

ALIENATING LABOR:

**WORKERS ON THE ROAD FROM SOCIALISM TO CAPITALISM IN
EAST GERMANY AND HUNGARY (1968-1989)**

Anikó Eszter Bartha

A DISSERTATION

IN

HISTORY

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Supervisor of Dissertation and Ph. D. Director

Professor Jacek Kochanowicz

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Abstract

The rapid collapse of the Eastern European socialist regimes rendered the year of 1989 a watershed event. Because of the focus on political upheaval, 1989 was often seen as a “year zero” – an unquestionable turning point. This boundary was first challenged by economic history, which showed that the economic decline of the system started well before its political collapse.

This dissertation seeks to explore the social roots of the decline of the socialist regimes through two factory case studies in East Germany and Hungary (Carl Zeiss Jena and Rába MVG in Győr) from the late 1960s until 1989. By undertaking a comparative study of the party’s policy towards the working class in these two, partly similar, partly different socialist environments, the dissertation locates common factors in order to answer the question of why there was no independent working-class action against the regimes during the examined period – in complete contrast to the Polish case – but neither did the workers defend the socialist system in 1989. The Honecker regime – just like the Kádár regime in Hungary - propagated a consumption-oriented policy while consequently refusing to widen workers’ participation in the political and economic decision-making process. In this respect both regimes represented variants of a welfare dictatorship.

By comparing the East German and Hungarian workers’ experience of socialism, the dissertation also demonstrates that there were common patterns in the development of the relationship between the party and workers in the two countries. It argues that the period of economic reform opened up space for re-negotiating the terms of the agreement between the workers and the party in both countries. Since the party needed the support of the population for the continuation of reform, even in the ideologically more rigid GDR there was an attempt to open dialogue with the working class. Although the hardliners exploited the dissatisfaction of the population in internal party debates about economic

reform, the criticism documented in the period went beyond the expectations of the hardliners attacking the contradictions between the “workerist” ideology of the party and the actual powerlessness of the working class in the factories. Even more importantly, the criticism suggests that in the late 1960s the workers in both countries accepted the party as a conversation partner and they believed in its ability to carry through reform.

Social dialogue ended in failure in both countries. The party refused to change the power structure; instead, it offered economic concessions to the workers albeit in different forms. Hungary experimented with the expansion of the market, which offered an opportunity for people to earn more money in their “second” jobs after finishing work in the state sector. Honecker, on the contrary, combined central planning with the extension of welfare provision. In accordance with the original emancipatory objectives of the labor movement, policy towards the workers had common features in both countries: amongst these we can count community building (socialist brigades) and educational programs. These attempts, however, ran out of steam by the 1980s, and the “working class” increasingly became, even for the party, an abstract category that only served to legitimize its political rule. For the workers the consumption-oriented policy that was followed in both countries became the basis of legitimacy, and given that it could not offer the kinds of consumption levels that existed in Western capitalist countries, it could only offer poor compensation for the actual lack of control over the means of production and limited political freedom. With the loss of the ideological battle the regime’s support among the working class crumbled, as it was increasingly difficult to sustain the loyalty of the working people.

In the 1980s the signs of decline were visible in Hungary and repressed in East Germany. The mounting discontent of the population can be documented through regularly collected information reports. Ideological rigidity was more powerfully enforced in the

GDR, where it was the mass flight of the population from the country after the opening of the Hungarian border that eventually demonstrated the unpopularity of the regime. Although both regimes failed, their different political climate was reflected in the memory of the two systems. The ambiguous picture of the Kádár era and the unambiguously negative judgment of the Honecker regime suggest that people regarded limited political freedom as being more important, than material concessions.

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Preface

My interest in labor history was awoken by an interview project that I undertook as part of my M. Phil.-degree in Modern Society and Global Transformations at the Faculty of the Social and Political Sciences of the University of Cambridge in the academic year of 2001/2002. My thesis studied how the workers of the Hungarian Rába factory experienced postsocialist change thirteen years after the change of regime and how they saw the two systems in which they had lived. The scale of change was apparently radical: the personnel of the factory were reduced to one-quarter of the original number. The workers did not only find themselves in an increasingly difficult financial situation but they also had to learn to live with the constant fear of unemployment, and to accept the loss of prestige of working in a “model” factory. These vividly presented “narratives of decline” did not, however, challenge the capitalist order as such. The contradiction between experience and expectation was resolved with the argument that something went wrong with the implementation of capitalism leading to the search for “enemies” and the support of the ideology of the strong state.

These results challenged the original hypothesis of the project that the “losers” of the change of regime would be strongly critical of the new system *and* they would, therefore, support a socialist alternative. Although working-class memory of Hungary’s Kádár regime showed a mixed picture, no one would really identify himself or herself with “actually existing” socialism; neither would they regard it as their system. The construction of memory is, of course, a social process, and one cannot re-construct the functioning – let alone the everyday – of late socialism on the basis of interviews alone. These narratives, did, however, increase my interest in a subject that was less popular at the time I started my research than it is now. Under socialism, any real research on workers was considered to be politically undesirable because it could have been used as a criticism of the socialist

system. After the collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes, workers were often uncritically associated with the former, discredited system. This intellectual climate was not very favorable for the rediscovery of the working class.

My first research question was borrowed from Michael Burawoy, who conducted fieldwork in Hungarian factories in the mid-1980s. Burawoy originally came to Hungary to test his general theory of the development of factory regimes from bureaucratic to hegemonic despotism for the socialist countries as well. During his fieldwork he found that his fellow workers refused to believe that they were building socialism and they effectively distanced themselves from the ruling regime. While with the renouncement of the Soviet control of Eastern Europe it became manifest that the regimes had no popular support, Burawoy wanted to know why the workers refused to support a socialist alternative. In a modified form, it can be also asked why there was no independent working-class action after the collapse of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. Both questions implied that workers' alienation from the socialist system was a crucial factor in their decline.

The selection of the two countries was influenced by my M. A.-thesis at the Central European University, which discussed world-systems theory and its explanatory power in the context of Eastern European history. Although both Hungary and the GDR belonged to the socialist bloc, there were important historical differences between the two countries: Germany was a leading industrial nation with a strong working-class movement, whereas Hungary was part of the Eastern European semi-periphery. In the 1960s, both countries experimented with different reforms of their planned economies with varying outcomes. Comparison in this sense serves the purpose of establishing certain common features of the socialist policy towards the working class as well as to identify the common social roots of the decline of these regimes.

Since the history of socialism remains a challenging and controversial topic even after the end of the Cold War, I hope that a broader public will also read my dissertation with interest.

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Introduction

The crisis of the welfare dictatorships

In January 1977 the primary party organization of the Motor Factory of Rába MVG¹ in Győr held a party meeting, where a mechanic made the following comment: “Concerning the information reports, I can freely say that on my side the political mood is not good. The previous speakers have mentioned the problem of revising the norms that affect blue-collar workers. We feel uneasy both about the revision of norms and the increases in the prices. They nevertheless say that our mood is generally good. This cannot be said at all. The statistics show that everything is very good here. The price increases do not show me that the political mood is good. I don’t experience a rising standard of living. When I pick up a newspaper, everything I read in it makes me angry. With respect to the utilization of working hours, even the psychologists of the capitalist countries have demonstrated that the human body needs a break during its eight working hours. So we cannot spend 480 minutes working. I think that they do not represent the workers’ interests here. They always demand more work for less money. After the present revision of the norms I cannot earn my money even if I violate the technical specifications. I cannot understand where and in relation to what we see a rising standard of living. Despite of the increase of prices, they are cutting our wages”.² The criticism received some consideration in the closing speech of the party secretary: “The reasons why comrades are a bit passive have been explained in the discussion. I would like to point out that it is not right that the

¹ MVG (Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár): Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory.

² Győr Megyei Jogú Város Levéltára (GYML), X. 415/196/9, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottságának anyagai. Jegyzőkönyv a Motor Pártalapszervezet 1977. január 26.-i taggyűléséről, 4-5.

blue-collar workers have such a bad opinion of their white-collar counterparts and that this disagreement has been so often heard recently. Comrades should realize that we have equal need here of each and every employee. It is true that the money is not enough but it is the responsibility of the management that the wage is 8,000 Ft³ for one job while it is only 2,000 Ft for another. The management should also provide better working conditions”.⁴

In Rába MVG few records of grass-roots party meetings have survived, so it is difficult to tell how widespread criticism was in public forums. The citations, however, reveal that the relationship between the workers and the party-state was not as unclouded as was propagated by the regime. This relationship has been in fact a widely contested issue since the establishment of the Eastern European Communist regimes, and subject to ideological rather than academic debate. Since class theory was central to the self-legitimation of these regimes, and the Communist parties claimed to rule in the name of the working class, the writing of working-class histories under state socialism had to conform to this dominant legitimizing ideology.⁵

While there were instances of working-class revolt against the ruling regimes in both the GDR and Hungary in the 1950s – the revolt of 1953 in the GDR and the Hungarian revolution of 1956, which were both rooted in working-class protest⁶ - from the 1960s, with the marked exception of Poland, and the lesser one of Romania, there were no major instances of open working-class protest against the ruling regimes in the Eastern

³ Ft = Forint, Hungarian currency.

⁴ Jegyzőkönyv a Motor Pártalapszervezet 1977. január 26.-i taggyűléséről, op. cit.

⁵ While labor history in the Eastern European countries was influenced directly by the political and ideological requirements, this “traditional” paradigm - that Thomas Welskopp called the “prevented heroic history of the proletariat” – was present in the Western historiography as well. According to Welskopp’s argument, in this traditional narrative the complex relationship between class position and class consciousness has been simplified to the triangle “situation – consciousness – behaviour”. For a theoretical critique of the old narrative see: Thomas Welskopp, ‘Von der verhinderten Heldengeschichte des Proletariats zur vergleichenden Sozialgeschichte der Arbeiterschaft – Perspektiven der Arbeitergeschichtsschreibung in den 1990er Jahren.’ *1999 Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, no. 3. (1993), 34-53.

⁶ For a social history of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 see: Mark Pittaway, ‘A magyar forradalom új megközelítésben: az ipari munkásság, a szocializmus széthullása és rekonstrukciója, 1953-1958’, *Eszmélet*, 72, 2006, 11-31. The role of the Hungarian workers’ councils in the revolution of 1956 is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

European socialist countries. The eventual and rapid collapse of Communist regimes across the region in 1989 discredited the “legitimizing” narratives of official working-class histories; the events of the year disproved notions of a simple equivalence between class position and class consciousness characterized of dominant trends in Marxist thought. Contrary to the expectations of many Eastern and Western European leftist, political programs based on the philosophies of democratic socialism and workers’ self-management received very little support from Eastern European working classes after they were liberated from the bureaucratic tutelage of their ruling Communist parties.⁷ Nor was the Eastern European political and intellectual climate favorable for revisiting working-class histories after the change of regimes: all forms of class theory were regarded as utterly discredited⁸ and the “working class” was often uncritically associated with the state socialist past, as intellectual elites invested in futures based on “embourgeoisement”, which downplayed the social and political roles of industrial workers.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in Eastern European working-class histories but attention has focused on the era of early socialism during the 1940s and 1950s, rather than on the relationship between the working-class and the party state from the 1960s onwards – there is, consequently, practically no literature on the topic for the late Kádár era in Hungary, and there is relatively little for East Germany, and these studies

⁷ Michael Burawoy self-critically reflected to these expectations in Michael Burawoy- János Lukács, *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary’s Road to Capitalism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). For a critical re-evaluation of the chances of leftist alternatives in Hungary see: Tamás Krausz - Péter Márkus (eds.). *Önkormányzás vagy az elitek uralma?* (Budapest: Liberter, 1995).; Tamás Krausz, (ed.) *Rendszerváltás és társadalomkritika* (Budapest: Napvilág, 1998); Erzsébet Szalai, *A civil társadalomtól a politikai társadalom felé. Munkástanácsok 1989-93* (Budapest: T-Twins Kiadó, 1994); id. *Baloldal - új kihívások előtt* (Budapest: Aula Kiadó, 2003); László Thoma, *Alternatívák nélküli társadalom* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1995).

⁸ While it has become fashionable to dismiss class analysis altogether, there are authors who propose the reinterpretation of the concept of class rather than propagating its general crisis. See Don Kalb, *Expanding Class: Power and Everyday Politics in Industrial Communities, the Netherlands, 1850-1950* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 3-24; Thomas Welskopp, ‘Ein modernes Klassenkonzept für die vergleichende Geschichte industrialisierender und industrieller Gesellschaften’ in: Karl-Thomas Lauschke-Thomas Welskopp (eds.). *Mikropolitik im Unternehmen. Arbeitsbeziehungen und Machtstrukturen in industriellen Großbetrieben des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1994), 48-106.

hardly deal at all with the issue of how the workers related to the socialist state.⁹ This dissertation addresses issues that have been largely ignored in the national literatures of both countries. It argues for a revisiting of issues of class, after these have been largely ignored for the past two decades. Since in the Eastern European literature the concept of

