REAL EXISTING IDEALS: EAST GERMANY AND THE SOCIALIST IMAGINARY

1945-1991

By

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

Belinda Davis

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

January, 2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines how socialist ideals, drawn from a broader socialist imaginary, guided activist practices in the German Democratic Republic (GDR/East Germany). The GDR was expressly founded as a socialist society constantly transforming itself for the better, ultimately to reach a utopian state of being, or communism. Activists within, outside of, and opposed to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) all sought to practice ambitious ideals to continually transform society for the better. Activists developed and understood these ideal practice through a distinctly socialist imaginary, encompassing social-historical understandings, or "background," that provided the GDR with its discourses, epistemologies, and habitus. This socialist imaginary also determined what was considered normal or normative, as well as prohibited, fantastical, or impossible. The socialist imaginary was thus the source of a East Germans' sense of reality and its ideals, and guided those activists seeking to preserve or change the status quo. Ultimately this work challenges existing scholarship that sees socialism as an illegitimate and imposed ideology, finding instead that socialist ideal practices were a key driver of social transformation in East German history.

This work focuses on five specific case studies of ideal practice in this broader development of East German and socialist history. The first three chapters trace party and party-affiliated activists' attempts to build socialism in the GDR from 1945 until the early

1970s. They examine ideals of antifascist democracy, socialist consciousness, and socialism itself as a self-regulating metasystem through their contingent and contested practice. The latter two chapters trace a gradual shift of ideal authority from the party-state to an emerging civil movement. This movement, beginning with environmental activists active in the semi-autonomous Protestant Church in the late 1970s, eventually expanded their criticisms of a static and repressive party-state into ideals of, and demands for, a sustainable, direct democratic, and for many, still socialist GDR. This movement then sought to practice these ideals during the revolution of 1989, and enshrine them in a new constitution for the GDR and, possibly, a unified Germany.

Acknowledgements

known through books. And finally, Udo Wolter of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation provided an ideal research space in the former offices of the SED daily *Neues Deutschland*, regularly reminding me to drink enough water on hot summer days.

As an undergraduate at Arizona State University, I was fortunate to meet a number of individuals who fostered my interest in history and graduate studies. Volker Benkert has steadfastly encouraged me to act tactically and think strategically about writing history, and above all else to take risks without attachment. Laurie Manchester guided my study of Soviet history, and her advice left me with few illusions about embarking upon graduate studies. Independent studies with Anna Holian and Brian Gratton taught me the rules of writing history, and the significance of placing word limits on one's sentences. And the late Mark von Hagen offered me a seat in two of his graduate seminars, and in so doing introduced me to thinking about how communism, decolonization, and neoliberalism have shaped our world.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my family. In retrospect, years of dinner conversations covering politics, history, and the human condition prepared me for a career in the humanities. My parents provided an environment of critical thinking, informed debate, and personal integrity, so much that now I cannot conceive of an upbringing without this. The influence of my brother Nick cannot be overstated, but above all else I thank him for his ongoing reminders to take a more detached perspective to professional demands. Finally, I thank my partner, Yulia Cherniavskaia. Our journeys across the post-Soviet world have shown me more of the triumphs and tragedies of the socialist experience than I could ever learn from art or scholarship. Above all else, her patience, understanding, and love are sustaining pillars of my present, and future.

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Introduction

In late November 1989, weeks after the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) opened the Berlin Wall and the possibility of German unification, leading East German artists and writers called for the preservation of an independent, democratic, and socialist GDR. In their "For Our Country" appeal, the authors presented their fellow citizens with a stark either/or: East Germans could build a society based on "solidarity and guaranteeing peace and social justice, freedom of the individual, freedom of movement for all, and environmental protection," or be gradually taken over by the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany), and "suffer the start of a sellout of our material and moral values." Advocating for the "first road," the appeal's authors reminded their fellow citizens that "we still have a chance to develop a socialist alternative to the FRG," and could still "focus on the antifascist and humanistic ideals that once guided us." The appeal concluded by encouraging citizens to respond with their views, and sign the appeal if they agreed.[1]

Replies came in from across the GDR. Respondents overwhelmingly supported the appeal, but many still doubted East Germany's future. Frau B., a forty-five-year-old industrial manager, addressed her reply directly to a co-author of the appeal, renowned writer Stefan Heym. Frau B., along with other older East Germans like Heym, hoped real reform was possible, "as we received the ideals of socialist society during our studies, and were convinced of their correctness." But she felt the GDR could not be saved due to its economic and infrastructural decline. "I have been working in the economy for thirty years in a middle management position, spent years of strength and health in order to stop

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[1] Bundesarchiv-SAPMO (BArch) DY 2/5, "FÜR UNSER LAND," Nov. 1989.

the imminent and thoroughly foreseeable decay of our economy – in vain! This economy can no longer stand on its own with our ideals," she lamented. In light of these systemic problems, Frau B. admitted that her generation had failed East Germany's young people, using her own children's experience as evidence. Frau B.'s twenty-three-year-old son was denied an apartment and a car in the GDR, yet his friends in the FRG had already earned both. In frustration, he asked his mother, "What did I go to school for? What did I learn a profession for, and why am I struggling every day?" Frau B. confessed that "I can't answer him. I do not know." Even faced with this sense of failure, she still felt the socialist "dream" was "wonderful and worthwhile." Yet she also feared that reform would be too slow, and that the young would continue to emigrate west, leaving behind only "pensioners and a few idealists." "I do not know whether it is right and responsible," she concluded, "to continue to fool our youth with an idealism that cannot be realized."[2]

Ultimately, Frau B.'s assessment was correct: The "For Our Country" authors were unable to prevent unification with the FRG one year later, due largely to the country's moribund economy and growing emigration crisis. Yet the 1.17 million letters of support they received by January 1990 signaled a very different view of East Germany than the secret police revelations and triumphalist declarations of the "end of history" that followed unification.[3] Frau B.'s invocation of an "idealism that cannot be realized" expresses the painful reckoning of a mother wanting a good life for her son while recognizing she and her generation had failed to provide it, and of a believer in socialist ideals who powerlessly witnessed the GDR's decay over thirty years. Frau B.'s

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[2] BArch DY 2/5, "Bitte um Weiterleitung an Stefan Heym..." Dec. 1, 1989.
[3] "Für unser Land," https://www.ddr89.de/texte/land.html (accessed June 13, 2021). This is out of a total population of just under 17 million.

experience brings life to the difficult gulf between intent and result, ideal and real, that characterized life in the GDR for many of its citizens.

To understand how people like Frau B. both accepted and lamented the passing of the GDR, this work examines East Germany through its transformational means rather than its ultimate end. Socialist ideals, drawn from a broader socialist imaginary, were East German society's guiding means, inspiring political leaders, cultural figures, economic planners, and citizen-activists to transform their society. Through five case studies, this work examines how activists within, outside of, and opposed to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) sought to practice ambitious, even utopian, interpretations of socialism from the end of the Second World War until after German unification in 1990. East German society certainly fell short of the ideals it set out to practice. But as Frau B. attests in her letter, this inability to attain the ideal also signals a deeper and unceasing impulse to imagine a better society, and strive to make it real. This work situates this evolving socialist project, with its ideals and the activists who practiced them, as the driving force of East German history.

From Totalitarian State to "Dashed Dreamworld": East Germany in Historiography

Since 1989, GDR studies has slowly emerged from liberal capitalist triumphalism and antisocialist totalitarian theory to better understand East German society and its historical development. Throughout the 1990s, political surveys of the GDR focused almost uniformly on the totalizing claims, systemic abuses, and illegitimacy of the SED. These works discredited East German society by reducing it to the party-state's abuses of power. As a result, they foreclosed the everyday lives and popular culture of East

Germans, and the GDR's role in the wider world. By the 2000s, however, social and

cultural scholars of the GDR challenged that foreclosure, exploring more complex

relationships between state and society. More recent studies have built upon this by

situating the GDR in broader understandings of postwar modernity, examining consumer

culture, domesticity and the private sphere, gender and sexuality, local identities, and

mass media. Consequently, the modern, transnational GDR of the past decade is far less

the communist mirror of the Third Reich, failed antagonist to West Germany, or Soviet

client state than it was at the turn of the last century. However, the ideal practices of East

German socialism, and their role in mobilizing GDR citizens to build, challenge, and

transform their society, remain conceptually and empirically underdeveloped. Thirty

years after the *Wende*, there is still a need to examine the GDR as a fundamentally

utopian project, one that inspired at least a minority of East Germans like Frau B. to

imagine, practice, and reimagine socialism on German soil.

Conceptualizing East German socialism in this way was not feasible immediately

after German unification. Revelations of SED corruption and Stasi surveillance and

abuses gave new life to totalitarian analyses, based on the work of Hannah Arendt and

other anticommunist thinkers.[4] Throughout the 1990s, GDR scholarship was also

enmeshed with the expanded Federal Republic's own founding myth. This myth saw the

revolution of 1989 as an affirmation of liberal capitalism, albeit one situated between a

contested coming to terms with Nazism, and a bitter partisan reckoning with socialism.

This partisanship also affected the two conservative-led Bundestag Commissions of

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[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1958). See also Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Inquiry into the "SED dictatorship" (1994) and its "consequences" (1998). Both inquiries

were intended to give victims of the SED a public voice and unite eastern and western

Germans through a common reckoning with their past. In practice, they became moral

judgements on the SED's abuses of power, and the socialist experiment more generally.[5]

In tandem with these public debates, a number of studies also took the SED's totalizing

claims as fact, and thus jointly delegitimized the party-state and East German society

itself.[6] Accordingly there was little nuance between the polemics of GDR apologists and

their antisocialist critics, leading to extreme interpretations of the state itself.

As overt politicization ebbed by the end of the 1990s, GDR scholars distanced

East German society from the state's ideological claims, opening conceptual room to

explore the lateral relationships of everyday life, and the GDR's connections to postwar

European modernity. Some historians drew upon concepts from social history to explore

citizens' relative agency vis-à-vis the state.[7] Others put forth new terms to describe the

GDR's social politics, emphasizing the dictatorial nature of the regime while seeking to

explain its longevity.[8] Exemplifying both trends, Martin Sabrow called for more nuanced

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[5] Andrew H. Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), 35.

[6] Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR* (Frankfurt: Edition Suhrkamp, 1992); Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949–1990* (Munich: Hanser, 1998); and Clemens Vollnhals and Jürgen Weber, eds., *Der Schein der Normalität. Alltag und Herrschaft in der SED-Diktatur* (Munich: Olzog, 2002). For an early social history that largely upholds the totalitarian view, see Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998); for a recent defense of totalitarianism, see Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

[7] Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Eigen-Sinn*, or a sense of self-will/interest and direction, emphasized East Germans' abilities to circumvent or subvert SED power through workplace disputes, underwork, or outright stoppages; see Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn. Industriealltag: Arbeitererfahrung und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis zum Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993). For Thomas Lindenberger's use of the concept for the GDR, see his "Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn," in Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999).

[8] By 2006, Donna Harsch cited Dorothee Wierling's "educational state," Günter Grass' "commodious dictatorship," Rolf Henrich's "tutelary state," Beatrix Bouvier's "provisioning dictatorship," Konrad Jarausch's "welfare dictatorship," and Kocka's "modern dictatorship." See Harsch, *Revenge of the*

study of East German culture, along with the "conviction, repression, and (self-)

deception" that underpinned what he called the GDR's "consensus dictatorship" – a

particularly necessary task, as the SED had fictionalized reality so wholly that "it became

impossible to distinguish between repression and freedom" for those who identified with

the regime.[9] Jürgen Kocka drew upon postwar modernization theory to find possible

commonalities between East Germany and other "modern" societies. Although he found

that the GDR was a "modern dictatorship" through both positive and "destructive"

practices, the latter held greater weight, with its bureaucratic administration, efficient

repressive and surveillance measures, and the SED's monopoly of control through the

"binding, all-encompassing ideology" of Marxism-Leninism.[10] Yet Kocka also called for

further accounting of aspects of social life that, while influenced by the regime,

"possessed their own inner logic, and... intrinsic value."[11]

Mary Fulbrook, in turn, analyzed the GDR as both "a modern industrial society"

and a dictatorial "honeycomb state," where state functionaries interacted with their

constituents, and vice-versa, through myriad everyday practices. Despite the peculiarities

of SED rule, Fulbrook found that the GDR faced "familiar economic challenges"

associated with "wider patterns of globalization" and postwar social-cultural change.[12]

Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11.

[9] Martin Sabrow, "Dictatorship as Discourse: Cultural Perspectives on SED Legitimacy," in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 207-208. See also Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949-1969* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001).

[10] Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience*, 19-21. The primary issue with such taxonomies, as Andrew Port has more recently observed, is that the "label becomes the content," and the complexity of history must be flattened to meet the boundaries of the category itself. See Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, eds., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 9.

[11] Kocka, "A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," 24.

[12] Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Fulbrook had previously emphasized state domination and social complicity or

Fulbrook later introduced the concept of "normalization" to explain the relative stability of East German society after 1961, and citizens' own experiences of having lived a "totally normal life" in the GDR.[13] Yet this approach sparked serious criticism. Social historian Thomas Lindenberger faulted questionnaires Fulbrook sent to several hundred former East Germans that flatly asked if they had indeed lived "totally normal lives."[14] This leading question signaled the ethnographical difficulties of tracing "normalization" as a historical practice or analytical category, and generalizing contemporary subjective experiences. Although Fulbrook's work raised key questions of how East Germans collectively experienced socialism, GDR historiography has not further conceptualized how subjective-collective mentalities took shape through or within socialism itself.[15]

A smaller group of scholars, especially those from the former GDR, have examined select subjective-collective experiences through the nexus of understandings,

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dissent, though did recognize that the GDR's legitimacy and longevity required further explanation. See her *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

[13] Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR 1961-1979: The "Normalisation of Rule"?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1-30. See also Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Working in East Germany: Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961-79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For "normalization" in the Czechoslovak context, see Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism After the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[14] Thomas Lindenberger, "Normality, Utopia, Memory, and Beyond: Reassembling East German Society," *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (2011): 71-72.

[15] Soviet historiography, however, has fruitfully examined how citizens engaged with socialism through collective and individual experiences. Stephen Kotkin applied a Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity, or "the processes by which individuals are made, and also make themselves, into subjects under the aegis of the state," to authoritative political discourse and practices in the new city of Magnitogorsk in the 1930s. Jochen Hellbeck examined private diaries from the 1930s, tracing an emergent "Soviet subjectivity," in which citizens morally integrated themselves into the socialist project through self-interrogation, transformation, and reinvention. Yet Alexei Yurchak has argued that after Stalin's death in 1953, authoritative discourse "normalized," or hollowed to a mere performative act, as Soviet subjectivity moved beyond self-fashioning through socialism's moral-historical mission. Soviet citizens now differentiated between "normal people" who understood this performativity, and the abnormal dissidents and socialist activists who, like Hellbeck's diarists, took discourse at face value. See Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22; Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

utopia, and everyday reality. Franziska Becker and her collaborators argued that the

interplay of utopia and reality were indispensable to understanding the GDR as a society

creating and recreating itself over time. In the context of everyday life, "great socialist

ideals" served to legitimize the policies of the unelected SED, while also providing a

normative vision to compare these policies against. At the center of the socialist utopia

was work – and, through an individual's meaningful engagement in work, their

identification with the larger collective of society. Although a creative utopianism could

be measured by faith in the *potential* of socialism to be improved and reformed over time,

it was also practiced through "people who extensively lived and loved, who indulged

their passions and systematically expanded the boundaries of convention."[16] Ina Merkel

later expanded upon this insight, viewing East German society as a globally connected,

"lived web of interconnections among individuals, imbued with different meanings," the

ambiguities and overlaps of which constituted a collective "creative process."[17] Andreas

Glaeser has examined understandings of the party-state, Stasi, and civil opposition

members, to help explain how East German activists within and beyond the SED

conceived of their society and its development.[18] In effect, the GDR's socialist project

changed through practice over time, in the policies of the SED, oppositional activism, and

in the everyday actions of East German citizens. This invoked process of social-

individual creativity, variable in subjective-collective meaning over time, underscores the

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[16] Franziska Becker, Ina Merkel, and Simone Tippach-Schneider, *Das Kollektiv bin ich: Utopie und Alltag in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 7-10. For Merkel's pioneering work on the GDR's own *Konsumkultur*, see her *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999).
[17] Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR*, 195.
[18] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

necessity of conceptualizing and examining how socialism's goals and visions influenced the actions of East Germans themselves, and vice-versa.

Recent social and cultural studies have laid the groundwork for such an approach by examining the kaleidoscope of East Germany's "socialist modernity." In their 2007 co-edited volume, Katherine Pence and Paul Betts cited former GDR citizens' "popular uproar" over the "crude rendering of GDR history in the mass media" during the 1990s as their point of departure from previous studies. By exploring the "conflict and texture" of what they termed the GDR's "socialist modernity," Pence and Betts sought to understand how East Germany, among other socialist nations, formed an "alternative" modernity comparable to, but distinct from, Western liberal capitalism – a "dashed 'dreamworld'" that inspired many in the global South to adopt socialism as their own path to modernity.[19] This approach inaugurated a wealth of studies of consumerism, fashion, domesticity, gender and sexuality, design, and other topics in the GDR and across other socialist nations – works that have greatly expanded scholarly understanding of everyday life in European socialist states.[20] What has emerged from this body of work is a complex

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[19] Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2007), 11-21. Although the scope of his study is more limited, Benjamin Robinson also conceives of the GDR as an alternative socialist modernity, playing upon the contradictions of its utopian promises and the material and ethical limitations of real existing socialism. See Robinson, *The Skin of the System: On Germany's Socialist Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 19-37.

[20] These are too numerous to list comprehensively, but see especially Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Katharina Pfützner, *Designing for Socialist Need. Industrial Design Practice in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2017) and Andrea Prause, *Catwalk wider den Sozialismus. Die alternative Modeszene der DDR in den 1980er Jahren* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft, 2018). For a selection of cultural studies of socialism in southern and eastern Europe, see Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Krisztina Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle*

mosaic of East Germany's socialist modernity, and an ambitious intent to integrate everyday experience with the broader development of global modernity. However, this literature lacks a systemic analysis of the common origins, goals, and limits of the GDR's socialist "dreamworld." What inspired East Germans' subjective and collective engagement with "socialist modernity," through elements specific, if not unique, to socialism itself?

This work seeks answer this question by examining how East Germans imagined and practiced socialism, and how this creative process transformed their society over time. As SED abuses and post-unification polemics recede into historical memory, it is now possible to examine East Germans' socialist ideals without appearing to excuse their ethical and political failures. Rather, to understand the GDR's basic utopian logic and historical development, it necessary to reexamine socialism's subjectivities, collective identities, and "dashed dreamworld" as ideal practices emanating from a modern, but distinctly socialist, East German imaginary.

Methodology: East Germany as Ideal Practices from a Socialist Imaginary

Understanding how ideals shape social reality requires a conceptual methodology integrating representations and practice through a common social imaginary. Social imaginaries shape the ideals that people hold about themselves and their society, as well as the possible ways to practice those ideals as social reality. History, then, can be understood as the development of ideal practices over time, and determining who holds the authority to determine a society's dominant ideal practices. Although this process

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Class in Hungary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013) and Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

generally unfolds both with and without broader social awareness, the GDR offers a case of more explicitly conscious social formation, with activists expressly practicing ideals drawn from a broader socialist imaginary to intentionally transform their society. East German history, then, is an evolving, contested answer to the question of socialism's ideals and best practice. Conceiving and analyzing the GDR in this way recovers the utopian impulse at the core of its history. From its beginnings in the ruins of the Third Reich to its dissolution after the revolution of 1989, East German law, political and economic policy, cultural expression, and grassroots activism were conscious ideal practices designed to transform society and its citizens.

A social imaginary is an open-ended ensemble of significations that provide a society with its languages, categories, dispositions, and understandings. Social imaginaries are unlimited and indefinite, an implicit understanding or "background" that guides action.[21] Consequently, imaginaries also determine habitus, and accordingly what is considered "normal" as well as abnormal, fantastical, or impossible.[22] The imaginary thus simultaneously encompasses and shapes a society's possible practices, in effect eliminating the division between social reality and its description.[23] In this sense, the social imaginary also shapes the institutions that order social practices. Societies and their

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[21] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 3. See also Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-28.

[22] Castoriadis's concept of the imaginary rejected Marxist and structuralist determinism, emphasizing individual and collective autonomy in social formation through consciousness of the imaginary's social-historical development. Although Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as "principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to maintain them," generally emphasizes that habitus is not consciously made, this does not render the concept as mutually exclusive to the imaginary. In the interplay between the two concepts, imaginary as the site and stuff of the open-ended creation of seemingly more fixed habitus. See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

[23] Samuel Moyn, "Imaginary Intellectual History," in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117.

history are thus not reducible to institutions that organize actions, but return to the practices of individuals and collectives within and beyond institutions. Thus imaginary social formation is not a determined process, not does it demand that individuals or collectives possess "total knowledge" of its development. Instead, conscious awareness of the social imaginary and its social-historical development offers individuals and groups the ability to act autonomously, to effectively break out of existing habitus and literally imagine a better world as real practice.[24] New practices, in turn, add new content to the social imaginary, forming a social-historical process of creation.

The GDR's socialist imaginary served the same purpose, albeit with conscious practice from East Germans themselves. The socialist imaginary provided activists with social-historical experiences, understandings, categories, and practices to expressly imagine new ways to transform their society.[25] This imaginary encompassed Marxism-Leninism, the German and Soviet working-class movements, the Second World War and the antifascist struggle against Nazism, as well as myriad currents of European history and contemporary developments in the West and global South. In this, the socialist imaginary was the conscious, creative locus of East German society, and the source of myriad and conflicting answers to the question of socialism's contents, limits, and purpose. Although imaginings play a uniquely constitutive role in all social formation,

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[24] Castoriadis argued that "politics, however, is neither the concretization of an absolute Knowledge, nor a technique; neither is it the blind will of no one knows what." Instead, political practice "is what intends the development of autonomy as its end and, for this end, uses autonomy as its means." See Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution of Society*, 75.

[25] Stephen Hastings-King has used the concept of the "Marxist imaginary" to contextualize and analyze the work of the postwar French Marxist group Socialisme ou Barbarie, which included Castoriadis. Seán Allan, drawing upon the work of Charles Taylor, uses the "socialist imaginary" to understand how East Germans could "imagine" socialist society not through Marxist-Leninist theory, but "images, stories, legends and other cultural products," especially film. See Hastings-King, *Looking for the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing* (Boston: Brill, 2014) and Allan, *Modernist Aesthetics and the Socialist Imaginary in East German Cinema* (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

this is especially true in the conscious, autonomous construction of habitus and institutions of socialist societies like the GDR.[26] Socialists within and outside of the SED intended the GDR to be a social transformation always in the making. Despite Marxism-Leninism's avowed materialist determinism, this also made the GDR a thoroughly idealist and voluntarist society: As East German socialists were conscious participants in their own social development, ideas preceded practice, while practices were changed to better reflect existing or new ideas.[27] This meant that the SED's own definition of socialism was also in a constant state of transformation from within, as well as continually challenged by other interpretations of socialism from those outside of the party. Consequently, East German society did not quickly attain a sense of habitus, or the "illusion of innateness," despite enormous efforts from the party-state to instill its interpretations of socialism in East German citizens.[28] Thus the development of East German society was a series of competing and conflicting answers to the question of "what is socialism," a process that illustrates an ongoing awareness of socialist imagination in practice.

Examining the effectively infinite ensemble of the socialist imaginary, however, requires a more focused approach on significations that most explicitly guide socialist transformation: ideals. Conceived as "a mind's-eye picture of a utopian condition of

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[26] For fantasy and imagined spaces in East German and other socialist contexts, see Stefan Wolle, "Der Traum vom Westen. Wahrnehmungen der bundesteutschen Gesellschaft in der DDR," in Martin Sabrow and Konrad Jarausch eds, *Weg in den Untergang. Der innere Zerfall der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 158-206; James Mark, "'The Spanish Analogy': Imagining the Future in State Socialist Hungary, 1948-1989" *Contemporary European History* 26, no. 4 (2017): 600-620; Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); and David Eugster and Sibylle Marti, eds., *Das Imaginäre des Kalten Krieges. Beiträge zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Ost-West-Konfliktes in Europa* (Essen: Klartext, 2015).
[27] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 82-89.
[28] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 50. See also Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 120-162.

affairs in which the realization of certain values is fulfilled and perfected," ideals

integrate thought, affect, and behavior though an ideal practice to attain utopia. Ideals are

thus normative instruments of the imagination, deciding "what *should* be," like liberty,

equality, and brotherhood of the French Revolution.[29] Of course, ideals also contain a

degree of fantasy or impossibility; "idealization" by definition entails an impossible

perfection, or utopia. Yet the active dedication to an ideal, "the inner impetus to do one's

utmost to make the world into a certain sort of place," still serves as a powerful orienting

role in how individuals and groups practice social transformation.[30]

Ideal practices also help explain how seemingly definitive "ideologies" are in fact

fluid beliefs that meet individual and collective needs. Rather than seemingly fixed or

coherent systems of logical claims, "ideologies" like socialism are instead general

orientations contingent on "situational and chronic dispositional factors," as well as

shifting emotional interpretations of this over time.[31] Recent social psychology research

has examined how collective political beliefs help manage individual psychological

needs, especially uncertainty and threat, and how this can serve to justify a given social-

political system or initiate a search for alternatives.[32] Ideals, then, serve as important

benchmarks for social development, with utopian thinking, or "imagining better

societies," acting as a powerful impetus for individual and collective action. Utopian

thinking is based on both the intellectual-cognitive development of ideas, but also social

hope for a more positive future for oneself and society, even if based on disillusionment

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[29] Nicholas Rescher, *Ethical Idealism: An Inquiry into the Nature and Function of Ideals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 113-115. Italics in original.
[30] Ibid. 132.
[31] John T. Jost, "The End of the End of Ideology," *American Psychologist* 61, no. 7 (2006): 663.
[32] John T. Jost, Aaron C. Kay, and Hulda Thorisdottir, *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6-7.

with the status quo. Together, thought and affect can overcome factors of system justification to enact social change.[33] These ideal practices, drawn from individual and collective experiences and their social imaginary, thus play a decisive role in forming and transforming societies, especially explicitly self-transformational societies like the GDR.

Of course, societies have a wealth of ideal practices, as well as groups and individuals that vie for the authority to determine which are dominant. In the GDR, the SED claimed that its ideal practice of Marxism-Leninism was the sole determinant of socialist transformation. This claim to historical truth in turn justified the party's power over East German society.[34] As the determiner and driver of the GDR's ideal practice, the SED thus claimed both power (*Macht*) and ideal authority (*Herrschaft*), or the sovereignty to determine society's ideals and their practice. Yet the SED's claims to ideal authority were never absolute in practice, and in fact placed far more pressure on the party than on East Germans themselves to make the ideal real. By monopolizing the conscious, idealist transformation of society, the SED effectively tasked itself with a responsibility far beyond following determined laws of history, or the institutional exercise of power: To maintain its authority as the vanguard of the working class, the class whose efforts and labor would build socialism, the SED had to achieve tangible results. The party-state struggled intensely to achieve this through a number of practices, especially in the GDR's first two decades, but effectively abandoned further innovations to Marxism-Leninism after the 1970s. This in turn triggered a struggle over ideal

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[33] Vivienne Badaan, et al., "Imagining Better Societies: A Social Psychological Framework for the Study of Utopian Thinking and Collective Action," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 14, no. 4 (2020): 1-14.

[34] Andreas Glaeser, "Theorizing Modern Politics and its Ironies of Control through the Case of East German State Socialism," *InterDisciplines* 4, no. 2 (2013): 119-166.

authority between the party leadership and a growing civil opposition movement culminating in the revolution of 1989.

With this basic methodology of ideal practice as a guide, it is possible to analyze East Germany history as a story of conscious and contested social transformation, shaped by ideal practices drawn from a socialist imaginary. While a cataclysm for Germans who had explicitly or implicitly supported the Third Reich, the Nazi defeat in 1945 gave Social Democratic Party (SPD) and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) activists the opportunity to lead a radical break with Germany's militarist and fascist past.[35] This break drew upon broad-based ideals of antifascism, democracy, and socialism that set to unify the socialist movement and transform social life in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ). Following the unification of the SPD and KPD as the SED in 1946, Soviet authorities and the SED initiated an "antifascist-democratic" transformation of the SBZ, forming new legal, educational, economic, and cultural institutions, a social leveling that offered unparalleled opportunities to those of working-class backgrounds.[36] After founding the GDR in 1949, the SED leadership increasingly pursued Soviet-inspired Marxist-Leninist practices, emphasizing political centralization and rapid industrialization at the expense of democratic participation. Despite sharp conflicts

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[35] Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Doris L. Bergen, ed.*, Lessons and Legacies VIII: From Generation to Generation* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2008); Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Thomas A. Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[36] Helga Solga, *Auf dem Weg in eine klassenlose Gesellschaft?: Klassenlagen und Mobilität zwischen Generationen in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995); Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins. Der Geburtsjahrgang 1949 in der DDR. Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2002); and Christian König, *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der DDR-Aufbaugeneration. Sozial- und biographiegeschichtliche Studien* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014).

among leading members themselves, and nearly being overthrown by an uprising of East German workers in 1953, throughout the 1950s the SED persisted in transforming East German society by leveling prewar hierarchies, instilling antifascist-socialist consciousness through art and media, and pursuing economic growth through gross production, with full communism as its ultimate goal.

The early development of the GDR also unfolded in a rapidly changing world, including an expanding socialist imaginary and a growing diversity of ideal practices. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 signaled a shift away from the late dictator's more coercive and autarkic practices. Soviet and East German leaders increasingly integrated their economy into a global market dominated by the US, seeking to surpass Western levels of growth and prosperity in a spirit of competitive convergence.[37] The GDR in fact led the way in this new ideal practice, drawing on Western science and technology, and even capitalist market metrics, to imagine and practice an ambitious economic reform program. At this time socialism also posed a potent alternative to capitalism, integrating the West's most innovative ideas and technologies into the construction of a more stable, just, and peaceful social order. With successful socialist revolutions in China and Cuba, European socialist states like the GDR came to constitute an intermediary "Second World" between the capitalist "First World" and the "Third World" of the global South, criticizing capitalist imperialism while providing extensive aid to Marxist and anticolonial activists

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[37] Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); see also Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). On the connections between socialist economic reforms of the 1960s and neoliberalism, see Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

in the global South in the name of international solidarity.[38] These networks linked

otherwise diverse societies through material aid, information exchange, as well as

common socialist ideal practices and an imaginary that encompassed a global struggle for

egalitarian progress.

By the late 1960s, however, new ideal practices of social transformation in

Western Europe and North America linked with a similar impulse in Eastern Europe.

Socialists in both East and West increasingly turned away from the USSR as a leading

ideal authority, seeking instead to build socialism within a more democratic framework.

With rising standards of living and growing diversity of interests, a younger generation of

European progressives also looked beyond received narratives, categories, and norms of

competition and class struggle to imagine an egalitarian society beyond liberal capitalism

or Marxism-Leninism.[39] In this further expansion of the socialist imaginary, this "New

Left" organized not through existing socialist parties, but internationally connected civil

movements. The flashpoint year of 1968 signaled this movement's common challenge to

authority across the East/West divide, with mass protests in France, Germany, the US,

Poland, and Yugoslavia, along with immense popular support for Alexander Dubček's

reform socialist movement in Czechoslovakia. Yet these efforts to practice ideals of

environmental protection, peace, feminism and sexual equality, and human rights

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[38] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Quinn Slobodian ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Miriam Müller, *A Spectre Is Haunting Arabia: How the Germans Brought Their Communism to Yemen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016); Matthias Bengtson-Krallert, *Die DDR und der internationale Terrorismus* (Marburg: Tectum, 2017); and Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
[39] Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); see also Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

encountered sharp limitations: In Western Europe, the apparent inability of the civil movement to transform the euphoric freedom of protest to lasting institutional change led to a sense of disappointment and cynicism that activists worked hard to overcome.[40] Following the Soviet-led suppression of the Prague Spring, a similar disappointment came to Eastern Europe and the GDR.[41]

Given the tumult of the 1960s, by the 1970s and 1980s, ruling parties in the socialist world largely retreated from sweeping social transformation, while critical socialists and civil activists imagined new ideal practices that would move society forward.[42] In the GDR, a new SED leadership under Erich Honecker introduced a more pragmatic ideal practice, "real existing socialism," that emphasized consumer goods production, social welfare, and political uniformity. Civil movements across Eastern Europe increasingly rejected this social stalemate, challenging their governments to instead live up to their ideals of equality and social justice, and enter into dialogue with citizens over social reforms. These groups, most notably Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, used an emerging human rights discourse to put forth their challenges to the party-state.[43]

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[40] Belinda Davis, "Disappointment and the Emotion of Historical Law and Change," in Bernhard Gotto and Anna Ullrich, eds., *Hoffnung-Scheitern-Weiterleben* (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2020), 87-108. See also Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Anette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ingo Cornils, *Writing the Revolution. The Construction of "1968" in Germany* (New York: Camden House, 2016); and Detlef Siegfried, *1968. Protest, Revolte, Gegenkultur* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2018). For an analysis of how the revolutionary actions of May 1968 in France were later trivialized or ignored by conservative historians, see Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[41] Stefan Wolle, *Der Traum von der Revolte. Die DDR 1968* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008) and Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die blinden Flecken der 68er-Bewegung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017).
[42] Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV,* and Beth Greene, "Selling Market Socialism: Hungary in the 1960s," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 1 (2014): 108-132.
[43] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ed., *Geschichte der Menschenrechte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany* (Philadelphia:

In the GDR, critical socialists and civil activists advocated for ideals of peace and demilitarization, as well as meaningful environmental and human rights protections, through grassroots activism based in, but not controlled by, the Protestant Church.[44] The SED rejected these claims outright, while refusing to engage in further social transformation or reforms. Effectively laying claim to the party's ideal authority by drawing attention to its abuses and abdication of transformational leadership, civil groups successfully mobilized East Germans to protest against SED rule by autumn 1989. Drawing on developments in the socialist imaginary since the 1960s, the civil movement in turn led a revolution to democratize their society, and even drafted a new constitution for an democratic, ecologically sustainable, and socialist GDR. The revolution of 1989 produced a synthesis of old and new ideals about how society might imagine, practice, and represent itself – ideals that despite their anti-SED stance, were often quite socialist in their origins and proved more resilient than the society that gave them brief practice.

Chapter Overview

This work is divided into two parts, focusing on five specific case studies of ideal practice in this broader development of East German and socialist history. Part One,

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University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

[44] Rainer Land and Ralf Possekel, *Fremde Welten: Die gegensätzliche Deutung der DDR durch SED-Reformer und Bürgerbewegung in der 80er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998); Christof Geisel, *Auf der Suche nach einem dritten Weg: Das politische Selbstverständnis der DDR-Opposition in den 80er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2005); Alexander Amberger, *Bahro – Harich – Havemann. Marxistische Systemkritik und Politische Utopie in der DDR* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014); Ines Weber, *Sozialismus in der DDR: Alternative Gesellschaftskonzepte von Robert Havemann und Rudolf Bahro* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2015); Alexander Leistner, *Soziale Bewegungen. Entstehung und Stabilisierung am Beispiel der unabhängigen Friedensbewegung in der DDR* (Cologne: Herbert von Halem, 2017); and Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Latham: Lexington Books, 2017).

encompassing the first three chapters, traces party and party-affiliated activists' attempts to build socialism in the GDR from 1945 until the early 1970s. They examine ideals of antifascist democracy, socialist consciousness, and socialism itself as a self-regulating metasystem through their contingent and contested practice. Part Two traces a gradual shift of ideal authority from the party-state to an emerging civil movement. This movement, beginning with environmental activists active in the semi-autonomous Protestant Church in the late 1970s, eventually expanded their criticisms of a static and repressive party-state into ideals of, and demands for, a sustainable, direct democratic, and for many, still socialist GDR. This movement then sought to practice these ideals during the revolution of 1989, and enshrine them in a new constitution for the GDR and, possibly, a unified Germany.

Chapter One traces the development of antifascist democracy in the SBZ and GDR after 1945. Practiced under the Soviet administration, antifascist democracy called for a broad coalition of antifascist parties and other mass-organizations, led by the unification of the KPD and SPD as the SED. Antifascist democracy also meant a transformation of the SBZ's economic and political institutions, from expropriating large landholdings and industries to overhauling the judiciary and drafting a new constitution for a unified Germany. Although unification eluded the Soviets and SED, antifascist democracy formed the basis of the GDR's 1949 constitution. As top SED leaders pushed for the GDR's further transformation into a socialist state, antifascist democracy was superseded by Marxism-Leninism as the GDR's dominant ideal practice. Yet a mass uprising of East German workers in June 1953 vividly demonstrated the limits of this practice, and how the party needed to convince citizens to participate in the construction

of socialism. Chapter Two then examines how GDR writers and publishers used progressive literature to work to shape a new socialist consciousness in the 1950s. Drawing on ideals of self-cultivation and communal identification from both a classical German and Russian-Soviet literary imaginary, East German cultural activists used widely read and easily available socialist literature to inspire their fellow citizens' subjective and collective identification with the socialist project. While inspiring a new generation of authors to engage directly with workers and tell their stories realistically, their efforts did not prevent hundreds of thousands of East Germans from emigrating to the West. Nevertheless, the GDR's emigration crisis triggered a fundamental change within the SED leadership under Walter Ulbricht: After stemming emigrations by closing the Berlin border in 1961, leading scientists, economic planners, and political leaders began to reimagine socialism's identity and best practice in the 1960s, aiming for direct competition with West German levels of growth and prosperity. Chapter Three thus examines how cybernetics and prognostics, two disciplines introduced to the socialist imaginary from the West, inspired sweeping reform programs, the New Economic System (NES) and Economic System of Socialism (ESS). NES/ESS proponents imagined the GDR as a decentralized, yet integrated, cybernetic metasystem plannable into the long-term future. While successful in boosting productivity, the program faltered due to intraparty conflicts over socialist identity, and the eventual victory of the SED's conservative faction under Erich Honecker. After seizing power in 1971, Honecker abandoned the NES, reasserted Marxist-Leninist central planning, and emphasized consumer goods production and social welfare, through an ideal practice called "real existing socialism." Taken together, these three case studies illustrate how diverse

understandings of the socialist imaginary in the first two decades of the GDR resulted in conflicts over ideals, practices, and ideal authority. This conflict was ultimately resolved by Honecker's reassertion of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, and an increasingly aging party leadership that refused to embark on any further reforms.

By the 1970s however, groups at the margins of East German society advocated for new ideals, pressing the party-state to live up to its promises for a growing economy and a clean environment. Chapter Four thus examines how rising pollution triggered the growth of an environmental protection movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In response to widespread citizen complaints of pollution in the late 1960s, the party-state passed a sweeping environmental protection law in 1970. Yet as the decade wore on, state officials could only pursue piecemeal solutions due to a lack of funds and a need to maintain production. Citizens frustrated with this inaction increasingly focused their activism on local anti-growth environmental groups organized through the Protestant Church. Although these groups continued to work with the state in the 1980s, the SED's classification of environmental data in 1982 signaled for many the need for a more confrontational approach. These Church-based activists, including left-liberals, Christians, socialists, and many former SED members, in turn challenged the state's ideal authority on the basis of its environmental policy. These groups effectively assumed that authority for themselves through gathering and disseminating environmental data, and protesting pollution and the state's growth-first ideal. By the late 1980s, their criticisms expanded to encompass the party-state's human rights abuses, leading to peace, environmental, and human rights activists to directly challenge the SED's ideal authority during the revolution of 1989. Yet following the opening of the Berlin Wall, and the

growing possibility of unification with the FRG, these activists convened the Central Round Table (CRT) discussions to work with the reforming SED to save the GDR. Chapter Five in turn examines the CRT's constitutional working group, and its members' draft constitution for a democratic socialist GDR. This draft represented a confluence of longstanding East German ideals of social equality and collective rights, while adding protections for direct democracy and the environment. Although this draft was not ratified by the GDR after its last parliamentary elections in 1990, its authors and supporters campaigned for a new constitution for the unified Germany after unification.

Understanding the past is ultimately distinct from judging it; the former requires empathy, while the latter does not. This truism, at times, has been remarkably elusive in studies of East Germany. Consequently, this work is not interested in determining the GDR's point of inexorable decline, or arguing that East Germans simply failed to make their ideals into reality. This teleological interpretation reduces the means of East German history to its end, and ultimately forecloses the point of historical analysis. Certainly, socialist ideals inspired East Germans to imagine and practice a better society that no longer exists. However, in examining their intensive efforts to build that better society over nearly five decades, the GDR's eventual dissolution seems less of a failure, and more of a personal and collective tragedy. In this, Frau B.'s silence towards her son's frustrations, a silence borne from the pain of holding to "an idealism that cannot be realized," makes considerably more sense.

Chapter One
Risen from the Ruins:
Antifascist Democracy on German Soil, 1945-1953

In April 1945, a group of liberated inmates from the Buchenwald concentration camp declared a new "antifascist democracy" on the ruins of the Third Reich. The "Buchenwald Manifesto," written by SPD activist and former Reichstag member Hermann Brill in the name of the Alliance of Democratic Socialists, called for a new "people's republic" that eschewed "empty, formulaic parliamentarianism," and instead allowed "the broad masses in town and country to effectively engage in politics and administration." To practice this ideal, Brill called for all anti-Nazi Germans to form local "antifascist People's Committees," and together appoint a "German People's Congress [*Volkskongress*]" to set up a new German government. This antifascist democracy would ensure that "the civil liberties of the person, belief, thought, speech and writing, freedom of movement, and the right of association" be restored "immediately," and the former Reich "governmental apparatus," with its "privileged civil servants," be "replaced by highly qualified, unsoiled, and socially modern people's civil servants." In addition to expanding protections for workers and transferring property to public ownership, Brill also based this antifascist democracy on unity among socialists to build a more egalitarian Germany in alliance with other parties. "Based on the ideas of class struggle and internationalism, and on the consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] that the realization of socialism is... the immediate task of the present," Brill concluded, "we want to create the unity of the socialist movement as a unity of practical action, of proletarian action."[1]

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[1] Bundesarchiv-SAPMO (BArch) NY 4182/857, "Manifest der demokratischen Sozialisten des ehem. Konzentrationslagers Buchenwald," 79-83.

Brill's call for a comprehensive social transformation articulated a broad consensus that the new Germany should completely reject fascism, and commit to ideals of peace, equality, and democracy. In the waning weeks of the Second World War, activists across Germany practiced this ideal of antifascist democracy. Surviving Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) activists worked with Christian Democrats (CDU) and others to drive out remaining Nazi leaders, publish newspapers, restart factories and public works, and reopen schools and churches.[2] Yet this ideal practice was superseded by the Allied occupation authorities, who either disbanded the antifascist committees or integrated their members into a formal administration. In the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ), the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) institutionalized antifascist democracy through a "Democratic Bloc" of the KPD, SPD, CDU, and Liberal Democrats (LPD). Overcoming longstanding socialist divisions and deep skepticism in their own parties, KPD and SPD leaders even united in April 1946 as the SED, working with the SMAD and Democratic Bloc to transform the SBZ through economic redistribution and judicial overhaul, as well as an all-German constitution that gave sweeping powers to parliament, and protected individual and social rights, especially those of workers. Practicing these socialist ideals through democratic consensus, the antifascist-democratic transformation of the SBZ provided the basis for the first socialist state on German soil.

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[2] Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lenore Lobeck, *Die Schwarzenberg-Utopie: Geschichte und Legende im Niemandsland* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004); and Gareth Pritchard, *Niemandsland: A History of Unoccupied Germany 1944–45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Antifascist democracy was the GDR's foundational ideal practice, shaping its state institutions and East Germans' expectations of their new government. Analyzing why and how requires a deeper understanding of a German and Soviet socialist imaginary and ideal practices that took shape before 1945. Antifascist democracy's emphasis on substantive social and economic transformation developed in response to the October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent building of the USSR, and the contrasting SPD-led November Revolution of 1918 that failed to reform Germany's state apparatus or redistribute its means of production. Antifascist democracy's emphasis on consensus politics and socialist unity developed in response to the parliamentary deadlock and executive authoritarianism of the Weimar Republic, and the bitter divisions between the SPD and KPD that in part allowed Hitler's rise to power. Even before uniting in 1946, both parties agreed on a commitment to democracy, and to eschew a socialist seizure of power, rightfully viewing most Germans as still essentially fascist in outlook. Through antifascist democracy, the SED hoped that a consensus-based democracy would help Germans overcome their Nazi past, and provide the basis for an evolution to socialism, even if their efforts were ultimately dependent on the SMAD and geopolitical developments between the Allies.

Antifascist democracy also provided Soviet and SED leaders a way to push for German unification, and craft a constitution enshrining the SBZ's economic and administrative transformations in a new state order. As the relationship between the USSR and western Allies reached a nadir by the end of 1947, the SED organized three "People's Congresses," which gathered political activists from across the SBZ and western zones, to demand a unified, neutral, and democratic German state. Seeking to

counter Allied moves to build an independent western German state, the Second People's Congress also elected a governing People's Council, in part to draw up a new, all-German constitution. Over 1948, the Council's constitutional committee, comprising of members from all Democratic Bloc parties and mass organizations, drafted an antifascist-democratic constitution for a "German democratic republic." This draft concentrated state power in parliament, and mandated that all parliamentary parties and groups participate in a given government. Moreover, the draft provided extensive civil and labor rights protections, while prohibiting fascist or militarist propaganda. Once complete, the constitutional committee put the draft to public discussion; on the basis of thousands of suggestions by SBZ groups and citizens, it was amended and adopted by the People's Council in March 1949. This constitution, however, did little to convince the western Allies to cooperate in founding a unified German state; instead, the western zones formed the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in May 1949. With Soviet permission, the Third People's Congress in turn founded the GDR in October, and elected the first East German government, on the basis of its constitution.

In the early 1950s, however, the SED-led government increasingly moved away from antifascist-democratic consensus to minority rule. This shift began in the SED itself from 1948 onwards, as executive committee member Walter Ulbricht pressed for the party's transition from a mass socialist party to a Soviet-inspired Marxist-Leninist "party of a new type." Once Ulbricht assumed sole leadership of the SED in 1950, he initiated a purge of former Social Democrats, and also used the GDR's justice system to imprison CDU and LPD opponents, often in violation of the 1949 constitution. Also by 1950, the party applied Marxist-Leninist economic practices through a Soviet-style five-year plan,

which emphasized intensive, voluntarist industrial production to generate overall economic growth. This ideal practice of raised productivity then became the GDR's guiding policy. Ulbricht, going against many in his own party and the Soviet leadership, accelerated these measures in 1952 through the "construction of socialism" program. The program raised work norms and instituted new laws against "economic crimes," including wasting resources or failing to meet established norms. By spring 1953, these practices landed tens of thousands of East Germans in jail, and generated widespread resentment among the population. Fed up with exploitation and arbitrary jurisprudence in an ostensible workers' state, East Germans rose up against the SED across the GDR in June 1953, forcibly freeing political prisoners while demanding new elections and the reestablishment of the SPD. Although Ulbricht retained his leadership position, the uprising initiated a serious debate among party members over the best path forward for the GDR. Many leading party members, especially cultural activists, recognized that although they had transformed state institutions and expropriated the means of production, they had not yet transformed their fellow citizens' consciousness.

Historiography on the SBZ and early GDR generally dismisses antifascist democracy as a prelude to minority rule, and views antifascism as a hollow claim to ideal authority on the part of the SED. This approach frames the late 1940s and early 1950s as a teleological "Stalinization" of the SED and GDR, and characterizes the 1953 Uprising as a rejection of "socialism" as defined through Ulbricht's policies of intensive industrialization, judicial abuse, and party dictatorship. However, scholarship on the SBZ has also fruitfully uncovered the evolving and ambiguous policies of the SED, SMAD, and Soviet leadership during 1945-1949, as well as the relative lack of support for

Ulbricht's policies even among Soviet and SED leaders.[3] The SMAD and SED also saw antifascist democracy as an attractive ideal practice to invite eastern Germans to participate in the transformation of their country, and prevent the political division of Germany.[4] The introduction of Marxist-Leninist practices in party and state institutions from 1948 onwards neither elevates antifascist democracy to a "lost chance" for a more democratic GDR, nor reduces it to a "grand delusion" (*Lebenslüge*).[5] The hundreds of thousands of antifascists who helped to transform their society in these years were not mere pawns in a master plan to "Stalinize" the SBZ/GDR. In fact, antifascism both bolstered and challenged the SED's ideal authority: Many leading party members were also antifascist veterans, while more critical socialists, even if disagreeing with the party's policies or rejecting its authority, upheld antifascism as an inspiring ideal throughout the GDR's existence.[6]

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[3] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*; Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Wilfried Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*, trans. Robert F. Hogg (London: Macmillan, 1998); and Filip Slaveski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany: Hunger, Mass Violence, and the Struggle for Peace, 1945-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[4] See especially Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-53: From Antifascism to Stalinism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[5] Harold Hurwitz, *Die Stalinisierung der SED: Zum Verlust von Freiräumen und sozialdemokratischer Identität in den Vorständen 1946–1949* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1997), 19-33 and Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse, and Ehrhart Neubert, eds., *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus. DDR-Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002). For major studies that characterize the occupation and early years of the GDR as a gradual "Stalinization," see Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945-1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Edition Suhrkamp, 1992); Andreas Malycha, *Die SED: Geschichte ihrer Stalinisierung 1946-1953* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 2000); and Stefan Wolle, *Der große Plan. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1949–1961* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2013).

[6] For the role of antifascism and its memory in the SED's claims to ideal authority, see Annette Leo and Peter Reif-Spirek, eds., *Helden, Täter und Verräter. Studien zum DDR-Antifaschismus* (Berlin: Metropol, 1999); Jeanette Michelmann, *Aktivisten der ersten Stunde. Die Antifa in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002); and Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). SED-critical intellectuals up held the antifascist ideal well into the revolution of 1989. See Chapter Five of this work; Konrad H. Jarausch, "The Failure of East German Antifascism: Some Ironies of History as Politics," *German Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (1991), 85-102; Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989: Social Movement in a Leninist Regime* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 183-215; Mark Thompson, "Reluctant

Of course the antifascist-democratic consensus of the early postwar years broke by the early 1950s, as the SED under Ulbricht squandered its ideal authority by exploiting its workers and violating the 1949 constitution. By reneging on the ideals it popularized and instituted, the party only had itself to blame for the June 1953 Uprising. Yet protestors' demands for new elections, a new socialist party that reflected their own ideals, and consistent legal protections cannot be understood outside of antifascist-democratic ideal practices, and their later violation.

1.1 *The Genealogy of Antifascist Democracy in the Socialist Imaginary*

The ideal practice of antifascist democracy arose from developments in the German socialist movement and its imaginary from 1914 until 1945. World War One fractured the German socialist movement, creating a more moderate SPD and a more radical KPD by the early 1920s. Although the SPD assumed power following the German defeat in 1918, the party did not embark upon substantive institutional or social transformation, instead enlisting the help of nationalist-conservative parties to suppress more radical socialists, including the KPD. This bitterly antagonistic relationship between the SPD and KPD also meant that the German left was unable to counter the rise of fascism in the early 1930s, or prevent the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. As SPD and KPD leaders went into exile thereafter, many members who stayed in Germany worked together during periods of incarceration, practicing a "popular front" strategy of parties committed to antifascist resistance. The experience of a divided left defeated, and nearly destroyed, by Nazi rule also proved a powerful impetus, and justification, for socialists in

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Revolutionaries: Antifascism and the East German Opposition," *German Politics* 8, no. 1 (1999): 40-65, and Agethen, Jesse, and Neubert, *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus*.

the SBZ to work with "bourgeois" parties to rebuild Germany, and unify the SPD and KPD. The antifascist democracy practiced by the KPD- and eventually SED-led Democratic Bloc, while ultimately responsible to the SMAD and shaped by geopolitical developments between the wartime Allies, thus took the form of an egalitarian, consensus-based democracy drawn from a socialist imaginary encompassing defeat, division, and a revolution unfinished.

The First World War and its aftermath sharply divided the German socialist movement, a division that ultimately blunted the transformational potential of the November Revolution of 1918. Germany's declaration of war on the Entente powers in 1914 first split the SPD into pro- and antiwar factions. Germans welcomed the outbreak of hostilities as a nationalist leveling of class and religious divisions and the beginning of a new era of national harmony. Yet the war, and the SPD leadership's support for it, also violated international socialist solidarity, causing radicals like Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and others to form a revolutionary anti-war party, the Spartacus League, in 1914.[7] The negative course of the war eventually split the SPD's center as well, with co-chairman Hugo Haase founding the antiwar Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) in 1917. By fall 1918, the euphoria of 1914 had devolved into dire material conditions for civilians, a naval mutiny in Kiel, and socialist-inspired strikes across Germany.[8] The military dictatorship under Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, seeking to preserve the army's prestige in defeat, asked the Reichstag's SPD

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[7] Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 38-39. For a compelling account of the mass-euphoria of 1914 in Berlin, see Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), 55-94.

[8] For an account of civil privations in Berlin during WW1, see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

leadership to sue for peace. Following the abdication of Emperor Wilhelm II on November 9, 1918, the rump SPD under chairman Friedrich Ebert declared the foundation of a parliamentary republic, while paradoxically allying with the military to lead a caretaker government until new elections. On the same day, Liebknecht proclaimed a grassroots socialist republic, while radical socialists across Germany created local workers' and soldiers' councils, based on the *soviets* of the February and October Revolutions in Russia. Rather than curb the power of the military or its auxiliaries, the *Freikorps*, Ebert relied on both to check the seeming threat from the far left, leading to increased social unrest during 1918-1919 and deep animosity between socialist groups.[9]

Foremost among the new government's leftist targets were the Spartacists. Although the group held to the ideal practice of Marxist revolution, its leaders also emphasized mass action and inner-party democracy over a party dictatorship. Rosa Luxemburg explicitly rejected pursuing a Bolshevik-style coup in Germany, calling instead for mass strikes and protests that would grant any revolutionary action clear ideal authority. In her 1918 essay "The Russian Revolution," Luxemburg sharply criticized Lenin's "dictatorship of party cadres" in lieu of the "unlimited participation of the mass of the people," or "unlimited democracy."[10] Although defending Bolshevik violence and party dictatorship as necessary measures "forced upon them by these fatal circumstances," she warned against making such measures a universal revolutionary

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[9] Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For the complexities of the SPD-*Freikorps* suppression of the radical socialist movement in 1918-1919, and the activities of the KPD at this time, see Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 78-98 and J.P. Nettl*, Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 706-786.

[10] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 76-77.

program.[11] Thus in founding the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in December 1918-January 1919, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and other Spartacist and allied USPD activists emphasized the choice facing Germans as one between "bourgeois democracy or socialist democracy" rather than democracy and dictatorship. Yet real events quickly overtook the party's control. Mass strikes later in January led to an armed uprising in Berlin and other urban centers, with Luxemburg and Liebknecht unable to assert effective leadership. Ebert, seeking to stabilize his government's alliance with the military and state administration, called upon the *Freikorps* to quell the uprising. In the ensuing violence, hundreds of socialist activists were killed, and Luxemburg and Liebknecht were arrested and executed. Another KPD member arrested with them, future GDR President Wilhelm Pieck, tricked his guards and escaped.[12]

Though this unrest, violence, and deep social divisions, the SPD led the founding of a new republic. The January 19, 1919 federal elections brought the party to power in a coalition government with the Catholic Centre Party and the liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). The government then convened a constitutional convention in Weimar. Absent from the convention was the KPD, who refused to send their own delegates, contrary to Luxemburg's advice. After months of heated negotiations, newly elected Reich President Ebert signed the constitution into law on August 11, 1919. However, class and partisan divisions found little reconciliation in the Weimar constitution. Hugo Preuß, a liberal lawyer and the constitution's main author, envisioned few explicitly guaranteed rights, emphasizing instead territorial redivision to foster a unified, pan-

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[11] Ibid. 69-72.
[12] BArch NY 4182/856, "Lebenslauf von Wilhelm Pieck," Dec. 24, 1945, 55-56.

German state-society.[13] SPD delegates advocated for worker protections and social

welfare provisions, along with referenda and other forms of direct democracy.

Conservatives emphasized a strong executive, which was accepted by the other parties:

Article 48 of the constitution allowed the President to suspend the Reichstag in times of

national emergency, and rule by decree. This concentration of power in the executive,

persistent partisan division in the Reichstag, and an unchanged state bureaucracy – most

notably the judiciary – effectively signaled the SPD's abdication of transformational

socialist ideal practices, and provided national conservatives the institutional and legal

means to establish a presidential dictatorship.[14]

The SPD and KPD also became intractable enemies throughout the 1920s and

1930s, as the KPD remained committed to socialist revolution, while the SPD pursued a

gradual evolution towards socialism through a liberal constitutional order. Local and

national SPD authorities often worked with large employers and nationalists to curb the

influence of the KPD and suppress strikes and protests.[15] The KPD, from 1925 under the

leadership of Ernst Thälmann, competed well in local, state, and federal elections, often

attracting young male workers who rejected the SPD's moderate course, in preference for

more revolutionary politics.[16] Although the KPD looked to the USSR for guidance and

funding through the Soviet-led Third International, or Comintern, the party was not a

clone of the Bolsheviks. Some leading KPD activists even viewed their Soviet

counterparts as inferior, and still considered Germany the most fertile ground for socialist

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[13] Jasper Mauersberg, *Ideen und Konzeption Hugo Preuss für die Verfassung der deutschen Republik 1919 und ihre Durchsetzung im Verfassungswerk von Weimar* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1991).
[14] William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933* (Latham: Lexington Books, 2010), 7-8.
[15] Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 100-131.
[16] Timothy Scott Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

revolution.[17] But other activists, including Thälmann and those who studied at the

International Lenin School in Moscow – including future SED leaders Walter Ulbricht

and Erich Honecker – embraced the Bolsheviks' conspiratorial tactics and discipline. The

KPD also focused much of its energy against the SPD, labeling its members as "social

fascists" for their seeming betrayal of the socialist cause during 1918-1919, and ongoing

repressions of KPD rallies and marches, especially the "Bloody May" massacre in Berlin

in 1929. As the Nazis gained in popularity in the early 1930s, aided by Germany's

powerful conservative elites, the two socialist parties fought among themselves. This

bitter conflict, and its tragic consequences, formed a pivotal common experience in the

socialist imaginary, and was repeatedly invoked to justify the unification of the SPD and

KPD in 1946.

  With a divided left, there was little opposition to the growing alliance between

conservative elites and Hitler's National Socialists, especially after a marked decline in

living standards and social order during the Great Depression. Paul von Hindenburg,

elected as President in 1925 following Ebert's death, used Article 48 of the constitution,

and a sympathetic judiciary, to appoint governments at will and rule by decree from

March 1930.[18] After Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor in February 1933, the

Nazis used the subsequent Reichstag fire to justify banning the KPD and suspending civil

rights such as due process and freedom of expression, all under Article 48 of the

constitution. The succeeding Enabling Act of March 1933, passed through the Reichstag

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[17] Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 233-279. See also Bert Hoppe, "Iron Revolutionaries and Salon Socialists: Bolsheviks and German Communists in the 1920s and 1930s," in Michael David-Foxy, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin, eds., *Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 59-82 and Hoppe, *In Stalins Gefolgschaft: Moskau und die KPD 1928-1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007).
[18] Noah Benezra Strote, *Lions and Lambs: Conflict in Weimar and the Creation of Post-Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 19-45.

with only the SPD dissenting, in turn abrogated the Weimar constitution, and legally justified the succeeding years of Nazi rule.

Both the SPD and KPD conducted clandestine antifascist activities until most activists had been imprisoned or fled into exile. SPD leaders established an organization in exile first in Prague, then in Paris, until finally settling in London to join a number of other socialist resistance groups.[19] Other SPD leaders who remained in France, like party theoretician Rudolf Hilferding and former Reichstag member Rudolf Breitscheid, were extradited back to Germany after 1940 and eventually executed. Activists who remained in Germany supported each other through periods of unemployment and incarceration, and coordinated antifascist work in concentration camps. Hermann Brill, incarcerated throughout the 1930s and at Buchenwald since 1943, collaborated with KPD activists, Christians, and liberals – experiences that shaped the "Buchenwald Manifesto."[20] Other SPD activists, like former Reichstag deputy Otto Grotewohl, were released after relatively lenient sentences and kept low profiles throughout the war, but struggled against Nazi discrimination to provide for themselves and their families.[21]

After the Nazi takeover, the KPD leadership's fate was increasingly entwined with that of the USSR. Following Thälmann's imprisonment, Pieck and Ulbricht assumed leadership of the party, first in exile in Europe, and later in Moscow. In 1935, Stalin ordered all Comintern parties to organize antifascist "popular fronts" in their respective countries, with communists working with social democrats and Christians to resist

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[19] Lewis J. Erdinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).
[20] Pritchard, *Niemandsland*, 7.
[21] Dierk Hoffmann, *Otto Grotewohl (1894-1964): Eine politische Biografie* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2009), 165-194.

fascism, especially in Spain and France.[22] This was a largely moot point within Germany, with imprisoned activists already working together independent of their party leadership.[23] And although many other radical socialist activists had escaped to London, New York City, or Mexico, Ulbricht's domineering and inflexible personality did little to unite this diaspora under KPD leadership, leaving his party wholly dependent on Soviet assistance.[24] By the late 1930s, KPD activists in the USSR also faced the danger of Stalin's purges, with nearly sixty percent of Moscow-based party members being executed by the NKVD.[25] Stalin's nonaggression pact with Hitler in 1939 further marginalized the KPD, until the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941.

The USSR's war against Third Reich, and its subsequent alliance with Britain, France, and the United States for the duration of the Second World War, gave the Moscow-based KPD leadership a key role in the global antifascist struggle and the future occupation of Germany. As the Red Army checked the German advance and pushed Hitler's army back into the Reich, Soviet leaders and KPD activists drew upon antifascist ideals, and interwar experiences, to plan for a postwar German state. In July 1943, KPD leaders and captured German officers founded the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD), which pressed for Hitler's overthrow and a new, antifascist government in Germany. Ulbricht led the NKFD from Moscow, working with KPD

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[22] Mario Frank, *Walter Ulbricht: Eine deutsche Biografie* (Berlin: Siedler, 2001), 114-134; see also Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 292-298.

[23] German communists worked with other leftists through the Comintern-organized International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, while French communists allied with social democrats through the Popular Front government in 1930s France. See McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory*, 14-42 and Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934-38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[24] Frank, *Walter Ulbricht*, 134; Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 298-301. Ulbricht refused to work with Trotskyists; see Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-1971: Conflict and Crisis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 26.

[25] Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 280.

leaders Erich Weinert, Anton Ackermann, and others on propaganda content and distribution.[26] Their office, known as Institute 99, also coordinated the operation of "antifascist camps" in the USSR, dedicated to training new cadres recruited from prisoners of war for future occupation work. Former prisoners learned about Marxist-Leninist historical materialism, the October Revolution and the founding of the USSR, Nazism's origins in imperialist capitalism, and their new role as antifascists in rebuilding Germany.[27] In spring and summer 1944, a KPD Politburo working group met to specify its vision for the future Germany, ultimately deciding that the party would not pursue a socialist revolution, as a largely fascist German population lacked "revolutionary consciousness." Instead, the party would build its ideal authority by expropriating major land holdings and industries, and founding a liberal republic led by a popular front "Bloc of Militant Democracy," uniting all antifascist groups under KPD leadership. Activists were also warned that given the Nazification of the German population, this process could take many years.[28] In the meantime, KPD cadres would accompany the advancing Red Army into eastern Europe, and upon the eventual German defeat reconstitute the party and organize local "people's committees" for administrative work.[29]

These plans developed alongside Allied occupation policy, culminating in the Potsdam Conference of July-August 1945 and the ensuing Potsdam Agreement. The Allied powers agreed to the demilitarization, denazification, decentralization, and democratization of Germany, and divided the former Reich into occupation zones

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[26] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 41-44; see also Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 1-12. For US doubts about the Committee's ultimate goals, see Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 21-22.

[27] Jörg Morré, *Hinter den Kulissen des Nationalkomitees: das Institut 99 in Moskau und die Deutschlandpolitik der UdSSR 1943-1946* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), 117-136.

[28] Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR*, 7-10.

[29] Morré, *Hinter den Kulissen*, 158-166; see also Frank, *Walter Ulbricht*, 170-180.

coordinated through a joint Allied Control Council. Political representatives of the Allied

powers were also to meet regularly through the Council of Foreign Ministers, to address

occupational policy and determine the shape of a postwar German state. Although the

Potsdam Agreement aimed at a transformation of German society in each occupation

zone, it would quickly emerge that the Allied powers had quite different interpretations of

how far that transformation should extend. The US, especially after 1946, would pursue a

rapid rebuilding of German industry to facilitate western European reconstruction. The

USSR, however, would pursue a more radical economic decentralization and institutional

transformation in the SBZ, with the KPD as its leading local authority.

Antifascist democracy in the SBZ thus took shape through a socialist imaginary

encompassing the perceived incomplete November Revolution of 1918, deep divisions in

the German socialist movement during the Weimar Republic, and the traumatic

persecution of antifascists during the Third Reich. Although prepared to begin Germany's

antifascist transformation, Soviet and KPD leaders agreed that Germany was not ready

for a Bolshevik-style socialist revolution. Instead, the KPD and SPD worked together to

build a unified antifascist-democratic coalition, and set up a new state administration that

would destroy the economic basis of fascism through expropriations and institutional

overhaul, and unite Germany under a new constitution.

1.2 *Antifascist Democracy in Practice: Transforming Society through Occupation*

The wartime devastation of Germany gave Soviet administrators and returning

KPD activists the opportunity to transform the SBZ according to both the Potsdam

Agreement and antifascist-democratic ideals. Given the unpopularity of the Soviet

administration due to Nazi propaganda, punitive reparations, and the mass rape of German women by Red Army soldiers, however, the KPD took the lead in organizing antifascist political forces in a broad-based coalition. The KPD transformed itself into a mass party open to new members, and organized a "Democratic Bloc" alliance with other parties to lead the SBZ's "antifascist-democratic order." The Democratic Bloc emphasized political consensus within the framework of Soviet occupation policy, and in turn administered a transformation of existing property relations, institutions, and jurisprudence: SBZ authorities expropriated large landholdings and industries, completely overhauled the civil service and judiciary, and incarcerated thousands of Nazis in NKVD-run "special camps." Yet this transformation rested foremost upon the reunification of the German socialist movement. Despite resistance from some rank-and-file members, KPD and SPD leaders pushed for the merger of their parties, which was agreed upon in April 1946. The new Socialist Unity Party then focused on building an all-German antifascist democratic republic, a "German path to socialism" that would bar a fascist resurgence by legalizing expropriations, formalizing an economic planning system, and concentrating all state power in an elected parliament. By November 1946, the SED presented a draft constitution for such a state, hoping to pressure the western Allies to agree to pan-German negotiations.

After the Nazi surrender, the KPD emphasized providing Germans with basic necessities through new administrative institutions, emerging as a party committed to social order and stability. Three KPD groups returned to Germany to begin this work: Ulbricht's Berlin-based group, Anton Ackermann's Saxony group, and Gustav

Sobottka's group in Mecklenburg.[30] Unable to stop Red Army abuses – Ulbricht's

personal files contained a police report of girls as young as eleven being assaulted[31] – the

groups focused on economic recovery, attempting to position the KPD as the leading

"party of order" in a time of social breakdown.[32] In this, party activists could be effective:

Wolfgang Leonhard, a twenty-three-year-old member of the Ulbricht Group, recalled

meeting with surviving KPD activists in Berlin with Ulbricht immediately after the

surrender, admitting that "more was accomplished in half an hour than in all the endless

meetings I was used to in Russia."[33] Along with administration, the KPD aided the

SMAD in crafting and disseminating antifascist propaganda and "antifascist and

progressive literature" in libraries and schools, as well as establishing "administrative

organs" in cities and towns, responsible for health and nutrition, housing, local industry,

trade, education, finance, and agriculture.[34] By summer 1945, additional KPD members

and three hundred former POWs from the antifascist schools returned to Germany to

assist in administration, and rebuild the KPD as a mass party committed to gradual social

change. Bolstering their prewar assessments, KPD leaders accepted that a defeated nation

of largely complicit or enthusiastic Nazis was poor ground for socialist revolution. "We

must avoid extremes" thus became the party's guiding practice, even as rank-and-file

members expressed frustration with this approach.[35]

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[30] Morré, *Hinter den Kulissen*, 179-196.

[31] BArch NY 4182/853, letter from the Forst/Lausitz police administration to Captain Schulgin, July 9, 1945, 100.

[32] BArch NY 4182/853, "Bericht über die Ernährungslage und die Unsicherheit im Kriegsgebiet," July 10, 1945, 101; "Plan für den Wirtschaftsaufbau des Winterhalbjahres 1945/46," Sept. 27, 1945, 120; see also Slaveski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany*, 87-102.

[33] Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C.M. Woodhouse (London: Ink Links, 1979), 300.

[34] BArch NY 4182/851, "Richtlinien für die Arbeit der deutschen Antifaschisten in dem von der Sowjetarmee besetzten deutschen Gebiet," Apr. 1945, 7; see also ibid., letter from Ulbricht to Dimitrov, May 9, 1945, 94-95.

[35] Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 42-44, 252-260; Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, 302-304.

