liked the original lineup better. Lade had a good voice, but he wasn't the frontman that Pankow was. Lade went back behind the drums.

The first song they put together was called "*Überall wohin's dich fährt,*" or "Wherever You Go." Lade wrote it.

Wherever you go  
 You're asked for ID  
 If you say a false word  
 You know what happens next  
 It doesn't matter where you look  
 Cameras are everywhere

Accompanying you step for step  
"Security" always follows you  
You speak your mind openly  
And what will happen?  
You can only hope

Something has to happen  
Who wants to stand around passively?  
Were you really born  
To be subordinate to it all?

Observations like that were the sort of thing that got people sent to jail. The members of the band knew that. But as far as Pankow was concerned, this was the logical next step. He knew the country was fucked up and wanted to do something about it.