⁹ For the GDR see: Peter Hübner, 'Die Zukunft war gestern: soziale und mentale Trends in der DDR-Industriearbeiterschaft', in: Hartmut Kaelble-Jürgen Kocka-Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 171-187; id., *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiß: Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1970* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995). For other, more ethnographically oriented studies see: Regina Bittner, *Kolonien des Eigensinns. Ethnographie einer ostdeutschen Industrieregion*. (Frankfurt-New York: Campus Verlag, 1998); id., 'Rund um die Uhr – ostdeutscher Arbeiteralltag im Kraftwerk Elbe' *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 96 (2000), 203-217; id., 'Der kleine Mann – Paradoxien und Ambivalenzen einer ostdeutschen Arbeiterfigur vor und nach der Wende' in: Renate Hürtgen - Thomas Reichel (eds.), *Der Schein der Stabilität: DDR-Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2001), 217-228; Jenny Richter-Heike Förster-Ulrich Lakemann, *Stalinstadt-Eisenhüttenstadt: von der Utopie zur Gegenwart: Wandel industrieller, regionaler und sozialer Strukturen in Eisenhüttenstadt* (Marburg: Schüren, 1997). There is also an orientation towards regional studies, see, e.g. Michael Vester-Michael Hofmann-Irene Zierke (eds.), *Soziale Milieus in Ostdeutschland. Gesellschaftliche Strukturen zwischen Zerfall und Neubildung* (Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1995) and the study of gender, see Leonore Ansorg, 'Ich hab immer von unten Druck gekriegt und von oben': Weibliche Leitungskader und Arbeiterinnen in einem DDR-Textilbetrieb. Eine Studie zum Innenleben der DDR-Industrie' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), 123-165; Ina Merkel, ... und Du, *Frau an der Werkbank: die DDR in der 50er Jahren* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1990); Annette Schüler, 'Die Spinne': die Erfahrungsgeschichte weiblicher Industriearbeit im VEB Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei (Leipzig: Leipziger-Univ.-Verl., 2001); Francesca Weil, *Herrschaftsanspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit: zwei sächsische Betriebe in der DDR während der Honecker Ära* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000). Literature on the Honecker era mainly addresses particular aspects such as welfare policy (Beatrix Bouvier, *Die DDR- ein Sozialstaat? Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker*, Bonn: Dietz, 2002), consumption (Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR*, Köln: Böhlau, 1999) and historical consciousness (Bernd Faulenbach -Annette Leo-Klaus Weberskirch. 'Die 'Wende' 1989/90 aus der Sicht von Stahlarbeitern in Henningsdorf und Dortmund' *Jahrbuch Arbeit, Bildung, Kultur* 12 (1994), 167-201; Bernd Faulenbach -Annette Leo-Klaus Weberskirch, *Zweierlei Geschichte. Lebensgeschichte und Geschichtsbewusstsein von Arbeiternehmern in West -und Ostdeutschland*, Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2000). For collected volumes see: Richard Bessel-Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); Peter Hübner- Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), *Arbeiter in der SBZ – DDR* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1999); Peter Hübner-Christoph Kleßmann-Klaus Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus: ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005); Renate Hürtgen - Thomas Reichel (eds.), *Der Schein der Stabilität: DDR-Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker*. (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2001); Hartmut Kaelble -Jürgen Kocka-Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994). With some exceptions, the historiography of the East German working-class after the change of regimes carefully avoids class analysis and have a descriptive rather than theoretical focus. In the Hungarian case Mark Pittaway studied the relationship between the workers and the state in the era of Soviet-type industrialization, see: id., 'Industrial Workers, Socialist Industrialisation and the State in Hungary, 1948-1958' (Ph. D., University of Liverpool, 1998); id., 'The Reproduction of Hierarchy: Skill, Working-Class Culture and the State in Early Socialist Hungary' *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (December 2002), 737-769. For a study of working-class life in the 1950s see: Sándor Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: mindennapi Sztálinváros* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004); id., 'Remaking Working-Class Life in Hungary's First Socialist City' *Journal of International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 68 (Fall 2005), 24-46. For studies of socialism and gender see: Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria 1945-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Eszter Zsófia Tóth, 'Változó identitások munkásnők élettörténeti elbeszéléseiben' *Évkönyv X*. (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2002), 76-89. For a collected volume on working-class history see: Sándor Horváth-László Pethő - Eszter Zsófia Tóth (eds.), *Munkástörténet – munkásantropológia* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2003). Judit Sas H. studies the experience of the change of regime in the light of narrative interviews conducted at different time intervals (id., *Szubjektív történelem 1980-1994*, Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Intézet, 1995).

class itself developed ideologically and politically-overloaded connotations in the later socialist years being associated almost exclusively with the legitimation of the party state, it is all the more difficult to bring it back in; however much the concept has been re-worked. Yet, the party-states' class-based legitimizing ideology concealed from the elites the social weaknesses of their system, for the workers did not defend the "workers' states" in 1989. In part for this reason, the neglect of the working class carries another danger - that without a critical history of the relationship between the socialist system and industrial workers, the social roots of the rapid collapse of these regimes will remain largely unexplored.¹⁰

This dissertation therefore adopts a relational and historical approach to class¹¹, and by doing so, it revisits the simplistic narratives of heroic histories of workers, or of the linear development of class consciousness.¹² Simplified notions of a homogenous working-class and a relevant class consciousness can be easily refuted, even through the official documents of the party-state: in the Hungarian case, local archival sources openly speak of worker-peasants¹³, conflict, and from the Zeiss factory it was reported that loyalty to the old capitalist company meant more to workers than abstract notions of class

¹⁰ The year of 1989 was, with the words of Klaus von Beyme, a "black Friday" for social sciences for their failure to prognosticate the rapid collapse of the Communist regimes. (Klaus von Beyme, *Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe*, London: Macmillan, 1996). The history of the working class can offer new insights into the internal weakness of these regimes.

¹¹ For a discussion of the expanded concept of class see Don Kalb, op. cit., 3-17.

¹² Interestingly, Eastern European dissident intellectuals remained within this conceptual framework, but they thought that the working class would turn against the ruling regimes because they were conscious of being exploited by the party state (See, for instance, Miklós Haraszti's book, *Darabér. Egy munkás a munkásállamban*, Párizs, Magyar Füzetek, 1979).

¹³ As the documents explain, urban workers often identified the commuters as peasants, and they were envious of the higher incomes of the peasantry. See the chapter entitled *Downgrading the working class?* Studies of social mobility showed that significant part of the socialist working class was recruited from the peasantry, and many workers also had an income from agricultural activity. On social mobility see: Rudolf Andorka, *Historical comparison of Hungarian social mobility, 1930-1963, by means of census data and retrospective life histories* (Budapest: Statisztikai Kiadó Vállalat, 1974); id., *A társadalmi mobilitás változásai Magyarországon* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1982). On the commuters see: Antal Böhm – László Pál, 'A bejáró munkások társadalmi-politikai magatartása' *Társadalmi Szemle* 34, no. 10 (1979), 50-58; Antal Böhm – László Pál, *Társadalmunk ingázói - az ingázók társadalma* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1985).

consciousness.¹⁴ Therefore this study *does not* attribute any pre-given class consciousness to workers but examines the relationship between workers and the party state in two particular national and local contexts using two factory case-studies - Carl Zeiss in Jena in East Germany and Rába MVG in Hungary. The workforces of both factories embodied the heavy-industrial, skilled working-class “core” that the regime considered to be crucial for its social support. The party’s policy towards the working class was therefore chiefly targeted at this group, and the initial success and ultimate failure of this labor policy demonstrates the loss of the social support for the regime. What makes the concept of class relevant for my study is that the dissertation argues that even though in the 1960s the regime attempted to build a settlement with the working class, despite initial successes, workers were effectively alienated from the socialist system in the late Kádár era, and under the Honecker regime. In the case of the GDR not even negative experiences of the new system influenced the overall negative judgment of Honecker’s rule, and in the Hungarian case urban skilled workers likewise did not back the Kádár regime.¹⁵ As the regimes in both countries suppressed any discussion of leftist alternatives, the dissertation argues that the party state effectively alienated workers as a class, leaving them disappointed in socialism itself, thus opening the way for notions of capitalist transformation to win considerable social support.¹⁶

¹⁴ See the chapter entitled *Planning the impossible?*

¹⁵ Information from the life-history interviews. There is a tendency in the literature to attribute too much explanatory power to a kind of “Ostalgie” (see, e.g. Thomas Ahbe- Michael Hofmann, ‘Eigentlich unsere beste Zeit’: Erinnerungen an den DDR- Alltag in verschiedenen Milieus’ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 17/2002, 13-22; Werner Schmidt, *Betriebliche Sozialordnung und ostdeutsches Arbeitnehmerbewußtsein im Prozess der Transformation* (München, Mering: Hampp, 1996). My research does not support this argument because even though the majority of the interview partners were critical of the new, capitalist system, they did not have a positive image of the Honecker regime either.

¹⁶ It can be argued that what James Ferguson called the expectations of modernity (James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) – myths related to industrial development, and the expectation to catch up with the material welfare and levels of consumption of the developed capitalist “core” countries (see Wallerstein’s classical work, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) – persist longer in the periphery than in countries that are closer to the core. My oral history project in East Germany and Hungary found that even though the experience of transformation was more painful in Hungary

The two countries – the GDR and Hungary – were chosen as examples because they offer two different approaches to socialism; one can be labeled as reformist – Hungary; the other as collectivist – East Germany. Even though the real crisis of the Kádár regime came in 1989, signs of decline were visible much earlier in Hungary. Following the defeat of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, MSZMP – the Communist party that was re-organized by János Kádár -¹⁷ implemented a consumption-oriented policy that promised a general increase of the standard-of-living of “working people”. Encouraged by the Soviet reform discussions under Khrushchev, Hungary experimented with a market socialist reform of its planned economy to provide the economic basis for its welfare policy.¹⁸ The economic reform of 1968 was, however, followed by a partial retreat not only because of the hardening of the Soviet line in the Brezhnev-era, but also because the party itself was divided on the social consequences of the market reform. Fearing that it would lose popular support, the party leadership promised to reduce income differentials that had grown between the working class and wealthier social groups, who had benefited from economic reform. The failure of the standard-of-living policy meant, in essence, the exhaustion of the party’s policy towards the working class. On the basis of the regularly collected information reports concerning the public mood of employees in Győr-Sopron county¹⁹ and Rába MVG, people became increasingly critical of the economic situation of the country and the standard-of-living policy from the second half of the 1970s. In the late

than in East Germany, these “narratives of decline” did not, however, challenge capitalist order as such. The contradiction between experience and expectation was resolved with the argument that something went wrong with the implementation of capitalism leading to the search for “enemies” and the support of the ideology of the strong state. In the East German interviews, the decline of community life - in particular that of neighborhood and workplace communities - and increasing social inequalities in the new system were much criticized but they were seen as a consequence of the capitalist system rather than an aberration from it. (Eszter Bartha, ‘Munkások a munkásállam után. A változás etnográfiaja egy volt szocialista "mintagyárban’, in: Dénes Némédi (ed.). *Kötőjelek. Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Szociológiai Doktori Iskolájának Évkönyve 2002*, Budapest: ELTE Szociológiai és Szociálpolitikai Intézet, 2003, 117-147).

¹⁷ MSZMP (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt): Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party.

¹⁸ The reform of 1968 is introduced in more detail in *The beginning of market socialism in Hungary*.

¹⁹ Rába MVG belonged to Győr-Sopron county.

Kádár era, mounting economic discontent gradually developed into overt criticism of the party and the political system.

The policies pursued in the GDR under Honecker were similar to those in Kádár's Hungary in two important respects. The first was the attempt to win over people for the regime through consistent increases in welfare provision. Honecker came to power in the GDR in 1971 after Ulbricht's economic reform failed, which forced the resignation of the first secretary. Ulbricht experimented with a different type of economic reform than in Hungary based on de-centralization and the development of strategic sectors.²⁰ His new economic system led, however, to mounting social discontent because of the increasing shortage of consumer goods. Honecker promised to "correct" this policy and – in a marked parallel with the Hungarian standard-of-living policy - to continuously increase the welfare of his people.

The second common feature of the two regimes was the consequent suppression of any *leftist* attempt to reform socialism: the direct ownership of workers did not even come up in reform discussions. While in Poland an independent workers' movement started to develop in the late 1970s and blossomed during the sixteen months of Solidarity, in the GDR and Hungary 1953 and 1956 were last moments of large-scale working-class resistance when workers articulated an alternative to the regime. Discussions of leftist alternatives were also suppressed on an everyday level; workers' self-management was never mentioned in information reports, nor in other materials. True, the party's policy towards the working class included the promotion of non-materialist values including community building and support for workers' culture and education in both countries. These initiatives – including the socialist brigade movement – were not, however, intended to increase worker control over the factories; in actual fact, socialist collectivism of this

²⁰ The reform experiment is discussed at length in *From reform to retreat: the GDR under late socialism*.

kind was meant to compensate the workers for their effective exclusion from political power.²¹

Even though the loss of the working-class support for the regime was not as visibly spectacular in the GDR and Hungary, as in Poland - which was exceptional because of the political turmoil that surrounded the emergence and suppression of Solidarity – the dissertation seeks to show that signs of the social decline could be detected in both countries. On the basis of the Hungarian materials it is possible to trace growing awareness on an everyday level of the limits – and eventually the failure – of the standard-of-living policy, even among the party membership.²² The failure of the party’s policy towards the working class also became evident in the GDR, where large-scale ideological control under Honecker – which was much stronger than in Hungary – prevented the open expression of mounting discontent among the population. It was only the mass flight of GDR citizens to the West in 1989 with the opening of the Hungarian borders, that rendered the crisis of the welfare dictatorship in the GDR visible.. In this respect, the more “visible” social decline of the system in Hungary complements the picture of an East Germany engulfed in enforced silence about the tensions that lay under the surface.

Prior to 1989, the intertwining of the working class with the “workers’ state” was a political dogma that could only be challenged at the risk of a scholar’s academic career

²¹ The argument is developed in *Socialist brigades* and “*Du und dein Werk*”.

²² It has been shown for both countries that the welfare policy was increasingly financed by foreign loans. For Hungary see: György Földes, *Az eladósodás politikai története 1957-1986* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1995); for the GDR see: André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan. Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (München, Dt. Vrl-Anst., 2004). There is evidence that the Soviet leadership was informed of the slackening economic development: in 1979 governmental analysts conducted an extensive study of the state and perspectives of the Soviet economy under the leadership of V. A. Kirilin Deputy Prime Minister. The study concluded that with respect to the most important parameters there is an increasing gap between the Soviet Union and the countries using modern technology. The Kirilin report did not meet the approval of the political leadership and Kirilin was relieved of his post. Zoltán Bíró Sz. argues that it was not the recognition of the economic problems that was missing from the central leadership but the political will to initiate structural reforms. (Zoltán Bíró Sz., ‘Politikatörténeti vázlat a késői Szovjetunióról’, in Tamás Krausz –Zoltán Bíró Sz. (eds.), *Peresztrojka és tulajdonáthelyezés. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok a rendszerváltás történetéből a Szovjetunióban 1985-1991* (Budapest, 2003), 11-51.

behind the iron curtain.²³ Yet in cold-war Western Europe and North America the relationship between the workers and the party received relatively little attention in the literature; with the exception of Poland, where the rise of Solidarity generated a wave of interest in the first half of the 1980s.²⁴ The dissertation therefore specifically addresses the development of this relationship seeking to find common patterns between the GDR and Hungary. In the 1960s economic reforms were initiated in both countries, which were accompanied by broader social dialogue. The study aims to introduce the workers' responses to the economic reform and in so doing reveals unexplored contradictions of the socialist system. What rendered the reform period above all interesting in both countries was that it was the last time when elements of a real dialogue could be documented between the workers and the party. More importantly, workers accepted the party as a conversation partner and believed that it would be able to accomplish reform. In the 1980s, the workers' alienation from the party could be documented in Hungary whereas the grass-roots members were silenced in the GDR: the party materials of the Honecker era are

23 Haraszti's cited book, for instance, triggered a show-trial against the author (Haraszti, op. cit, 1979) and the sociologist István Kemény, who examined working-class life under socialism was eventually forced into exile for his studies on poverty. See: id., (ed.), *Pest megye munkásai* (Budapest, 1971); id., (ed.), *A Csepel Vas- és Fémművek munkásai* (Budapest, 1971); id., 'A magyar munkásság rétegződése', *Szociológia*, no. 1 (1972), 36-48. His essays on differing working-class mentalities were published in Hungary only after the change of regime (István Kemény, *Velünk nevelkedett a gép: Magyar munkások a hetvenes évek elején*, Budapest: Művelődéskutató Intézet, 1990). In the GDR there was a much more fierce ideological fight between the two Germanies; for instance, Eberhard Nemitz's sociological study (which otherwise concluded that young trainees in the GDR had an overall positive picture of socialism) was published in West Germany (Eberhard Nemitz, *Junge Produktionsarbeiter und Lehrlinge in der DDR. Eine empirische Untersuchung über Jugendliche in volkseigenen Betrieben des Bauwesens*, Koblenz: Verlag Siegfried Bublies, 1988). For a study of the ideological controversies over sociology in the GDR see Horst Laatz, *Klassenstruktur und soziales Verhalten. Zur Entstehung der empirischen Sozialstrukturforschung in der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990). Since scholars from the West rarely had access to socialist factories, they often had to rely on theoretical analysis (see: Jan F. Triska – Charles Gati (eds.), *Blue-collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

24 For a discussion of the social background of Solidarity see Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). For a contemporary study see: Alain Touraine et al., *Solidarity: The Analysis of a Social Movement, Poland 1980-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In Kádár's Hungary Michael Burawoy conducted fieldwork in a factory, where he has already observed that the workers increasingly distanced themselves from the regime (This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). In the GDR the oral history project of Western scholars focused on the study of historical consciousness (Lutz Niethammer-Alexander von Plato-Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR* (Berlin: Rowohlt-Berlin-Verlag, 1991).

documents produced under the influence of official propaganda, and they tell us very little of workers' political ideas.