The SMAD and KPD also quickly organized a broad-based antifascist political coalition to help administer the SBZ. SMAD Order No. 2 allowed the formation of four parties, with the KPD, SPD, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (LDP) all established by mid-June 1945.[36] The parties in turn allied themselves through an overarching organization, the Democratic Bloc, that coordinated discussions between party leaders and with the SMAD. Though led by the KPD and responsible to the SMAD, decisions were generally attained through consensus, and all parties agreed on the nationalization of key industries and institutional overhaul. Nevertheless, each party sought its own position in the SBZ: The KPD's new platform, published on June 11, 1945 and written by Ackermann with Stalin's approval, affirmed the party's support of an "antifascist, democratic regime" of parliamentary democracy, with the aim of breaking the power of prewar elites.[37] The party also focused on expanding its membership (especially among women), disseminating propaganda in local factories and union organizations, and preparing for local administrative elections in close alliance with the SPD.[38] The SPD committed to much the same course, sharing the KPD's pragmatic position towards socialist transformation. Yet these party positions were ultimately dependent on occupation policy. Hermann Brill, SPD leader in Thuringia, admitted in a September 1945 speech that the party's position in 1918-1920 was "incomparably easier," because then "we had our own state authority with a relatively free willpower." Dependence on the decisions of the occupying powers – "it doesn't matter which," Brill

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[36] Ibid. 260; Slaveski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany*, 118-119.
[37] Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 10.
[38] BArch NY 4182/852, "Kurzer Bericht über die Tätigkeit der Berliner Bezirksleitung," Oct. 31, 1945, 11-23.

admitted – made Germany's postwar situation far more unpredictable, necessitating that the party learn from its past mistakes and remain united.[39]

Over time, close cooperation between the two socialist parties raised the question of unification, with both SPD and KPD leaders gauging the possibility through past ideals and present realities. Max Fechner, a prewar member of the SPD's Executive Committee, approached Ulbricht about the issue even before the Nazi surrender, but was rebuffed.[40] Yet the two parties later established a Berlin-based joint working committee, and continued meetings across the SBZ through summer 1945. In the meantime, the SPD gained in members and influence, especially as its leader in the SBZ, Otto Grotewohl, roundly criticized Red Army abuses, coercive SMAD policies, and the loss of Germany's former eastern territories.[41] Fearful of being overwhelmed by a resurgent SPD, Ulbricht, Pieck, and other KPD leaders then began to push for rapid unification; Grotewohl, recognizing the relative strength of his party, did not initially embrace their overtures.[42] Rather, the strident anticommunism of the SPD leader in the western zones, Kurt Schumacher, helped to seal the rift between pro- and anti-unity positions, culminating in a widely publicized debate between Grotewohl and Schumacher in October 1945 that set the two factions on diverging paths.[43] Schumacher's mistrust of the KPD, however, was

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[39] BArch NY 4182/857, "Referat des Gen. Dr. Brill..." Sept. 9, 1945, 9-23. The SMAD forced Brill to resign his position as SPD leader in Thuringia; after emigrating west, he participated in the drafting of the West German constitution. See Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 260-263 and Manfred Overesch, *Hermann Brill in Thüringen, 1895-1946: Ein Kämpfer gegen Hitler und Ulbricht* (Bonn: Dietz, 1992).
[40] Rudi Beckert, *Lieber Genosse Max. Aufstieg und Fall des ersten Justizministers der DDR Max Fechner* (Berlin: BWV Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2010), 74-95.
[41] Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR*, 102.
[42] Patrick Major, *The Death of the KPD: Communism and Anticommunism in West Germany, 1945-1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37-40; Hoffmann, *Otto Grotewohl*, 213-229.
[43] Ibid. 229-235. See also Matthias Loeding, *Otto Grotewohl kontra Kurt Schumacher: die Wennigsener Konferenz im Oktober 1945* (Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 2004). The KPD also gathered damaging information on anti-unity SPD members, including Schumacher's alleged misconduct while incarcerated at Dachau. See BArch NY 4182/858, "Frage Kurt Schumacher," Apr. 4, 1946, 71-72.

not unfounded: In February 1946, the SPD district leadership in Spandau-Berlin received threatening letters from KPD activists for resisting unification. Although local KPD leaders attributed these letters to "provocateurs," their existence attested to the SMAD's and KPD's broader campaign of favoritism, intimidation, and grassroots activism to convince SPD leaders and members to assent to unity.[44] Nevertheless, doubts persisted on both sides, based largely on divisions over ideal practice from the Weimar period: While SPD members feared that merging with the KPD would put both parties under the control of Soviet authorities, rank-and-file KPD members worried about the possible dilution of "political standards" in the party, and an inexorable drift to parliamentary deadlock.[45]

To combat these doubts, SPD and KPD leaders appealed to their members' common socialist imaginary and ideals, and their shared goal of a socialist Germany. In a January 1946 speech, Fechner suggested that his comrades reflect upon their past, and how a divided workers' movement allowed the Nazis to take power. While empathizing with those who still doubted unity, Fechner offered that "these mistakes are a thing of the past," and the time for working-class unity had arrived. Together, the parties would "lay the foundation for a vital and combative democracy, which should be fulfilled by liberty, individual rights, [and] social equality."[46] KPD leaders also exhorted their ranks to unite for Germany's future. In his February 1946 article for the joint SPD-KPD journal *Einheit*, "Is There a German Path to Socialism?", Anton Ackermann conceded that any bourgeois state would turn against the working class if bourgeois power was threatened. Yet Ackermann saw an exception in the postwar moment: Although the Nazis were not

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[44] BArch NY 4182/857, "Provokateure am Werk!" Feb. 23, 1946, 243.
[45] Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR*, 110-123.
[46] BArch DP 1/6990, "Für die Einheit der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung," Jan. 21, 1946.

ousted in a revolution, and Germany was under Allied occupation, he argued that even in these conditions a broad-based, antifascist-democratic state could, from its inception, bar the bourgeoisie from power. If this were the case, an evolution towards socialism would be possible; however, if the economic base of the bourgeoisie still survived, as it had in 1918, it would take power again. Ackermann thus argued for socialists to pursue this "special German path to socialism," citing Lenin's and Luxemburg's points that the October Revolution was not universally applicable, and building German socialism would in fact be less difficult than the Soviet experience, especially with a more advanced and united working class.[47] Ackermann's article also helped to convince SPD members that the KPD was equally committed to democracy, and that a united party drawing on common ideals would represent all socialists equally.[48]

Through appeals to a common socialist imaginary and the tragic consequences of past divisions, KPD and SPD leaders secured the unification of their parties as the Socialist Unity Party on April 21, 1946. The SED's first congress began with the honoring of antifascists, dead and alive: "Gathered here today are a large number of victims, who have escaped the hell of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*...," Grotewohl declared in his opening remarks, thanking "everyone who rose to honor our dead heroes."[49] Pieck, heralding the moment as a "turning point" in world history, also thanked the eastern CDU and LDP for their support, and pledged closer cooperation while adding that "this is not to say, however, as the enemies of unity and cooperation claim, that we intend to eat up

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[47] Anton Ackermann, ""Gibt es einen besonderen deutschen Weg zum Sozialismus?", *Einheit* 1, no. 2 (1946).

[48] Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR*, 128.

[49] *Protokoll des Vereinigungspartietages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD) und der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (KPD) am 21. und 22. April 1946 in der Staatsoper "Admiralspalast" in Berlin* (Berlin: JHW Dietz Nachf., 1946), 14.

the two parties and to establish the dictatorship of a one-party system."[50] Nevertheless, party leaders emphasized antifascist democracy's ultimate goal of socialism. Fechner declared that since the war had devastated the bourgeoisie, "the [German] workforce has become economically, culturally, and politically the foundation of the German future."[51] Pieck added, to "lively approval," that the party "fights for a classless socialist society."[52] Grotewohl then outlined how the SED had begun building that society by breaking up large landholdings and expropriating major industries.[53] With Pieck and Grotewohl elected as co-chairmen, and an executive committee with equal SPD and KPD members, however, the SED appeared committed to a gradual socialist transformation of Germany based on democratic consensus.

The SED's emphasis on economic distribution and institutional overhaul also gained popular support and direct participation among Germans in the SBZ. Following the Potsdam Agreement's provision for economic decentralization, SMAD administrators seized noble estates in Prussia, redistributing them to thousands of local farmers. Antifascist committees had already carried out industrial expropriations in spring and summer 1945, with the SMAD often simply transferring these enterprises to state or local ownership. To gauge support for these actions, the SMAD and SED organized a referendum regarding expropriations in Saxony on June 30, 1946. Voters decided with a 77.7 percent majority to expropriate 1,861 enterprises out of the 4,700 originally taken in 1945.[54] Judicial and educational overhaul accompanied these expropriations. Already in

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[50] Ibid. 18-19.
[51] Ibid. 27.
[52] Ibid. 85.
[53] Ibid. 102-104.
[54] Dirk Spilker, *The East German Leadership and the Division of Germany: Patriotism and Propaganda 1945-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 85-86.

1945 the SMAD established the German Central Administration for Justice (DJV) to coordinate the review of Nazi-era judges, the reconstruction of local courts with acceptable personnel, and the training of new "people's judges" (*Volksrichter*), drawn predominantly from the working class.[55] Although the SED's influence was limited in the DJV's early years, key party members including Fechner and Hilde Benjamin, a KPD attorney who would help draft the GDR's 1949 constitution, helped shape judicial reforms and *Volksrichter* training. As Fechner made clear to the first graduating class of *Volksrichter* in September 1946, their task was to make legal decisions "in line with the principles of an antifascist, democratic commonwealth," which had already achieved "the smashing of the alien, autocratic state apparatus...; the transfer of important businesses into the hands of self-governing bodies; control of production by works councils; [and] land and industrial reform and the rights of farmers' organizations."[56] Fechner also made it clear that *Volksrichter* were expected to defend these achievements in their rulings, underscoring the judiciary's key role in Germany's unfolding transformation.

Given both Soviet and German socialist antipathy towards fascists, Soviet occupation also entailed a far more expansive denazification process than those of the western occupation zones. Accompanying the Soviet Army's march into Germany and operating beyond SMAD jurisdiction, by spring 1945 the NKVD had identified and isolated possibly hostile groups, with individuals arrested by association with known Nazis or through denunciation. Over time, NKVD-operated "special camps" came to hold

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[55] Hermann Wentker, *Justiz in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953: Transformation und Rolle ihrer zentralen Institutionen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), 40-41. For a local study of the building of justice administration in the SBZ/GDR, see Inga Markovits, *Justice in Lüritz: Experiencing Socialist Law in East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[56] BArch DP 1/6990, "Die soziale Aufgabe der Volksrichter," Sept. 23, 1946.

nearly 200,000 former SS and Wehrmacht officers, Nazi youths and low-level

functionaries, as well as increasing numbers of unsuitable antifascists.[57] The NKVD

cared little for due process, with indefinite detainments and arbitrary releases. Prisoners

were also poorly clothed and fed, and tens of thousands died while in custody. Both men

and women were detained, and denunciations and betrayals of other prisoners were

commonplace.[58] Rape was also used against female prisoners.[59] Although most inmates

were born around 1900 and came from age cohorts with substantive leadership positions,

the NKVD also targeted those born from 1925-30; by focusing on relatively young

cohorts, the NKVD hoped to eliminate those who might pose a future threat to the

antifascist-democratic order. Following a July 1947 SMAD order allowing for more

nuanced prosecution of active and passive Nazis, Soviet military tribunals began a review

of "special camp" prisoners, releasing tens of thousands by mid-1948.[60] Although these

measures ensured a higher degree of denazification in the SBZ than in other occupational

zones, they also set a precedence for coercion, political expediency, and a disregard for

individual rights that would mark East German jurisprudence by the early 1950s.

Just over a year after the end of the Second World War, and with a unified

socialist movement and comprehensive institutional reforms underway, the SMAD and

SED began to outline an antifascist-democratic German state. In late July 1946, Pieck

and other SED leaders met with the Democratic Bloc's SMAD liaison officer to discuss

building an all-German government and the drafting of a new constitution. Soviet and

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[57] Sergej Mironenko, Lutz Niethammer, and Alexander von Plato, eds., *Sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland 1945 bis 1950*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Akademie, 1998), 55-58; Bettina Greiner, *Suppressed Terror: History and Perception of Soviet Special Camps in Germany* (Latham: Lexington Books, 2014), 38-49.
[58] Greiner, *Suppressed Terror*, 96.
[59] Ibid. 104-105.
[60] Hilde Benjamin, "Zum SMAD-Befehl Nr. 201," *Neue Justiz* 1, no. 7 (1947), 150-151.

SED leaders intended for the initiative to subvert the possible unification of the western occupation zones, especially after the inconclusive results of the Foreign Ministers Council earlier in July. SED jurist Karl Polak drew up an initial draft. Possessing a deep knowledge of German and Soviet legal traditions through his education in both Germany and the USSR, Polak worked with Ulbricht on the draft's basic principles and phrasing.[61] However, a press release introducing the necessity of this all-German constitution – written by Ulbricht and Fechner, after consultation with Grotewohl and Pieck – was held back by the SMAD and Moscow leadership, sensing that the geopolitical timing was not right.[62] Only after the SBZ municipal elections of September, with the SED gaining 57 percent of the vote, did the SMAD allow the SED to proceed with publicizing the constitutional issue, although without publishing the draft itself.[63] Yet following the SBZ state (*Land*) elections in October, the need for an all-German constitution arose anew. Even after the SMAD suppressed the CDU's and LDP's campaign efforts, the SED gained only 47.6 percent of the overall vote, and no absolute majorities. This modest result demonstrated that the SED, even with its allied mass organizations such as the zone's umbrella trade union, the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB), did not possess sufficient ideal authority to lead the SBZ, let alone a unified Germany. A new constitution now seemed to be the best avenue to guarantee the SED's role in a future

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[61] Heike Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR 1946-1949* (Münster: Lit, 2006), 42-58; see also Marcus Howe, *Karl Polak. Parteijurist unter Ulbricht* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 2002).

[62] BArch NY 4182/1104, "Der Weg zur Einheit Deutschlands und die Grundrechte des Volkes im neuen Deutschland," Aug. 29, 1946, 1-8.

[63] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung,* 37-42.

German state.[64] Accordingly the party's central executive established a commission to draft a constitution for a "German democratic republic."[65]

This draft brought together a number of antifascist-democratic ideals into a liberal legal framework, establishing a parliamentary democracy that could eventually develop into a socialist state. Based on the "certainty that the unity of the nation, social progress, securing peace, and friendship with other peoples can only be guaranteed through a democratic people's republic," the draft established a federal republic, with an elected parliament as the seat of state power. Democratic consensus also featured prominently in the state's structure. A parliamentary presidium, led by a president but including all parties according to their proportion in parliament, would serve as a collective head of state (Article 47), while a prime minister would serve as head of government.[66] The draft also claimed the state's central role in the economy, establishing "an intergovernmental regulation of the legal relationships of workers and employees" with the aim of attaining a "general minimum level of social rights for the entire working class of mankind" (Article 14). These included the right to work, health insurance and maternity leave, old age pensions, and unemployment assistance. Workers could also negotiate their pay and working conditions through unions and factory councils (Article 17). Although protecting certain private property rights and small businesses, the draft also mandated that "the republic ensures an appropriate utilization of all possibilities of the economy through extensive economic planning," which reserved "a decisive influence on companies or associations" for national, state, and local governments (Article 22). The new republic

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[64] Ibid. 56-58.

[65] BArch NY 4090/379, "III umgearbeitete Fassung (nach Besprechung am 7.XI.46)...," Nov. 9, 1946, 118-162.

[66] This is comparable to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet as established in the 1936 Soviet constitution.

would also be expressly antifascist, criminalizing "any expression of national or religious hatred and racial agitation" (Article 7) or any group disseminating "fascist or militaristic views" (Article 14). Moreover, the businesses of "war criminals and active National Socialists" were to be nationalized without compensation, along with "private companies that serve an aggressive war policy" (Article 22). Beyond providing for popular referenda to introduce laws (Article 81), the draft offered little protection from state abuse of power: The republic's judiciary was underdeveloped, and ultimately subordinate to parliamentary approval and oversight.[67]

The SED Constitutional Committee presented its ideal vision of an antifascist democratic German state at a public meeting on November 11, 1946. In his opening remarks, committee chairman Grotewohl emphasized the draft's ultimately socialist teleology: Given that the SED was "creating the stronger conditions for truly peaceful democratic development in Germany, and for the extinction [*Ausrottung*] of fascism," Grotewohl argued that "our aim must be to ensure that the upcoming constitutional debate is bridled [*aufgezäumt*] in a way that we oblige the remaining parts of Germany to deal with our thoughts."[68] Karl Polak explained that the draft was a response to the Weimar Constitution's development, implementation, and flaws. In addition to the excessive power of the President, Polak faulted the republic itself for being beyond democratic oversight, especially the judiciary and state administration that had remained untouched by the 1918 Revolution. In explaining his draft's privileging of parliament over the judiciary, Polak argued *against* judicial independence and the separation of

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[67] BArch NY 4090/379, "Entwurf einer Verfassung für die Deutsche Demokratische Republik."
[68] BArch NY 4090/379, "Stenographische Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Verfassungsausschusses...," Nov. 11, 1946, 15-19.

powers, citing the Weimar judiciary's frequent usurpation of Reichstag laws. Rather than

provide provisions for a reformed constitutional court, Polak opted to abolish it entirely:

"The State Constitutional Court is always a second chamber; however legal its decisions

may be, they are always political decisions... in favor of reactionary forces." In keeping

with the ideal of bloc-based antifascist democracy, Polak declared that a representative

"parliament, as the highest will-bearer [*Willensträger*], does not tolerate having a

counterweight, and it does not tolerate any master over itself."[69] Following Ackermann's

thesis that a new state could bar bourgeois power at the outset, parliament would be the

seat of state authority at the expense of the executive and judiciary, and ensure that the

transformations already achieved in the SBZ would be upheld.

     The draft was widely disseminated and acclaimed within the SBZ, but did not

lead to an all-German constitutional discussion. Following an extraordinary meeting of

the SED Executive Committee on November 14, the party leadership formally approved

the draft, with Grotewohl and Pieck holding a press conference extolling its virtues on

November 16.[70] Fechner and Ulbricht also coordinated a press strategy with state and

local leaders.[71] The text appeared in full in the SED's daily *Neues Deutschland*, along

with a special edition of *Einheit*; the party also printed and distributed 400,000 copies of

a brochure, along with an introductory essay by Grotewohl, by the beginning of 1947.

Although the draft had not been shared with the Democratic Bloc, LDP and CDU leaders

welcomed it as a basis for further negotiations.[72] The SBZ's state parliaments also

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[69] Ibid. 19-22.
[70] BArch DY 30/41267, "Stenographische Niederschrift über die Pressekonferenz...," Nov. 16, 1946, 2-16.
[71] BArch NY 4182/1104, "Organisierung des Meinungsaustausches und der Massenpropaganda zum Entwurf der Verfassung," Nov. 21, 1946, 52-53.
[72] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 73-76.

established constitutional committees to discuss the draft, with the CDU and LDP stressing the need for judicial oversight over parliament via a constitutional court.[73] The draft also circulated in the western zones, with major press outlets criticizing it, if not rejecting it out of hand.[74] More significantly, the western Allies did not consider the draft a serious gesture of cooperation, or as a viable framework for a united Germany.

This tepid reaction also signaled a deep division over fundamental ideal practices between the USSR and the western Allies, especially the US: From a Soviet and SED position, antifascist democracy was the best means to fulfill the goals of the Potsdam Agreement, and rebuild a neutral and egalitarian Germany while assuring access to Ruhr resources. Restarting German industry without expropriation or denazification amounted to the reinstitution of fascism, and bourgeois power. The US, however, began to take a different approach. Key figures in the Truman Administration (including Truman himself), along with influential diplomats in the US State Department such as former Soviet ambassador George Kennan, assumed an increasingly anticommunist stance from 1946 onwards, and resisted major institutional or economic transformations in the western zones. US domestic pressure to restart German industry with minimal decentralization played a role as well; for American industrialists, postwar reconstruction rested on the unimpeded flow of capital across nations, which stood at odds with a new German state with a dominant parliament overseeing a semi-planned economy.[75]

As the relationship between the US and USSR deteriorated over 1947, the SED and SMAD also took a more partisan approach to judicial reform. The DJV founded its

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[73] BArch NY 4182/1104, "Zu Verfassungsfrage," 83-84.
[74] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*. 78-79.
[75] Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 139-151; 200-232.

own journal, *Neue Justiz*, in January 1947 to articulate the new antifascist jurisprudence

practiced by the SBZ's growing community of judges and state prosecutors. The journal

also featured articles by leading DJV officials and SED members Hilde Benjamin and

Ernst Melsheimer, who would play key roles in the GDR's new justice system.

Benjamin's antifascist credentials were beyond reproach. Following her KPD work, she

had been forced to work in a factory by Nazi authorities during the war, and her husband

Georg, brother of philosopher Walter Benjamin, was killed at the Mauthausen

concentration camp. Benjamin took a leading position in justice reform through the DJV,

as the director for personnel and *Volksrichter* education. Melsheimer, by contrast, was a

member of the SPD only until 1933, when he left the party to embark upon a career in the

Nazi legal system. In 1945 he joined the KPD, and became one of the few Nazi-era legal

experts allowed to practice in the SBZ, rising to DJV Vice President.[76] Nevertheless,

Melsheimer and Benjamin outlined the SBZ's ongoing judicial reform in the first issues

of *Neue Justiz*. Benjamin specified that *Volksrichter* were equal to judges with academic

and professional training, and emphasized that all students were "proven antifascists"

nominated by one of the "antifascist parties" of the Democratic Bloc.[77] Melsheimer

underscored the need for judicial reform by highlighting the judiciary's past abuses,

asking "was it not judges who... had used their judicial independence guaranteed in the

constitution to make the transition from the bourgeois constitutional state of Weimar to

Hitler's unlawful state possible through numerous 'legal decisions' and thus to open the

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[76] Marianne Brentzel, *Die Machtfrau: Hilde Benjamin 1902-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2013) and Britta Heymann, *Ernst Melsheimer (1897–1960): Eine juristische Karriere in verschiedenen staatlichen Systemen* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2007).
[77] Hilde Benjamin, "Der Volksrichter in der Sowjetzone," *Neue Justiz* 1, no. 1 (1947), 13-15.

door to the rule of the darkest powers?"[78] Taken together, Benjamin and Melsheimer oversaw this explicitly political transformation of German jurisprudence to ensure the stability of antifascist democracy.

Despite the growing rifts between the former Allies, the first two years of occupation signaled major steps in attaining the SED's ideal of antifascist democracy drawn from interwar, wartime, and postwar experiences. After organizing all antifascist forces in the Democratic Bloc, uniting with the SPD, leading the expropriation of landholdings and industries, and formulating a draft constitution, by the beginning of 1947 the SED had effectively laid the basis for the German state that KPD leaders envisioned in 1944. However, given the western Allies' unwillingness to institute similar transformations in their zones, the party needed a broad-based movement to demonstrate the appeal of antifascist democracy as the basis for a new German state. By the end of 1947, the SMAD and SED organized the People's Congress movement to demonstrate a popular will for the formation of a united, antifascist, and democratic Germany.

1.3 *Antifascist Democracy as Ideal Basis: The People's Congress and the 1949 Constitution*

Throughout 1948 and 1949, the SED positioned itself as the party of German unity, championing the SBZ's antifascist-democratic order as the best model for a unified German state. To express this ideal practice as a mass movement, the SMAD and SED, along with the reluctant participation of the Democratic Bloc, organized three People's Congresses from 1947-49. These Congresses gathered all major political parties and mass

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[78] Ernst Melsheimer, "Zu einer neuen Justiz," *Neue Justiz* 1, no. 2 (1947), 25-27.

organizations, and purported to speak on behalf of the entire German nation. The Second People's Congress in turn elected a standing People's Council, which in part drafted a new constitution for an antifascist-democratic Germany. The Council's committees, while led by the SED, genuinely debated the legal and ideal basis of what became the GDR, coming to major decisions largely through consensus. Nevertheless the western Allies viewed the People's Council as a Soviet front, and proceeded with the formation of a western German state. By May 1949, the western occupation zones formed the Federal Republic of Germany, and by October the SBZ became the GDR. The new SED-led East German government institutionalized the People's Council as the GDR's parliament, or Volkskammer. In practice, the SED consolidated its power over and through the GDR's state institutions, using antifascist democracy's constitutional and judicial framework to gradually implement minority rule.

Through the People's Congress movement, the SED sought to portray antifascist democracy as a mass-based popular movement, despite serious divisions and reservations among party leadership and the Democratic Bloc. Following the union of the US and UK zones and Stalin's rejection of Marshall Plan assistance for the SBZ, reconciliation among the Allies and a unified German state seemed increasingly unlikely. Although the SED leadership pushed the Bloc to release a joint statement calling for a dialogue with their western counterparts on a future state, CDU chairman Jakob Kaiser blocked the move, citing the Marshall Plan's popularity in the West. Soviet pressure for a gesture of German unity compelled the SED to organize, after an extraordinary party executive meeting on November 26, what Grotewohl would name the first "People's Congress for Unity and a Just Peace." Despite genuine desires for unity, other top SED leaders

recognized failure was likely: Pieck even confessed to CDU deputy chairman Otto Nuschke he doubted the Congress would succeed. Nevertheless, the SED proceeded, despite high political costs: The eastern CDU initially refused to participate, and Kaiser was forced to resign and emigrate; his successor Nuschke assented to CDU participation, but Kaiser's public removal undermined the People's Congress emphasis on democratic consensus. Unsurprisingly, the first Congress, held from December 6-7 in Berlin, was a mixed result for the SED. In total, 2,215 delegates attended, with 664 from the western zones and nearly half from the CDU, LDP, the western SPD, and many nonpartisan delegates. However, the SED, western KPD, and SED-affiliated mass organizations held a majority, and while unable to control delegates' remarks, could determine Congress resolutions – a fact noted in the western German press. Ultimately, the first Congress resolved against the union of the western zones, the Marshall Plan, and an independent western German state. Delegates also elected a forty-person standing committee, with Pieck, Nuschke, and Wilhelm Külz of the LDP as co-chairmen, to plan a second People's Congress for spring 1948.[79] The Congress also sent a delegation to the Foreign Ministers Conference to share their resolutions, but were ignored by Allied representatives.[80]

The second People's Congress convened on March 17-18, 1948, in commemoration, and an avowed completion of, the "bourgeois revolution" of the March Revolution of 1848. In effect, the People's Congress was to serve as Germany's symbolic and practical attainment of democracy first attempted at the Frankfurt Assembly. The Congress's nearly two thousand delegates in turn elected a People's Council (*Volksrat*) of

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[79] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 133-134.
[80] Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 62-71; Hurwitz, *Die Stalinisierung der SED*, 394-396; Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 139-141.

four hundred representatives to discuss and draft the basis of a new German state. The

Council, constituted on March 19, elected Pieck, Nuschke, and Külz as chairmen, along

with a standing presidium and administrative secretariat.[81] The Council also appointed a

number of special committees to examine political and institutional issues, including the

Constitutional Committee (VA) and the Committee for Legal Affairs and Justice

Administration (AR).[82] The VA elected Otto Grotewohl as its chairman, a position

drawing upon his ability to reconcile divergent opinions. As a firm believer in German

unity, and the viability of the draft constitution as a basis for negotiations with the

western German parties, Grotewohl earnestly applied himself to this task.[83] The rest of

the VA consisted of thirty-one regular members, including Polak, Käthe Kern of the SED

and Democratic Women's League of Germany (DFD), CDU general-secretary Georg

Dertinger, and Johannes Dieckmann of the LDP. After the second session, four experts

were asked to participate, including Alfons Steiniger of the SED, and a CDU lawyer,

Helmut Brandt.[84] The AR, co-chaired by LDP jurist Wilhelm von Stoltzenberg and Hilde

Benjamin, also included Fechner and an SED jurist, Erich Gniffke, among others. Brandt

served as an expert for both committees, and came to be a prominent representative of the

bourgeois parties, especially in private deliberations.[85]

The VA grounded its work in reference to the Weimar constitution and the SED

draft of 1946, with leading committee experts citing judicial and executive abuses of

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[81] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 137-143.
[82] BArch DA 1/99, "Entwurf einer Geschäftsordnung des Deutschen Volksrates in der von dem Ausschuss für Recht und Rechtspflege...," Jun. 15, 1948, 55. There were additional committees for culture, a final peace treaty between the Allies and Germany, the economy, and social policy; others followed.
[83] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 235.
[84] Ibid. 144-146.
[85] Hermann Wentker, "Ein Deutsch-Deutsches Schicksal. Der CDU-Politiker Helmut Brandt zwischen Anpassung und Widerstand," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49, no. 3 (2001), 473.

power during the early 1930s to justify their emphasis on consensus government and parliamentary primacy. At its second session on April 15, the VA agreed upon a series of presentations for its next five sessions, from May 11 to June 8, that interpreted German legal history through antifascist-democratic ideal practice.[86] At the fifth session, Karl Polak presented a sustained analysis of the Weimar constitution, upholding his view that the republic's judicial and civil administration was undemocratic, and that "the future German constitution has to constitute and consolidate popular representation [*Volksvertretung*] vis-à-vis the state apparatus and the economy."[87] In the discussion that followed, Brandt countered Polak, claiming that his interpretation was "not historically correct," and that "it was only after parliament seized up [*festgelaufen*] that the Reich President intervened." When Polak reminded Brandt of Max Weber's observation that "if parliament has no political power from the outset, it will also become intellectually and politically impotent," Brandt interrupted that "parliament had power, it just didn't exercise it." While Polak remained unmoved, Grotewohl ultimately offered a compromise: parliament in the Weimar system "did not have the central position of power due to it in democracy." Grotewohl then called for a vote on this phrasing, which passed with "a great majority." It is unclear if Brandt assented as well.[88]

During the VA's eighth session on July 6, 1948, its members elected a subcommittee to draft the constitution's basic outline. The group included Steiniger, Polak, Brandt, Dertinger, and Käthe Kern, while an SED expert, Karl Schultes, joined

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[86] BArch DA 1/149, "Plan der Vorbereitung des Verfassungsentwurfes," Apr. 15, 1948, 12.

[87] BArch DA 1/151, "Die Weimarer Verfassung: ihre Errungenschaften und Mängel," 69.

[88] Ibid. "Verfassungsausschuss, 5. Sitzung," June 8, 1948, 20-21. An uncorrected version of Brandt's statement appears on page 53.

later.[89] Over the next two weeks the group crafted a rough outline that changed little of the SED draft's basis, preserving the key power of parliament and the sweeping prohibition of "war agitation, boycott agitation against democratic organizations, death threats against democratic politicians, [and] manifestations of hatred of people, faith, and race." Economic planning remained in place as well. However, the outline did revise the procedure for forming a government, and allowed for a constitutional committee elected from parliamentary members, along with three members of the state supreme court as well as three legal experts, to review possible legal abuses.[90]

In time, the draft constitution came to institutionalize both parliamentary primacy and consensus government. The subcommittee presented its work at the VA's tenth session on July 20, which was closed to the press at the subcommittee's request, due to possible conflicts over the draft's provisions for constitutional justice, civil rights protections, and a consensus-based government. Polak explained to his colleagues that the new constitutional committee would resolve constitutional disputes, but its decisions would be only binding if approved by parliament. Polak added that political parties and mass organizations could approve their list of parliamentary candidates, but only "if they operate within the framework of the constitution and its basic principles," which remained undefined.[91] Regarding rights themselves, Grotewohl interjected to highlight a clause that "restrictions on the rights of liberty are only permitted if they do not violate the basic idea of the constitution" – seemingly without realizing that this would not apply

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[89] BArch DA 1/153, "Verfassungsausschuss, 8. Sitzung," July 6, 1948, 52-53. It is unclear how, or if, Schultes' participation was agreed upon by the whole committee.

[90] BArch DA 1/154, "Richtlinien für die Verfassung der deutschen demokratischen Republik," 89-101.

[91] Ibid. "Verfassungsausschuss, 10. Sitzung," July 20, 1948, 175-178.

to restrictions within the constitution itself, such as those against "agitation."[92] After

further deliberations, CDU jurist Hugo Hickmann objected to a new requirement that a

government must include every parliamentary faction. Steiniger defended this "brilliant

innovation" (his own), explaining that it would "involve the opposition in the factual

work of the government" and thus institutionalize the antifascist movement and the

Democratic Bloc. Steiniger argued that parliament should not only house society's

political forces, but reflect society itself: "Just like the *Volk*," he added, "with those who

are stubborn and others who determine principles, but still at the end of the day live

together in objective, communal work, so we must also strive for this artificial, technical

homogeneity in parliament if we want to build democracy at all." After explaining the

complex rules guiding the "opposition" in this arrangement, Steiniger concluded that his

"organizationally well thought-out bloc system" would "create uniformity that may

eventually lead to a kind of bloc among democratic parties over time," effectively

institutionalizing consensus. Hickmann conceded the point, but he warned that such a

system could only work under occupation; thereafter "it is a very different matter."[93] The

VA approved the amended outline, and adjourned until late September to draw up a full

draft.[94]

      The VA's subcommittee also worked with the AR to refine the draft constitution's

judicial articles. Following preliminary sessions in June, the AR reconvened in

September to discuss the VA's initial outline. Benjamin criticized the outline for its

poorly developed judicial structure, whose points were listed "under the most varied

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[92] Ibid. 196-197.
[93] Ibid. 223-232.
[94] Ibid. "Anlage zum Beschlussprotokoll der 10. Sitzung des Verfassungsausschusses," Oct. 5, 1948, 88-88a.

headings."[95] Member Erich Gniffke thus proposed that the AR also create a subcommittee to draft a complete judiciary section, which included himself, Fechner, Benjamin, Brandt, and LDP lawyer Hermann Kastner.[96] The AR then discussed the subcommittee's articles at the next full session on September 10. The articles divided the courts at a national and state level, established an independent judiciary of lay and professional judges responsible only to the constitution and case law, mandated that lay judges be elected "on the proposal of democratic parties and organizations," and made court sessions open to the public unless "public security and order or morality are endangered." The articles also established a State Supreme Court, elected to four-year terms through parliament by government proposal, as well as responsible state courts. The articles also provided additional rights, such as legal representation, judicial confirmation of arrest warrants and searches, the right to see a judge within one day of arrest, and no *ex post facto* laws unless necessary "to overcome Nazism, fascism and militarism, or… to prosecute crimes against humanity."[97] Satisfied with the subcommittee's work, the AR made no major amendments and passed on the articles to the VA.[98]

By the end of September, the VA subcommittee presented a complete draft for consideration by the full committee. In its eleventh session on September 27, Schultes presented at length on the draft, responding to criticisms of the anti-"agitation" articles. Article 6 was amended to make "boycott agitation against democratic organizations,

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[95] BArch DA 1/100, "Ausschuss für Recht und Rechtspflege, 5. Sitzung...", Sept. 3, 1948, 27.
[96] Ibid. 42.
[97] BArch DA 1/101, "Entwurf für die Rechtspflege betreffenden Bestimmungen des Verfassungsentwurfes," Sept. 10, 1948, 8-9.
[98] Ibid. "Ausschuss für Recht und Rechtspflege, 6. Sitzung...", Sept. 10, 1948, 11.

death threats against democratic politicians, expression of religious, racial, or ethnic

hared and war propaganda, as well as all other acts against equality

[*Gleichberechtigung*]" crimes within the Criminal Code. In explaining these changes,

Schultes offered that these prohibitions should be interpreted through Article 8, which

guaranteed the right of personal liberty, postal privacy, and movement, as well as Article

143, which established that constitutional freedoms and rights cannot conflict with

current and future provisions passed "to overcome National Socialism and militarism,

and to make up for the injustice they have caused." Schultes explained that Article 6

would prevent "an abuse of freedom which could lead to democracy being broken up

again by the means of democracy."[99] The committee also debated whether judges should

be responsible to, and could be removed by, parliament. Polak defended the decision to

have judges responsible in this way, and the motion remained.[100]

These deliberations of the AR and VA were, however, increasingly overshadowed

by the accelerated development of a western German state. Due to the stalemate of the

December 1947 Foreign Minister Conference, the western Allies convened the first Six-

Power Conference in February 1948 to determine the future western German state. As the

USSR was excluded, SMAD leader Vasily Sokolovsky walked out of the Allied Control

Commission on March 20, ending joint occupational work. Following the second Six-

Power Conference from April to June, the western military governors advised the prime

ministers of the western German states, and mayors of major cities, to convene to form a

draft constitution. A draft was duly written at the Herrenchiemsee Conference of August

10-23, which formed the basis of the Parliamentary Council that convened in Bonn to

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[99] BArch DA 1/155, "Verfassungsausschuss, 11. Sitzung," Sept. 27, 1948, 21-22.
[100] Ibid. 55-56.

write a formal constitution.[101] Meanwhile, the relationship between the western Allies and the USSR completely broke down. In retribution for exclusion from the Six-Power Conference and introducing a separate western German currency on June 21, the USSR blockaded all land access routes to West Berlin beginning on June 24. Much to the surprise and embarrassment of the Soviet government and SED, the US resolved to hold on to the city, and resupplied it through a massive airlift.[102] The ensuing Berlin Blockade turned popular opinion in the US against the USSR, and largely foreclosed any further cooperation between the two powers in the years to come.

As the wartime Allies clashed over occupation policy, the VA's ideal consensus also began to fray. Sharp conflicts broke out over the draft constitution during the group's twelfth session on October 8. Heinrich Acker, deputy mayor of Greater Berlin and an SPD member before joining the SED, heavily criticized the draft. Acker first took exception to the "state authority" (*Staatsgewalt*) section that outlined the basis of the republic, arguing that "We are building the whole constitution on the concept of state authority... [and] I think it is a misfortune that we are sociologically adopting the concept of authority." Contrasting this term with that of "state order" (*Staatsordnung*), Acker argued that "authority is something you exercise against a stranger. It cannot be said that if a citizen does not conform to order, and measures are taken against him, that is authority – we call it sociological coercion [*Zwang*]." Acker also criticized the section's

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[101] For the developments of the Six-Power Conferences, and the centrality of the status of the Ruhr in the negotiations, see Gerd Wehner, *Die Westalliierten und das Grundgesetz 1948–1949: Die Londoner Sechsmächtekonferenz* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1994). For an account of the Parliamentary Council and the drafting of the Grundgesetz, see Michael F. Feldkamp, *Der Parlamentarische Rat 1948-1949: Die Entstehung des Grundgesetzes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

[102] Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line*, 411-477; for the Soviet and SED activity behind the blockade, see Paul Steege, "Holding on in Berlin: March 1948 and the Soviet Zone," *Central European History* 38, 3 (August 2005): 417-49.

wording as "dominated... by legal German," especially Article 1, which stated in part that "all questions that are decisive for the existence and development of the German people as a whole are decided by the Republic..." Acker argued instead that "state affairs are not decisions" and "questions can only be answered, not decided." Grotewohl forcefully responded that "today's consultation is the last [for] our draft constitution, and I will under no circumstances go as far as Dr. Acker in assessing the proposals here." Grotewohl then added that "a state is an organ for the exercise of power [*Macht*]" and "the only question is who exercises power in it. We socialists are of the opinion that you cannot accomplish this through an order [*Ordnung*], but that you can do it through real power relations [*Machtverhältnisse*]. We should therefore adhere to this phrasing under all circumstances."[103] The committee did exactly that; after relatively minor changes, Grotewohl presented the draft at the next People's Council session on October 22.[104] One month later, Acker lost his position as deputy mayor.

The People's Council then publicized the October draft throughout Germany, but most intensively in the SBZ. The ensuing "constitutional discussion" was to be a participatory affirmation of antifascist democracy in the SBZ's workplaces, organizations, and schools: Even before Grotewohl's speech, the People's Council secretariat printed 240,000 copies of the constitution to be sent to the SBZ's primary, secondary, technical, and vocational schools, as well as its own local offices.[105] Once this work was completed, the People's Council secretariat arranged the constitution to be discussed in the SMAD-licensed mass media, and integrated into school syllabi. Another

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[103] BArch DA 1/156, "Verfassungsausschuss, 12. Sitzung," Oct. 8, 1948, 18-20.
[104] BArch DA 1/3318, "Entwurf einer Verfassung für die deutsche demokratische Republik," Oct. 22, 1948.
[105] BArch DA 1/167, Bericht über Popularisierung der Verfassungs-Broschüren der Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Volksrates," Oct. 5, 1948, 31-42.

plan called for "every business and administration" to set up displays and signboards of the draft as "agitative centers [*agitatorischen Mittelpunkte*]," albeit "without falling into a uniform pattern" so as to avoid suspicion of coordination.[106] Leading VA members also wrote numerous articles extolling the virtues of the draft constitution and its ideals, with *Neue Justiz* featuring several. In his essay, Karl Polak criticized the undemocratic work of the western German Parliamentary Council, highlighting the centrality of parliament, or the "hegemony of peoples' representation," of the People's Council's draft.[107]

Popular reception, however, was mixed. The People's Council received numerous reports from the SBZ's mass organizations, parties, schools, and administrative institutions, but not all were positive. A Council representative, leading a discussion of the constitution at an FDGB youth meeting in January 1949, reported that young people "repeatedly pointed out that the cultural-political side was actually rather little taken into account in the draft constitution," and that "a constitution should not represent a direction of a concession, or party politics, but should find a middle ground."[108] Others repeated the need for nonpartisanship. In a letter to the People's Council, Josef Ressel of Berlin argued that "the present constitution draft, perhaps unintentionally, does not define individual legal and economic issues sufficiently comprehensively," and that "equitability must be anchored in the draft constitution for both right-wing and left-wing German people." Ressel thus recommended conservative changes, such as raising the voting age to twenty-six and parliamentary membership to those thirty and older, abolishing the state

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[106] BArch DA 1/170, "Bericht über den Stand der Verfassungspropaganda vom 26.11.48," Nov. 26, 1948, 110-112, and "Mappe Verfassungsdiskussion," 24.

[107] Karl Polak, "Volkssouveränität und Staatsgestaltung im kommenden Deutschland," *Neue Justiz* 2, no. 12 (1948): 243-249.

[108] BArch DA 1/174, "Warum Verfassungsdiskussion?", Jan 14, 1949, 62.

governments "because Germany is to be regarded as a closed German nation state regardless of previous traditional state borders, under a uniform German national language," and that judges should be subject only to the constitution and law in their jurisprudence, and nonpartisan.[109] Only the latter was included in the final draft.

After a four-month pause, the VA reconvened on February 18 to assess the ongoing constitutional discussion and its recommendations. Grotewohl touted the nine thousand larger meetings held to discuss the constitution, and the five hundred amendments proposed by groups and private citizens.[110] Rather than review such an overwhelming number, the committee instead delegated the responsibility to its subcommittee, which was divided in turn by sections of amendments to examine. The full VA discussed instead the Parliamentary Council's draft constitution, the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), predictably finding it of little improvement over the Weimar constitution.[111] To review the public recommendations, the subcommittee added two members from two new SMAD-licensed parties: Rudolf Albrecht of the Democratic Farmers' Party of Germany (DBD) and Lothar Bolz of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD). Over two all-day sessions, February 24 and 27, the subcommittee reviewed all recommendations, and made in total 129 additions and edits.[112] These were presented and discussed at the VA's last session on March 2, where subcommittee chairman Alfons Steiniger declared "for the information of some daily Berlin

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[109] BArch DA 1/171, letter from Ressel to the German People's Council and German Economic Council, Nov. 11, 1948, 46-48.
[110] BArch DA 1/3318, "Unkorrigiert Niederschrift, Verfassungsausschuss, 13. Sitzung," Feb. 18, 1949, 11-12.
[111] Ibid. 20-36. Philosopher Ernst Bloch also contributed a critique of the Basic Law; see BArch DA 1/162, "Das Bonner Grundgesetz und seine kulturpolitischen Auswirkungen," Feb. 5, 1949, 312-345.
[112] BArch DA 1/159, "Stellungnahme des Verfassungs-Unterausschusses zu den Diskussionsbeiträgen der Bevölkerung, Feb. 28, 1949, 92-118.

newspapers" that "on many important points, it was unpredictable how the grouping would turn out, and that, to the extent that initial ideological or technological discussions had taken place, a really serious discussion, which was by no means fixed beforehand, had taken place."[113] The VA respected the subcommittee's findings, and passed on the amended constitution to the People's Council. Introducing the draft at the Council's session on March 18-19, Grotewohl denounced the Basic Law, using it as a counterpoint to the VR draft that placed all power in the hands of the parliament, and thus the German *Volk*. Following speakers from the Democratic Bloc parties and mass organizations, the People's Council approved the constitution.[114]

In addition to numerous minor amendments, the final draft included some significant responses to citizen concerns about nonpartisanship, rights protections, and private property. The draft allowed for citizen petitions (*Eingaben*) to the Volkskammer, and mandated that public servants are "servants of the whole and not one party," as established in Article 3. Article 6 also clarified that "exercising democratic rights in the meaning of the constitution is not boycott-agitation," and Article 24 guaranteed that after land expropriations, farmers would maintain private ownership of their small holdings. Article 32 guaranteed maternity protection laws, with corresponding facilities for mothers and children, while Articles 36-39 regarding school reforms were completely rewritten. Article 92 now clarified that parliamentary factions with forty or more members would be represented in the government in proportion to their faction size. Most significantly,

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[113] BArch DA 1/3318, "Unkorrigiert Niederschrift, Verfassungsausschuss, 14. Sitzung," Mar. 2, 1949, 66-67.
[114] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 291-294.

Article 132 explained in greater detail the process for removing Supreme Court judges and state prosecutors by the Volkskammer and state parliaments.[115]

The new constitution did not, however, facilitate renewed inter-German talks, and in part heralded the erosion of democracy in the SBZ. After adopting the constitution, the People's Council voted to elect a third People's Congress on May 15-16. Yet rather than allow free elections for the Congress, the SED argued (with Soviet permission) that ballots should only present Democratic Bloc "unity lists" rather than individual party lists, to present an image of unity. The CDU and LDP agreed to this due to the "national emergency" of impending division, in exchange for a return to party lists and proportional representation thereafter. The SED apportioned itself a third of all Congress delegates, with one third split between the CDU and LDP, fifteen percent for the DBD and NDPD, ten percent for the FDGB, and the rest for the mass organizations. Voters could only approve or reject the list; although 34.2 percent of voters rejected the list, the approving supermajority signaled a broad consensus for unity government and German unification. This display of "democratic" unity did nothing to prevent the foundation of the FRG on May 23, 1949.[116] Convened on May 29-30, the third People's Congress again resolved against west German independence, called for a "National Front for Unity and a Just Peace" to draw together all Germans in pursuing unity, and elected a new People's Council. The third Congress also sharply distinguished developments in western and eastern Germany, attacking what many delegates saw as resurgent fascism in the western German government.[117] Although the SBZ remained an occupied zone, and the Soviet

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[115] BArch DA 1/4524, "Entwurf der Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zur Vorlage auf der 6. Volksratstagung vom 17. bis 19. März 1949,"
[116] Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 113; Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 297-298.
[117] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 300-302.

leadership continued to press for all-German unity, the SED leadership recognized division as an at least temporary reality, and looked to transition the People's Council to a provisional government.

Over the next two months, the German Democratic Republic took shape on the basis of the People's Council constitution, and several years of antifascist-democratic transformations within the SBZ. Throughout summer 1949, top SED leaders continually petitioned the Soviet leadership to implement the new constitution and form a government, to no avail. Following the election of western CDU leader Konrad Adenauer as FRG chancellor on September 15, Pieck, Grotewohl, and Ulbricht flew to Moscow to convince Stalin to reconsider his position. The SED leaders argued that an eastern German government was necessary for continued struggle against the Western powers, and that due to popular support for Adenauer's CDU, quick unification would bring the SBZ under conservative control. With Stalin's permission, the SED then used the People's Council to vote itself into a provisional parliament, or Volkskammer. This body in turn ratified the constitution and appointed the first GDR government on October 7, 1949. Although Democratic Bloc members attained parliamentary, ministerial, or administrative positions, SED leaders occupied most major state offices: Grotewohl became prime minister and chairman of the governing Council of Ministers, Ulbricht became a deputy prime minister, and Pieck served as President. In turn they appointed Fechner as Minister of Justice, Benjamin as vice president of the Supreme Court, and Ernst Melsheimer as the chief state prosecutor.[118]

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[118] Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 117-120; Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 302-319. This was not their first trip to Moscow for the purpose; Pieck, Grotewohl, and Ulbricht attempted the same in December 1948, but were rebuffed by Stalin, who advised them to "zigzag" to socialism. See Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 180-181.

Despite being ultimately controlled by the SED, the People's Congress movement, and the drafting of the 1949 constitution, exhibited something of antifascist democracy in practice, bringing together activists from across Germany committed to a unified, antifascist, and democratic German state. The VA's deliberations also involved genuine debate among members with at times divergent legal positions and views on recent German history, creating a constitution based on antifascist-democratic ideals with deep genealogy in the socialist imaginary. However, the SED would use the state and judicial institutions established in the 1949 constitution to gradually implement a minority-rule, Marxist-Leninist dictatorship – one that proved to be so unpopular that East German citizens nearly overthrew it four years later.

1.4 *Consensus to Minority Rule: The "Construction of Socialism" and the 1953 Uprising*

Although the GDR was founded as an antifascist-democratic state, over time the SED leadership under Walter Ulbricht eschewed the consensus politics of the occupation years and initiated a transition to Soviet-style socialism, or Marxism-Leninism. This transition began within the SED itself by 1948, and culminated in the "construction of socialism" program of 1952. Along the way, the party closed its ranks and expelled thousands of former SPD members, prosecuted a number of Democratic Bloc party members for crimes under Article 6 of the 1949 constitution, and restricted democratic elections to static unity lists. Minority rule also directly affected East German workers. Following the Soviet example of privileging heavy industry over consumer goods, the SED also used the GDR's judicial system to prosecute workers for "economic crimes" that threatened to slow down production. Tens of thousands of workers were imprisoned

under these laws, while the rest struggled to keep up with higher work norms. By spring
1953, popular sentiment turned sharply against the East German government, and the
SED above all. On June 16-17, workers struck against raised work norms, leading to
mass protests that freed prisoners, attacked party and judicial authorities, re-founded
independent SPD groups, and demanded free elections. However, Soviet troops
suppressed the uprising, and the division of Soviet leaders and Ulbricht's opponents
allowed him to hold onto power. However, in the wake of the uprising, the SED
introduced a more moderate "New Course" that lowered work norms, limited
prosecutions for economic crimes, and introduced a robust public debate on the practice
of socialism in the GDR.

By late 1947, inter-Allied conflict and the possibility of German division caused
some SED leaders to seek a more distinctly Marxist-Leninist path for the SBZ. Even as
the SED publicly committed itself to antifascist democracy and pursuing German
unification, Ulbricht and Sergei Tiulpanov, the SMAD's information department chief,
saw the failure of the Foreign Ministers Conference of December 1947 as a signal that
German division was inevitable, and the SED should prepare for a more dominant role in
society.[119] By May 1948, Tiulpanov proposed to the SED executive that the SBZ's
antifascist-democratic transformation had advanced much farther than anticipated in
1944-45. Given Germany's *de facto* division into "two parts, which develop according to
different laws," the SBZ would develop into a "higher" democracy than a liberal
bourgeois state. In anticipation of the SBZ's further development into a fully socialist
democracy, the SED could no longer act as a "parliamentary party," and should instead

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[119] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 14

emphasize "Leninism" in its training cadres, close membership to selected individuals, and become the "decisive power" in the SBZ by assuming "a dominant state position."[120] Although Stalin recalled Tiulpanov to Moscow in 1949 for advocating this course, Ulbricht quietly followed his advice. By September 1948, the SED established a Central Party Control Commission (ZPKK), led by Ulbricht's close ally Hermann Matern, to review party members for corruption, deviance, and contacts with foreign agents. The ZPKK also targeted former SPD members, especially those who maintained contacts with the western SPD.[121] Given this growing repression, even leading SED activists like VA legal expert Karl Schultes, Ulbricht Group member Wolfgang Leonhard, and AR member Erich Gniffke emigrated west, along with thousands of others.[122] Although the SED did not practice show trials like those in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the party approved of such measures against perceived internal "enemies."[123]

Following a party conference in January 1949, the SED also gradually transitioned from a socialist mass party to a cadre-based, Marxist-Leninist party. As anticipated by Tiulpanov, the party leadership justified this development as a reaction to the return of "English, American, and French imperialists" and western German capitalists to power, and the infiltration of SPD "spies and agents" to create "anti-Soviet and nationalist tendencies and sentiments" within the party itself. Consequently the Central Committee declared the SED as a Marxist-Leninist "party of a new type" acting

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[120] Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Wilhelm Pieck - Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1953* (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), 216-227.

[121] Thomas Klein, Wilfriede Otto, and Peter Grieder, *Visionen: Repression und Opposition in der SED (1949-1989)*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt/Oder: Frankfurter Oder Editionen, 1996), 146-148, 164-178; Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 164-169.

[122] Amos, *Die Entstehung der Verfassung*, 115; Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 165. See also Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1966).

[123] Josef Streit, "Die Prozesse gegen die Verschwörer in den Volksdemokratien," *Neue Justz* 4, no. 1 (1950), 8-10.

as the "vanguard" of the working class, adopting the practice of democratic centralism in its internal affairs. This entailed "intraparty democracy" based on "socialist consciousness [*Bewußtsein*]," and "strict party discipline" based on "party decisions" that are "valid without exception for all party members," especially those working in state parliaments and governments and mass organizations. The SED also affirmed its alliance with the USSR and the people's democracies of eastern Europe. Nevertheless, in deference to Stalin's desire for unification, the conference's final report affirmed that the SBZ was "an antifascist-democratic order in which the working class occupies crucial positions" rather than a fully socialist "people's democracy." The party reaffirmed its policy of consolidating the zone's "antifascist-democratic order," and reuniting Germany through a popular front gathering "all antifascist-democratic parties and mass organizations... aimed at promoting democratic forces and fighting the reactionary forces in whatever mask they may appear."[124] A majority of party members supported this latter policy at the time, and would continue to do so into the early 1950s.

After the founding of the GDR, the SED also formally maintained antifascist democracy's institutional basis, and the goal of German unity. On January 7, 1950, the People's Congress secretariat reconstituted itself as the National Council of the National Front, an organization founded on October 4, 1949 to replace the People's Congress as an ongoing public initiative for unification.[125] Although pro-unification SED leaders like Grotewohl hoped the National Front would attract Germans of all political persuasions,

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[124] Andreas Herbst, Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, and Jürgen Winkler, eds., *Die SED: Geschichte, Organisation, Politik. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 1997), 569-577. Following the conference, key remarks from Pieck, Grotewohl, and Ulbricht were also summarized and sent to the People's Council. See BArch DA 1/174, "Auszug der in den Referaten von Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht und Otto Grotewohl..." Feb. 2, 1949, 53.
[125] Ibid. 580-581.

this did not materialize. The Front languished in ambiguity until October 1950, when it was finally designated to succeed both the People's Congress and the Democratic Bloc as the Volkskammer's umbrella organization for all parties and mass organizations. Based on Alfons Steiniger's concept of a "permanent bloc" of parties for the duration of a parliamentary term, the National Front would ultimately organize elections and all-party representation in the government. Moreover, parties could not refuse to participate, as this would be "obstructionist" and against the constitution; rather they could conduct "opposition from within" by criticizing the majority program while pursuing their own vision in their respective ministries.[126] For the national and state elections on October 15, 1950, voters were presented with a familiar yes/no unity list – albeit no longer under the name of the People's Congress, but that of the National Front.[127]

Simultaneously, the SED under Ulbricht's leadership introduced a more explicitly Marxist-Leninist path for the GDR, a policy that conflicted with other party leaders committed to consensus government and German unity. At the third Party Congress of July 9-12, Ulbricht was elected General Secretary (First Secretary after 1953) and thus party leader. In his address, Ulbricht staked his party's ideal authority on Soviet-style rapid industrialization, and economic growth through a five-year plan. Ulbricht situated these practices in the "great accomplishments" of "our workers, employees, technical intelligentsia, and farmers... since 1945."[128] The five-year plan was, at least in part, an acceleration of steps taken during the years of antifascist democracy. The German

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[126] Alfons Steiniger, *Das Blocksystem. Beitrag zu einer demokratischen Verfassungslehre* (Berlin: Akademie, 1949).

[127] Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 199-202.

[128] BArch DY 30/40017, "Stenographische Niederschrift des III. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands vom 20.-24. Juli 1950," 472.

Economic Commission (DWK), established in 1947, had already centralized labor unions

and coordinated expropriated industries through a two-year plan (1948-49). Nevertheless,

the first five-year plan was far more ambitious, prioritizing production in the steel and

energy sectors, shipbuilding, and heavy industry. Overall, Ulbricht planned to double

industrial production from 1950 figures, increase agricultural yields by twenty-five

percent and labor productivity by sixty percent, reduce costs by twenty-three percent,

boost the standards of living (measured by national income) by 160 percent, and to spend

forty percent more funds on education and cultural development.[129] In part to ensure that

these economic practices would be implemented effectively, Ulbricht also initiated a

purge of the SED's membership in October 1950, explicitly drawing inspiration from

similar purges in Hungary and Bulgaria. In addition to "hostile and morally unclean

elements," the purges focused on members who had been in western Allied prison camps,

or emigrated to capitalist countries during the 1930s and 1940s.[130] Although Ulbricht did

not say so openly, the purges also targeted former SPD members. By accelerating

economic centralization, emphasizing gross productivity, and purging party members,

Ulbricht intended to build socialism along a Soviet-style Marxist-Leninist path, even if

this alienated East Germans or other SED leaders, and went against his own thinking

prior to 1945.

Ulbricht and his allies also used the GDR's justice system to prosecute political

enemies outside of the party, beginning with the remaining inmates of the NKVD

"special camps." Following the foundation of the GDR, the SMAD formally became the

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[129] Ibid. 482-487.
[130] Walter Ulbricht, "Die Überprüfung der Parteimitglieder und der Umtausch der Parteimitgliedsbücher," *Einheit* 5, no. 12 (1950): 1053-1061.

advisory Soviet Control Commission (SKK), and transferred its responsibilities to the East German state. This included the NKVD camps, which now fell under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, while the Justice Ministry initiated reviews and prosecutions. Leading Ministry officials, including Benjamin, Melsheimer, and Hildegard Heinze, reviewed individual cases and brought indictments based on confessions often obtained through torture. Although inmates were detained in a number of newly built prisons, most trials took place at the prison at Waldheim. Following Soviet military tribunal rules, prisoners did not have access to an attorney unless in cases requiring the death penalty, and most proceedings, from indictment to sentencing, took twenty-four hours. In total, 3,324 sentences were handed down from late April to early June, with over two thousand being between fifteen and twenty-five years in prison. Thirty-three were condemned to death.[131] Writing in *Neue Justiz* after the trials, Heinze assured readers that the convicted were "exclusively fascist criminals" and their trials exhibited "a picture of tremendous crimes against humanity, committed not only against Germans, but also against all the peoples oppressed by Hitler-fascism, especially in the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia." Heinze then thanked the local judiciary and police for their "valuable contribution to the implementation of the Potsdam Agreement and to securing peace."[132]

Despite these assurances, other Justice Ministry officials sharply criticized the Waldheim trials, including some who helped write the 1949 constitution. As the trials were "special courts" as classified under Article 134 of the constitution, the

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[131] Mironenko et al., *Sowjetische Speziallager*, 97-98. See also Wilfriede Otto, *Die 'Waldheimer Prozesse' 1950. Historische, politische und juristische Aspekte im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Antifaschismus und Stalinismus* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 1993) and Falco Werkentin, *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995).

[132] Hildegard Heinze, "Kriegsverbrecherprozesse in Waldheim," *Neue Justiz* 4, no. 7 (1950), 250.

Volkskammer had final jurisdiction. Family members of the prisoners thus petitioned CDU chairman and GDR deputy prime minister Otto Nuschke to look into the issue, as this fell within his responsibilities at the Council of Ministers.[133] Privately, he asked Helmut Brandt, a Justice Ministry secretary since October 1949, to go to Waldheim and see the trials for himself. Brandt did, and strongly criticized the haphazard trials, singling out Heinze's disregard for constitutional rights. After Brandt threatened to resign his position if Heinze's nomination to state prosecutor was not blocked, Nuschke pledged his support.[134] Nuschke raised the issue at the August 10 Council of Ministers meeting, but Ulbricht shouted him down, arguing that Nuschke had been misinformed by Brandt. The discussion then turned to Brandt himself, who had been under investigation by the Central Commission for State Control (ZKSK), the state equivalent of the ZPKK, for using his private practice as a lawyer to defend "economic criminals" in the SBZ.[135] A week later, Nuschke recommended that the Council of Ministers form a review committee of thirteen mishandled Waldheim cases, sending the report to Fechner as well. Yet before Fechner could respond, Grotewohl put forth Heinze's promotion at the next Council meeting, which passed with only Nuschke, Foreign Minister Georg Dertinger, and Postal Minister Friedrich Burmeister voting against. Nothing more was said of the Waldheim trials, or a possible review committee.

Ulbricht and his Justice Ministry allies then prosecuted and convicted their CDU critics through the same laws they helped to draft. Brandt was arrested by the Ministry for State Security (Stasi) on September 6 on the basis of the ZKSK investigation. The ZKSK

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[133] Mironenko et al., *Sowjetische Speziallager*, 100-101.
[134] Wentker, "Ein deutsch-deutsches Schicksal," 489.
[135] BArch DC 1/2590, letter from the ZKSK to Grotewohl, Mar. 21, 1950. See also Wentker, "Ein deutsch-deutsches Schicksal," 483-489.

highlighted his "particular preference for defending fascist economic criminals" and his

alleged attempts "to make the laws of the [GDR] ineffective in their application."[136]

Brandt was then detained without seeing a judge for two years, in clear violation of

Article 136 of the 1949 constitution. On January 11, 1952, Brandt was further charged

with sharing Ministry of Justice materials with Bavarian Justice Minister Josef Müller.

By October, the Stasi connected Brandt's case with that of Georg Dertinger, who had also

been under investigation for his West German contacts. The GDR Supreme Court

eventually tried the "Dertinger Group," which now included four other defendants, in

spring 1954. Judgement was carried out on June 2, with Hilde Benjamin and Melsheimer

present. Despite the "angry intervention" of Melsheimer, Brandt testified that he had been

abused in pretrial detention. Nevertheless all six defendants were found guilty under

Article 6 of the constitution, and sentenced to terms pre-approved by the Ulbricht.[137]

Brandt was released in 1958, but was re-arrested after attempting to leave for West Berlin

and incarcerated again until 1964, when he was ransomed by the FRG government.[138]

Despite these harsh measures against perceived internal enemies, the SED

leadership was not uniform in its support for a rapid socialist transformation of East

Germany. Ulbricht's pursuit of a Marxist-Leninist GDR ironically stood at stark variance

from other SED and Soviet leaders who still advocated for unification. The Prague

Declaration of October 1950, signed by the GDR, USSR, and the people's democracies,

called for a "constituent assembly" to establish an all-German government. Ulbricht, as

the driving force behind the acceleration of Marxist-Leninist ideal practices, resisted the

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[136] BArch DC 1/2590, ZKSK report on Brandt, Sept. 7, 1950.
[137] Wentker, "Ein deutsch-deutsches Schicksal," 493-497.
[138] Ibid. 497-402.

Declaration, and only supported it after pressure from Stalin.[139] Other Politburo members, however, fully supported unification. In December 1950, Grotewohl sent a public letter to Adenauer calling for negotiations, although this was rebuffed.[140] Other Politburo members, such as *Neues Deutschland* editor-in-chief Rudolf Herrnstadt and Stasi minister Wilhelm Zaisser, also supported unification, and came to oppose Ulbricht's increasingly dictatorial bearing.[141] Ulbricht also did little to engender Soviet support. By spring 1952, Stalin sent the western Allies the first of several so-called "Stalin Notes," calling for the reunification of Germany in exchange for its neutrality. Although rejected by the FRG and western Allies, the notes exhibited Stalin's ambivalence towards both the GDR and the SED.[142] Ulbricht in turn relied on staunch allies in the Politburo, especially Matern and Erich Honecker, to generate support for his policies.

The ambitious "construction of socialism" (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*) program, presented by Ulbricht at the Second Party Conference in July, reflected the extremity of this position. The program called for establishing East German armed forces; accelerating the five-year plan through raised work norms, rewriting labor, criminal, and civil codes to prosecute "economic crimes"; collectivizing medium and small farms; and "relentlessly" removing any "anti-party" elements within the SED.[143] The SED also abolished state administrations, replacing them with fourteen new districts (*Bezirke*), and closed the border with the FRG other than through Berlin.[144] The party also cracked down on

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[139] Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 204-226; Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*, 127-132.
[140] Adenauer turned down Grotewohl's offer, demanding free, all-German elections as a preconditions to negotiations. See ibid. 214-216.
[141] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 53-66.
[142] Spilker, *The East German Leadership*, 227-232; see also Jurgen Zarusky, ed., *Die Stalin-Note Vom 10. März 1952: Neue Quellen und Analysen* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2002).
[143] Herbst, Stephan, and Winkler, *Die SED*, 588-592.
[144] BArch DP 1/256, "Analyse der Rechtsprechung in Strafsachen auf Grund der Verordnung über Maßnahmen an der Demarkationslinie...," Jan. 24, 1953.

practicing Christians and increased surveillance over the National Front parties, a flagrant act of minority rule that came as an unpleasant surprise to SED members committed to ideals of antifascist-democratic consensus.[145] More ominously, East German farmers resisted collectivization, while workers resented the increased work norms and shortages of consumer goods. Above all else, East Germans of all social groups deeply resented the relentless prosecution of their fellow citizens for "economic crimes," where relatively trifling mistakes or indiscretions at work could lead to draconian prison sentences. From December 1952 until March 1953, judicial authorities brought nearly ten thousand such cases to trial, a number so excessive that Melsheimer wrote to the Central Committee in April 1953 asking for a more selective approach. Yet Ulbricht instructed judicial and prison administrators to continue their efforts.[146] Nevertheless, his drive to construct a Soviet-inspired, Marxist-Leninist society steadily eroded the party's ideal authority and its hold on power, and would ultimately threaten the existence of East Germany itself.

By early 1953, popular opinion across the GDR signaled deep dissatisfaction with the SED's "construction of socialism" program. In addition to punitive laws for "economic crimes," workers were also subject to raised work norms. Introduced in October 1947 through SMAD Order No. 234, work norms were typically set by "shock workers" who overfilled them to an impossible degree. Raised norms meant that workers worked longer hours for the same pay, increased the chances (and instances) of accidents, and led to inferior products. Moreover, local representatives of the FDGB had to enforce the work norms passed by the Council of Ministers, and had little room to negotiate with

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[145] Stephen Brockmann, *The Writers' State: Constructing East German Literature, 1945-1959* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), 172-173.

[146] Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany 1945-1955* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 161-163.

frustrated workers. Workers often refused to speak with SED activists at all, and "shock workers" were at times attacked by their colleagues. Workers also frequently went on strike, especially during the spring of 1953. These gathered tensions came to a head in May, as mass emigrations of farmers in late 1952 led to food shortages in the cities, along with a scarcity of consumer goods. This compelled the SED to announce a ten percent rise in work norms, as well as increased prices for food, health care, and transportation – taken together, a roughly thirty-three percent pay cut for the average worker. Although in a state of disarray after the death of Stalin in March, the Soviet leadership recognized the growing discontent among the GDR population. Ulbricht and Grotewohl were called to Moscow and instructed to follow a "New Course," advocated by longtime secret police leader Lavrentiy Beria. While the New Course softened a number of policies, it did not rescind the work norms; once East German workers realized this, they initiated strikes.[147]

Although the June 1953 Uprising began as strikes protesting worker exploitation, demonstrators across the GDR eventually demanded new elections and a new socialist party, and freed political prisoners held in local jails. Events began at the Stalinallee construction site in Berlin, where the SED had been building a monumental series of apartments and shops to embody its National Reconstruction Program. The workers, hearing of the raised work norms on June 16, went on strike, and presented a list of complaints to their FDGB representatives. Thousands of workers from other sites joined in solidarity, marching down Stalinallee chanting, "We are workers, not slaves!" and

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[147] Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR*, 194-206; Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 66-71; Armin Mitte and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993), 48-53; and Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 36-37.

"We demand lowering of standards and prices!"[148] The next day, FDGB representatives

reported a shift in strikers' slogans, who now chanted "We're at the end of our agony; we

demand free elections!" and "[He] has no purpose, the goatee [Ulbricht] must go!"[149]

Workers across the GDR also called for the reestablishment of the SPD; demonstrators in

the border town of Görlitz even re-founded the party in the town square.[150] Protestors

also consistently expressed deep frustrations with judicial abuses and legal insecurity.

Many groups demanded Hilde Benjamin's arrest and imprisonment, targeted local judges

and prosecutors, and raided local prisons, freeing political prisoners and those held on

economic charges.[151] Eventually over half a million people joined the unrest in over 350

cities and villages. Given the collapse of local security forces, the SKK assumed

leadership of the GDR, and held the top SED leadership at SKK headquarters until Red

Army units suppressed the unrest.[152]

  Surprisingly, Ulbricht managed to retain his position as General Secretary after

the uprising. Although Politburo members Zaisser and Herrnstadt challenged Ulbricht's

leadership, they were unable to gain Soviet support for his ouster. Following Beria's

arrest and incarceration on June 26, the emerging collective leadership under Georgy

Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev, while no supporters of Ulbricht, deemed him too

essential to remove. Ulbricht quickly retaliated against his opponents: Zaisser,

Herrnstadt, and Ackermann were forced out of the Politburo by July. Minister of Justice

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[148] "Bericht vom Einsatz Stalin-Allee," June 16, 1953, *Projekt "17. Juni 1953"*,
http://www.17juni53.de/chronik/530616/53-06-16_fdgb_liebenau.pdf (accessed June 6, 2020).
[149] "Bericht Bauarbeiter Stalinallee," June 17, 1953, *Projekt "17. Juni 1953"*,
http://www.17juni53.de/chronik/530616/53-06-17_fdgb_nohr.pdf (accessed June 6, 2020).
[150] Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 185.
[151] Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *17. Juni 1953: Volksaufstand in der DDR* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2003),
125; see also Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 182-194.
[152] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 71-72; Mitte and Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten*, 53-62.

Fechner, who supported the New Course in *Neue Justiz* and defended the rights of

Stalinallee workers to strike in a *Neues Deutschland* interview after the uprising, was also

removed from his position, expelled from the SED, and incarcerated until 1956.[153] Hilde

Benjamin succeeded Fechner as Justice Minister. Benjamin publicly admitted that

"criminal judgments were passed in some areas, the magnitude of which was not only

always understood, and which were also not designed to consolidate and strengthen

confidence in legal certainty," especially regarding the "high penalties" mandated "in the

field of the protection of public property."[154] Despite this, her appointment was met with

widespread disapproval from local CDU and LPD leaders, as well as East German

citizens. Nevertheless, Benjamin retained her position until 1967.[155]

Through creeping minority rule and an intensive "construction of socialism"

program, the SED flagrantly violated the civil and social rights, from due process to labor

exploitation, it had pledged to defend in the GDR's 1949 constitution. For the second

time in German history, democracy was broken up by the means of democracy. Unlike

during the Weimar Republic, the collective effects of this triggered an uprising that

nearly toppled the party-state. Yet the June Uprising cannot be reduced to a wholescale

rejection of socialism; certainly calls from East German workers to reestablish the SPD

signaled a rejection of Marxist-Leninist practices rather than broadly socialist ideals.

Instead, the June Uprising was the result of the GDR's transition from antifascist

democracy to a minority dictatorship, and the country's first significant struggle over

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[153] Fechner, "Der neue Kurs der Regierung und die Aufgaben der Justiz," *Neue Justiz* 7, no. 7 (1953); "Alle Inhaftierten kommen vor ein ordentliches Gericht. Interview mit dem Minister der Justiz, Max Fechner...," *Neues Deutschland*, June 30, 1953. Fechner had been under suspicion since at least December 1948; see Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 24.
[154] BArch DX 3/805, "Unsere Gerichte – ein wirksames Instrument bei der Durchführung des neuen Kurses," Jul. 21, 1953.
[155] Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 227-228.

ideal authority. Citizens, promised an antifascist, egalitarian, and democratic state by the SED, rightfully expected the party to practice these ideals in reality. When the party instead ruled by decree and exploited its workers, East Germans responded by going on strike, beating up local judges and prosecutors, and liberating fellow citizens from prison.

Conclusion: Antifascist Democracy as Ideal Practice

The GDR was founded as the first socialist state on German soil by a party committed to antifascist democracy for at least the first four years of its existence, a reality that its members lived through and genuinely believed in. An ideal that took shape through German socialism's bitter divisions during and after the First World War and near annihilation in the course of the Second, antifascist democracy was administered by an occupying army and its local political representatives, crafted by politicians and lawyers through an ambitious constitution, and ultimately foreclosed by geopolitics and the imposition of minority rule. Nevertheless, antifascist democracy was first practiced by local activists and liberated concentration camp inmates, a persecuted minority who resisted Nazism and dedicated itself to establishing a democratic and egalitarian Germany. Despite the GDR's transformation into a minority dictatorship, the years of antifascist democracy birthed East Germany's founding ideal, and most resilient claim to ideal authority, until its dissolution in 1990.

Few learned the limits of ideal authority better than Ulbricht himself, who prohibited the raising of work norms after the 1953 Uprising, and took a more relaxed approach to public discourse and cultural content. The uprising vividly illustrated that although the SED had succeeded in building and seizing state power, and expropriating

the means of production, this did not win many East German workers to the SED's

interpretation of socialism. In this sense, the assessments of KPD leaders before 1945,

including Ulbricht, proved prophetic: The quick imposition of Marxism-Leninism did not

quickly transform the consciousness of the East German people. Consequently,

throughout the 1950s the party would focus much more heavily on shaping East

Germans' consciousness, above all else through a new socialist literature.

Chapter Two
"A Great and Beautiful Task":
Shaping Consciousness through Literature, 1945-1959

Aufbau Press, the GDR's leading publisher of literature and philosophy in the

1940s and 1950s, began its 1952 collective contract with a "great and beautiful task." Its

employees pledged "to suffuse the working people with a socialist consciousness through

literature, to inspire them to build a new social order, and to promote their willingness to

consciously and resolutely defend the success of their work."[1] Aufbau's workers certainly

succeeded by sheer quantity: Printing almost three million copies of 242 titles in 1952,

the house's output that year was enough to give one in six East Germans a new book.[2]

Yet Aufbau's goal of getting "the right book at the right time to the right man" had a

deeper meaning, a provision of the most essential means of the spiritual renewal of the

German nation. This meant no less than facilitating the cultural reckoning and

redemption of a people who, less than twenty years prior, acclaimed Hitler's rise to

power, persecuted his enemies, and enthusiastically prosecuted his war of annihilation.

To successfully complete this task, Aufbau and a number of other cultural institutions

would work to shape a new consciousness among East Germans, transforming them from

a nation of complicit fascists to antifascist citizens committed to building socialism

through their best progressive traditions.

This chapter examines how East German cultural activists sought to shape

socialist consciousness through writing, editing, and publishing literature from 1945 until

1959. This ideal practice drew from German and Soviet traditions in the socialist

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[1] Berlin Staatsbibliothek Bestände, Aufbau-Verlag (SBB A-V) 38-0020, S.123, "Betriebskollektivvertrag, Planjahr 1952," 43.
[2] SBB A-V 38-1762, S.145, "Eine kleine Chronik des Aufbau-Verlages..." Aug. 1955, 158.

imaginary. East German activists first sought the union of cultural spirit (*Geist*) and political power (*Macht*), or the ideal and practical realms of knowledge and action. Even before the founding of the GDR, intellectuals called for the union of *Geist* and *Macht* by envisioning a culturally renewed Germany striving to realize its highest objective "truth" of socialism. Imagining this ideal practice was possible because political-cultural activists, from writers and editors to party-state leaders, agreed on the validity of socialism's objective truth, and that literature, as an "ideological means of production," could express that truth and inspire its practice among readers. This truth encompassed not just Marxist-Leninist vanguardism, but progressive, classical humanist traditions as well. East German cultural activists certainly drew on the Soviet literary style of socialist realism, or narratives of the construction of socialism that were to facilitate an individual's identity "in the spirit of socialism," and their commitment to practicing socialism in everyday life.[3] Consciousness thus encompassed the subjective and collective. Although led, shaped, and enforced by political institutions and groups, it also extended to individual subjectivity, or the comprehension of oneself as a subject of history's deeper purpose or truth, and commitment to making this ideal real. Once expressed and imbibed through literature, this consciousness would transform East Germans into "knowledgeable, responsible, truly democratically-minded citizens who were able to find their way about in life, especially political life," as SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht argued in 1958.[4] Literature, then, served as the primary conduit of consciousness from writers, editors, and administrators, or "intellectuals," to workers;

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[3] Andrei Zhdanov, *Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 12-13.

[4] Walter Ulbricht, *On Questions of Socialist Construction in the GDR* (Dresden: Zeit im Bild, 1968), 273.

literature's symbolic representation of socialist reality would directly reach readers'

emotions, thus transforming their own actions.[5] Taken together, consciousness was the

aware, active relation of the individual and collective to socialism's historical mission.

Literature was its primary medium of inspiration.

A nexus of cultural institutions were key to putting this ideal into practice, based

on a common commitment to shaping consciousness through literature. Founded in

August 1945, Aufbau Press immediately set about publishing classical humanist, socialist

realist, and antifascist literature to facilitate Germany's cultural renewal. Over time,

Aufbau editors reinterpreted classical works, published established authors, and worked

with new writers to cultivate a distinctly East German literature. Yet Aufbau's parent

organization, the Cultural Alliance for the Democratic Renewal of Germany

(Kulturbund), first articulated the union of *Geist* and *Macht*, and encouraged East

Germans to practice this union by drawing upon the most progressive traditions in

German culture. By 1951, the GDR's state publishing administration, the Office for

Literature and Publishing (ALV), also planned and oversaw book production and literary

themes, but after the 1953 Uprising largely trusted publishers and editors to

collaboratively shape content with their authors, often approving recommended titles

without further review. Taken together, activists at these institutions agreed on the need

to instill a progressive consciousness in their fellow citizens. Accordingly, authors,

editors, and administrators worked together in publishing classical-humanist, antifascist,

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[5] For the confluence of socialist realism, consciousness, and social values in Soviet literature, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

and socialist realist literature to carry on the best classical humanist traditions of the German past, and to inspire East Germans to build socialism in the present.

Shaping consciousness through literature during this time reflected tensions within subjectivity and collective identity, *Geist* and *Macht*, and ultimately how literature should depict an objective social-historical truth in the making. Creating early East German literature was an evolving practice of ideal consensus based on conflicts over the contents of consciousness, and who had the ideal authority to shape it. Although early East German literature has been perceived as largely subordinate to the SED's political concerns, conflicts over content does not reduce to a conflict between party leaders on one hand, and intellectuals on the other. Cultural activists were often leading party members themselves, and generally recognized the party's ideal authority to set cultural policy.[6] More recent work has shown that the 1940s and 1950s were decades of intense debate and ambition, with an emergent literary culture attempting to shape a new collective German identity committed to building a socialist society.[7] As will be explored

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[6] Secondary literature has typically focused on the role of the SED in shaping cultural policy and literary content, the relative disagreements of cultural intellectuals with this policy, and if or how these disagreements constituted "resistance" to party rule. See David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), Axel Fair-Schulz, *Loyal Subversion: East Germany and its Bildungsbürgerlich Marxist Intellectuals* (Berlin: trafo, 2009); Sara Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); and Thomas W. Goldstein, *Writing in Red: The East German Writers Union and the Role of Literary Intellectuals* (Rochester: Camden House, 2017). For works examining intellectual-cultural elites and conflicts with the SED leadership around 1956, see Siegfried Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg: Opposition und neue Konzepte der Intelligenz* (Berlin: Kai Homilius, 2006) and Guntolf Herzberg, *Anpassung und Aufbegehren: Die Intelligenz der DDR in den Krisenjahren 1956/58* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006).

[7] Stephen Brockmann, *The Writers' State: Constructing East German Literature, 1945-1959* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), 6-7. Secondary literature has often subordinated early GDR literature to political developments. Recent works have challenged this interpretation, situating this literature and cultural developments in occupied Germany as a common impulse to antifascist, humanist, and democratic renewal. See Brockmann, *The Writers' State*; Sean Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

below, literary content was largely shaped as an exchange between cultural functionaries, publishers, editors, and authors. In this process, East Germany's cultural activists pursued what they thought would be the effective content in shaping consciousness, at times emphasizing classical humanism, fascist-to-socialist transformations, or narratives of socialist realism.

Although these themes largely coexisted in early East German literature, their relative emphasis shifted over time, through the broader changes of the SBZ and GDR. In the immediate postwar years, cultural activists returning from exile put forth a narrative of cultural renewal through Germany's most progressive classical traditions. By directly practicing these traditions, Germans would finally unite *Geist* and *Macht*, and embody their highest truth of socialism. Yet the gradual division of Germany led SBZ cultural activists to sharpen the distinctions between East and West, socialism and resurgent capitalism. With the founding of the GDR in 1949, East German cultural activists emphasized both socialist realist and classical humanist themes, producing works that drew upon these themes, as well as the experiences of fascism. Although the SED leadership stressed the need for socialist realist literature in the early 1950s, and especially during the "construction of socialism" program of 1952, this emphasis lessened considerably after the 1953 Uprising, and the subsequent New Course of 1953-1956. As top SED leaders refrained from interfering in cultural policy, Kulturbund leaders and Aufbau editors largely determined the contents and limits of socialist consciousness. Yet following the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, this contested consensus eventually broke forth into public conflict, culminating in Aufbau editor Wolfgang Harich publishing a scathing critique of the SED in West German media. Arrested and

imprisoned, Harich then implicated his Aufbau colleagues as an antiparty conspiracy, leading to bitterly divisive trials of the so-called "Harich Group" in 1957. These developments brought an end to the relatively open New Course.

Nevertheless, by the late 1950s the conflicts of the preceding years ultimately served to clarify the ideal of socialist consciousness, and how East German authors themselves were to practice it in crafting their works. After the Harich affair, SED leaders reasserted their ideal authority over culture and consciousness through a new policy, the Bitterfeld Path. This policy mandated that writers work alongside industrial workers, learning socialist realism from those who practiced it most directly. East German authors committed themselves to this task, creating literature that portrayed socialism "as it really was." This in turn led to conflicts with editors over how realistic socialist realist literature should be, if it portrayed socialism in an unflattering light.

2.1 *Uniting* Geist *and* Macht*: Practicing Redemption through Cultural Renewal*

In the immediate postwar years, shaping consciousness in the SBZ meant enlisting Germans' active participation in the physical and spiritual rebuilding of their country. Following the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, many antifascist cultural activists returned from exile to foster a narrative of moral redemption through cultural renewal. Poet, author, and KPD activist Johannes R. Becher, along with his deputy Alexander Abusch and others, led this effort through the Kulturbund, a popular front association that united bourgeois and socialist artists and intellectuals as a cultural equivalent of the Democratic Bloc. The Kulturbund's narrative of renewal envisioned the German people's reckoning with, and redemption from, Nazism through actively

practicing their most progressive cultural traditions as politics. This practice would in turn overcome the traditional separation of spiritual truth and political power in German history, founding a new Germany on the union, rather than estrangement or conflict, of *Geist* and *Macht*. In order to foster this new consciousness, the Kulturbund also founded the journal *Aufbau*, and a dedicated publishing house, Aufbau Press, to stimulate public discussion and begin publishing a progressive German and Soviet literary canon. Given the SMAD's and SED's emphasis on gradual transformation over socialist revolution, this expression of consciousness largely privileged German classical humanist works over expressly socialist realist literature.

Since the rise of fascist parties across Europe in the 1920s, antifascism and antifascist literature formed an ideal consensus that connected otherwise diverse activists. Progressive and some conservative German authors opposed Nazism during its rise in Weimar Republic. Yet the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 confronted them with a difficult choice: to continue their struggle against fascism from exile, to stay in Germany and publish on apolitical topics, or to speak out and invite the regime's wrath. Writers who chose to stay, like Walter von Molo and Frank Thiess, faced varying difficulties under the regime. Other authors, especially avowed socialists (and secular Jews) such Anna Seghers, Friedrich Wolf, and Alexander Abusch, went into exile, often first in Western Europe.[8] Despite geographical distances and political differences, exiled authors attempted to form their own antifascist popular front, with Heinrich Mann organizing a "German People's Front" in Paris in 1936, to draw together leading antifascist authors,

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[8] German authors in Soviet exile, however, were also caught in the Great Purges of the 1930s. See David Pike, *German Writers in Soviet Exile, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). For postwar tensions between emigrants, see Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 49-54.

including Seghers, Arnold Zweig, Lion Feuchtwanger and others.[9] After the fall of France in 1940, many of these writers made their way to Mexico, New York, and Moscow, founding an antifascist network, the Free German Movement, that connected socialists, liberals, and even former Nazis.[10] Together, these authors cultivated a literary "antifascist humanism" to both preserve German culture during its political nadir, and offer stories expressing embodied ideals of antifascist resistance and, often, a socialist future.[11] Many of these works also served as the basis of Germany's postwar renewal, published through Aufbau in the SBZ and other occupation zones.

Alexander Abusch's *The Aberration of a Nation* is an early expression of that antifascist-humanist ideal, and its development as a progressive thread through German history. First published in Mexico City in 1944 but expanded after the end of World War Two, the text traced German history from the sixteenth century onwards, weaving a kind of *Sonderweg* interpretation into the socialist imaginary's teleology of class conflict.[12] The progressive spirit of modern Germany, Abusch argued, had been perverted through reactionary politics. Although he acknowledged the revolution of 1848 as a significant moment of "democratic consciousness," the unified German Empire held democracy in contempt, and "romantically [gilded] everything reactionary from the German past" while cultivating an external "spirit of arrogance."[13] This antidemocratic and chauvinist

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[9] Stephen Parker, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 347.

[10] Thomas Koebner, Gert Sautermeister, Sigrid Schneider, eds., *Deutschland nach Hitler. Zukunftspläne im Exil und aus der Besatzungszeit 1939-1945* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1987).

[11] Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism*, 37-53.

[12] Although postwar West German historians, notably Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, popularized the *Sonderweg* thesis, some of Abusch's British contemporaries put forth comparable interpretations of the Third Reich as a result of a deviant German essentialism. See Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941); Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism, 1783-1933* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945).

[13] Alexander Abusch, *Der Irrweg einer Nation* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1946), 185.

spirit proved remarkably resilient: Even after leading the nation into the disaster of the First World War, reactionary forces also quashed the "lost chance" of the 1918 November Revolution. Abusch acknowledged that the Weimar Republic allowed for far greater democratic participation than ever before in German history, and created Europe's "most progressive cultural center" in Berlin. Yet its eventual collapse resulted from a divided working class and the ongoing strength of state institutions and social organizations supporting "Wilhelmine imperialism" and its "militaristic tradition."[14] Thus Nazism, for Abusch and other KPD members, was a culmination of the most reactionary Prussian traditions, from militarism to "the slave-owner's contempt for the Slavic peoples," that also drew upon Italian fascism, racial theorists like Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and the "antihumanist tendency" of German philosophy, especially Nietzsche. Abusch conceded that not every SS officer read Nietzsche, but still argued that the "aesthetic anti-morality... sown in a certain class of German intellectuals" helped to ease their inhibitions against "the SS spirit."[15] In effect, Germans created, and were responsible for, Nazism and the horrors of World War Two.

To overcome their reactionary legacy, and find moral redemption and renewal, Abusch argued that Germans needed to actively practice their own progressive traditions. This work had already begun through the antifascist movement: Abusch traced the formation of a "moral community, from the Communists and Social Democrats to Catholic parishes and conservative democrats," who campaigned against the "dictatorship of immorality and inhumanity." Following the "unconditional surrender" of the Third Reich, Abusch highlighted the work of local antifascist committees and the Democratic

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[14] Ibid. 237-238.
[15] Ibid. 246-247.

Bloc, a "new alliance of democratic forces [that] emerged visibly among the German people" and would lead its renewal.[16] Yet rather than relying on a morally courageous elite, Abusch emphasized that each German should participate in "doing something fundamentally new," to achieve "inner change" and to finally "understand and fulfill the teachings of their history."[17] In practice, all progressive cultural activists would together condemn reactionary forces, and work to find common ground among all "democratic" groups in facilitating a renewal of society.[18] *Aberration of a Nation* thus envisioned the ideal basis of antifascist democracy, and Germany's postwar cultural renewal.

Abusch's ideal of social transformation fused with individual "inner change" drew upon a Soviet socialist imaginary that understood social transformation through shaping consciousness, facilitated foremost by literature. As a collective practice of emancipatory ideals, Soviet socialism necessitated a new subjectivity to connect individuals with socialism's historical mission. This "new Soviet person" was as an evolving, contested practice of the individual in and as the collective, an ethics requiring a commitment to Marxism and collectivism, guided by a "harmonious" inner consciousness submitted to the greater good.[19] In the Soviet socialist imaginary, literature above all other art forms facilitated and demonstrated this transformation. From the 1930s, socialist realist literature, along with curated Russian classics and progressive

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[16] Ibid. 263.

[17] Ibid. 271.

[18] Carsten Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag, 1945-1961: Konzepte und Kontroversen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 33-40.

[19] Maja Soboleva, "The Concept of the 'New Soviet Man' and Its Short History," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 74-76. See also Anna Krylova, "Imagining Socialism in the Soviet Century," *Social History* 42, no. 3 (2017): 315-41. I use the term "new Soviet person," as the original Russian word, *chelovek*, in a socialist context was intended to include men and women.

"world literature," formed the basis of Soviet literary culture.[20] At the First Soviet Writers Congress in 1934, the Bolshevik party secretary for ideology, Andrei Zhdanov, introduced socialist realism's aim as the "ideological remolding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism."[21] This meant that authors would depict socialism in real and ideal practice, through narratives that emphasized industrial work and its challenges, but ultimately ended with socialism's triumph. This ideal union of workers and their historical mission also extended to writers themselves, who were to collectively create and transmit a socialist consciousness to readers via their works. Thus inspired by the example of socialist realist narratives, readers in turn would work all the more ardently to build socialism. SMAD authorities and KPD activists like Abusch drew upon this socialist realist tradition, and its underlying ideal practice of shaping consciousness through literature, to understand and promote Germany's renewal through its most progressive cultural traditions.

Even before the conclusion of the war, KPD activists in Moscow identified cultural renewal as the conduit for reshaping Germans' consciousness, designating key leaders and institutional plans to facilitate this. In September 1944, Soviet and KPD leaders selected Johannes R. Becher to coordinate a broad-based antifascist cultural organization. Becher was well suited to this task, effectively emphasizing aspects of his identity to appeal to divergent groups. Christian and liberal activists saw him as one of their own, a politically moderate "bourgeois son" who "only incidentally belonged to the

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[20] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 114.
[21] Zhdanov, *Essays*, 12-13.

KPD," while KPD members respected him as a lifelong socialist.[22] Upon his return to Berlin in 1945, Becher began recruiting liberal, Christian, and nonpartisan activists to aid in getting Germans to atone for their complicity in Nazi crimes, embrace defeat as a liberation, and make their progressive traditions into reality. Becher was ultimately responsible to the SMAD's two main culture and propaganda officers, Sergei Tiulpanov and literary scholar Alexander Dymshitz. Both men were well-versed in the German language, history, and culture, and took their cultural work seriously.[23] As Dymshitz recalled in his memoirs, their goal was "to work with German cultural figures... to take up progressive German cultural traditions again and develop them further," ultimately towards building socialism.[24] In line with socialist realism and Soviet cultural policy, SMAD officers also instructed KPD cultural activists to avoid modernism or formalism, and emphasize German classics in order to appeal to as many Germans as possible.[25]

Redemption as renewal, and ultimately the practice of cultural spirit as active politics, thus served as the ideal basis of the nonpartisan Cultural Alliance for the Democratic Renewal of Germany, or Kulturbund. Founded on July 4, 1945, with Becher as its president, the group's inaugural meeting presented speakers ranging from professors and clergy to author Bernhard Kellermann and expressionist actor Paul Wegener. Together, these activists introduced Germans to their new antifascist narrative of guilt and redemption: The Kulturbund's founding appeal chastised Germans for their "shameless self-arrogance" in believing Hitler's claim that they were the only people of

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[22] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945-1948*, trans. Kelly Barry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 78.
[23] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 28-29.
[24] Ibid. 35-38.
[25] Ibid. 38-43.

culture in the world, while also criticizing the German intelligentsia's failure to lead its

people away from fascism.[26] Yet the Kulturbund also found hope for the German people

through the best of their heritage, affirming the "open-mindedness and receptivity of our

people for those ideals and ideas that are among our most valuable cultural assets and

that, when put into reality, represent a historical force." The appeal affirmed that "we

believe in the good of the true German spirit," and sought its redemption foremost

through consciousness of this heritage.[27] Becher's speech at the meeting expanded this

narrative into a dialectical synthesis of *Geist* and *Macht*. He asked Germans first to

recognize their collective "weakness" that made "us all complicit in Hitler's war crimes,"

because only through "a sincere confession of our complicity and co-responsibility can

we succeed in... resurrecting ourselves as a new, democratic German people."[28] By

invoking Christian themes of confession and redemption, and drawing upon German

historical figures for guidance – even evoking Prussian military reformer Carl von

Clausewitz's renunciation of "the reckless hope of salvation through the hand of chance"

to show the need for active, conscious renewal – Becher demonstrated how Germans

could return to their classical past for their present renewal. Becher argued that by

yielding its higher *Geist* to a baser *Macht*, Germans had historically failed to live up to

their own ideals: "We have never found the political expression appropriate to those high

cultural achievements," he argued. "Out of this ominous contradiction between *Geist* and

Macht, we have to find out how the gravest catastrophe of our history came about, and

what, in the end, destroyed every free spiritual-intellectual activity," Becher concluded,

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[26] Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, *Manifest des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1945), 5.
[27] Ibid. 8-9.
[28] Ibid. 34.

adding that in synthesizing spirit and power, "in the sense of a spiritual affinity with our best, in the sense of a popular solidarity – in this sense Germany must become Germany!"[29] Or, in order to redeem themselves from Nazism, Germans would have to suffuse political power with the best ideals of their common cultural spirit.

Becher expanded upon these themes in his 1946 work *Nurturing Freedom: Thoughts and Reflections*, drawing on Germany's classical humanist tradition to show how the German people could practice their best spiritual truths. In a poem and accompanying essay, "Geist and Macht," Becher united the two as an ethical imperative. Power, or "spirit which separates itself from deed," is simply violence, he argued; only spirit emanating from the people, practiced consciously through their actions, could reign in "perfection" – or, phrased in rather grand style, "the omnipotence of the people frees spirit to power." Less grandly, Becher claimed "the point is, it's about truth becoming power," a social transformation that required both consciousness of an ideal truth, and practice to realize it. Becher thus challenged Goethe's assertion that "the doer is always unscrupulous; nobody has a conscience like the viewer," calling upon fellow intellectuals to overcome their traditional "isolation and abstinence" as "marginal figures, outsiders, and observers," by recognizing the moral truth of the postwar moment: "Since a good deed is very different from a bad deed," Becher declared, those who consign themselves to passivity are the truly unscrupulous actors. Even the most spiritually detached, "especially in war," might find themselves adaptable to even the worst actions. "Pure observation," for Becher, was a moral abdication of the good by refusing to condemn, and even passively allowing oneself to perform, evil. Instead, a spiritual power, "the

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[29] Ibid. 40. Italics added.

spirit of truth, the spirit of freedom," unites through the conscious actions of a people, providing society's guiding ethics and goals. In a moral universe of good and evil, of antifascism and fascism, "truth must become power, it must become a material force" in order to overcome illusion and nihilism.[30] For Becher, *Geist* and *Macht* at their purest were an embodied universal truth, ideal and practice, united in the service of building a peaceful, egalitarian, and progressive Germany.

In order to foster this cultural renewal, the Kulturbund needed to provide the necessary literature to reshape Germans' consciousness. To accomplish this, the Kulturbund leadership founded Aufbau Press as its in-house publisher, as well as the weekly journal *Sonntag* and the monthly *Aufbau*, to both disseminate literature and discuss Germany's cultural traditions and social transformation. Kulturbund activists Heinz Willmann, Klaus Gysi, Kurt Wilhelm, and Otto Schiele formally organized Aufbau on August 16, 1945.[31] Wilhelm, a lifelong publisher without party affiliation, assumed the role of director, with Schiele as his deputy and KPD-turned-SED members Gysi and Willmann as editors. From the midst of a ruined Berlin, Aufbau immediately began publishing classical German and Russian texts, as well as contemporary socialist realist and world literature. In its first eighteen months of operations, Aufbau published over fifty titles in printings from two to thirty thousand copies, from the Kulturbund's founding appeal to Russian classics like Gogol's *Arabesques* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, to German classics by Schiller and Heinrich Heine, as well as translated works by Soviet socialist realist writers like Konstantin Paustovsky, Yuri Krymov, and Maxim

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[30] Johannes R. Becher, *Erziehung zur Freiheit: Gedanken und Betrachtungen* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1946), 121-123.

[31] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 15.

Gorky.[32] Aufbau also published antifascist works produced and first published in exile, such as Anna Seghers' *The Seventh Cross*, Friedrich Wolf's *Two on the Border*, and Abusch's *Aberration of a Nation*. Leading intellectuals also discussed these works in the pages of *Sonntag* and *Aufbau*, to win over intellectuals to the ideal of cultural renewal. Although *Sonntag* reached a wider audience, *Aufbau* served as a platform for more sustained and sophisticated intellectual discussion, focusing on German art and literature, classical and contemporary works, and a Marxist-influenced interpretation of German history. Edited by Gysi, *Aufbau* began publishing in September 1945, with its first issue of 50,000 copies distributed across all occupational zones.[33] By publishing and discussing these socialist realist and antifascist exile works, Kulturbund and Aufbau leaders intended to shape the consciousness of their readers through narratives of heroism and redemption.

Drawing German history, its progressive traditions, and contemporary politics into a common imaginary and discursive field, *Aufbau* contributors exhorted their readers to realize the ideal union of *Macht* and *Geist* through active practice. In order to overcome their historical tendency to national chauvinism, Germans first needed to understand the origins of fascism as the dark mirror of this "true German spirit." Werner Krauss, SED member, Romantic scholar, and antifascist activist, argued in a 1946 essay that Germany's identity arose through a legitimate "consciousness of cultural commonality" in the early nineteenth century. Yet the German Empire founded in 1871 was not "a creation of national consciousness," but that of arch-conservative Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck's leadership broke with Germany's earlier national-cultural consciousness by supplanting a "politics of principles" with a "politics of interests," or

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[32] SBB A-V 38-0007, S.122, "Produktionszahlen 1945, 1946," 42-43.
[33] Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism*, 104.

privileging *Macht* over *Geist*.[34] Consequently, the ideal of "Deutschland über alles"
(Germany above all) led to a blind, nihilistic nationalism devoid of higher principle, one
that turned "the nation on its head by throwing its real and historical life, and finally its
own concept, into nothingness."[35] For Krauss, this is what led to 1945, and although
progressive traditions in Germany's "national consciousness" had reemerged since
defeat, the "mere return to a thought" will not "arouse a present." Instead, Germans
would succeed in "freeing a people-binding idealism for a socialist reality" only through
"leading the process of history in their own right." The idealist-voluntarist renewal of
Germany would come from within the best of its own cultural imaginary, but needed to
be consciously practiced by the German people.

Other *Aufbau* contributors connected the union of cultural spirit and political
action with the German tradition of self-cultivation through education, or *Bildung*.
Lecturer and SED member Alfons Kauffeldt's article "Back to the German Bildung
Ideal" situated *Bildung*, originally associated with the bourgeoisie, in a Marxist narrative
of class conflict. For Kauffeldt, the nineteenth century German bourgeoisie (*Bürgertum*)
used *Bildung* to challenge to the nobility, arguing that intellectual merit rather than birth
should constitute a person's standing in society. Yet as the German bourgeoisie failed to
extract that equality from the nobility, they retreated from political action into intellectual
cultivation, to ineffectually "play in still rooms as a free man and prince of spirits."
Kauffeldt rejected this form of *Bildung*, focusing instead on its aspiration to universal
truth, or "a universally recognized goal, which serves as a guide in each individual's life,
no matter what he deals with in particular, and all those who are like him to aspire to

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[34] Werner Krauss, "Nationalismus und Chauvinismus," *Aufbau* 2, no. 5 (1946), 449-456.
[35] Ibid. 456.

connect to a community." Intertwining the subjective and collective, Kauffeldt argued

that consciousness of this goal held the key to social transformation. "The tremendous

power [*Macht*] that gives such a universal purpose, the spiritual [*geistliche*] uplift that it

triggers, the enthusiasm and inner contentment it can impart to each individual" would

lead Germany out of its postwar catastrophe. The new Germany had no use for

individuals locked in self-formation; rather, intellectuals were to apply their abilities to

shape a new consciousness in themselves and others. He also advocated for this new ideal

of *Bildung* to be taught in the SBZ's schools as an active, collective integration of art,

science, and a "basic knowledge of scientific socialism... as well as the knowledge of

democratic forms of government," including the "socialist democracy" of the USSR.[36]

 Aufbau readers actively engaged with this discussion, probing the extent and

limits of this ideal practice by invoking a more radical imaginary of social renewal.

Another Kauffeldt article, "German Youth," inspired a "youth discussion" among *Aufbau*

readers, who submitted their own articles to the editors. While some of this commentary

reached *Aufbau*'s pages, articles denied for publication also told of the breadth, and

definitive limits, of this discussion. In his essay "Revolution of the Spirit," P.A. Müller of

Leipzig sharply criticized the "reactionary" state of German culture after 1945. Although

celebrating the end of the Third Reich, Müller situated this seeming zero hour in a longer

arc of European history. Rather than viewing Nazism as a singular catastrophe, he

characterized modernity itself as "a certain urge for expansion and analgesia, conquest

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[36] Alfons Kauffeldt, "Zurück zum deutschen Bildungsideal," *Aufbau* 2, no. 1 (1946): 31-36. The SMAD and the KPD/SED initiated an educational reform that paralleled that of the judiciary, with new schools emphasizing Germany's progressive and antifascist tradition. See Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Catherine Plum, *Antifascism After Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

and destruction, strandlessness and atomization," where each technological or intellectual achievement met a destructive end, as a dialectic without teleology. Although 1945 was the signal catastrophe of this epoch, it was hardly a total break in European history or German culture. In a passage echoing German expressionists of the 1920s and 1930s, Müller criticized how Germany's cultural past weighed *too* heavily on the present, thwarting a future-oriented social renewal that should bear little resemblance to the past:

> We have to accept from the outset that this future cannot necessarily correspond to the existing, the recognized, and the familiar. If it seems alien, absurd, or insane, it is more a privilege than a mistake. The derogatory censorship of what is valid merely repeats the narrowmindedness which always opposes the existing to the coming, but says nothing about the value and creative power of a revolutionary idea.[37]

Although *Aufbau* did not publish Müller's piece, his rejection of overreliance on past traditions, and emphasis on the potential for the present to shape a truly revolutionary future, prefigured later debates in the GDR about literary content and, ultimately, consciousness itself. Although activists like Becher would continue to invoke Germany's classical humanist past to guide its present transformation, other Kulturbund leaders, including Abusch, emphasized the present's connection to a socialist future. As the division of Germany became increasingly likely after 1947, these two threads would largely coexist in the SBZ's socialist imaginary. Yet the overall historical "truth" guiding the union of *Geist* and *Macht* in the SBZ narrowed from antifascist-democratic consensus into a more explicit ideal practice of socialism, even if many cultural activists disagreed with the SED's increasing application of Marxist-Leninist policies.

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[37] BArch DY 27/320, "Revolution des Geistes," Aug. 30, 1946, 72-79.

2.2 *Consciousness through Classical Humanism and Socialist Realism*

As the western Allies and the USSR clashed over the future of Germany, SBZ cultural activists increasingly interpreted the division of Germany as a moral choice between Germany's progressive and reactionary historical threads. Consciousness, then, came to include more socialist realist content, especially after the foundation of the GDR in 1949. Nevertheless, cultural activists like Becher continued to stress the importance of Germany's classical humanist traditions, both in facilitating the GDR's socialist transformation and in maintaining a common culture with the capitalist FRG. In the early 1950s, the SED leadership increasingly set cultural policy, integrating the Kulturbund into the party-state while also relegating publication review and production to a dedicated state authority, the ALV. Consequently, the Kulturbund and Aufbau focused on publishing established authors from both German states, the USSR, and across Europe, as well as cultivating a new generation of writers. More established East German authors explored themes of socialist realism and coming to terms with the fascist past, through narratives of individual transformation that reflected the GDR's own collective transformation. Due in part to a sense that East Germans' consciousness had risen to a new level of development, Ulbricht introduced his "construction of socialism" program in 1952. However, East Germans rejected this program, most spectacularly during the subsequent 1953 Uprising. These events compelled the SED to relax its cultural policy, and include cultural activists in party-state leadership, with Becher named as Minister of Culture in 1954. As the GDR embarked upon the New Course of 1953-1956, cultural activists took the lead in shaping socialist consciousness.

By 1947, conflicts among Kulturbund leaders signaled a growing emphasis on publishing expressly political works, especially classical humanist and socialist realist literature. These divisions began along seemingly practical matters. In early 1947, Kurt Wilhelm, director of Aufbau Press and publisher of *Aufbau*, sent Gysi a letter warning of the journal's drop in sales in the last months of 1946. Wilhelm cited complaints he received from subscribers that "editions too often contain articles tailored to a limited, spiritually interested [*geistig interessierten*] circle," constituting only a "wafer-thin intellectual layer" of German society. Wilhelm concluded that while "I do not consider it my job to comment on original editorial concerns," he nevertheless found it his "duty to recommend you analyze such a development."[38] This heavy-handed approach led to a rift between the two, and a longer pattern of conflict.[39] In late 1946, Wilhelm clashed with his colleagues over other practical issues: In a November letter to Becher and Abusch, now leader of the Kulturbund's Ideological Department, Wilhelm welcomed their approval of a list of new authors for publication, including Heinrich Mann's autobiography, Ludwig Renn's account of the Spanish Civil War, *Nobility in Decline*, and Segher's anti-capitalist novel *The Rescue*. Citing the shortage of paper and bookbinding material, he reiterated to Abusch that "with regard to planning, we should only devote ourselves to the truly most important authors or their works."[40] Yet in another letter to the Department the following month, Wilhelm condemned how long processing times through the Central Advisory Council of the Central Administration for People's Education put in jeopardy Aufbau's contracts with printers and distributors in

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[38] SBB A-V 38-0759a, S.131, Letter from Wilhelm to Klaus Gysi, Jan. 24, 1947, 17-18.
[39] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 72.
[40] SBB A-V 38-0759a, S.131, letter from Wilhelm to Abusch and Becher, Nov. 5, 1946, 39.

other Allied zones, which Wilhelm had obtained under "difficult circumstances."[41] He

demanded that Abusch either clarify the reasons for delay in gaining approval "and

immediately grant [permission]," or face losing Aufbau's non-SBZ printing contracts.[42]

Wilhelm's ultimatum did little to change the situation, contributing instead to his

own ouster as Aufbau director. At a meeting on April 2, 1947, Becher, Willmann,

Abusch, and Erich Wendt asked Wilhelm to step down to "inactivity" and behavioral

problems. Wilhelm assented, but did not accept their criticisms: In his resignation letter,

he rejected accusations of being a "hysterical terrorist, megalomaniac, dictator, [and]

madman," and Schiele's assertion that he was also a morphine addict. Although it is

unclear if Wilhelm's behavior was this extreme, he maintained that Aufbau had made a

profit of twenty million Reichsmarks during his two years as director, and considered the

slander against his name as a breach of contract. After his resignation, Wilhelm

demanded financial restitution, and accelerated his correspondence campaign against the

Kulturbund leadership. By May, he wrote to Willmann from Stuttgart, revealing that he

had been forced to emigrate not due to morphine recovery, as the Kulturbund publicly

claimed, but to surveillance by the NKVD.[43] In a late 1947 letter to a Kulturbund lawyer,

Wilhelm went further, explaining that his ouster was politically motivated:

> It was... well known to Messrs. Becher, Willmann and Abusch... that I defied their
> dogmatic course, as far as I could, versus the "nonpartisanship," "freedom of
> expression," "humanism," and many other beautiful ideals at least printed in the
> Kulturbund's guiding principles. These ideals of humanity, which are used by the
> party-doctrinal rulers of the Kulturbund at all public rally all too often and readily

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[41] From 1945, SMAD officers subjected all publications to review. In 1946, this authority also shifted to the Cultural Advisory Council within the Central Administration for Peoples' Education. Thereafter publications had to pass both KB and SMAD, which led to long delays in approval. For an analysis of the KB, see David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 356-375.

[42] SBB A-V 38-0759a, S.131, "Betrifft: Zensur," Dec. 12, 1946, 24.

[43] BArch DY 27/799, letter from Wilhelm to Willmann, May 5, 1947, 40.

– if only in the sense of a catchphrase – certainly mean more to me, especially in my publishing work. And so I finally had to fail, because even "party discipline" and "loyalty to the line" had their unavoidable limits with me.[44]

This was not an empty justification. Willmann, recalling the episode in 1987, expressed the Kulturbund's position: "Aufbau Press was run in the first year by a bourgeois businessman of not quite definable origin, who had come to his office because he was able to procure paper... Ideologically he understood nothing of what the publisher printed on behalf of the Kulturbund's leadership, and so it proved necessary to replace him."[45] In effect, Wilhelm ultimately exhibited a "bourgeois" consciousness: He did not understand Aufbau's greater social purpose, focusing instead on publishing works that would sell. Wilhelm's successor, Erich Wendt, would fare rather better as Aufbau director. A longtime KPD member and editor who had emigrated to Moscow in 1931 and was imprisoned by the NKVD from 1936 to 1938, Wendt certainly understood the Kulturbund's political intentions for Aufbau.

Wilhelm's forced resignation and emigration signaled the deepening political division of occupied Germany, and the Kulturbund's growing partisanship in asserting the SBZ's emerging socialist identity. Despite this, many cultural activists, including those living in the western zones, still believed in antifascism's unifying moral power. The Kulturbund-organized First German Writers' Congress of October 4-8, 1947 was the last significant attempt at East-West cultural reconciliation, with German, Soviet, American, and other international activists emphasizing their common antifascist ideal.

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[44] SBB A-V 38-0759b, S.131, letter from Wilhelm to Wolfgang Weiss, Dec. 12, 1947, 88.
[45] Carsten Wurm, Aufbau-Verlag's last archivist before its bankruptcy in 1994, attributes Wilhelm's ouster to a power struggle between Willmann and Abusch. Becher, in Wurm's view, liked Wilhelm and his work, and "apparently did not notice or did not want to notice that there was cadre politics [*Kaderpolitik*] operating behind his back..." See Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 73-74.

Yet even as guests gave speeches condemning fascism and encroaching Allied division,

others recognized that division was inevitable. On the congress's last evening, antifascist

author Günther Birkenfeld admitted that "although I knew that there were forces which

strove for a partisan political influence" in the Kulturbund, he joined "out of my deep

conviction that we need to keep up the conversation with friends and colleagues who

have different political principles." Yet from the often bitter arguments at the congress,

generally over Soviet censorship and the gradual introduction of socialism in the SBZ,

Birkenfeld recognized that "we already no longer speak a common language, and that the

German language is on its way to split into two dialects, an eastern and a western one."[46]

That split would proceed apace throughout 1948 and 1949, ultimately concluding

in the foundation of the FRG and GDR. In the SBZ, the People's Congress movement did

little to foster an inter-German consensus, instead fueling Allied mistrust and an

institutional basis for division. Moreover, the increasing centralization of the SBZ

economy through the German Economic Commission meant that printed materials, like

any other produced good, were also subject to central planning and political control.[47] As

the division of Germany into separate state administrations accelerated, German cultural

activists were also compelled to choose in which Germany they would live. Birkenfeld

and many others opted for the West. Those who remained in the SBZ or returned from

exile, such as playwright Bertolt Brecht in 1947, did so largely because they felt the

"antifascist-democratic order" of the SBZ was based on the "right conclusions from

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[46] Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism*, 152-154. See also Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 98-102 and Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, 375-389.

[47] For an analysis of early SBZ and GDR economic planning, see Peter C. Caldwell, *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14-32.

National Socialism."[48] In light of these sharpening moral antipodes, cultural activists would increasingly emphasize a distinctly socialist consciousness, if not necessarily a rigidly Marxist-Leninist one.

By 1949, that consciousness expressed classical humanist and socialist realist themes, a mix that came to the fore through celebrations of the bicentennial of Goethe's birth, and Stalin's seventieth birthday. Stefan Heymann, leader of the SED Central Committee's Department for Culture and Education, published an essay on Goethe in June 1949, which was more of a Marxist-Leninist polemic against western German culture than an appreciation of Goethe himself.[49] Becher, however, took a more humanist approach: In a speech in Weimar on August 28, 1949, Becher declared that Germany's transformation since 1945 had finally made it possible to "truly comprehend" Goethe as a "liberator," through his vision "of a free people on free land."[50] At the Kulturbund's federal conference in November 1949, Becher reiterated his past themes of *Geist* and *Macht*, declaring that the GDR was the embodiment of the "will to power of the spirit," and would guarantee a "classical future" for a united Germany.[51] In a December 1949 speech denouncing the "cosmopolitanism and formalism" of contemporary East German visual art, Stefan Heymann called for artists to look to literature as an example of how "to appropriate and reshape [progressive traditions] in accordance with the new tasks" of building socialism.[52] Consequently, Aufbau's new titles of 1949 covered both of these themes. Antiwar novels like Arnold Zweig's *The Dispute over Sergeant Grischa* and

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[48] Forner, *German Intellectuals*, 238-241.
[49] Stefan Heymann, "Goethe und die Einheit Deutschlands," *Einheit* 4, no. 6 (1949): 421-431.
[50] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 107-108.
[51] Ibid. 114-115.
[52] Stefan Heymann, "Kosmopolitismus und Formalismus," Elimar Schubbe, ed., *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 127-30.

Young Woman of 1914 appeared alongside Anna Seghers' antifascist novel *The Dead*

Remain Young, and classics like the collected works of Alexander Pushkin and, of course,

Goethe. Yet Goethe's preeminence was somewhat challenged by titles on Stalin,

including Abusch's *Stalin and the Fated Question of the German Nation*, and *Stalin as*

Philosopher by Viktor Stern, a professor of political economy at the top SED training

institute.[53]

As the SED leadership turned towards building socialism in the early 1950s, the

party assumed a greater role in shaping cultural policy, while both integrating and

sidelining cultural institutions. With the founding of the GDR, the Kulturbund became an

official mass organization represented in the Volkskammer and the National Front.

Despite this, the SED leadership generally shaped major cultural policies on its own. On

March 16, 1950, the Council of Ministers announced the "development of a progressive

democratic culture of the German people, and the further improvement of working and

living conditions of the intelligentsia," establishing housing, funding, and educational

institutions for cultural workers. Later that spring, the SED also established the German

Writer's Union (DSV) and the Academy of Arts in Berlin; although the DSV was initially

part of the Kulturbund, by 1952 it became an independent organization.[54] Unsurprisingly,

the third Kulturbund congress in May 1951 expressed an unclear role in shaping

consciousness, even as the leadership's commitment to classical humanism remained. In

his speech to the Congress, Becher situating the Kulturbund's place in the ambiguous

relationship between the intelligentsia and workers: "What do we want? Is it our main

task to work in the factories? Are we a broad mass organization whose goal must be to

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[53] SBB A-V 38-0007, S.122, "Produktionszahlen 1949," 30-32.
[54] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 108-109.

win hundreds of thousands, and hundreds of thousands more? Or is it no longer our main task to gather the intelligentsia around us and seriously carry out the cultural renewal of Germany?" Becher's answer was to return to the Kulturbund's intellectual roots, and "to have more courage for our truth, more courage for our worldview" in winning over the GDR's doctors, engineers, artists, and students – but not its workers.[55] By the conclusion of the congress, the Kulturbund resolved to "intensify and concretize" the debate between formalism and socialist realism, and "to pay particular attention to ensure that cultural regulations are also carried out in this area."[56]

As the party-state leadership expanded its involvement in setting cultural policy, the SED also created a dedicated institution to evaluate prospective publications: the Office for Literature and Publishing (ALV). As the Wilhelm case illustrated, official censorship existed in the SBZ through both SMAD authorities and the Cultural Advisory Board since 1946, a cumbersome process that created long delays in publication. By 1950, the sheer volume of new publications required a state authority to coordinate editing, publication approval, printing, and distribution. In May 1951, the Central Committee submitted a plan to the Council of Ministers to establish the ALV. As a part of the Ministry for Peoples' Education, the ALV would "further the development of a progressive literature that [fulfills] the tasks of the struggle for peace and the unity of Germany, the five-year plan and democratization of all spheres of social life... [and] an intensified, more scheduled and systematic direction and promotion of book and magazine production." As the responsible locus for proposing titles to be published, the ALV's duties also included handling licenses, allocating printing and binding materials,

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55 BArch DY 27/1032, "III Bundestag des Kulturbundes... Protokoll und Drucksachen," May 51, 220-224.
56 BArch DY 27/1032, "Entschließung des III Bundestages," 56-57.

and, most crucial for shaping socialist consciousness, the provision of "constant advisory support of publishing and editorial work."[57] This meant that the ALV mediated both the amount and kinds of titles to be published, according to each year's plan. In emphasizing certain kinds of works to be published, and discouraging or forbidding others, the ALV functioned as the GDR's literary censor.

Given the central role of literature in shaping socialist consciousness, in its first years the ALV advised on fiction works more than any other genre.[58] ALV correspondence also reflected how contemporary political concerns shaped literary content and availability, especially surrounding the "eradication of pacifist tendencies" campaign in 1952.[59] In a letter to Aufbau director Wendt and his deputy Walter Janka, ALV assessment department leader Oskar Hoffmann found that the recent "American preparation [for] the European war" had led to an increased need to defend the "construction of socialism" and "our peaceful life by all means." The USSR, expecting an American attack on mainland Europe during the "feint" of the war in Korea, could hardly afford Germans refusing to defend their socialist achievements by arms. Without irony, Hoffmann elaborated that "it is a self-evident duty of all editors to be extremely vigilant on all pacifist tendencies in our literature, and to eradicate all phenomena that lead our people to inactivity... [and] who awaken and nurture... the illusion that peace is a 'gift of nature'..."[60] As East Germans were to actively defend socialism, Hoffmann then asked Janka to "spy out pacifist tendencies" in literature published by Aufbau, and to

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[57] BArch DY 30/60254, "Entwurf einer Verordnung über die Entwicklung fortschrittlicher Literatur," May 28, 1951, 28-29.

[58] Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, *"Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer": Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeiten in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), 29-30.

[59] Ibid. 33-34.

[60] SBB A-V 38-0253, S.130, letter from Hoffmann to the Aufbau-Verlag management, Dec. 12, 1952, 7.

"counteract their poison effectively." Janka replied that Aufbau's leadership had already discussed the same issue, and resolved first to remove Georg Holmsten's anti-war novel *Bridgehead* from reprint lists and special orders.[61] In all, around thirty-five related titles were removed from circulation.[62]

As the party-state assumed institutional control over literary production and content, the Kulturbund and Aufbau maintained considerable autonomy in organizing and supporting young writers, and in this sense shaped the consciousness of a new generation. In early 1952, the Kulturbund and Aufbau leadership organized a "Day of Young Authors" at the Club of Culture in Berlin. In attendance were Wendt and Janka, *Aufbau* chief editor Bodo Uhse and his deputy, Günter Caspar, along with Kulturbund Secretary Abusch. In the discussion that followed, the all-male attendees voiced their practical concerns as working writers, namely having to choose between a fulltime job that left no time for writing, or the poverty of unemployment. Yuri Brezan, an author from the GDR's Sorb minority, voiced his concern that without financial independence, young writers would simply become "cultural administrators" at their workplaces. Moreover, authors felt that neither the party's local cultural groups nor the ALV understood their predicament. Although Wendt, Janka, Abusch, and the others listened to their concerns, young East German writers faced these same difficulties well into the 1950s.[63]

Aufbau, however, reached out directly to young writers through literary contests that drew entries from across the GDR. In 1952, Anna Seghers lent her name to the publisher's writing competition, selecting the three best stories from over three hundred

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[61] SBB A-V 38-0253, S.130, letter from Janka to Hoffmann, Dec. 30, 1952, 3.
[62] Barck, Langermann, and Lokatis, *"Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer,"* 34.
[63] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 119-121.

entries. The first prize went to the short story "Seven is a Good Number," by twenty-two-year-old Siegfried Pitschmann, which was published in *Aufbau*.[64] Drawing on socialist realist themes, Pitschmann's prose created a richly sensuous treatment of the experience of labor, and the personal relationships that take shape through and beyond the workplace. The story's protagonist, a twenty-five-year-old train driver named Herbert, engages in his work, a "hard life," with steeled detachment; yet his thoughts constantly return to his partner, Hanna, and the possibility of marriage. As his shift progresses, the intermingling of the collective with the subjective renders both Herbert's work, and his connection to Hanna, more intimate and purposeful. Yet the story does not indulge in sentimentality; the couple exchange only a few sentences, and agree simply to see each other that Sunday. Moreover, the tumult of young romance is lost on Herbert's older colleague, who concludes the story by remarking, "You're weird people. First you run away from each other, and now you can't part."[65] This mix of socialist realism and romantic nuance and intimacy illustrated the kind of narratives necessary to shape East Germans' consciousness.

Other young writers directly submitted their work to Aufbau. One such writer was Brigitte Reimann, a nineteen-year-old from a town outside of Magdeburg. Instead of submitting her story for the writing contest, Reimann had written to Anna Seghers directly to review her manuscript. Seghers encouraged her to do so, but Reimann instead left it with Seghers' doorman when she visited Berlin in late 1952. "I now have the dark suspicion that the manuscript never came into her hands," worried Reimann in her letter to Aufbau's editorial office, "although it may have been a slight delusion of grandeur to

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[64] SBB A-V 38-1089, S.165, "Anna Seghers Preisausschreiben, Eingegangene Manuskripte," 14.
[65] Siegfried Pitschmann, "Sieben ist eine gute Zahl," *Aufbau* 8, no. 6 (1952): 537-548.

demand my first literary work be criticized by one of our greatest writers." Reimann then asked for her manuscript back, as it was an incomplete draft. Her reply two weeks later from an Aufbau editor, who assumed Reimann had inquired about an entry in the writing contest, explained that due to the "unexpectedly high" number of submissions, the judges did not yet look at all the manuscripts; nevertheless Reimann's had been received and was "in good hands." In January 1953, Reimann replied that her story was not intended for the contest, but still was "very pleased" that her work ended up in Aufbau's editorial department.[66] The matter settled there, and it is unclear what happened to her manuscript. However, Pitschmann and Reimann would continue to pursue their writing through the 1950s, participating in writing groups and publishing more works. Meeting at a writers' retreat in 1958, the two married in early 1959, and collaborated on two radio plays while working on their own novels for Aufbau.

GDR literature in the early 1950s expressed subjective transformations of consciousness that mixed themes of socialist realism, and a moral reckoning with fascism. Two seminal works published by Aufbau expressed these themes: Eduard Claudius' novel *People on Our Side*, and Anna Seghers' novella *The Man and His Name*. Claudius's novel traces the efforts of Hans Aehre, based on the real shock worker Hans Garbe, to exceed his work quota despite having to use a broken kiln. Yet Aehre's colleague, technician Andreas Andrytzki, offers the most prescient commentary not only on the construction of socialism and the fascist past, but how both themes related to contemporary East German art. Andrytzki, a talented sketch artist, laments how he effortlessly portrays fascist injustice and wartime devastation, and yet cannot express the

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[66] SBB A-V 38-EO297c, correspondence between Reimann and Schmidt, Nov. 1952-Jan. 1953, 21-25.

success of socialism. Only when Andrytzki sketches Aehre, "as he really is," does he attain a truly socialist consciousness. For the protagonist in Seghers' novella, this transformation passes through a much darker path. Also based on a real man whom Seghers only referred to as "Franz," the novella traces the life of Walter Retzlow, a former SS soldier who, after 1945, assumed the identity of a murdered antifascist, Heinz Brenner. Despite his own fascist past and nihilistic outlook after the war, Walter gradually learns to emulate the real Heinz, using his memory as a way to transform himself into a socialist. Rather than just an individual experience, Walter's acquaintances also help facilitate his transformation of consciousness, and compare it to the GDR's transformation from a fascist to a socialist nation. Given their successful treatments of socialist transformations, both works were widely praised within the GDR, with critics praising the "typical," yet exemplary development of their protagonists.[67]

By July 1952, the SED leadership felt confident enough in the GDR's transformation to introduce the "construction of socialism" program at the Second Party Conference. *Aufbau* reprinted some of Ulbricht's remarks, in which the General Secretary justified the program by invoking consciousness itself. Admitting that the GDR still faced unresolved "difficulties," Ulbricht found that "the consciousness of the working class, and a majority of working people, is now so advanced that the construction of socialism has become a fundamental task."[68] Ulbricht also called for a more heroic, and avowedly socialist realist, literature. Yet much like members of the SED Central Committee, the announcement caught East German cultural activists by surprise, especially those

[67] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 180-196; Eduard Claudius, *Menschen an unserer Seite* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1952); and Anna Seghers, *Der Mann und sein Name* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1952).
[68] Walter Ulbricht, "Für Frieden, Einheit, Demokratie und Sozialismus," *Aufbau* 8, no. 8 (1952), 676.

committed to antifascist-democratic consensus and a unified Germany.[69] The

Kulturbund's initial response to the policy simply affirmed its contents and promised to

work out a "specific work program" regarding German cultural unity and the

intelligentsia's role in building socialism.[70] However, in a later issue of *Aufbau*,

Kulturbund secretary Abusch clarified the role of literature in the "construction of

socialism." Tracing the divergent paths of East and West German literature since 1947 –

when Kurt Wilhelm was forced to resign – Abusch championed the GDR's development

of socialist realism, in contrast to the American-influenced "untrue naturalism,"

absurdism, and cynicism of West German literature. He then called for literature to

further express "what is new in our GDR," especially a "deep and passionate conviction"

that "must be contained in the objective artistic design itself; it must pass over into the

reader as self-evident consciousness."[71] Abusch then praised Claudius' *People on Our

Side*, and Seghers' *The Man and His Name*, among others, for practicing this ideal as

"new literary territory." Nevertheless, this "self-evident consciousness" failed to reach

East German workers, who largely rejected Ulbricht's policy and turned away from

cultural institutions. In the months leading to the 1953 Uprising, *Aufbau* itself faced

marked declines in sales, a trend that accelerated after late 1952.[72]

The 1953 Uprising thus triggered a deluge of criticism towards the SED

leadership from East German cultural activists, who advocated for a more open and

active cultural policy, and an honest assessment of citizens' socialist consciousness.

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[69] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 172-174.
[70] "Kommuniqué des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands," *Aufbau* 8, no. 8 (1952), 684.
[71] Alexander Abusch, "Nationalliteratur der Gegenwart," *Aufbau* 8, no. 9 (1952): 795-805.
[72] SBB A-V 38-0756, S.131, letter from Walter Janka to Erich Wendt, Jul. 28, 1953, 7-8.

Rather than take the demonstrators' demands seriously, many leading authors attributed the uprising to Western interference, residual fascist consciousness, and the overall failure of cultural work.[73] Playwright Bertolt Brecht squarely blamed the SED leadership and the ALV for the insularity of cultural content: In his poem "The Office for Literature," Brecht ridiculed the ALV's apparent tendency to approve content already given assent by the SED through reviews in the mass media, and to deny problematic publications on the basis of paper shortages:

> It is well known that the Office of Literature assigns to the publishers
> of the Republic the paper, so many hundredweight
> of the rare material for welcome works
> Welcome are works with ideas
> known to the Office of Literature from the newspapers[74]

By criticizing these reactive censorship practices, Brecht drew attention to the party-state's idealization of the "construction of socialism" while refusing to confront its real difficulties, and ultimately its failure to take the shaping of conscious more seriously. This drive for more openness began in Kulturbund circles, with Brecht, academic and Aufbau editor Wolfgang Harich, and Becher emerging as public proponents for less administrative interference from the AVL and other party-state organs. Moreover, reform-minded activists came to assume positions of authority in the ensuing "New Course" (*Neue Kurs*) of 1953-1956. The Council of Ministers named Becher the GDR's first Minister for Culture in 1954, and his Ministry in turn assumed supervision over the ALV. With Ulbricht on uneven political ground after the Uprising, cultural policy, and

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[73] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 223-238 and Forner, *German Intellectuals*, 261-264.

[74] Barck, Langermann, and Lokatis, *"Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer,"* 48. The ALV did, in fact, encouraging its reviewers to "study the press on a daily basis" in order to "increase the ideological level of the workforce." See BArch DR 1/1510, "Beschlussprotokoll der Arbeitsbesprechung der Abteilungsleiter des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen," Jan. 25, 1952, 2-6.

the content of consciousness, shifted again towards classical humanism, and reckoning with the fascist past.

2.3 *The New Course: Socialist Consciousness in the Union of* Geist *and* Macht

Although cultural activists were still committed to the ideal of shaping socialist consciousness, the New Course effectively widened the contents of that consciousness. In this time, Aufbau also emerged as a leading center of literary exchange in the GDR. Director Walter Janka established personal relationships with East German and international authors, enhanced the prestige of the publishing house and its associated journals, and even fought for a more independent course in the face of occasional interference from SED leaders. Janka largely succeeded in his goal: During the New Course, final evaluations passed on to the ALV were taken at face value, with ALV reviewers trusting the opinions of Aufbau editors. With a generally detached party leadership, Aufbau editors were largely free to shape literary content with their authors; some editors, most prominently Wolfgang Harich, engaged in lengthy exchanges with their authors, debating purpose and intent as well as style and content. This institutional arrangement, and the general consensus between cultural activists on the need to shape consciousness through curated literature, signaled a tentative union of *Geist* and *Macht* in practice. Although disagreeing, at times vehemently, over the content of consciousness, Aufbau editors and ALV reviewers, along with Kulturbund and Ministry for Culture functionaries, used the relatively permissive policy of the SED leadership to expand GDR literature's boundaries, and with it, the narratives and ideas through which East Germans could practice socialism.

Even before the 1953 Uprising, a new course was underway at Aufbau Press, under the leadership of director Walter Janka. Although serving as Wendt's deputy since February 1951, Janka had been a somewhat risky choice for the position. A veteran KPD activist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, until making his way to Mexico to work alongside Abusch, Seghers, and others at the antifascist publishing house El libro libre, Janka returned to occupied Germany in 1947. His initial position at the SBZ (and later, GDR) film studio, DEFA, had come to an ignominious end due to personal and professional indiscretions. Nevertheless, once at Aufbau, Janka initiated a number of changes to make Aufbau more appealing to employees and authors, from installing a bright neon sign on the publishing house's façade to turning the in-house cafeteria into a "decent restaurant" with "white-topped tables." Janka also mandated that Aufbau's cleaning staff, apprentices, elevator operators, and manual laborers, "whose income was practically below the poverty line," were given a free company lunch as well. The new atmosphere also encouraged employees to participate in Aufbau's cultural life, with film screenings, readings, and conversations connecting authors, staff, and guests. Janka later remarked that Aufbau's "internal cultural life developed by itself, and became a concern of the entire workforce." Janka also undertook trips to the FRG, and published articles in the GDR press to boost Aufbau's profile among the broader German public. When Wendt was asked to serve as Kulturbund Secretary-General in 1953, he named Janka as his successor, with the Kulturbund secretariat's and Becher's approval.[75]

As Aufbau director, Janka was also responsible for cultivating new writers as well as attracting and retaining more established authors. Given the popularity of reading in

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[75] Walter Janka, *Spuren eines Lebens* (Berlin: Rohwolt, 1992), 223-226.

the GDR, publishing through Aufbau could also be quite lucrative: Janka later recalled

that since book prices in the GDR were typically lower than in the FRG, West Germans

also bought Aufbau books. This potentially profitable market of both German states drew

the interest of internationally-known authors like Nobel Prize in Literature laureates

Thomas Mann and Halldór Laxness, and many others to publish through Aufbau, which

in turn enhanced the house's prestige and sales.[76] Aufbau also consulted with leading

GDR authors about future publications. Janka's deputy, editor Max Schroeder, even sent

a form letter at the end of 1953 to Anna Seghers, Stephan Hermlin, Bodo Uhse, and other

leading authors, inquiring which works they felt should be added to Aufbau's long-term

plans. Schroeder elaborated that "we want to serve not only connoisseurs and specialists,

but all those readers who want to expand their worldview and education in the sense of

our humanistic and democratic views," while also reminding authors that titles were

ultimately subject to approval by the ALV.[77] In this, Aufbau emerged as the leading

publishing house of the GDR, offering German and Russian classics, as well as

international and East German literature, to citizens of both German states.

The New Course also affected the ALV's work, reaffirming the ideal of shaping

consciousness while exploring how to practice this more effectively. An August 1953

Council of Ministers assessment, conceived and written by the Politburo, found that in

the leadup to the Uprising, state institutions like the ALV had failed to effectively

implement policy. Although such bodies made important decisions in regular meetings,

"their implementation is often poorly controlled and, as a result, the decisions are not

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[76] Ibid. 228-245. Mann at times spoke favorably of the GDR, and its privileging of writers and literature. See Willi Bredel, "Unsere Verantwortung," *Aufbau* 8, no. 7 (1952), 608.
[77] SBB A-V 38-1199, S.150, letter from Schroeder to Seghers, Dec. 8, 1953, 149-151.

fully effective."[78] In its response to this criticism, the ALV leadership undertook a self-assessment, affirming that in a "democratic state" with a "high sense of responsibility towards the people and the role of culture as a guarantor of peace and progress," a central state agency would always be necessary to regulate, coordinate, and control the activities of publishers and bookstores. ALV leaders noted that while Article 6 of the 1949 constitution guaranteed citizens equal rights before the law, this was contingent on refraining from "incitement to the boycott of democratic institutions," religious or racial hatred, disseminating militaristic propaganda, or "any other discriminatory acts," prohibitions that the ALV needed to respect and negotiate as well. Thus the ALV resolved it was not a "mere ideological final check," but responsible for shaping literature as "an ideological means of production" to be planned according to the "objective" needs of society.[79] This reaffirmed and in part clarified the ALV's role as a book producer and a literary censor, and a key institution in determining the overall content and limits of socialist consciousness.[80]

In practice, however, the New Course signaled a less centralized cultural policy, albeit with the same underlying ideal practice. Based on a common understanding that literature was to serve as an "ideological means of production" rather than an aesthetic commodity, East German authors, editors, and publishers were largely free to examine classical humanist and socialist realist themes, as well as the recent fascist past. Less than a month after the June Uprising, ALV department head Hoffmann wrote to Aufbau's management, calling for a renewed emphasis on instilling in "our people a love of our

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[78] BArch DR 1/1537, letter from ALV leader Erich Apelt to all department leaders, Aug. 24, 1953.
[79] BArch DR 1/1084, "Neue Kurs in der Arbeit des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen," 1953.
[80] Dunham, *In Stalin's Time*, 27.

homeland, and willingness to defend their achievements," as well as the progressive

traditions and literary heritage of Germany and Russia.[81] Aufbau in turn published *more*

of this kind of work during the New Course, signaling that authors, editors, and reviewers

agreed on the necessity of shaping consciousness through literature, even if disagreeing

over some of its contents. In this sense, the GDR's cultural institutions rather than the

SED leadership were to be the vanguards of East Germany's spiritual transformation.

What was thus more significant during the New Course were the margins of debate

between who or what was included in a literary socialist consciousness, and more

practically, what authors or works could be published, and why. Sharp disagreements

arose in these negotiations, overwhelmingly with Aufbau editors prevailing.

Literature written by progressive authors from outside the GDR often served as a

point of contention between the ALV and Aufbau, and a key site of negotiation over the

limits of consciousness. In early 1954, Aufbau requested permission to publish *The First

Rescue Party*, a science fiction novel originally published in 1937 by Czech author and

antifascist Karel Čapek. The novel tells of a rescue party sent to find trapped miners, who

must rely on solidarity, and their work experience, to complete their mission. Yet the

ALV reviewer, Hoffmann, registered strong criticism of the narrative. Although he

allowed the book to be published, as the ALV did not wish "to restrict publishers self-

responsibility for the books they propose for publication," Hoffmann took issue with how

a "quasi-realistic medium is used to give the work a class-conciliatory content that

falsifies social reality to a high degree." He argued further that the story focused too

much on the eight rescuers, none of whom had "the slightest hint of class consciousness."

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[81] SBB A-V 38-0255, S.130, "Unsere Naturwissenschaftler fordern..." July 4, 1953, 190.

Although some express conflicts with their managers, most are model capitalist workers, "proud of their strength, of the mastery of their trade, without making the slightest demands on it." Janka, however, found Hoffmann's criticisms "exaggerated," and that he had misunderstood the work. "The book and the workers portrayed clearly reveal the class problem. One recognizes this class problem not only in strikes, demonstrations, etc.," Janka added, finding that "the artistic means chosen by Čapek are realistic and convincing." Ultimately Janka chose to ignore Hoffmann's advice and publish the book, which appeared later that year.[82]

Even critical reports from ALV reviewers on works written by East German authors were not always followed. One example involves a novella by Dieter Noll, a Wehrmacht veteran and SED member who would later achieve fame for his two-part novel, *The Adventures of Werner Holt*, about a soldier who participates in wartime atrocities and ultimately rejects Nazism. Noll submitted a novella, *Mother of the Pigeons*, for publication in summer 1955. Also drawing on themes of fascist redemption, the novella tells the story of a Warsaw woman who aided Polish fighters in the 1944 Uprising, but who lost her memory after being beaten by the SS. Yet the SS soldier assigned to execute her refuses to do so. ALV functionary Arno Hausmann found Noll's work to be a valuable contribution to German-Polish friendship, but faulted his portrayal of the SS expressly through this character. Hausmann commented that while individual SS soldiers may have hesitated to kill, Noll's character was "nothing typical for the followers of this formation." Ultimately, Hausmann concluded that such a figure needed to be better explained, or omitted, and recommended Noll interview concentration camp

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[82] SBB A-V 38-0255, S.130, "Karel Capek 'Die erste Kolonne'," Feb. 23, 1954, 235-237; letter from Janka to Hoffmann, Mar. 9, 1954, 230. See also Capek, *Die erste Kolonne* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954).

survivors for a better understanding of wartime realities, and rewrite the necessary passages.[83] Yet the published story still concludes with the SS soldier refusing to kill the woman. Sent to work in the crematoria in Birkenau as punishment, the soldier ends his story with the appeal, "Brothers, who will breathe again in the sun and peace – have mercy on my soul."[84] For Noll, the humanity common to the Polish woman and the SS soldier, as well as the latter's sacrifice for a better future, was more important to socialist consciousness than a flat condemnation of the SS.