While the “welfare dictatorships” successfully prevented open working-class protests against the regime – in contrast to Poland – signs of mounting social discontent can be documented in both cases albeit for different reasons. Economic reform had different trajectories in the two countries: while Ulbricht’s reform failed, leading to the resignation of the first secretary, the Hungarian reform was followed only by a partial retreat. As the economic problems were felt in Hungary earlier than in the GDR, the Kádár-government gave the green light to further pro-market reforms. The expansion of the private sector was accompanied by a gradual softening of the dictatorship (traveling, mitigation of censorship), which rendered Hungary one of the most “Western” socialist countries - also known as “goulash communism” or “the happiest barrack in the camp”. While many workers used the opportunities of the private – or, as it was called, the second economy²⁵ - people’s dissatisfaction increased because of widening social inequalities.²⁶ Increasing interest in consumption and the increased working hours, whether in the formal or informal economies, that were needed to achieve a higher standard of living contributed to the decline of socialist collectivism, and the increasing individualization of society.²⁷

The GDR, by contrast, was always regarded as a socialist stronghold on the border of the Eastern bloc where the Soviet military presence and ideological control was much

25 On the second economy in Hungary see: István R. Gábor– Péter Galasi, *A 'második' gazdaság: Tények és hipotézisek* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1981).

26 According to the argument of Martha Lampland, capitalist relations in agriculture were established under socialism in Hungary (see: Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor. Commodification in Socialist Hungary*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). On the establishment of Hungarian market economy see: Ákos Róna-Tas, *The Great Surprise of the Small Transformation: The Demise of Communism and the Rise of the Private Sector in Hungary* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1997).

27 For a similar argument see Erzsébet Szalai, 'Tulajdonviszonyok, társadalomszerkezet és munkásság' *Kritika*, 33, no. 9 (2004), 2-6. Mark Pittaway speaks of the privatization of the working class. See: Mark Pittaway, 'Accommodation and the Limits of Economic Reform: Industrial Workers during the Making and Unmaking of Kádár's Hungary', in: Peter Hübner-Christoph Kleßmann-Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), op. cit., 2005, 453-471.

more stronger than in Hungary. There was also a more marked need to compete with the capitalist West directly. After the collapse of Ulbricht's reform, Honecker combined central planning with a significant extension of the welfare state. As the gap between the East and West German standards of living continued to grow, repression was used to a greater extent than in Hungary to prevent open criticism that allowed the states to publicly maintain the fiction of the superiority of the socialist system. Criticism was therefore targeted at the shortage of consumer goods; shortages that were generated more by the collectivist model prevalent in the GDR, than by the reformist one found in Kádár's Hungary – and economic gap between the GDR and West Germany. Even though the intelligentsia was believed to be privileged in comparison to the working class²⁸, we cannot speak of widening social inequality in the GDR prior to 1989.²⁹ The comparison shows how different models of socialist rule – one collectivist, the other reformist -l influenced the workers' relationship with the party state.

The selection of the two countries was motivated by another, broader historical consideration. Prior to the establishment of Communist rule, Germany and Hungary stood at different stages of industrial development, the former being a leading industrial nation and the latter belonging to the Eastern European semi-periphery of the European

28 See Linda Fuller, *Where Was the Working Class?: Revolution in Eastern Germany* (Urbana, 1999); Katharina Belwe, 'Sozialstruktur und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in der DDR' in Werner Weidenfeld-Hartmut Zimmermann (eds.), *Deutschland-Handbuch. Eine doppelte Bilanz 1949-1989* (Bonn: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1989), 125-143; Katharina Belwe, *Entwicklung der Intelligenz innerhalb der Sozialstruktur der DDR in den Jahren 1978 bis 1989 – eine Literaturanalyse* (Bonn, 1990). For a counter-argument see Günter Erbe, *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz in der DDR. Soziale Annäherung von Produktionsarbeiterschaft und wissenschaftlich-technischer Intelligenz im Industriebetrieb?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982).

²⁹ Jaroslav Krejci, *Social Structure in Divided Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1976). In his essay Johannes Weiß distinguishes between the high party leadership, the mid level cadres, members of the old intelligentsia and Christian opposition and the masses of workers and peasants (id., 'Die namenlose Gesellschaft. Identitätsprobleme der Bevölkerung Ostdeutschlands' in: Stephan Beetz-Ulf Jacob-Anton Sterbling (eds.), *Soziologie über die Grenzen. Festschrift für Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Bálint Balla zum 75. Geburtstag* (Hamburg: Krämer, 2003), 487-494. For a sociological analysis see also Detlef Pollack, 'Die konstitutive Widersprüchlichkeit der DDR Oder War die DDR-Gesellschaft homogen?' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 24, no. 1 (1998), 110-131; Hans Joas -Martin Kohli (eds.), *Der Zusammenbruch der DDR. Soziologische Analyse.* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993).

economy.³⁰ Despite different working-class traditions in the two countries³¹, socialist rule produced certain social responses that were common to both cases; near identical socialist institutions provided for similar experiences and sometimes even attitudes. The comparison of two case studies cannot, of course, give a fully-fledged typology of workers in all of the Eastern European socialist systems, but it can provide us with some useful insights into the relationship between the labor policies of the party and the absence of open working-class protest. The periodization of the welfare dictatorships also displays common features. The period of economic reform witnessed a real social debate in which the party demonstrated a willingness to listen to workers' opinions. This was particularly remarkable in the GDR - in comparison with the later disappearance of criticism under Honecker. The reform period ended with the failure of dialogue in both countries: the party decided to buy the support – or at least the silence – of the people through the standard-of-

30 On the peripheral development of the Hungarian economy see Iván T. Berend – György Ránki, *Gazdaság és társadalom. Tanulmányok hazánk és Kelet-Európa XIX-XX. századi történetéről* (Budapest: Magvető, 1974); Iván T. Berend – György Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the 20. Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); György Ránki, *Mozgásterek, kényszerpályák. Válogatott tanulmányok* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983).

31 The working-class formation and political mobilization of labor substantially differed in the two counties. On the working-class formation in Hungary see: Gyula Rézler, *A magyar nagyipari munkásosztály kialakulása, 1867-1914* (Budapest: Rekord, 1938). For a study on the political mobilization of labor in the interwar period see: Péter Sipos, *Legális és illegális munkásmozgalom, 1919-1944* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1988). A collection of pre-war working-class ethnographies was published by György Litván (id., ed., *Magyar munkásszociográfiák 1888-1945*, Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1974). There is much more extensive literature on working-class formation and political activity in Germany, see: Jürgen Kocka, 'Stand – Klasse – Organisation. Strukturen sozialer Ungleichheit in Deutschland vom späten 18. bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert im Aufriß' in: Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Klassen in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 137-165; id., *Lohnarbeit und Klassenbildung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1800-1875* (Berlin, Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 1983); id., (ed.), *Europäische Arbeiterbewegungen im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland, Österreich, England, und Frankreich im Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983); id., (ed.), *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zum modernen Sozialstaat*: Festschrift für Gerhard A. Ritter zum 65. Geburtstag (München: Saur, 1994); Gerhard A. Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung, Parteien und Parlamentarismus: Aufsätze zur Deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht, 1976); id., *Der Sozialstaat: Entstehung und Entwicklung im internationalen Vergleich* (München: Oldenbourg, 1989); id., (ed.), *Der Aufstieg der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Sozialdemokratie und Freie Gewerkschaften im Parteiensystem und Sozialmilieu des Kaiserreichs* (München: Oldenbourg, 1990); id.-Klaus Tenfelde, *Arbeiter im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1871 bis 1914* (Bonn: Dietz, 1992); Klaus Tenfelde, (ed.), *Arbeiter im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); Thomas Welskopp, *Arbeit und Macht im Hüttenwerk. Arbeits- und industrielle Beziehungen in der deutschen und amerikanischen Eisen- und Stahlindustrie von den 1860er bis zu den 1930er Jahren* (Bonn: Dietz, 1994). See also: Ira Katznelson -Aristide R. Zolberg (eds.), *Working-Class Formation. Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). From the literature of the GDR see: Jürgen Kuczynski, *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967). For a discussion of historiography see also: Richard J. Evans, *Proletarians and Politics. Socialism, Protest and the Working Class in Germany before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

living policy and the promise of catching up with Western levels of consumption. The orientation towards consumption was paralleled with a gradual change in the rhetoric of the party: while the speeches of the East German party leaders abounded in quotations from Marx and Lenin, real workers increasingly disappeared from the party documents. With the adoption of the consumption-oriented policy the working-class ideology of the party increasingly lost its social content, which left people disillusioned.

After the failure of the state socialist project, Eastern European countries hoped to “catch up” with the developed capitalist countries by adopting Western-style political institutions and market economies. The adoption of Western institutions facilitated new “expectations of modernity”.³² These expectations, as Bryant and Mokrzycki rightly argued, combined the aspiration to achieve Western levels of consumption with the maintenance of full employment, and some of the other social “gains” of the state socialist years.³³ As it became clear that combining the market economy with the socialist welfare state was an illusion, the legitimacy of the “transition” was called into question. This generated a search for new paradigms both at theoretical and at methodological levels.³⁴ The experience of transformation was less economically painful in East Germany than in Hungary because the former adopted the welfare system of West Germany, which mitigated the social costs of industrial re-structuring. In Hungary the socialist welfare

³² See footnote 16.

³³ Christopher G. A. Bryant-Edmund Mokrzycki, *The New Great Transformation? Change and Continuity in East Central Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁴ For an “early” economic criticism of the neoliberal program in Eastern Europe see: Alice H. Amsden - Jacek Kochanowicz-Lance Taylor, *The Market Meets its Match: Restructuring the Economies of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Peter Gowan, ‘Neo-liberal theory and practice for Eastern Europe’, *New Left Review*, 213 (1995), 317-343; Hugo Radice, ‘A feltámadt kapitalizmus: Kelet-Közép-Európa a “globalizáció” fényében’ in: Tamás Krausz (ed.), op. cit., 1998, 194-209. Transitology has been widely criticized by authors with diverse theoretical backgrounds, from David Stark and László Bruszt to Michael Burawoy and Chris Hann. For a theoretical criticism of transitology see Bill Lomax, ‘A tranzitológia válsága: A kelet-európai változások és a tranzitológiai elmélet’ in: Tamás Krausz (ed.), op. cit., 1998, 307-315. For a discussion of main paradigms of transformation see Eszter Bartha, ‘Rendszerváltozás és társadalomtudomány. A kelet-európai átalakulás nagy elméletei’ in: Tamás Krausz (ed.), *Kelet-Európa: Történelem és sorsközösség. Palotás Emil professzor 70. születésnapjára* (Budapest, ELTE Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, 2006), 12-27.

system was dismantled outright.³⁵ While it is recognized that collective memory of the previous regimes have been shaped by the experiences of post-socialist economic and social transformation, in the conclusion, the working-class memory of the Kádár and Honecker regimes is examined.

Methodologically, the dissertation seeks to make use of what Michael Burawoy called the extensive case method.³⁶ The first dimension of the extended case method is participant observation. Even though the dissertation primarily relies on archival sources, it also uses life-history interviews conducted with workers and former workers of both factories. The second dimension is the establishment of a link between the macro and the micro levels. One way to think of the macro-micro link is to view the micro as an expression of the macro, discovering reification within the factory, commodification within the family, bureaucratization within a school. From the perspective of the extended case method, this link is established, however, not as a reference to an “expressive” totality but to a “structured” one in which the part is shaped by its relation to the whole, taking the nature of a dialectic relationship. This dimension is particularly important for my research since in order to compare the findings of the factory studies, which are located in different national contexts, it is essential to link the individual case studies to the labor policy of the state in both countries. The third dimension is the extension of the case study in time, a condition that is fulfilled in the research. The last dimension is the extension of theory: by showing workers’ alienation from the socialist regime in large factories where state

35 To be more precise, while important elements of the socialist welfare system such as universal employment and the subsidization of food prices and utilities disappeared after 1989, social security provisions such as unemployment benefit were severely cut back after the Hungarian government accepted the Bokros-package (named after the Minister of Finance, Lajos Bokros) in 1995 in order to stabilize the state budget. (For a discussion of the Polish case to which Hungary shows some similarity between 1990 and 1994 see: Jacek Kochanowicz, ‘Incomplete Demise: Reflections on the Welfare State in Poland after Communism’, *Social Research*, 64, no. 4. (1997), 1445-1469.). On welfare policy in postsocialist Hungary see: Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

36 The extensive case method is described in Michael Burawoy, ‘Introduction: Reaching for the Global’, in id., (ed.), *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1-38.

redistribution was at its strongest, the dissertation argues that the social decline of the regime had started well before it lost political power.

While scholars such as Michael Burawoy, Katherine Verdery³⁷ and Chris Hann³⁸ thought that anthropology could provide a necessary correctives to studies based on notions of “transition”, critics of the traditional “heroic” narrative of working-class histories likewise argued that the factory should be taken more seriously as a social environment where labor relations are formulated.³⁹ The choice of the two factory case studies was therefore motivated by theoretical as well as methodological considerations. There is an extensive literature on comparison that cannot be introduced here⁴⁰; for the purpose of the dissertation, two aspects are discussed in more detail. While there are several examples of the comparison of big structures, it is less common to compare local case studies. It is argued that in-depth case studies can offer better insights into the formation of working-class political ideas than the grand narratives that tend to assume a pre-given pattern of the formation of class consciousness. Without being related to a bigger structure, there is, however, a danger that analysis is lost in a mass of description, and local case studies discover specificity in institutions that were not specific to the national variant of socialism.⁴¹ Since comparison requires the case studies to be more relational, it can offer

37 Michael Burawoy -Katherine Verdery (eds.), *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

38 Chris Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002).

39 Thomas Welskopp, 'Der Betrieb als soziales Handlungsfeld. Neuere Forschungsansätze in der Industrie- und Arbeitergeschichte' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22 (1996), 117-142.