Literary and critical content did at times overstep political boundaries during the New Course, with the GDR's political leadership removing books from circulation or threatening to cancel the offending periodical. These efforts were not always successful, however. When Ulbricht threatened to cancel the journals *Aufbau* and *Sinn und Form* due to a nonexistent "paper scarcity" in early 1955, Janka wrote a letter of protest to Becher. Given the international reputation of both *Aufbau* and *Sinn und Form*, Janka derided the litany of local and special interest newspapers given paper priority, adding with a mix of sarcasm and seriousness that if cancellations of different magazines or newspapers were truly unavoidable, "you should start with publications that are of little importance in terms of content... I mean in particular newspapers such as *German Gardener's Post*, *German Fowl Gazette*, *The Dog,... The Stenographer's Friend*... and a few hundred more of them." Although Janka acknowledged that *Aufbau* was at times critical of the SED, the journal "wasn't the worst [thing] that the Kulturbund has issued," and should in fact be better distributed in the GDR and "especially in West Germany." In a sharp contrast to Wilhelm's letter to Gysi eight years earlier about the journal's profitability, Janka also

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[83] SBB A-V 38-0987, S.157, "Dieter Noll: 'Mutter der Tauben,'" July 21, 1955, 153.
[84] Dieter Noll, *Mutter der Tauben* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955), 45-47.

reminded Becher that "it is nothing new to publish such magazines at a loss," and that the

West German publishing house S. Fischer published the literary journal *Neue Rundschau*

"with substantial subsidies." He concluded that if *Aufbau* needed to supported financially,

"it doesn't need to prove anything in terms of its importance and quality." In effect, Janka

argued that *Aufbau* served a crucial, if at times critical, social purpose in shaping the

consciousness of its readers, in the GDR and internationally. This was enough to

convince Becher to push back against Ulbricht, granting *Aufbau* a temporary reprieve.[85]

Political considerations did at times influence major publishing decisions, albeit

privately within cultural institutions rather than through public party pronouncements. In

October 1955, Janka wrote to former Aufbau director Erich Wendt, asking for his advice

on a proposed twenty-volume edition of Ernst Bloch's work. Bloch, a Marxist

philosopher of hermeneutics and chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of

Leipzig since 1948, had emerged as the GDR's leading philosopher by the 1950s. Yet

Wendt advised against committing to such a contract, as this would mean "Ernst Bloch =

main and state philosopher," and would block Aufbau editors from "other important

things that give the publishing house (and the literature of the GDR) richness and

diversity." Although he did not say so directly, Wendt also implied that the SED

leadership did not trust Bloch enough to make such a commitment; after speaking to a

"comrade whose opinion matters on these things," Wendt advised Janka to publish

Bloch's works piecemeal, and "stick to the course, even if the current has turned." He

then added that this should be negotiated with Bloch directly but discreetly, as Wendt

"always considered it a party obligation to address such questions with authors as far as

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[85] SBB A-V 38-0289, S.131, letter from Janka to Becher, Mar. 8, 1955, 100-101.

possible without referring to the party or the state, only with 'arguments from the publisher.'" Such discretion would avoid unpleasant public conflicts. Although Wendt added that more inexperienced publishers sometimes "hid behind the party and state to justify the rejection of a book," or overzealous critics declared that an artist's point of view was "incompatible" with official position, all this did was bring said author's allies into "the sharpest conflict with the entire policy of the party and state." Wendt concluded that "we tried to avoid that" during his time at Aufbau, and advised that in order to avoid pitting influential authors like Bloch against the SED, Janka and his editors should keep such disagreements in-house.[86]

Wendt's advice also highlighted a key practice of shaping literary content and socialist consciousness: The sharpest and most sustained interventions in literary content occurred in editorial departments, between editors and authors themselves. An extreme case at Aufbau was classical literature and philosophy editor Wolfgang Harich. After graduating in the first cohort of social scientists trained after the war, Harich gained an appointment as a philosophy professor at Humboldt University in 1951. Already an intellectual celebrity before age thirty, Harich had close relationships with top SED leaders as well as internationally-known, and at times party-critical, socialist intellectuals, most notably his mentors Bloch and Hungarian philosopher György Lukács.[87] This wide breadth of associations, which also included members of the West German SPD, meant that he became consistently embroiled in controversy, beginning at Humboldt in 1952. Unlike Janka, Harich did so quite publicly, and his commitment to socialist ideals often manifested as overreaching criticisms of both peers and superiors. For example, bristling

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[86] SBB A-V 38-0756, S.131, letter from Wendt to Janka, Oct. 17, 1955, 2.
[87] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 105.

at being required to submit his lecture notes to the philosophy department's party cadre for review, Harich denounced the blatant censorship and called the cadre leader Klaus Schrickel an "asshole."[88] As punishment, his teaching was scaled back. Following a full-time appointment as an Aufbau editor in 1954, Harich dedicated his energy to the publishing house, which he saw as an "intellectual Elysium" where he intended to "find myself again."[89]

Although he did not work with fiction authors, Harich reviewed the German and Russian classical humanist works central to socialist consciousness. As a full-time editor, he expanded Aufbau's classical and philosophical catalogue and replaced the "hastily-written ideological forewords" of German and Russian classical and philosophical compilations with more thoroughly edited editions. Harich also planned and edited a series of such texts, the *Philosophical Library*, which included dialectical materialist and anti-religious works from Feuerbach and Chernyshevsky, and essays critical of "reactionary" philosophers like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Harich recruited other East German scholars to introduce these new editions. Yet he was exceptionally critical of work he felt was insufficiently rigorous, intellectually or politically.[90] One such scholar was University of Jena philosophy professor Georg Klaus, who had written his habilitation on the early works of Kant, and would later play a key role in the New Economic System of the 1960s through his pioneering work in cybernetics. Harich first wrote to Klaus in 1950 soliciting an introduction to Immanuel Kant's early writings, specifically one that "reflects the historical significance of the classical author of

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[88] Forner, *German Intellectuals*, 260.
[89] Ibid. 261; Wolfgang Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit: zur nationalkommunistischen Opposition 1956 in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993), 15.
[90] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 105-107.

bourgeois philosophy, his greatness and limitations, and the continuing knowledge content of his works from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism." Klaus readily agreed, and sent him a draft manuscript. Although Harich's response first asked Klaus "not to be personally offended by the sharpness of the factual objections" that followed, his thirty-nine single-spaced pages of notes ranged from stylistic concerns to harsh criticisms of Klaus's basic understanding of history, Kantian philosophy, and Marxism-Leninism. In response, Klaus thanked Harich for the care he took in reviewing the draft, agreed in the main with his points, and promised to send him another draft.[91]

Harich's editing of classical humanist works is extreme when compared to Aufbau editor's reports to the ALV. These exchanges generally showed a relaxed attitude towards even problematic subject matter, depending on the author. German antifascist author Leonhard Frank's 1947 novel *The Disciples of Jesus* follows German working-class youths in the "hunger years" of postwar Germany, who regularly stole from capitalists and fought with Hitler Youth remnants in their town. Written during Frank's exile in New York, and thus at considerable physical distance from real conditions in occupied Germany, the novel included politically problematic themes and characters, including a sympathetic American soldier.[92] However, Frank's favorable standing in the GDR, along with the more relaxed atmosphere of the New Course, meant that Aufbau editor Günter Caspar could safely call the work "one of Frank's strongest novels" in his report to the ALV. Caspar also highlighted Frank's own socialist consciousness, and the novel's practice of socialist realism, by remarking that when the protagonists joined the

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[91] SBB A-V 38-1895, S.227, correspondence between Klaus and Harich, Apr.-Nov. 1950.

[92] Leonhard Frank, *Die Jünger Jesu* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1956). The novel went through six editions in the decade following its first appearance.

socialist movement after the war, "what may never have happened in reality becomes typical in the right sense." Thus despite the inclusion of an American soldier character, Frank's underlying consciousness of Germany's growing division into two camps – the "heavy industrialists," rich landowners, bankers, and their fellow travelers on one side, and the German worker who wants socialism and peace on the other – allowed Caspar to undermine potential critics as "stupid or inaccurate" for failing to understand the broader circumstances of Frank's sympathetic American.[93]

Given editors' effectiveness in shaping and curating literature and classical humanist works submitted to the ALV for publication, by the mid-1950s, the office rarely issued rejections or prohibitions. In 1955 the ALV prohibited only twenty-eight of the 2,039 manuscripts (1,188 previously unpublished) they reviewed, deferring to publishers' editorial process in granting final permission. Luise Kraushaar of the ALV's Belletristic Department reported that for at least eighteen months, censors approved myriad titles, from "works of our great living German poets" to socialist realist and Soviet works and "all of classical literature" without even reviewing the manuscripts. Even after receiving accusations of laxness from SED leaders when more controversial titles appeared in print, she reported that "this kind of approach [still] turns out to be correct, and only corroborates once again that it is quite possible to give certain publishers full responsibility for their production."[94] Kraushaar's observation also attests to the common ideals and practices among the GDR's cultural and party-state institutions: Although ALV reviewers indeed took a more lax attitude toward the content of socialist

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[93] SBB A-V 38-1154, S.173, report from Caspar to the ALV, Jan. 21, 1956, 35-40.
[94] Barck, Langermann, and Lokatis, *"Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer,"* 47.

consciousness during the New Course, the works reaching their office were already shaped by Aufbau's editorial staff.

Amid the institutional machinery that shaped socialist consciousness during the New Course, the relationship between *Geist* and *Macht* quite nearly united without friction. Authors wrote works, which were submitted to editors for review; editors reviewed those works, even harshly, but then advocated for them once submitted for review. The ALV in turn approved the vast majority of titles, even those with questionable characters or topics. In effect, without consistent SED intervention in cultural policy, shaping consciousness in the GDR from 1953 until 1956 was a practice of both politics determining culture, and culture determining politics.

This union of *Geist* and *Macht* was in fact central to Aufbau's own institutional ideal practice. In a brief history circulated for its tenth anniversary in August 1955, Aufbau celebrated the 1600 titles it published in twenty million copies until then, especially those under the extreme difficulties of Berlin's postwar devastation. Yet the exponential production that followed, facilitated by its management and workers, simply continued "the tradition of great German publishers," whose publishing of "valuable books" was meant to "strengthen poets' courage to create them, with the clarity of their objectives." Especially in reference to the "up-and-coming development of German national literature," Aufbau viewed its work as "mediation," or fostering the "agreement between poets and the people." Thus Aufbau's task was "not just a business," but a "moral act" understood wherever publishing "operated conscientiously" – that is, in socialism. In the coming years, Aufbau vowed "to keep what has been achieved and to

raise construction [*Bau*], so that the vision of the beautiful, the true, and the good helps to... consolidate peace."[95]

2.4 Macht *Suffuses* Geist*: 1956 and the Path to Bitterfeld*

The seeming union of *Geist* and *Macht* during the New Course ruptured by the close of 1956. Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the party's Twentieth Congress in late February, along with antisocialist unrest in Poland and a violent uprising in Hungary, brought immense political tension to the GDR, and radically shifted the socialist imaginary itself. Who or what was socialist, and who had the authority to determine this, was thrown into question. This destabilization also affected the GDR's cultural activists, who by year's end both pushed the farthest boundaries of socialist consciousness, and received the harshest rebuke for doing so. Aufbau Press stood at the center of this rift between *Geist* and *Macht*, when Wolfgang Harich denounced the SED leadership though West German media, and upon his arrest and trial in turn denounced Janka and a number of other Aufbau leaders. Janka and a number of his deputies, individuals key to the flexible content of the New Course, were consigned to prison, while the authors, editors, and administrators who remained either actively condemned the so-called "Harich Group," or remained silent. In the aftermath of the affair, the SED leadership, along with Minister for Culture Becher, recognized that the party needed to establish a clear cultural policy, one that explicitly defined consciousness and its connection to literary content. This policy, the Bitterfeld Path, in turn called on authors to practice socialist realism in their

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[95] SBB A-V 38-1762, S.145, "Eine kleine Chronik des Aufbau-Verlages zum 10. Jahrestag," July 1955, 156-159.

professional work and personal lives, to live alongside industrial workers and physically witness socialist reality in the making, and craft narratives that idealized this. Yet talented authors who did so, including Brigitte Reimann and Siegfried Pitschmann, struggled to offer a socialist realism that satisfied their editors.

Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's abuses of power had a profound effect in the USSR and throughout the socialist world.[96] Given their generally unquestioned support for Stalin and his policies, these revelations fundamentally destabilized the SED leadership as well. In anticipation of a formal response to the Twentieth CPSU Congress, Prime Minister Grotewohl initially sent a form letter to all other state and scientific institutions, cautioning against adopting "instructions or recommendations" from "international organizations and institutions" to which East German state organs belong without prior consultation and approval.[97] The SED convened its own Third Party Conference in late March 1953 to address some of Khrushchev's criticisms, with Ulbricht stating that Stalin was no longer a "philosopher of importance," while Grotewohl admitted that in years past, there had been some violations of "socialist legality." For cultural activists, however, author and cultural activist Stephan Hermlin's "clarification" speech published in the April issue of *Aufbau* did little to temper ensuing debates over cultural policy, and ultimately the contents of socialist consciousness.[98] In the meantime, Aufbau's Slavic Department leader Wolf Düwel analyzed Soviet literary criticism for

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[96] Pavel Kolář, *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016).

[97] BArch DR 1/8227, letter from Grotewohl to all central state organs and scientific institutions, Mar. 21, 1956, 183.

[98] Stephan Hermlin, "Die Sieger," *Aufbau* 12, no. 4 (1956), 289-292. For an account of cultural activists' debate in the months after Khrushchev's speech, see Dieter Schiller, *Kulturdebatten in der DDR nach dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU: Die Arbeitstagung des Ministeriums für Kultur und der Kongreß Junger Künstler im Mai und Juni 1956* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 1999).

further developments, sending Aufbau management, *Sonntag* and *Aufbau* editors, and the

DSV reports on, and translations of, Soviet cultural periodicals.[99]

Some socialist critics seized the opportunity to put forth their own criticisms of

the SED, foremost Aufbau editor Wolfgang Harich. Using Khrushchev's remarks as his

basis, Harich shared his own longstanding resentments towards Ulbricht with leading

SED and Ministry for Culture activists throughout 1956, using the party organization at

Aufbau to sound out support for his ideas.[100] Unrest in Hungary, culminating in the rise

of Imre Nagy's reform socialist government and the appointment of his other mentor,

Lukács, as Hungarian Minister for Culture, gave Harich further encouragement for bolder

action.[101] After consulting with members of the West Berlin SPD, and just as the Soviet

Army invaded Hungary to overthrow the Nagy government in late 1956, Harich

presented a list of reform demands to the Soviet Ambassador to the GDR, Georgi

Pushkin. Despite Pushkin's rejection of his ideas, and a subsequent argument with

Ulbricht that ended in the First Secretary's warning that the SED "would not tolerate any

intellectual experiments like those in Hungary," Harich then published his reform agenda,

the "Platform for a Special German Way to Socialism," as the cover story in the West

German magazine *Der Spiegel*.[102] In his platform, Harich called for Ulbricht's

resignation, free elections and the lifting of censorship, the withdrawal of Soviet troops

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[99] SBB A-V 38-0017, S.123, "Aus der Presse der slawischen Länder," June 5, 1956.
[100] Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten*, 41.
[101] Lukacs also resigned as Minister when the Nagy government announced its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, and was protected from subsequent execution (unlike Nagy and others) due to his international prominence. See Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 246. For contact between Harich and Lukacs at the time, see Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, 132.
[102] Gustav Just, *Witness to His Own Cause: The Fifties in the German Democratic Republic*, trans. Oliver Lu (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 79.

from the GDR, and negotiations between the SED and western SPD to facilitate German unification.

Despite these enormous disagreements with SED policy, the underlying ideal practice of Harich's reforms also returned to the union of *Geist* and *Macht* in shaping consciousness through the media and literature. While calling for the "overcoming of all censorship," Harich also reserved the state's right "to confiscate printed matter that threatens the foundations of state order by means of an injunction by the state prosecutor." This emphasis on state power, and its implicit identification of the party-state as the sole ideal authority of society's historical truth, extended to the press as well: Regarding the "organs of public opinion formation," Harich demanded that they "be firmly in the hands of progressive forces," because "it cannot be tolerated... that any press... represents reactionary political tendencies." This tension between providing free access to information and the need to shape a specific consciousness extended to Harich's understanding of media itself. The press, especially if published by the SED, was to "provide rich, exemplary, and objective information, and to shed light on the most important facts of national and international life from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism." Harich argued that on this basis the press would serve as "a forum for freedom of expression and criticism from below," allowing for all strata of society "to express misconceptions which must be objectively refuted, but not suppressed from the outset."[103] For Harich, the logical conclusion of this openness was the consciousness of socialism's universal truth, and a Germany "under socialist auspices."[104] Harich's ideals,

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[103] Harich, *Keine Schwierigkeiten*, 151-152.
[104] Forner, *German Intellectuals*, 272. Given the largely formalized permission to publish from the AVL, Janka, Paul Merker, and other Aufbau leaders proposed shifting publishing authority to an independent

whose dissemination earned him eight years in prison, in effect restated the longstanding

ideal of attaining socialism's objective historical truth through the union of *Geist* and

Macht, and collective-subjective identification with the party's interpretation of

socialism.

Yet in the eyes of Ulbricht and the SED leadership, Harich's actions amounted to

treason, and his arrest triggered a hunt for possible collaborators. Harich was charged

with treason based on Article 6 of the 1949 constitution; prosecutors based this on his

SPD contacts, and publishing via West German media.[105] Despite the largely unilateral

nature of these actions, however, Harich denounced others in his confession to the

Ministry of State Security (Stasi). This led to the arrest of the so-called "Harich Group,"

which included Janka, *Sonntag* editor Gustav Just, and others who had participated in

"revisionist" conversations with Harich.[106] Harich's trial, and that of Janka in early 1957,

brought a definitive end to the New Course, and was a defining moment for the GDR's

cultural elite. Harich's denunciation of Janka and the others, and Janka's own treatment

at his trial – physical deprivation, intense verbal abuse from State Prosecutor Ernst

Melsheimer, condemning testimony from Hilde Benjamin, and the terrified silence of his

colleagues, including Anna Seghers – undermined any reformist solidarity among

cultural activists, and demonstrated that SED leaders still firmly held political power.[107]

Their colleagues at Aufbau offered no support either, with editors Wolf Düwel and

Günter Caspar giving damning testimony to the SED's internal investigation committee;

"Publishing Council," even introducing legislation to the Volkskammer in November to this effect. See
BArch DY 30/71291, "Statut für den Verlagsrat im Aufbau-Verlag," Nov. 26, 1956, 237-238.
[105] BArch DY 30/3372, "Schlussbericht," Feb. 11, 1957.
[106] Forner, *German Intellectuals*, 270.
[107] Janka, *Spuren eines Lebens*, 380-396.

Caspar even mentioned Janka's past comments about how Melsheimer and Benjamin should be relieved of their positions, likely contributing to their punitive actions at his trial.[108] The group's harsh imprisonment, and marginalization following their releases, sent a powerful message to other East German cultural activists: *Geist* was not united with *Macht*, but fully dependent upon and subordinate to it.

Becher, ironically, was the first to call for a new cultural policy subordinated to political power. Despite his condemnation of Harich's reform program, however, Becher was greatly damaged by the affair, and had to submit a self-critical report to the Politburo. In this report, Becher admitted that while Harich's conception of socialism once "seemed so infantile to me that I could not imagine that anyone could have taken it seriously," he recognized that this assessment "was undoubtedly a serious mistake," even likening the young editor's appeal to that of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. As Minister for Culture, Becher ultimately took responsibility for the "dangerous fluctuations" in Aufbau's institutional culture and publications through the mid-1950s, and admitted that he should have relieved both Janka and Just of their positions far earlier. Yet he also criticized the SED leadership, claiming that such "corrosion" flourished within the Kulturbund and Aufbau, as both institutions rarely received a clear policy from the Politburo.[109] For Becher, the New Course led directly to the Harich affair. More central control and clear ideal authority over cultural matters would be the necessary solution.

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[108] BArch DY 30/71291, "Protokoll der Befragung des Genossen Wolf Düwel," Mar. 15, 1957; "Protokoll der Befragung des Genossen Günter Caspar," Feb. 29, 1957.

[109] BArch DY 30/3372, letter from Becher to the Politburo and Central Committee of the SED, Sept. 10, 1957. Just also similarly criticized the New Course, arguing that while it encouraged more open discourse, it left the party without a "theoretical basis." See BArch DY 30/71291, "Bericht über die Entstehung und Entwicklung der konterrevolutionären Gruppe des Wolfgang Harich in der Parteiorganisation des Aufbau-Verlages," Mar. 15, 1957.

Thereafter, the SED leadership gradually asserted its power over cultural policy, beginning with major personnel changes at Aufbau. Klaus Gysi, working at Verlag Volk und Wissen since 1952 and as the political editor of *Sonntag* since late 1956, was appointed as the new director in 1957. Düwel, Caspar, and other editors who had denounced or were unaffiliated with the "Harich group" remained at their positions. Gysi undertook serious reforms, beginning with a revised version of Aufbau's collective contract for 1957. The lofty ideals of the 1952 contract were replaced with a clear commitment to "make a contribution to the cultural development of the [GDR], which imposes its high ideological responsibility and requires political and spiritual clarity [*geistige Klarheit*], professional skills, and loyal cooperation."[110] Gysi also transformed *Aufbau*, slimming down its content to short stories and poetry without commentary, and even asked the Kulturbund to consider cancelling it in late 1957.[111] After roughly six months of issues into 1958, the journal ceased publication. The Kulturbund ultimately resolved that although the journal's early editorial team helped to build "an antifascist-democratic culture," it had failed to "intervene in the cultural-political controversy" of the Harich case.[112] As testament to the journal's significance, disappointed subscribers from the GDR to Maoist China to Brazil, wrote to Aufbau's offices inquiring about subsequent issues. The eventual form reply, sent in January 1959, confirmed *Aufbau* had been cancelled, offered a refund of the remaining months, and enclosed a free copy of the magazine *New German Literature*.[113]

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[110] SBB A-V 38-0021, S.123, "Betriebskollektivvertrag 1957," Mar. 9, 1957, 156.
[111] BArch DY 27/6531, letter from Gysi to Kulturbund secretary Schulmeister, Nov. 25, 1957, 12.
[112] BArch DY 27/6531, "Bemerkungen über die Zeitschrift AUFBAU," May 20, 1958, 40-42.
[113] SBB A-V 38-0506, S.146, letter from Aufbau's Verlagsleitung to Herr M., Jan. 14, 1959, 43.

A clarified consciousness also came to East German literature and its authors. Based on a series of speeches from Ulbricht about developing socialist consciousness and morality, the Kulturbund and the Writers' Union initiated a new literary movement that would more closely connect writers to workers. This contact would in turn facilitate the transformation of writers' consciousness as well, ideally producing works with minimal political deviation. In a speech to party leaders in Leipzig in April 1957, Ulbricht argued that socialist consciousness develops from "socialist relations of production" based on the "scientific teachings of Marxism-Leninism" as well as the experience of the USSR and other socialist countries. Yet consciousness developed differently among social strata; for workers, socialist consciousness came from years of struggle against "capitalist exploitation and fascist oppression," while "working farmers" developed a socialist consciousness through the expropriation of large landholdings, and the gradual collectivization of agriculture. Yet for the intelligentsia, "the development of consciousness is more complicated." Ulbricht argued that those who work in production were strongly influenced by "constant cooperation with the working class," as did scientists and artists who temporarily participated in production through work sponsorships. Yet intellectuals at a distance from production "frequently gain a socialist insight from the ideal and moral side" – a source that Ulbricht implicitly denigrated as too subjective, and prone to deviance.[114]

Thus socialist consciousness would be based on writers' proximity to workers, and socialist literature would result from their exchanges of experience. The party's cadre at the DSV convened a "theoretical conference" in June 1958 to examine a new literary

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[114] Ulbricht, *On Questions of Socialist Construction*, 349-352.

policy, especially after overcoming "revisionism" after the Harich affair. The group

ultimately concluded that literature should emphasize "the working class as the designer

of literature" and "the shaping of the working class and the heroes of construction," along

with sustained study of the development of socialist literature, and more public

discussions of it. Ultimately this would be based on cultivating "close and permanent

work with the best young writers from the working class."[115] This policy was introduced

at a DSV meeting at the Schwarze Pumpe electrochemical factory in Bitterfeld in April

1959. This "Bitterfeld Path" called for East German writers to connect directly with

workers as cultural activists in the factories, and to write their stories through immediate

experience. In keeping with the socialist realist tradition, this policy also integrated East

German cultural intellectuals into a proletarian habitus: Rather than serve as a detached

social strata, writers were to write workers' stories as faithfully as possible; the only

intermediaries would be trusted editors and administrators, tasked with ensuring the right

kind of literature resulted from these interactions, and expressed the right kind of

consciousness for the East German public. In explicitly stating the parameters of socialist

realist literature, and bringing writers to the physical sites of socialism's construction, the

SED could more directly determine the content and contours of socialist consciousness in

its workers and cultural intellectuals. Indeed, many of the GDR's best young writers

welcomed this practice, finding their voices along this new collective path. Novelist

Christa Wolf later recalled the inspiration she felt meeting with workers, and telling their

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[115] BArch DY 30/85124, "Einschätzung der Theoretischen Konferenz zu Problem des sozialistischen Realismus, veranstaltet von der Parteigruppe im Vorstand des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes," June 10, 1958, 120-125.

stories, in the early 1960s.[116] Works by more established authors like Stefan Heym, Erwin Strittmatter, and others also appeared to great acclaim, striking the balance between optimism and a realistic portrayal of difficult industrial conditions.[117]

The two young authors who submitted their work to Aufbau in the early 1950s, Siegfried Pitschmann and Brigitte Reimann, participated fully in the Bitterfeld Path, moving to the industrial town of Hoyerswerda to cultivate worker-writers, and craft their own narratives of socialism's historical truth in the making. In this, both Pitschmann and Reimann struggled to balance their subjective and collective experiences with East German workers with the demands of their editor at Aufbau, Günter Caspar. The three formed a particularly complex relationship that blurred professional and personal boundaries. As Reimann expressed in her diary, Caspar felt little restraint in criticizing her personally, especially for "eating men with a knife and fork," including her husband, Pitschmann. Reimann, who once outdrank Caspar at a party to the extent that the editor could no longer stand, nevertheless deeply desired Caspar's approval, writing her wartime novella *The Confession* from a worker's perspective after Caspar called her a "routine talent" only capable of writing about the "petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals." Caspar, in turn, also routinely stood up for Reimann, even negotiating a better contract for *Confession*.[118] This mix of condescension and care, criticism and guidance, eventually involved Pitschmann as Reimann's spokesman and defender, and a voice of writers struggling with socialist realism's demands to portray ideals in the making.

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[116] Christa Wolf, *Parting from Phantoms: Selected Writings, 1990-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[117] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 336.

[118] Brigitte Reimann, *Ich bedaure nichts: Tagebücher 1955-1963* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1997), 115-125.

Correspondence between the three from 1959 illustrates this complex relationship, the difficulties facing young East German writers through a hardening of narrative boundaries in the Bitterfeld Path, and the stringent demands placed on them by editors. A month after their marriage, Pitschmann wrote to Caspar about the couple's lack of money and a specific contract issue. Although the couple had been working on their respective novels, as the spring wore on, letters from both Pitschmann and Reimann signaled a deteriorating emotional and material situation. By May, Pitschmann wrote to Caspar, describing his wife's "nervous breakdown" over criticism of her manuscript from another Aufbau editor, Joachim Schreck. Schreck had joined Aufbau from the Cultural Department of the SED Central Committee in early 1958, to bolster the ongoing "ideological reinforcement" under Gysi's leadership.[119] Pitschmann spared no criticism of Schreck, or what the process had done to Reimann, supporting her assessment that "the editorial department's opinions cannot be reconciled with her own opinions on the conception, intent, and direction of the book, and she is... completely confused by the department's rather imprecise proposed changes." Although Pitschmann lamented the "shitty situation," he still argued that his wife should not have to "make a book based on the ideas of a copy editor," especially one he saw as a party functionary without any literary understanding.[120] This sparked an argument between the two men. Denying the basis for Reimann's distress, and sarcastically using Pitschmann's own phrasing against him, Caspar reduced their entire conflict to youthful "resentment." Instead he argued that Reimann had "clearly understood our main objection" in their last meeting, and that they had "talked about a few principles of her work, [and] touched upon a few points where

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[119] Wurm, *Der frühe Aufbau-Verlag*, 226. "Schreck" also means "fear" or "fright" in German.
[120] SBB A-V 38-1235, S.167, letter from Pitschmann to Caspar, May 13, 1959, 55-56.

Brigitte's project seems to be going astray." Caspar added that he shared "certain ideas about life" with Schreck, including his problems with Reimann's manuscript, and invited both authors to think about socialism not as something "fifty years from now," but a present reality in the making. He suggested that Reimann "keep writing," and that they would resume the discussion after she wrote fifty pages. If she continued to have "no desire or courage" to keep writing, then she consider herself a "Sunday writer, as there should also be Sunday hunters and Sunday riders."[121]

In his reply Pitschmann apologized for his emotional tone, but reiterated his disagreement with Schreck and Caspar's criticisms, and their underlying understandings about the reality that socialist literature should depict:

> I was furious because... [Schreck] complained that my chapter was too dark, unoptimistic, or simply not positive enough. In sum, I suspected he was not comfortable reading that certain jobs would still be damn difficult even under socialism, and God knows no cakewalk. You have to understand: If we always raise the same objections, it is because we read and hear too many bad stories, reports, and the like (you only need to look in the newspaper), where everything is always the same, where people are already so good that one would have to wonder why we are not there yet. Our "failures," "monkey-wrenches," or "critical marginal notes," or whatever you want to call them, have no destructive purpose, but are directed with honest intent to help move forward against the trifle, whitewashing, falsehood, and hypocrisy that affect us overall. The variety and level of literature simply seems to narrow down and become impoverished.

Perhaps recognizing the irresolvable nature of their conflict between reality and idealism, Pitschmann asked that they drop the issue, and "continue our normal conversation."[122] Caspar agreed, and the three mended their relationship by the end of the year.

The truce between the two authors and their editor, however, did not necessarily lead to a heightened socialist consciousness among East German readers. Reimann

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[121] SBB A-V 38-1235, S.167, letter from Caspar to Pitschmann, June 2, 1959, 53-54.
[122] SBB A-V 38-1235, S.167, letter from Pitschmann to Caspar, June 5, 1959, 50-52.

sensed this vividly when she read excerpts from *Confession* in public. Following the

fascist redemption works of Anna Seghers, Dieter Noll, and others, the novella tells the

story of Martin D., a worker at a machine factory who is nominated to become a teacher.

Martin felt he needed to confess to having been a Hitler Youth member during the war,

and reporting a Wehrmacht deserter to the military police – an act that ended in the

deserter's execution. Ultimately the local district prosecutor cleared Martin for teacher

training after his "confession," affirming the transformation of his consciousness. Yet

Reimann's reading of the story before an audience of workers cast light on the long

shadow of Nazism, and the very real limits of socialist consciousness:

> The fifty or sixty listeners weren't just petty bourgeois. And then this reaction... discomfort, displeasure. More than just displeasure. They dared not contradict anything; only a few young people confidently agreed. I cannot describe this mood in the room to you now; for me it was bitter but not depressing, and it reminded me vividly of a speech by Walter Ulbricht, who asked the writer have courage – courage to confront the petty bourgeoisie with our books. At that time, of course, I did not believe that it took courage... but now I believe it. [...] Perhaps you cannot imagine how much and why our gruesome past oppresses and shames me – even more ashamed when I have to see and hear how many people in our country have forgotten or want to forget it... That's why I will finish the book, among all circumstances.[123]

Reimann and Pitschmann completed novels based on their experiences in Hoyerswerda,

in the spirit of suffusing Germans with a new socialist consciousness. Yet the two writers,

and their works, had sharply different fates. Pitschmann's 1959 autobiographical novel,

Raising a Hero, depicted life at the Schwarze Pumpe factory with all the genuine realism

its author witnessed. Yet the work was banned in the GDR after being heavily criticized

at a DSV meeting in July 1959, for presenting workers as too vulgar.[124] Reimann's novel,

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[123] SBB A-V 38-1030, S.163, letter from Reimann to Caspar, Oct. 19, 1959, 141-142.
[124] Siegfried Pitschmann, *Erziehung eines Helden* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2015).

Arrival in the Everyday (1961), examined idealistic young intellectuals' drive to join workers in the construction of socialism, and was received with immense acclaim, with Reimann becoming one of the GDR's most celebrated authors. The couple eventually divorced in 1964.

Conclusion: Writers, Workers, and Shaping Socialist Consciousness

On face value, it is tempting to see SED political leaders, rather than cultural activists, as the reason the union of *Geist* and *Macht* that Becher proclaimed in 1945 remained elusive, and that political necessity eventually sublated cultural spirit, especially after 1956. Yet Reimann's and Pitschmann's experiences help to illustrate the basic tensions of shaping consciousness in the early years of the GDR, and how East German authors, editors, and cultural administrators struggled to balance real subjective experiences with those of an ideal collective. Both Reimann and Pitschmann encountered immense difficulties in rectifying their subjective experiences of socialism with the demands of expressing a certain kind of consciousness, yet both also won the GDR's highest literary award, the Heinrich Mann Prize (Reimann in 1965; Pitschmann in 1976), for expressing that consciousness effectively. Much like their relationship with Caspar, the two authors' experiences illustrate a more intimate, interpersonal, and ultimately ideal-based practice of authorship, censorship, and shaping socialist consciousness than institutional studies or antipodes allowed.

Pitschmann and Reimann were not the only Bitterfeld Path authors to struggle with balancing socialist ideals and socialist realities in their work, or the seeming sublation of *Geist* into the shortsighted concerns of *Macht*. Even amid the more open

cultural discourse from 1963 to 1965 – a corollary of Ulbricht's utopian, metasystemic

reform program, the New Economic System – the second Bitterfeld Conference in 1964

acknowledged that although great works had come from the policy, it did not transform

East German workers into writer-proletarians, and had in fact created many more

problematic works that portrayed socialist realities in an unfavorable light. Moreover,

SED conservatives led by Erich Honecker sharply criticized these developments at the

Eleventh Party Plenum in December 1965, leading to an effective end to state-led cultural

experimentation. Following the Plenum, East German authors moved away from the ideal

of shaping consciousness, and towards pragmatic reflections on interpersonal

relationships, ideals foreclosed by intractable realities, and the shadow of the Nazi past.

Consequently, East German literature's turn away from politics in the 1970s and 1980s

can be seen as a kind of "inner emigration," a nursing of disappointment until better times

reminiscent of the nineteenth century *Bildungsbürgertum*.[125] Bitterfeld Path authors,

however, never truly abandoned the ideals of the 1950s, or the better socialism that they

hoped to practice. Indeed, Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym, Volker Braun, and others would

lead efforts to save the GDR in 1989 – not only from the sclerotic SED leadership under

Honecker, but also from unification with the FRG.

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[125] Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, 337.

Chapter Three
The Socialist Metasystem:
Cybernetics, Prognostics, and the NES/ESS, 1961-1971

In his address to the Sixth Party Congress in January 1963, First Secretary Walter Ulbricht laid out an uncharacteristically reformist path for the GDR. He denounced the "dogmatic persistence" of "outdated" central planning practices, calling instead for a rationalized, "self-contained system of measures and regulations" to implement material incentives and new technologies across the East German economy. In sharp contrast to his earlier emphases on gross output during the "construction of socialism" period, Ulbricht outlined a new focus on "scientifically-based and mutually-agreed ratio systems in planning; improvement of the accounting system, especially of the material and equipment balance sheets...; the transition to continuous planning based on our perspective plan (*Perspektivplan*) until 1970; and the increased introduction of modern computer technology and information processing with the help of electronic machines." Through this more decentralized, integrated, and sophisticated economic reform program, named the New Economic System (NES), the SED hoped to facilitate greater productivity and overall economic growth, in direct competition with the FRG.[1]

Economic growth through economic planning was a core ideal of the socialist imaginary. First articulated by Marx and pursued relentlessly in the USSR since the 1920s, rising productivity and growth were to serve as the primary metric of socialism's superiority over capitalism. In this practice, the GDR was no different. State-led growth was the party's paramount ideal throughout the GDR's existence, beginning with the first

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[1] Walter Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System der Planung und Leitung* (Berlin: Dietz, 1966), 109.

five-year plan in 1950.[2] Yet the NES, along with its successor the Economic System of Socialism (ESS), indicated an enormous shift in how to attain growth, and understand socialism's historical development more broadly. The NES repudiated the strict central planning of the 1950s in lieu of a more systemic, territorial-temporal mastery of its productive forces – an economic metasystem comprised of systems and sub-systems, coordinated, though not always directly controlled by, party-state leaders. Imagining the East German economy as a metasystem in turn allowed planners to contextualize growth and productivity as an empirical social process beyond short-term political concerns, and thus predictable into the long-term future. Although the NES was conceived and practiced as a dialectical development of Marxist-Leninist ideals, the reforms themselves signaled a largely new philosophy of socialism: By 1967, Ulbricht even declared that through the NES/ESS, the GDR had attained a new stage of socialist development. This "developed social system of socialism" challenged Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy that saw socialism as a relatively brief stage of history between capitalism and full communism. This declaration, largely rejected by party conservatives, also signaled the decline of Ulbricht's ideal authority until his ouster by Erich Honecker in 1971. The economic metasystem of the NES/ESS was thus the SED's last, and most ambitious, transformational ideal practice, until replaced by a return to central planning.

This metasystemic ideal practice also unfolded through a broader postwar imaginary of competitive convergence. Convergence theory, or the gradual development of socialist and capitalist "camps" into a common, state-led industrial society, was first analyzed in the 1940s by liberal and socialist economists, who ultimately rejected this

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[2] Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 89-95.

approach. Yet with marked leaps in technological development during the 1950s and

1960s, the US and USSR competed over the pace of scientific research and technological

innovations, based on a pursuit of knowledge and prosperity common to both ideological

"camps."[3] By the 1960s, competitive convergence meant that socialist societies might

surpass capitalist levels of prosperity through adapting scientific knowledge and

technologies from the West. In the GDR, this meant direct competition with the capitalist

FRG, using the "Western" disciplines of cybernetics and prognostics, and their concepts

of systemic territorial-temporal integration, as the basis of what became the NES/ESS.

Cybernetics, or the study of automatic control systems, and prognostics, or the

forecasting of systemic trends into the long-term future, were innovative approaches to

information exchange through complex systems over time. After overcoming initial

skepticism from party leaders, East German cybernetics proponents articulated a new

approach to planned growth that seemed to offer a critical advantage in the SED's

competition with West Germany. Rather than the inefficient and often unpredictable

production booms and shortfalls of earlier central planning, planners intended the

NES/ESS to generate stable and controllable growth by applying information technology

(IT), cybernetic systems theory, and long-range prognostics to production. These

disciplines heralded an economic practice that would "overtake" capitalism by using the

West's best concepts and technologies in the service of higher socialist ideals. Planning

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[3] Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 175-179. Egle Rindezeviciute convincingly argues that a new "technocrat elite" linked socialist and capitalist countries through ideologically-neutral, systems-centric approaches to common problems. This group in the GDR were the primary authors and executors of the NES. See Rindezeviciute, *The Power of Systems: How Policy Sciences Opened up the Cold War World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). See also James W. Cortada, *The Digital Flood: The Diffusion of Information Technology Across the U.S., Europe, and Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

this system necessitated faster transfers of information – accurate prices and costs, the latest technological discoveries, and material distribution – through control systems that were flexible in the present but stable enough to plan well into the future. By the late 1960s, cybernetics, prognostics, and IT were integrated into an overall structural policy encompassing economic and social planning, which conceptualized the GDR as a productive territorial-temporal metasystem.

Previous studies of the NES/ESS have often dismissed them as ineffectual, quasi-capitalist attempts to save a flawed planned economy.[4] This chapter takes a different approach, arguing that the NES/ESS constituted an extremely ambitious practice of ideals, imagined and implemented by East German scientists, economic planners, and political leaders as the best path to reach a new level of international socialist development. The reforms radically departed from earlier central planning in their intensive use of cybernetics and prognostics, emphasis on advanced IT, and sheer integrative ambition. This departure was possible only after the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, an act of *Störfreimachung,* or making the GDR free from disturbances, that stemmed the tide of emigrating workers while offering SED leaders an opportunity to economically compete with the FRG on a more stable basis. Economic

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[4] Andre Steiner's study of NES/ESS credited the reforms with professionalizing the GDR's economic administration, but found that the NES constituted only a more "indirect bureaucratic control" whose gains were lost after 1971. Jeffrey Kopstein also argues that the NES was ultimately abandoned due to political divisions among the SED elite, but presents the reforms as a false dichotomy between a "retreat to conservative immobilism" or "the road of gradual capitalist restoration." Klaus Steinitz and Dieter Walter, both SPK prognostics specialists in the late 1960s, found that the reforms themselves worked well, but "priority planning" investments outside of the plan, especially in 1968-1969, ultimately cost billions of GDR marks, and fundamentally undermined existing plans. See Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform der sechziger Jahre: Konflikt zwischen Effizienz- und Machtkalkül* (Berlin: Akademie, 1999), 558-559; Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 46; and Steinitz and Walter, *Plan-Markt-Demokratie: Prognose und langfristige Planung in der DDR – Schlussfolgerungen für Morgen* (Hamburg: VSA, 2014), 63-64.

planners and prominent scientists then gradually conceived of the GDR as a self-regulating cybernetic metasystem, one that was subject to socialist economic laws and thus ultra-stable and plannable into the long-term future.

The NES/ESS ultimately, however, created its own systemic disturbances, forcing a split between pro- and anti-reform factions that ultimately led to a struggle over ideal authority between Ulbricht and his deputy, Erich Honecker. The question of who held ideal authority, or the sovereignty to determine society's ideals and their practice, determined the course of the NES/ESS. For its proponents, the reforms were the next conceptual development of scientific planning and growth. To its critics, NES/ESS threatened to transform the GDR into a system too convergent with, and unfavorably comparable to, capitalist West Germany. Despite these extremities, the reforms neither depended on nor demonstrated "liberalization" through introducing a market economy or free elections, as previous studies have argued.[5] NES/ESS proponents, many of them far younger than the SED leadership and with greater technical education than their predecessors, did not question the leading role of the party-state in economic planning, or state ownership of the means of production.[6] They did, however, understand their reforms

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[5] This view is based on a false causation between liberal democracy and capitalist economic arrangements, and indicative of liberal capitalist normativity applied to NES/ESS. In his brief treatment of the NES, Corey Ross argues that "liberalization in the economic realm cannot happen without liberalization in the political realm," while the experience with NES demonstrated that a conservative economic-political apparatus actually stymied its own economic reform. See Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80. For an account of China's transition away from a centrally-planned economy without political liberalization, see John Gittings, *The Changing Face of China: From Mao to Market* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Xiaoshuo Hou challenges the assumed dichotomies of state and market, capitalism and communism, through an exploration of China's "community capitalism." See Hou, *Capitalism in China: The State, the Market, and Collectivization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Chris Miller argues that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev failure to embark upon Chinese-style reforms in the 1980s – perestroika without glasnost – led to the USSR's disintegration. See Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016).

[6] Thomas A. Baylis, writing in the early 1970s, recognized that "reforms in any directively planned economy... need not invariably be in a 'liberalizing' direction." Yet he saw a possible emerging power base

as a dialectical development of applying socialist economic laws, based on a critique of

the "dogmatic" central planning practices of the GDR during the 1950s.[7] Party

"dogmatists," however, doubted the viability and socialist character of the NES/ESS.

Critics like Honecker saw the technocratic language and convergent tendencies of the

NES/ESS as a dangerous deviation from Marxism-Leninism and central planning.

Although Ulbricht steadfastly defended NES/ESS, Honecker, along with his conservative

allies, deemed the reforms insufficiently Marxist-Leninist, and often refused to carry

them out. This divide over the best practice of the ideal of economic growth, and who

had the authority to define its practice, split the party to the top of its leadership.

Political pragmatism ultimately prevailed over economic idealism. The political

threat of convergence, as well as the GDR's basic inability to match West German

standards of living, allowed Honecker to force Ulbricht's resignation as First Secretary,

and repudiate NES/ESS, by 1971. Honecker's replacement program, the "unity of

economic and social policy," and eventually "real existing socialism," was based on a

conservative, retrospective philosophy of socialism, and one less innovative than the

NES/ESS it replaced. Yet real existing socialism, which emphasized consumer goods

production and housing construction, along with promoting a distinct socialist identity,

eventually proved unable to consistently raise economic productivity over the next two

decades.[8] However, Honecker's practice of ideals makes little sense without

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in a new "technical intelligentsia" taking leading positions during NES/ESS, rather than the assertion of
ideal authority by older, more conservative leaders, as the case transpired. See Baylis, *The Technical
Intelligentsia and the East German Elite: Legitimacy and Social Change in Mature Communism* (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1974), 244.

[7] David Granick, *Enterprise Guidance in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of Four Socialist Economie*s
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 161-162.

[8] Beatrix Bouvier argues that after Honecker's assumption of power, the GDR rather ironically more
resembled the social welfare states of Western Europe. See Bouvier, *Die DDR – ein Sozialstaat?
Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 2002).

understanding the reforms of the 1960s, the utopian ideals and stark limits of competitive convergence, and the key role that cybernetic and prognostic concepts played in the dynamic assessment, practice, and reassessment of the GDR's economic metasystem.

3.1 *Free from Disturbances: Convergence, Cybernetics, and Sealing the Berlin Border*

During the "construction of socialism" in the 1950s, the SED understood the East German economy through the ideal of growth, and practiced this through state ownership of the means of production and centralized planning. Reflecting Cold War tensions, Soviet and East German leaders also conceived the world market as divided between two "camps," one capitalist and one socialist, despite common emphases on scientific knowledge, technological advancements, and growth. Yet after Stalin's death in 1953, and the stagnating productivity of the East German economy by the end of the decade, reform economists and researchers looked to economic decentralization, and Western technology and science, for a way to boost productivity and international competition. By the early 1960s, GDR researchers, and eventually Walter Ulbricht himself, embraced the Western discipline of cybernetics, or the study of information control and transfer across systems, as the means to success in a new competitive convergence with the FRG. Recognizing the applicability of cybernetic concepts to economic planning, the party-state initiated a series of economic measures, *Störfreimachung*, to better systematize and rationalize the GDR's state-owned industries. The success of these measures, as well as the rising profile of cybernetics through scientific conferences and public discussions, created the ideal and practical basis of the New Economic System of 1963.

Convergence took shape in the socialist imaginary from a shared social reality across postwar Europe, with economic growth as its ultimate ideal. The poverty, unrest, and devastation of the Great Depression and Second World War initiated a deeper shift in European policy and ideals, away from both autarkic and *laissez-faire* capitalism, towards consensus politics, social welfare, and stronger state regulation of the economy.[9] As postwar Eastern European states like the GDR adopted Soviet-style planned economies, broad support in the West for state intervention in economics also necessitated a closer relationship between state, workers, and capital. Drawing upon experiences of state-directed economic policy during the war, European societies after 1945 practiced a far closer collaboration between state, management, and labor interests to restrain wage growth and channel profits back into investments and welfare. Smooth economic growth became a political imperative, with shared prosperity easing conflict between nations and among classes. Postwar governments also practiced a new ideal of multilateral cooperation, albeit through divided institutions: The Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was organized in 1948 by the US and administered by European recipients of the Marshall Plan, while countries allied with the USSR formed the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in 1949.[10] Taken together, economic growth fortified social integration, ultimately serving to stabilize the postwar domestic and international order. Simultaneously, a common practice of state intervention in economic affairs, a growing emphasis on technological innovation, and

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[9] Alexander Hicks argues that Christian Democratic governments in the immediate postwar years practiced neocorporate institutional arrangements as well as social welfare programs. See Hicks, *Social Democracy & Welfare Capitalism: A Century of Income Security Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 76-193;

[10] Barry Eichengreen, *The European Economy Since 1945: Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 32-37.

the split of the North American and European market into capitalist and socialist trade blocs, set the stage for the competitive convergence of the late 1950s and 1960s.

Economists analyzed this state intervention in economic affairs in both capitalist and socialist systems through the lens of convergence as well, albeit often with unease. Eugen Varga, Stalin's main economic advisor, found in his 1946 work *Changes in the Economy of Capitalism as a Result of the Second World War* that state intervention in capitalist markets during the war had eased capitalism's instability, reducing class struggle to conflicts over state administration and regulation. Varga saw enough equality and stability in postwar capitalist societies to revise earlier theses of impending social revolution, pointing instead to a possible evolution towards socialist central planning. Although Varga was widely attacked for his analysis and marginalized by 1949, his analysis drew the attention of reform socialist economists after his rehabilitation following Stalin's death in 1953.[11] Emerging neoliberal economists also traced these developments with some trepidation. In his 1944 work, *The Road to Serfdom*, Friedrich Hayek criticized growing state-led economic centralization in the US and Britain, warning of a "corporative society" wherein industries functioned as "semi-independent and self-governing 'estates.'" Hayek argued that no state would allow such economic power to rest in private hands, and industrial monopolies would inevitably be nationalized, stifling "potential competition and effective criticism," as this would amount to criticism of the state. Hayek also cautioned against the state taking on this responsibility. Once "entangled" in the "running of monopolistic enterprise," the state

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[11] Andre Mommen, *Stalin's Economist: The Economic Contributions of Jeno Varga* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 167-191.

would lose its freedom to formulate and institute new policy.[12] In assuming control over major industries, the state would be bonded to their success or failure, and yet also constricted in its ability to initiate reforms, and risk further failures.

Throughout the GDR's existence, the SED upheld economic growth as its primary ideal practice, and centralized party-state institutions and productive companies to achieve this as effectively as possible. In guiding a "transitional" socialist economy retaining capitalist characteristics such as privately-owned businesses and farms, the party-state was ultimately responsible for setting and meeting production goals in all major industries. This immense task of coordination and information exchange necessitated a union of state institutions, economic management and production, and technological development that far exceeded those found in capitalist economies.[13] This union took shape well before the founding of the GDR, with the SBZ-based German Economic Commission (DWK) assuming economic administration during the "two-year plan" of 1948-1949.[14] For the first five-year plan of 1950-1954, economic and political institutions were fully integrated under the overall direction of the SED Politburo. Yearly plans approved by the Politburo and Central Committee were then passed on to the Council of Ministers, State Planning Commission (SPK), and relevant industrial ministries, including those for heavy industry, construction, and metallurgy and mining. As the GDR's economy expanded in scope and complexity during the NES/ESS, the Council of Ministers added further ministries for the chemical industry and raw materials

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[12] F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 200-203.

[13] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 27; Mark Harrison, "Communism and Economic Modernization," Stephen A. Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 389-390.

[14] Norman A. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 52-55.

management and logistics. At the level of production, administrative "associations of people's-owned companies" (VVB) vertically integrated the "people's-owned companies" (VEB) in a sprawling economic bureaucracy. SED leaders effectively centralized all productive forces under party-state control and coordination, to practice its key ideal of state-led economic growth.

However, the first two five-year plans (1950-1959) were limited by a host of conceptual and practical issues. Strict adherence to Soviet-style central planning meant that the GDR privileged heavy industry over consumer goods production, leading to goods shortages for many East Germans. Moreover, planners collated all measures of productivity to the whole economy rather than differentiating between more and less productive sectors, leading to an at best inaccurate view of overall growth. Most significantly, SED leaders understood the global economy in terms of two opposing camps rather than a systemic market, which inhibiting the application of technology or concepts developed in the West.[15] These issues, along with scarce resources, rivalries and poor information exchange between institutions, and unpopular labor practices meant that the GDR lagged behind the FRG's productivity and overall growth throughout the 1950s. The 1953 Uprising, and the ongoing emigration of hundreds of thousands of East Germans through the still-open Berlin border, exemplified and exacerbated these issues. By 1956, even the SED leadership admitted major discrepancies between planned and real production, attributing these to "insufficient material management and cooperation between enterprises," among other causes. Yet the fallout from the Harich affair in 1957 foreclosed economic reform. With the 1953 Uprising and the show trials of the GDR's

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[15] J.V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, trans. A. Fineberg (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953). See also Sanchez-Sibony, *Red* Globalization, 57-90.

cultural elite fresh in their memories, the Politburo under Ulbricht were wary of changes that might disrupt the party-state's ideal authority and control over the economy.[16]

Economists outside the top party leadership nevertheless pushed for reforms that would use capitalist metrics and decentralization to improve socialist planning and stimulate growth. In March 1957, University of Leipzig economics professor and Central Statistical Office director Fritz Behrens and his student, Arne Benary, published a pamphlet, "On the Problem of Utilization of the Economic Laws in the Transitional Period," that analyzed the GDR's transition from capitalism to socialism. The authors identified how throughout the 1950s, multiple key industries had failed to produce the right goods in the right amount, while planners' focus on gross production ignored these failures, along with a rising inflation rate and real declines in productivity in critical sectors.[17] In effect, the lack of accurate information flow through the GDR's economic system – especially prices, or the exact values of materials, products, and services – made top-down planning exceedingly difficult, if not outright arbitrary. To ease these problems, Behrens and Benary advocated for allowing prices to reflect demand and cost rather than being fixed by top planners, giving local managers both a metric to gauge, and greater authority to direct, production and necessary investments. These measures would give both managers and planners a more accurate view of values, costs, and profitability, and thus more flexibility in guiding future investments and production capacity.

Behrens and Benary intended these measures to make socialism more productive, and thus more competitive against the FRG. Yet given their decentralization of planning,

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[16] Siegfried Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg: Opposition und neue Konzepte der Intelligenz* (Berlin: Kai Homilius, 2006), 62-87.

[17] Peter C. Caldwell, *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 51-53.

and introduction of capitalist market metrics, SED leaders rejected these reforms as fundamentally un-socialist. The Central Committee publicly criticized Behrens at its Thirteenth Plenum in March 1957 for his supposed "revisionist" policy of economic "decentralization," which amounted to a charge of backsliding towards capitalism through a weakening of party-state control over the economy.[18] In a defense submitted to the Politburo and Central Committee in July, Behrens backtracked somewhat. He argued that "the state would not wither away during the transition period," upholding the necessity of "a high degree of centralization of state power," and might even "extend beyond the transition period." Behrens added that he in fact called for the "further deepening and improvement" of the planned economy through "new forms of management," or a perfective of practices still aiming towards Marxist-Leninist ideals. Yet he still highlighted the need for "positive spontaneity" in production and management, and argued that flexible, reflective management over a "self-administering" economy needed to focus on profitability and avoid bureaucratization. He called for state planners to manage productivity and investment "directly from the point of view of profitability," meaning that companies should be self-sustaining, rather than rely on subsidies from the state budget to stay afloat. Behrens reaffirmed his support for market "reflexes," such as profit and value, to be used as "signal systems" for further investment and production.[19] Ultimately, Behrens stood firm in his belief that the transition from capitalism to socialism could be accelerated by more reflective management and employing market metrics, especially prices set to costs and profits that measured a company's relative success in production.

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[18] BArch DY 30/47840, "Information über Prof. Behrens und Dr. Benary," Mar. 6, 1957.

[19] BArch DY 30/47889, "Die Planung und Leitung der Wirtschaft – eine Stellungnahme," July 4, 1957.

Despite these arguments, the Central Committee deemed this "revisionist" approach as too convergent with capitalism, and fundamentally threatening to the party-state's control over economic planning. Behrens was removed from his position at the Central Statistical Office, while Benary was expelled from Humboldt University and demoted to a low-level manager at a cable works factory.[20] Nevertheless other economists shared their views, specifically the necessity to localize planning, introduce values and prices that accurately reflected cost and demand, and incentivize technological development. Two of Behrens' students, Wolfgang Berger and Herbert Wolf, would eventually advise Ulbricht during the NES.[21]

In the meantime, other researchers across the socialist world used the discipline of cybernetics to introduce a rethinking of planning and productivity into the socialist imaginary. In adherence to the "two camps" view, since its popularization in the West in the early 1950s cybernetics was rejected as a "bourgeois science" by Stalin and his advisors.[22] After Stalin's death, however, Soviet philosophers, scientists, and mathematicians publicly recognized the potential in cybernetics concepts, and succeeded in winning some official toleration of the discipline. Ernst Kolman presented his "What is Cybernetics?" lecture to the Soviet Academy of Social Sciences in 1954. This was followed by an article by Sergei Sobolev, Alexey Liapunov, and Anatoly Kitov, "The

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[20] BArch DY 30/48131, "Abschrift," Jan. 17, 1960 and "Erklärungen," Dec. 1959. See also Caldwell, *Dictatorship*, 53; for a more detailed treatment of the Behrens case, see his, "Productivity, Value, and Plan: Fritz Behrens and the Economics of Revisionism in the German Democratic Republic," *History of Political Economy* 32, no. 1 (2000), 114-120.

[21] Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962 bis 1972* (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), 64-65.

[22] See Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); for cybernetics' origins in the interwar, see David Mindell, *Between Human and Machine: Feedback, Control, and Computing before Cybernetics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

Main Features of Cybernetics," published in the leading Soviet journal *Problems of Philosophy* in 1955.[23] Researchers in other socialist countries followed suit: Works by Hungarian mathematician László Kalmár contributed to the integration of cybernetic concepts in information theory, while Polish economist Oskar Lange applied market theory and cybernetics to economic planning. Lange's work, presented in 1958, also called for introducing capitalist market "econometrics" in planning, arguing in part that pricing in the planned economy should relate directly with supply and demand rather than being set arbitrarily, as was common practice in the USSR and GDR at the time.[24] Ultimately, these theoretical developments sought to make socialism more productive by simulating capitalist metrics to more accurately gauge prices, costs, profitability, and necessary investments, while understanding planning and production as a complex, interrelated system rather than a top-down process.

In the GDR, philosopher Georg Klaus led official advocacy for cybernetics, and its application to economics, throughout the late 1950s. Klaus, a longtime KPD member before joining the SED, was interested in the intersection of philosophy, mathematics, and logic. Klaus was drawn to cybernetics through his mentor, Max Bense, a professor of philosophy at the University of Stuttgart.[25] Following his doctoral studies, Klaus wrote extensively on philosophical themes, gaining the attention of the GDR's cultural and scientific elite, as his correspondence with Aufbau Press editor Wolfgang Harich attests. Klaus's growing interest in cybernetics inspired him to begin publishing on the topic. In a

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[23] Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002). More recently, Benjamin Peters has focused on the discipline's rise under Khrushchev; see Peters, "Normalizing Soviet Cybernetics," *Information & Culture* 47, no. 2 (2012): 145-175.

[24] Oskar Lange, *Introduction to Econometrics*, trans. Eugene Lepa (New York: Pergamon, 1959), 96.

[25] Michael Eckardt, ed., *Mensch-Maschine-Symbiose: Ausgewählte Schriften von Georg Klaus zur Konstruktionswissenschaft und Medientheorie* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2002), 12-13.

1957 essay, "Electron Brain or Human Brain?", Klaus introduced cybernetics as a way to understand productive development. Despite their abstract modeling, cybernetics presented "a real social and scientific fact," and Klaus argued that the increased use of automated control systems could initiate "an industrial revolution of the greatest style," allowing factories to automate production and accounting tasks. Rather than create masses of unemployed workers as in capitalist countries, full automation in socialism would free workers from routine and physical labor, thus transcending "technical alienation" and allowing for all to engage in more innovative work.[26] Thus through cybernetics, socialist society could attain exponential advancement towards its ultimate ideal of communism, without yielding any of its core ideals.

Klaus later expanded his arguments to encompass society as well, conceiving the GDR itself as a cybernetic system. To do so, he employed three interrelated concepts: system, control, and information, beginning with his first book on the subject, *Cybernetics in a Philosophical View*, published in 1961.[27] Society and individuals, for Klaus, functioned as complex probabilistic systems, which were dynamic, self-regulating, and ultra-stable, or able to maintain their stability against disturbances. These systems also functioned according to scale: A metasystem encompassed systems, which in turn encompassed subsystems. Control, then, was regulation of information, and syntactic and semantic information exchange, along with an organizational structure and function, defined cybernetic processes.[28] Thus a cybernetic system was the functional, organized

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[26] Ibid. 45-50. Klaus's acknowledgement of "technical alienation," or alienation from repetitive and dull manual work, signaled an ongoing debate among GDR economists and social scientists that often skirted the edge of politically-acceptable debate. See Peter C. Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany*, trans. D. Ben-Jaakov (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972), 351-359.

[27] Georg Klaus, *Kybernetik in philosophischer Sicht* (Berlin: Dietz, 1961).

[28] Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite*, 368-372.

control of information. In this schema, a metasystem could deliver stable output based on the input, though not always full knowledge, of the information of its constituent systems. In socialist economic practice, planning and productive institutions functioned as systems and sub-systems of the East German economy's overall metasystem. Leading planners did not need total information from all VVBs to make further plans, requiring instead overall outputs to make accurate future assessments. In conceiving the economy this way, Klaus's goal was to boost productivity and growth while raising the overall quality of life for East German citizens.

Klaus also expressly integrated cybernetics with, and subordinate to, Marxism-Leninism, proposing his ideals in language familiar to party leaders. Thus the discipline's proponents brought cybernetics into the GDR's socialist imaginary through a tide of scientific meetings, conferences, and new publications in the early 1960s, organized in cooperation with SED institutions. In February 1961, a German Academy of Sciences (DAW) commission on cybernetics met for the first time, followed by a Cybernetics Philosophy Society conference held on April 24, 1961, in the offices of the SED's journal, *Einheit*. Ulbricht himself attended some of these meetings, and came to be convinced of their application to the East German economy, which had experienced sharp downturns in 1958 and 1959 in addition to its deeper structural problems.[29] Although the full breadth of cybernetics theory, and its application to economic planning, would not be officially introduced until after the construction of the Berlin Wall, these earlier meetings provided supportive leaders like Ulbricht a discourse to justify reform without appearing

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[29] Ulbricht explained as much in a speech to Leipzig party delegates later in 1962. See Walter Ulbricht, "Antwort auf Fragen der Delegierten. Aus der Diskussionsrede des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf der Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz in Leipzig," *Neues Deutschland*, Dec. 15, 1962, 3.

to yield party-state control over the economy. They also signaled an impending shift in the GDR's practice of ideals, and a confident commitment to competitive convergence.

Ironically, deteriorating relations between the USSR and US allowed Ulbricht to put system-integrative cybernetics concepts into practice. Tensions over the status of Berlin between the western Allies and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev came to a crisis point by summer 1961. Although Khrushchev wanted to demilitarize and internationalize the city, the western Allies and Ulbricht vehemently rejected this approach. Instead, the First Secretary eventually persuaded Khrushchev to agree to close the Berlin border on August 13, 1961. Beyond geopolitical posturing, the ideal practice behind the Berlin Wall was ultimately that of productivity: The new border stemmed the flow of East German workers into West Berlin, and prevented Western "saboteurs" from freely entering the GDR.[30] Although the Council of Ministers publicly claimed on August 15 that ninety percent of losses in West German trade would be made up by other socialist countries, party-state institutions anticipated significant disruptions to trade and domestic production.[31] By August, all ministries enacted contingency plans named *Störfreimachung*, or making the GDR "free from disturbances," to account for these disruptions.[32] These plans also allowed Ulbricht to shift economic planning away from the likely resistance of the Central Committee.[33] Already in July 1961, Ulbricht tasked close ally and Politburo member Alfred Neumann with leading the new People's

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[30] Hope Harrison finds that top Soviet and SED leaders regularly discussed the emigration problem and Western espionage at least a year before the crisis. See Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 100-101.

[31] BArch DC 20-I/4/477, "Erklärung des Ministerrates des Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," Aug. 15, 1961. Soviet food and raw material imports did increase during 1961-62, while Western imports reached their lowest levels yet; see Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 104.

[32] BArch DE 4/2667, "Zwischenbericht über den Stand der Arbeiten zur Sicherung unser Wirtschaft...," July 1961.

[33] Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, 106.

Economic Council (VWR), which largely assumed the tasks of coordinating and

controlling VVBs, local economic councils, and research institutions. Neumann saw

Störfreimachung as not only protecting the GDR from West German interference, but a

means to raise productivity, reduce costs, implement finance reforms, and increase

cooperation between VVBs.[34] Ultimately these measures would move the GDR away

from inefficient planning, and provide a means to compete directly and equally with West

German economic growth.

     Störfreimachung measures systemically identified problems in production and

productivity, and sought to overcome these by fostering better information gathering in

local companies, and improved exchange among VVBs. A report from the VWR's aptly

named "Brigade of Securing the Economy against Disruptive Measures by the Bonn

Militarists," sent to Karl-Marx-Stadt in September 1961, exemplified this practice. In its

report, the Brigade commended a number of local councils in implementing the mandated

measures. However, they also found disturbing trends, with production shortfalls and

miscommunication between local planning authorities, VVBs, their constituent

companies, and suppliers. While this was particularly acute in steel and furniture

production, one VVB found a creative solution by delegating integrated working groups

based around certain types of equipment across all related branches, "to arrange for the

production of workshop drawings and models, and find the most suitable manufacturers

for spare parts." The VVB eventually secured forty percent of needed spares in this

way.[35] Consequently the Brigade recommended that all VWR department leaders set up

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[34] Siegfried Prokop, ed., *Poltergeist im Politbüro: Siegfried Prokop im Gespräch mit Alfred Neumann* (Frankfurt/Oder: Frankfurt Oder Editionen, 1996), 189-191.

[35] BArch DE 4/9255, "1. Bericht der Brigade zur Sicherung der Wirtschaft gegen Störmaßnahmen der Bonner Militaristen im Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt," Sept. 26, 1961, 303.

such groups to handle "focus problems" such as parts procurement, and to "personally arrange and control the enforcement of these measures." Responsible DAW research institutes were also to coordinate with VWR leaders on research and improvement areas, and maintain "a constant, systematic coordination and generalization of the work results between industry and institutions." This approach also applied to local VWR representatives and VVB directors, and mandated that all changes be reviewed by specialist groups, accurately determined in advance and economically justified, and carried out in "precise coordination with the supplier or user."[36] In effect, the Brigade emphasized the need for fast and accurate information exchange across the economy to deal with supply and production problems and, ultimately, boost productivity.

This work continued into the new year, garnering more institutional experience of integrating East German economic institutions and producers, and a sense among state planners that economic reform could lead the GDR to new heights of growth. In an early 1962 assessment of *Störfreimachung*, VWR advisers highlighted the difficulties of coordinating all industries, from chemicals to consumer goods, along with their own intersecting relationships. Nevertheless, planners increasingly recognized the need for competitiveness and profitability, stressing further investments in industries that "influence the rapid growth of labor productivity... or which bring a high export revenue." With an eye to international trade and competition, VWR advisers also recognized the need for greater application of new technology, and a concerted effort to "improve the planning, management, and organization of productive and scientific work" in economic affairs.[37] Taken together, *Störfreimachung* integrated competitive

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[36] Ibid. 311-313.
[37] BArch DE 4/9256, "Informationsbericht über Probleme der *Störfreimachung*," Jan. 29, 1962, 430.

convergence practices of better information exchange, technological applications, and profitability by conceptualizing the planned economy and the GDR itself as a cybernetic metasystem. The New Economic System gave a new name, and an expanded purpose and scope, to this basic practice of ideals.

3.2 *NES Imagined: Developing a Socialist Metasystem through Competitive Convergence*

Stemming from the confluence of cybernetics concepts, the need for economic reform, and the experiences of *Störfreimachung*, what became the NES conceived the East German economy as a stable metasystem, situated in a global market of trade and technological exchange. The closed Berlin border allowed planners to stabilize the GDR's workforce, and apply cybernetics concepts and market measures to boost the GDR's competitiveness in a more integrated global market than that of the 1950s. Georg Klaus and other cybernetics proponents saw this ideal practice as a dialectical process, with technical innovations and useful concepts, even those from the West, sublating old "dogmatisms" to attain a competitive edge over the FRG. Yet this expansion of the socialist imaginary, through the introduction of previously unacceptable concepts, in time invited the criticism of conservative party leaders still attached to ideological confrontation and central planning. Their misgivings were, in part, well founded: The NES promised and publicized an ideal of systematic and stable growth without fully knowing how to practice it. As Ulbricht and his supporters repeatedly called for research groups to develop and coordinate their work, this led to a cycle of planning assessment, practice, and reassessment actually far more complex in its scope than earlier central planning. The commitment to direct competition with the FRG, to surpass its productivity

and prosperity through partly convergent technological applications and economic concepts, reached practical and conceptual limits.

The official shift to cybernetic-inspired economic reform came gradually, but unevenly, across the CEMA, with Klaus and other researchers as its leading proponents. Cybernetics continued to develop in the USSR with Khrushchev's blessing, and Soviet economist Evsei Liberman's seminal *Pravda* article "Plan, Profit, Bonus" in September 1962 opened the possibility of profit-based economic reforms. Yet this still posed a "complex question" for the Soviets at that time, as Alfred Neumann later observed, leaving the GDR to be the first socialist state to integrate cybernetics and economic reform.[38] By 1962, supportive SED leaders circulated a digest of Liberman's article among the Central Committee. The digest emphasized that VEBs and VVBs were too precisely planned, and poorly coordinated their plans with investments and necessary materials. The digest also stressed the significance of prices, which in the future should strike a balance between stability and flexibility. It then presented a long list of potential criticisms of the article from likely "dogmatists," and how to respond to them. For example, if a dogmatist argued that profits are irrelevant in socialism and do not recognize collective achievements, one should respond that "the most important thing is that companies strive to increase profits," as unprofitability will exhibit "either the poor work of the company or of inadequate specialization or mechanization of production."[39] Reiterating Behrens' arguments from 1957, profits then were to be a measure of socialist success. As testament to Ulbricht's turn towards reform, Behrens himself was

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[38] Prokop, *Poltergeist im Politbüro*, 186. For a brief summary of debates on cybernetics' scope and definition in the USSR after 1954, see Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak*, 246-251.

[39] BArch DY 30/80326, "Konspekt zum Artikel des Gen. Libermann Antworten auf Einwände zu dem Artikel 'Plan, Gewinn, Prämie'," 1962.

rehabilitated, and allowed to continue his work at the DAW on productivity in the

planned economy, even publishing an article about the topic in the party journal *Einheit*

in 1961.[40] Aside from providing physical meeting space for cybernetics conferences,

Einheit also published numerous related articles on economics, information technology,

and cybernetics in this period, forming a major institutional platform for new ideas.

Klaus and other reform proponents presented the summary of their work at a

DAW conference, "Cybernetics in the Sciences, Engineering, and Economy of the

German Democratic Republic," held from October 16-17, 1962. In addition to Klaus and

other GDR researchers, Ernst Kolman and László Kalmár spoke on behalf of the

Czechoslovak and Hungarian Academies of Science. Taken together, they argued for

economic decentralization from both scientific and political positions, albeit conceived

and expressed through cybernetics concepts. Klaus's presentation generally dealt with the

integration of cybernetics and Marxism-Leninism, highlighting both as a "science of

action," while affirming the primacy of the latter. Klaus also integrated cybernetics

concepts with Marxist-Leninist terms; for example, a "self-regulating system" meant the

"dialectic unity of two opposites."[41] Johannes Rudolf, Director of the Institute of

Economic Planning at the Berlin-Karlshorst College of Economics, presented on the

confluence of cybernetics and planning. Rudolf argued that the economy was a

metasystemic "control circuit" managed by the party-state, subdivided into systems and

subsystems of information exchange, from statistics to planning proposals and

projections. Although Rudolf admitted that the issue of "control" had not yet been

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[40]Fritz Behrens, "Produktive Arbeit in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft," *Einheit* 16, no. 11/12 (1961): 1684-1696. For a view of Behrens' work during NES, see Caldwell, "Productivity, Value, and Plan," 120-127.
[41] Hermann Klare, ed., *Cybernetics in the Sciences, Engineering and Economy of the German Democratic Republic* (Washington DC: Joint Publications Research Service, 1964),

adequately examined, he proposed that control might be conceived through degrees of "regulation magnitude," from actual production to international economic relationships. These magnitudes should also account for internal and external "disturbances," from technological innovations to changes in labor resources, as well as "deviation" from planned changes through political-ideological shifts or international relationships. To do so effectively, Rudolf argued for further "clarification on which special laws determine the individual moments of the regulation magnitude," and more detailed modelling to allow planners to recognize alternatives within "moments" of regulation magnitudes. This model would not be in the "traditional form" of gross production and politicized priorities, but "formulated mathematically and considering the causality of the production process."[42]

Kolman and Kalmár took a more partisan approach, situating cybernetics at the forefront of development in Marxist-Leninist societies. Kalmár first attacked "dogmatism," or the inability "to realize whatever is new," arguing instead that true Marxists thought dialectically, and could recognize innovations in other philosophical systems and integrate them across scientific disciplines.[43] Kolman also spoke against dogmatism, noting the "familiar inertia of human thought" and the "terrible power of habit" that allowed cybernetics opponents to resist its practice, despite being officially sanctioned in the party program of the CPSU. Kolman singled out "political economists" who resisted mathematical applications to political economy, "for the simple reason that they do not know mathematics," for obstructing the development of socialism. Yet Kolman also warned against the temptation to apply cybernetics to areas beyond its

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[42] Ibid. 81-85.
[43] Ibid. 49-52.

boundaries, especially where it might conflict with the "revolutionary" ideas of Marx. Rather, Kolman argued that cybernetics was useful "only where the transfer of information quantities is involved," and was neither a substitute for Marxism-Leninism, nor an intermediary between materialism and science.[44] Yet as the NES took shape, and later developed into the ESS, planners and even party leaders would venture far beyond these conceptual boundaries, with cybernetics as nearly coequal with Marxism-Leninism.

These scientific meetings also signaled the development of a cybernetics-based economic reform program, crafted by pro-reform policymakers on Ulbricht's initiative. By mid-1962, the First Secretary tasked Deputy Finance Minister Walter Halbritter and pro-reform Politburo member Erich Apel with forming party-state working groups to examine various aspects of economic planning, identify necessary reforms, and even craft a new party platform.[45] Cybernetics concepts formed the basis of these discussions, especially regarding territorial planning and distribution, as well as the tentative name of the reforms: the "economic *system* of planning and management." The Central Committee's Department of Planning and Finance also examined proposals for "an exact, scientifically sound, and long-term concept" to better coordinate material transportation across the GDR, including an article by Professor Ludwig Küttner of the Weimar Higher School of Architecture and Construction. Küttner conceptualized spatial territories as a "system with subsystems embedded in time-dependent processes," where relevant social needs would regulate the uses of land and urban centers. This integration of physical structures, defined geographic areas, information transport networks, and social needs

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[44] Ibid. 43-45. These remarks were part of a wider campaign in the SED leadership against "dogmatism," especially in social sciences. See Kurt Hager, "Die Verbindung von Theorie und Praxis und der Kampf gegen den Dogmatismus in den Gesellschaftwissenschaften," *Einheit* 16, no. 7 (1961): 1008-1031.
[45] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 49-60; Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 47-49.

through "structural organization and information processing" foreshadowed a number of further conceptual developments leading to the structural policy of the ESS.[46] In the meantime, Ulbricht firmly shifted economic policymaking to the VWR and SPK, and installed his allies in key leadership positions.[47] Neumann was skeptical of the reforms, and his VWR would be criticized for poor leadership until being abolished in 1965. However, Ulbricht appointed Apel as SPK chairman, and economist Günter Mittag became the Central Committee economics department leader. Both Apel and Mittag were rising stars in the party, and led its reformist current behind Ulbricht.[48] Apel, in turn, appointed a pro-reform economist, Gerhard Schürer, as his deputy.[49] Following initial Politburo and Council of Ministers resolutions for an "economic system of management and planning of industry" in December 1962, the reforms were first implemented through district branches of the VWR, beginning with select VVBs in January 1963.[50]

As the reforms developed in practice throughout the first half of 1963, Ulbricht publicly introduced the NES as the GDR's new practice of ideals. Ulbricht debuted the NES at the Sixth Party Congress in January 1963, and declared cybernetics to be the program's conceptual basis. Now serving as the basis of the next five-year plan, NES guidelines were duly implemented by party and state institutions, with the SPK

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[46] BArch DY 30/80326, "Zum Problem der stärkeren Anwendung mathematischer (kybernetischer) Methoden...," Sept. 21, 1962; Ludwig Küttner, "Anwendung kybernetischen Denkens in der komplex-territorialen Planung," Oct. 10, 1962.

[47] Monika Kaiser argues that Ulbricht's still powerful authority, the application of NES in other socialist countries (after 1964) with an uncertain outcome, and a desire to show public loyalty temporarily overrode NES skeptics' unwillingness to understand and enforce the reforms. See Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, 63-64.

[48] Gerhard Schürer attests to Neumann's skepticism; see Schürer, *Gewagt und verloren: Eine deutsche Biographie* (Frankfurt/Oder: Frankfurter Oder Edition, 1996), 57; for Apel's and Mittag's instrumental role in NES, see Caldwell, *Dictatorship*, 146.

[49] Ibid. 54.

[50] BArch DY 30/80341, "Information über den Stand der Vorbereitung von ökonomischen Experimenten in 4 VVB und 10 VEB," Jan. 7, 1963; and "Bericht über das ökonomische Experiment in der VVB Bergnauansrüstungen und Förderanlagen – Leipzig," Jan. 26, 1963.

prioritizing index figure and industrial price reform, as well as working out an

"interlocking system of economic levers" with a basis in planning methods.[51] Drawing on

Störfreimachung experiences, the VWR under Neumann submitted a detailed plan to the

Politburo regarding price and budget reforms in local handicrafts and light industry,

coordinated with the Ministry of Finance under Willy Rumpf.[52] Following the Sixth Party

Congress, research groups organized under Halbritter continued their work clarifying the

economic lever system.[53] These groups then presented more comprehensive guidelines to

the Politburo in June 1963, and expressly based their ongoing on the overcoming of

"certain effects of dogmatism" in economic practices.[54] Ulbricht then expanded the

NES's role at a joint Central Committee and Council of Ministers conference in late June.

In his multi-hour speech, he explained in more detail how the NES would use market

metrics and material incentives, or "economic levers," to reward profitable and efficient

VVBs, and use more consistent prices and accounting that reflected real costs and

profitability. Control processes would change as well: Ulbricht also called for expanding

NES working groups across the economy, creating "Perspective Plan Groups" in every

VVB to be responsible for "developing proposals for the perspective development of the

firm, including the... main direction of research and development, the introduction of new

technology, and the development and rationalization of production."[55] To emphasize the

technical expertise necessary for leadership in the new economy, VVB directors would

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[51] BArch DY 30/80326, "Aufgaben aus den Dokumenten des VI. Parteitages" and "Probleme für die Beratung mit Genossen Apel," 1963.
[52] BArch DY 30/80340, "Beschluss über Maßnahmen zur Vervollkommnung der Leitung und Planung der örtlichen Industrie, des Handwerks und der Kommunalwirtschaft," Mar. 6, 1963.
[53] BArch DY 30/80336, "2. Bericht über den Stand der Arbeiten am in sich geschlossenen System ökonomischer Hebel," May 7, 1963.
[54] BArch DY 30/80327, "Richtlinie für die Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft/Kritische Einschätzung des bisherigen Systems der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft," June 11-12, 1963.
[55] Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System*, 204.

also receive three semesters of further training, including sixty hours of cybernetics courses.[56]

Although couched in Marxist-Leninist terms and presented as a distinctly East German path to growth, the NES clearly integrated scientific and technological developments from well beyond the GDR's borders. The technological competition between the US and USSR, along with the wider proliferation of scientific knowledge and technology across both East and West, also emphasized spirited competition between the two German states. The SED resolved to compete with and surpass West German economic growth through its own "scientific-technological revolution," especially advances in petrochemicals, semiconductors, and IT attained domestically, through trade with the USSR or neutral countries, or espionage.[57] Applied technology had a direct bearing on productivity, and thus growth: Following the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee in 1961, work norms were increasingly tailored to the introduction of new technologies in an extensive "New Technology Plan" characterized by the slogan "new technology, new norms."[58] Investments in research and development, especially in semiconductor and computer technology, were critical to modernizing the economy, and

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[56] BArch DY 30/80326, "Vorschlag zur Qualifizierung von leitenden Wirtschaftsfunktionären," 1963.

[57] Hubert Laitko, "The Reform Package of the 1960s: The Policy Finale of the Ulbricht Era," Kristie Macrakis and Dieter Hoffmann, eds., *Science under Socialism: East Germany in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 45-49; see also Raymond G. Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany, 1945-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 110-151. On the relational competition between the Germanys, see Jaap Sliefer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind: The East German Economy in Comparison with West Germany* (Berlin: Akademie, 2006). For contemporary GDR accounts of the "technical revolution," see Erhard John, *Technische Revolution und kulturelle Massenarbeit* (Berlin: Dietz, 1965); Wolfgang Berger and Otto Reinhold, *Zu den wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen des neuen ökonomischen Systems der Planung und Leitung* (Berlin: Dietz, 1966); 33-110; and Hans Arnold, *Die wissenschaftlich-technische Revolution in der Industrie der DDR* (Berlin: Wirtschaft-Verlag, 1967).

[58] Schürer, *Gewagt und verloren,* 54; Friedrich Macher, "Neue Technik - neue Normen," *Einheit* 17, no. 5 (1962), 33-42; see also Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 303-304; Cortada, *The Digital Flood*, 282-283; and Hans-Christoph Rauh and Peter Ruben, eds., *Denkversuche: DDR-Philosophie in den 60er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2005), 69.

the basic functioning of the NES.[59] Although computers had been developed in the GDR

since the early 1950s, the NES vastly accelerated the need for semiconductors and IT

development, and analyzing their economic application.[60] As with cybernetics, while the

USSR initiated IT's application to economics, the GDR first put the ideal into practice: In

late 1962, deputy chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Alexei Kosygin, called for

the application of computers to economic planning, but its implementation was delayed

by institutional rivalries.[61] In August 1963, the GDR Council of Ministers established the

Central Institute for Information and Documentation (ZIID), under the direction of

physicist Josef Stranek, to coordinate IT research and its application through the

economic metasystem. Specialists Wolfgang Seidel and Rudi Walther, writing in *Einheit*

in early 1964, also drew attention to converting manual recordkeeping into computer

punch cards, and stressed the need for all areas of economic information and research to

be interconnected across institutions.[62]

In practicing a more integrative and competitive socialism, the NES also

explicitly drew upon capitalist market metrics advocated by Behrens and Benary, such as

prices and profit, to boost industrial productivity through worker bonuses. The program's

use of "economic levers" sought to simulate these market metrics within an otherwise

planned economy, and like the economy itself, conceptualized these levers as an

interdependent, but decentralized, "closed system," with planning and management

determining prices, accounting, and sales, that were in turn informed by profits,

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[59] Stokes, *Constructing Socialism*, 142-149.
[60] Ibid. 93-107. See also Cortada, *The Digital Flood*, 280.
[61] Ibid. 254.
[62] Wolfgang Seidel and Rudi Walther, "Das neue ökonomische System und die wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Dokumentation und Information," *Einheit* 19, no. 2 (1964): 22-30.

assortments of products, productivity, and investments. Bonus or premium funds, based on yearly profits of a given VVB, would be distributed back to managers and workers and re-invested in the VVB's constituent enterprises. In addition to instilling a profit motive, these incentives were intended to more closely connect workers' material interests to collective economic needs, such as raising productivity, assuring better quality, and lowering costs.[63] The NES also used the relatively large private and semi-private sector to facilitate supply gaps between VVBs, with small and medium-sized firms providing goods and parts that larger state-owned companies could not produce on short notice.[64]

The NES thus took shape through a reformist impulse shared by East German researchers and key political leaders, one that welcomed a confluence of capitalist and socialist ideal practices to "fully unfolding the advantages of our socialist order" in convergent competition with the FRG and West more broadly.[65] This reform policy, the first of its kind in the socialist world but hardly the last, in turn drew upon an expansive, global social imaginary that emphasized economic growth, pursued scientific and technological innovation, and placed boundless faith in these measures to lead humanity to a brighter and more peaceful future. Yet in the years ahead, the NES would be undercut by unending cycles of assessment, application, and reassessment within research

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[63] BArch DY 30/80336, "Bericht über die bereits eingeleiteten maßnahmen zur Anwendung eines in sich geschlossenen Systems ökonomischer Hebel...", Apr. 30, 1963; and "2. Bericht über den Stand der Arbeiten am in sich geschlossenen System ökonomischer Hebel," May 7, 1963; see also Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirschaftsreform*, 282-289. For a simpler explanation of levers, see Gerd Friedrich, "Zur Wirkung der ökonomischen Hebel im System der Planung und Leitung," *Einheit* 18, no. 7 (1963), 18-28.

[64] Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 77-78. David Granick finds that "private industry can very usefully fill the interstices of nationally planned production," which functioned "better in the G.D.R. than in other socialist countries where they have long been socialized." See Granick, *Enterprise Guidance in Eastern Europe*, 136-137.

[65] BArch DY 30/80327, "Richtlinie für die Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft," June 11-12, 1963, 2.

institutions, incomplete or halfhearted application at the production level, and unexpected disturbances at its very center: the party-state leadership.

3.3 *The NES in Practice: Assessment, Application, and Reassessment in Phase One*

During its first phase, from January 1963 until the end of 1965, the NES attained a growing level of complexity and sophistication. Leading scientists and economists refined the relationships between subsystems, systems, and the overall economic metasystem, while party-state planners and industrial managers assessed and reassessed the reforms in practice. Yet disturbances steadily mounted at several systemic levels: Although successful in raising productivity, managers also reported that their research groups lacked more holistic knowledge beyond their technical expertise, while party-state planners struggled to devise a workable system of economic "levers" that would match prices with costs, and balance investments with profitability, among other issues. In the meantime, party leadership under Ulbricht ironically accelerated the pace of the NES to ease resistance within the party, while also trying to popularize the reforms through a more open youth policy, science education and literature, and coordination with other socialist countries interested in practicing similar metasystemic ideals. Nevertheless, these efforts did not satisfy party conservatives under Honecker, who criticized the GDR's growing deviance from traditional Marxist-Leninist practices by the end of 1965.

Throughout 1963, reformists encountered difficulties in both clearly articulating the ideal practice of the NES, and compelling conservatives to implement the reforms. The director of the State Secretariat for Research and Technology (SFT) found by August 1963 that the reports presented to him by various SFT departments "are so different in

quality that they cannot be used as a basis for management treatment."[66] SFT working

groups were then tasked with collaborating laterally on reworking their reports. By

October, recommendations from the Politburo, ministries and SPK, as well as leading

VVBs and the Central Committee's economics department highlighted further tasks still

needing resolution, including a better understanding of the price reform, especially in

relation to foreign trade and VVB profitability, and the application of economic levers to

both increase the benefit of investments, and to reduce their costs and setup times.[67] Yet

by December, further assessments yielded a disturbing new insight. "Attempting to

evaluate the results of this work to optimize these cohesive levers made it clear that no

progress has been made in this field since the [June 1963] economic conference," a

Central Committee report found. This was not only due to a lack of clarity, but also

because "a number of leading state and economic functionaries are not convinced that it

is worthwhile to... [develop] a system of economic levers, as they are not yet fully

convinced of its functioning under our conditions. Therefore, they continue to focus on

the traditional way of mastering problems by intensifying administration, and on the use

of individual or internal levers."[68] Resistance was serious enough to warrant a meeting of

VVB directors at the Central Committee in December 1963, where several hours of often

heated discussion illustrated planning institutions and VVBs at cross-purposes. The plan

manager of the Schwarzheide refinery echoed the frustrations of other directors about the

lack of accountability: "I say to myself, the same people are sitting in the same places

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[66] BArch DF 4/1697, "Betr.: Auswertung der Wirtschaftskonferenz," Aug. 12, 1963.

[67] BArch DY 3023/425, "Aufgaben des neuen ökonomischen Systems der Planung und Leitung..." Oct. 15, 1963, 18-20.

[68] BArch DY 30/80341, "Zur Lage und zu den Problemen der mit der Wirtschaftlichen Rechnungsführung der Zweige und Betriebe verbundenen ökonomischen Hebel," Dec. 17, 1963, 35-37.

everywhere, with no reproach against anyone. How is each individual supposed to have changed their way of working a year ago, when not a year has passed," he asked, adding that intermittent leadership from the VWR, and an unclear role of VVBs in accounting and administration, compounded the issue.[69] In effect, the persistence of "dogmatism" among existing planners and managers, in addition to an unclear practice of the reforms themselves, limited the effective introduction of NES.

Ulbricht anticipated resistance from the GDR's industrial managers and political leaders, and would rely on party discipline to see that the NES was followed at all levels of the economic subsystem. However, he also set his sights on instilling a more creative, science-based socialist consciousness among young people to strengthen support for the NES over time. Ulbricht established a dedicated "youth commission" responsible solely to the Politburo. Commission members Kurt Turba, Heinz Nahke, and Harald Wessel drafted the "youth communique" of September 1963, which encouraged young people's creative involvement in society; youth in turn responded with unprecedented excitement and enthusiasm. Author Brigitte Reimann, by this point a public figure due to the success of her novel *Arrival in the Everyday*, also served on the youth commission, observing in her journal at the time how Ulbricht struggled intensely against conservative opposition to publish the communique.[70] Yet Ulbricht also pursued more structural shifts in consciousness, through popular literature and education. Through the NES, publishing houses were to expand the quality and quantity of their publications, including an emphasis on science fiction. In October 1962, the DSV held its first "Conference on the

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[69] BArch DY 30/80342, "Protokoll über eine Problem-Diskussion beim ZK der SED mit Vertretern von Praxis und Wissenschaft am 23.12.1963," Jan. 3, 1964, 66-67.

[70] Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 160-161.

Literature of the Future," establishing science fiction as a recognized genre and emphasizing its role in foreseeing possible communist futures based on present realities.[71] Indeed, the space race between the US and USSR – especially the first manned spaceflight by Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin in 1961 – generated enormous enthusiasm in young people for modern science and technology, as well as its potential to build a more ideal, even utopian, future.[72]

Ulbricht and his supporters also saw that the NES was widely publicized through nonfiction publications and the mass media. New developments were regularly announced through *Neues Deutschland*, and although polemical, anticapitalist articles still graced the pages of *Einheit*, alongside them appeared articles on mathematics, cybernetics, IT, and aspects of the planned economy, written by leading researchers such as economist Gerd Friedrich, chemist Peter Adolf Thießen, and SPK research director Herbert Wolf, along with Fritz Behrens and Georg Klaus. Books complemented this work in newspapers and periodicals. Responding to VVB directors' frustrations over the lack of a clear management structure, SPK chairman Apel and SED economics chief Mittag collaborated on a 1964 book*, Scientific Leadership: The VVB's New Role*, which clarified the role of the VVB in the NES. Acting as the "economic management center" for its specific industry area, the VVB was to encompass scientific-technical development, accounting, plan fulfillment, and coordinating with relevant private and semi-private businesses.[73] In this, the VVB was to be the local control mechanism of the yearly and

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[71] Sonja Fritzsche, *Science Fiction Literature in East Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 103-109.
[72] Colleen Anderson, "Youth Space Education and the Future of the GDR," *Central European History* 53, no. 1 (2020):146-167.
[73] Erich Apel and Günter Mittag, *Wissenschaftliche Führungstätigkeit: Neue Rolle der VVB* (Berlin: Dietz, 1964), 99-101.

five-year plan (*Perspektivplan*), serving as the metasystem's productive subsystems.

Georg Klaus's 1964 work, *Cybernetics and Society*, clarified the overall structure of the

planned economy's metasystem, made up of "relatively independent and reliable"

systems and subsystems, or blocks:

> The entire economy is viewed, in abstraction from the impact of all non-economic factors and foreign trade relations, as an absolutely independent block, the essential economic subsystems (relatively independent blocks) of which are linked by certain input-output relations. Input of the production blocks are the production factors required for production (material, technology, labor, etc.). Their output consists of a certain quantity of the product produced, which is at the same time input from other subsystems or production blocks, the output of which in turn largely depends on these inputs, etc. It depends to a large extent on the complete knowledge of the relationships to be included in this regard, which depends on whether significant disruptions occur during the implementation of the plan or not. The causes of disturbances of the type mentioned are lack of information about the outputs of a block, or inadequate knowledge of the "determiners" of the known outputs of a block, by means of which the so-called response time of the block in question can be determined, i.e. the time elapsing between an input and an output or the input of the production factors and the production output.[74]

By 1964, this model of the planned economy as a metasystem consisting of

interdependent subsystems defined the relationship of administrative VEBs to production

VVBs, and VEBs to higher planning institutions. Klaus's emphasis on "complete

knowledge" highlighted the necessity of accurate information flow throughout the

system, which worked optimally when output information from leading bodies would be

input to VVBs and VEBs, which would then output both products for the economy and

new information back to the leadership to make further plans. Conceived holistically,

planners would be able to identify which elements of the NES still needed to be

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[74] Georg Klaus, *Kybernetik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: VEB Verlag der Wissenschaft), 201-211; see also Caldwell, *Dictatorship*, 157-158; and Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 65, for an analysis of Klaus's post-1963 impact on the NES.

"elaborated or perfected," which have "an inhibiting or beneficial effect on the full implementation" of the NES, and what new measures might remedy this.[75] Thus the NES was to function as a self-regulating metasystem, albeit one requiring regular assessment and reassessment.

Of course, the economic metasystem could not be abstracted from "non-economic factors" or foreign trade, and conditions beyond the control of state planners forced a closer integration into the international market. East German planners certainly anticipated disturbances in trade over time, and tried to meet as many productive needs as possible domestically. *Störfreimachung* prepared the GDR for significant reduction in trade with the FRG, and by the early 1960s the GDR met much of its own domestic need for commodities, goods, and parts.[76] Yet this also required capital-intensive investments (especially in energy and fabrication) while undercutting more efficient economies of scale in production. VVBs had to invest intensely in producing an exceptionally wide product range, all while being exhorted by Soviet trade partners to specialize productive industries within the CMEA.[77] Although the VWR initially hoped that CMEA trade, or bilateral trade with the USSR, would make up for domestic shortfalls, it sometimes did not – through intentional and unintentional disturbances.[78] As Soviet raw materials trade with the West expanded through the 1960s, less were available for the GDR, especially

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[75] BArch DY 3023/427, "Hauptaufgaben und Maßnahmen zur weiteren Durchsetzung des neuen ökonomischen Systems der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft als Ganzen," Jan. 29, 1965, 91-92.
[76] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 37-38.
[77] Granick, *Enterprise Guidance in Eastern Europe*, 137-138; Stokes, *The Construction of Socialism*, 134-136.
[78] Randall W. Stone finds that the USSR regularly decreased its economic subsidies to its Eastern European allies to shape their behavior, which was linked not to political considerations, but allies' ability to export coal and steel. In the case of the GDR, this is also true of semi-finished and finished machine parts. See Stone, *Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 72-88.

crude oil for its critical petrochemical and energy industries.[79] Moreover, a crop failure in

the USSR in 1962 necessitated that GDR planners find foodstuffs and other imports

elsewhere, requiring more refined goods to export to the West in exchange for hard

currency.[80] The NES thus required planners to incorporate foreign trade variables into

yearly and perspective plans, which in turn accelerated convergent trends in material and

technological trade. Yet NES proponents embraced the opportunity to learn from trade

partners, regardless of their ideology: Erich Apel, writing in *Neues Deutschland* in 1964,

declared that if the FRG or Japan achieved a particular success, "we shall follow their

example."[81] Although firmly in the spirit of competitive convergence, statements such as

these rankled SED conservatives still wedded to a "two camps" ideal.

Public pronouncements after the first two years of the NES extolled its successes

in higher productivity and technical application, while difficulties and discord were kept

largely within the party. In December 1964, Ulbricht explicitly outlined the party-state's

responsibility for the NES at the Central Committee's Seventh Plenum. While praising

the party's success in implementing the "technical revolution," Ulbricht warned against a

"gradual evolutionary development" that might underestimate "the development of

cybernetics and electronics."[82] He also reiterated the necessity of economic levers, which

"enables the delegation of greater responsibility downwards" and freed "governing

bodies to deal more with basic tasks and coordination." Leadership would also be further

delegated to the district and local level, with each VWR branch and VVB creating

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[79] Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization*, 94, 184-193.
[80] BArch DY 3023/427, "Information über den Stand der Vorbereitung der Wissenschaftlichen Konferenz über 'Das neue ökonomische System... und Grundfragen der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zwischen den Staaten beider Weltsysteme'," Feb. 17, 1965, 158-163; see also Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 104-105.
[81] Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-1971: Conflict and Crisis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 162.
[82] Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System*, 544.

temporary groups for scientific-economic management to help with rationalization, standardization, and cooperation. Ulbricht argued this "self-regulation," unfettered by bureaucracy, was vital in more effective VVB and VEB management, reducing costs, and aligning prices with value. He then linked these practices with the ideal of growth and competitive convergence: "This is the prerequisite for the systematic increase in the living standards of the population," with West Germany as the standard of comparison.[83] For Ulbricht and other NES advocates, the program would accelerate its administrative decentralization, and use of capitalist metrics to raise socialist productivity.

The first phase of the NES did lead to higher productivity, but it also uncovered the difficulties of coordinating general information flow across the various subsystems of the economic metasystem. In January 1965 the SPK reported to the Council of Ministers that "the application of a self-contained system of economic levers, and the enforcement of economic accounting in the VVBs and enterprises have already led to visible economic results."[84] Yet these results were not uniform, and frustrations from management groups signaled local problems indicative of more systemic ones. As director Teichler of the VVB for power plant construction also reported to the SPK in January 1965, his management groups often deferred to technical experts, who inevitably created assessments that simply resonated with their own areas of expertise:

> The composition of the working groups of the VVB... was too unilaterally oriented in that only the [technical] representatives... were entrusted with the solution of these tasks. This resulted in a considerable narrowing in the consideration of problems, so that the results so far essentially include only technological changes, namely in manufacturing. Further elaboration therefore requires active cooperation on the part of the economic sectors, in particular for questions of warehouse management, and the rationalization of administration,

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[83] Ibid. 550-551.
[84] BArch DY 3023/427, "Diskussionsgrundlage zum erreichten Stand...," Jan. 15, 1965.

organization of operations, and organization of production. This complex view of the entire operation and its development must be enforced.[85]

Teichler's observation called attention to the main problems of the NES in its first two years: a clear ideal of a more productive, rational, and competitive economy, but an unclear path of how to collaboratively, concretely, and systematically practice that ideal at all levels of the GDR's economic metasystem. If party-state planners took a metasystemic approach, those at the local level focused on their immediate, subsystem tasks. Yet as local views could not easily consider metasystemic issues, purely technical innovation could not solve larger practical problems of supply, production, and management.

Despite these difficulties, the apparent success of the NES also attracted the attention of other socialist countries. Later in spring 1965, the Central Committee circulated a confidential summary of economic developments across the CMEA, gathered by the GDR's embassies. The reports asked party-state officials of the other socialist countries about possible changes in central planning, delegation of responsibility to local management, levers of material interest, development of systemic accounting, designing a more elastic pricing system, and improved use of investment funds. Respondents found that only Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia had plans for a comparable "closed system of management and planning," with the Czechoslovak plan built "on a special emphasis on the market," which was seen as "the objectifying criterion for production [wherein] extreme views even assign it the role of a regulator of production." Czechoslovak enterprises were already decentralized from state planners, working through their

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[85] BArch DF 4/3815, "Aufgaben zur weiteren Präzisierung des neuen ökonomischen Systems...in Kraftwerksanlagenbau," Jan 14, 1965, 72.

production plans "based on their negotiations with customers, i.e. according to the movement of supply and demand on the market itself." This extremity was unique to Czechoslovakia, however. Bulgaria's system, initiated in April 1964, more closely resembled NES. Yet Bulgarian planners had thus far found their basic mechanisms inconsistent, and were eager to share ideas and experience with their East German counterparts.[86] Other nations followed suit, and a number of socialist countries applied NES-style reforms throughout the 1960s. With some resolution to the bureaucratic infighting that had prevented NES-style reforms, and a new party leadership under General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, the USSR undertook reforms under premier Alexei Kosygin, passed by the Soviet Council of Ministers in fall 1965. Bulgaria continued with its decentralizing reforms and experiments with IT, eventually becoming the leading developer and producer of computers within the CMEA.[87] By 1966, the Hungarian government under Janos Kadar initiated what became the New Economic Mechanism, and in Czechoslovakia, reform economists including Ota Šik, and a team of researchers in the Prague Academy of Sciences organized by philosopher Radovan Richta, led new efforts for further economic reforms.[88] The ideal of competitive convergence had spread across the socialist world, shaped by a shared scientific-utopian imaginary that promised a new, technocratic path to communism.

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[86] BArch DY 30/81113, "Zusammenfassung über die Weiterentwicklung und den Stand des Systems der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft in den sozialistischen Ländern Europas," May 10, 1965, 2-12, 29-33.

[87] Victor Petrov, "A Cyber-Socialism at Home and Abroad: Bulgarian Modernisation, Computers, and the World, 1967-1989," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017.

[88] Jenny Andersson, *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018), 123-124. Richta also created the term "socialism with a human face," which would be adopted by Prague Spring reformers.

In the GDR, however, growing disturbances from trade imbalances, a still-unclear system of market metrics, and halfhearted application led to growing pressure and recrimination among the party-state leadership. By late 1965, unreliable imports from the USSR, and unpredictable productive capacity, reduced long-term planning to a constant back-and-forth between planners and producers. Moreover, VVB directors collectively asked the Council of Ministers for so much capital investment on the basis of their profits in 1965 that its total was three times the economy's material-financial capacity. "Self-regulation" had led to local concerns thwarting systemic plans, leaving NES only partially implemented by year's end. Criticism focused on Erich Apel, who already in July 1965 was reprimanded at a private meeting with Ulbricht, Mittag, Schürer, Neumann, and Prime Minister Willi Stoph. Apel lost further standing when the Politburo rejected his yearly plan for 1966. Following a bitter argument with Mittag over an unfavorable trade agreement with the USSR in early December, Apel shot himself in his SPK office, housed in the same building where workers first gathered to protest the raised work norms on June 16, 1953.[89] Apel had been one of the few top party-state leaders with extensive technical experience, and a keen ability to understand complex systems. With his death, NES supporters lost one of their most capable advocates.

Less than two weeks after Apel's suicide, the Central Committee convened its Eleventh Plenum to discuss the progress of NES – a discussion that quickly exposed growing rifts in the party leadership. While introducing the second phase of the reforms, Ulbricht reiterated their distinctly socialist character, declaring that the NES "is the

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[89] Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 57-59; Schürer, *Gewagt und verloren*, 58-61; Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, 105-132. Peter Grieder attributes Apel's suicide in part to the "less than favorable" trade agreement with the USSR; see Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 164-165.

economic system of a socialist state that has essentially mastered the unprecedented burdens of the imperialist past, particularly the fascist world war and the division of the country."[90] He reminded his colleagues that while "the party embraces the new, and learns [from it]," and many comrades had duly embraced NES, others "are not learning energetically and consistently enough." For the second phase, Ulbricht called for more rational investments, the development and import of more advanced technology, and above all else increased foreign trade, especially with capitalist countries, stating plainly "the point is to import a piece of the technical revolution and make it safe for socialism, and this piece should be as large as possible."[91] Ulbricht's gesture to a "safe" competitive convergence did little to convince Politburo skeptics. His immediate deputy, Erich Honecker, also spoke at the plenum, and his sharp criticisms of Ulbricht's more permissive youth policy indirectly applied to the NES as well. Honecker saw a GDR seemingly losing its socialist moral character, warning that ideological "skepticism and rising living standards in the comprehensive construction of socialism are mutually exclusive." Honecker reminded his listeners, especially those attracted to technical metasystems, that "the developed Marxist-Leninist level of thinking is the prerequisite for a deep understanding of the problems of ideal and reality, partisanship and truth, and the beauty and seriousness of our struggle."[92] For Honecker, the GDR was to be sharply contrasted with, and separate from, the nonsocialist world.

This basic dispute over socialist competition and convergence, the definite and dialectic, would accelerate through the 1960s. Although cybernetics concepts

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[90] Ulbricht, *Zum neuen ökonomischen System,* 668; Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 59-60.
[91] Ibid. 677.
[92] Andreas Herbst, Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, and Jürgen Winkler, eds., *Die SED: Geschichte, Organisation, Politik. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 1997), 685.

systematized the ideal of plannable growth through a dialectical practice of assessment, practice, and reassessment, this was practiced largely without effective information exchange from local to center. A wealth of local issues did not easily coalesce into metasystemic solutions, or an understandable, actionable program leading to exponential growth. Anything less than this ideal outcome would incur the criticism and obstruction of SED conservatives, which is what transpired in practice even as the NES, and eventually ESS, expanded in scope to encompass East German society itself.

3.4 *From NES to ESS: Prognostics, Structural Policy, and Metasystemic Integration*

Although heeding Honecker's warning of ideological deviation in youth policy and culture, Ulbricht and other reformers pressed forward with the second phase of the NES and its successor, the ESS. Through these more ambitious ideal practices, cybernetics concepts expanded both territorially and temporally, through the discipline of prognostics and the explicitly metasystemic reach of structural policy. The last half of the 1960s thus witnessed not a slowing down of reform, but their systematization and acceleration as an innovative, if also tentative, philosophy of socialism. Ulbricht and his supporters, once careful to employ cybernetics within Marxism-Leninism, increasingly conceived of the NES/ESS as a new stage of historical materialism. The proliferation of technological metasystemic ideals, along with Ulbricht's push for rapprochement with the FRG, would give party conservatives like Honecker ample basis to challenge the reforms, and eventually Ulbricht's own authority.

Following the Eleventh Plenum of December 1965, Ulbricht and his allies went on the offensive. Willi Stoph, speaking to a joint Central Committee and Council of

Ministers economic conference in January 1966, declared that while "there are hardly any comrades today who have reservations about the [NES]," he did recognize that "there is a larger group who embrace the [NES], but do not learn enough, and not consistently enough." Stoph instructed his fellow party members to read more on socialist political economy, and share "a creative exchange of ideas" with each other.[93] This rather sympathetic reading of his colleagues glossed over a party deeply divided over NES. While the second stage was introduced at the end of 1965, by 1966 the reforms were again at institutional cross-purposes, with new directives implemented only by leading party and state officials who agreed with them, and by VVB directors who would benefit from them. Finance Minister Willy Rumpf, a sixty-three-year-old trained insurance clerk, exemplified party-state leaders who resisted further reforms. Throughout the NES, Rumpf only selectively implemented price reforms, did not include his pro-NES deputy in decision-making, and even withheld important information from the Politburo. Although he was finally relieved of his position in 1966, his actions signified systemic disturbances in information exchange and price reforms that led to lagging production forecasts for the 1967 yearly plan, as well as the perspective plan into 1970. Far more dangerously, due to these factors, consumer prices no longer reflected real costs, necessitating increases. Yet memories of the June 1953 Uprising created resistance to raising prices, reminding Ulbricht of his limited ability to shape policy in light of popular

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[93] BArch DY 3023/427, "Referate des Genossen Willi Stoph auf dem Seminar des ZK und des Minsterrates 'Die Durchführung der zweiten Etappe des neuen ökonomischen Systems der Planung und Leitung' im Kongresssaal des Hauses des Zentralkomitees," Jan. 10, 1966, 63.

sentiments. The First Secretary's hands were tied both by an unresponsive bureaucracy, and a poor balance of central intervention and VVB independence.[94]

Nevertheless, the GDR's "technical revolution" pressed onwards, with advancements in information technologies and cybernetics regularly applied to metasystemic economic practice. In 1966, at the ZIID's initiative, party-state institutions adopted an aperture card system, developed by the American company 3M, for easier information and documentation exchange, storage, and preservation.[95] Meanwhile, the ZIID continued its efforts to introduce information systems across the GDR. At the ZIID's annual conference in November 1966, all communication center representatives, as well as employees responsible for IT and documentation work in the central economic and scientific research institutions, gathered to share experiences and new developments in various seminar groups. Director Stanek's address to the group highlighted the ZIID's achievements in introducing punch card technology in the GDR, and their potential introduction to all information facilities in 1967.[96] Nevertheless, Stanek admitted that the institute was unable to employ information specialists and new IT systems at the VVB level, and could not do so in 1967.[97] However, the ZIID could apply such systems in NES-critical industries such as petrochemicals, electrical engineering, and electronics. Indeed, the institute proposed the adoption, and eventual licensed manufacture, of IBM Robotron 300 mainframes for interconnecting the chemical industry, starting in 1967.[98]

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[94] Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 60-66; see also Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 118-135.

[95] BArch DY 3023/433, "Erläuterung für die Einführung des Systems 'Lochkarte mit Microfilm' zur Modernisierung der Informations- und Dokumentationsarbeit im Parteiapparat," 1966, 49-60.

[96] Zentralinstitut für Information und Dokumentation, *Hauptaufgaben zur komplexen sozialistischen Rationalisierung und Weiterentwicklung des Informationssystems in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Zentralinstitut für Information und Dokumentation, 1966), 43.

[97] Ibid. 49-50.

[98] BArch DF 4/4868, "Zur Konzeption des ZIID für die Nutzung des Robotron 300...," 1967.

Despite these technical advancements, by 1967 the ideal of convergence had reached its political limits. Few knew this better than Fritz Behrens. Following the introduction of the NES, Behrens continued his work on productivity analysis, and also edited a cybernetics-informed volume, *Factor Analysis of Labor Productivity and Cybernetics*, published in 1965.[99] Yet Behrens could not keep his grievances over the limited extent of the reforms within the party. In September 1967, he was invited by West German political scientist Irving Fetscher of the University of Frankfurt to a conference in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of Marx's *Kapital*. The SED rejected Behrens' request to travel to the conference, so without prior approval, Behrens sent his speech. This "blackmail" forced the party to allow him to attend regardless. Once there, Behrens argued that until the Kosygin reforms of 1965, the USSR had employed "bureaucratic centralism with administrative, coercive methods" to force industrialization – measures that had "strongly discredited the ideas of planning and the socialist economy." Behrens found that the "contradictions and errors" that had occurred even during NES "lie in socialism itself," and the only remedy was VVB self-management and an effective "de-nationalization of the economy." Behrens concluded that "not all 'sacred cows' of dogmatism have been slaughtered," although he did spare the SED from direct criticism. This might explain why, in its assessment of his remarks, the DAW party cadre was less punitive than the Central Committee rebuke of 1957. Instead, the cadre secretary admitted that Behrens had been ill for some time, and his "self-isolation" from party discussions may have contributed to his indiscretions. Regardless, they found that "his views are not guided by the decisions of the party, but rather he tries to counter them with

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[99] Fritz Behrens, ed., *Faktorenanalyse der Arbeitsproduktivität und Kybernetik* (Berlin: Verlag die Wirtschaft), 1965.

his own concept," and "he in no way drew the lessons from the argument that the party had to have with him in 1956/57."[100] Yet the party cadre only mandated a disciplinary "ideological discussion" when Behrens's health improved.

By 1967, however, the NES's cyclical reassessments drew growing criticism from party conservatives accustomed to relatively unchanging directives, prompting a more distinctly socialist basis for the program's next phase. Phase three was thus introduced as a rebranded program, the Economic System of Socialism, or ESS, at the Seventh Party Congress in April 1967. In his address, Ulbricht reaffirmed the centrality of competition with West Germany, though now forcefully rejected any developmental convergence. Rather, he vowed to "overtake without catching up" (*überholen ohne einzuholen*), surpassing the FRG's standard of living and productivity through a distinctly socialist path. Initially, this shift was largely discursive. Although expanded in ambition, the same basic elements from the NES during 1963-65 remained, and reforms continued to use levers such as profit, investments, and prices to gauge productivity. However, investments were now specifically targeted at the most profitable or critical industries, including metallurgy, petrochemicals, and energy, and existing guidelines more centrally enforced.[101] In time, however, the ESS also expanded in conceptual and philosophical scope, integrating production, distribution, and trade through "structural policy"

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[100] BArch DY 30/84180, "Aktennotiz üer die Sitzung der Parteileitung der GO Institut für Wirtschaftswissenschaften am 5.10.1967...," Oct. 6, 1967; and "Information über den gegenwärtigen Stand der Auseinandersetzung mit Genossen Prof. Fritz Behrens," Oct. 13, 1967. For Behrens' participation in NES and the circumstances leading to the Frankfurt episode, see Caldwell, "Productivity, Value, and Plan," 120-127. For the text of Behrens' speech, see Walter Euchner and Alfred Schmidt, eds., *Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie heute: 100 Jahre "Kapital"* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968).

[101] In contrast to Kopstein, Steiner, and Caldwell, David Granick found in his interviews with GDR economic managers in 1970 that NES-style reforms were "implemented most thoroughly" during the ESS phase of 1967-70. See Granick, *Enterprise Guidance in Eastern Europe,* 131.

(*Strukturpolitik*), which conceptualized information and resource distribution as a decentralized, yet integrated, domestic and international metasystem.

This shift to structural policy also signaled the ESS's expansion from largely short- and medium-term plans to one integrating productive and social forces in a long-term practice of ideals. To do so, the ESS also introduced the discipline of prognostics to planning, which like cybernetics came to the GDR from the West.[102] Its main innovators included American political scientist Daniel Bell, West German political scientist Ossip K. Flechtheim, and Austrian researcher Robert Jungk, socialist-inclined thinkers who focused on systems theory, East-West convergence, and the emancipatory potential of the future as a category of analysis and area of imagination.[103] Also like cybernetics, prognostics was adopted in the GDR at a major academic conference with a utopian idealism, albeit with rather more polemic differentiation. The "Theoretical and Methodological Problems of the Prognostic Preparation of Planning under the Conditions of the Technical Revolution" Symposium, held in November 1966, declared in its final report that prognostics was "not an invention of capitalism or its intellectual apologetics," and in a socialist context would encompass "all fundamental aspects of life," in which the social ownership of the means of production and the unity of prognostics, planning, and "socialist democracy" guarantees "a high degree of forecasting certainty."[104] In economic applications, prognostics specialists took the variable perspective plan as their main

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[102] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 442-502.

[103] Jenny Andersson outlines the genesis of prognostics, and its arrival in socialist countries, in her *The Future of the World.* For an overview of Flechtheim's and Jungk's work, see Elke Seefried, *Zukünfte: Aufstieg und Krise der Zukunftsforschung 1946-1980* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015),125-153.

[104] Lehrstuhl Planung und Prognostik des Instituts für sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung der Hochschule für Ökonomie, *Wirtschaftsprognose in der technischen Revolution: Protokoll des Symposiums "Theoretische und methodologische Probleme der prognostischen Vorbereitung der Planung unter den Bedingungne der technischen Revolution" am 9. und 10. November 1966 an der Hochschule für Ökonomie, Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag die Wirtschaft, 1967), 11-12.

instrument. Yet like cybernetics, prognostics did not have a discrete focus, giving

planners tasks of complex variability including long-term development and structural

calculations of the total national product and income, along with accumulation and

consumption, forecasts in research and education, developments in living standards and

foreign trade, and raw material resource prediction and distribution.[105] This systemic

emphasis on space and temporality, integrating past, present, and future, characterized the

primary difference between the ESS and its predecessor.

Given their sheer metasystemic scope, these tasks were thus distributed

throughout the GDR's planning and research institutions, and rapidly coalesced into a far

more ambitious philosophy of technocratic socialism. Working groups of various

ministries, the SPK, research institutes, and the DAW would collaborate on five, ten, and

twenty-year forecasts of growth and investment.[106] In order to "overtake without catching

up," the ESS needed to both reassess the lessons of the NES, and reapply them as a

wholly new stage of historical development. The guidelines of ESS were accordingly

based on a tentative rethinking of dialectical materialism, with socialism not as "a short

stage in the transition between capitalism and communism, but a relatively independent

socioeconomic formation in the historical epoch of the transition from capitalism to

communism on a world scale."[107] Officially approved but privately disparaged by SED

conservatives and Brezhnev, this "developed social system of socialism" redefined basic

Marxist-Leninist categories, tentatively transforming socialism into a distinct mode of

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[105] Ibid. 17-18.
[106] BArch DE 1/53137, "Arbeitsmaterial, zur Entwicklung der permanenten prognostischen Tätigkeit...,"
Mar. 1967.
[107] BArch DY 3023/435, "Wesen und Hauptbestandteile des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus...,"
14.

production.[108] Given this systemic revision, the ESS went far beyond economics, forming an "organic connection" between central planning and "basic questions of the overall social process," encompassing the "largely independent activity" of producers as well as "the independent design of social life" at every administrative level of the GDR.[109] The ESS also introduced a new economic administrative body, the combinate (*Kombinate*), which would integrate large-scale scientific research, planning, and administration at a level across multiple VVBs, which were now wholly occupied with more local management tasks.[110] The ESS was deemed so transformational that the standard GDR textbook of political economy was replaced by an updated, thousand-page volume written by four different working groups under the direction of SPK deputy chairman Herbert Wolf. Ulbricht himself wrote the foreword.[111]

Prognostics thus became the discursive spirit of the GDR's technocratic practice of ideals, and often wholly eclipsed dialectical materialist concepts in party-state reports. In June 1966, the SFT introduced prognostics to the natural sciences and technological research and application, highlighting its relevance to the perspective plan by giving it a "scientific basis," as well as coordinating relevant scientific areas with their economic tasks.[112] By early 1967, SPK planners organized prognostics committees in other central

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[108] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 166.

[109] BArch DY 3023/435, "Wesen und Hauptbestandteile ...," 14.

[110] BArch DY 3023/435, "Zum Inhalt und zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen Großforschung in den Kombinaten und Großbetrieben," 87-98; Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 46-469; Granick, *Enterprise Guidance in Eastern Europe*, 141-143, 171-209.

[111] DY 3023/435, "Konzeption für das Lehrbuch Politische Ökonomie des Sozialismus, May 3, 1968," 327-344; and Walter Ulbricht, ed., *Politische Ökonomie des Sozialismus und ihre Anwendung in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz, 1969).

[112] BArch DE 1/53137, "Grundsätze zur Erarbeitung von Prognosen auf den Gebieten von Naturwissenschaft und Technik," June 10, 1966.

state organs, the VVBs, as well as district councils.[113] One classified thesis from January 1967 even envisioned productive forecasts until 1980, or thirteen years into the future.[114] The impulse to grasp the future in the present, firmly rooted in the socialist imaginary of the 1960s, was both practical and ideal: In a report of an SPK research group investigating prognostics as a "real leadership tool," leader Fritz Haberland highlighted that the discipline "should not only tell us what will be at what time, but above all: what must be." Haberland identified five main tasks of prognostics: to anticipate the development tendencies of the economic process, determine the most important laws of expected economic development, determine the period of effect of individual factors of economic development, provide possible alternatives to the prospective development of the economy, and "handle the connections between past, present, and future."[115] Making accurate predictions for the economic metasystem, then, necessitated anticipating possible changes or disturbances by balancing past experience with future possibility – a control of information across space and time that approached the limits of the possible.

Prognostics so conceived also added temporality to the cybernetic systems innovated by Georg Klaus and others, and once integrated into structural policy, greatly expanded cybernetics' control system concepts through a spatial connection of area and

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[113] BArch DE 1/53137, "Vorschläge über Grundsätze und methodische Festlegungen für die permanente prognostische Tätigkeit als Bestandteil der wissenschaftlichen Leitungtätigkeit in der zentralen Staatsorganen, VVB und Betrieben sowie den Räten der Bezirke," Feb. 9, 1967; and "Arbeitsmaterial, zur Entwicklung der permanenten prognostischen Tätigkeit als Bestandteil der wissenschaftlichen Leitungtätigkeit in den Betrieben, VVB in den zentralen Staatsorganen und in den Räten der Bezirke," March 1967.

[114] BArch DE 1/53308, "Thesen zu einer ersten prognostischen Einschätzung der Entwicklung der Produktivkräfte der DDR bis 1980," Jan. 16, 1967.

[115] BArch DY 30/87188, "Bisherige Ergebnisse bei der Erfüllung des Forschungsauftrages 'Die Gestalt und der Prognose zu einem echten Führungsinstrument,'" July 6, 1967.

networks.[116] In effect, state planners thought of production not only as a complex of systems, but how those systems interacted in the past, present, and future. Structural policy thus integrated prognostics research into a systemic worldview for the GDR's territory, temporality, and society, with the ESS as its ongoing management and planning mechanism.[117] Following a Politburo resolution in August 1967 to integrate prognostics into structural policy and perspective planning, the SPK established a dedicated department studying both, led by deputy chairman Siegfried Wenzel. This department was tasked with the "elaboration of the baseline and final completion of the structural policy concept, development of its main economic factors, and selection of the areas to be forecast from the point of view of the SPK."[118] This was in turn applied to ESS-critical industries of energy, machine-building, electronics, and petrochemicals, along with electronic data processing.[119] By early 1968, it became clear to SPK planners that the GDR's territorial and transportation disparities needed to be addressed directly. The SPK thus mandated better use of industrialized areas, and further development of the GDR's rural northern and central districts. This in turn necessitated better information and transportation networks to resolve the "still uncoordinated development" between infrastructure centers, and "the associated uneconomic territorial fragmentation of

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[116] By the mid-1960s, the GDR's concurrent competition with the FRG actually worked to limit the applications of state intervention in industry to a relative minimum (compared with France or Great Britain at the time). For a comparative look at structural policy in the GDR and FRG, see Stefan Grüner and Sabine Mecking, eds., *Wirtschaftsräume und Lebenschancen: Wahrnehmung und Steuerung von sozialiökonomischem Wandel in Deutschland 1945-2000* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 39-78.

[117] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaft*, 135-136.

[118] BArch DE 1/53308, "Vorschläge zur endgültigen Gestaltung der Arbeit auf dem Gebiet der Prognose, Strukturpolitik, Perspektivplanung," Sept. 11, 1967.

[119] Ibid. "Die Entwicklung der Energiewirtschaft im Prognosezeitraum im Zusammenhang mit der Profilierung des Kraftwerksanlagenbaues, der entsprechenden Zweige des Maschinenbaues, der Elektrotechnik/Elektronik und der chemischen Industrie," Feb. 27, 1968; and "Stellungnahme zur Prognose der Entwicklung und Anwendung der elektronischen Datenverarbeitung," May 17, 1968.

resources."[120] Forecasting these developments would allow planners to conceive of new possibilities for economic development. Taken together, structural policy and prognostics seemed to promise a mastery of the GDR as a temporal and stable cybernetic system, more responsive to possible disturbances. Based on the assumption that the ESS could operate as a relatively stable system, planners could forecast growth well into the future.

As with cybernetics, the introduction of prognostics initiated a deluge of visionary and ambitious publications, albeit at times garnering criticism for a lack of a scientific basis and clarity. *Einheit* published a number of prognostics-themed articles from 1967 until 1970, and Dietz Press, the SED-owned publishing house and the largest in the GDR, reviewed and released numerous prognostics monographs. Herbert Edeling's dissertation thesis for the Central Committee's Institute for Social Sciences, one of the earliest prognostics studies, was expanded and published as *Prognostics and Socialism* in 1968.[121] Rudolf Bröer, reviewing the book for the Dresden daily *Sächsische Zeitung*, praised Edeling's use of "system-theoretical considerations" to relate forecasting from smaller systems to the "overall" metasystem. By focusing on "productive forces" as the centerpiece of prognostics, "Edeling once again provides proof of how cybernetic systems theory can help to understand important social issues more deeply, and in more

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[120] BArch DE 1/53331, "Probleme der Prognose der Standortverteilung der Produktivkräfte in der DDR," Mar. 26, 1968; "Methodischen und organisatorischen Festlegungen und Hinweise zur Ausarbeitung der strukturpolitischen Konzeption der Volkswirtschaft," Feb. 8. 1968; and "Die Entwicklung der territorialen Grundstruktur der Volkswirtschaft," Apr. 4, 1968.

[121] The thesis was revised once, with a new title emphasizing prognostics and the specifically Marxist-Leninist character of the work. BArch DY 30/21361, "Sozialistisches Perspektivbewußtsein beim umfassenden Aufbau des Sozialismus Deutschen Demokratischen Republik unter den Bedingungen der wissenschaftlich-technischen Revolution," Jan. 1967; and "Komplexität und komplexe Prognostik moderner Produktivkräfte in der wissenschaftlich-technischen Revolution beim umfassenden Aufbau des Sozialismus in der Deutschen Demorkatischen Republik - einige philosophische Probleme der marxistsich-leninistischen Gesellschaftsprognostik," Mar. 1967. See also Edeling, *Prognostik und Sozialismus: zur marxistisch-leninistischen Prognostik moderner Produktivkraefte in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz, 1968).

ways than one."[122] Yet *Philosophy and Prognostics*, also published in 1968 by a Central Committee author collective, received harsher, albeit internal, criticism. The social prognostics chair of the Institute for Social Sciences, Hans Kulow, criticized the "disproportions between meta-theoretical-logical treatises on prognostics, which should not be confused with philosophical ones, and the philosophical-ideological investigations necessary for prognostics, whereby these two sides are also not connected to an organic unity," a disproportion giving the book "an abstract character" that is "permeated" by incorrect "meta-theoretical" explanations.[123] In effect, the collective's work seemed to be wholly detached from the realities of planning policy and historical materialism. Despite this, similar titles followed: SPK deputy chairman Fritz Haberland and Heinz-Dieter Haustein integrated prognostics into the ongoing "scientific-technical revolution" in their joint 1969 work, while G.M. Dobrov introduced prognostics to Soviet readers, with Dietz publishing the German language edition of his 1969 book in 1970.[124]

With its integration into a prognostic structural policy, cybernetics itself began to recede in discursive significance. This did not, however, deter Georg Klaus from also applying cybernetics concepts to an ever-wider field of study throughout the 1960s, from cognition and consciousness to the democracy of the future. In his 1966 magnum opus, *Cybernetics and Cognitive Theory*, Klaus applied cybernetics to a host of philosophical and scientific fields, including game theory, objective and subjective consciousness, and

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[122] BArch DY 30/21361, review by Rudolf Bröer, "Interessant und aufschlussreich," *Sächsische Zeitung*, Dec. 11, 1968.

[123] BArch DY 30/21370, "Rezension zum Buch 'Philosophie und Prognostik'." See also Adolf Bauer et al., *Philosophie und Prognostik: Weltanschauliche und methodologische Probleme der Gesellschaftsprognose* (Berlin: Dietz, 1968).

[124] Fritz Haberland and Heinz-Dieter Haustein, *Die Prognostik als neue Element der Führungstätigkeit zur Meisterung der wissenschaftlich-technischen Revolution* (Berlin: Dietz, 1969).G.M. Dobrov, *Prognostik in Wissenschaft und Technik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1970).

his concept of "man-machine symbiosis," all based on a fundamental understanding of consciousness (and thus humanity) as a dynamic and self-regulating system.[125] In a 1967 interview with *Einheit*, Klaus clearly identified the ongoing work of assessing and reassessing technocratic socialism, reminding readers that while Marx, Engels, and Lenin will always be the "foundation" of social science, "a foundation is not a finished house, and our house has the peculiarity of never being completed – it must be further developed in lively interaction with the development of social life." In returning to the dialectical sublation of old dogmatisms that initiated the NES/ESS, Klaus added that the ESS is fundamentally "characterized by the use of mathematical-cybernetic methods," and serves as a general model for a "very general philosophical area." Yet Klaus argued that the economy is simply a subsystem of society, and even the best goal and plan might seem "optimal from an exclusively economic point of view, but contradict certain other requirements within the overall framework of the system." Therefore abstract economic relationships could not be fully realized in the "complex practice" of social reality, especially one including ignorant, opportunistic, or obstructionist party leaders, finance ministers, or VVB directors. In order to work more effectively, Klaus implicitly argued, the ESS needed time and practice.

By the beginning of 1968, the ESS seemed to bring the GDR as close as possible to Klaus's initial ideal of a socialist cybernetic system regulated by determinable laws. Yet even uniting cybernetics, prognostics, and structural policy as a spatial-temporal metasystem proved incapable of fully practicing this ideal as social reality. The complexities of modeling, planning, and managing an entire modern industrial economy

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[125] Georg Klaus, *Kybernetik und Erkenntnistheorie* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1966); see also Caldwell, *Dictatorship*, 153-159.

were simply too immense for the short time it was able to be implemented without political interference. By 1970, the ESS ran out of political time, as did Walter Ulbricht. Disturbances within and beyond the GDR undermined the leader who most conspicuously tied his authority to competitive convergent growth.

3.5 *Ulbricht's Removal and the End of the ESS*

By the end of the 1960s, information exchange between central leadership and local management, once the dynamic core of the economic metasystem, led to growing contradictions in planning and production, and a sharpening conflict between party reformers and conservatives. In April 1968, the Council of State reported that "the responsibility of the local organs of state power for the design of development in its territory should be increased," and for all firms, combines, and economic bodies to take on further "autonomous complex planning" while reserving central importance for the main perspective plan.[126] Behind the scenes, however, the Politburo criticized Herbert Wolf, leader of the SPK working groups who wrote the ESS guidelines, for the sheer complexity of the economic lever system that VVBs were expected to implement. Party conservatives under Honecker, while not always understanding the system itself, likely intuited that the ESS would limit political interference in the yearly and perspective plans.[127] Seemingly rational considerations at the center were often absolutized and exaggerated, leading to planners basing their long-term productive forecasts on

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[126] BArch DY 3023/430, "Beschluss des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über weitere Maßnahmen zur Gestaltung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus," Apr. 22, 1968. See also Harry Nick, *Gesellschaft und Betrieb im Sozialismus: Zur zentralen Idee des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus* (Berlin: Verlag die Wirtschaft, 1970).
[127] Steiner, *Die DDR-Wirtschaftsreform*, 143-144. Taken with Steinitz and Walter's assessment of extra-plan investments, it seems likely that Politburo members also feared losing the ability to pursue their own "priority planning" projects. See Steinitz and Walter, *Plan-Markt-Demokratie*, 63-64.

particularly productive past years. This utopian planning, along with an overemphasis on key industries, meant that more peripheral industries were unable to simply maintain their existing productive capacity and stock, let alone modernize or expand. Moreover, many "structure-determining" industries – petrochemicals, shipbuilding, and metallurgy – receiving the most investments were in fact the least profitable, diverting funds from more innovative or productive sectors.[128]

Moreover, 1968 was not a good year for reforms across the socialist world, or for the leaders who stood behind them, including Ulbricht. Growing popular resentments against the SED for a host of reasons, from the destruction of University Church in Leipzig to the GDR's growing pollution problem, bolstered party conservatives displeased with Ulbricht's leadership.[129] Anton Ackermann, rehabilitated in 1956 and a deputy chairman for culture and education at the SPK since 1961, sent Ulbricht a confidential ten-page letter outlining his criticisms of the ESS in spring. Ackermann warned of the danger of "convergence theory" and the GDR following a path to a "socialist market economy," a warning that Ulbricht inexplicably shared with his Politburo.[130] By summer, the reforms were further discredited through their association with Czechoslovak economic policies during the Prague Spring, most notably the work of economist Ota Šik.[131] Moreover, fallout from the Prague Spring accelerated criticisms of

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[128] Steinitz and Walter, *Plan-Markt-Demokratie*, 55-56; Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 57-58.
[129] For the destruction of the University Church and its fallout, see Andrew Demshuk, *Demolition on Karl Marx Square: Cultural Barbarism and the People's State in 1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For the GDR's growing pollution problem and its effects on party-state policy, see the following chapter.
[130] Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 66.
[131] This despite Dietz Verlag publishing Šik's major economics work in German translation; see Ota Šik, *Ökonomie – Interessen – Politik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1966). For a more detailed analysis of the political events of the Prague Spring and their impact on the GDR, see Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, 284-301; for a more detailed analysis of Czechoslovak reform economists, see Vítězslav Sommer, "The Economics of Everyday Life in 'New' Socialism: Czechoslovak Public Economics and Economic Reform in the Prague Spring Era," in

remaining reformists in the USSR as well, with Brezhnev outmaneuvering Alexei

Kosygin as the leading figure in the Soviet Politburo by the end of the year. Ulbricht's

often lecturing pronouncements about conceptual and technological advancements did

little to help. Even Apel's successor as SPK chairman, Gerhard Schürer, who had long

been a proponent of NES/ESS, later reflected that the "catchphrases" from cybernetics,

system automatization, and "big research" had come to do more harm than good.[132]

The lack of equally spectacular results, and an impatient Politburo, eventually

caught up to Ulbricht, undermining his ideal authority and eventual leadership of the

party-state. Ironically, his anxiety over losing control of the Politburo may have

contributed to his pressing for ambitious yearly plans for 1969 and 1970. Yet by mid-

1969, a comprehensive reassessment of ESS did not reduce its complexity or reliance on

vague metasystem concepts, even as growth rates continued to rise.[133] Ulbricht's

longtime supporter Neumann also signaled his loss of confidence in reform, writing to

Ulbricht in April 1969 that the GDR should no longer compare itself to West Germany

through purely economic metrics. Ulbricht, unlike the rest of his Politburo, welcomed the

October election of Willy Brandt's SPD government, hoping for top-level rapprochement

with the FRG and a far more integrated relationship between the two states.[134] The FRG

under Brandt's leadership was more than willing to comply, with meetings between the

new Chancellor and Prime Minister Stoph in the GDR in March 1970, and in the FRG in

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Economic Knowledge in Socialism, Till Düppe and Ivan Boldyrev, eds., *History of Political Economy* 51, S1 (2019): 52-72.

[132] Schürer, *Gewagt und verloren*, 92-93.

[133] BArch DY 3023/429, "Der Hauptinhalt der Maßnahmen zur Gestaltung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," May 13, 1969. See also Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 87-88.

[134] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 177.

May. Faced with further reductions in Soviet raw material support, Ulbricht increasingly turned to West German loans to support trade shortfalls, "so that we can pull through in some way."[135] In addition to his personal dislike of Ulbricht, these meetings aroused Brezhnev's fears of a German-German "special relationship" – fears that Honecker exploited, positioning himself as the hardline alternative to Ulbricht.[136]

Honecker moved quickly to eclipse the First Secretary, basing his criticisms on Ulbricht's rapprochement with the FRG and the ESS's distinct deviance from Marxist-Leninist practices. Along the way, Honecker gained the support of other Politburo members and a number of former NES proponents, including Günter Mittag. In September 1970, Honecker used a Politburo meeting to attack the ESS, and call for a return of central planning powers to the SED. At the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee in December 1970, a number of key SED leaders failed to defend the ESS, with only Ulbricht pressing for a renewed development of structural policy.[137] These efforts were largely in vain. Politburo opposition organized around Honecker, who traveled with Ulbricht to the USSR in April 1971 to address the next CPSU Party Congress. At a private meeting, Brezhnev ordered Ulbricht to resign as First Secretary. Losing both domestic and Soviet support, Ulbricht unwillingly complied, but still used his position on the Council of State to advocate for the ESS until being explicitly forbidden from doing so.[138]

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[135] Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 68-69.

[136] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 178-183.

[137] BArch DY 3023/429, "Information über die Durchführung des Beschlusses des Ministerrates von 15.12.1970 über Regelungen zur besseren Ausnutzung ökonomischer Gesetzes des Sozialismus in bestimmten Bereichen der Volkswirtschaft sowie über weitere Maßnahmen zur Verwirklichung der Grundsätze der Gestaltung der Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen der Werktätigen im Jahre 1971," Dec. 16, 1970; see also Peter Hübner, *Arbeit, Arbeiter, und Technik der DDR 1971 bis 1989: Zwischen Fordismus und digitaler Revolution* (Berlin: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfl., 2014), 82-93.

[138] Grieder, *East German Leadership*, 168-170, 186-187; Caldwell, *Dictatorship*, 146-148.

Ulbricht's ouster as First Secretary brought an end to ESS, and Honecker quickly introduced his own comprehensive vision of the GDR. At the Eighth Party Congress of June 15-19, 1971, the new General Secretary introduced his "unity of social and economic policy," which amounted to a reassertion of central planning, albeit with an emphasis on consumer goods production and housing construction. Honecker pledged to "hand over half a million flats to our working people" from 1971 to 1975. He also recognized these homes needed to be stocked with "the thousand and one little things" of modern life, and thus prioritized expanded production of consumer goods.[139] Honecker's aim to "eliminate many sources of friction and vexation" was intended to better meet East Germans' material expectations, and to clarify SED policy "in a language clearly understandable to the masses."[140] In equating his policy with tangible measures of growth, Honecker repudiated his predecessor's privileging of economics over politics, and returned to the party's pre-NES premise: "To separate economics and politics from each other is just as wrong as to conceive of the *economic system of socialism* in the sense of a mere control and regulating mechanism."[141] Economic policy was explicitly political again, and what would become Honecker's "real existing socialism" would base its ideal authority on prioritizing tangible, consumer metrics of economic growth, at its own profit or peril.

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[139] Erich Honecker, *The German Democratic Republic: Pillar of Peace and Socialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 36-39.
[140] Ibid. 55.
[141] Ibid. 55-56. Italics added.

Conclusion: From Socialist Metasystem to Real Existing Socialism

In imagining the GDR's productive forces, territory, and temporality as a technocratic metasystem both open and closed to the outside world, the SED hoped to compete with the FRG through convergent ideas, technologies, and metrics. Imagining and practicing socialism as a distinct stage of development, a technological metasystem, was intended to systematize and stabilize the complexities and disturbances of modern industrial society. In practice, the NES/ESS modernized the East German economy of the 1950s, and brought a new generation of researchers, planners, and managers to the forefront of development in the socialist world. With more time, better technology, and political support, their work was by no means a foreordained failure. Yet the NES/ESS ended due to disturbances at its center: the SED leadership itself.

This pragmatic turn from the ESS to the "unity of social and economic policy" signaled the effective end of the SED's attempts to transform East German society through a utopian vision of the future. Throughout the 1970s, Honecker's policy, politically expedient and aligning with his own ideals, brought a sense of stability to the GDR after a decade beginning with the Berlin Wall and ending in a palace coup. Yet it also slowly painted the SED into a corner, as the shift away from NES-era industrial investment to consumer goods production left what remained of the GDR's industrial capacity falling behind even replacement rates. This gradual decomposition, and the nationalization of the GDR's remaining private enterprises in 1972, eventually undermined the GDR's ability to make sufficient industrial or consumer goods, with only the SED to hold responsible for it. Rather than address these issues, Honecker ignored adverse economic data, cut working hours, and in a sublime twist of fate, took out

massive loans from the FRG to pay for his social welfare program. The nexus of these conditions – the GDR's degrading production capacity, consumer goods shortages, increasing debt, and environmental pollution from the petrochemical and energy sectors – by the 1980s led many East German citizens to resent the SED. A core group of those citizens also protested the environmental pollution in the GDR, demanding action from the party-state. The SED's subsequent ban on the publication of environmental data in 1982 compelled these activists to seek alternative sources of information, and steadily challenge the party's ideal authority throughout the 1980s.

Not all of this was Honecker's fault, however. The stagnant growth and rampant pollution of the 1980s were partly the result of policies undertaken in the 1960s, especially intensive investments in petrochemicals and other heavy industries that polluted East Germany's soil and waterways. Moreover, less Soviet oil imports meant that the GDR would have to rely on highly sulfuric lignite to satisfy its energy needs, filling the air with smog and toxins. Although the party leadership was aware of these consequences by the late 1960s, and enacted progressive environmental protection legislation in 1970 to remedy them, insufficient funds for pollution-limiting technology ultimately rendered them unfulfilled.

Chapter Four
A Socialist Environmentalism:
The SED, the Environmental Movement, and the Struggle for Ideal Authority,
1968-1989

In February 1983, Rolf Jähnichen, a collective farm manager and CDU member from Zedtlitz, a town in the Borna district near Leipzig, wrote a petition (*Eingabe*) to the leader of the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management (MUW), Minister Hans Reichelt. In his letter, Jähnichen drew attention to the misuse of topsoil in his district by strip mining. Jähnichen also reminded the Minister that "air pollution in our area... is particularly high," especially in the nearby town of Mölbis, which was directly downwind from a major coal plant in nearby Espenhain. Jähnichen pledged that "the people in our county, as well as me personally, are ready to provide a variety of services to improve our environment, in our work and in our free time." Yet in this gesture of support, Jähnichen also described the MUW's efforts thus far to keep water and air clean as a "drop in the bucket." He concluded with a request that henceforth, the MUW do more to "ensure that we in the Borna district can be proud of our home and our environment again."[1]

After receiving Jähnichen's letter, the MUW office in Berlin asked its representative in Borna, Heinz Lippmann, to submit a detailed report on Jähnichen's claims, "as Dr. Reichelt intends to answer this question himself."[2] Lippmann's detailed yet subtly defensive reply argued that due to the increased use of lignite (brown coal, or the lowest-quality coal type with the highest sulfur content) mandated at the Tenth Party Congress in 1981, large-scale strip mining and air pollution were unavoidable. He then

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[1] BArch DK 5/123, *Eingabe* from Jähnichen to Reichelt, Feb. 8, 1983.
[2] BArch DK 5/123, letter from Hoffmann to Lippmann, Feb. 21, 1983.

highlighted attempts to recultivate soil in the area by local collective farms and a fertilizer

factory, while also acknowledging such efforts had been limited by "many unclear

questions and the lack of commitment [from] interested parties." Lippmann's explanation

for the air pollution offered no such excuses: He admitted that the lignite plant upwind of

Mölbis was an outdated facility that regularly exceeded emissions limits for "sulfur

compounds, hydrocarbons, phenols, coal dust, and SO_2 [sulfur dioxide]" by a

thousandfold. In 1982, emissions had accelerated due to "an increase in pressure in the

outdated smoldering furnaces," and although over a million Mark worth of sanctions had

been imposed on the plant, Lippmann explained that the only "fundamental solution"

would be a wholly new exhaust purification system, "low-waste" furnaces, and

downstream plants to recover pollutants.[3] In his reply to Jähnichen in late March,

Reichelt repeated Lippmann's assessment about soil reclamation, but condensed his

analysis on the brown coal plant into a single paragraph without mention of the plant's

condition, or its need for massive investments.[4] Without addressing this fundamental

problem, both Jähnichen's and Reichelt's efforts did little to improve the obvious

pollution in Borna, or ease the frustrations it caused.

This exchange illustrates a key practice of ideals in real existing socialism's last

decades: environmental protection. Although conservation groups existed in the GDR

since its foundation, comprehensive state protection began as a bottom-up ideal practice.

Thousands of citizen *Eingaben* (petitions) criticizing water, air, and soil pollution caused

by the "key industries" of the NES/ESS. Walter Ulbricht, largely receptive to these

criticisms, directed prognostics groups in the Council of Ministers to develop the ideal of

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[3] BArch DK 5/123, letter from Lippmann to Reichelt, Mar. 10, 1983.
[4] BArch DK 5/123, letter from Reichelt to Jähnichen, Mar. 23, 1983.