40 Out of the extensive literature the dissertation mainly used Theda Skocpol (ed.), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt-Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 1996); Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Europäische Arbeiterbewegungen im 19. Jahrhundert*, op. cit., 1983; Ira Katznelson-Aristide R. Zolberg (eds.), op. cit., 1986.

41 This criticism is particularly valid for the East German literature, where the main point of reference is the most frequently West Germany. While socialist institutions undoubtedly differed from that of West Germany, this alone does not prove the specificity of the Honecker regime. Further, this kind of comparison usually means a “definition of absences” for the GDR since, when referred to West Germany, its institutions seem to be incomplete or they deviate from the structures understood as normative. It cannot be the intention here to reflect on the debates of the writing of the history of East Germany; from the extensive literature on the topic see: Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Die gescheiterte Gesellschaft. Überlegungen zu einer Sozialgeschichte

novel insights into national working-class histories. The second aspect where comparison can “extend” the extended case method is precisely in the establishment of a macro-micro link. Cross-national comparisons inevitably call for a more systematic and structural approach to local case studies in order to make them comparable. They can therefore help reinforce the second dimension of the extended case method, which seems to be a crucial problem of traditional working-class histories.

Workers and socialist ownership

In 1989 the newly established local opposition journal, *Tér-kép* published an interview with the chief manager of Rába MFG, Ede Horváth, a former Stakhanovite, who was at the time increasingly attacked for his prominent political role in the hierarchy of the party: since 1970 he had been a member of the Central Committee. The manager agreed to the interview in order to clear himself of the accusation made against him that he found to be the most outrageous and unfounded: he was charged with pursuing an anti-worker policy. In the interview Horváth, who never denied his working-class origins, protested not only against this charge but he sought to find an answer to the anti-manager attitudes of the workers: “At one time we tried to motivate the people with the slogan that the factory is yours, you are building it for yourself. This did not prove true. People are interested in two things: that they have honest work and they receive fair wages. If these two are fulfilled, they will regard their workplace, if not the factory, as their own. And then they will be satisfied and their political attitudes will show this. We could not provide this, and we continuously darkened the political climate. This partly holds also for Rába. Despite the

der DDR' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), 1-17; Christoph Kleßmann (ed.), *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History* (New York: Berg Press, 2001); Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Historische DDR-Forschung: Aufsätze und Studien* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993); Jürgen Kocka-Martin Sabrow (eds.), *Die DDR als Geschichte: Fragen-Hypothese-Perspektive* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994); Sigrid Meuschel, 'Überlegungen zu einer Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19, no. 1. (1993), 5-14.

fact that we pay honest money in comparison to the national wages, we could not solve this problem completely. I said for a long time that we would pay a very heavy price for cheap labor. But I am not to blame for the fact that today there is a bad political climate for the regime in every Hungarian factory”.⁴²

In the quoted passage the manager formulated a crucial contradiction of “actually existing” socialism that the regime sought to silence. In the socialist era everybody knew the slogan “The factory is yours, you are working for yourself!”, even though, particularly in the late phase, it served as basis for political jokes rather than a source of motivation. The question of socialist ownership has been a long debated theoretical issue, which emerged as a crucial practical problem after the victory of the October revolution. The consolidation of Stalin’s political power and the program of collectivization and super-industrialization put a rapid end to the theoretical debates, at least in the Soviet Union.⁴³ After the end of the Second World War, the Stalinist system, based on the state ownership of the means of production and the centrally planned economy, has been “exported” to the Eastern European countries, which likewise closed the discussion about socialist alternatives. Following the clash between Stalin and Tito, Yugoslavia, which later experimented with workers’ self-management, was “excommunicated” from the socialist camp in the Stalinist era. The defeat of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 put a quick end to the attempts of working-class councils to realize the direct ownership of the workers.

The relationship between the workers and the party has, of course, remained central to the leftist critics of Stalinist society. Even though real research on workers was effectively prevented by the political regimes, the question of how to define socialist

⁴² ‘Beszélgetés Horváth Edével, a Rába MVG vezérigazgatójával’, *Tér-kép*, 1989. június 1.

⁴³ Debates in the Soviet Union ended with the consolidation of Stalin’s power in the 1930s. On the debates of the 1920s see: Tamás Krausz, *Pártviták és történettudomány: Viták “az orosz fejlődés” sajátosságairól, különös tekintettel az 1920-as évekre* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1991). For a discussion of the theoretical roots of the Stalinist turn (the abandonment of the NEP – new economic policy – in favor of collectivization and forced industrialization see id., *Szovjet thermidor: A sztálini fordulat szellemi előzményei 1917-1928* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1996).

societies has been widely theorized, and several prognoses have been developed for their ultimate fall. The present chapter cannot undertake to introduce this debate; the discussion is limited to two authors, whose theoretical work has especially informed the arguments of this dissertation. The lack of socialist proprietorship was central to both authors' criticism, envisaging the withdrawal of working-class support from the party. This is followed by a brief historical overview of why the concept of self-management has become marginalized in the two examined countries and how rational redistribution functioned, which was an important support of the workerist⁴⁴ ideology of both regimes. Finally, the chapter introduces the main findings of Burawoy's fieldwork in Hungarian factories in the mid 1980s, which reveal that the workers increasingly distanced themselves from the regime.

The first, theoretically influential "answer" to Stalinism was given by Trotsky in his famous critique, *The Revolution Betrayed*⁴⁵ that he wrote in exile. The work was not only meant to be a fierce polemic against his victorious political rival, but the author had the more ambitious goal to understand the social roots of Stalinism which he linked with the "degeneration" of the revolution. Trotsky concentrated on the issue of property, arguing that, contrary to the original Marxist program, it was not the working class which took control of the means of production, but the Stalinist nomenklatura. The bureaucrats themselves were not proprietors but their control of redistribution enabled them to appropriate surplus and reproduce social inequalities. Even though Trotsky used the term of state capitalism, he claimed that the nomenklatura has not yet reached the stage to be called a new class. Only if they restored the old forms of private property relations could

⁴⁴ The ideology of the party focused on the urban, skilled working class that the regime regarded to be its main social support. For a discussion of the "workerist" policy of the late Kádár regime see: Mark Pittaway, op. cit., 2005.

⁴⁵ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed. What is the Soviet Union and where is it going?* (New York: Doubleday, 1937).

they be called proper capitalists, which, unless prevented by the Soviet people, would have meant the betrayal of the October revolution.⁴⁶

After Trotsky, the most original analysis of property relations under “actually existing” socialism was put forward by Pavel Campenau⁴⁷, who published a trilogy entitled *The Syncretic Society* under the pseudonym Casals.⁴⁸, in which he offered a comprehensive critique of Stalinist society. It was Campenau who introduced the concept of a property vacuum to describe the first form of state socialism: “Stalinism as a mode of production is based on negative property relations in two ways: first, it is anti-capitalist (since it destroys capitalism) and second, it is not socialist (since it has never experimented with the social form of ownership)”.⁴⁹ Since the new system of property relations excluded economic democracy, the liquidation of the propertied class and the prohibition of the private ownership of the means of production did not remove but merely vacated private property relations. The essence of the state socialist system was that the state extracted the means of production from the sphere of the market and thereby created a “valuation vacuum” in the economy. It separated property relations from the control over the means of production and removed responsibility from the party cadres, who were in charge of the means of production.⁵⁰ Hence the property vacuum was the only type of modern property relation, which was not codified by law, thus enabling the replacement of inequalities represented

⁴⁶ Trotsky already forecasted that the nomenklatura would not hesitate to privatize property if they felt their political power endangered. For a discussion of the debates about property under perestroika see: Tamás Krausz, ‘A peresztrojka és a tulajdonváltás’, in Tamás Krausz- Zoltán Bíró Sz. (eds.), op. cit., 2003, 52-102.

⁴⁷ Casals [Pavel Campenau], *The Syncretic Society* (White Plains, N.Y. : M. E. Sharpe, 1980).

⁴⁸ Stalinist society was widely criticized by Eastern European intellectuals. To mention just a few well-known examples see: Milovan Djilas [Gyilas], *The New Class* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983); Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative: zur Kritik des realexistierenden Sozialismus* (Köln: Europäische Verlaganstalt, 1977.1977); György Bence –János Kis [Mark Rakovski], *A szovjet típusú társadalom marxista szemmel* (Párizs, Magyar Füzetek, 1983); György Konrád-Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979). Campenau’s work is discussed in more detail because of his explanation of property relations. For a criticism of the socialist cadre class see also: Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Officialdom and Class - Bases of Inequality in a Socialist Society’, in: Frank Parkin (ed.). *The Social Analysis of Class Structure* (London: Tavistock, 1974); Bálint Balla, *Kaderverwaltung* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1972).

⁴⁹ Casals, op. cit., 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20.

by private property with the inequalities of Stalinist society manifested in the informal allocation.

According to Campenau, the most important deficiency of Stalinism was its failure to establish a “positive” institutional mechanism, which would have guaranteed equal opportunities for all citizens to exercise control over the means of production. Therefore the workers were again forced to sell their labor power. This is all the more important for the definition of the relations of production in Stalinist societies because the necessity to sell labor was combined with a prohibition on buying it. The inadequate social control over the means of production thereby brought about the state’s monopoly to buy labor. The transformation of property relations in state socialism involved a repressive restructuring: the removal of the propertied class and the replacement of direct, legally protected private property relations with a property vacuum. Property was vacated with the removal of property owners as a class and the state penetrated into the “empty space” of private property relations.

Disappointed with Stalinist society, many authors sought to outline another socialist alternative while refusing to identify Stalinism with socialism. The role of the workers’ councils in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 gave a fresh impetus to the theoretical debates about workers’ self-management.⁵¹ In many places workers’ councils continued to maintain control of the factories even after the defeat of the revolution, and the Kádár

51 On the Hungarian working-class councils see: István Kemény -Bill Lomax (eds.), *Magyar munkástanácsok 1956-ban: Dokumentumok* (Párizs, Magyar Füzetek, 1986); Bill Lomax, *Magyarország 1956* (Budapest: Aura, 1989); Eszter Zsófia Tóth, 'A Csepel Vas- és Fémművek munkástanácsainak története 1956-1957', *Múltunk*, 4 (1999) 163-198; István Feitl, 'Parlamentarizmus és öngazgatás az 1956-os forradalomban', *Múltunk*, 2 (2005), 231-243; id.: 'A magyar munkástanácsok és az öngazgatás 1956-ban', *Eszmélet*, 2 (1989), 42-52; János Molnár, *A Nagybudapesti Központi Munkástanács* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969); id., *A forradalom előzményei, alakulása és utóélete. Tanulmányok és kronológia* (Párizs and New Jersey, 1987); Zoltán Ripp, *1956. Forradalom és szabadságharc Magyarországon* (Budapest: Korona Kiadó, 2002). From the latest literature see: Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions. Moscow, Washington, Budapest and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

regime could consolidate its power only by satisfying a significant number of working-class demands.⁵²

After the official dissolution of the workers' councils in 1957, there were at least formal attempts to increase enterprise democracy. Workers' councils had been formed to replace the "shop triangle", which effectively secured the state and party control of the factories. The "shop triangle" consisted of the state management, the party secretary and the secretary of the trade union committee. The secretary of the newly established Communist youth organization (KISZ) was added to form the "shop quadrangle", and instead of the workers' councils, enterprise councils were formed to increase the participation of the employees in management. Employees elected one third of the members of the council and the trade union delegated the other two-thirds. The managers, the party secretary and the secretary of the KISZ were officially members of the council. The chairperson was the secretary of the trade union committee. The enterprise council had the right of oversight over issues of economic efficiency, it received reports on the management of the enterprise and decided the distribution of bonuses and the social and cultural funds. The managers were accountable to the enterprise council.

⁵² For a current debate on the role of the working-class councils in the revolution see: Tamás Krausz, 'Az 1956-os munkástanácsokról', *Eszmélet* 72 (2006), 32-38 and László Tütő, '1956 mint nyelvi probléma', *Eszmélet* 72 (2006), 5-10. Mark Pittaway, who studied Hungarian social history in the period of forced industrialization, argues that the revolution found its social basis in the working class, which protested not only against their material pauperization but also against collectivization in the province since the overwhelming majority of the newly recruited workforce came from the peasantry. In addition, the wage policy of the early 1950s overthrew the traditional hierarchies based on skill, age and gender in the factories, and turned the more experienced, skilled core of the working class against the system. (Mark Pittaway, op. cit., 1998). The discontent of the working class was a crucial factor in the armed resistance to the Soviet troops. In an inspiring article, Pittaway argues that the consolidation of the Kádár regime was possible through the satisfaction of the most important working-class demands. (Mark Pittaway, op. cit., 2006).

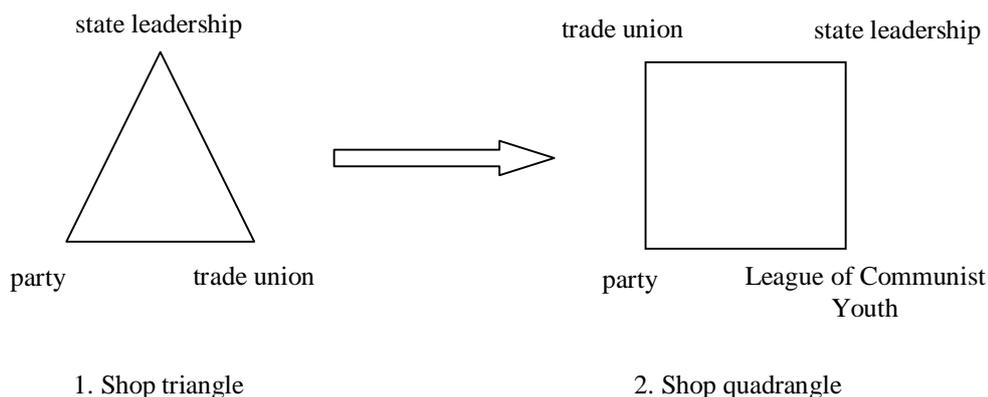


Figure 1. Two models of enterprise management

The reality of enterprise councils was, of course, distant from ideas of workers' self-management, and they were soon reduced to a formal role. Since they were regarded as institutions parallel to the trade union, they were eventually placed under the direct control of the trade union committees. The appointment (or replacement) of the managers was decided by the central authorities⁵³ and not the trade union; thus, the criticism of the managers was often a theoretical right that few people exercised.⁵⁴ Although in the 1970s there was an academic discussion about the scope and nature of enterprise democracy, state, and thus party control of the factories remained unchallenged.⁵⁵

⁵³ Officially, the managers were appointed by the relevant ministries, but the leading party organs had to approve of the appointments.