"socialist land stewardship" (*sozialistische Landeskultur*). Practicing socialist *Landeskultur* also meant including the right to a clean environment in the GDR's 1968 constitution, and passing the Land Stewardship Law (*Landeskulturgesetz*, or LKG) of 1970. The LKG provided the most comprehensive environmental protections in the world at the time. Assigning oversight to the Council of Ministers and, after 1972, the MUW, the LKG also stood as the definitive legal expression of a state-directed, technocratic-focused ideal of environmental protection, developed in turn from a socialist imaginary that idealized humanity's technological mastery of the natural world. Yet this ideal also depended on real mastery of productive forces and their consequences. Through the 1970s and 1980s, environmental destruction in the GDR in fact accelerated, alongside growing public consciousness and demands to the party-state for redress. Accepting the state's responsibility and authority to practice this ideal, citizens regularly wrote to the MUW to investigate water treatment and pollution issues. However, top SED leaders under Erich Honecker allowed key industries to continue destructive practices for the sake of production and overall growth, while pollution-reducing technologies proved too expensive or ineffectual for the GDR's aging industrial stock. Although MUW officials often did their best to remedy egregious cases, as Reichelt's letter to Jähnichen attests, they proved unable to enforce the LKG over the party-state's primary ideal of productive growth. Ultimately, party-state leaders decided that the socialist ideal of productivity and overall growth was more important to practice than environmental protection, both undercutting their ideal authority and eventually compelling concerned citizens to explore other ideal practices of environmental activism.

By the early 1980s, pollution in the GDR had become a pressing social issue. Initially, the party-state moved to channel growing "environmental consciousness" to its official environmental group, the Society for Nature and the Environment (GNU). Although concerned citizens joined the GNU, others also formed ecological groups through the semi-autonomous Protestant Church. These Church groups, drawing on ideals of Christian stewardship as well as anti-consumerist and anti-growth ideals, initially worked with the state to practice local solutions to pollution from below. However, the Council of Ministers banned the publication of environmental data through the "information protection" (*Informationschutz*) law of 1982, as a means to prevent unfavorable pollution data from becoming public knowledge. Concerned citizens were compelled to establish their own networks of information exchange to identify environmental problems, share them with likeminded others, and collaboratively formulate solutions beyond, and increasingly in opposition to, official practices. By the mid-1980s, these groups increasingly questioned the state's ability to protect the environment, and some eventually challenged its authority to practice any ideals, socialist or otherwise, in the name of the East German public.

Environmental activism in real existing socialism did not, however, lead neatly from the late 1960s into the oppositional politics of 1989. *Eingaben* to the MUW and Council of Ministers from the late 1960s until well into the 1980s in fact exhibit a recognition of the state's ideal authority to articulate and practice socialist *Landeskultur*, and a willingness to work with state representatives to find solutions to local, national, and international environmental issues. This finding complicates the work of earlier historians of the GDR's environmental movement, who have emphasized the

oppositional approach of Berlin-based Church-based environmental groups by the late

1980s, while neglecting the movement's grassroots origins and dispersion across the

GDR.[5] More recent works have examined environmentalism's deeper roots in the

socialist imaginary and East Germany's cultural and political identity, and the

interrelationship of state authorities, Church activists, and ordinary citizens in finding the

best practices of protection.[6] On this basis, this chapter argues that environmental

activism in the 1970s and 1980s, originating in a socialist ideal practiced by the party-

state, practically connected a broad social movement, focused on a common goal and

facing a common obstacle, that played a resonant, mobilizing role in the revolution of

1989.[7] Citizens initially saw themselves as participating in practicing a socialist ideal of

protection, and party-state authorities in turn responded seriously to their appeals. Yet

due to a host of practical issues, from insufficient technology and funds to overall

economic decline, the *Informationschutz* signified a growing rift between state authorities

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[5] Former Church-based activists strongly emphasized this opposition-centered perspective. See especially Wolfgang Rüddenklau, *Störenfried. DDR-Opposition 1986-1989* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth, eds., *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR. Das "Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche" 1988-1990* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1995), and Michael Beleites, *Dicke Luft: Zwischen Ruß und Revolte. Die unabhängige Umweltbewegung in der DDR* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 2016). Early historiography followed this perspective as well. See Merrill E. Jones, "Origins of the East German Environmental Movement," *German Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (1993): 235-264 and Eberhard Kuhrt, Hannsjörg F. Buck and Gunter Holzweißig, eds., *Die wirtschaftliche und ökologische Situation der DDR in den 80er Jahren* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996).

[6] Tobias Huff traces state- and Church-based East German conservation and environmental protection activism in a broader study of industrial and political policy, although he does not integrate state and Church activism, and his top-down approach omits the role of citizen complaints. Julia Ault remedies many of these issues, integrating the environmental movement in its cross-social context. Yet she does not explicitly examine the connections of this movement with the broader ideals and reforms of 1989. See Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus. Eine Umweltgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015) and Ault, "Defending God's Creation? The Environment in State, Church and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1975-1989," *German History* 37, no. 2 (2019): 205-226. For a study of local nature appreciation societies and their mutually-constitutive relationship with state authorities, see Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Homeland: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a history of nature conservation and tourism in the GDR, see Scott Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism, and Dictatorship in East Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

[7] Gareth Dale, *The East German Revolution of 1989* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

and Church groups. As the party-state intensified Stasi surveillance over the environmental movement while doing little to address pollution, Church-based groups were put into an increasingly oppositional position, over time working against the party-state in the realization of socialist ideals.

Consequently this chapter analyzes the genesis of the socialist *Landeskultur* ideal, how and why the state claimed authority over this ideal but did not achieve it in practice, how Church-based groups and unaffiliated citizens worked with and against the state in pursuit of this ideal, and how increasingly state-critical environmental activists helped to mobilize and lead the revolution of 1989. Why these groups worked together to practice socialist environmentalism in the 1970s, and turned towards a broader conflict over ideal authority in the 1980s, makes sense only in the context of the state's failure to balance its ideals of economic growth with environmental protection, alongside the rise of anti-growth ideals in both Western and Eastern Europe during the 1970s. By the 1980s, the GDR's polluted soil, air, and water signaled the SED's growing *inability* to practice its ideal authority. With the *Informationschutz* law, the party-state also signaled its *unwillingness* to recognize the East German public as a trustworthy ally in addressing a major social issue, one that officials themselves had established as a socialist ideal. The state's ineffectual and cynical response to a systemic problem it caused in the first place simply eroded its ideal authority in the eyes of frustrated citizens, local authorities, and Church groups over time.

This cumulative frustration eventually had systemic effects. As will be seen in this and the following chapter, while the party-state accelerated surveillance and intimidation of activists in the late 1980s, this did little to regain ideal authority or to

meaningfully address economic decline and environmental decay. Moreover, by the late 1980s a group of environmental activists emerged from the Church-based movement, who were more willing to transgress previous boundaries of acceptable criticism to stake their ideal claims. These activists, based at the Berlin *Umweltbibliothek* (UB) before expanding to the GDR's other major cities, joined with other peace and human rights activists in calls for greater democratization of socialism in the GDR. Although these activists constituted a tiny fraction of East German society, their articulation of ongoing pollution and state intransigence through West German media also available in the GDR granted them the ideal authority to represent East Germans in the protests against SED rule in late 1989. Activists' growing awareness of the resonance of their criticisms among East German society, and the ideal authority this granted them, gave them sufficient confidence and cohesion to eventually challenge party-state power itself. In this sense, examining environmental activism in the 1970s and 1980s offers a way to understand this gradual shift in ideal authority from the party-state leadership to the grassroots, a shift that anticipated, initiated, and shaped the practices and ideals of the revolution of 1989.

4.1 *Towards a Socialist* Landeskultur: *An Ideal becomes Law*

Practices of conservation and environmental protection in socialist countries, beginning in the USSR already in the 1930s, typically came from a state-driven, metasystemic, and technophilic ideal of nature conservation balanced with planned economic growth. Committing themselves to this ideal as well, early East German conservationists succeeded in passing a series of nature conservation laws in the 1950s. While both ideals figured in the GDR's socialist imaginary, the 1954 Nature Protection

Law (*Naturschutzgesetz*) prioritized economic production over environmental protection, and the GDR's "structure-determining" industries – coal, petrochemicals, mining, and metallurgy – continued to pollute East Germany's air, water, and soil. Despite growing scientific awareness of humanity's destructive impact on the natural world, given the significance of these industries to economic growth during the NES/ESS, pollution continued unabated into the 1960s. However, by 1968 the party-state received a cavalcade of citizen *Eingaben* criticizing rampant pollution, and moved to craft a new ideal of environmental protection enshrined in law: socialist *Landeskultur*. The resulting *Landeskulturgesetz* (LKG) of 1970, crafted by a prognostics group under Deputy Chairman Werner Titel, ensured protection of the GDR's air, water, and ground through rational resource use and the application of new technologies,. The LKG also established the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Water Management (MUW) to investigate cases of abuse, and impose fines against offending industries. Yet the lack of cost-effective pollution-reducing technology, and the primacy of the ideal of exponential growth especially under General Secretary Erich Honecker, meant that socialist *Landeskultur* would achieve only limited early successes.

The development of environmental policy in the GDR reflected key Soviet environmental practices, and the state-led, growth-first ideals guiding them. Rapid economic growth was a core ideal of the Soviet project from its inception under Vladimir Lenin. In practice, Stalin's first five-year plan (1928-32) for the industrialization of the USSR poured all available resources into "brute force technology," from building new steel mills to expanded mining and huge public works projects, to facilitate the

transformation of nature for socialist production.[8] Yet these state-led efforts also met with scientific opposition: The All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP) and Moscow Society of Naturalists (MOIP) played a significant role in nature conservation and protection, and advocated for nature preserves (*zapovedniki*) throughout Soviet history. This relatively independent opposition found an intermittent ally in Stalin himself. Indeed, Stalin's 1948 "Plan for the Transformation of Nature," though aimed at boosting agricultural production in light of postwar food shortages, also drew on a longer Russian forestry tradition to reserve millions of hectares from economic exploitation.[9] For the many areas subjected to heavy industrialization and extraction, however, human intervention left a patchwork of nature reserves in a landscape otherwise transformed by mining, deforestation, and industrial contamination.[10] Though the USSR had significant nature reserves, and a vocal if small conservation movement, party-state authorities saw economic productivity as socialism's highest ideal, and a necessity metric of socialism's superiority to capitalism.

Like their counterparts in the USSR, socialist activists in the GDR also drew upon a long tradition of German conservation and nature protection (*Naturschutz*) societies for their ideals and practices, but largely worked through the party-state in the 1950s to attain their policy goals. Following the Nazi defeat in 1945, SED and Soviet occupation

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[8] Paul R. Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Washington D.C.: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2002). See also Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[9] Stephen Brain, *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905–1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011) and Alan Roe, *Into Russian Nature: Tourism, Environmental Protection, and National Parks in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[10] The Kola Peninsula, encompassing much of the Murmansk *oblast*, was indicative of many such areas across the USSR. See Andy Bruno, *The Nature of Soviet Power: An Arctic Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

authorities emphasized reconstruction and economic recovery over nature conservation, with tangible growth as socialism's key ideal and metric of success. Simultaneously however, popular sentiments in both eastern and western occupation zones returned to the ideal of *Heimat*, or the comfort of belonging to a larger spiritual-cultural homeland, and the local conservation and enjoyment of the *Heimat*'s natural landscapes.[11] Thus in what became the GDR, ideals of state-led growth and conservation combined into state-directed natural protection. Landscape planners and conservationists, organized through the Institute for Land Research and Nature Protection (ILN) and the Kulturbund's conservation group, Friends of Nature and *Heimat*, held to a state-driven, rational-use ideal of conservation. During the intensive industrialization of the 1950s, these activists sought to be included in economic planning and legislation rather than challenging the SED's basic ideal of rapid economic growth. Yet given the centrality of growth to the SED's vision of socialism, they were only somewhat successful. After years of lobbying Volkskammer president (and 1949 constitution coauthor) Johannes Dieckmann to take action, ILN director Hermann Meusel and Kulturbund secretary and Volkskammer deputy Karl Kneschke succeeded in passing the 1954 *Naturschutzgesetz*. This law provided for the protection of designated areas, as well as selected flora and fauna. However, the law also allowed for the repeal of any of these protections "for predominantly national economic reasons" (§15, Abs. 2). The law also did not specify

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[11] David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 311-345; see also Sandra Chaney, "Protecting Nature in a Divided Nation: Conservation in the Two Germanys, 1945-1972," in Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller, eds., *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005). For an excellent study of the ideal of *Heimat* and its role in shaping local activism, see also Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Homeland*.

which state institution would be responsible for enforcing them.[12] Whether by design or neglect, this lack of clear designation meant that no specific institution could be blamed for poor oversight, while the party-state could still publicly affirm its commitment to conservation.

As seen in the previous chapter, the Council of Ministers and many of its responsible ministries were organized around key industries, resources, and utilities, centralizing state and industry into a productive metasystem. In addition to ministries for heavy industry, construction, and metallurgy, the Council oversaw the Office for Water Supply, established in 1952 to coordinate the use and treatment of the GDR's relatively meager water resources. To better organize the "structure-determining industries" of the NES/ESS, the Council also established ministries for the chemical industry and raw materials management and logistics. Following Honecker's accession to General Secretary and the end of the NES/ESS in 1971, the Council also established a dedicated Ministry for Energy and Coal to oversee the GDR's power plants and lignite supply. After 1971, all ministries were again coordinated firmly through SED-approved economic plans, and expected to fulfill their plan requirements above all else. Rather than the predominance of the SPK during NES/ESS, the SED Politburo reasserted both planning and oversight authority. The party-state's role as both producer and regulator meant that any industrial problems would be its responsibility to solve, including environmental pollution. Given the SED's emphasis on economic growth, the state could not easily impose punitive measures on its most flagrant polluters, as these industries

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[12] "Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur (Naturschutzgesetz)," *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* 71, no. 1 (Aug. 13, 1954): 695-698. See also Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape*, 49-70, 111-113, and Chaney, "Protecting Nature in a Divided Nation," 220-223.

were often key to short- and medium-term planned growth. Shutting down plants would fundamentally disrupt the economic plan, and financial penalties often amounted to shifting around funds earmarked for research or investments. Consequently, key industrial ministries such as chemicals, energy, and metallurgy were largely allowed free reign to meet their production goals, while the state emphasized technological solutions to its growing production-protection paradox.

Yet in the 1960s, this paradox was not yet apparent, and the ideal of productive-protective synthesis found welcome justification in the prevalent anthrocentrism, technophilia, and metasystemic conceptual developments in the emerging field of ecology. Sophisticated systemic models of the natural world, as well as human influence over it, were well established in the socialist imaginary. In the 1920s, Russian-Soviet geochemist Vladimir Vernadsky had popularized the term "biosphere," and also helped to introduce the concept of the "noosphere," which posited that humanity had initiated a new phase in earth's history by partially mastering the forces of nature.[13] Human mastery of nature took on even greater significance in the broader social imaginary of socialist and capitalist societies in the postwar era, with an emphasis on ambitious scientific research and technological advancement. After Vernadsky's death in 1945, others built upon his systemic biosphere/noosphere work. In the 1960s, biogeophysicist Genrikh Khil'mi explored in part how the human transformation of nature was based on humanity's need for energy, and this need's fundamental connection to production, be it

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[13] Vladimir Vernadsky, "The Transition from the Biosphere to the Noösphere," trans. William Jones, in *21st Century Science & Technology* 25, no. 1-2 (2012): 22. Vernandsky was also influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French geology professor and Catholic priest who based his own work on the noosphere on Catholic theology. Both men shared deterministic views of evolution and noosphere development. See Vernandsky, *The Biosphere*, trans. David B. Langmuir (New York: Copernicus, 1998) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenology of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

subsistence farming or massive industrial projects.[14] Given the vast increase in human

energy consumption in the twentieth century, especially given the rapid industrialization

of the USSR and Eastern European socialist nations, Khil'mi argued that searches for

new energy sources, and their rational use, would require enormous technological

interventions; humanity would have to create a wholly new "artificial" biosphere through

a "transformation" of the existing one.[15] Also at this time, Mikhail Budyko, a pioneering

Soviet climatologist studying global heat distribution, recognized the "greenhouse" effect

of CO_2 emissions from burning coal and other fossil fuels. Yet Budyko foresaw warming

would create transformational effects in "one or two centuries," in contrast to American

scientists who measured a much faster rate, with possible consequences in the near

future.[16] Nevertheless, Budyko shared Khil'mi's faith in state-led technological

intervention, and was optimistic that such projects could also have an "active impact" on

"climatic change caused by the general progress of energy development." For Budyko,

this progress might also include the *active* destruction of the Arctic ice cap with atomic

weapons.[17] Although such utopian (or dystopian) plans never came to fruition, their

positivism, anthrocentrism, reliance on state-led technological solutions, and privileging

of economic growth informed production-protection practices in the USSR and GDR

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[14] G.F. Khil'mi, *Philosophical Questions of the Transformation of Nature* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Technical Services, 1963), 1-2.

[15] By "transformation," Khil'mi meant projects of irrigation, reclamation of swamps, "elimination or alleviation of permanent frost... changing or redistributing the influx of solar energy into the biosphere..." and even "control of precipitation through interference with cloud formations." See ibid. 3-5.

[16] Mikhail Budyko, *Climate and Life*, trans. David H. Miller (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 485. By contrast, American atmospheric scientist Charles David Keeling's measurements of atmospheric CO_2 beginning in 1958 exhibited the "Keeling curve," or growing carbon dioxide rates due to the burning of fossil fuels. By 1965, the Johnson Administration recognized the role of fossil fuels in its report, "Restoring the Quality of Our Environment."

[17] Ibid. 188-190. This plan would have been geopolitically impossible, as the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, signed first by the US, UK, and USSR, prohibited the military and civilian testing of nuclear weapons in all cases other than contained, underground blasts.

both by the late 1960s. In short, the maximal practice of economic growth in socialism would by necessity encompass the technological mastery of the natural world and its resources, planned by the party-state.

Ideals of systemic economic production, and more rational resource use, also developed concurrently with a growing problem of pollution by the late 1960s. At the Seventh Party Congress in 1967, Ulbricht defended the ESS and his own waning authority by offering a robust defense of cybernetics, prognostics, and information technology, "especially in the area of resource management."[18] Although Ulbricht made no mention of pollution, this issue had already become quite significant to GDR citizens. Growing numbers of *Eingaben* to the Council of Ministers by the latter half of 1967 sought redress for air, water, and noise pollution. Ministries reported to party-state leaders that citizens had decried pollution from the raw material, chemical, and building materials industries, and leveled "massive criticisms" at the stark "deficiencies" of open sewer ditches near residential areas and buildings.[19] Given Ulbricht's longstanding emphasis on responding to citizen complaints, and the unfolding push to draft a new socialist constitution for the GDR, the state incorporated these *Eingaben* into an environmental protection article in the new constitution of 1968.[20] This document, intended to legally recognize the GDR's Marxist-Leninist identity while emphasizing the necessity for German unity, enshrined the "leading role" of the SED in governing East

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[18] Zentralkomitee der SED, *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VII. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), 109-110. The Congress resolution also directed the Council of Ministers to establish new industrial ministries, including Electrical Technology and Light Industry, to coordinate the industrial tasks emphasized in the ESS.

[19] BArch DQ 1/11534, "Bericht über Hauptprobleme der Eingabenarbeit im 3. Vierteljahr 1967," Nov. 1967.

[20] Ulbricht welcomed *Eingaben* for the purpose of showing the state's ability to solve problems. See Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 277.

German society and declaring "democratic centralism" to be the "sustaining principle of the state structure." Article 15 also established the right to a clean environment, outlining that the land of the GDR "must be protected and used efficiently," and that "state and society" must ensure the "protection of nature" and the "natural beauty of the *Heimat*."[21] This article also tasked "responsible bodies" for ensuring clean air and water, but like the 1954 *Naturschutzgesetz*, did not assign enforcement authority to a specific state institution. Yet after the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968, limited protections and vague promises were no longer sufficient to stem growing public discontent.

Thus the state searched for metasystemic, technophilic, ESS-inspired ideals to address for what had become a pressing social issue. By fall 1968, the Council of Ministers tasked one of its Deputy Chairmen and leader of the Office of Water Management, Dr. Werner Titel of the Democratic Farmers' Party of Germany (DBD), to expand his small prognostics working group for "waste products and socialist *Landeskultur*" and prepare a comprehensive nature protection and resource management policy.[22] Initially, this work required Titel to coordinate with various industrial ministries to achieve higher production with fewer resources, and to reuse byproducts where possible. Titel was not always easy on his colleagues, criticizing Gerhard Zimmermann, Minister for Heavy Machinery and Plant Construction, for submitting a report that offered far less emissions reduction in his ministry's factories than proposed by the *Landeskultur* prognostic group. Criticisms such as this, however, could not provide the

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[21] Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape*, 116-119.
[22] Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 169-171. A Deputy Chairman was comparable to a minister without portfolio.

air-filtration systems that Zimmermann's factories needed, as they were only accessible through foreign contacts and expensive imports – a key obstacle Titel tacitly acknowledged in his report.[23]

Despite these limitations, members of Titel's prognostics group continued their work integrating environmental protection into socialist production, and began to publicize this ideal as "socialist *Landeskultur*." In addition to the bottom-up push from citizens, state authorities also recognized the profound economic impact of pollution: By May 1969, Titel's group reported to the Council of Ministers that their studies indicated national income losses of two billion Mark per year due to pollution, in addition to "the unpredictable harmful effects on the working and living conditions" of East German citizens in the long-term. Regulations thus required a comprehensive legal basis, and integration into future planning.[24] An initial draft was prepared from this report, and by December, the Council of State opened public discussion of the law.[25] At a speech to an "environmental design" conference at the Dresden Technical University later that month, Titel defined socialist *Landeskultur* as "a complex system of social measures for the meaningful design of the natural environment and for the effective protection of nature, which in the interests and the well-being of our citizens aims for the continuous development of our national economy, the improvement and effective use of the natural basis of life and production of society... and the beautification of the socialist *Heimat*."[26]

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[23] BArch DC 20/19116, letter from Titel to Zimmermann, Nov. 20, 1986, 22-24.

[24] BArch DC 20/19103, "Hauptprobleme und Ziele der planmäßigen Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR," May 27, 1969, 182-207.

[25] BArch DA 1/7081, "Beschluss des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zum Entwurf des Gesetzes über die planmäßige Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur...," Nov. 20, 1969. The Staatsrat was a collective head of state that replaced the Presidency upon Wilhelm Pieck's death in 1960.

[26] BArch DC 20/19089, "Die Aufgaben der sozialistischen Landeskultur bei der Gestaltung des Entwickelten gesellschaftlichen Systems des Sozialismus," Dec. 2, 1969, 69-72.

Given its role in conservation activism in the GDR, the Kulturbund's Nature and *Heimat* group leadership met in December to discuss the draft LKG as well, unsurprisingly praising its state-led efforts to systematize and integrate economic planning, prognostic forecasts, and environmental protection.[27]

In May 1970, as Ulbricht and Honecker struggled over the fate of ESS and the leadership of the SED, the Volkskammer passed the LKG. Steeped in the metasystemic language of the ESS, the law was the GDR's ultimate expression of state-directed environmental protection first envisioned in the 1950s, integrating conservation and rational resource use into socialist production and planning. The law laid out broad protections for agricultural land, forests, water, and air, as well as the "utilization and harmless disposal of waste products." Its key provisions integrated socialist *Landeskultur* into "the planning of the local distribution of the productive forces, as well as in the preparation of investments" (§2), and tasked the Council of Ministers with ensuring "the integration of the planning and management of socialist *Landeskultur*" into the ESS, subject to "prognostic, perspective, and economic plans" (§3). District- and county-level state representatives were to enforce the law by establishing "suitable cooperative relationships" with each other and the industries in their jurisdictions (§5). In turn, industries were responsible for using resources "sensibly and rationally," including "the problems of socialist *Landeskultur* in prognostic work," and coordinating with local state councils in the forming of perspective and yearly plans (§7).[28] Given the vagueness of

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[27] BArch DY 27/10622, "Stenographisches Protokoll der Tagung der Kommission Natur und Heimat im Deutschen Kulturbund am 19.12.1969 zum Landeskulturgesetz."
[28] BArch DA 1/4018, "Gesetz über die planmäßige Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Landeskulturgesetz)," May 14, 1970. See also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 171-175.

these tasks and their institutional coordination, however, questions of how offending companies would be held accountable by state authorities, and which authorities in the Council of Ministers would enforce the LKG, remained unanswered.

Regardless, state authorities heralded the law as the first of its kind in the world, a domestic and international assertion of socialism's ideal authority over economy and environment – public work also backed up by real practice: The Halle district council, responsible in part for the vast chemical complex in Bitterfeld (site of the literary Bitterfeld Path), reported to the Council of Ministers in March 1971 that the LKG's economic regulations were "properly designed" and could serve as the basis for further legal regulations of pollution. However, this would require dedicated funds for exhaust-reducing technology, regular cooperation between local state authorities and factories, regular and accurate reporting from the factories themselves, and an "urgently required" central state body for coordinating pollution control.[29] Meanwhile, Titel continued his public relations work, giving the keynote speech to the fifth congress of Urania, the GDR's scientific knowledge society, in December 1971. While praising Urania's work in popularizing the LKG through its lectures, he reminded the group that their efforts should also emphasize that genuine environmental protection could only take place in socialism, and GDR citizens should ignore capitalist "environmental propaganda" while still recognizing global problems.[30] As part of their public outreach, the Council's press office also organized a "Week of Socialist *Landeskultur*" in May 1972, which encouraged citizens to participate in local cleanup and planting projects. Scientists of the DAW also

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[29] BArch DQ 1/11534, "Das Ökonomische Experiment zur Reinhaltung der Luft im Bezirk Halle 1969/70," Mar. 1971.
[30] BArch DC 20/19091, "Bericht des Präsidiums an den V. Kongress der URANIA (16. bis 18. Dezember 1971)," 6-41.

introduced the LKG to the world at the United Nations conference on environmental

protection later in June, positioning the GDR as an international leader on protection

efforts.[31]

Heeding the advice of state authorities in Halle, the Council of Ministers also

established a dedicated ministry for environmental protection in January 1972, specifying

the LKG's enforcement provisions and firmly assuming party-state responsibility for

balancing production and protection. The new MUW grew from the existing Office for

Water Supply, but was now expanded to include protection duties and, most significantly,

the responsibility for receiving and responding to citizens' complaints about pollution,

sewage treatment, and water supply and quality. Titel, as the leading force behind the

LKG, was duly named the GDR's first environmental minister, and seemed to harbor few

illusions about the difficulty of his ministry's task. In late November 1971 he sent a

sobering five-year prognostic report to all industrial ministries about implementing the

LKG. Titel reported that wastewater would need to be reduced by 23 percent over the

next five years, a difficult task given the "completely inadequate" coordination between

economic and industrial sectors. Titel also squarely identified the factories of the

chemical, raw material, metallurgy, potash, and mining industries as the leading causes of

wastewater pollution. The report also cited that air pollution in Halle, Leipzig, Karl-

Marx-Stadt, Cottbus, and Berlin "significantly exceeded" the legally-stipulated maximum

emissions, largely caused by the burning of lignite in outdated furnaces. Unless generous

investments were made to modernize this and other industries, Titel concluded, pollution

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[31] BArch DK 5/2428, "Plan der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit zur Vorbereitung, Durchführung und Auswertung der 'Woche der sozialistischen Landeskultur 1972' (14. bis 21. Mai) sowie zur Vorbereitung der UNO-Umweltschutzkonferenz (Juni 1972 in Stockholm)" and "Konzeption für eine Pressekonferenz des Presseamtes zu Problemen der sozialistischen Landeskultur." undated.

would continue to rise.[32] In that case, the LKG would appear to be little more than an empty promise, undermining the SED's ideal authority over environmental issues.

Titel took his position seriously, and in light of party-state authorities' self-perception and presentation as lading environmental activists, East German citizens were right to expect committed and robust state action. However, Titel's assessment, along with his unexpected death in December 1971, did not bode well for the SED's long-term authority to practice socialist *Landeskultur*. Nor did the outcome of the struggle between Ulbricht and Honecker for the leadership of the SED: Given its basis in the metasystemic ideals of the NES/ESS, and ultimately Ulbricht's more consultative style of leadership, the optimism and ambition of the LKG dissipated with the shift in political winds. Honecker quickly tempered expectations for grand solutions when he assumed the position of First Secretary in 1971. He acknowledged the need for environmental protection at the Eighth Party Congress, an issue he rightly predicted would only "increase in the coming years." Although hopeful that much could be "practically improved if state organs and economic managers mobilize all reserves in this matter," Honecker added that "certainly one thing we need for this is money." But given the current lack of funds for new pollution-limiting technology, "we will only move forward gradually."[33] Having inherited a sweeping ideal of environmental protection that sought to square itself with production goals, Honecker was perceptive enough to recognize this may not be practicable in the years to come. Yet East German citizens supported the

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[32] BArch DK 5/3399, letter from Titel to Minister of Finance Siegfried Böhm, Nov. 23, 1971 and "Entwurf. Einschätzung zum Stand und zur Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR bis 1975."

[33] Zentralkomitee der SED, *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den VIII. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Dietz, 1971), 40.

LKG's vision of a clean environment and a prosperous society, and looked to the party-state to practice this.

4.2 *The Limits to Growth, the Limits to Practice: Environmentalisms in the 1970s*

Honecker's pragmatic assessment proved prophetic, due to factors both within and beyond the party-state's control. Throughout the 1970s, efforts to curb pollution in the GDR would be stymied by a lack of modern waste disposal technology and energy sources cleaner than lignite, and a growing inability to modernize, or even maintain, existing productive facilities. Citizen *Eingaben* about pollution would thus increase throughout the decade, with expectations met only piecemeal by the MUW. Given the inadequacy of these efforts, an alternative environmental movement began to take shape within the Protestant Church, which held a semi-independent position vis-à-vis the party-state. A new ideal of environmental protection that diverged sharply from the SED's vision of unimpeded, state-administered economic growth gradually emerged from this Church movement. Drawing upon developments in the global environmental movement by the early 1970s, Church-based activists began to question the sustainability of unlimited growth itself. This criticism in turn challenged Honecker's "unity of social and economic policy," and the destructive growth-first practices endemic to real existing socialism and capitalism alike. Nevertheless, growing energy demands, a decrease in Soviet oil imports, and a natural catastrophe in 1979 compelled party-state authorities to choose providing power and goods over a clean environment.

By the early 1970s, the global environmental movement, though hardly uniform in its emphases, increasingly viewed population growth, resource depletion, and pollution as systemic problems of exponential productive growth. By the late 1960s, evidence of

environmental pollution, resource depletion, and population growth caused leading

scientists and economists to question purely technical solutions to increasingly global

problems. Convened in 1968 on the initiative of Italian industrialist Aurelio Peccei, an

international group of scientists, diplomats, and businesspeople formed the transnational

Club of Rome to study pollution, resource depletion, food and energy limits, and

population control, and integrate these findings as a metasystemic "problematic"

demanding global solutions.[34] The Club of Rome's 1972 report, *The Limits to Growth*,

thus broke with the scientific optimism of the 1960s, drawing upon their own prognostics

forecasting to conclude that "the basic behavior mode of the world system is exponential

growth of population and capital, followed by collapse."[35] Although advocating for

technological developments and international cooperation to limit pollution and harness

recyclable resources, the report's authors, Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jørgen

Randers, and William W. Behrens, also put forth an ideal "state of global equilibrium"

for the future, a global cybernetic system stabilized by a birth rate and industrial growth

rate matched with deaths and depreciation, respectively.[36] This finding squarely

challenged the growth ideal central to modern capitalist and socialist production alike, as

well as the potential for both capitalist and socialist countries to address global problems

while maintaining ideological polarity.

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[34] In the West, criticisms of growth and its ecological impact emanated from neo-Malthusian works of the immediate postwar. William Vogt's analysis of population growth and global resource depletion, along with Fairfield Osborn's analysis of soil overuse, influenced the growing American environmental movement in the late 1940s. The Club of Rome integrated these issues, along with studies of chemical pollution such as Rachel Carson's seminal *Silent Spring*, in their metasystemic work. See Vogt, *Road to Survival* (New York: W. Sloane and Associates, 1948); Osborn, *Our Plundered Planet* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1948); and Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
[35] Donella H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth* (Washington DC: Potomac Associates, 1972), 142.
[36] Ibid.156-184.

In the wake of disruptions caused by the 1973 oil crisis, in which oil-producing Arab states placed an oil embargo on states supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War, the Club of Rome's basic recognition of the limits of natural resources, and the need for more sustainable production and consumption, found willing ears in Western Europe and North America. Their analysis also found some resonance in the socialist world. However, given the Club of Rome's "capitalist" origins, its analysis did little to challenge the state-centric ideals of productive-protective balance held by socialist elites. Leading Soviet geophysicist Evgenii Fedorov accepted the impossibility of unlimited growth, but argued that this presented a crisis only in capitalism. Socialist long-term planning, Fedorov argued, was the only logical, egalitarian basis for the necessary "consciously directed civilization" that could find a future global ecological balance.[37] In the GDR, a semi-rehabilitated and committed socialist and environmentalist Wolfgang Harich analyzed the Club of Rome's findings from a Marxist perspective, coming to much the same conclusion as Fedorov, finding the planned economy the only way to ensure humanity's sustainable future.[38] Dissenting East German voices rejected this view, however. In his 1977 book, *Die Alternative*, SED member and industrial manager Rudolf Bahro publicly criticized the planned economy, and real existing socialism more broadly, as alienating and unsustainable, and called instead for a new communist movement to eschew material growth for spiritual enlightenment.[39] Although imprisoned and then

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[37] E. Fedorov, *Man and Nature: The Ecological Crisis and Social Progress*, trans. Sergei Chulaki (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980).

[38] Harich had been released from prison in 1964, and retuned to a rather Stalinist position until 1989. See Wolfgang Harich, *Kommunismus ohne Wachstum? Baboeuf und der "Club of Rome"* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1975).

[39] Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative. Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus* (Cologne: Europäische Verlangsanstalt, 1977). East German peace and eco-activist Thomas Klein also cites the growth-critical work of dissident Robert Havemann, although Church groups were typically concerned with more practical than theoretical issues; see Klein, *"Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!". Die Politisierung der Unabhängigen*

expelled from the GDR for publishing his views, Bahro's slow-growth socialism

anticipated the ideals of many Church groups in the 1980s.

The SED took little interest in these calls to curb or slow growth, holding instead

to its proclaimed ideal of state-directed production balanced with environmental

protection. In practice, this meant relying on the MUW to respond to *Eingaben* about

local pollution or water treatment problems, and to "coordinate" with offending industries

– tasks that required resourceful and well-connected leadership. Titel's untimely death

led to the appointment of Hans Reichelt, a trained economist with no experience in

conservation or prognostics, as the MUW head. Having already served in a number of

positions in the Council of Ministers, including as Minister for Agriculture, Reichelt's

established reputation made him an uncontroversial choice to lead the MUW. More

significantly, he was close to key SED leaders, including the Central Committee's

economics chief Günter Mittag, even if his influence as a non-SED member was

limited.[40] Reichelt indeed used his contacts to address particularly egregious instances of

pollution that reached him via *Eingaben*, as the case with Jähnichen illustrated. Over the

1970s, however, his authority would be limited by financial and technological

constraints, geopolitical shifts, and – as many other East Germans would encounter – an

unresponsive SED leadership. In fact, many of his own letters to Mittag on pressing

environmental issues were found unopened after 1989.[41] This basic disinterest on the part

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Friendesbewegung in Ost-Berlin während der 80er Jahre (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 158-161. Researchers
at the *Kirchlichen Forschungsheimes* (KFH) in Wittenberg did take the Club of Rome report seriously, and
criticized the party-state's argument that pollution was largely a capitalist problem. See below and Ault,
"Defending God's Creation?," 214.
[40] Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 177-178.
[41] Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology: A Global History*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity
Press, 2014), 368; see also Hans-Peter Gensichen, "Umweltverantwortung in einer betonierten
Gesellschaft: Anmerkungen zur kirchlichen Umweltarbeit in der DDR 1970 bis 1990?" in Franz-Josef

of top SED leaders meant that systemic solutions would remain out of reach for concerned activists, including government-level officials, leading to growing frustrations with state-led solutions.

From this unenviable position, the MUW was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the LKG across the GDR's state and economic bodies. Ministry representatives were appointed for every district and county state council, who in turn were the first authorities to handle local pollution, sewage, and water treatment complaints – tasks that many took seriously. By September 1972, the Council of Ministers tasked the MUW with ensuring "that the tasks of *Landeskultur* and environmental protection [*Umweltschutz*] become an integral part of the management and planning activities" of the industrial ministries, responsible VVBs, and larger combines, as well as supervising the "control and strict operational order, discipline, and proper maintenance of existing facilities to keep the biosphere clean." Given the state's emphasis on technological solutions, the MUW was also expected to coordinate its efforts with the Ministry for Science and Technology, as well as the DAW.[42] Reichelt himself emphasized this in a speech to the GDR's Chamber of Technology in September 1972. "Use, [and] the protection of nature and the care and improvement of reproducible natural resources, form an inseparable unit under socialist production conditions," Reichelt explained to his audience, adding that these elements "have to be connected with each other if our future generations are to find sufficient, even improved, living and production foundations, and be able to enjoy the beauties of their *Heimat*." Reichelt then

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Brüggemeier and Jens Ivo Engels, eds., *Natur- und Umweltschutz nach 1945: Konzepte, Kompetenzen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005), 289.

[42] BArch DK 5/3399, "Beschluss über weitere Maßnahmen zur Leitung und Planung der sozialistischen Landeskultur und des Umweltschutzes vom 20.9.1972."

duly argued that only the socialist planned economy could meet these tasks, and called on engineers and researchers to create new technologies that would help clean the GDR's environment, and rationalize its resource use.[43]

Meeting these immense responsibilities would prove to be far more difficult in practice. *Eingaben* from the early 1970s reveal ongoing problems with both water treatment and air pollution, most significantly that of processing and burning lignite. Moreover, local responsibility did not always entail responsiveness, and even urgent *Eingaben* needed to reach Reichelt personally to be addressed. In July 1972, the MUW received a letter from Herr H., leader of an industrial *Landeskultur* working-group at a coking plant in Lauchhammer, near Cottbus. Herr H. reported that dust and exhaust from a neighboring coal briquette factory had been causing "sickness, nausea, and headaches" among his own workers "for a long time," and local state authorities were unresponsive to repeated complaints.[44] Reichelt replied that he had contacted the Minister for Coal and Energy, Klaus Siebold, to address the issue immediately, as well as the local district chairwoman to coordinate these efforts.[45] By December – almost three months later – Reichelt received a reply from Siebold, who enclosed a lengthy technical report from the coal plant's chief engineer pledging a number of technological remedies. Yet the report also revealed that some of the facilities used for briquette manufacture dated from the late nineteenth century, and the factory lacked a device for even measuring emitted dust.

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[43] BArch DK 5/2428, "Der Beitrag der Kammer der Technik bei der Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur und zum Schutz der Umwelt. Referat von Dr. Hans Reichelt...," Sept. 21, 1972.

[44] BArch DK 5/4393, "Eingabe betreffs Luftverschmutzung im Raum Lauchhammer," Jul. 21, 1972. Exemptions for offending industries could be granted by local state authorities, and although the MUW could refer the most egregious cases of pollution to the Ministry for State Security (Stasi), even the secret police could only pursue similarly piecemeal solutions. See Julia Elizabeth Ault, "Saving Nature in Socialism: East Germany's Official and Independent Environmentalism, 1968-1990" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2015), 92-93.

[45] BArch DK 5/4393, letter from Reichelt to Frau U.; letter from Reichelt to Herr H., Aug. 17, 1972.

Nonetheless, Siebold assured Reichelt that the coking plant's *Eingabe* was "taken as an

opportunity to review the previously available documents for the fulfillment of the

requirements of the *Landeskulturgesetz*," and asserted that the plant's representatives

were "impressed by the status of the enforcement [*Durchsetzung*] of the planned

measures, as well as of the scope of the measures still planned," and agreed that these

actions would address their longstanding criticisms.[46] The matter settled there, but the

Lauchhammer facility would continue to pollute the surrounding area for the rest of the

GDR's existence. More significantly, the burning of lignite would contribute to

worsening air pollution across East Germany, constituting a key focal point for later

environmental activists.

Other *Eingaben* from private citizens also reflected local unresponsiveness, and

Reichelt's personal commitment to addressing citizens' issues in whatever way available

to him. A letter from Frau A. of the village of Korbetha, near Halle, offered her

frustrations with local pollution with a mix of respect and cynicism. "When I arrive at my

company in Merseburg early, I have to wash my socks and feet first," Frau A. began,

"because I don't want to run around like a dirty pig all day!" She squarely blamed the

nearby Buna works and passing cars for the dirt, and added that the works often made a

deafening hissing noise late at night. "[A] Buna worker revealed why this is done at

night: A lot of dirt is emitted - aha - that's why," Frau A. went on, "nevertheless, I would

prefer to swallow another extra portion of dirt rather than being roused from my sleep –

because we are also asked a lot at work the next day!" Although Frau A. concluded that

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[46] BArch DK 5/4393, letter from Siebold to Reichelt, Dec. 5, 1972; "Arbeitsprogramm in Durchsetzung des Planes zur stufenweisen Verbesserung der Abluftverhältnisse des VEB BKK Lauchhammer," Sept. 29, 1972; and ""Bericht zum Stand der Durchsetzung der Maßnahmen des VEB BKK Lauchhammer zur Einschränkung der Luftverunreinigungen," Nov. 13, 1972.

Reichelt would not read the letter, "and I do not expect an answer," she wanted someone in Berlin to know "what it is like to live so close to such a plant," and although other residents shared her frustrations, "likely nothing would change here." Perhaps this cynicism prompted Reichelt to reply personally, affirming her criticisms and despite the "large financial and material resources" necessary for remedy, pledged to contact the Buna works director and local district leader for solutions. Both the director and district leader replied at length to Reichelt, with the former disputing some of Frau A.'s claims and concluding that the exhaust release could not be altered due to "technical and also economic inadequacies." Frau A. nevertheless thanked Reichelt for his unexpected reply. "Earlier," Frau A. added, "such a letter would have gone unnoticed in the wastebasket - but it is no longer 'earlier'." Indeed, she happily reported that sweepers had finally come to remove the dust along the road.[47]

Other *Eingaben* to the MUW from this period exhibited a willingness to work with the state to find solutions, highlighting a grassroots interest in practicing socialist *Landeskultur*, beyond a strictly top-down approach. Herr S. of Halle, a DBD member and a nature conservation volunteer, congratulated Reichelt on his appointment as Minister, and that he shared the MUW's goal of ensuring "the consistent implementation of the *Landeskulturgesetz*." Herr S. then asked to work at the MUW on "questions of nature conservation and *Landeskultur*," which Reichelt in turn politely declined, claiming that the Ministry was "in principle formed from existing organs and institutions," and did not have the authority to hire new personnel.[48] This lack of authority illustrated top SED

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[47] BArch DK 5/2487, Eingabe from Frau A. to Reichelt, Jun. 25, 1972; letter from Reichelt to Frau A., Jul. 18, 1972; letter from the director of VEB Chemische Werke Buna to Reichelt, Aug. 10, 1972.
[48] BArch DK 5/2487, Eingabe from Herr S. to Reichelt, Mar. 10; letter from Reichelt to Herr S., Apr. 27, 1972.

leaders' general disinterest in genuinely resolving the tensions between ideals of production and protection, and left it to lower-level authorities like Reichelt to manage citizen complaints and expectations.

Nevertheless, as Frau A.'s letter attests to, the MUW's responsiveness also led to raised awareness of environmental issues and citizen expectations. By the mid-1970s, as citizens called for more comprehensive enforcement of the LKG, the MUW and Kulturbund attempted to channel this into public activism, albeit within specific ideal limits. In late April 1976, the Kulturbund's executive met to publicly discuss the status of socialist *Landeskultur*. Minister Reichelt gave the conference's keynote address, reiterating now-familiar arguments of how state-directed economic planning and new technology could ensure growth while also protecting the environment. Yet Reichelt also sharply criticized the "zero-growth" arguments of "bourgeois" scientists, most notably the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth*, as a way to "prevent socialism from triumphing in economic competition with capitalism," by targeting the socialist countries who had "the greatest [levels of] production growth" in the world. Reichelt then touted the GDR's ability to balance growth and environmental protection, even claiming that water and air pollution had been reduced since 1971.[49] Yet following the deliberations of its local and thematic working groups, the conference ultimately concluded that the Kulturbund needed to address environmental protection more specifically. "The growing political-ideological problems in the relationship between society and the environment," the executive committee agreed, "demand the public, partisan commitment of the

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[49] BArch DY 27/5648, "Stenografische Niederschrift der Zentralen Konferenz des Präsidialrates des Kulturbundes der DDR zum Thema 'Die Aufgaben des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur,'" Apr. 28-29, 1976, 137-139.

Kulturbund," including establishing an organization dedicated to socialist *Landeskultur* and environmental protection.[50] Ultimately, however, these pronouncements and activities made it clear that although environmental protection was still a socialist ideal, its practice could not challenge economic growth.

Both despite and because of these efforts, citizens continued to register criticisms large and small. Herr O. of Pulsnitz offered a rare resounding criticism of the Ministry's efforts just before the Kulturbund's socialist *Landeskultur* conference of 1976. Herr O. made a long list of demands, including a regular report on the development of the LKG across the GDR, clear explanations of pollution's health risks, and above all else, effective authority and honesty: "The sparse publications about the environmental problem in the mass media... are more or less meaningless and unsatisfactory for the environmentally-interested citizen," he continued, adding that "in many cases it is a question of secondary problems, while the large and vital problems are dismissed with inadequate and less informative facts." Moreover, those who wished to draw attention to pollution as a "state of crisis" were too often referred to as "anti-technology apostles, prophets of the end of the world." Herr O. chided the MUW for hiding behind the "soon-to-be hackneyed saying of 'gradual improvement'," because "most of the time this is just an unconvincing excuse for the lack of activity." He then advocated for more public outreach, including education in schools, posters, postage stamps, and a return to the *Landeskultur* Week, which had been discontinued after 1973. Nevertheless, Herr O. concluded with a commitment to work with the state, as "the well-informed citizen will

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[50] BArch DY 27/5647, "Einschätzung und Werbung der Konferenz des Präsidialrates in Klink (Waren/Mürutz): Die Aufgaben des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur," May 18, 1976, 4-6.

always be the citizen who is ready for activity and cooperation!" The MUW's reply

nearly three months later predictably disagreed with Herr O.'s claims, stating that

extreme interpretations of environmental problems "slide quickly into self-important

sensationalism," and the current "provision of information for publication organs by our

ministry can be described as sufficient." Despite his critical tone, Herr O. actively

engaged with the party-state through its own practice of ideals, and ultimately recognized

its ideal authority. Yet the response in this case was anything but respectful: Although the

MUW resolved to look into postage stamps, which were popular collectibles and a useful

medium for political messages, it rejected Herr O.'s criticisms of the Ministry's outreach,

adding that the *Landeskultur* Weeks would not return, due to their failure to produce their

proper intended effect.[51] What precisely that effect was remained unelaborated, but the

Ministry's reply clearly signaled an unwillingness to accept systemic criticisms, even if

the petitioners expressed their willingness to work with the state.

Although Herr O.'s *Eingabe* must be considered alongside the MUW's genuine

efforts to achieve the systemically impossible one case at a time, his letter, and the

MUW's testy response, highlighted a shared frustration with the lack of comprehensive

resolutions. Those working with or through the MUW or local state institutions had little

opportunity to discuss such issues openly, as the state increasingly restricted access to

environmental data by the end of the 1970s. For activists like Herr O., however, the

emerging environmental movement in the Protestant Church began to offer a new venue

to discuss environmental problems, and possible solutions. Although the party-state

would continue to tout socialist *Landeskultur*, Church-based activists increasingly sought

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[51] BArch DK 5/4397, Eingabe from Herr O. to Reichelt, Mar. 6 and 10, 1976; letter from the MUW to Herr O., May 25, 1976.

their own practice of environmental protection, one that moved away from reliance on state leadership and technology, and towards individual and local lifestyle changes, and a questioning of the sustainability of growth itself.

The Protestant Church's role in East German society, and its relationship to the SED, went through major shifts in the GDR's first two decades, but emerged by the 1970s as an alternative, if not oppositional, space for discussing new ideals and practices. Initially, the KPD and then the SED sought Christian participation in their mass organizations, and the 1949 constitution guaranteed the freedom of religious belief. Yet as many religious leaders were quite critical of the SED's agenda (and avowed atheism), the state took measures to limit religious expression, most notably forbidding religious schools in 1948.[52] By the early 1950s, the party-state gradually isolated the Church, excluding its members from the "construction of socialism." SED leaders condemned the churches as havens for Western espionage, and intensified Stasi surveillance while discriminating against practicing Christians.[53] The SED also introduced the *Jugendweihe*, a socialist coming-of-age ceremony to replace Christian confirmation and instill an atheist, socialist consciousness in youth.[54] The Council of Ministers established a State Secretariat for Church Affairs in 1957 to ostensibly oversee religious affairs, but this office held no authority independent from the SED leadership. Although the Church

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[52] Although the legally mandated separation of religious and state authority in education traces its genealogy to the French Revolution, the SED sought to eliminate Catholic and Protestant Church authority over education even before the founding of the GDR. This was also done in explicit contrast to the FRG's Basic Law, which gave churches expressed authority to oversee educational institutions.

[53] Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), 70-80.

[54] Markus Anhalt, *Die Macht der Kirchen brechen. Die Mitwirkung der Staatssicherheit bei der Durchsetzung der Jugendweihe in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016). For a study of antifascism and the youth movement, and the development of the *Jugendweihe*, see Catherine J. Plum, *Antifascism After Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

maintained a unified organization with its West German counterpart, the closing of the

Berlin border in 1961 made ongoing contact difficult. Under these more isolated

circumstances, the Church's rejection of SED authority softened. Increased pressure from

the party-state on local parishes throughout the 1960s compelled Church leaders to form

the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) in 1969 as an umbrella

organization for all GDR churches.[55] Although party-state leaders hoped this arrangement

would enhance their control over the Church, the BEK instead defined the Church's

position within East German society. BEK chairman and the bishop for Berlin-

Brandenburg, Albrecht Schönherr, characterized this position as a "church within

socialism," a middle path between total compliance with, or opposition to, the state and

its authority.[56] State authorities, in turn, hoped to use their newly formalized relationship

with the Church to better control its involvement in East German society.

As the BEK normalized its relationship with the state in the 1970s, the Church

also emerged as an institutional center for clergy and parishioners interested in

environmental issues. This interest put into practice the BEK's broader strategy of

reaching out to more GDR citizens following two decades of declining attendance,

declaring the Church's focus at the 1971 and 1972 conferences of the First Synod (1969-

1973) to be as a "Church for others," emphasizing service to the community at large.

Moreover, the Church's theological research institute, the *Kirchliches Forschungsheim*

(KFH) in Wittenburg, examined Christianity's relationship with the natural world, its

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[55] The Protestant Church organization in West Germany nevertheless provided ample subsidies to its Eastern counterpart, constituting as much as one third of the Eastern churches' collective annual budget. See Robert F. Goeckel, "The GDR Legacy and the German Protestant Church," *German Politics & Society* 31 (Spring 1994), 97.

[56] Ibid. 89.

relationship to the zero- or slow-growth findings of the Club of Rome, and how to practice environmental protection at the grassroots level, especially under the leadership of Hans-Peter Gensichen from 1975 onward.[57] Other clergy, including Heino Falcke and Jürgen Morgenstern, criticized the state's technological-focused efforts in speeches and sermons, emphasizing instead the ethical dimension of environmental protection, especially for Christians who eschewed materialist excess.[58] Still other pastors, especially those in polluted areas, organized grassroots activist groups with local leaders. The Christian Environmental Seminar of Rötha (CUR), organized in part by Pastor Walter Christian Steinbach and Rolf Jähnichen in 1978, drew attention to the devastating pollution in Espenhain and Mölbis. Nevertheless, this joint grassroots activism and institutional focus within the Church did not invite party-state suspicions. Though the Stasi closely monitored the Church's emerging peace movement, environmental groups were initially seen as complements to the state's own public outreach efforts.[59] Moreover, top-level talks between Schönherr, BEK secretariat leader Manfred Stolpe, and Honecker in March 1978 sanctioned the "church within socialism" practice, even if some local clergy and parishioners disagreed with the status quo.[60]

Despite the largely cooperative work between Church activists and state authorities, the GDR's pollution problem continued to worsen throughout the 1970s, reaching a level of severity that affected surrounding nations. After the Soviets reduced oil exports to the GDR late in the decade, the worst pollution was caused by burning

[57] Jordan and Kloth, *Arche Nova*, 28.
[58] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 212-214. See also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 322-324 and Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 251-255.
[59] Ibid. 206.
[60] Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 301-314.

lignite to meet the GDR's immense energy needs, and the air, water, and ground

contamination caused by heavy industry.[61] In a classified report on chemical pollution in

the Leipzig-Halle-Wittenberg area from June 1978, the Council of Ministers

acknowledged that sections of the Saale and Elbe rivers were "heavily polluted" by the

nearby Buna complex and Piesteritz nitrogen works. The Council resolved to invest

millions of Mark into the local factories and water treatment facilities to clean up the

waterways, but the area continued to be heavily polluted well into the 1980s.[62] The state's

growing financial straits also led to a new practice: in exchange for hard currency, the

SED Politburo authorized West German authorities in 1979 to dump refuse in an East

German landfill specifically opened for this purpose – a practice that skirted the FRG's

own environmental regulations.[63] Nevertheless the revelation of this top-level agreement

in West German media led to complaints from within the GDR, although the practice

continued until 1989.[64] Moreover, air pollution from lignite mining and acid rain from

Czechoslovakia and Poland contributed to forest die-off in the Erzgebirge mountains.[65]

Pollution's ability to transcend borders also alerted foreign environmental activists to the

worsening conditions within the East Germany. In 1979, the Swedish group

"Fältbiologerna" sent over 1,200 postcards to the MUW, protesting sulfur dioxide

pollution in the North Sea.[66] Actions such as these, along with ongoing pollution, steadily

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[61] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 210-212.

[62] BArch DK 5/2003 "Beschluss zur Durchführung der Vorhaben der chemischen Industrie für die Abwasserreinigung im Ballungsgebiet Leipzig-Halle-Wittenberg," Jun. 1, 1978.

[63] BArch DK 5/5219, "Zustimmung zu Mülltransport in die DDR möglich," May 18, 1979.

[64] Astrid M. Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: The Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 126. Pollution in the GDR also affected the FRG, especially East Berlin's air pollution.

[65] Eagle Glassheim, "Ethnic Cleansing, Communism, and Environmental Devastation in Czechoslovakia's Borderlands, 1945-1989," *Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 1 (2006): 65-92.

[66] BArch DK 5/5219, "Information über eine in Schweden durchgeführte Aktion gegen die Schwefeldioxidbelastung aus der DDR," Jan. 15, 1979.

undermined the state's authority as the leading social actor responsible for environmental protection. They also emphasized the growing political costs of environmental pollution for the party-state.

The ideal of state-led socialist *Landeskultur* would also reach its real limits when confronted with an environment quite untamed by human intervention. An abnormally cold New Year season, with two successive blizzards in December 1978-January 1979 and mid-February, brought life to a halt across northern Europe. This so-called *Schneekatastrophe* had an especially grave impact on the GDR, catching state authorities wholly unprepared to supply stranded citizens with basic necessities, including coal. On the North Sea coast, soldiers from the National People's Army (NVA) had to be called up to rescue citizens trapped in their frozen-over homes, while in the south, soldiers and miners were organized into work teams with pickaxes, to hack away lignite from the frozen ground. Although fatalities were minimal, the lesson was clear for state leadership: energy supplies needed to be provided, whatever the cost.[67] For his failure to provide sufficient coal for the GDR's citizens, Coal and Energy Minister Sebold was sacked – a rare public punishment for such a senior official.[68] Beyond this, however, the *Schneekatastrophe* signaled a turning point for the SED leadership. The near-collapse of the energy grid and supply system due to unexpected extreme weather illustrated to the Politburo that maintaining the GDR's energy supply trumped all other responsibilities. This event, in turn, led the SED to commit to accelerated lignite mining at its Tenth Party Congress in April 1981, and stake its ideal authority on providing energy, consumer

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[67] BStU Nbg BdL/764, "Berichterstattung zu den gezeigten Leistungen zur Beseitigung der Folgen der Naturkatastrophe," 1979.

[68] Katja Herr, *Sechs Tage Eiszeit – Der Katastrophenwinter 1978/79*, documentary film, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, 2019.

goods, and steady growth to its citizens. Its inability to do so would in part create the basis for its eventual downfall in late 1989.

The fault lines of this conflict thus emerged already by the end of the 1970s, as leading state and Church activists exhibited diverging ideals over production and pollution management, especially as the state turned decisively towards production at the expense of protection. In their 1979 study, *Environmental Problems: Humanity's Challenge*, researchers Adolf Bauer and Horst Paucke largely recapitulated earlier arguments that only state-led socialist production could guarantee rational resource use and general environmental protection, and that whatever pollution socialist factories created could, eventually, be mitigated with technology rather than limiting growth.[69] Church minister Heino Falcke, however, disagreed: At a speech to the Theological Faculty of the University of Basel, Switzerland, in February 1977, Falcke gladly reported that the Club of Rome's work was no longer wholly dismissed as "late capitalist scaremongering." Yet he recognized the political limits of this development, admitting that "the socialist orientation towards quantitative economic growth, and the future vision of an affluent communist society, are not – not yet – up for discussion." Falcke argued that real existing socialism's basic logic of practice meant that the SED's commitment to rising production, or "growth fetishism," came from an implicit competition with the capitalist world, and "the imposition of reduced consumption would jeopardize the loyalty of citizens to the socialist state." Thus zero-growth was a challenge to the party-state itself, one that could not be overcome by Christians with little power to influence structural changes. Rather, Christians should cultivate a new ethical "consciousness" of

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[69] Horst Paucke and Adolf Bauer, *Umweltprobleme – Herausforderung der Menschheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Marxistische Blätter, 1980), 61-72.

reduced consumption, and practice this in "small action models" at the local level. Falcke predicted that "the transformations that are required of us are likely to go very deep, into the very core of being human," but "the lived Gospel reaches into these depths, and we need the... tenacious patience of hope, that is not fixated on quick succession of actions, but depends on the bounty of the [Holy] Spirit."[70]

Falcke's ideal practice would have a profound effect on the Church-based movement in to the 1980s. As the party-state retreated from its own environmental ideal, and even prohibited the publication of pollution data in 1982, Church groups would come to practice their ideals of reduced growth, free information exchange, and environmental protection at the grassroots level. These groups, organized through the Church, formed the basis of a larger struggle for ideal authority by the late 1980s.

4.3 Informationschutz: *Information Exchange and the Struggle for Ideal Authority in the 1980s*

As Honecker's "unity of social and economic policy" pledged, and the *Schnee-katastrophe* reinforced, the state's primary responsibility and basis of its ideal authority into the 1980s was to provide a stable standard of living for its citizens through economic growth. Yet as the GDR's aging industrial infrastructure, poor financial management, and dependence on lignite led to simultaneous declining growth and higher pollution, the party-state's ability to deliver even on this diminished as well. Rather than take public responsibility for growing pollution, in 1982 the Council of Ministers prohibited the publication of most environmental data. Activists in Church-based groups faced a

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[70] Falcke borrowed "growth fetishism" from Harich's book. See Heino Falcke, *Mit Gott Schritt halten. Reden und Aufsätze eines Theologen in der DDR aus zwanzig Jahren* (Berlin: Wichern, 1986), 144-156.

growing struggle against an ineffective and intransigent party-state throughout the decade. Yet the *Informationschutz* also focused and sharpened the locally-practiced, zero-growth ideals of many Church-based activists, who after 1985 more openly questioned the SED's "growth fetishism." As the state retreated from its own proclaimed responsibility to protect the environment, these activists effectively took its place, pursuing local initiatives to mitigate pollution, and gaining valuable experience in organization and exercising their own ideal authority parallel to, and eventually against, the state. Activists from a number of Berlin-based groups even established their own library, the *Umweltbibliothek* (UB), in September 1986, which became a center for information exchange among Church groups committed to environmental protection as a critical aspect of reforming socialism in the GDR. Due to these efforts, by the late 1980s the state viewed the Church-based environmental movement as a threat to its own authority, and accelerated surveillance and interdiction actions, including a Stasi raid on the UB in 1987. Yet environmentalists simply widened their criticisms of the state leading into and following the municipal election campaign of May 1989, vowing that if the state would not live up to their socialist ideals, citizens would.

By the early 1980s, pollution in the GDR had become an internationally known issue, prompting further state-led efforts improve its image and channel citizen frustrations into more communal and pro-state activism. In 1980, the Central Committee directed the Kulturbund to establish a dedicated organization for nature appreciation and environmental protection, the Society for Nature and the Environment (GNU). The GNU was expressly tasked with cultivating local interest in nature appreciation, emphasizing the state's efforts to protect the environment, and to stand "against the waste of natural

resources through capitalist exploitation policy."[71] Given that its chairman, Dr. Harald

Thomasius, and many of the organization's executive board were SED members

(including Guido Thoms, Reichelt's deputy at the MUW), the GNU was intended in part

to explain the GDR's pollution problem by acknowledging the issue without addressing

its cause – namely a party-state that valued production above protection. In a speech at a

July 1981 meeting of the GNU executive, Thomasius acknowledged that the resolutions

for higher economic growth made at the Tenth Party Congress were "inextricably linked"

with environmental problems, and that piecemeal solutions fell short of comprehensive

protection. Rather than address the state's logic of growth, however, as Heino Falcke and

others had done, Thomasius instead called for workers' initiatives in environmental

protection through the GNU, which should "take into account the dialectic that arises

from the fact that the working people, who make environmentally relevant decisions in

production, are influenced to a large extent by this working and living environment

themselves."[72] This assessment, while emphasizing the official position of workers'

power, did nothing to recognize the SED leadership's responsibility in promising

contradictory ideals, and practicing destructive policies that workers were required to

carry out. Unsurprisingly, although the GNU attracted tens of thousands of members in

its first years, the group did little to mitigate the GDR's widespread pollution, or

influence the growth-first policy behind it.

Moreover, environmental issues began to attract the attention of activists more

willing to make wider political criticisms. Monika Maron, a journalist for the magazine

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[71] BArch DY 27/6618, "Gründung der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt im Kulturbund der DDR," Jan. 18, 1980, 1-15. See also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 388.

[72] BArch DY 27/9185, "Vortrag von Prof. Dr. habil. Harald Thomasius...," July 3-4, 1981.

Wochenzeitung and daughter of former GDR Interior Minister Karl Maron, published a

semi-autographical novel, *Flugasche* (*Flight of Ashes*), in 1981. The novel told the story

of a journalist reporting on a lignite plant in "Stadt B." (the gravely polluted industrial

city of Bitterfeld), and the state's efforts to repress the protagonist's expose of the plant's

rampant pollution.[73] Although prohibited in the GDR, the novel's criticism of the party-

state generated widespread interest after its publication in West Germany, and in turn

made Bitterfeld synonymous with pollution in the GDR. Nevertheless, the lignite

pollution and their effects examined in *Flugasche* were hardly restricted to Bitterfeld.

Chemical contamination, smog, coal dust, and resulting illnesses were common

throughout the industrialized areas of the GDR, connecting East Germans through a

shared discontent, while even sympathetic local state authorities were largely powerless

to provide lasting solutions.[74] East German citizens, most of whom had access to West

German television and radio programs and could gather environmental information

through these sources, increasingly connected their frustration over growing pollution

with state ineptitude and denial. For the SED and Council of Ministers, what began as an

ideal to integrate production and protection through socialist *Landeskultur* became a

crisis of the state's ideal authority itself.

Rather than publicly accept responsibility for its own conflict of ideals, in

November 1982 the Council of Ministers responded by classifying most environmental

data as state secrets. A Council working group developed the *Informationschutz* law

months before its passage, with Reichelt himself circulating drafts among the industrial

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[73] Monika Maron, *Flugasche* (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1981).

[74] Josef Hille, et al., eds. *Bitterfeld. Modellhafte ökologische Bestandsaufnahme einer kontaminierten Industrieregion. Beiträge der 1. Bitterfelder Umweltkonferenz* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1992).

ministries, research institutes, and smaller offices, including the State Secretariat for

Church Affairs, for consultation and amendments. By early November, the working

group reported on the pressing need to protect environmental data, as the GDR's

participation in international institutions such as the World Health Organization and

scientific conferences allowed for even general environmental data to be misused "for

political and economic purposes," to discredit "real existing socialism internationally,"

and to "make economic claims against the GDR." More significantly, the working group

found that Western media used this information to "generate unrest and distrust of the

state," which had surfaced in *Eingaben* from GDR citizens themselves:

> Environmental consciousness [*Umweltbewußtsein*] among citizens of the GDR
> has grown. Citizens' *Eingaben* about environmental problems, especially at the
> county and municipal level, have increased. The number of *Eingaben* to the
> Chairman of the Council of Ministers and to the [MUW] has remained the same,
> or has only increased slightly. However, the scope of the problems has increased
> (e.g. *Eingabe* from 320 citizens from the Dohna municipality).[75]

Given this growing awareness and coordinated action among concerned citizens, the

working group thus recommended that all environmental data be restricted to appropriate

state and research institutions "according to uniforms standards." The final version of the

law, submitted and signed by Reichelt, restricted the publication of pollution

measurements and infractions according to geographical area. The law also designated

information regarding air, soil, and water pollution in counties such as Bitterfeld,

Halle/Saale, and Borna (including Mölbis-Espenhain) as "confidential classified

information," publication of which was prohibited for at least fifteen years. As the

Ministry responsible for the law, the MUW was also delegated to explain

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[75] BArch DC 20-I/4/5063, "Information über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes auf dem Gebiet des
Umweltschutzes," Nov. 8, 1982, 134-145.

Informationschutz through the GNU, as well as defining appropriate parameters and procedures for "targeted and differentiated public relations work" for the public.[76]

Over the following two years, party-state authorities treated concerned citizens and environmental groups within the Church with growing suspicion, even as these activists still expressed a willingness to work with the state. Party-state leaders specifically targeted the group's Christian identities. Local groups, such as the Christian Environmental Seminar of Rötha (CUR), near Espenhain, and the Ecology Seminar in Schwerin, certainly drew upon Christian teachings and the experiences of the West German Greens for ways to directly improve local environmental conditions. Yet these groups also worked with local GNU chapters, planting trees and initiating recycling drives while still stressing the enforcement of the LKG and other regulations. Nevertheless state authorities grew suspicious of activists who worked with both state and Church groups, implicitly rejecting the "church within socialism" position. Dr. Rolf Casper, a GNU executive, found that Church members' suggestions uneasily blurred the distinction between "socialist environmental policy" and "clerical anti-socialist ideology."[77] Reichelt himself acknowledged the ambiguous position of Church activists, reporting to Prime Minister Willi Stoph that recently "we have had to deal with a number of activities from certain circles of the Protestant Church, that are directed against the environmental protection policy of the party and the government." Reichelt feared that these activities were instigated by the West German Greens through "cross-border actions." He then added that the State Secretary for Church Affairs, Klaus Gysi (former

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[76] BArch DC 20-I/4/5063, "Anordnung zur Gewinnung oder Bearbeitung und zum Schutz von Informationen über den Zustand der natürlichen Umwelt in der DDR," Nov. 16, 1982, 84-100.
[77] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 215-216.

director of Aufbau Press), had agreed to draw up "proposals for a broader inclusion of positive church circles... in the field of environmental protection" and present them to the party leadership.[78] But over time, the state saw any citizen affiliated with a Church environmental group as likely hostile to socialism, effectively forcing concerned citizens into an oppositional role, and hastening the party-state's own decline in ideal authority.

Growing suspicions between Church groups and the state could also cause trouble for unaffiliated citizens who crossed the boundary between environmental activism and political criticism. Herr S., an employee of the Gera district hygiene inspection office, sharply criticized the *Informationschutz* in a March 1984 *Eingabe* to Reichelt. Citing United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) statistics from 1978, Herr S. relayed that the GDR already had the "highest specific per capita and area emissions of SO_2 in the world," a situation that had surely worsened since "the... changeover to raw lignite as an energy source." Yet Herr S. criticized the lack of more recent figures, reminding Reichelt that secrecy "doesn't make the situation any better," and that telling the truth would ensure "the active cooperation of many people." Yet Herr S. went further, wondering if the state had "[any] conception at all, not only how to stop this threatening development, but to reverse it as far as possible." In response, Reichelt's deputy Thoms requested that Herr S. report to the Gera district council for a "discussion" of his *Eingabe*. However, a subsequent letter to the district health ministry official (and Herr S.'s superior) revealed that the purpose for this meeting was Herr S.'s use of unpublished

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[78] BArch DC 20/16603, letter from Reichelt to Stoph, Feb. 8, 1984, 176. On May 12, 1983, a delegation of Bundestag members from the Greens, including faction leader Petra Kelly, unfurled a peace banner in Berlin's Alexanderplatz and were briefly arrested. The group returned to East Berlin on Oct. 31, 1983 to meet with Honecker. See Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 481-482, 495-497.

data, and his "comparisons and suggestions that do not agree with our policy."[79] Although it is unclear what consequences this had for Herr S., such heavy-handed treatment over an *Eingabe* signaled the state's growing fear of losing authority over the practice of environmental protection – a fear that also compelled Church activists to build their own information networks, and more forcefully express their ideals.

By the mid-1980s, calls for social reform in the socialist world came to align with the Church's growing SED-critical internal discourse, creating discursive and institutional spaces for debating environmental protection in socialism, and social reform more broadly, beyond and in opposition to the SED. This new discourse took shape through inner-Church publications and activist meetings. In 1980, the KFH published an influential inner-Church booklet, *The Earth is to be Saved*, which examined the Club of Rome's work and called upon the GDR's Christians to reject materialism and waste while looking to improve communal living conditions.[80] Moreover, the KFH also began publishing the *Letter for Orientation in the Human-Earth Conflict*, the first socially-critical periodical published in the GDR.[81] Environmental activists in the Church also inaugurated the first of a series of Eco-Seminars in Berlin's Friedrichsfelde Church in 1984, which gathered activists from across the GDR to discuss new environmental information, international developments, and local practices. The second Eco-Seminar in 1985, attended by hundreds of activists, emphasized the use of scientific-technical information to squarely question real existing socialism's logic of growth and its effects

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[79] BArch DK 5/4462, Eingabe from Herr S. to Reichelt, Mar. 8, 1984; letter from Thoms to Herr S., Mar. 19, 1984; letter from Thoms to Prof. Erler, Apr. 4, 1984.
[80] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 213-214; see also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 324-327.
[81] Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 327.

on the environment. The Seminar's final resolution called for equal state-society collaboration and for limits to production and consumption.[82] Additionally, the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary later in 1985, along with his introduction of *perestroika* (restructuring) reforms at the Twenty-Third CPSU Party Congress in spring 1986, tentatively raised expectations for reform across the Soviet-aligned world.