⁵⁴ The formal role of the trade union in the enterprise management was criticized even in the executive committee of Győr-Sopron county (GYML, X. 415/134/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Az üzemi demokrácia helyzete, az egyszemélyi vezetés érvényesülése és a továbbfejlesztés feladatai. 1974. március 29.

⁵⁵ In Hungary Lajos Héthy and Csaba Makó wrote several studies on the functioning of interest representation and the often informal ways of successful bargaining. See: Lajos Héthy – Csaba Makó, *Munkásmagatartások és a gazdasági szervezet* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972); Lajos Héthy – Csaba Makó, 'A munkások perspektívái és a szocialista vállalat' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 1 (1976), 53-63; Lajos Héthy – Csaba Makó, *Munkások, érdekek, érdekegyeztetés* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó 1978); Lajos Héthy-Csaba Makó, 'Work Performance, Interests, Powers and Environment (The Case of Cyclical Slowdowns in a Hungarian Factory)' *The Sociological Review Monograph*, no. 17 (1972), 123-150; Lajos Héthy, 'Bérvita az építkezésen. (Az érdekérvényesítési képesség problémája)' *Valóság*, 20, no. 11 (1977), 76-88. Concerning enterprise democracy see in particular: Lajos Héthy, *Az üzemi demokrácia és a munkások* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1980); id., *Vállalatirányítás és demokrácia. Az üzemi demokrácia szociológiai koncepciója és fejlesztésének lehetőségei szervezeti-társadalmi viszonyainkban* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1983); Csaba Makó, 'Részvétel: a feladat átalakítása vagy a hatalmi viszonyok átalakítása', *Valóság*, 22, no. 4 (1979): 14-24. In the periodical *Társadalmi Szemle* there was also an extensive debate on how to realize enterprise democracy. See: Aladárné Mód, 'Munkásismeretek, munkástörekvések, üzemi

The concept of workers' self-management was discussed only in narrow intellectual circles, and there is no evidence that these debates reached the workers themselves, nor did they become well known at the shop-floor. The programmatic essay of the famous Marxist philosopher, György Lukács, *Demokratisierung heute und morgen* (1968), in which he argued that the direct control of producers could establish a more democratic society without "returning to" capitalism, was published in Hungary only in 1988, when the restoration of private property relations was already on the political agenda. Socialist alternatives to Stalinist society were widely discussed and partly experimented with in Poland and Yugoslavia but since they had even less influence on the two examined cases than the tradition of the workers' councils, the present chapter omits the introduction of these debates.⁵⁶ While in Hungary the improvement of enterprise democracy appeared at least among the political slogans and was discussed even in the executive committee of the

demokrácia (Kutatási tapasztalatok)', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 29, no. 11 (1974), 53-63; Imre Katona, 'Eszmecsere a párttagokkal', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 2 (1976), 15-25; Lajos Héthy, 'Hogyan látjuk ma az üzemi demokráciát?' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 9 (1977), 64-66; id., 'A gazdasági munka pártirányítása és az érdekegyeztetés' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 34, no. 2 (1979), 26-35; id., 'Az üzemi demokrácia fejlesztésének útján. (Az eszmecsere befejezéséhez)' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 6 (1978), 52-64; Edit Sötér, 'Gondolatok a szocialista brigádmozgalmról', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 4. (1977), 9-16; Csaba Makó, 'Az érdekegyeztetés és a cselekvési egység az üzemben. Az üzemi demokrácia fejlesztésének kérdéséhez' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 5 (1977), 58-67; László Horváth, 'Üzemi demokrácia és vállalati stratégia', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 9 (1977), 72-77; Csaba Egerszegi, 'Termelési tanácskozás és üzemi demokrácia', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 9 (1977), 81-85; György Akszentievics, 'Ki hogyan érdekelt az üzemi demokrácia gyakorlásában?', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 10, (1977), 94-99; Ágnes Simonyi, 'Munkásrészvétel üzemi bérezési döntésekben. (Kutatói tapasztalatok a Magyar Vagon és Gépgyárban)', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 10, (1977), 99-101; id. 'Munkahelyi demokrácia és nyilvánosság', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 1 (1978), 59-67; Márton Búza, 'Az üzemi demokrácia érvényesítése: a gazdasági vezetők kötelessége', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 9 (1977), 67-71; János Marosi, 'Nem csak a gazdasági vezetők dolga...' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 12 (1977), 70-72; János Fehér, 'Diósgyőri munkások az üzemi demokráciáról', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 11 (1977), 76-80; István Ferenczi, 'Az üzemi demokrácia: fokozott társadalmi ellenőrzés', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 12 (1977), 72-74; Pálné Vitkovics, 'Az üzemi demokrácia és a pártszervezet munkája', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 1 (1978), 67-69; György Marle, 'Az üzemi demokrácia és a termelés', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 3 (1978), 69-75; Tibor Folkmayer, 'Üzemi demokrácia és tervezés', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 4 (1978), 95-97; Jenő Andics – Tamás Rozgonyi, 'A vállalati konfliktusok és a hatékonyság', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 34, no. 5 (1979), 48-59; György Gergely, 'Hogyan látják a munkások üzemi gondjainkat és tennivalóinkat?' *Társadalmi Szemle*, 34, no. 9 (1979), 41-47; János Rózsa, 'Napjaink kérdése: az üzemi demokrácia', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 2 (1978), 79-84. It should be noted that Lajos Héthy and Csaba Makó conducted a study in Rába MVG about how automation influenced working-class consciousness. See: Lajos Héthy – Csaba Makó, *Az automatizáció és a munkástudat* (Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Kutató Intézet Kiadványa, 1975). The research is discussed in: Lajos Héthy –Csaba Makó, 'Az automatizáció és az ipari munkások. Beszámoló egy nemzetközi kutatási program menetéről', *Szociológia*, 2 (1972), 262-273.

⁵⁶ For the discussion of the Polish and Yugoslavian debates about self-management as well as the afterlife of the concept in the period of transformation see the Ph. D. – dissertation of Tibor Meszmann (Department of Political Science of the Central European University, Budapest), which is in progress.

county, in the GDR there is no evidence of any criticism of the existing structure of enterprise management. In both cases it can be argued that even though there was an intellectual tradition of criticism of Stalinist society, the idea of self-management could not be embedded in the consciousness of the workers because the political regimes effectively prevented any public discussion of socialist alternatives to their system.⁵⁷

In principle, rational redistribution could have provided for a strong support of the workerist ideology of the regime. In practice, however, it was often not the workers, who benefited from the policy of state redistribution even though they were claimed to be the main beneficiaries. György Konrád and Iván Szelényi studied state redistribution through the example of housing⁵⁸, which led them to make the provocative case that it was not the bureaucrats, but the intellectuals who were becoming a new ruling class under state socialism.⁵⁹ They described the party-state as one in which the new ruling class controlled the mechanisms of rational redistribution and it thereby had a chance to increase its share at the expense of the others. At the same time the authors recognized the existence of conflicting interests and they argued that their representation took place in the forums of the party, hidden from the public sphere. The highest political forum was the Central Committee that elected the Political Bureau, the highest executive body of the party. The decisions of the Central Committee were resolutions that did not fit within in a formalized legal order. The necessary consequences were adopted as laws by the parliament. The authors give a good description of the constitution of the Central Committee: “Every representative member of the ruling elite takes part in the sessions of the Central Committee. Every secretary and section chief at party headquarters is a member almost automatically, as are the heads of all the larger regional administrative organs of party and

⁵⁷ Workers’ self-management as a possible alternative was not even mentioned in the interviews. When asked directly, the majority of the interview partners were unfamiliar with the concept.

⁵⁸ Iván Szelényi –György Konrád, *Az új lakótelepek szociológiai problémái* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

⁵⁹ György Konrád-Iván Szelényi, op. cit., 1979.

state, the heads of every ministry and administrative organ of national scope (from the president of the National Bank and the director of the Statistical Office to the secretary of the Academy), the editor-in-chief of every daily, the directors of the state radio and television, the heads of the larger enterprises, and not least the chiefs of the army and police; all those are present who by reason of their office dispose of significant power and for that reason can take part in redistributive decisions of national significance”.⁶⁰ The model is relevant for my research insofar as it shows the intertwining of political and economic interests: the fact that the chief manager of Rába was also a member of the Central Committee played a role in influencing central decisions about the allocation of resources in favor of his enterprise.⁶¹ The thesis of the new ruling class was, however, later revisited by Szelényi, who argued that contrary to their expectations, participation in private economic activities had become increasingly important for social stratification in Hungary.⁶²

The British sociologist Michael Burawoy undertook his fieldwork in Hungary at the time when market relations increasingly penetrated the economy.⁶³ He was interested in the Hungarian case study in order to test his general theory of the development of factory regimes for socialist countries. He argued that the despotic regimes of early capitalism were replaced with hegemonic regimes, in which consent prevailed over coercion. In advanced capitalism he observed the emergence of a new type of despotism that he called hegemonic, in which the workers were tied to the enterprise by the “rational” tyranny of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁶¹ Horváth himself admitted that his political contacts contributed to his success as a manager. For his description of the contemporary political leadership see his autobiographical book: Ede Horváth, *Én volnék a Vörös Báró?* (Pécs: Szikra Nyomda, 1990), 52-71.

⁶² Iván Szelényi, ‘A kelet európai újosztály stratégia távlatai és korlátai: Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz önkritikus felülvizsgálata.’ in id., *Új osztály, állam, politika* (Budapest, Európa, 1990), 51-98.

⁶³ The general change of the political climate could have been one reason of why a Western researcher was admitted to Hungarian factories. In 1972, Haraszti’s book, which grew out of his experience as an unskilled worker in a factory, triggered a show-trial against the author because he argued that the feeling of being exploited had not disappeared in the socialist system. (Miklós Haraszti, op. cit., 1979). Burawoy was familiar with this book. His fieldwork is introduced in more detail in: Michael Burawoy- János Lukács, op. cit., 1992.

capital mobility and they willingly made concessions to the capital in order to prevent the transfer of production to other countries or continents. This was paralleled with the weakening of the traditional forms of interest representation such as trade unions. The internal division of labor increased: workers saw their fellow-workers as rivals, and there were cases when they voluntarily agreed to wage cuts to prevent the closing of their enterprise.⁶⁴

Burawoy argued that a similar development took place under socialism where the state directly regulated the production process and repressed the struggles of labor. To eliminate the latter, the party and trade union organizations were admitted to the management; thus, the conflicts between the state and labor were covert and work disputes were settled informally as a result of negotiations behind closed doors. Contrary to market despotism where production politics and state politics were separated, “under bureaucratic despotism state and factory politics are continuous, so that struggles which begin in one arena easily spill over into others. They therefore tend to be repressed rather than organized”.⁶⁵ Burawoy, however, argued that bureaucratic despotism had a greater need for the consent of the workers in order to maintain continuous production than its hegemonic counterpart.⁶⁶ He indeed predicted that workers were more likely to recover a socialist consciousness and struggle to appropriate the control over the production and distribution of surplus under socialism than under capitalism.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁶ Burawoy distinguished between core and peripheral workers. The older, experienced, male skilled workers constituted the first group, who occupied key positions in the production process. They were given better-paid jobs, and they were overrepresented among party and trade union officials in comparison to other workers. Among the peripheral workers one could find the young and unskilled “whose only hope is to leave in search of a better job or to seek promotion to the core”. (Michael Burawoy, *op. cit.* 189). Héthy and Makó likewise proved that workers in key positions could successfully build up a group to exert pressure on the management. (Lajos Héthy-Csaba Makó, *op. cit.*, 1978).

⁶⁷ Michael Burawoy, *op. cit.*, 197.

Burawoy later self-critically recognized that his prognosis was wrong and in fact the opposite happened of what he expected in Eastern Europe.⁶⁸ The question of why the working class did not defend the workers' state, remains, however, a valid one. In her sociological study of the change of regime in the GDR Linda Fuller adopted the thesis of the new ruling class to argue that there was a great social gulf between the workers and the intelligentsia, and the workers did not intend to interfere in a struggle that they understood as one going on between competing groups of intellectuals.⁶⁹ This thesis, however, falls short to explain why the workers withdrew their support from the system and why they were more susceptible to the ideology of market than self-management.

The present study focuses on two theoretical arguments that it intends to develop: the first one is the workers' lack of ownership consciousness and the second is the dysfunction of rational redistribution, which the party offered them as substitute. The reform of the planned economies was followed by the closing of a social dialogue in both countries. The party's failure to communicate with the working class increasingly distanced the "cadres" from the working people. The recognition of the increasing gap between the socialist ideology and the reality of everyday life rendered communist propaganda mostly ineffective and indeed counter-productive because the people would rather choose to believe the opposite of what the party said. Burawoy's fieldwork account, published after the change of regimes, reveals that his fellow workers no longer believed in the socialist system, which was reflected in their jokes and casual remarks about politics.⁷⁰ By developing the above mentioned two theses, the study argues that the communist regimes have, in fact, *weakened* the socialist consciousness of the workers rendering labor politically inactive and consequently more defenseless in the new, capitalist societies.

⁶⁸ Michael Burawoy-János Lukács, op. cit., 1992.

⁶⁹ Linda Fuller, op. cit., 1999.

⁷⁰ See in particular the chapter 'Painting socialism' in Michael Burawoy-János Lukács, op. cit., 1992, 111-142.

The beginning of market socialism in Hungary

As the dissertation distinguishes between the reformist and collectivist models of the welfare dictatorships, the following two chapters seek to give an overview of the different trajectories of the reform processes in the two countries to introduce the national contexts of the socialist system. Even though there was a partial retreat from the initial, more radical program of the Hungarian reform of 1968, the extension of the private sector continued in the 1980s, which influenced the existing social structure.⁷¹ While in Hungary reforms were concentrated on the decrease of state control of the economy, in Honecker's GDR the opposite can be observed: the state extended social provisions and promised to solve centrally even the housing of the citizens. Reform processes thus constitute an important starting point for the different national contexts that the following two chapters seek to outline. The overview of the economic and social policies of the two countries – apart from highlighting the differences between the models – also introduces the partly similar, partly different environments of the two examined state-owned enterprises, thus enabling an analysis of the individual case studies in a larger national context.

Decided upon in 1966 and implemented in 1968, Hungary's new economic mechanism (*új gazdasági mechanizmus*) emerged out of an extensive discussion among economists and a growing concern within the party leadership over poor export performance and the inefficient operation of state-owned industry during the mid-1960s.⁷²

⁷¹ The argument is developed below.

⁷² On Hungary's new economic mechanism see: Tamás Bauer, 'A vállalatok ellentmondásos helyzete az új mechanizmusban', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 22, no. 6 (1975), 725-735; Rezső Nyers, *Gazdaságpolitikánk és a gazdasági mechanizmus reformja* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1968); Jolán Ritter Pappné- Lászlóné Tüü, 'A kis-és középzemek szerepéről', *Gazdaság*, 2, no. 2, (1968), 12-25; Iván Schweitzer, *A vállalatnagyság* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1982); András Bródy, 'A gazdasági mechanizmus bírálatának három hulláma', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 30, no. 7-8 (1983), 802-807. In English see: Iván T. Berend, *Hungarian Economic Reforms 1953-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Nigel Swain, *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 1992).

The discussion of the reform of the planned economy was, of course, not a unique Hungarian phenomenon at the time; it was closely linked with the Soviet thaw under Khrushchev, which enabled the public criticism of the shortcomings of the over-centralized economy. The reform discourse in the Soviet Union started with the article of the Soviet economist, Evsei G. Liberman entitled “Plan, profit, premium” published in *Pravda* in 1962, in which he proposed to strengthen profitability of the centrally planned economy. Liberman summarized his proposals in two slogans: “Let’s liberate the factories from the petty tutelage of administrative measures!” and “What is useful for society must be useful for the factories!”⁷³ By the first he meant an increase in the autonomy of the individual enterprises, and by the second he proposed to tie premiums to value of goods produced value rather than the raw quantities specified in the plan.

The Liberman discussion initiated a wave of reform discussions throughout the Eastern European countries. While the GDR was the first to implement an economic reform inspired by Liberman’s suggestions, the Hungarian economic reform, albeit adopted later, was targeted not only at decentralization but it granted more concessions to the market than did the new economic system of the GDR. The Hungarian economist János Kornai gave a theoretical criticism of over-centralization prior to Liberman.⁷⁴ In 1965 reform-minded economists outlined the *Criticism of our present economic management*, which argued, that the system of the allocation of the tasks to the ministries and enterprises was dysfunctional because the central planning apparatus could not have a clear picture of the production capacities and reserves of every enterprise, and the enterprises were not

⁷³ Liberman’s article is quoted in: Gert Leptin, ‘Das „Neue ökonomische System” Mitteldeutschlands’ in Karl C. Thalheim-Hans-Hermann Höhmann (eds.), *Wirtschaftsreformen in Osteuropa* (Köln: Verl. Wissenschaft und Politik, 1968), 115. See also: Evsei Liberman, Maurice Dobb et al., *Theory of Profit in Socialist Economy: A Discussion on the Recent Economic Reforms in the USSR* (New Delhi: People’s Pub. House, 1966).

⁷⁴ János Kornai, *A gazdasági vezetés túlzott központosítása* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könykiadó, 1957). For his famous criticism of the socialist economy see: id., *A hiány* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könykiadó, 1980).

interested in increasing efficiency and the better satisfaction of consumers' demands.⁷⁵ Besides giving a sharp critique of the existing system of management, the document also pointed out the political dangers of the over-centralized economy: "The system of plan allocation has a negative impact on the consciousness of the people: on the one hand, they forget how to act autonomously, how to initiate things and to account for them and on the other hand, it confirms the politically harmful view that the higher leading bodies are responsible for every mistake and hardship. Since we regulate everything centrally, it facilitates the wrong 'reflection' of reality that the increase of the standard of living is decided by the will of the central authorities".⁷⁶ The document was also critical of the system of central pricing observing that the prices largely and economically unreasonably differed from the social costs of labor.⁷⁷

The reform increased the autonomy of the enterprises and the managers' authority to make tactical decisions. To stimulate the enterprises, the state allowed them to retain part of the profits, and the managers could decide the distribution of the bonuses. The state's proprietary rights were not, however challenged; amongst others, the state retained the important right of appointing the management. Indirect control was established through prices and taxation of the enterprises, which eventually had a leveling effect. It was envisaged that there would be a limited competition among the enterprises that would improve the economic performance without restoring capitalist relations: "An important feature of the new economic mechanism is that it enables the economic competition of the

⁷⁵ 'Jelenlegi gazdaságirányításunk kritikája', in: Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának kiinduló irányelvei a gazdaságirányítási rendszer reformjára (1965. november 18-20). *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1963-1966*. Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1978, 237-247. For a similar criticism see: Ota Šik, *Plan and market under Socialism* (White Plains, N. Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1967). Šik described the interest trap of the command economy as an input-output game. The centre demanded the production of maximal output with the smallest possible input. The enterprise tried to get maximal investment and promised minimal output in exchange so that it can over-fulfil the plan and receive governmental awards and premiums.

⁷⁶ 'Jelenlegi gazdaságirányításunk kritikája', op. cit., 242.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 243.

socialist enterprises and it urges them to compete in the market. This competition is, of course, limited. It is limited by the level of the development of the productive forces (concentration and specialization of production and distribution) and the socialist nature of our planned economy. This limited competition has, nevertheless, a special significance for the development of enterprise initiative, the increase of efficiency, technical improvement and the satisfaction of buyers' needs".⁷⁸

Even though the increase of enterprise autonomy was an important element of the reform, it was also linked with the re-organization of economic management. The structural transformation of the industry had been on the agenda since 1958 but the "experimental" enterprise concentration was followed by a retreat, and it was only in 1962-1964 that a new industrial structure emerged characterized by giant enterprises and an almost absolute lack of small companies. The grand-scale concentration of the means of production was expected to reduce bureaucracy and increase the authority and responsibility of the management. The enterprise was responsible for the determination of the social needs for the products within its profile (responsibility of planning) and the satisfaction of the demands (responsibility of supply), and it had to finance the technological improvement and the change of products.⁷⁹

Although the re-organization of economic management increased the role of market incentives, Iván Schweitzer already indicated that the requirement to make profits often contradicted the responsibility of supply. The managers would typically argue that any product could be made profitable with more investment and that if they stopped their production, it would lead to shortage in the domestic economy.⁸⁰ String-pulling and political contacts were also frequently used to secure state subventions. The central

⁷⁸ Ibid. 318.

⁷⁹ Iván Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, 39-47.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 47-54.

allocation of the resources was thus subject to fierce criticism; profitable enterprises complained that the subventions were distributed at their expense.⁸¹ It can be therefore argued that within the enterprise structure market incentives could only have a limited effect.

Within the framework of the new economic mechanism more radical reforms had been planned but the growing division of the party over reform and the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia resulted in a retreat. This, however, did not reverse the process, which indicated the real significance of the reform: the legal extension of the second or private economy (*második gazdaság*). Although the 1968 economic reform did not entail a concept of ownership, it made the development of industrial units within agricultural co-operatives possible, which did not carry out agricultural production, but industrial and service activities. The private economy within the framework of agriculture started to expand towards the industrial and service sectors, which influenced the competitive position of the state industrial and service companies in the domestic market significantly more than the very limited competition created by the private retailers and craftsmen. Although in the 1970s attacks against the agricultural subsidiary industries were renewed again and again, these became the ever expanding bases of the development of the private sector.

The second major market reform came in 1982 when the government authorized the introduction of nine forms of small business. The reform allowed the formation of the so-called VGMK-s (*vállalati gazdasági munkaközösség* = economic productive communities of the enterprise), which were in fact private enterprises using the infrastructure and personnel of the factory outside regular working hours. VGMK-s often received contracts

⁸¹ Giant enterprises could at the same time represent significant bargaining power, and they could effectively prevent reform initiatives or the cuts of subventions. For a discussion of the relation between the giant enterprises and the central bodies see: Erzsébet Szalai, *Gazdasági mechanizmus, reformtörekvések és nagyvállalati érdekek* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1989); Éva Voszka, *Reform és átszervezés a 80-as években* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1988).

from their own factories. In the 1980s Hungary was already a socialist “mixed” economy insofar as the second economy operated as a significant adjunct to the state sector. Since salaries in the private economy were considerably higher than in the state sector, the expertise started to wander away to the private enterprises.

The second economy impacted on social stratification as well. In 1981 a national sociological survey led by Tamás Kolosi found that the private economy had the second largest impact on social stratification after occupation.⁸² The interpretation of the Hungarian market reform was at the time subject to fierce political controversies. To overcome the resistance of the hardliners in the party, the reformers argued that it would “correct” the inequalities of state redistribution. The reform did, in fact, increase social inequalities because people in higher state positions had better access to the private economy.⁸³

From the late 1970s the growing indebtedness and the deteriorating economic performance of the country⁸⁴ urged the reformers to search for more pronounced pro-market reforms. This explains that when the democratic opposition published *Social contract* in 1987, in which they outlined the conditions of a democratic reform, their economic program did not differ radically from *Property and reform*, the communist reform program of 1986. *Social contract* called for a legal recognition of the mixed (state and private) ownership, the expansion of the private sector and decentralization (enterprises should be managed by the enterprise councils elected from below). From today’s perspective, the program was anything but radical. Although there was a call for the expansion of the private sector, there was no proposal for the privatization of the large

⁸² Tamás Kolosi, *Tagolt társadalom: Struktúra, rétegződés, egyenlőtlenség Magyarországon* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987).

⁸³ Iván Szelényi, op. cit., 1990.

⁸⁴ According to the study of Károly Lóránt, the development of economic indexes (GDP, industrial production, the gross production value of agricultural products, real wage/person) showed a decline in the period between 1978 and 1987 as compared to the data of the period between 1958 and 1978 (Károly Lóránt, *Gazdasági fejlődésünk kritikus kérdései 1968-1988*, Budapest: Társadalomtudományi Intézet, 1989).

state enterprises. The demand to democratize the enterprise councils was modeled on the example of the workers' councils of 1956, which pointed to the direction of workers' self-management. Although some critics later argued that *Social contract* was a strategic step on behalf of the democratic opposition, according to Csizmadia there is no reason to doubt that the opposition at that time agreed with this program.⁸⁵

With the weakening of the Soviet control the reform took a different direction. By 1988, both the reform communists and the democratic opposition abandoned the concept of the "mixed" economy in favor of private property. In 1988, Prime Minister Miklós Németh announced that capital related income was of equal value to labor related income.⁸⁶ The announcement of the Prime Minister was followed by a change of legislation, which propelled the property reform towards an outright change of system.

From reform to retreat: the GDR under late socialism

The establishment of the Honecker regime and its program of providing for the social needs of the citizens, including housing, were preceded by Ulbricht's reform experiment and his subsequent fall. The reform generated mounting social discontent because of increasing shortages⁸⁷, and Honecker and his supporters came to believe that the generous social policy of the state and maintaining a regular supply of goods to the population could ensure lasting support. Since the social policy of the state was inseparably intertwined with its labor policy, this chapter seeks to outline Ulbricht's reform and Honecker's welfare program, the first being important because one chapter studies the

⁸⁵ Ervin Csizmadia (ed.): *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék 1968-1988* (Budapest: T-Twins, 1995).

⁸⁶ The Act VI of 1988 on Business Organizations enabled the employment of up to 500 people. Gorbachev's naivety in economic issues was revealed in his question to Miklós Németh, the Prime Minister of Hungary: "is the employer the private owner?". Tamás Krausz, 'A peresztrojka és a tulajdonváltás: Politikai koncepciók és történelmi valóság', op. cit., 2003, 73.

⁸⁷ See the chapter on *Reform and Retreat*.

effect of the reform on the district⁸⁸ and the Zeiss factory, while the second provides a context for the examination of the study of the labor policy of the district and the factory.

The reform of the planned economy in the GDR started earlier than in Hungary and it took a more controversial trajectory.⁸⁹ Inspired by the Liberman discussion in the Soviet Union, Ulbricht announced the reform experiment, which bore the somewhat euphemistic name of the New Economic System of Planning and Managing the People's Economy (NES), (*das Neue ökonomische System der Planung und Leitung*), later renamed the Economic System of Socialism (EES), (*das Ökonomische System des Sozialismus*) at the Sixth Party Congress in December 1963.⁹⁰ The reform sought to re-organize the enterprise structure, to increase the autonomy and financial responsibility of the enterprises, and to introduce more economic incentives and a more realistic price policy mainly in order to improve the export performance of the country. The economic indexes of the GDR showed a decline in the previous years even in the light of official statistics: the national income

⁸⁸ The Zeiss factory belonged to the district of Gera (today Thuringia).

⁸⁹ Even though the Hungarian reform of enterprise management has much in common with the GDR reform, there is very little contemporary literature on the NES, which shows that the ideological discipline effectively prevented communication within the socialist camp. After Ulbricht's fall the GDR sources do not even mention the reform. For literature on the NES see: Michael Keren, 'The Rise and Fall of the New Economic System', in Lyman H. Legters (ed.), *The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), 61-84; Gert Leptin, op. cit., 1968; André Steiner, 'Abkehr vom NÖS. Die wirtschaftlichen Entscheidungen 1967/68 – Ausgangspunkt der Krisenprozesse 1969/70?' in Jochen Cerny (ed.), *Brüche, Krisen, Wendepunkte: Neubefragungen von DDR-Geschichte* (Leipzig: Urania-Verl., 1990), 247-253; André Steiner, *Die DDR- Wirtschaftsreform der sechziger Jahre: Konflikt zwischen Effizienz- und Machtkalkül* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999). In Hungarian see: Günter Manz, 'Tapasztalatok a népgazdasági tervezés és irányítás új rendszeréről az NDK-ban', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 12, no. 2 (1965), 176-188; Ferenc Fejtő, *A népi demokráciák története*, 2. volume, (Budapest: Magvető, 1991), 178-182. On the 1960s in the GDR see also Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed). *Aufbruch in die Zukunft: die 1960er Jahre zwischen Planungseuphorie und kulturellem Wandel: DDR, ČSSR und Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Vergleich* (Weilerswist: Velbrück-Wissenschaft, 2004).

⁹⁰ The criticism of the Stalinist economy appeared also in the GDR prior to Liberman. In 1957 Behrens and Benary published two articles in the journal *Wirtschaftswissenschaft* in which they argued that the product-money relations should be more fully exploited and the value principle should be given a greater role. At that time, however, both authors were forced to practice self-criticism and revise their theses. The affair is introduced in Leptin, op. cit., 113-115.

increased by 11% in 1958, 4,5% in 1960 and 2,1% in 1962; investments increased by 12% in 1958 and only 2% in 1962.⁹¹

While Ulbricht used phrases resonant with Liberman's slogans, condemning the "petty tutelage over the state-owned enterprises" and pointing out that "what is useful for the society must be useful for every socialist factory and its employees"⁹²), he maintained that the NES was a socialist system adapted to the specific needs and conditions of the GDR. The reform of the enterprise structure meant the creation of large state enterprises, the so-called "socialist trusts", which were responsible for the production, improvement and research work within their profile.⁹³ The reform, like in Hungary, increased the legal, economic and financial autonomy of the enterprises; the NES delegated many of the chores of the material supply mechanism to subordinate bodies in the hierarchy. A basic tool of the material supply mechanism was the material balance, which checked whether a given production-cum-final-uses plan was consistent. The administration of these balances was, to a large extent, delegated to the enterprises. In 1963, nearly a quarter of all balances were balanced by the State Planning Commission (SPC) and the ministries. By 1966 the enterprises were responsible for nearly 90% of the balances and the delegation went further in 1967. Another part of devolution was to provide the enterprises with a much wider freedom of action within the assigned production targets. This was closely related to the functioning of the supply mechanism: for any material balance for which the top had no specific desire, neither limits for inputs nor detailed output targets had to appear in the

⁹¹ Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1958 (Ost-Berlin, 1959), 272; Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1960/61 (Ost-Berlin, 1961), 302; Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1962 (Ost-Berlin, 1962), 282. Cited in Leptin, op. cit., 112.