The greater exchange and discussion of environmental information also led to more system-critical *Eingaben*. In the mid-1980s, citizens continued to write to the MUW and other state bodies, though now in a more oppositional position as coordinated members of Church environmental groups, and with greater scientific-technical knowledge than petitioners even a few years before – despite the aims of the *Informationschutz*. A group from Pirna, in the Erzgebirge near Dresden, wrote to Reichelt in February 1984 to draw attention to forest die-off in their area. Yet rather than requesting redress from state experts, the group offered its own analysis: After collectively reading a GDR-published book, *Influence of Air Pollution on Vegetation* by Hans-Günther Däßler, "we believe, even as laypeople, to see that energy production reduced in its productivity (and thus more expensive) through appropriate [air] filter systems is fully outweighed by the lack of smoke damage in agriculture and forestry, as well as in people (recreation, healthcare)."[83] After presenting their evidence, the group

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[82] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 220-221.

[83] This parallels discussions taking place in the FRG as well among environmental activists, who pursued alternative sources of information and expertise in the 1970s and 1980s. See Andrew S. Tompkins, *Better Active than Radioactive! Anti-Nuclear Protest in 1970s France and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Stephen Milder, *Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and Beyond, 1968-1983* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

then positioned itself as a collective ideal authority in a passage that clearly expressed the

stakes of the GDR's environmental crisis for concerned activists:

> We are particularly concerned about the lack of public information. In our opinion, the amount and content of information freely available to the public do not do justice to the scope of the problem and the degree of public concern. Above all, we regret the absence of precise information on the extent of the SO_2 emissions, the size of the area and the degree of damage to the forest areas concerned (on a national, district, and county level), as well as forecasts for both problem areas. In the daily press one can rarely find more detailed articles, [and] in the specialist literature only publications on special issues, but no numerical representations of the overall situation.

The group then expressed regret at this turn of events, as it showed the party-state's lack

of trust in its own citizens, and the destructive effect this had on East Germans' faith in

the party-state to simply accept reality:

> In our opinion, there is a regrettable and ultimately disastrous lack of openness and trust towards the population and especially the people directly affected by forest dieback. This trivialization of the problem can sooner or later prove to be very dangerous. How should the individual citizen be encouraged to use more economical energy, to collect secondary raw materials, to behave in an environmentally conscious manner in nature, to save gasoline, to carry out regular emissions tests for cars or to plant trees when, on the other hand, they see everyday with their own eyes the thick exhaust plumes of factory chimneys, as well as ailing or even dead forests? What we – especially young people – observe in this regard is uncertainty and often resignation.

Nevertheless, the group held back from overt opposition, and instead pledged their

commitment to prioritizing protection over production:

> Many people would be ready again today to restrict their personal standard of living, because trees, animals, or clean rivers are more important to them than an accumulation of consumer goods. We subscribers to this letter also acknowledge this attitude. We would also be ready to help curb forest death in our own district areas, but see only a few starting points. We would be grateful for an answer to our concerns – working towards a reduction in emissions, the question of the lack

of information, as well as the question of one's own participation in reducing environmental damage.[84]

The *Eingabe* was signed by twenty-one citizens, whose professions ranged from cooks and nurses to housewives and conservationists. Reichelt responded on March 21, inviting the group to meet with representatives from the Pirna council. After the meeting, the Dresden district chairman reported to Reichelt that while air pollution in the Erzgebirge was "explained to the citizens" and "reference was made to publications on environmental protection," this did not satisfy them. "The petitioners emphasized that it would be necessary to provide citizens with more detailed information in order to motivate them to participate in measures to preserve the environment," the chairman concluded, although adding that the authors thanked them for their discussion.[85] Nevertheless, the inconclusive result likely increased frustrations on both sides, and did nothing to resolve air pollution or forest die-off in the Erzgebirge.

Given this stalemate with state officials, Church groups had to gather their own environmental information and practical knowledge, while honing more strident claims over ideal authority and alternative practices to growth. The Peace and Environmental Circle of the Glaubenskirche parish in Berlin-Lichtenberg (a three-minute walk from Stasi headquarters), founded in 1983, put new ideals of sustainability and local initiative into practice through their "ecological public work."[86] In its founding meeting in 1983, the group declared that while the material "dreams of our ancestors" had been fulfilled, the "anxiety of competition, meaninglessness, loneliness, and the fear of death" had

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[84] BArch DK 5/4462, *Eingabe* from Frau and Herr K. and Herr A. to Reichelt, Feb. 1984.
[85] BArch DK 5/4462, letter from Reichelt to Frau and Herr K. and Herr A., Mar. 21, 1984; letter from District Chairman Witteck to Reichelt, May 7, 1984.
[86] Klein, *"Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!"*, 267.

increased, illustrating that "material paradise cannot satisfy the real longings of humans, those of affection, appreciation, and safety." Consequently the group resolved "to drive out" those who through greed or a lust for power – characteristics most commonly associated in the GDR with capitalism – "are destroying God's world piece by piece."[87] The Ecology Circle of the neighboring Friedrichsfelde Evangelical Parish declared its task to "plant ecological consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] in people's heads and hearts," and resolved to share ecological information as widely as possible.[88] Older groups like the CUR similarly sharpened their criticism of growth, using local knowledge of the lignite plant in Espenhain to bolster their ideal claims with factual data. In March 1984, the CUR released a report on forest die-off in the Erzgebirge, as well as the corrosive effects of acid rain in the area. The CUR found that these effects were accelerated by the use of low-quality lignite "previously not considered to be exploitable," and that most coal-processing factories lacked filtration systems, or their systems no longer functioned. The CUR then called for concerned citizens "to make it clear to those responsible in this country what economic damage has already occurred, and will continue to arise, if production continues in all areas according to the principle of economy over ecology."[89]

As other groups took the CUR's call seriously, the state simply reasserted the primacy of its growth-first ideal and expanded surveillance of the Church-based environmental movement. In a 1984 argumentation paper circulated by the SED to the MUW, the party firmly connected its "environmental policy" with that of improving the

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[87] Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft (RHG) RG/B 08, "Protokoll der Gründungssitzung des Friedens- und Umweltkreises in der Evangelischen Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Lichtenberg," June 23, 1983.
[88] RHG RG/B 02/05, "Der Arbeitskreis Ökologie...," undated, 23-36.
[89] RHG SWV 02/02, "Ein Beitrag zum Umweltseminar in Rötha (Seminar für die Gemeinde)," Mar. 10, 1984, 6-7.

work and living conditions of GDR citizens, as well as raising the productivity of the

national economy. In this, "the use of science and technology, higher refinement of raw

materials, comprehensive saving of materials and energy, the rational use of water, and

the absolutely falling [rate of] production waste" ensured that growth could be

compatible with reduced consumption and environmental protection. The paper went on

to highlight the GDR's successes in treating SO_2 emissions from burning lignite, and

looked forward to the next five-year plan to implement more desulphurization

technologies.[90] Yet in a March 1985 *Eingabe*, the members of the Glaubenskirche's

Peace and Environmental Circle were far more interested in addressing the capital's

current air pollution problem, especially SO_2 and other pollutants. "Is it measured in the

capital? What is being measured? If so, what are the results?" the petitioners asked,

before requesting the cessation of private car traffic in highly polluted areas, and the

public dissemination of pollutant measurements. "Unless a change in the whole public

and private life is sought – that is, responsible use of coal, energy, fuel, [and]

detergents..." the sixteen signatories concluded, "state measures will only have partial

success." Rather than address the group's suggestions, or the supreme irony of Church

members insisting on a reliance on science, Reichelt instead wrote to the leader of the

SED Central Committee's Primary Industry Department, Horst Wambutt, informing him

of the group's persistent *Eingaben*. Following investigations from "responsible

comrades" – likely the Stasi – Reichelt told Wambutt of his intention to meet with "four

or five people – including a clergyman from this church... to emphasize the responsibility

of the church on whose behalf such *Eingaben* are made." Sensing that these activists

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[90] BArch DK 5/765, "Argumentationsmaterial zu Fragen der Umweltpolitik der SED und des sozialistischen Staates in der DDR," undated [1984].

were acting beyond the authority of the Church authorities, Reichelt resolved to investigate, and report back to the Central Committee.[91]

As the MUW worked with the Stasi to investigate Church groups, the Council of Ministers and Central Committee secretariat organized a dedicated department, the State Environmental Inspectorate (SUI), in January 1985 to measure air, ground, and water contamination across the GDR. Initially intended to be a joint institution of the MUW and Health Ministry, the SUI eventually combined the Meteorological Service of the GDR, district health inspectorates, and the Center for Environmental Design under MUW leadership; given the SUI's scientific-technical emphasis, its first leader was distinguished meteorologist Dr. Eginhard Peters.[92] Although the ordinance establishing the SUI mandated that leaders of major industrial combines and VEBs report their emissions, the law also tasked the organization with coordinating all efforts to curb pollution, from investigation to financial recommendations to technological research. The SUI also had the powers to order reports from offending industries and conduct surprise inspections, but needed to comply with "regulations for the protection of state and official secrets," and could not interfere with the Interior Ministry, the Ministry for National Defense, or the Stasi in areas of their jurisdictions relevant to air pollution or waste disposal.[93] Despite these limitations, the SUI conducted detailed studies of pollution in key areas throughout the GDR, actively recruiting energy and public transportation

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[91] BArch DK 5/2843, *Eingabe* from the Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubenskirche (Lichtenberg) to the MUW, Mar 3, 1985, and letter from Reichelt to Wambutt, May 7, 1985.
[92] BArch DK 5/765, letter from Reichelt to Wambutt, Dec. 21, 1984 and "Konzeption für die Weiterentwicklung und Vervollkommnung der Kontrolle der Umweltbedingungen in der DDR," undated. For unclear reasons, Peters left his position as SUI leader in 1987, and was replaced by an SED member, Frank Herrmann.
[93] BArch DK 5/3159, "Vereinbarung über die Umsetzung der im Volkswirtschaftsplan und im Staatshaushaltsplan 1985 geplanten Fonds zur Bildung der Staatlichen Umweltinspektion," May 28, 1985, and "Verordnung über die Staatliche Umweltinspektion," undated [1985].

specialists, meteorologists, chemists and physicists, as well as engineers to serve in its

district offices.[94] SUI reports from the late 1980s typically confirmed what citizens and

Church groups in affected areas had long observed: For example, the inspectorate's

emissions report from the Gera district for 1987 revealed increases in SO_2, dust, as well

as nitric oxide (NO_X) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) – the compounds most responsible for

smog and acid rain.[95]

Church environmental groups turned towards more distinctly oppositional activity

following the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the USSR on April 26, 1986. The official

silence about the fallout that blanketed much of Europe signaled the enormous stakes of

environmental activism for Church groups.[96] Activists now confronted a matter that was

not simply about quality of life, but life and death itself – and the party-state seemed both

ineffectual and dishonest about the risk. Glaubenskirche Peace and Environmental Circle

member Wolfgang Rüddenklau later recalled that state media and scientific experts

downplayed the radiation, and declared a possible meltdown in the GDR to be impossible

due to "our German safety technology." Nonetheless, for the many East Germans with

access to West German television and radio, the dire reports of radiation levels across

Europe "called into question" the SED's main goal of guaranteeing their "social and

sanitary safety." For more critical Church-based activists like Rüddenklau, Chernobyl

was a turning point in terms of both breadth and tactics: Previously, "in the face of a lack

of information, know-how, and any analytical technique," activists were limited to

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[94] BArch DK 5/1054, "Vereinbarung über die Arbeits- und Lohnbedingungen der Mitarbeiter der Staatlichen Umweltinspektion bei den Räten der Bezirke," Jun. 13, 1985.
[95] BArch DK 5/1783, "Emissionsbericht der Staatlichen Umweltinspektion beim Rat des Bezirkes Gera für das Jahr 1987," undated [1988].
[96] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 221.

Eingaben about "stench, noise, cloudy water, dead trees and fish." But after the nuclear disaster, "the connections between environmental degradation, economy, and politics" became clearer, "and the population reacted sensitively." Although wary of direct actions like nuclear protests in West Germany, East German activists organized the Third Berlin Eco-Seminar later that year around the theme of "Nuclear Power and Alternative Energies." Groups from the GDR and FRG contributed papers about alternative energy sources and peaceful uses of atomic energy. Rüddenklau was especially impressed by the analysis of Thomas Klein and Wolfgang Wolf, both SED-critical Marxists, who examined the connections between political and economic conditions, and economic efficiency in energy policy.[97]

Also in 1986, members of the Church-based environmental movement in Berlin secured their own library, the *Umweltbibliothek* (UB), to serve as an independent information center for peace, human rights, and environmental activists. Located in the basement of the Zion Church, the UB was founded in September 1986 by Rüddenklau, Carlo Jordan, Holger Brand, Christine Müller, Bert Schlegel and Christian Halbrock, with the enthusiastic support of Pastor Hans Simon.[98] The library came to contain environmental volumes, as well as works on feminism, peace and disarmament, and alternative social concepts. A wish list from 1988 included Monika Maron's *Flugasche*, Greenpeace cofounder David McTaggart's *Greenpeace*, Bahro's *The Alternative*, and Stefan Heym's antifascist novel *Schwarzenberg*, copies that would be brought in from

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[97] Rüddenklau, *Störenfried,* 61-64. See also Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 221-222 and Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 626-629.

[98] Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 629-630; Rüddenklau, *Störenfried*, 68-69.

West Berlin by visiting Green Party activists.[99] The library also acted as a site for activism, with UB members writing *Eingaben* to Honecker, Reichelt, and other party-state leaders. The UB also printed its own magazine, *Umwelt-Blätter* (*Environment Papers*) on presses smuggled in from the West by Greens. Printed in runs from one to two thousand copies, *Umwelt-Blätter* were circulated within relatively small Church circles; articles discussed environmental issues and strategies, as well as contemporary politics and events across the globe.[100] The UB also organized public events from seminars to art shows and concerts, bringing the GDR's human rights, peace, environmental, and feminist activists together with punks, bohemians, and artists. The UB was also subject to heavy Stasi surveillance, with some members also acting as informants.[101]

By 1987, antagonisms between Berlin-based Church groups and state authorities came to a head. On the night of November 24-25, the UB was raided by the Stasi, after UB members had been printing an illegal periodical, *Grenzfall*, for the human rights group Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM). IFM had been founded in 1985 as a largely Church-independent, and thus illegal, group. For their part in printing *Grenzfall*, UB members Till Böttcher, Tim Eisenlohr, Uta Ihlow, Andreas Kalk, Wolfgang Rüddenklau, Bert Schlegel, and Bodo Wolff were arrested. Rüddenklau and Schlegel were held at the Stasi prison in Hohenschönhausen until November 28, on the charge of "association for the pursuit of illegal goals." The men were released via intercession from

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[99] RHG OWK 07, "Bücherliste für uns," (1987), 26-31. See also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 356-357.

[100] Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 357-358.

[101] RHG RG/B 19/01, "Zwei Veranstaltungen," May 24, 1987, 27-28; "Westberlin – Die andere Seite in der Stadt...", Apr. 22, 1987, 30-31; and "Konzert in der berliner Zionskirche vom 17.10.87," 36. See also Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 630.

Church leaders, albeit after being interrogated for eight-hour intervals about the structure

and staff of *Umweltblätter*, the *Grenzfall* edition, and the origins and ownership of the

UB's printing machines.[102] Nevertheless a number of GDR and international groups,

including the West German Greens and the Czech dissident group Charter 77, expressed

their support for the UB, writing letters to Honecker and other state leaders demanding

dialogue and free information exchange. The UB released a statement thanking all for

their support, while clarifying their foundational ideals of dialogue, openness, and free

access to information:

> The combined efforts of all, but also the insight on the part of dialogue-willing
> forces in the GDR government, brought about that the attack by an
> "*Einsatzgruppe*" acting from a Stalinist spirit was nullified. This attack did not
> only apply to us and the *Umweltblätter*, but also to *Grenzfall* and other
> information newsletters, the peace grassroots groups in the GDR, and all people
> who are trying to stay upright in this time and in this country. It will not be the
> last encroachment of those forces, and we call on you in every future case to stand
> together in the same way, and to defend what has been achieved.[103]

Despite these defiant words, the raid on the UB sent a shock through Church

activist groups throughout late 1987, leading to self-searching and an articulated role for

both the groups and the Church itself. In the immediate aftermath of the Stasi raid, KFH

director Hans-Peter Gensichen circulated an inner-Church letter, examining the role of

groups in Church life. Although state authorities explained that the raid was due to the

printing of *Grenzfall*, and they "did not intend to question the Church's environmental

commitment," Gensichen also recognized that Church-state relations had been "seriously

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[102] RHG RG/B 19/02, statement from Rüddenklau, Schlegel, Till Böttcher, and Andreas Kalk, Nov. 28, 1987. Reflecting on the experience a few years later, Rüddenklau acknowledged that the negotiations between State Secretary Klaus Gysi and Berlin-Brandenburg Consistory President Manfred Stolpe were integral to securing their release. See Rüddenklau, *Störenfried,* 122.

[103] RHG RG/B 19/02 "Die Umwelt-Bibliothek in eigener Sache," 1988, 102.

damaged" in the incident. Yet with a worsening ecological crisis with little change in policy, both independent and Church environmental groups were becoming "more radical," and Gensichen could only see a "large internal political opening of our society" resolving the tensions among more radical groups, the Church leadership, and state authorities.[104] Another inner-Church report from late 1987 analyzed the Church's relationship with its activist groups. "Groups have clearly seen the connection between information and power," the report stated, but argued that these groups needed to determine where the "umbrella function of the Church" ended, and where to "take responsibility for the consequences of their activities." Yet the Church recognized the groups as a "gift" rather than a problem, commending their ability to form solidarity among men and women, young and old, manual and mental workers, and Christians and non-Christians – a solidarity that "repeatedly crosses the boundaries" of traditional social groups. Hence the groups represented a challenge to stand up for justice, both in a Church milieu that stood as "a kind of representative public" and in a country with "a poorly developed public sphere" and a "low threshold for confrontation." Although ultimately refraining from a prediction of their future roles, the report affirmed that all groups "socialize people who find themselves on the fringes of society... practice elements of democracy such as solidarity (making the voice of the victims audible) and confrontation... they are elements of an opposition in the sense of a check on power, [and] they make the factual plurality of our society visible. They are cross-border movements in a relatively closed society."[105]

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[104] RGH RG/B 19/02, letter from Gensichen to Church environmental groups, Dec. 7, 1987, 100.

[105] RGH RG/B 19/02, "Gruppen in der Kirche – Orienterung für Konfliktfelder," undated [Dec. 1987], 42-43.

Yet this solidarity had its limits. At this moment of instability within the movement, the UB's liberal minority, led by Carlo Jordan, and its anarchist, syndicalist, and Marxist majority, led in part by Rüddenklau, eventually opened into a full rift by January 1988. Their point of division was over an initiative of a UB affiliate group, Green-Ecological Network Ark (Arche), to pursue a federative structure of all Church-based ecological groups, and to coordinate themes and strategies with the state-independent Polish Ecological Club and the Hungary-based Greenway network. More leftist members resisted this impulse to centralization, advocating instead for a confederative approach granting individual groups more autonomy. UB members Falk Zimmermann and Rebecca Münz aggravated this rupture, as they were also Stasi informants pursuing a preconceived plan, "Action Wedge," to divide the group. This in turn led to Arche leaving the UB.[106] Arche also began publishing its own newsletter, *Arche Nova*, and planned more daring activism at a distance from the rest of the UB. Nevertheless, overt protest on the part of the Church groups was still dangerous: After IFM activists held unsanctioned placards at the annual Luxemburg-Liebknecht march in January, many of its leading members were deported to the FRG; UB members were also caught up in the ensuring arrests.[107]

Confrontation between state authorities and environmental groups accelerated in 1988, centering upon areas with the most egregious pollution, such as Bitterfeld and Mölbis/Espenhain. Perhaps due to the disturbances in Berlin, the state began to respond

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[106] RHG RG/B 19/03, "Soweit dieses Konsenspapier," undated [Jan. 1988]. See also Jones, "Origins of the East German Environmental Movement," 255-256; Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 370; and Rüddenklau, *Störenfried*, 178.
[107] RHG RG/B 19/03/3-4, "Der Prozess gegen Till Böttcher, Andreas Kalk und Bert Schlegel," undated [1988], 64. See also Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 696-698.

to citizen complaints about pollution in some of the worst-affected areas. At a February 1988 public meeting in Bitterfeld, Dr. Karl Enders, leader of the environmental protection department of the massive Bitterfeld chemical complex, responded to a number of citizen questions. Enders first asserted that the complex could not slow production, as since "the plan is law... [and] the plant produces approx. 4000 sales products, for which it is for some the sole manufacturer." Nevertheless he also provided detailed answers to the pollutants that Bitterfeld-based industries dumped into the surrounding landfills, and their carcinogenic and respiratory risks.[108] Yet for local Arche members, this gesture was insufficient. In April, activist Hans Zimmermann, working with a cameraman from West Germany, illegally filmed Bitterfeld chemical dumps and landfills. This footage was edited into a film, *Bitter from Bitterfeld*, which was shown on West German television later that year, and in turn reached millions of East Germans. At that moment, citizens witnessed firsthand the extent of environmental pollution in their country, and that a grassroots environmental movement could disseminate this information on its own.[109]

Other groups initiated their own public events. In June 1988 the Ecological Working-Circle of the Dresden Church District, working with the CUR, initiated the "One Mark for Espenhain" campaign to draw attention to the rampant air pollution in Mölbis/Espenhain, caused by the same massive lignite refinery that Rolf Jähnichen had written to Reichelt about in February 1983. The "solidarity campaign" called for signatures and donations of one Mark to be sent to a collection fund as a symbolic gesture of support for the CUR, and a sign to the party-state that citizens were willing to

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[108] RHG TH 02/01, "Eingeladen zu dieser Diskussion hatten Dr. Karl Enders...," Feb. 18, 1988, 128-131.
[109] Jones, "Origins of the East German Environmental Movement," 256-257.

contribute to modernize the lignite refinery.[110] Although its organizers were well aware

that the funds collected would be insufficient to modernize the plant, the funds

symbolized a social transformation long in the making, one based on an ideal and moral

choice, practiced collectively. As Pastor Walter Christian Steinbach wrote in a long

report to other district parishes, regarding the CUR's activities leading up to the

campaign:

> Socialism in the GDR, like all other socialist countries, has a share in the global question of human survival. Thus, the socialist order of society is facing a phase of fundamental transformation in which the superiority and ultimately the survivability of socialism will be decided. In the phase ahead, socialism must unleash an unprecedented moral force that must give global politics a dimension that will convince people. The survival of mankind will depend to a large extent on whether social structures can be developed that promote human consciousness [*Bewußtsein*], not the satisfaction of their material needs. This question has always stood before mankind – the novelty of our situation lies in the fact that the survival of mankind will depend on the solution of this question. The global problems of peace, justice, and the preservation of nature show that in the end it is not a question of technology, but questions of consciousness.

Like cultural activists of the 1950s, Steinbach connected this consciousness to the need

for political action, and ultimately the transformation of society itself:

> So far, both systems of competition have failed in the face of these problems – to the same extent as we fail as single individuals. The "new thinking" proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev and its socio-political implementation in practice as "transformation" [*Umgestaltung*] could carry the germ of a viable social order. Even the GDR will not be able to close itself off to the "transformation" in perpetuity: Either the SED will gain the strength to put the "transformation" into action, or the economic conditions in our country will distort the "transformation" in such a manner, where it is only the content of a qualitatively novel process.[111]

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[110] RHG TH 02/03, "Eine Mark für Espenhain," June 88. See also Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 403-408, and Walter Christian Steinbach, *Eine Mark für Espenhain: Vom Christlichen Umweltseminar Rötha zum Leipziger Neuseenland* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018).

[111] RHG TH 02/03, "Eine Mark für Espenhain: Ein Protest Bekommt oder Flügel," undated [1988], 10-19.

Transformation would come to the GDR less than a year after Steinbach's report. However, while the state-activist stalemate pattern persisted, more overt criticism from some Church groups, and harsher state measures, followed into mid- and late 1988. In November, the People's Police confiscated the printing press of the Ecological Group of Halle, as it had been allegedly used to print a newsletter, *Umweltbrief*, that was "directed against public order and socialist coexistence." Moreover, the Halle city council refused to meet with members of the group thereafter, "as we are generally not accepted as conversation partners."[112] Yet even these ham-fisted efforts could not conceal the pressing need for major social reforms and new ideals, fix the party-state's precipitous decline in authority, or stop the growing reach and ideal authority of opposition groups. The successive political crises of 1989 would bear this out vividly, with environmental ideals as a resonant thread uniting otherwise diverse civil activists.

Conclusion: Environmentalism and 1989

On the basis of these far more system-critical demands, East German environmentalists played a leading role in the widening civil movement's challenge to the party-state's ideal authority during the 1980s. These efforts would eventually culminate during the revolutionary autumn of 1989. With the convening of the Polish Round Table talks in February 1989, and the legalization of the Solidarity trade union as a political movement, oppositional groups like the UB, Arche, IFM, and others felt empowered to accelerate their state-critical activism. These groups and other Church activists demanded participation in the GDR municipal elections of May 1989. Once denied, they encouraged

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[112] RHG RG/SA 04, "Information zur Sicherstellung und Verwahrung von kirchlichen, ökologisch orientierten Informationspapieren durch die Staatsorgane in Halle," Nov. 11, 1988, 66.

citizens to vote against the National Front unity list – a largely unchanged practice since 1952 – and include environmental protests on their ballots.[113] After supervising voting in locations across the country, Church activists found that the SED had manipulated the results.[114] While not wholly surprising to most citizens, this brazen and cynical act, in the face of a worsening environmental and economic crisis, highlighted the party-state's total loss of authority.

Following the emigrant crisis of summer, popular resentment against the SED under Honecker boiled over into wider calls for social reform, including environmental protection. By September 1989, IFM and other Church-based activists founded the citizen groups New Forum, Democracy Now, and Democratic Awakening, among others – all of whom advocated for environmental protection in their founding statements. Meanwhile, Monday peace services at the Leipzig Nicholas Church attracted hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, which the People's Police and Stasi proved unwilling to violently suppress. With Honecker's resignation as General Secretary and Chairman of the Council of State in October and the opening of the Berlin Wall in late November, the GDR entered a phase of rapid, revolutionary transformation. Given its heterogenous membership, the Church-based environmentalists did not unite as a cohesive political movement, breaking apart among other civil groups along increasingly acute ideal divisions. No longer in need of institutional protection against a hostile state, the UB left the Church, moving to its own facility in Berlin.[115] Arche, after a long and bitter debate over organization, reformed itself as the GDR Green Party in November 1989; a

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[113] Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 132.

[114] Ault, "Defending God's Creation?", 224-225; Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 810-815.

[115] RGH RG/B 19/03, press release of the *Umweltbibliothek*, Dec. 18, 1989, 149-150.

breakaway group formed an independent Green League. Under these groups, leading environmental activists participated in the Central Round Table discussions from December 1989 to March 1990, working alongside reformers within and outside of the party-state to, among other immense tasks, dismantle the Stasi, draft a new constitution, and begin rehabilitating the GDR's environment.

The ideal of environmental protection thus provided a vital impulse in East German society, from its grassroots beginnings in the late 1960s until the revolution of 1989. Initially taken seriously by the party-state when citizens condemned the GDR's pollution problem, socialist *Landeskultur*, the LKG, and the MUW provided an ideal, practice, and authority that seemed, if only for a short while, to remedy industrial pollution on a national scale. Yet the MUW's piecemeal solutions to citizen *Eingaben*, even with the best intentions, could not overcome the state's inability to both ensure stable economic growth and protect the environment. Had the state recognized this limit to its own practice of ideals and opened a dialogue about alternative solutions, authorities would have found, at least until the early 1980s, concerned citizens, in the Church or otherwise, willing to help. Yet the SED's decision to classify environmental data in 1982 signaled not only its inability to address the pollution it caused, but a deeper intransigence against openness and change. In this sense, environmentally concerned East Germans did not give up on the GDR; the SED gave up on them.

Recognizing this, these activists increasingly voiced their concerns, and anti-growth ideals vastly divergent from those of the party-state, in the only institutional venue available to them: the Protestant Church. From beneath this unsteady umbrella, environmental activists came to express frustrations held by many unaffiliated East

Germans, calling attention to social problems common to society at large. As these groups became more confrontational, and more widely known, by the late 1980s, they began to assume the state's ideal authority by plainly stating the darker realities of real existing socialism, and offering ideals and practices that might build a better tomorrow. This spirit would suffuse and drive the revolutionary changes of 1989.

Chapter Five
For Our Country:
A New Constitution for a Socialist Democracy, 1989-1991

At a press conference on the night of November 9, 1989, the SED leadership

under Erich Honecker's toothy successor, Egon Krenz, abruptly opened the Berlin Wall.

Within hours, thousands of East Berliners overwhelmed border checkpoints, streaming

into the hitherto largely prohibited FRG. Although this event has been rightly celebrated

as the effective end of the SED's Marxist-Leninist regime, it also signaled an existential

crossroads in GDR history, one many years in the making but lost in subsequent

interpretations of the revolution of 1989. On November 9, East Germans faced two

possible alternatives: continue to reform the GDR as a distinctively democratic socialist

society, or join West Germany's liberal capitalist order.

At the time, the outcome of this choice was anything but certain. Many East

Germans who protested against the SED regime in autumn 1989 were still committed to

building a democratic, but still socialist, society. They did not want to abolish the GDR,

but instead transform it through a synthesis of longstanding socialist ideals of equality

and collective rights, as well as the human rights, environmental protection, and direct

democracy. Following the opening of the Wall, these activists chose socialism over

capitalism, and dedicated themselves to rooting out the remnants of real existing

socialism, as well as imagining and articulating a compelling vision of a democratic

socialist GDR. In the course of the Central Round Table (CRT) discussions of December

1989 to March 1990, East Germans from all major parties, organizations, and civil groups

drew up a draft constitution through dialogue and consensus, enshrining liberal

democratic and socialist ideals as the legal basis for a new East German, and eventually

united German, society. Accordingly this chapter will examine the revolution of 1989,

along with its draft constitution, as the final ideal practice through which East Germans imagined and tried to realize a better society.

The revolution, and the constitution it produced, ultimately took shape through, and in opposition to, the practice of real existing socialism in the 1970s and 1980s. As the SED under Honecker refused to reform a slowing economy, address pollution, or introduce democratic participation in decision-making, Church-based civil activists increasingly called the party-state to task for its abuses and, ultimately, its failure to lead society out of its mounting crises. Although allied largely through their opposition to the party-state, this civil movement also forged a basic ideal consensus on human rights guarantees, a clean environment, and an equitable society organized through social welfare guarantees and grassroots democracy. Challenging the party-state's ideal authority through provocative publications, protests, and media appearances through the late 1980s, these civil groups drew domestic and international attention to their cause. By the end of the decade these groups emerged as more credible ideal authorities than the SED. Fueled by years of economic decline and growing party-state repression, an emigrant crisis in summer 1989 sparked mass protests by autumn. In light of growing social unrest, these groups stepped forward to call for dialogue with the party-state, and democratic reforms in the GDR. Although successful in forcing Honecker's resignation in October, after the opening of the Berlin Wall and the emigration of hundreds of thousands of East Germans, pro-socialist civil activists focused more on formulating a democratic socialist alternative to the liberal capitalism of the FRG. In the meantime, East German citizens faced economic decline, social unrest, and, for many, an increasingly attractive prospect of unification on West German terms.

As East German society discovered its own political voice, the civil movement's alternative took shape through the CRT, its constitutional working group, and its draft constitution. In the spirit of the revolution's direct democratic ideals, the working group's members strove for an ideal consensus, or a general agreement on society's ideals and the practices to attain them, in shaping a future East German state. Negotiations were not always unanimous, however, and group members also understood their work within existing political circumstances: Given the GDR's emigration crisis and moribund economy, the working group also recognized that some form of unification would be necessary. Thus the draft constitution enshrined a wealth of individual and collective rights to protect East Germans from pollution, exploitation, and poverty, rights guaranteed but not practiced in prior GDR constitutions. The draft also included two articles ensuring these rights would be permanent on the territory of the GDR following ratification. Once complete, the group submitted their draft to the Volkskammer, to be put to a public referendum on June 17, 1990.

The CRT's practice of democratic consensus-building, and the constitution this practice created, only briefly survived East Germany's broader transition from Marxism-Leninism to parliamentary majority rule. Ultimately, a pro-unification government, elected on March 18, 1990 after extensive antisocialist campaigning by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and other prominent conservatives, voted against even reviewing the draft. Months later, the Volkskammer instead passed a series of "constitutional principles," largely to give a legal basis to the privatization of the GDR's state-owned businesses. Although defeated in the Volkskammer, civil activists continued to campaign for a new, all-German constitution before and after unification. Through the

Board of Trustees for a Democratically Elected Germany (Kuratorium), a grassroots

group organized by former constitutional working group members, East and West

Germans convened to integrate the 1990 draft constitution into the FRG's existing

constitution, the Basic Law, and to use this draft as a basis for a new Federation of

German States. By 1993, however, their efforts led only to minor amendments to the

Basic Law, effectively ending the possibility of a new constitution.

This chapter argues that the revolution of 1989 was led by a movement seeking to

transform East German society's prevailing economic and political system through a

"third way" between liberal capitalism and real existing socialism. Given the revolution's

eventual absorption into the push for unification with the FRG, a number of observers

and scholars have argued that 1989 had no new ideals to offer, or was a simply a

"catching-up" to liberal capitalism.[1] Consequently, even otherwise detailed studies of the

revolution's historical genealogy, social basis and development, and geopolitical context

offer little analysis of the CRT deliberations, the 1990 constitution, or the activities of its

authors after the March 1990 elections.[2] Historiography analyzing the civil opposition

itself has characterized the movement's leaders as idealistic intellectuals striving for a

more perfected socialism, while ignoring democracy and human rights, "an insight that

failed to come in East Germany," as one author noted.[3] In fact, direct democracy and

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990) and Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[2] Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009).

[3] Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* (London: Macmillan, 1995), viii; see also Konrad H. Jarausch, *Die Umkehr. Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004) and Dietrich Orlow, *Socialist Reformers and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). John Torpey more sympathetically analyzes East German intellectuals and civil activists' defense of socialism and the GDR in 1989, but ultimately

human rights were of central significance to civil activists in the 1980s, and formed the

core of the CRT and Kuratorium draft constitutions.[4] Moreover, the revolution of 1989

encompassed all social strata, if not in the same ways or for the same ends. Millions of

East Germans engaged in revolutionary activism, writing letters to state and civil

movement leaders, participating in protests and local meetings, and demanding more

rights, better pay, and greater environmental protections in factories and workplaces – in

effect practicing the revolution's egalitarian and direct democratic ideals.[5] Through these

collective experiences, the revolution of 1989 was for many a time ripe with excitement,

a vastly expanding socialist imaginary that seemed to herald a new world in the making.[6]

Nevertheless the realities of a moribund economy, ongoing emigrations, and growing

social unrest, especially after the opening of the Berlin Wall, also created a groundswell

of support for unification with the FRG. By the end of 1989, protests included displays of

German nationalism that many civil opposition leaders did not share. However, while a

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subordinates their ideals to a normative liberal capitalism; see Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent: The East German Opposition and Its Legacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). For a more nuanced study of critical GDR intellectuals and their relationship with the SED through discourse, see David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

[4] Klaus Michael Rogner, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Zentralen Runden Tisches der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993); Bernd Gehrke and Wolfgang Rüddenklau, eds., *…das war doch nicht unsere Alternative. DDR-Oppositionelle zehn Jahre nach der Wende* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999), and Leonore Ansorg, et al., eds., *"Das Land ist still – noch!" Herrschaftswandele und politische Gegnerschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009).

[5] Linda Fuller has argued that most East German workers were "passive participants" in the revolution, reactively supporting the "status quo" of socialist reform and eventually some form of unification; later scholars have examined extensive worker participation in labor negotiations and strikes, albeit at a distance from the concerns of full-time civil activists. See Fuller, *Where was the Working Class? Revolution in Eastern Germany* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Bernd Gehrke and Renate Hürtgen, eds., *Der betriebliche Aufbruch im Herbst 1989: die unbekannte Seite der DDR-Revolution* (Berlin: Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2001); and Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[6] Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); see also James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Philipp Ther, *Europe Since 1989: A History*, trans. Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmueller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); and James Mark, et al., *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

majority of East Germans voted for pro-unification parties in the March 1990 elections, not all of these voters wanted unification solely along West German lines, fearing more social unrest, privatizations, and rising rents. Even those who hoped that unification would lead to the prosperity promised by Kohl's government were forced to confront harsh post-unification realities of further emigrations, political and ethnic violence, and mass unemployment. The "winners" of unification were not the civil movement or East German citizens broadly, but FRG statesmen who retained their power and ideal authority over the expanded FRG, even as the more prosperous future they promised failed to materialize.

The civil movement failed to connect its ideal practices to the concerns of East German citizens until it was too late. But set to the backdrop of unification's realities, the egalitarian, ecological, and direct democratic ideals legally expressed in the CRT and Kuratorium draft constitutions represent a poignant synthesis of socialism and direct democracy. Although such a constitution for the GDR or a unified Germany may not have eased all of unification's hardships, its ideals gestured to a more just and responsible government than East and West Germans knew before 1989, or after 1990.

5.1 *Real Existing Socialism in the 1980s: Social Stalemate and Direct Democratic Alternatives*

Throughout the 1980s, the SED under Erich Honecker refused to recognize the GDR's growing economic and social problems, effectively yielding its role as the primary authority of ideal practice and social transformation. As with the environmental movement, Church-based activists gradually assumed this role by invoking socialist

ideals – equality, individual and collective rights, and antifascism – to criticize the party-state's abdication of leadership. As the party-state in turn grew more antagonistic towards the civil movement itself during the late 1980s, activists used human rights ideals to draw attention to the SED's use of surveillance, intimidation, work-prohibitions, and travel restrictions to punish those who questioned its authority.[7] Through a series of widely-publicized actions, civil groups in Berlin mobilized popular support for their ideals, and by 1989 emerged as more legitimate ideal authorities than the SED leadership. This oppositional activism in the 1980s provided the revolution of 1989 with its central ideal practices. However, translating these practices into coherent political reform required experience and consensus: While commonly rejecting real existing socialism and aspects of consumer capitalism, opposition groups largely relied on the existence and resistance of the party-state for cohesion. This lack of a clear ideal practice meant that once the party-state was forced into dialogue, any "third way" beyond real existing socialism or liberal capitalism would have to be reached through negotiated, democratic consensus. Although effective in challenging party-state rule, civil activists had to quickly articulate and popularize the path to a socialist and democratic GDR, especially as the opening of the Berlin Wall in November, and the possibility of unification with the FRG, called the state's very existence into question.

What became the civil opposition movement of the late 1980s largely took shape in reaction to the SED's practice of "real existing socialism" in the 1970s and 1980s.

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[7] Ned Richardson-Little argues that human rights played a major role in the SED's own ideal practices, especially in mobilizing solidarity with revolutionary movements in the Global South. See Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For a study of human rights discourse in contemporary Europe, see Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, eds., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

Honecker himself first used the term at the Ninth Party Plenum in May 1973, in the

context of the GDR's main task (*Hauptaufgabe*) of raising productivity and tangible

growth, and shaping a socialist identity in contrast to the FRG and the competitive

convergence of the NES.[8] In this, *Abgrenzung* (demarcation) became a key practice of

real existing socialism, which intensified the party-state's emphasis on Marxism-

Leninism and class conflict, held the GDR's emulation of the USSR as sacrosanct, and

made Western travel nearly impossible for most citizens. Amendments to the 1968

constitution, passed by the Volkskammer in 1974 without public discussion, sanctioned

demarcation by eliminating all references to a German nation or possible unification, and

declared the GDR to be "forever and irrevocably allied" with the USSR. To foster a

distinctive identity for its citizens, the party-state emphasized class conflict and military

training in education, and encouraged citizens to cultivate local identities based on a

static ideal of a socialist *Heimat*.[9] In this, real existing socialism became an inward-

looking practice of ideals, with a party-state leadership emphasizing a conservative,

Marxist-Leninist worldview.

Paradoxically, this real existing socialism took shape in an increasingly complex

and interconnected world. During the 1970s, the SED also accelerated East Germany's

connections and obligations to the nonsocialist world. In 1972, the GDR and FRG signed

the Basic Treaty, recognizing each other as legally legitimate states; this in turn fostered

the GDR's diplomatic recognition by the United Kingdom, France, and the United States,

and its entry into the United Nations in 1973. In the spirit of détente between the US and

USSR, and *Ostpolitik* with the FRG, the GDR also participated in the Conference on

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[8] BArch DY 30/2085, "Bericht des Politbüros an die 9. Tagung des ZK," May 28-29, 1973, 146.
[9] Maier, *Dissolution*, 29.

Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) negotiations in 1975, signing the Helsinki

Final Act (or Helsinki Accords). The Final Act recognized the relative balance of power

in Europe, while calling for closer scientific and economic integration, and holding its

signatories to an albeit nonbinding agreement to respect their citizens' human rights,

including the freedoms of expression and travel.[10] Although the SED would largely

ignore these commitments, civil activists would refer to the Helsinki Accords to draw

attention to the party-state's failure to respect individual and collective rights. Given the

GDR's further integration into the international market through its closer relationship

with the FRG, the contradictions of détente and demarcation found their way into East

German homes as well: Accelerated housing construction and consumer goods

production granted East Germans the highest living standard among the Soviet-aligned

states, yet these achievements were often compared unfavorably to the higher living

standards seen through West German television. In effect, by opening the GDR to the

commitments, alternatives, and wider imaginary of postwar modernity, the SED

unwittingly undermined its static, ideal image of real existing socialism.

Real existing socialism thus became a target of criticism by activists demanding

greater rights and meaningful democratic participation. Before the peace, environmental,

and human rights movements gained traction in the 1980s, small groups of "dissident"

activists articulated systemic criticisms of real existing socialism throughout Eastern

Europe in the 1970s.[11] These activists, both at the fringes and center of their societies,

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[10] Ibid. 26-27.
[11] Used by Western journalists and experts, the term "dissident" also flattened diverse activists into a uniform group. Many such activists were wary of the term. See Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 3.

generally held to ideals of diversity and openness, practiced as an ongoing, public reminder to the party-state to live up to its humanistic ideals while respecting the rights of its citizens. Organized in 1977 in response to the arrest of members of the rock band Plastic People of the Universe, Czechoslovak civil group Charter 77 led the way in arguing for the role of grassroots democracy in holding the state accountable to its actions and abuses. The Charter's founding declaration denounced the party-state's violations of the Helsinki Accords, which it had signed along with the GDR. Rather than posing as an alternative party, Charter 77 carefully styled itself as a "loose, informal and open association of people... united by the will to strive individually and collectively for the respecting of civic and human rights in our own country and throughout the world." Seeking to remain a broad-based movement and to avoid being targeted as an outright political opposition, Charter 77 explicitly refused to offer a reform program, vowing instead to enter into "constructive dialogue" with authorities about human rights violations and possible remedies.[12] This practice of dialogue and consensus-building beyond strict ideological definition, along with an emphasis on human rights and direct democracy, would influence the GDR's civil movement in the 1980s.

Yet while Charter 77 distanced itself from explicitly socialist ideals and categories, East German dissident activists remained committed to socialist ideals, while drawing upon democratic traditions in the socialist imaginary to challenge the party-state's ideal authority. In the GDR, socialists led the way in articulating systemic criticisms of real existing socialism. In the 1960s, chemist and Volkskammer member Robert Havemann gave a series of lectures at Humboldt University condemning the

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[12] Charter 77 Declaration, in Václav Havel, et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 217-221.

encroachment of Marxism-Leninism in the natural sciences.[13] Havemann's subsequent

house arrest did little to attenuate his criticisms through the 1970s, or his mentoring a

group of likeminded activists. One was singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann, a committed

socialist whose father was murdered at Auschwitz, and who emigrated to the GDR in

1953 to participate in the construction of socialism. Dissatisfied by the party's practices

by the 1960s, however, Biermann published SED-critical poetry and performed

subversive songs in the FRG throughout the 1970s, emerging as a popular figure in both

German states. Moreover, Rudolf Bahro's 1977 book *Die Alternative* criticized real

existing socialism as a Soviet-inspired, state-directed "industrial despotism" necessary for

modernizing the agrarian USSR of the 1930s, but wholly unsuited for a complex society

like the GDR. Bahro's alternative foresaw a coming "cultural revolution" that would

dismantle the party-state, limit economic growth, and establish a "League of

Communists" to lead society in collective renewal.[14] Though differing in their proposed

solutions, these socialist dissidents agreed with direct democratic activists on the need for

the party-state to take responsibility for its abuses of power and poor leadership, and for

new social groups to lead democratic reforms.

Rather than accept these criticisms, the SED under Honecker further centralized

power, and dealt harshly with its dissenters. By the end of the 1970s, Honecker himself

wielded enormous power over the party-state, interfering in relatively trifling decisions

while ignoring critical issues.[15] However, Honecker was largely unsuited to his

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[13] Robert Havemann*, Dialektik oder Dogma?* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1990).

[14] Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative. Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus* (Cologne: Europäische Verlangsanstalt, 1977). For a discussion of Bahro's and Havemann's activism and their contributions to democratic socialism, see Ines Weber, *Sozialismus in der DDR. Alternative Gesellschaftskonzepte von Robert Havemann und Rudolf Bahro* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2015).

[15] Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 215.

responsibilities, having a limited understanding of the complex society he led. Like other

SED leaders who came of age in the interwar KPD, he assumed that East Germans only

needed steady work, subsidized necessities, and a cheap apartment to be content – and

believed that the centrally-planned economy was the only path to attain this.[16] In effect,

this practice of ideals drawn from a limited Weimar-era socialist imaginary had little

capacity to engage with change or criticism, especially from fellow socialists: Havemann

died while still under house arrest in 1982, while Bahro was imprisoned for espionage

and emigrated to the FRG in 1979. Biermann was secretly stripped of his citizenship and

refused entry back into the GDR following a concert in Cologne in 1976. Biermann's

exile in turn led to a number of prominent East German artists and writers to sign a public

letter of protest, which also incurred the wrath of the SED leadership. The signatories

were sharply criticized by their respective unions, with the German Writers Association

voting in 1979 to formally expel a number of authors including Stefan Heym, an

internationally-known novelist who had also emigrated to the GDR in the 1950s. The

party-state's message to its critics was clear: follow the party, or risk denunciation,

imprisonment, or expulsion. As for East German citizens, the party-state expected

uncritical, if not enthusiastic, affirmation of the status quo in return for basic necessities

and guaranteed employment.

By the 1980s, then, real existing socialism symbolized a broader stalemate

between a party leadership unwilling to initiate any meaningful reforms, and an

increasingly restive society contending with declining living standards. Insufficient

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[16] Ibid. 215-223. Martin Sabrow has argued that Honecker developed a "frozen wealth of experiences," a rigid valorization of the KPD and USSR of the 1920s and 1930s that cauterized his experience of imprisonment during the Third Reich. See Sabrow, *Erich Honecker: Das Leben davor, 1912-1945* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016), 502.

investments and innovation, a shrinking workforce due to a low birthrate, and resource

shortages contributed to frequent work stoppages and overall lagging growth. But with a

party leadership unwilling to embark upon any structural reforms like the NES/ESS, and

unable to initiate austerity policies, the status quo persisted.[17] For East German citizens,

the resulting goods shortages, decaying infrastructure, and growing pollution expressed a

sense of *Verkommenheit* (dilapidation) and decline.[18] Yet Soviet premier Mikhail

Gorbachev's introduction of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) in 1986

seemed to offer hope, giving Soviet sanction for reform and dialogue. Rather than

dutifully follow the Soviet example, however, SED propaganda chief and Politburo

member Kurt Hager faintly praised *perestroika* and *glasnost* in a 1987 interview while

denying their applicability to the GDR.[19] Even the personal relationship between

Honecker and Gorbachev soured, with Honecker viewing himself as more experienced

than his Soviet counterpart, while Gorbachev came to see the SED leader as an arrogant

"scumbag" resisting change at his peril.[20] Social stalemate also had a deleterious effect on

the SED's rank-and-file. In 1984 and 1985, the party's review board concluded over forty

thousand cases of disciplinary actions and expulsions, with only a slight decrease in

1986.[21] Despite the leadership's rejection of *glasnost*, party members broadly supported

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[17] Maier, *Dissolution*, 34-37, and Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR*, trans. Ewald Osers (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 171-193. Microprocessor production exemplified the GDR's diminishing returns in this era. Despite massive investments by the party-state, the industry could not compete with units produced by Japan and the US. See Peter Salomon, *Die Geschichte der Mikroelektronik-Halbleiterindustrie in der DDR* (Dessau: Funkverlag Bernhard Hein, 2003).

[18] Maier, *Dissolution*, 95.

[19] Interview with Kurt Hager, *Neues Deutschland*, Apr. 10, 1987, 3.

[20] William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 484.

[21] Party disciplinary records do not differentiate these reasons; the figure excludes "anti-party or anti-state activities," criminal activity or corruption, or members attempting to flee the GDR. See Thomas Klein, Wilfriede Otto, and Peter Grieder, *Visionen: Repression und Opposition in der SED (1949-1989)*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Oder: Frankfurter Oder Editionen, 1996), 118-120. See also Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 122.

the reforms, and grew demoralized by the lack of inner-party debate amid a society clearly in decline.[22] In economic, social, and political spheres, the confluence of anachronistic ideals practiced poorly by an inflexible SED leadership signaled a serious, and seemingly intractable, social stalemate.

In addition to environmental and peace activism, Church-based groups saw ideals of civil dialogue, direct democracy, and human rights as the best path out of East Germany's social stalemate. By the mid-1980s, activists sharpened their criticism of the SED by drawing attention to the party-state's poor human rights record, including surveillance and harassment of dissidents like Havemann and Bahro, travel restrictions, and resistance to democratization. Yet given the diversity of its members, this movement split as soon as it took shape: A Charter 77-inspired "Peace and Human Rights" initiative, organized by Church activists in East Berlin in late 1985 (albeit without the Church's approval), first articulated this approach.[23] The initiative's majority appeal, publicized by Wolfgang Templin, Ralph Hirsch, and Peter Grimm via West German media, understood peace and environmental protection as basic human rights, and called for the party-state to open dialogue about these and other issues. The group then vowed to connect with other Church and independent groups in the GDR for further discussion, and eventually became the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM) for this purpose. Yet a dissenting opinion from the meeting, signed by Reinhard Schult, Thomas Klein, and former SED members Wolfgang Wolf, Silvia Müller, and Vera Wollenberger, claimed that the majority's appeal omitted further fields of discussion, including different ideas of

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[22] Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 121-122.
[23] Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), 722-724.

democracy, and socialist law and its practice in the GDR.[24] As Templin and the others

founded the left-liberal IFM, the dissenters founded the Voices Against Group, holding to

"social revolutionary" ideals and hosting debates about Marxism and socialist history.

Although Voices Against disbanded in 1988, its founders would play significant roles in

the years ahead: Wollenberger and Schult founded the group Church from Below in

September 1987, working with the UB and IFM to foster dialogue about pressing social

issues ignored by the SED and Church leadership.[25]

      Some civil activists analyzed the GDR's stalemate still more expressly through

the socialist imaginary, developing ideals of renewal, democratization, and economic

decentralization articulated by earlier dissidents and the SED itself. Bernd Gehrke, an

engineer at the GDR Academy of Sciences, was expelled from the party for participating

in critical Marxist circles in the 1970s; resolving to criticize the SED "from the left,"

Gehrke was active in a number of such groups throughout the 1980s, emphasizing

activism among East German workers to promote grassroots reform.[26] Jutta Braband was

expelled from the party for protesting the punishment of writers after the Biermann affair

in 1979; arrested with her partner Thomas Klein, both were committed to a democratic

socialism, and refused to be deported to the FRG.[27] Braband later reflected that the

emerging civil opposition was overall "quite leftist," not always by name but through

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[24] Wolfgang Rüddenklau, *Störenfried. DDR-Opposition 1986-1989* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), 51-60. See also Thomas Klein, *"Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!". Die Politisierung der Unabhängigen Friedensbewegung in Ost-Berlin während der 80er Jahre* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 235-246.

[25] Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 685-689. See also Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 125-126.

[26] "15 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall. Interview mit Bernd Gehrke, *analyse + kritik – Zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis*, Nov. 19, 2004, http://www.labournetaustria.at/b-gehrke-vl-ruckblick-auf-den-kampf-d-vereinigten-linken-i-d-ddr-1989/ (accessed May 2, 2021).

[27] Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 384-386.

ideals that were "commonly called leftist," especially grassroots democracy.[28] Klein, who

worked as a cybernetics specialist along with Gehrke at the Academy of Sciences until

his arrest, also developed his views among Church groups throughout the 1980s. In a

September 1988 *Arche Nova* essay, Klein argued that Honecker's recentralization of the

economy after the NES/ESS meant that its "structure-determining" industries had since

become "technology museums," and attempts to innovate and expand foreign trade were

largely squandered through managing growing debts to the FRG. In effect, real existing

socialism's rigid centralization meant that the SED could not develop along with the

changing global market. Therefore Klein advocated for a grassroots revolution in

workplaces and factories, emphasizing local "territorial self-administration" along with

"a fundamental redesign" and "democratization" of all major party-state institutions – a

program drawing upon the ideals of the NES/ESS, elements of Bahro's *Alternative*, and

perestroika and *glasnost*.[29] Despite the relative prominence of left-liberal groups in the

opposition movement, socialist activists like Gehrke, Klein, and Braband would play key

roles in the revolution of 1989, co-founding the socialist group United Left and

participating in the CRT discussions of 1989-1990.

Other activists also thought systematically about human rights and

democratization in the GDR, albeit based on a broader deconstruction of East/West,

socialist/capitalist binaries. Wolfgang Ullmann, a Protestant minister and theologian,

increasingly questioned the divisions of East and West, as well as capitalism and

socialism, following a guest professorship in the US in the early 1980s. Through this

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[28] Rüddenklau, *Störenfried*, 371-375; Dinah Dodds and Pam Allen-Thomson, eds., *The Wall in My Backyard: East German Women in Transition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 157.

[29] RHG VL 02, "Ist die DDR reif für eine Reform ihres gesellschaftlichen Systems?", Sept. 1988, 130-131.

experience, Ullmann witnessed the US's ethnic and religious diversity firsthand, and met many Americans who took a "constructive stand" against the Reagan administration's anticommunist rhetoric while enjoying the freedom to do so publicly. Ullmann shared this experience in informal Church discussion groups, which formed the basis of the group Initiative for Rejection of the Practice and Principle of Demarcation, founded in 1987.[30] The group condemned the division of Europe and the SED's policy of demarcation, decrying the prevailing "distorted" images of the nonsocialist world within the GDR, as well as the "isolation" and "patronized" nature of life for its citizens. The Initiative's signatories called for unrestricted right to travel to the West for all East Germans, the lifting of entry bans on citizens who had forcibly or willingly emigrated, and a "public discussion about sociopolitical changes" that might persuade emigrants to return.[31] The group also encouraged activist participation in the elections of May 1989, and formed the basis of the civil group Democracy Now, founded in October.[32] Ullmann's ideal of a more unified and just world, expressed through legally-binding human rights, social justice, and direct democracy, would also inform his contribution to the CRT draft constitution of 1990, finding a basic ideal consensus with socialist-leaning activists like Gehrke and others.

As new ideals and practices of direct democracy and human rights took root in the GDR's civil movement, antifascism also took on renewed significance as well, especially among young people. By the 1980s, the GDR's various youth subcultures had diversified

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[30] Wolfram Bürger and Michael Weichenhan, eds., *Wolfgang Ullmann. Demokratie - jetzt oder nie!* (Munich: Kyrill & Method, 1990), 70-71.

[31] RHG WU 254, "Antrag an die Synode der Evangelischen Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg: Absage an Praxis und Prinzip der Abgrenzung, Mar. 31, 1987, 7-8.

[32] RHG WU 254, "Ein Brief an Christen in der DDR und ihre Gemeindevertreter zu den Kommunalwahlen 89," Jan. 8, 1989, 33. See also Bürger and Weichenhan, *Wolfgang Ullmann*, 71; and Maier, *Dissolution*, 172.

into metalheads, hippies, rockers, goths, punks, and skinheads, among others – distinctive groups nevertheless connected by disinterest in, or outright rejection of, real existing socialism.[33] However, throughout the 1980s antifascist punks split with neofascist skinheads, leading to growing violence between the two groups. This violence also profoundly affected the civil movement: In October 1987, thirty neo-Nazis attacked a UB-sponsored punk show at Berlin's Zion Church. Shouting slogans such as "Communist pigs!" and "Sieg heil!", the skinheads attacked the concertgoers, who in turn pushed them outside the church. Yet GDR police refused to intervene, which became an embarrassment after the incident was made public via West German media.[34] Following the attack, punks, anarchists, and other young people organized a number of antifascist groups across the GDR. One group, Antifa of Potsdam, was organized through the Church by eighteen-year-old David Burkhardt, and his father, Frieder, served as the group's mentor.[35] While the SED eventually cracked down on skinheads, and the FDJ reached out to antifascist punks, growing fascist violence shocked both West and East German citizens. Opposition activists in turn used the Zion Church attack and subsequent incidents to invoke the socialist imaginary's strong antifascist tradition, and framed this youth violence as evidence of the party-state's eroding ideal authority.[36] If the SED could not impart antifascism upon East German youth, or protect its citizens from fascist violence, how could it claim authority over its founding antifascist ideal?

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[33] Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 122-123.

[34] RHG RG/B 19/01, "Konzert in der berliner Zionskirche vom 17.10.87," Oct. 1987, 36.

[35] Peter Ulrich Weiss, "Civil Society from the Underground: The Alternative Antifa Network in the GDR," *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 4 (2014): 652-653.

[36] Jeff Hayton, "Krawall in der Zionskirche: Skinhead Violence and the Political Legitimacy of the GDR," *European History Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2015): 336-356.

In the GDR's last years, opposition activists directly challenged the party-state's ideal authority, drawing attention to human rights abuses by disrupting public rituals of party-state affirmation. In late 1987, peace activist and director Freya Klier, along with her husband, musician (and former SED member) Stephan Krawczyk, decided to use the annual Rosa Luxemburg-Karl Liebknecht memorial march in January 1988 to protest their work prohibitions, and highlight human rights abuses in the GDR. Hundreds of thousands of East Germans, including the SED Politburo, attended the annual march commemorating the murder of the two socialists, and any disruptions would be further publicized through foreign media. Loosely collaborating with the emigrant advocate Citizenship Rights Group, Klier, Krawczyk, and other activists planned to unfurl banners bearing Luxemburg quotes.[37] Given the presence of emigrants and the likelihood of Stasi interference, the UB, IFM, and other groups declined to participate, but allowed their members to do so independently. Tipped off by informants, the Stasi preemptively arrested a number of activists, including Krawczyk and Vera Wollenberger of the Church from Below.[38] Yet the protest went along as planned, and on January 18 nearly two hundred activists unfurled banners bearing appeals to emigrate, Article 27 of the 1974 constitution (freedom of speech), and Luxemburg's famous dictum, "Freedom is always freedom for those who think differently," before being arrested by Stasi agents – all in front of Western cameras. In the following days, the Stasi arrested more civil activists,

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[37] Freya Klier, "Excerpt from Freya Klier's Diary," *Making the History of 1989*, Item #467, https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/467 (accessed May 16, 2021). Luxemburg's words meant a great deal to Krawczyk personally, who was banned from performing in the GDR for publicly reading a Luxemburg quote.

[38] The SED leadership under Honecker went to great lengths to prevent such protests from occurring at major events. See Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, 151.

including leading IFM members as well as Klier.[39] These arrests were met with international protests, as well as demonstrations in forty cities and towns across the GDR – the most widespread protests since the June 1953 Uprising.[40] More crucially, these displays of solidarity showed civil activists that mass mobilization was possible, if still unsteady.[41]

Nevertheless, these oppositional actions only further entrenched the SED leadership. In addition to surveilling and harassing civil activist groups more intensely in 1988, Honecker personally resisted the encroachment of *glasnost* in to the GDR's socialist imaginary via Soviet publications, foremost the magazine *Sputnik* (satellite, or fellow traveler). The magazine served as a forum for Soviet debates about socialist history, examining taboo topics such as the Stalinist purges, SPD and KPD divisions in the early 1930s, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. In the GDR, the UB and other civil groups regularly reprinted these articles in their own newsletters, using them as a basis for group discussions. Yet the SED's prohibition of *Sputnik* in November 1988 held greater significance than censorship: at stake was the party leadership's position in the socialist imaginary as antifascists. What led to the magazine's ban in the GDR concerned its discussion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, and the KPD's inability to resist Nazism in the early 1930s – events that many senior party members personally experienced.[42] Moreover, one *Sputnik* contributor even compared Nazism with Stalinism, and asked if

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[39] Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition*, 696-700. For an analysis of the event in *Umweltblätter*, see Rüddenklau, *Störenfried*, 203-223. Some of those arrested left the GDR; leading IFM members wrote from the FRG to explain they did not do so willingly. See RHG EP 04/02, letter from Bärbel and Anselm Bohley, Werner Fischer, and Regina and Wolfgang Templin to the IFM, Apr. 6, 1988, 104-106.

[40] Ibid. 698.

[41] Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany,* 130-131.

[42] Frank Herold, "Vor 15 Jahren wurde in der DDR die Zeitschrift *Sputnik* verboten: Ein unerwünschter Begleiter," *Berliner Zeitung*, Nov. 19, 2003, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/vor-15-jahren-wurde-in-der-ddr-die-zeitschrift-sputnik-verboten-ein-unerwuenschter-begleiter-li.10421 (accessed Mar. 26, 2021).

Stalin contributed to Hitler's rise. Given this seeming attack on the integrity of KPD

activists of the era, and the centrality of their antifascist activism in the GDR's founding

ideal practice, the party's leadership acted swiftly: The prohibition was announced in

Neues Deutschland, in a brief note written by Honecker himself, stating that the

magazine made no contribution to "German-Soviet friendship," and "makes distorting

contributions to history."[43] An explanation published in *Neues Deutschland* in the

following days made it clear that only the party-state, rather than *Sputnik* contributors,

had the authority to interpret socialist history. Given already rising resentments against

Honecker and his Politburo, protest against this action was enormous. Over two hundred

thousand SED members, unaffiliated citizens, and civil activists alike wrote letters

arguing for their right to alternative interpretations of history, and access to information.

More significantly, this was accompanied by thousands of resignations from the party, as

well as official protests from local SED branches and functionaries.[44]

By the end of the 1980s, the civil opposition seemed to be succeeding in breaking

the GDR's social stalemate by directly challenging the party's ideal authority, and

building broader support for necessary reforms. But the conflict between the party-state

and civil opposition signaled a deeper conflict unfolding in East German society. Given

the widespread public response to the party-state's repressive actions, real existing

socialism's ideal of party and people united as one against the class enemy poorly

concealed social realities of growing diversity, conflicts, and decline. East German

society no longer reflected or respected the SED's practice of ideals, a fact increasingly

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[43] "Mitteilung der Pressestelle des Ministeriums für Post- und Fernmeldewesen," *Neues Deutschland*, Nov. 19, 1988.

[44] Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 123-124. See especially RHG EP 08, Eingabe from the Ökumenischen Friedensarbeitskreis Dresden-Johannstadt to the Ministerrat press office, Dec. 1988, 3-5.

articulated by civil activists and underpinned by the growing number of GDR citizens applying for emigration or protesting party-state actions. Yet the civil movement's growing diversity also signaled a new challenge: As different voices sought to practice their own ideals, democratizing East German socialism would be a lengthy, and tumultuous, process of building ideal consensus.

5.2 Mauerfall: *Forging an Ideal Consensus beyond Real Existing Socialism and Capitalism*

The GDR's social stalemate would ultimately rupture though late summer and fall 1989, as mass emigrations and growing protests undermined Honecker's leadership, and provided the impetus for the civil movement to demand dialogue and democratic reforms. By August 1989, thousands of East German putative vacationers took advantage of relaxed border controls in Hungary to emigrate to the FRG via Austria; when the GDR closed its border with Hungary, thousands more flocked to the FRG embassy in Prague to seek asylum – events broadcast in the GDR by West German media. With Gorbachev unwilling to intervene, Honecker allowed the emigrants to leave to the FRG, albeit in sealed trains passing through East German territory. Due to the resulting disorder and bad publicity, Politburo members began plotting Honecker's removal, while civil opposition groups organized broad-based reform movements based on ideal practices developed throughout the 1980s. By September, a number of civil groups emerged from the opposition movement, broadly calling for dialogue with party-state authorities, greater protection of human rights and the environment, and an end to the SED's monopoly on power. This movement, led by veteran civil activists from the IFM, UB, and other

Church-based groups, along with SED-critical artists and writers, gradually articulated a vision of a democratic socialist GDR, especially following Honecker's resignation in October. Yet Honecker's successor, Egon Krenz, initiated only tentative reforms until the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9. As GDR citizens streamed through the open border, with many never coming back, those who remained began to question the necessity of the GDR as an independent state. Consequently, civil activists called upon their fellow citizens to stay, and help save an independent, democratic, and socialist GDR from the remnants of real existing socialism and outright absorption by West Germany.

Throughout September and early October, several civil groups emerged from the Church-based opposition to open up social discussions of reform in the GDR. New Forum, founded in part by Bärbel Bohley, Reinhard Schult, Jens Reich, and Rolf Heinrich on September 9, argued in its founding appeal that the GDR stood at a point of real crisis and a contradiction of basic ideals: Desiring both consumer goods and limits to "unchecked growth"; free, "self-aware" citizens who would also act "in a community-conscious manner"; and participation in global trade without becoming "a debtor and servant" to richer nations or exploiters to poorer ones, East Germans needed to make difficult decisions about the purpose and practice of their society. New Forum thus called for dialogue based on common ideals of "justice, democracy, peace, and the protection and preservation of nature" to collectively find solutions.[45] The foundational appeal of Democracy Now echoed this approach, albeit with a more socialist emphasis. Founded in part by Wolfgang Ullmann, IFM member Ulrike Poppe, and director Konrad Weiss on September 12, Democracy Now argued that given real existing socialism's ideal

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[45] "Aufruf 89," *gesammelte Flugschriften. DDR 89*, vol. 1 (Berlin: AStA der TU Berlin, 1989), 2-3.

bankruptcy, "socialism must rediscover its intended, democratic form if it is not to be lost to history" – a tragic possibility, the group argued, as humanity "needs other options to save human coexistence than the example set by Western consumer societies, the prosperity of which must be paid for by the rest of the world."[46] Other groups pressed for a more liberal approach: Democratic Awakening, founded in early October, advocated for an open public sphere and competitive elections, environmental cleanup and protection, and economic decentralization and some privatization. By December 1989, Democratic Awakening moved in a more conservative direction, allying with the Western and Eastern branches of the CDU for a rapid path to unification.[47] While sharing an ideal consensus on dialogue and democracy, these emerging divisions between more liberal capitalist and democratic socialist course of reforms signaled the eventual split in the civil movement, and their visions of the revolution's ultimate aim of a democratic socialist GDR, or quick accession to the FRG.

These divisions, however, do not militate against serious consideration of many activists' socialist vision. As during the late 1980s, democratic socialists offered new ideals and practices drawn from the socialist imaginary to overcome the stalemate of real existing socialism. Already in July 1989, Church-based peace activists Martin Gutzeit, Markus Meckel, Arndt Noack, and Ibrahim Böhme released an appeal for a social democratic party in the GDR, which would advocate for the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, environmental protections, a social market economy, and a decentralized,

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[46] Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds. *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993,* trans. Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper (Providence: Berghahn, 1994), 48.

[47] Gerhard Rein, ed., *Die Opposition in der DDR: Entwürfe für einen anderen Sozialismus* (Berlin: Wichern, 1989), 34-37. For a detailed history of DA and its later participation in the Alliance for Germany with the CDU, see Wolfgang Jäger and Michael Walter, *Die Allianz für Deutschland. CDU, Demokratischer Aufbruch und Deutsche Soziale Union 1989/90* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998).

direct democratic state structure – ideal practices repeated in the Social Democratic Party of the GDR's founding appeal of September 12.[48] At this time, more radical socialist activists, including Gehrke, Klein, Misslitz, and Anett Seese, founded the United Left. The group's first appeal, the Böhlen Platform, acknowledged that SED rule had "degenerated" the labor movement's historical goals into "disillusionment and passivity." Socialists thus needed a "radical renewal of theoretical thought on a Marxist basis... in the shortest possible time" to avoid either a "sell-off" to capitalism or a "neo-Stalinist" military dictatorship. United Left thus called for the public ownership of the means of production through local self-determination; a decentralized state based on "liberal-socialist constitutional law"; and the realization of "undivided human rights" according to the UN Human Rights Charter. The appeal also demanded more specific collective and individual rights, including equal protection for citizen and civil group initiatives, the freedom of information (in contrast with classified environmental data during the 1980s), and individual data protection. Overall, the United Left envisioned a new society based on the "free development of each individual as the basis for the development of all," including worker autonomy, equality of the sexes, "overcoming the inequality of classes in favor of the diversity of individuals," and "the defense of the character of the GDR as a society of socialist freedom." This society would also uphold antifascism, and reject "Stalinism," militarism, capitalism, nationalism, and racism.[49]

As the civil opposition publicly demanded dialogue with the party-state on the basis of its ideal consensus of democracy, social justice, and human rights, Honecker was

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[48] "Aufruf zur Bildung einer Initiativgruppe, mit dem Ziel eine sozialdemokratische Partei in der DDR ins Leben zu rufen," Jun. 24, 1989, https://www.ddr89.de/sdp/SDP5.html (accessed June 2, 2021).
[49] RHG VL 01, "Für eine Vereinigte Linke in der DDR! Appell," Sept. 1989, 2-3.

forced to resign as General Secretary by his Politburo and an unsupportive Gorbachev.

Although standing alongside Honecker at the GDR's fortieth anniversary celebrations on

October 7, in private the Soviet leader made it clear to the Politburo that major reforms

were necessary, and the USSR would not intervene to preserve their grip on power.