⁹² Walter Ulbricht: Das Programm des Sozialismus und die geschichtliche Aufgabe der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands. *Neues Deutschland*, Berlin, 16.1.1963. Cited in Leptin, op. cit., 116.

⁹³ Schweitzer described a similar enterprise structure in Hungary without referring to the GDR experiences (Iván Schweitzer, op. cit.).

plan. The 1967 plan included only products of strategic importance. In 1968, the heyday of the NES, enterprises received fewer directions on the composition of sales than before.⁹⁴

Devolution was linked with the attempt to change the managerial approach and increase competition in the planned economy. Managers received funds from the center that they could use relatively freely (e.g. for investment, research, innovation), and the enterprises could retain a significant part of the profit. The quantitative approach (the so-called ton- ideology) was replaced with qualitative criteria such as profit, cost, price, labor productivity, and the optimal use of materials. The managers received a free hand to decide about bonuses, and they were encouraged to make use of the economic incentives (which were euphemistically called *ökonomische Hebel*): in 1969-1970 the center regulated only the wage funds, and not the average wages of the workers. The industrial price reform, which attempted to adjust the prices to the social costs of labor, was completed in 1967.

According to one of the most original analysts of the reform, Michael Keren, the year of 1968 meant not only the heyday of the NES but also the beginning of the end. Keren explains this apparent contradiction with the argument that devolution in a centralized system can work, if at all, only with reasonable reserves, i.e. with plans that are not too ambitious and taut. According to his analysis, this was precisely the case in the first period of the NES when the GDR economy achieved an annual growth rate of 5%, which was a spectacular result in comparison with the previous “lean years”.⁹⁵ In 1968 priority planning was introduced, which indeed centralized the planning of certain sectors of the economy, considered to be crucial for export-driven growth. The taut and unbalanced plans of 1969 and 1970, which concentrated state resources on large investments and priority products, upset the fragile balance between central planning and devolution, on which the new economic system rested. Specific misfortunes hastened the fall of the reform: in the

⁹⁴ Michael Keren, op. cit., 64-65.

⁹⁵ There was even a talk of the “red economic miracle”. Michael Keren, op. cit. 70.

harsh winter of 1969 the shortage of electricity caused many breakdowns in production and arrears in contract fulfillment. Since structure-determining projects received high priority, even the low plan targets of consumer goods were not fulfilled.

Keren's main argument is that the economic upheaval in the last two years of the reform brought about the political fall of Ulbricht, who insisted on the maximal program of the NES that he considered his life's work. As late as January 1971, in his last major economic address, Ulbricht still called for the concentration of the resources on priority products. Fearing a general social upheaval, the party leadership, however, refused to follow his economic program. Tautness was given up when some 1970 plan targets were cut in September; at the same time it was decided to slacken the 1971-75 plan. A lower investment target was set, priority was given to investments in electrical power and other intermediate sectors that had suffered neglect over the previous years. Ulbricht resigned two days before the publication of the plan.

Keren devoted less attention to social discontent, which, however, could have been a stronger motive for the party leadership than the economic upheaval. The Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia undoubtedly weakened the position of the reformers, who had to do everything to distance the new economic system from the Czech reforms.⁹⁶ Another problem was that even though the reform started with a wage stop, the regime eventually agreed to increase the workers' wages in order to win them over to the NES.⁹⁷ Overtime work also increased the income of the working class, while there were not enough consumers' goods in the shops. In this situation, Keren argues, the party could

⁹⁶ From the 1968 second edition of Ulbricht's works a whole section was removed, which contained the term self-regulation because it was considered too capitalist.

⁹⁷ Peter Hübner argues that in the defense of the Berlin wall, the party was more determined to resist the wage demands of the workers: they wanted to increase labor productivity without increasing the wages. The economic incentives however, enabled greater wage differentials and the managers often had to fulfill the workers' demands (premiums, lower norms) if they wanted them to fulfill the plan. In 1967 the state made significant concessions to the lower-income groups: the minimal wage was increased from 220 to 300 Mark. So the ratio between the minimal and average wages decreased from 1: 2,8 (1964) to 1: 2,2. Peter Hübner, *op. cit.*, 1995, 86-88.

have generated inflation but after the bloody riots that followed the increase of the prices announced in Poland on 12 December 1970, the GDR leadership did not dare to risk a similar course. They rather chose to abandon the maximal program of the NES and the party secretary, who insisted on the maximal program.

Honecker came to power in the name of the consumption-oriented “standard-of-living” policy, to which he remained loyal until the collapse of his regime. Immediately after his takeover he increased the rate of growth of consumption. The new draft of the Five-Year-Plan put increases in consumption at the head of the national tasks; this was the first time when a Five-Year Plan had put the rate of increase of consumption above that of investment. In 1971 Honecker announced that the main task of the Five-Year-Plan was “the further improvement of the material and cultural standard of living of the population on the basis of the rapid development of the socialist production, the increase of efficiency, the scientific-technical advance and the increase of labor productivity”.⁹⁸ Keren argues that ever since Stalin combined taut, centralized planning with a high priority for investments, the economists believed that the reformers’ mix was just the opposite: slack, decentralized and consumption-oriented. The Honecker regime, however, combined a slack, but centralized planning with an orientation toward consumption.⁹⁹

In 1976 Honecker announced the unity of economic and social policy (*die Einheit von Wirtschafts-und Sozialpolitik*), which aimed to implement a socialist welfare program suitable to beat the GDR’s West German rival. Honecker promised “a constant improvement of working and living conditions” to his people, which, according to his later

⁹⁸ Direktive des VIII. Parteitages der SED zum Fünfjahrplan für die Entwicklung der Volkswirtschaft der DDR 1971 bis 1975, in: Protokoll des VIII. Parteitages der SED, 2. volume, 322-327 and 380-391. Cited in Beatrix Bouvier, op. cit., 2002, 71.

⁹⁹ Michael Keren, op. cit. 79.

critics, largely contributed to the growing indebtedness of the GDR.¹⁰⁰ The most important elements of this program were wage policy, state housing construction and the support for families with a special emphasis on the working women.¹⁰¹ Wages increased while prices were kept relatively stable. In 1971 the minimum wage was increased from 300 to 350 M, and in 1976 to 400 M. In 1977 the government decreased the unemployment insurance revenue of the workers. Even according to Western analysts the real income of the population significantly increased up to 1978.¹⁰²

As a study of GDR wages shows, blue-collar workers earned relatively well as compared to other social strata.¹⁰³ In 1988 the average wage of a blue-collar worker was 1110 M (gross) while that of a foreman was 1370 M (gross). University or college graduates earned 15% more on average than skilled workers. The difference among the various branches was also relatively little: 150 M per month. Shift bonuses could influence workers' wages up to 30%. The study found a smaller wage differential between the sexes in the GDR than in West Germany. In 1988 the average female income was 16% lower than the male income in the GDR, while in West Germany the difference was nearly double.

¹⁰⁰ Even in the 1980s when the GDR faced a deteriorating balance of foreign trade, Honecker consequently refused to increase the prices of consumers' goods with the argument that the counter-revolutionary attempts in the other socialist countries such as Poland all started with the increase of the prices. André Steiner, op. cit., 2004, 190.

¹⁰¹ On Honecker's social policy see: Bouvier, op. cit., 2002. For contemporary studies on the Honecker era see, e.g., Gert-Joachim Glaeßner (ed.), *Die DDR in der Ära Honecker* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988); Werner Weidenfeld-Hartmut Zimmermann (eds.), op. cit. 1989.

¹⁰² Doris Cornelsen, 'Die Wirtschaft der DDR in der Honecker-Ära', in Gert-Joachim Glaeßner (ed.), op. cit., 357-370.

¹⁰³ Helga Stephan-Eberhard Wiedemann, 'Lohnstruktur und Lohndifferenzierung in der DDR. Ergebnisse der Lohndatenerfassung vom September 1988', *Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung*, 23, (1990), 550-562. For a comparison between the income of blue-collar and white-collar households see: Peter Krause -Johannes Schwarze, 'Die Einkommensstichprobe in Arbeiter- und Angestelltenhaushalten der DDR vom August 1988 – Erhebungskonzeption und Datenbankzugriff' Diskussionspapier No. 11. (Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, 1990). For East German working-class wages see also: Manfred Kaufmann, 'Arbeitseinkommen in der DDR', *Leistung und Lohn*, Nr. 223/224, April 1990, Sonderheft DDR, 3-20. For an analysis of household incomes see: Klaus-Dietrich Bedau, et. al. 'Untersuchungen zur Einkommensverteilung und -umverteilung in der DDR 1988 nach Haushaltsgruppen und Einkommensgrößenklassen auf der methodischen Grundlage der Verteilungsrechnung des Deutschen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung'. Beiträge zur Strukturforchung, Heft 143, 1993.

The second main pillar of Honecker's social program was the state housing program, which aimed to solve the flat problem of every GDR citizen within twenty years, a historically very short period of time. The state promised to build, renovate or modernize 3,5 million flats and to provide every adult GDR citizen with comfortable and spacious housing (an own room for every adult family member). Young couples and shift workers principally enjoyed priority in the allocation of state flats. The housing program was later criticized because it concentrated state resources on the building of the modern blocks of flats, and there was not enough capacity for the renovation of the old houses.¹⁰⁴ Despite this criticism, the social impact of the project should not be underestimated; the overwhelming majority of the surviving correspondence between the Zeiss-employees and the enterprise addressed the issue of the allocation of the flats.¹⁰⁵

The support of the working mothers was an important field of social policy because the regime aimed to enhance the participation of the women in the labor market. This was mainly achieved with the extension of child care institutions. In 1980, 60% of the relevant age groups could be accommodated in the nurseries and 90% in the kindergartens. The social policy package of 1972 gave various benefits for the working mothers: 40-hour week for mothers with three children (shift workers with two children), the increase of paid maternity leave, higher child benefits and more holidays. To encourage the people to marry young, every couple who were below 26 and married for the first time, received an interest-free loan of 5,000 M. The state also paid a maternity grant of 1,000 M after every baby. Single working mothers, who received no nursery places, were given paid leave. In 1976 the 40-hour week was extended to every mother with two or more children, paid maternity leave increased to 26 weeks, the mothers got one year paid leave after the second

¹⁰⁴ Bouvier, op. cit., 180-193.

¹⁰⁵ In 1976 the enterprise disposed of 10,500 flats and 3,342 places in the workers' hostels in Jena. Unternehmensarchiv der Carl Zeiss Jena GmbH, Jena (UACZ), VA Nr. 1583, Unterlagen zur Direktion Kultur und Sozialwesen, 20.5.1976.

child and the paid holiday increased with the number of the children. From 1986 every mother was entitled to a one-year paid leave after the first child, and in justified cases fathers could also take advantage of this opportunity. In 1987 the regime significantly increased child benefits: from 20 to 50 M after one child, from 20 to 100 M after two, and from 100 to 150 M after three children.¹⁰⁶

The project of the socialist welfare state was, however, doomed to failure because the standard of living continued to be much higher in West Germany than in the GDR and the East German citizens compared themselves with their Western neighbors rather than with the socialist camp (where they were indeed leading). While in Hungary the market reforms were accompanied by relative political liberalization, Honecker's standard-of-living policy was combined with repression, which closed the possibility of any dialogue between the workers and the party. The ideological discipline was reflected in the local party materials: while the Hungarian party materials inform us about the growing social discontent, the GDR sources remain silent about the troubles until the very end.¹⁰⁷ The mass flight of the population to the West, when the Hungarian borders were opened, revealed that the silence was the result of repression rather than the sign of people's consent to Honecker's policy. At that time, however, the party effectively lost social trust and the brief attempt to reform the party and the system ended with the unification of Germany.

The selection of the factories

My research uses two case studies, Carl Zeiss Jena in East Germany and Rába MVG in Győr, Hungary, in order to examine the functioning of the labor policy of the

¹⁰⁶ Bouvier, op. cit., 264-272.

¹⁰⁷ I did not work with Stasi files.

party in the factories and in the county (in Hungary) or in the district (in the GDR). The selection of the two factories was motivated by theoretical as well as practical considerations. The party regarded workers in large-scale industry as its central social basis, and it sought to focus labor policy around this group. The re-organization of enterprise management in the 1960s increased the concentration of the means of production. Giant industrial enterprises were formed, which had a monopoly over their given product. Technological improvement and product development also became the responsibility of the enterprise.¹⁰⁸ The policy of the party towards the working class was at its strongest in the large enterprises, which could offer cultural, recreational and sport facilities for their employees. In Hungary I selected Rába MVG, which was the largest industrial enterprise in the county of Győr-Sopron located in northwestern Hungary, directly neighboring Austria. I first conducted an interview project in the factory with the research question of how the workers experienced transformation and how they saw the two systems in comparison. The primary sources were life-history interviews conducted with twenty people who were still employed in the factory and twenty former workers of MVG. The practical consideration was the existence of an archive: Rába MVG had an enterprise party committee with a full-time party secretary, and the materials of the party organization were preserved in the county archives.

The Zeiss enterprise was selected after I had finished working in the Rába factory. It was important to find an ex-socialist model factory, which survived the change of regime, and had a pre-socialist past. In the period of forced industrialization whole towns were built on heavy industry and cheaply exported fuels from the Soviet Union. Since these towns were obviously hit harder by re-structuring, I decided to exclude this distorting

¹⁰⁸ For a good summary on the changes of the enterprise structure in Hungary see: Iván Schweitzer, op. cit., 36-61. For the discussion of the bargaining power of the large enterprises see: Teréz Laky, *Érdekvizonyok a vállalati döntésekben* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1982); Szalai Erzsébet, op. cit., 1989.

factor. I also had to find a factory located outside of the capital in order to match the Hungarian factory. Peter Hübner called my attention to the Zeiss factory, which satisfied all of the above criteria. Apart from the party materials, which were located in the archive of the province, the enterprise maintained a factory archive. In addition, the district of Gera to which the factory belonged (today Thuringia) was one of the most developed parts of the GDR just like Győr-Sopron county in Hungary. True, the two factories belonged to different industrial branches but my research aim was not to compare factories but to examine the relationship between the workers and the party under late socialism. Since the workers of the Zeiss factory were part of the well paid core of the industrial working class, their experience of socialism was comparable to that of the Rába-employees.