Moreover, Monday evening peace services at Leipzig's Nicholas Church steadily gained

attendees, leading to nearly a hundred thousand protesters demanding change on the night

of October 9. Although police and army units were on hand to disperse the protesters,

local authorities and those in Berlin – defying Honecker's direct orders – refrained from

using force.[50] With his position undermined, Honecker was forced to resign as General

Secretary by his heir-apparent, Egon Krenz, and Stasi minister Erich Mielke. Citing ill

health, Honecker gave his resignation before the Central Committee on October 18, but

maintained that the GDR stood as "the culmination of the struggle of our Party and my

own activity as a communist."[51] That culmination looked rather less impressive by the

day: Beyond mass emigrations and protests, the SED would lose nearly half of its 2.3

million members by year's end, signaling that even party members committed to reforms

did not see the SED as the best authority to implement them.[52] Krenz did little to win

back these members, or regain the party's ideal authority. Instead he personally approved

the rejection of New Forum's application for official recognition, and his first major

speech to the East German public affirmed the leading role of the SED while calling for

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[50] Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). Andrew Demshuk has argued that Leipzig's "urban dystopia" ironically compelled local SED leaders and citizens to take a more independent course from Berlin; this in part explains why Leipzig was the site of the first major protests. See Demshuk*, Bowling for Communism: Urban Ingenuity at the End of East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).
[51] Zeno Zimmerling and Sabine Zimmerling, eds., *Neue Chronik DDR,* vol. 1 (Berlin: Tribüne, 1990), 138-139.
[52] Franz Oswald, *The Party that Came Out of the Cold War: The Party of Democratic Socialism in United Germany* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 3.

an end to "escalation" and further demonstrations.[53] For many East Germans, these efforts were wholly insufficient.

Drawing on their activism experience, New Forum partnered with the Berlin People's Theater to organize a mass protest at Berlin's Alexanderplatz on November 4 to demand a democratic socialist GDR. Millions of East German citizens, either physically present or watching via television, listened to speakers from the SED and the civil movement. Protestors booed SED representatives such as former Stasi general Markus Wolf and Politburo member Günter Schabowski, and applauded New Forum leader Jens Reich and IFM activist Marianne Birthler. Writer Stefan Heym praised the crowd for demanding "freedom and democracy, and a socialism worthy of the name." Heym also noted that the GDR's democratic socialist revolution could provide ideals for the FRG as well, adding that this socialism, "that we finally want to build for our benefit and for the benefit of all of Germany... is not possible without democracy."[54] Gregor Gysi, a prominent lawyer who represented GDR dissident cases and the son of Secretary for Church Affairs and former Aufbau director Klaus Gysi, still argued for the SED's "leading role" in society, but also called for *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and for the GDR to successfully merge the ideals of "socialism, humanism, democracy, and the rule of law into an inseparable unity."[55] Writer Christa Wolf saw immense difficulties and potential in breaking the old boundaries of the socialist imaginary, declaring, "So we dream with wide-awake reason: Imagine a socialism where no one goes away!"[56] Together, Heym,

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[53] Sarotte, *The Collapse*, 95; Zimmerling and Zimmerling, *Neue Chronik DDR* vol. 2, 17-18.

[54] Stefan Heym, Demo Alex speech, Nov. 4, 1989, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KO0KyhpjS1s (accessed May 22, 2021).

[55] Gregor Gysi, Demo Alex speech, Nov. 4, 1989, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pc27elXIXVU (accessed May 22, 2021).

[56] Christa Wolf, Demo Alex speech, Nov. 4, 1989, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGn2qnZHpds (accessed May 22, 2021).

Gysi, and Wolf all argued for the ideal of democratized socialism in the GDR, and

popular participation in its practice. Although still relatively unclear, this ideal practice

would come into much sharper focus following the opening of the Berlin Wall.

The opening of the Berlin Wall, however, laid bare the revolution's two

ultimately irreconcilable ideal practices: a more democratic, socialist, and at least

relatively independent GDR, or rapid unification with the FRG under a liberal capitalist

system. Yet the revolution's central turning point came about largely due to

incompetence: At a press conference on the night of November 9, Günter Schabowski

introduced what were to be temporary travel regulations allowing East Germans to leave

the country through internal borders, including East Berlin. Although the regulations

were to come into effect the next day, East Berliners flocked to the city's border

crossings, compelling guards to allow them to pass through. Through now-open borders,

GDR citizens had direct access to the FRG to either visit or emigrate; in light of this new

ability to directly compare life in both German states, maintaining a GDR mired in crisis

became much more difficult. Consequently, the opened border changed the civil

opposition's ideal practice from reforming the GDR to saving it from the remnants of real

existing socialism and a capitalist takeover. As a result, leading intellectuals released the

"For Our Country" appeal on November 26. Penned by Christa Wolf and presented by

Stefan Heym and others, the appeal called for GDR citizens to assert their sovereignty

over the "revolutionary renewal" unfolding at "breathtaking speed." Wolf posed the

GDR's future as a stark either/or: On one hand, East Germans could "insist on the

independence of the GDR" and build a society based on "solidarity and guaranteeing

peace and social justice, freedom of the individual, freedom of movement for all, and

environmental protection." Or, Wolf warned that East Germany would be gradually taken over by the FRG, and "suffer the start of a sellout of our material and moral values." Advocating for the "first road," Wolf reminded her fellow citizens that "we still have a chance to develop a socialist alternative to the FRG," and could still "focus on the antifascist and humanistic ideals that once guided us." The appeal concluded by encouraging citizens to respond with their views, and sign the appeal if they agreed.[57] Bernd Gehrke of the United Left (which later offered its full support) was the first to sign, followed by representatives from Democracy Now and New Forum.

In the coming weeks, hundreds of thousands of East Germans replied to the appeal. Respondents expressed support for the appeal's ideals, but often questioned whether these could, or even should, guide the GDR through its economic and social crises. Herr H. affirmed the appeal's "antifascist and humanist ideals" and also feared the "unconditional introduction of western economic mechanisms," seeing a confederation of the two states as the best solution. He also urged that the appeal's supporters should specify their "moral values and objectives" to avoid accusations of "abstractness and [being] unrealistic," and offered his own ideal of a "ecologically controlled market economy" as well as the "radical suppression of AIDS, drugs, crime, [and] neo-fascist tendencies" as a benchmark. Herr S., a manager at a weaving factory near the village of Grossröhrsdorf, did not share Herr H.'s optimism. While supporting the appeal's ideals, he also observed that the economy had deteriorated so much that "we can absolutely no longer negotiate from a position of strength," and would need financial assistance from

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[57] BArch DY 2/5, "FÜR UNSER LAND," Nov. 1989.

the FRG to stem emigration.[58] Although supportive of a democratic socialist GDR, an

SPD member from Jena echoed these criticisms, saying that "reality cannot be

understood through 'either-or,' and as a model of action this is even more useless,"

adding that unification should proceed equitably, based on a "constitution of a federal,

neutral, and demilitarized German state."[59] By the first week of December, the appeal's

organizers processed over two hundred thousand such replies, with five hundred in

disagreement.[60] However, the appeal was also signed by Krenz and other leading SED

members in an attempt to capitalize on the civil movement's ideal authority, which in

turn discredited the effort in the eyes of many East Germans. A New Forum working

group from the small town of Bodelwitz protested Krenz's signature as

"incomprehensible," especially given that "more and more people are losing hope of

renewal, and are looking for their salvation in an immediate reunification." The working

group then called for new elections to provide a legitimate government to lead the GDR's

antifascist, humanist renewal.[61]

     With the SED leadership under Krenz in disarray, and the civil movement not yet

possessing real political power, West German leaders put forth their own vision for

reform in the GDR, and eventual unification. FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl's "Ten-Point

Plan for German Unity," announced on November 28, in part offered financial assistance

to the GDR on the condition that the SED open the country to Western investment, and

collaborate with the civil movement in drafting a constitution and holding free elections.

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[58] BArch DY 2/5, letter from Herr H. to Andrée Türpe, Dec. 7, 1989; letter from Herr S. to Türpe, Nov. 28, 1989.
[59] BArch DY 2/7, letter from Herr F., Dec. 7, 1989.
[60] BArch DY 2/698, "Bislang wurden 234,826 Unterschriften gezählt," Dec. 7, 1989.
[61] BArch DY 2/7, letter from the Neues Forum Arbeitsgruppe Bodelwitz to Heym, Nov. 30, 1989.

Following these elections, Kohl foresaw a closely integrated German federation, one granting the GDR access to the European Community's common market. Given its basic intent to introduce liberal capitalism to the GDR, and Western prosperity and with it, Kohl's plan gained resonance among East Germans. Writing to the "For Our Country" organizers, Frau S. of Oberlungwitz criticized its either/or premise, finding that Wolf's negative view of the FRG to be reminiscent of SED propaganda. Some kind of financial union would be necessary, given the country's dilapidation: "We don't see it as a social achievement that while rents are low, whole streets and districts are collapsing," Frau S. argued, adding that "at least in economic terms, one only needs to look 'West' to see how it could be with us, and how it is done" and "you don't have to reinvent everything." Managers at a large Leipzig factory wrote to the "For Our Country" authors that their efforts to gather signatures for the appeal led to over sixty workers posting and signing a *counter*-petition in favor of Kohl's plan.[62] If civil activists hoped to save their country from the FRG, they would first have to come to an ideal consensus of what a democratic socialist GDR would look like, and convince East Germans their vision could lead to a more egalitarian, democratic, and prosperous society than what was already available in the West.

As the reforming SED faced largely the same monumental task, this opened the possibility for an ideal consensus between civil activists and the party in saving the GDR from unification. While Krenz and the Council of Ministers under Willi Stoph continued to lead without ideal authority and little effective control, reform-minded SED leaders pushed for the party to distance itself from state institutions, and integrate the other

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[62] BArch DY 2/5, letter from Frau S. to Steinbach, Dec. 12, 1989; letter from VEB Galvanotechnik Leipzig to Steinbach, Dec. 5, 1989.

National Front parties into a new government. With Stoph's resignation as prime minister on November 13, Krenz (as State Council chairman) appointed Hans Modrow, the Dresden district party secretary and a moderate reformist, to lead a new government. Modrow distanced himself from Krenz's Politburo, recalling later that "I made it very clear that... I would only be responsible to the government. I also stated unequivocally that I did not expect to receive any more decisions from the Politburo that could in any way limit my position as prime minister."[63] Modrow also honored his oath to "serve not one party, but the whole people," and offered the first draft of his government's program for debate in the Volkskammer on November 15. The draft was meaningfully amended by the other parties, with a stronger reformist commitment presented to the public on November 17.[64] Given the open borders and rapidly declining economic situation, Modrow's appointment signaled that the SED was finally willing to initiate meaningful reforms, or risk losing the GDR's best and brightest citizens to the FRG.

Accordingly, by December the SED resolved to reimagine its ideals and change its practices in order to save the GDR. Given his complete lack of ideal authority or credibility, Krenz resigned as State Council chairman and General Secretary on December 6. The SED then convened an extraordinary party congress to purge itself of Marxist-Leninists, elect a new leadership, and articulate a response to the GDR's political crisis. In his remarks, Modrow vowed that the party must be used "for a basic renovation of socialism in the GDR," and should act as a "true partner" in any coalition

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[63] Dirk Philipsen, *We Were the People: Voices from East Germany's Revolutionary Autumn of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 256.

[64] Hans Modrow, *Aufbruch und Ende* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur, 1991), 38-39.

government.[65] Gregor Gysi then presented the party's new ideal practice: a "third way"

between Stalinism and capitalism that dissident socialists in the 1970s, and socialist civil

activists in the 1980s, had long called for. Although he acknowledged that the "capitalist

world market" might seem attractive to those accustomed to a "planned, bureaucratic

economy of scarcity," Gysi added that capitalism exacerbated "global problems of

environmental protection, peacekeeping, and socioeconomic disparities." Gysi then

reminded his colleagues that "individual freedoms and rights, solidarity in the

development of all, equal conditions for an individual's self-realization, and preservation

of the natural and cultural heritage of humanity" were the party's "core values."[66] The

party thus committed itself to "peace, solidarity, environmental protection, social justice,

democracy, and socialist pluralism," as well as interparty democracy.[67] Agreeing to the

compromise name of Socialist Unity Party-Party of Democratic Socialism (SED-PDS),

the party congress also elected Gysi as Party President and Modrow as Deputy Chairman.

Modrow would govern at a distance from the party as before, particularly in light of

ongoing negotiations with the West German government.

In the meantime, the civil movement increased its push for dialogue with party-

state leaders, and to form an independent oversight body for the unelected Volkskammer

and government. In late November, Democracy Now released a statement calling for a

"four-sided table," bringing together the SED and its mass organizations, the bloc parties,

the churches, and the civil movements to begin "political dialogue on the future of our

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[65] Lothar Hornbogen, Detlef Nakath and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds. *Außerordentlicher Parteitag der SED/PDS: Protokoll der Beratungen am 8./9. und 16./17. Dezember 1989 in Berlin* (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 1999), 43-44.
[66] Ibid. 52-53.
[67] Ibid. 438-439.

country fairly and on an equal footing."[68] The United Left called for local "round tables"

in cities and factories to assume leadership from SED authorities. The group also

explicitly connected this to crafting an alternative to both real existing socialism and

liberal capitalism, calling for a nationwide "People's Congress" of all parties and groups

to make "the necessary decisions of social development" required to stave off "economic

and political catastrophe" and "create real people's power, the only alternative to the

previous systems in East and West!"[69] Ultimately, Krenz's departure, and the GDR's

declining stability, allowed negotiations to proceed.[70] Yet when civil groups and a new

SED leadership finally met for discussions in December at the Central Round Table

(CRT), East German society activists faced a breadth of seemingly insurmountable crises,

not least of which was to develop and present a compelling vision of a democratic

socialist GDR that could persuade East Germans to reject quick unification with the FRG.

5.3 *Creating Democratic Consensus: The Central Round Table and a New Constitution*

        Citizen activists and the reforming party-state met at the Central Round Table to

address these crises through consensus. From December 1989 to March 1990, the CRT

guided the GDR's transition from Marxism-Leninism to an egalitarian, ecological, and

direct democracy. With all major East German parties, mass organizations, and civil

groups participating in negotiations, the CRT came to serve as a quasi-parliament

representative of East German society as a whole. In addition to providing a regular

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[68] Stephan Bickhardt, "Für Vierseitigen Tisch, Volksabstimmung und freie Wahlen," *Demokratie Jetzt. Zeitung der Bürgerbewegung* 4 (Nov. 1989), https://www.ddr89.de/dj/DJ_Zeitung_4.html (accessed June 5, 2021).

[69] RHG VL 02, "Wir brauchen einen Volkskongress! Erklärung der Initiative Vereinigte Linke der DDR," Dec. 9, 1989, 54.

[70] Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 162-163.

social forum and investigating party-state actions and abuses, the CRT created a dedicated working group to writing a new constitution for the GDR. This provisional legal basis would enshrine longstanding ideals of social equality with direct democracy and human rights protections as the state's legal obligations. East German citizens contributed their own ideals to the working group, while bloc party members and legal experts worked with civil activists to shape a compelling alternative to both real existing socialism and liberal capitalism. By early 1990, however, East Germans continued to emigrate west, and the Modrow government's negotiations with the FRG effectively halted in the lead-up to the March 18 general election. The constitutional working group thus resolved to draft a complete constitution to ensure that East German ideals had a legal basis equal to that of the FRG's Basic Law, and could be integrated into any future German legal system that emerged from unification. By April 4, 1990, the working group submitted its draft, and vision for a democratic and socialist GDR, to the newly-elected Volkskammer.

The CRT first convened on December 7, 1989, as a forum for all major social groups in the GDR to collectively work out solutions to the country's crises. In time, however, the CRT emerged as the seat of the GDR's ideal authority, holding Modrow's unelected government to account while emphasizing consensus between participating groups, who had a relatively equal number of delegates and could not hold to extreme positions without losing support from other groups.[71] Between regular meetings of the main body, several CRT working groups assessed a range of issues, including economic and administrative reform, youth and women's rights, and social justice. The CRT also

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[71] Rogner, *Der Verfassungsentwurf*, 25.

provided civilian oversight for the Stasi, which Modrow's government had proved unwilling to wholly abolish.[72] Given the civil movement's commitment to environmental protection, the CRT's ecology working group also investigated the party-state's responsibility for the GDR's pollution. In January 1990, the group determined that Honecker, Stoph, Mielke, and economic chief Günter Mittag typically made environmental decisions through informal discussions, leading to "shortsighted" policies ultimately subordinate to economic concerns and "in agreement with the desired image of socialism." These men also regularly falsified published environmental data, reducing the offices of the Ministry of Environmental Protection to "mere alibi-organs or henchmen for the disinformation of citizens" – and even this work "was viewed with the greatest distrust in the Central Committee," at times leading to reprimands and firings. The working group also commended Hans Reichelt's efforts to address the most pressing environmental problems "verifiably until the end of 1989" and to protect environmental research, despite Mittag's paradoxical "general belief in technology and hostility to science." The group acknowledged that Reichelt's recommendations were "just as constantly ignored" by the old leadership "as those of the artists and the churches."[73]

In addition to fostering debate and pursuing investigations, CRT members also resolved to draft a new constitution that would synthesize the GDR's longstanding ideal of social equality with the direct democratic, environmental, and human rights ideals of the civil movement. Convened at the first CRT session, the "Working Group – New

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[72] Modrow's government renamed the Stasi as the Office for National Security, which drew widespread criticism after it was revealed Stasi employees were destroying past records. This office was abolished only after civil protesters occupied the ministry's headquarters in January 1990.

[73] RHG ZRT 2/235, "Zu den Ursachen der bisherigen Nicht-Umweltpolitik der DDR"/Information 10/8, Jan. 29, 1990.

Constitution" included activists from all parties and groups, including Bernd Gehrke, Gerd Poppe, and Wolfgang Templin; Wolfgang Ullmann and Vera Wollenberger also participated intermittently.[74] Templin later described the group as professionally heterogeneous, with legal experts largely on the side of the bloc parties rather than the civil groups; nevertheless experts and activists collaborated in producing discussion papers and draft articles.[75] The working group was divided into four subgroups, addressing fundamental rights; social and political decision-making processes; property and economic organization; and state principles, state organization, and municipal autonomy.[76] The group first met on December 18, reporting at the next CRT meeting that in consultation with East and West German legal experts, they would draft basic constitutional principles, rather than a complete draft. In the meantime, the Volkskammer's constitutional committee would work on amending the 1968/74 constitution as an interim legal basis.[77] Jurist Karl-Heinz Schöneburg's initial report to the working group, coauthored by other experts including Klaus Emmerich of the GDR's mass trade union (FDGB), recommended a constitutional order combining socialist ideals with a liberal institutional basis, albeit with a strong socialist emphasis.[78] Not all working-group members agreed with this approach, and over time, balancing socialist and liberal elements proved to be the primary point of division in the working group's activities. Templin later recalled that members were split by a conservative or radical

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[74] Uwe Thaysen, ed., *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch der DDR: Wortprotokoll und Dokumente*, vol. 1 (Weisbaden: Westdeutscher, 2000), 48-51. See also Thaysen, *Der Runde Tisch, Oder: Wo bleib das Volk?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1990), 146-147.

[75] Wolfgang Templin, "Der Verfassungsentwurf des Runden Tisches," *Gewerkschaftliche Monatsheft* (Jul. 5, 1990): 371.

[76] Thaysen, *Wo bleib das Volk?*, 144-145.

[77] Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch*, vol. 1, 152-153. For the Dec. 19 report, see Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch*, vol. 5, 28.

[78] BArch DA 3/36, "Grundsätze für eine neue Verfassung der DDR," Dec. 1989, 9-30.

democratic understanding of constitutional law, and the extent to which the state should regulate economic activity.[79]

Consequently, throughout January and February 1990 the working group reached only a general ideal consensus on individual and social rights, and state responsibilities in guaranteeing those rights. By mid-January, the group agreed that the constitution should begin with fundamental "value positions... capable of consensus in our country," that state institutions should be based on popular sovereignty and the separation of powers, and that "human rights and the basic rights of citizens should be of decisive importance... expressly formulated as obligations of state action."[80] Subgroups were then assigned to draft discussion papers on groups of rights central to the GDR's socialist and revolutionary imaginary.[81] In its report, the environmental rights subgroup affirmed the environmental movement's experiences in the 1980s, arguing that society's "claim to the maximum satisfaction of constantly growing needs," as well as the restriction of available information, led to widespread pollution and resource depletion in the GDR. The group argued that in order to effectively safeguard East Germans' right to a clean environment, protection must encompass all relevant sections of the constitution, especially economic production, political decision-making, and state organization, and required an "environmental control authority" to punish polluters.[82] The human and basic rights group, including Rosemarie Will of the SED-PDS and Bernd Gehrke, systematized rights in a hierarchy of individual freedom, social equality, solidarity, and justice. The group

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[79] Templin, "Der Verfassungsentwurf des Runden Tisches," 371-372.
[80] BArch DA 3/36, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 12.1.90," 68.
[81] BArch DA 3/36, "Protokoll der Sitzung vom 17.1.90," 92.
[82] BArch DA 3/36, "Grundsätzliche Überlegungen zur Festschreibung von Natur- und Umweltschutz in einer neuen Verfassung," Jan. 30, 1990, 109-111.

then outlined how constitutional rights complaints could be made against the executive, judiciary, or legislature via a constitutional court, as well as the possibility of an independent ombudsman.[83] At a subsequent session, Tatjana Böhm of the Independent Women's Association (UFV) and Klaus Emmerich of the FDGB also presented on gender equality and protections for workers, families, youth, and the disabled.[84] By late February, the subgroup for property and economic relations presented their work as well, situating the new GDR's economic rights in a mixed-ownership "social market economy" that "must guarantee entrepreneurial freedom and define the economic regulatory powers of the state."[85] Taken together, these basic positions would create a constitution that integrated individual rights with extensive social rights, along with significant state regulation of economic activity by emphasizing workers' rights and environmental protection.

The working group also received suggestions from groups and citizens across the GDR, expressing old and new ideal practices that should be included in the constitution. The Berlin section of the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters, the official group representing antifascists persecuted during Nazi rule, wrote to CRT moderator Martin Ziegler to argue that "the ideals of antifascism also form an important, recognized basis for renewal," especially given the rise in fascist violence.[86] Others expressed a clear

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[83] BArch DA 3/36, "Vorlage zum Problem der Systematik, der Schranken und der Grundrechtsgarantie...," Jan. 31, 1990, 112-116. Legal scholar Rosemarie Will participated in the reform-oriented "Modern Socialism" research circle at Humboldt University, that examined socialist history and its imaginary to modernize socialism in the GDR. Predictably, the group's members opposed to unification. See Rainer Land, ed., *Das Umbaupapier (DDR). Argumente gegen die Wiedervereinigung* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1990).

[84] BArch DA 3/37, "Grundsätzliche Überlegungen zur Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, zur Kinder-, Alten- und Behindertenproblematik in einer neuen Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," Feb. 6, 1990, 14-17.

[85] BArch DA 3/37, "Grundsätzlich Ausgangspunkte der Arbeitsgruppe," Feb. 28, 1990, 55-56.

[86] BArch DA 3/38, letter from the Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR to Herr Ziegler, Dec. 5, 1990, 6-7.

support for Marxist-Leninist practices: Herr S. from Leipzig presented his own draft

constitution for a "democratic socialist society," albeit with articles mandating the death

penalty for disseminating "fascist and militarist propaganda," based on the elimination of

"fascism, militarism, and capitalism" from the GDR.[87] Others reimagined the GDR's

administrative institutions. Herr A. of Berlin argued against reinstituting the old five

states of the SBZ, proposing instead nine administrative regions and Berlin, Leipzig,

Dresden, and Rostock as self-administered cities for a more equitable, confederal state

structure.[88] Other still argued for expanded rights and protections, drawing explicitly on

the revolution of 1989. Frau W. of Berlin called for enshrining "grassroots democratic

forms" in the new constitution, in order to make parliamentary and government work

more "transparent, controlled, and controllable, and more open to influence for citizens,"

especially between elections.[89] And a group for people with disabilities in Erfurt sent a

draft constitutional article guaranteeing equal opportunity for disabled persons across all

social institutions, including "the basic right to optimal education as well as the basic

right to work according to their abilities, skills, and qualifications."[90]

    As more East Germans emigrated west, and the Modrow government sought

financial assistance from the FRG during early spring 1990, however, CRT members

faced the increasing likelihood of some form of unification as they wound up their work.

The constitutional group thus sought to avoid unification under the Basic Law's Article

23, which would simply bring the former GDR under existing FRG law, and instead opt

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[87] BArch DA 3/38, letter from Herr S. to the Ministerrat and CRT secretariat, Jan. 9, 1990, 13-37.
Ironically, the word "capitalism" was crossed out in the text.
[88] BArch DA 3/38, letter from Herr A. to the CRT secretariat, Dec. 1989, 43-46a.
[89] BArch DA 3/38, letter from Frau W. to the "Arbeitsgruppe Recht und Verfassung," Feb. 16, ,1990, 107.
[90] BArch DA 3/38, letter from Initiativgruppe zur Gründung eines Behindertenverbandes to Ziegler, Mar. 6, 1990.

for Article 146, which would require a national referendum and the drafting of a new all-German constitution. With a complete draft, civil activists would be in a strong position to argue for including socialist and direct democratic ideals into the new German constitution. In this spirit, the CRT passed a formal rejection of admission to the FRG under Article 23 on February 19, 1990, which had arisen in a meeting between Kohl and Modrow a week prior. Although Kohl denied this was his government's position, Wolfgang Ullmann (now also a minister in the Modrow government) described the action as an "Anschluss," or annexation, as Hitler's 1938 occupation of Austria was known, that would also bring the former GDR into West Germany's NATO membership. The IFM, Democracy Now, and United Left strongly protested this possibility, and along with Ullmann argued for accession according to Article 146.[91] As the CRT approached its final session on March 12, the working group resolved to continue its work, and complete the draft after the March 18 elections. Although the CDU and Democratic Awakening took a more ambivalent position towards a new constitution after March 12, the PDS supported this publicly. In its internal policy discussions, the party's own constitutional group argued that a new constitution would be necessary "to preserve the values, achievements, and relationships from the overall failed socialism... and must also be brought into the whole of Germany."[92] By this logic, in the eventuality of a national referendum, a new GDR and potentially all-German constitution would enshrine the democratic and socialist ideals of the revolution.

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[91] Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch*, vol. 3, 786-787; see also BArch DA 3/37, "Vorlage 13/14," Feb. 19, 1990, 36; "Minderheitsvotum der Vereinigte Linke zur Vorlage 13/14..." and "Votum der Demokratie Jetzt zur Vorlage 13/14...," Feb. 19, 1990, 35.

[92] BArch DY 3/37, "Protokoll der Arbeitsgruppe Neue Verfassung," Mar. 7, 1990, 88-89, and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung – Archiv Demokratischer Sozialismus (RLS-ADS) VK/10. WP-82, "Standpunkt zur Ausarbeitung einer neuen Verfassung der DDR," Mar. 8, 1990, 53-59.

Given the rising stakes of the constitutional draft in shaping possible unification terms, the working group approached their task with idealism and pragmatism. Templin recalled that the group initially hoped to use the constitution to give the GDR an equal legal standing in a new German confederation, with the Basic Law as a point of reference but not the "sole standard of discussion." However, after the CRT moved elections from May to March 1990, the group understood that quick unification was more likely, and a complete, ratified constitution could be used as a means to negotiate better unification terms for East Germans, even if the FRG held a more dominant position.[93] Bernhard Schlink, a West German legal scholar invited by Rosemarie Will to advise the group, reflected later that this tempered some of the civil activists' "revolutionary" idealism. Although Schlink recalled that after one meeting, the group "sat together and dreamed and raved about when the draft constitution was ready, to travel to bookshops in the GDR, to do constitutional readings" and engage in public discussions about the draft, CDU and other bloc party representatives had the "expressed or unspoken reservation" that "the actual political game would not start until after the Volkskammer election in March."[94] Wolfgang Ullmann, although participating in the working group "more or less on the sidelines," found the group's draft to be "an authentic charter of what the citizens' movements and the parties of the old Volkskammer together wanted to retain as the result of the transformation of our country." Yet he also recognized that Kohl's government found this constitution unacceptable from the beginning, and never established an official

[93] Templin, "Der Verfassungsentwurf des Runden Tisches," 372-373.
[94] Bernhard Schlink, "Verfasst euch!," Mar. 14, 2019, https://blog.berlinerfestspiele.de/verfasst-euch/ (accessed July 4, 2021).

contact with the CRT, preferring instead to negotiate with the unelected Modrow government. [95]

The constitutional working group presented sections of its draft to the final CRT assembly on March 12, while a smaller "editorial group" continued working on the draft until offering a complete version to the newly elected Volkskammer on April 4. Introducing the drafted sections, Gerd Poppe elaborated that the length of the completed draft would extend to "120 or 140 articles," rather than the thirty-seven available at that time.[96] Despite this, Poppe argued that the draft constitution offered the GDR "equal standing" with the FRG in future negotiations on unification, and explicitly sought to prevent unification under Article 23.[97] After a lengthy debate, including criticisms from the SPD, the CRT resolved that the completed draft be submitted to the Volkskammer, made available for public discussion, and put to a referendum on June 17, in commemoration of the June 1953 Uprising.[98] In the meantime, the editorial group continued their work, meeting several times a week in frenetic sessions. The group also consulted with FRG constitutional expert Axel Azzola, who advised that Article 23 did not explicitly forbid a new all-German constitution, and negotiations over the terms of a unification treaty would be more decisive. The editorial group's PDS representative, Karl-Friedrich Gruel, recommended that his party's leadership should insist that pro-constitution ministers like Ullmann be retained in the new government to negotiate any

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[95] Bernhard Maleck, *"Ich werde nicht schweigen". Gespräche mit Wolfgang Ullmann* (Berlin: Dietz, 1991), 82.

[96] For the sections made available at the time, see Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch der DDR* v.5, 668-712.

[97] Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch der DDR*, vol. 4, 1097.

[98] Ibid. 1096-1112.

unification treaty.[99] Once finished, the group then submitted the full draft to the Volsksammer, arguing that "we have found appropriate constitutional regulations based on the standards of modern constitutional thought for the problems our country is facing," and that "the draft represents a coherent and coordinated regulation necessary for the establishment and functioning of a democratic and social constitutional state [*demokratischen und sozialen Rechtsstaates*]."[100]

The complete draft constitution synthesized the GDR's longstanding ideals of equality and collective rights with the direct democratic, environmental, and human rights ideals of the civil movement. The preamble, written by Christa Wolf at the invitation of Klaus Emmerich, anchored the constitution in "the best humanist traditions to which the best men and women of all classes of our people have contributed," and the "revolutionary renewal" of 1989.[101] The constitution thus sought to establish a "democratic community of solidarity," where citizens would work together, and with the state, to ensure the dignity and freedom of the individual, equal rights for all, and a protected environment. The body of the draft defined human, civil, and social rights, some of which existed in the GDR and FRG, and some of which did not. Existing GDR rights included in the draft constitution but not the Basic Law included Article 4, Section 3, which provided for on-demand abortions; Article 25, which provided the right to housing, and tasked the state with the construction of homes for the elderly and disabled; and Article 27, Section 1 which provided the right to work or state assistance in finding work, and mandated special protection for "apprentices, pregnant women, single parents,

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[99] RLS-ADS VK/10. WP-82, "Information zur Problematik der deutschen Einheit – Standpunktbildung in der Arbeitsgruppe 'Neue Verfassung'," Mar. 27, 1990, 60-64.
[100] RHG ZRT 9/695, letter from the Arbeitsgruppe "Neue Verfassung" to the Volkskammer, Apr. 4, 1990.
[101] BArch DA 3/38, letter from Emmerich to Wolf, Mar. 21, 1990, 137.

the sick, working people with disabilities and older working people" against

discrimination. The draft constitution also guaranteed individual and social rights that

went beyond both the 1974 constitution and the Basic Law, including Article 27, Section

2, which abolished conscription; Article 28, which provided for workers' participation in

the economic, social, and personnel decisions of their companies; Article 33, which

provided for specific environmental protection; and Article 35, which provided protection

and representation for civil groups in policymaking. Taken together, these articles were

an interconnected system of individual and social rights. Rather than simply mandating

that the state protect equality and a basic living standard, the draft constitution's articles

promoted citizen participation in government and economic decisions, which in turn

would strengthen and specify the necessary laws and practices to ensure a more just,

egalitarian, and democratic society.

The draft constitution also dealt with the issue of reunification, effectively

ensuring that once ratified, its expanded rights protections would be included in any

future German constitution. Again, wishing to avoid accession under Article 23 of the

Basic Law and maintain a measure of GDR sovereignty, the working group included

Article 134, which mandated that reunification with the FRG be agreed upon by both

German states, approved by a two-thirds majority in the Volkskammer, and would

automatically convene an all-German constitutional assembly. Moreover, Article 132

also required that the "human and civil rights" guaranteed in the GDR constitution would

extend to state (*Länder*) law even after unification, obviating the Basic Law's Article 31,

which established the precedence of federal over state law. This arrangement could only

be modified by the consent of all states on the territory of the GDR. In effect, the working

group sought to guarantee that the rights and protections provided in the draft constitution would likely prevail in the GDR in perpetuity. Moreover, the draft's Article 136 acted as an additional hurdle to unification under the Basic Law's Article 23, stipulating that the only avenue for the constitution to be repealed, once approved, would be the adoption of a new all-German constitution by referendum following a constitutional convention.[102]

In effect, the CRT constitutional working group evolved with ongoing shifts towards unification with the FRG. What began as a forum for the GDR's democratic socialist transformation evolved into a visionary and pragmatic means to synthesize and legally enshrine East Germany's longstanding and revolutionary ideals. Rather than a group of starry-eyed idealists imagining a utopian state beyond Eat Germans' real concerns, the constitutional working group anticipated unification under unequal terms, seeking to preserve as many individual and social rights for their fellow citizens as possible. Through its final draft, the working group also attempted to provide East German leaders with the legal basis to incorporate the ideals of 1989 into any future all-German constitution. Once the GDR's new government signaled their disinterest, and even contempt, for this path, working group members resolved to pursue it through grassroots activism.

5.4 *Unification: Majority Rule and the End of Direct Democratic Consensus*

Following the victory of pro-unification parties in the Volkskammer elections of March 18 and the introduction of majority rule, negotiations between the new East German government and the FRG led to a rapid unification of the two states. Former

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[102] BArch DA 3/42, "Die Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Entwurf der Arbeitsgruppe 'Neuen Verfassung der DDR' des Runden Tisches," Apr. 4, 1990, 214-263.

CRT working group members, some of whom also held seats in the new Volkskammer, pressed the new government to put their draft to a public referendum and prevent unification under Article 23 of the Basic Law. When the Volkskammer voted against doing so on April 19, these civil activists, especially Gerd Poppe and Wolfgang Ullmann, along with supporters in the PDS, pressed for a grassroots movement to generate popular support for the CRT draft constitution. Although these efforts were unsuccessful in securing a constitutional referendum or preventing the privatization of East Germany's state-owned companies, the final Unification Treaty allowed for a new all-German constitutional commission to review the Basic Law and possibly replace it. Thus a number of civil movement activists, as well as constitutional reformers from West Germany, convened the Board of Trustees for a Democratically-Constituted Federation of German States (Kuratorium) in July 1990 to generate a broad-based movement for a new German constitution. Meeting through several large congresses in 1990 and 1991, this group integrated the CRT draft into the Basic Law, crafting a new constitutional framework for an egalitarian, ecologically sustainable, peaceful, and direct democratic Federation of German States.

The ongoing emigration crisis, as well as the effects this had on economic productivity and basic social order, meant that by spring 1990 some form of unification was needed – the only open question would be under what legal auspices. Modrow admitted as much in his "Germany, united Fatherland" speech on February 1, envisioning a two-state federation on the basis of an "economic, monetary, and transport union" and "common institutions and bodies," along with a "unified Parliament which decides a uniform and consistent constitutional government based in Berlin." This plan also

encompassed longstanding East German and civil movement ideals: This future German state would also be militarily neutral, and committed to the "democratic, patriotic, and progressive ideas and movements... and the humanist and antifascist traditions of the German people."[103] West German leaders, however, took a more pragmatic position. During Modrow's visit to Bonn in mid-February, Kohl signaled that financial aid would not be forthcoming without more substantive steps towards unification, which should be decided by a democratically-elected GDR government after March 18.[104] Thus East Germans themselves would choose between preserving some form of an egalitarian and direct democratic GDR in a coequal confederation, or quick unification with the FRG under the Basic Law's liberal capitalist framework.

The March 1990 elections became a referendum on these two paths. The East German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), once a loyal bloc party in the SED-led National Front, now allied itself with its western counterpart, and the Kohl government's plan of quick unification. The CDU was joined by the German Social Union (DSU), a GDR counterpart to the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), and the center-right civil group Democratic Awakening, to campaigned together as the Alliance for Germany. Kohl personally traveled throughout the GDR during the election, promising prosperity and uninterrupted social welfare provisions through a rapid monetary union. Kohl falsely reframed the ideals of 1989 as inherently antisocialist, stating that East Germans "have clearly shown through their demonstrations that they no longer want socialism," and instead "know that a social market economy can bring them – as in West Germany –

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[103] Zimmerling and Zimmerling, *Neue Chronik DDR* vol. 4/5 (Berlin: Tribüne, 1990), 156.
[104] Thaysen, *Der Runde Tisch, Oder*, 138-139.

freedom, affluence, social security, and a peaceful and secure future."[105] The Alliance for

Germany's glossy election material strongly emphasized these antisocialist arguments,

with one poster declaring "socialism has to go" because "for forty years socialism has

cheated us of the fruits of our labor, has intimidated and imprisoned us, has brought our

country to the brink of ruin, and drove hundreds of thousands" into emigration.[106] The

PDS rejected this position, arguing that East German ideals, including the right to work,

free education, public ownership of the economy, and antifascism and internationalism

transcended the SED dictatorship, and demanded that on this basis the GDR "participate

in the unification process as a sovereign state."[107] New Forum, Democracy Now, and the

IFM, campaigning together as the party Alliance 90, championed the ideals of 1989,

arguing for a more equal unification based on citizen control over businesses and local

government, the rights to work and housing, and better environmental protection.[108]

The results of the March 18 elections delivered a victory for pro-unification

parties, and signaled the GDR's transition from a direct democracy of consensus to one

of majority rule. The Alliance for Germany coalition won 48.15 percent of the vote,

which along with the SPD's 21.9 percent share of the vote, ensured that unification would

proceed under Article 23. By contrast, the PDS 16.33 gained percent, the Green Party

won 2 percent, and Alliance 90 only 2.9 percent – the latter illustrating a surprising

abandonment of the civil groups that initiated and led the revolution.[109] The new

Volkskammer then convened to elect CDU party leader Lothar de Maizière as prime

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[105] Jarausch and Gransow, *Uniting Germany*, 122-123.
[106] RHG WU 256, "Allianz für Deutschland," 11.
[107] Jarausch and Gransow, *Uniting Germany*, 120-121.
[108] RHG WU 256, "Bürger für Bürger – was heißt das?", 8.
[109] Jarausch and Gransow, *Uniting Germany*, 128.

minister on April 12. De Maizière organized a grand coalition: In addition to Alliance for

Germany, the SPD as well as the Liberal Bloc of the Liberal Democratic Party of

Germany (LDPD) and Free Democratic Party (FPD) joined the government as well. The

PDS, Greens, Alliance 90, and the United Left served as unallied opposition. Although

SPD members at times voted with the opposition as well, their combined efforts could

not prevent the de Maizière government from pressing forward with rapid reunification.

After receiving the CRT draft constitution on April 4, the Volkskammer discussed

the text twice, leading to a debate over the necessity and purpose of a new constitution,

and by extension if the majority government could meaningfully legislate on behalf of all

East Germans. On April 19, Gerd Poppe of Alliance 90 introduced a measure to put the

draft constitution to review by the Volkskammer. Poppe defended the draft as an ideal

consensus of all parties and groups at the CRT, who agreed that it "would make a

significant contribution to making the conscious, politically-active individual the mature

and creative realization of their human and basic rights, and the bearer of popular

sovereignty." Poppe then argued that adopting the new constitution would give the GDR

a stable legal basis, adding that the "entire design" of the constitution rested on human

and basic rights, and "the experiences of the citizens of the GDR, both with dictatorship

and with the democratization process, must not be wasted." Poppe then adding that while

East Germans had voted for unification, they had not voted for the Basic Law, or for the

"simple imposition of another legal order." Poppe cited an April 10 opinion poll,

conducted in the GDR by a West German institute, that found 42 percent of GDR citizens

wanted a new GDR constitution, 38 percent wanted a new all-German constitution, and

only 9 percent wanted to adopt the Basic Law "in its current form." Yet Brigitta Kögler,

DA member and deputy chair of the Volkskammer's constitutional committee, largely

disregarded these points, arguing paradoxically that the March 18 election repudiated the

constitution of 1968/74 which nevertheless could serve as the GDR's legal basis until

unification; a new constitution would simply "be an obstacle to rapid German

unification." The DSU's speaker largely reiterated Kögler's points, while the SPD's

speaker, Richard Schröder, proposed a gradual review and adoption of the draft's

sections, beginning first with human and basic rights. Thus the Volkskammer narrowly

voted against moving the draft constitution to committee review.[110]

One week later, Alliance 90 attempted move the constitutional debate forward

again, this time emphasizing the CRT draft's protections for workers against the

increasing likelihood of privatization. Wolfgang Ullmann spoke on behalf of the party,

arguing that unification under Article 23 would mean that the "right to self-determination

of the GDR population is once again reduced to mere acclamation, as in the previous

forty years." Ullmann added that only a new constitution would protect East Germans

from privatization and giving "most favored nation clauses to the highest earners." Rather

than debate these points directly, the CDU/DA representative reiterated the party's earlier

position, adding that "packages" of constitutional amendments would be gradually passed

as a legal interim until unification. Jürgen Schwarz of the DSU added that his party's

position had not changed since April 19, and that "we do not consider endless discussion

about regulating a transition phase to be necessary."[111] Thus Alliance 90's second motion

failed as well, increasing the likelihood that any future privatization of East Germany's

state-owned companies would not protect workers from layoffs.

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[110] BArch DA 1/00 C 277, protocols of the third session of the tenth Volkskammer, Apr. 19, 1990, 51-60.
[111] BArch DA 1/00 C 277, protocols of the fifth session of the tenth Volkskammer, Apr. 26, 1990, 123-127.

Despite this setback, parties and civil groups rallied grassroots support a referendum on the CRT draft, lobbying the Volkskammer and its party factions throughout spring and early summer via letters and petitions. In fact, already in January 1990, civil activists Ralf Donner, Antje Hellem, and others founded the Democracy Initiative 90 to promote a new GDR constitution with direct democratic protections, including a path for citizen initiatives to be put to a referendum through petitions to the Volkskammer.[112] As the CRT draft took shape over spring 1990, this group also advocated its adoption through letters to the Volkskammer, reminding its members that "it was not parties that brought about the revolution, it was the people who practiced their sovereignty and thus made your presence in the first freely elected parliament possible."[113] Both the PDS and Alliance 90 also embarked upon a public campaign to pressure the Volkskammer to review the constitutional draft and put it to a referendum: As early as April 9, the PDS's Political System Commission recommended that the party should "come to an understanding with the parties and movements that are also in opposition about joint political actions and public campaigns" to promote the constitution if the Volkskammer blocked considering the draft, and vowed to print hundreds of thousands of copies through its own publishing house, Dietz.[114] District offices of groups belonging to Alliance 90 sent petitions bearing hundreds of signatures to Volkskammer President Sabine Bergmann-Pohl, declaring that "this draft constitution neither hampers

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[112] RHG GP 036, "Flensburger Hefte/Sonderheft Nr. 5: Volkssouveränität und Volksgesetzgebung – Die Kernpunkte der Demokratiefrage Teil I," 9. See also Bärbel Weixner, *Direkte Demokratie in den Bundesländern. Verfassungsrechtlicher und empirischer Befund als politikwissenschaftlicher Sicht* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), 57.

[113] RLS-ADS VK/10. WP-89, letter from Demokratie-Initiative 90 to the Volkskammer, May 8, 1990, 133.

[114] RLS-ADS VK/10. WP-08, "Standpunkt zum Entwurf der Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik...," Apr. 9, 1990, 52.

nor delays the unity of Germany. Rather, it gives the GDR the necessary legal security and dignity in this process."[115]

Private citizens also expressed their support for the draft constitution in letters to the Volkskammer. Frau S. argued that as a retiree, she was cautious about unification under Article 23, and the possible loss of her pension; she thus supported a referendum on the CRT constitution and reminded Bergmann-Pohl to "act for our people!" Also writing to Bergmann-Pohl, Frau Z. of Magdeburg protested the Volkskammer's refusal to review the CRT draft, arguing that the it had been "received by many citizens with great approval," despite being "withheld from broad sections of the population," published only in *Neues Deutschland* and a limited edition of brochures. Arguing that "the draft is already in excellent form" and would only need minor amendments, Frau Z. then demanded that the draft be put to a referendum without delay. She concluded by reminding Bergmann-Pohl that "we are the people" – a key slogan of the civil movement during the revolution of 1989 – and submitted over eight hundred signatures to support this point.[116] Yet the response from Bergmann-Pohl's secretary hardly reflected the revolution's ideals of direct democracy and the state's accountability to all citizens: While thanking Frau Z. for her letter, the secretary stated that the Volkskammer was "legitimized by the election... to make fundamental decisions based on social necessities."[117] Given that a plurality of East Germans had voted for a government

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[115] BArch DA 1/16635, "Das NEUE FORUM fordert einen Volksentscheid über den Verfassungsentwurf des Runden Tisches," May 2, 1990; see also "Wir fordern die öffentliche Diskussion des Verfassungsentwurfes für die DDR – erarbeitet durch den Zentralen Runden Tisch, des Staatsubertragen und dazu Volksabschied!", Jun. 6, 1990.
[116] BArch DA 1/16634a, letter from Frau Z. to Bergmann-Pohl, May 10, 1990.
[117] BArch DA 1/16634a, letter from Dr. Schmidt to Frau Z., May 30, 1990.

promising rapid unification, the Alliance for Germany coalition felt little need to address the concerns of those who thought differently.

The question of the GDR's constitutional basis remained in limbo until political expediency necessitated government action. On the advice of the Kohl government, throughout May and June the de Maizière government drafted a set of "constitutional principles," largely to provide a legal basis for privatizing the GDR's "peoples-owned" enterprises via a state holding trust, the *Treuhandanstalt* or *Treuhand*. The concept of a state trust in fact began with the civil movement itself, with Wolfgang Ullmann and others initially envisioning an equitable distribution of shares in state-owned property to each East German citizen.[118] On May 2, de Maizière completed negotiations with the Kohl government regarding the Monetary, Economic, and Social Union treaty, which would introduce the West German D-Mark to the GDR, with the FRG's central bank as the state's financial authority.[119] Yet since this contravened the 1968/74 constitution that was still in effect, the new "constitutional principles" allowed the government to negotiate its financial sovereignty and initiate privatization.

These "principles" were in turn put to a floor debate in the Volkskammer on May 17. Brigitta Kögler, speaking for the CDU/DA, acknowledged that the CRT draft's social market provisions, such as the right to work, were not included, as "there is no such thing as a little bit of a market economy," and implored members to vote for the proposal as "it is the quick route [to unification] that the people want." The PDS, Greens, and Alliance

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[118] RHG WU 312, "Gesetz zur Überfhrung vom vergesellschaftlichen Volkseigentum in Privateigentum und andere Eigentumsformen," Feb. 28, 1990, 14-16, and Thaysen, *Der Zentrale Runde Tisch*, vol. 4, 1079-1088.

[119] Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier, eds., *The East German Economy 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39-40.

90 criticized the "principles" as shoddy justification for the currency treaty, with Ullmann warning of "mass unemployment, legal uncertainty, [and] merciless economic war with all means of unfair competition," with the "constitutional principles" as the legal means to that end.[120] Despite the temporary defeat of the "principles," the Volkskammer voted the currency union into law on May 18, with effect on July 2, yielding the GDR's financial sovereignty to the FRG. The government then resubmitted its "constitutional principles" on June 17 – the originally planned date of the CRT draft constitutional referendum – where it again met with resistance from the PDS and Alliance 90. Ullmann reiterated his party's opposition to the new "principles," while Thomas Klein, United Left's sole representative in the Volkskammer, argued that "welfare cuts, mass unemployment, and the conversion of national wealth into welcome money for capital are never an acceptable price for civil liberties." Klein then added that the CRT constitution, while falling short of his own ideals of legally-anchored popular sovereignty, still originated in the "spirit of November." Klein reminded his colleagues that while some in the FRG believed "the GDR can be bought for D-Mark and NATO membership," this was not shared among many in the GDR. Klein then sharply criticized the government's practice of majority rule: "If a majority in this House – and the majority always forms the government with this claim, with this responsibility – also wants to occupy the general power for all decisions of the population at the same time, I think this is not legitimate. Here I mean that they have the power, but not the authority [*Legitimation*]."[121]

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[120] BArch DA 1/00 C 277, protocols of the seventh session of the tenth Volkskammer, May 17, 1990, 172-183.

[121] BArch DA 1/00 C 277, protocols of the fifteenth session of the tenth Volkskammer, Jun. 17, 1990, 543-555.

Nevertheless the Volkskammer adopted the "principles," and immediately thereafter allowed the *Treuhandanstalt* to privatize the GDR's "people's-owned" businesses.

With the passage of the currency union and the loss of any constitutional protections against privatization, former members of the CRT working group turned to a familiar ideal practice to generate support for a new, all-German constitution: grassroots activism. On May 25, and on behalf of the former CRT working group, Poppe sent invitations to dozens of leading East and West German politicians, activists, artists, and academics to participate in the first meeting of the Board of Trustees for a Democratically Elected Germany (Kuratorium) on June 16 in the former Reichstag building in Berlin – a day before the Volkskammer and Bundestag were to meet in their first joint session. Poppe outlined the Kuratorium as a citizen forum to "bring in the experiences and lessons from the history of both German states and to make them fruitful," in order to build "a new, peaceful, ecological, democratic, and social Germany in a historical act." In addition to Poppe and Ullmann, those in attendance included former dissidents Rudolf Bahro and Wolf Biermann, and CRT working group members Tatjana Böhm, Bernd Gehrke, Klaus Emmerich, Vera Wollenberger, Rosemarie Will, Wolfgang Templin, and Karl-Friedrich Gruel. Those unable to attend but expressing their support included Christa Wolf, former Aufbau Press director Walter Janka, and philosopher Jürgen Habermas.[122] In his speech to the Kuratorium, Ullmann spoke against the partisanship of parliamentary politics, invoking instead the "ideology-independent discourse" of the CRT, where decisions were made on the "burden of proof" and via "consensus" for the good of the country. Ullmann then called for this ideal practice to be applied in drafting a

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[122] RHG GP 036, "Aufruf zur Gründung eines Kuratoriums für ein demokratisch verfasstes Deutschland," May 25, 1990, 16-17; and "TeilnehmerInnenliste" and "UnterstützerInnen-Liste," Jun. 15, 1990, 44-45.

new constitution for a "Federation of German States," which would be "a completely new type of state" due to its basic ideal consensus.[123] Following a three-hour session, the Kuratorium ultimately voted to establish a leadership board and central office, and continue its work alongside the unification process.

Unification proceeded quickly. The two German states signed a Unification Treaty on August 31, which provided the accession of the five states of the former GDR into the FRG on the basis of Article 23 of the Basic Law. Nevertheless, Article 5 of the Unification Treaty provided for future amendments to the Basic Law, recommending that the "legislative bodies of the united Germany" address the possibility of a new all-German constitution and a referendum within two years of unification. Following the ratification of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany (or the Two Plus Four Agreement) on September 12, in which Germany's former occupying powers agreed to return sovereignty to both states, the Bundestag and Volkskammer passed the Unification Treaty on September 20, and the latter body held its final session on September 28. The two states were officially unified on October 3, 1990.

Through and following unification, the Kuratorium continued its work on a constitution for the Federation of German States, integrating the CRT draft constitution into the Basic Law. The group's "Constitution with a Referendum" Congress in Weimar in September drew nearly a thousand attendees from both German states, with speeches by Ullmann and others, and discussions between working groups in the style of the CRT, with an emphasis on social, human, and basic rights, as well as environmental protection,

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[123] Wolfgang Ullmann, *Verfassung und Parlament. Ein Beitrag zur Verfassungsdiskussion* (Berlin: Dietz, 1992), 71-81.

peace, and designing a democratic federal system.[124] The Kuratorium then convened a

second Congress in Potsdam in December to discuss the progress of its working groups

and the status of the constitutional movement. In its "Potsdam Declaration," the group

rejected the Kohl government's proposal for a joint Bundestag/Bundesrat constitutional

commission comprised of "party politicians and ministerial bureaucrats" that would

ignore "indispensable experiences in society." Instead, the group called for the Bundestag

to create a "constitutional council" (*Verfassungsrat*) comprised of various social groups,

as well as direct participation from German citizens, as "the social discussion and the

ability to publicly debate the new constitution will have a major impact on its content."[125]

In effect, this constitutional council was to function as a Round Table, coming to

decisions by consensus rather than majority rule. By its June 1991 meeting in Frankfurt

am Main, the Kuratorium presented its constitution. The draft integrated the CRT

provisions into the Basic Law's structure, providing for gender equality and abortions on

demand, the ability for popular initiatives and civil groups to introduce parliamentary

legislation, the right to work and housing, extensive personal data protections, and a

comprehensive commitment to balance economic production with ecological

sustainability.[126] Like the CRT draft, the German state emerging from this constitution

would play a central role in guaranteeing protections for individuals as well as society at

large, with an emphasis on providing social welfare, promoting direct democracy, and

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[124] RLS-ADS VK/10. WP-82, report from Karl-Friedrich Gruel to the PDS Political System Commission, Sept. 17, 1990, 270-285. See also RHG GP 036, "Dokumentation. Kongress 'Verfassung mit Volksentscheid'," Sept. 16, 1990, 111-114.

[125] RHG GP 036, "Potsdamer Erklärung. 'Verfassung für Deutschland'," Dec. 8, 1990, 172-173.

[126] Kuratorium für einen demokratischen verfaßten Bund deutscher Länder, ed., *Vom Grundgesetz zur deutschen Verfassung. Verfassungsentwurf und Denkschrift* (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 1991), 73-203.

ensuring that economic practices were fair to German workers, and did not destroy the natural environment.

Conclusion: 1989 and the Socialist Imaginary

Following the unification of the two German states, the territory of the former GDR entered an economic free fall, largely due to the moribund state of the East German economy before 1989 and widespread layoffs due to privatization through the *Treuhand*. Contrary to the Kohl government's expectations, privatization did not lead to a rush of Western investment; as unprofitable GDR factories and businesses were downsized or simply shut down, unemployment rose to fifteen percent by the mid-1990s, with many more East Germans underemployed in relation to their skills.[127] Consequently, unrest and political violence rose in frequency, especially attacks against minorities and terrorism. This violence also claimed the life of *Treuhand* administrator Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, who was shot by a sniper in his home on April 1, 1991. Although the far-left terrorist group Red Army Faction claimed responsibility for Rohwedder's assassination, rumors swirled in the press that the careful planning and lack of a definitive suspect pointed to involvement by former Stasi personnel. Regardless, Rohwedder's murder highlighted both the immense difficulties and upheaval of the years following unification, and the socialist imaginary's lingering, layered presence in the new Germany. The building housing the Treuhand was also the former seat of the People's Council and State Planning Commission (SPK), the site where protesting workers sparked the June 1953

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[127] Berghoff and Balbier, *The East German Economy,* 40-49.

Uprising, and where Erich Apel committed suicide over the perceived failure of the NES in 1964. In 1992, the building was renamed the Detlev Rohwedder House in his memory.

In January of 1991, a rather less sensational afterlife of unification played out as well. In accordance with Article 5 of the Unification Treaty, a Joint Constitutional Commission (GVK) of Bundestag and Bundesrat representatives convened to consider amendments of the Basic Law. Over the next eighteen months, the GVK debated various changes to the Basic Law, with Wolfgang Ullmann – now a member of the Bundestag – even participating in the proceedings. However, the GVK did not heed the Kuratorium's call for a constitutional commission with citizen participation, relying instead on politicians and constitutional experts to make relatively minor changes to the Basic Law, and incorporating only the personal data and some environmental protection clauses of the CRT and Kuratorium drafts.[128] With the conclusion of the GVK's work in summer 1993, further movement for a new constitution ended as well; the ideals of 1989 were, ultimately, to remain as such as the new Federal Republic shaped its ideal practice through a distinctly West German, antisocialist imaginary.

Nevertheless, the CRT and Kuratorium draft constitutions stand as expressions of East Germany's final ideal practice, one borne from several decades of conflict over ideal authority and what a more just society should look like. Given real existing socialism's social stalemate, caused by an unresponsive and ineffective party leadership, the civil opposition movement drew upon both a direct democratic and socialist dissident tradition to challenge the party-state's authority to dream and lead. In the 1980s, Church-based

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[128] Norbert Konegen and Peter Nitschke, eds., *Revision des Grundgesetzes? Ergebnisse der Gemeinsamen Verfassungskommission (GKV) des Deutschen Bundestags und des Bundesrates* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1997).

groups used human rights as an ideal discourse to highlight the party-state's failings, and

disrupted state rituals to show the limits of its power. In the course of the 1989

revolution, civil opposition groups mobilized mass protests to force Honecker's

resignation, and initiate a transformative movement from below.

Early calls for a democratized socialism changed after the opening of the Berlin

Wall into calls to preserve the GDR and reform the state through the CRT, which would

lead institutional reform and organize elections by consensus, while shaping a new state

via a new constitution. In the course of unification, however, the de Maziere and Kohl

governments pursued unification through majority rule, ensuring accession through

Article 23, which effectively brought FRG law and sovereignty to the former GDR. This

unification would come at the cost of quick privatization, which while intended to bring

prosperity for East Germans who largely voted for this ideal practice, in reality this

brought mass unemployment and long-term deindustrialization. The CRT and

Kuratorium draft constitutions, and the activists who wrote them, sought above all else to

prevent this outcome through instituting an egalitarian, ecological, and direct democratic

society based on extensive human, civil, and social rights guarantees; a parliamentary,

federal state that also gave significant powers to local communities and civil groups; a

regulated social market economy intended to protect workers from exploitation and

unemployment; and a state committed to peace, European integration, and international

solidarity in its foreign policy. These ideals stood at the core of the revolution of 1989,

and marked an ideal departure from both the Marxist-Leninist and liberal capitalist

societies that preceded it. Despite being denigrated and ignored after March 1990, these

ideals constitute the enduring legacy of the last revolution on German soil.

Conclusion

This work has argued that East Germans transformed their society according to ideal practices drawn from a socialist imaginary, with the ultimate aim of building a better socialist society. Activist groups also came into sharp conflict over who possessed the authority to imagine and practice these ideals, and who would be held responsible for their failure to become reality. From the late 1940s until the 1970s, the SED leadership claimed and exercised ideal authority over transforming East German society, until proving increasingly incapable of living up to its own ideals during the 1980s. Accordingly, the Church-based civil movement expanded its calls for ecological protection into a broader challenge to party-state authority, effectively calling for the SED to step aside and allow a more egalitarian, peaceful, and democratic socialist society to emerge from the grassroots. The civil opposition practiced these ideals during the revolution of 1989, but ultimately did not succeed in providing them an institutional basis after unification. Despite this outcome, the ideal practices examined in this work illustrate how the subjective and collective desire to strive for, and possibly attain, a better state of being is fundamental to understanding East German history.

Nearly three decades after unification, East German ideals, and their various historical interpretations, continue to play a role in contemporary German society. Activist groups across the political spectrum have especially drawn upon the legacy of 1989 to bolster their own ideal authority, most recently during the so-called European "migrant crisis" of 2014-2016. In late 2014, over six hundred thousand refugees applied for asylum in Germany, with most fleeing conflict and poverty in predominantly Muslim

countries.[1] In response, conservative nationalists based in the former GDR organized the group "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident" (Pegida), which drew explicitly on practices of the civil opposition movement to protest growing immigration. At "Monday demonstrations" in December 2014, tens of thousands of participants gathered to chant "We are the people!" in demonstrating their collective support for the "preservation and protection of our Christian-Jewish western culture."[2] However, Pegida's nationalist-conservative ideals stood at considerable odds with many 1989 activists' ideals of solidarity, equality, and inclusion. In turn, former VL members Bert Gehrke, Reinhard Schult, and Thomas Klein published a petition, "Pegida, Never Again!", which criticized both Pegida and those eastern Germans who voted for the liberal capitalist system that, in their view, caused the migrations to begin with:

> "We are the people," you exclaim
> '89 meant freedom, tolerance, an open world
> Visa-free till Hawaii was the motto
> and: the Wall must go
> But you want:
> Visa-free only for us
> The Wall must go, only for us
> The Wall is needed on the Mediterranean
> You want to watch when the wretched
> of the earth die on new walls
> On your walls
> Or you turn away
> to eat roast goose in peace
> and sing Christmas carols
> Jesus would have puked if he met you
> Have you ever asked yourself:
> Who supplies the weapons for the civil wars that drive people away?
> Who imposed neoliberalism on the world?

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[1] "The number of asylum applicants in the EU jumped to more than 625 000 in 2014," Eurostat press release, Mar. 20, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6751779/3-20032015-BP-EN.pdf/35e04263-2db5-4e75-b3d3-6b086b23ef2b (accessed Aug. 10, 2021).

[2] Maik Söhler, "Positionspapier der Pegida: Pegidisch für Anfänger," *taz*, Dec. 11, 2014, https://taz.de/Positionspapier-der-Pegida/!5026420/ (accessed Aug. 10, 2021).

Who drives them into inequality, poverty, need
Among us and in the south of the world?
And who produced the climate disasters
that made the Sahel hell?
Everybody already knows:
It's the system you couldn't get fast enough
To whom you sacrificed the experiment of '89
an attempt at alternative democracy
a free solidarity ecological
But you don't talk about this system
About capitalism and its vulgarities about interests
For this you protest against the weak
You don't dare to approach the mighty
Cowards
In Saxony, Muslims can only be found with a magnifying glass
But you are fighting the Islamization of the West
Your Occident is called "Dark Germany"
You smell of the provincial reek behind the Wall
Or the one in the valleys of the Alps
You do not speak for '89
You do not speak for any freedom movement
You are their shame
Shame on you
We didn't give a damn about your Occident in '89
We don't give a damn today either
Our solidarity is with the refugees
And we still say
another world is possible
another world is necessary
to bring down all walls

Dozens of former CRT, VL, and New Forum activists also signed the petition, staking

their claim to the ideals of 1989 as an egalitarian and anti-capitalist revolution.[3] By

January 2015, Germans across the political spectrum followed the group's example,

staging counterprotests that often dwarfed Pegida demonstrations. This display of social

consensus offered a powerful rebuke to Pegida's views, and opened a more critical debate

about East German history's role in shaping contemporary German society.

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[3] Anja Maier, "'Jesus hätte gekotzt'. Einstige DDR-Bürgerrechtler wenden sich gegen die 'Wir sind das Volk!'-Attitüde der Rechtspopulisten. Sie wollen Widerstand gegen sie anregen," *taz*, Dec. 22, 2014, https://taz.de/DDR-Oppositionelle-ueber-Pegida/!5025521/ (accessed Aug. 10, 2021).

In effect, the narrative of 1989 as a popular embrace of neoliberal democracy leading to a "coming to terms" with fascism and Marxism-Leninism remains a cornerstone of the FRG's identity, but has come under stronger criticism since the mid-2010s. In the 1990s, two official Bundestag Commissions of Inquiry into the "history and consequences of the SED dictatorship" and "overcoming" this dictatorship in the "process of German unity" shaped this narrative, while the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship (BzA) provided an ongoing institutional platform for its study and propagation. Yet the Pegida protests, and the resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia in the former GDR, also signaled the stark limits of this political-historical project. In 2016, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, a historian and expert advisor for both Commissions, criticized how federal institutes like the BzA effectively monopolized the study of East German history in the years since unification. Thus the "folk-pedagogical mandate" of the BzA reduced East German history to simple "lessons" in the pitfalls of socialist dictatorship. Given the "nationalism, racism, antisemitism, sexism, and homophobia" flourishing in the former GDR and across Eastern Europe, Kowalczuk argued that this mandate had clearly failed. To provide alternative interpretations of GDR history, and to better contextualize eastern Germany's present problems, the field needed to be separated from the "tight corset of state funding and reappraisal institutions" that served largely to justify the existing political order.[4]

Alternative interpretations of East German history and the socialist imaginary certainly exist, though often at the fringes of state-funded research and equally entwined with contemporary politics. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, the policy and research

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[4] Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, "Brotgelehrte, ade," *Der Freitag* 15 (2016), https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/brotgelehrte-ade (accessed July 4, 2021).

institute of the SED's successor party, Die Linke (The Left), regularly funds and

publishes research on East German history that generally criticizes SED abuses while

taking seriously the GDR's socialist identity and ideals. Neo-Marxist-Leninist parties,

such as the German Communist Party (DKP), Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany

(MLPD), and the Communist Organization (KO), however, staunchly defend the GDR

and much of the SED's practices. The KO is an interesting example of this approach.

Founded in 2018 as a splinter of the DKP, the KO has a far younger membership than

other Marxist-Leninist groups, and a strong online presence.[5] In addition to supporting

mutual aid among migrants, refugees, and other marginalized working class groups, the

KO also critically examines socialist history, including that of the GDR. While

acknowledging major failings in SED policy, especially under Honecker in the 1980s, the

group ultimately sees 1989 as a counterrevolution, a culmination of FRG efforts to

undermine the GDR, and discredit it through comparisons to the Third Reich. "Talk of

the 'two German dictatorships' is essential for this type of historiography," the group has

argued, adding that the "unscientific theory of totalitarianism," along with a "completely

empty equation of fascism and socialism," serves only to make the "bourgeois order of

the Federal Republic appear as the only truly democratic alternative." Referencing

Francis Fukuyama's oft-cited 1989 article "The End of History" that heralded the end of

both fascism and Marxism-Leninism as living ideologies, the group added that "the

mantra of the 1990s of the 'end of history'" had effectively excluded both positive

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[5] Ministerium für Inneres, Digitalisierung und Migration Baden-Württemburg, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2019* (Aalen: Wahl-Druck, 2020), 248.

assessments of East German history and political alternatives to neoliberalism.[6] In effect, the FRG's founding narrative assumed the end of ideological extremes on German soil through the revolution of 1989. Yet by the 2010s, a conservative nationalist movement, articulating grievances stemming in part from state policies after 1990, illustrated that assumption's fundamental myopia.

National-conservative groups in eastern Germany offer ideals of social justice and ethnonationalism that have resonated especially with workers. Local support for Pegida and the political party Alternative for Germany (AfD) stems only somewhat from East German experiences. Skepticism towards elites among older eastern Germans might originate in part from mistrust towards the SED, and a popular memory of the 1989 revolution as a moment of anti-elite citizen sovereignty. Calls of "We are the people!" at the 2014 Pegida protests certainly invoke this legacy. However, developments since unification hold far more significance. Eastern Germans are generally underrepresented among political elites in the FRG, and longstanding promises to equalize living conditions between western and eastern Germany have largely failed to become reality. Consequently, low-skill and low-income groups in eastern Germany feel forgotten by their political leaders, and view migrant workers and asylum seekers as competitors for the same low-paying jobs.[7] As a result, the AfD has increasingly targeted working-class voter concerns by defending social welfare as the reserve of "a clearly defined and limited community" of German citizens. The AfD's right wing, led by Björn Höcke, has

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[6] Kommunistische Organisation, "30 Jahre Konterrevolution – Die Sieger schreiben die Geschichte," Nov. 12, 2019, https://kommunistische.org/stellungnahmen/30-jahre-konterrevolution-die-sieger-schreiben-die-geschichte/ (accessed Aug. 10, 2021).

[7] Maria Pesthy, Mathhias Mader, and Harald Schoen, "Why is the AfD so Successful in Eastern Germany? An Analysis of the Ideational Foundations of the AfD Vote in the 2017 Federal Election," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 62 (2021), 75-76.

also effectively criticized the center-left SPD for repudiating its commitment to social welfare in preference for "policies for the ten percent winners of globalization." The AfD's stance on immigration has also allowed it to capture almost half a million voters from the pro-immigration Die Linke between 2013 and 2018.[8] Taken together, growing support for populist and nativist ideals signal a deep skepticism towards political elites, and anxieties about growing inequality and cultural changes. In effect, thirty years of neoliberal economic policies have stoked anxieties about economic and cultural decline – anxieties that uncomfortably echo the ideological extremes of the 1920s and 1930s.

Although memories of Nazism and Marxism-Leninism do not have the same dominant role in shaping German identity as they did in the 1990s, the economic and social conditions that brought their ideals into practice have worsened.[9] In fact, a declining awareness of fascist and Marxist-Leninist abuses may facilitate a growing attraction to their ideological promises. In this sense, the socialist imaginary, and its fascist counterpart, may inform political practice in the coming years in unexpected ways.

As the KO highlighted, Fukuyama's declaration of the "end of history" has been regularly invoked by conservatives and neoliberals to herald the collapse of Marxism-Leninism as "a living ideology of world significance." Yet Fukuyama also linked the collapse of Marxism-Leninism with the defeat of fascism in 1945 as a repudiation of extremes, one that made neoliberal democracy "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" largely by default. Ironically, Fukuyama found little idealism, or permanence, in this development:

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[8] Philipp Adorf, "A New Blue-Collar Force: The Alternative for Germany and the Working Class," *German Politics and Society* 36, no. 4 (2018), 37-41.
[9] Jennifer L. Allen, "Against the 1989-1990 Ending Myth," *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 125-147.

> The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. [...] Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.[10]

For the many East Germans who fear the "Islamization" of their country, and who reject a political elite they feel has left them behind, history may have only briefly come to an end after 1990. For the refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and countless other places, history continued unabated. In a longer retrospect, the collapse of Marxist-Leninist states like the GDR, and the seeming foreclosure of their broader socialist imaginary, will likely constitute only a brief interregnum in humanity's ongoing effort to imagine a better world, however conceived, beyond the one that currently exists.

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[10] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18.

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