Rába MVG in Győr (1945-1989)

The Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory¹⁰⁹ which became later known as Rába MVG was founded in Győr, a commercial and administrative center of western Hungary in 1896. Győr was a historically important town in the region: it was the seat of a diocese and also a county town. The Wagon Factory was established as part of the economic modernization of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which occurred during the last third of the nineteenth century. The production of carriages became a prosperous enterprise: the factory exported its products to Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Egypt, and it transported rolling stock to the London Underground and the Antwerp Tramways.¹¹⁰ In 2001 the management located Rába products dating back to 1905 in South Africa.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ The translation of the name of the factory is taken from the English summary of a book introducing the history of Rába (Zoltánné Tabiczky, *A Magyar Vagon- és Gépgyár története* 1-2 volumes, Győr, 1977).

¹¹⁰ Zoltánné Tabiczky, op. cit., 1. volume, 29-30.

¹¹¹ Information from an interview with the communication manager of the enterprise.

In 1939 the factory, which also started to produce buses, trucks and tractors in the interwar period, was officially declared an armament factory, which entailed the development of plants important for war production. The new motor car factory was completed in 1943, and produced Botond cars¹¹², Turán tanks and Rába-Maros military trucks.¹¹³ The personnel of the factory experienced a massive growth: in 1941 nearly 5,000 blue-collar workers worked in Rába while in 1943 their number was doubled.¹¹⁴

In 1945 war losses to factory capacity were assessed at 70% as against an average 36-40% of the Hungarian machine industry as a whole. Summer production in 1945 amounted to about 10% of that recorded earlier.¹¹⁵ The rebuilding of the factory was all the more pressing since its products were indispensable for the rebuilding of the almost totally ruined railway network.¹¹⁶ Simultaneously with the rebuilding of the factory ownership changed. In 1946 the government nationalized the largest enterprises in mining and heavy engineering, amongst them the Győr Wagon Works. After the first three-year plan reconstruction was successfully finished and the industrial production of 1949 rose above that of the last pre-war year by 40%. In 1949 7,500 people worked in the factory.¹¹⁷

The first five-year-plan (1950-1954) was a period of major change in the life of the factory. As a result of re-structuring, the car plant and the machine-tool works were detached from the Wagon Factory in 1951. The equipment and production of the plants detached amounted to 50% of the capacity of the enterprise.¹¹⁸ At the same time the

¹¹² The jeep Rába-Botond developed in 1936-37 was an independent design of the factory.

¹¹³ Zoltánné Tabiczky, op. cit., 154-155.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁵ The total built-in area of the factory was 146,000 m²; buildings covering 45,000 m² were so badly damaged that they could not be restored. Zoltánné Tabiczky, *A MagyarVagon- és Gépgyár története 2.* volume, (Győr, 1977), 10.

¹¹⁶ 17% of the total war damages was the traffic and the railway network suffered two third of the traffic damage. More than one third of the rails and 85% of the combined bridges were destroyed. At the end of the war around 10% of the locomotives and 4% of the carriages were in a usable state. Zoltánné Tabiczky, op. cit., 2. volume, 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 24-25.

¹¹⁸ The process was part of a central profile re-organization in the state industry. The car factory was independent only until 1952 when it was integrated into the Csepel Auto Factory. The Győr Screw Mill, the Foundry and the Industrial Tool Factory were also separated from the Wagon factory. Ede Horváth was

factory was granted significant sums to increase production. The production value of the factory surpassed that of the Ganz Wagon Works thus becoming the second largest machine manufacturing plant in the country. Exports rose, too: railway carriages, steam-cranes, lift trucks, bridges and other steel structures were exported, mainly to the Soviet Union. The number of blue-collar workers rose from 4861 to 6239 during the plan period (without the detached plants) and the number of the factory personnel rose from 7313 to 9141.¹¹⁹

In 1962 a new chapter started in the history of the Wagon Factory. The Central Committee examined the situation of the machine industry in the country and concluded that the sector was outdated and labor productivity was low. In 1962 the Wagon Factory failed to fulfill the plan and it produced the greatest shortfall in the export plan.¹²⁰ A process of concentration started in the machine industry: in 1963 Ede Horváth was appointed the chief manager of the Wagon Factory.¹²¹ With this the Industrial Tool Factory was officially reunited with the Wagon Factory. After a separation of thirteen years, the organizational unity of Rába was restored again by the beginning of the third five-year-plan (1966-1970).

The enterprise started the third five-year plan under its traditional name (i.e. it was again called Hungarian Railway Carriage and Machine Works – MVG - since 1965¹²²) and used the trade mark “Rába”. Horváth started a very ambitious project, which soon triggered a sharp conflict with the management of the Wagon factory. He sought to

appointed chief manager of the Industrial Tool Factory. In 1953 another tool factory was also detached from the car factory. (Zoltánné Tabiczky, op. cit., 2. volume, 33.)

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹²¹ Ede Horváth (1924, Szombathely-1998, Győr) came from a working-class family. He finished his training as a turner in the Rába factory and he also started working there before the Second World War. After the war, he established his career as a Stakhanovite and in 1950 he received the Kossuth Prize for his results in quick cutting. In 1953 he was appointed the manager of the Industrial Tool Factory of Győr. Between 1963 and 1989 he was the chief manager of Rába MVG. In 1980 he received a state prize for his results in the central developmental program of the vehicle industry. In 1986 he was made an honorary citizen of Győr.

¹²² The Wagon Factory was officially reunited with the Industrial Tool Factory on 1 January 1964, under the name of Wilhelm Pieck Vehicle Industrial Works.

modernize production by changing profile, by which he meant the decrease of the share of total production made up by rolling stock and the increase of engines and rear axles. The planned development was realized with the purchase of license to manufacture engines from the West German MAN firm. The reorganization of production generated a sharp conflict between Ede Horváth and the first secretary of the county, who - like Horváth - also started working in the Wagon Factory. In spite of the attacks of the local party leaders, who demanded Horváth's removal from his post, the central party leadership took his side in the conflict, and Horváth could carry out the ambitious development.¹²³ Production of rolling stock gradually fell. In 1965 the total value of its finished products amounted to 3 billion HUF with an export mounting up to 40%. In that year Rába employed more than 16,000 people. The total volume of investment in that year amounted to 700 millions HUF.¹²⁴ The new Rába plant producing engines was inaugurated on 17 June 1969 and it had the capacity to produce 13,000 engines and auxiliary parts. The biggest market for the engines was the Hungarian bus industry, producing over 12,000 large buses in a year at the Ikarus Factory in Budapest.¹²⁵ New plants joined the parent company - Sárvár and Ajka in 1967, the Foundry of Győr in 1968, the Red Star and the Mosonmagyaróvár Tractor Factories.¹²⁶ In 1975 Rába employed nearly 20,000 people in its Győr plants (about 15,000 blue-collar workers).¹²⁷ Although its main export partner was the Soviet Union, the company also exported axles to the United States.¹²⁸

¹²³ The personal dimension of the conflict is discussed in: János Tischler, 'A "győri csata" – 1965.', *Beszélő*, 10, no. 5 (2005), 63-67. Horváth also reported about the conflict in his book. Ede Horváth, op. cit., 29-33.

¹²⁴ Zoltánné Tabiczky, op. cit. 2. volume, 106-109.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 109.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 99.

¹²⁷ GYML, X. 415/3/23, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár vezérigazgatójának beszámolója a KB 1974. december 5.-i határozatáról a minőség, a takarékoság és a munkaerő-helyzetről, 16, 1975. július 22.

¹²⁸ The American export of Rába-axles started in 1974 with the Steiger-company. In 1980 Rába signed a treaty with the General Motors. In 1985 Rába had an export of 90 million \$ to capitalist countries and out of this sum the American export amounted to 54 million \$. Katalin Bossányi, 'Made in Rába', in István Matkó (ed.), *Ipari közelképek* (Budapest: Ipari és Kereskedelmi Minisztérium Kiadása, 1986), 35.

In the national and local press the “Rába miracle” received substantial media coverage. Rába was widely advertised as a socialist model factory, which worked well and made substantial profits.¹²⁹ The exports to the United States were understood as the Western recognition of the good quality of Rába-products. In 1986 when economic reform was again on the political agenda, Ede Horváth was elected the man of the year in acknowledgement of his managerial success. The company enjoyed high prestige in Győr, where it was the largest employer. The enterprise built a huge stadium, sponsored the local football team called Rába-ETO and launched many training and scholarship programs. It also had a technical library, a cultural center, a brass band, a chore, a dance group and a sports’ club.¹³⁰

The dissolution of the MSZMP¹³¹ in September 1989 deprived Ede Horváth of political support. Members of the old political elite, who were held responsible for the economic troubles of the country, came under greater pressure. As a member of the Central Committee Ede Horváth was an obvious target of attack. His conflict with the secretary of the trade union, Zoltán Kóh, exacerbated the situation and led to an abusive press campaign against him in the newly established independent newspapers. The Mosonmagyaróvár plant demanded to be detached from Rába and the trade union organized a strike. Even though the enterprise council confirmed Horváth in his managerial post until 1992, the Győr court repealed this resolution. The enterprise council asked Horváth to retire, to which he agreed on 18 December 1989.¹³² In the political atmosphere of 1989 it was unlikely that he would have ever kept his position.¹³³

129 See e.g. Katalin Bossányi, op. cit., 27-42; id., ‘A versenyképesség stratégiája: Beszélgetés Horváth Edével, a Rába vezérigazgatójával’, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 33, no. 11 (1978), 51-59; Lajos Horányi, ‘Megalapozott teljesítménykövetelmények és a termelő kapacitás kihasználása. (Beszélgetés a Magyar Vagon- és Gépgyárban)’ *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 7 (1976), 66-72.

¹³⁰ Zoltán Tabiczky, op. cit. 2. volume, 76-84. There is also a photo documentation of the cultural and social institutions.

¹³¹ MSZMP was dissolved on October 7 1989, at the last (14th) Party Congress.

¹³² Horváth tells the story from his perspective in Ede Horváth, op. cit., 130-150. He argued that the managers sacrificed him in order to save themselves. The story of Horváth’s removal is told from another

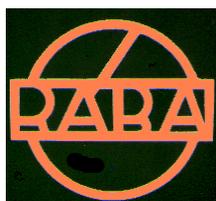


Figure 2. Logo of Rába

Carl Zeiss Jena (1945-1990)

The Carl Zeiss factory – or rather, the workers of the company - enjoyed a privileged position also among the industrial enterprises of pre-war Germany. The eponymous entrepreneur, Carl Zeiss founded his precision-mechanical-optical workshop in Jena in 1846. Zeiss himself was well known for his pedantry, and he set his employees high standards of workmanship. The real fame of the enterprise was established, however, through his partnership with Ernst Abbe, a Jena physicist and philanthropist and Otto Schott, a chemist specializing in high quality optical lenses. Zeiss was the only enterprise in the world that could manufacture microscopes according to catalogue and set characteristics. This established the success story of the enterprise: in 1875 the enterprise had 60 employees while in 1888 327 people worked in the factory. In 1889 the social-minded Abbe established the Carl Zeiss Foundation, which from 1891 became the sole proprietor of the enterprise. This form of ownership, which was at the time less typical, was combined with progressive social political measures and labor protection, for instance the regulation of the working hours, minimal wage, paid holiday, health care insurance,

perspective by András Dusza, the communication manager of the enterprise in: id. *A birodalom végnapjai: Így láttam Horváth Edét* (Győr: X-Meditor Kft., 2003).

¹³³ The evaluation of Ede Horváth is even today controversial. On 24 November 2003 the Rába sold its centrally located estate of 6,5 hectares to ECE-Einkaufs-Center-Győr. On this occasion many people recommended that Horváth should get a statute from the town. (Readers' letters were published in the local daily *Kisalföld*). In a public meeting of the town on 9 January 2004 the mayor of the town declared that because of the controversial judgment of his person, the town would rather consider a commemorative tablet. The overwhelming majority of my interview partners recognized and respected Horváth's commitment to Rába and his work for the factory. His autocratic leading style arose more controversies.

pension, severance pay and the legal representation of workers' interests in the factory. The generous social policy contributed not only to the success of the enterprise but it also facilitated the workers' identification with the factory that they could regard as their own from many aspects.¹³⁴

During the Second World War, Zeiss was integrated in the armaments industry, and it suffered very heavy war losses. In March 1945, the enterprise employed 13,000 people, (around 70% were Germans).¹³⁵ In 1945 the town of Jena was first taken by American troops, and when they marched out in order to hand over control to the Soviets, they strongly encouraged the resettlement of scientists and professionals in the Western zone. The migrants did indeed found another Carl Zeiss factory in Oberkochen and a new Carl Zeiss Foundation in Heidenheim. The two firms could not reach an agreement about the use of the trade mark, and after a long lawsuit, the matter was finally decided by a London court in 1971.¹³⁶ The rivalry of the two firms also symbolized the competition between the two German states in the period. Even though the Soviets ordered the dismantling of the factory, its rebuilding started in 1948 with a massive growth of the workforce: in 1950 the enterprise had around 10,000 employees while in 1954 their number increased to 16,500.¹³⁷ The rebuilding – like in Hungary – went hand in hand with the change of

¹³⁴ There is much literature on the history of the Zeiss factory, see e.g.: Felix Auerbach, *Ernst Abbe: sein Leben und Wirken* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlag, 1919); id., *Das Zeisswerk und die Carl-Zeiss-Stiftung in Jena: ihre wissenschaftliche, technische und soziale Entwicklung und Bedeutung* (Jena: Fischer, 1925); Moritz von Rohr, *Ernst Abbe* (Jena: Fischer, 1940); Julius Pierstorff, *Ernst Abbe als Sozialpolitiker* (München: Allgemeine Zeitung, 1905); Paul Gerhard Esche, *Ernst Abbe* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1963); id.: *Carl Zeiss: Leben und Werk* (Jena: Wartburg-Verl., 1966); Wolfgang Schumann *et al.*, *Carl Zeiss Jena, einst und jetzt* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1962); Horst Alexander William, *Carl Zeiss: 1816-1888* (München: Bruckmann, 1967); Armin Hermann, *Carl Zeiss. Die abenteuerliche Geschichte einer deutschen Firma* (München: Piper, 1992); Wolfgang Mühlfriedel (ed.), *Carl Zeiss: Die Geschichte eines Unternehmens* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1996); Kerstin Gerth, *Ernst Abbe: 1840-1905: Wissenschaftler, Unternehmer, Sozialreformer* (Jena: Bussert-Stadeler, 2005).

¹³⁵ Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, *Carl Zeiss in Jena 1945-1990* (Weimar: Böhlau), 8.

¹³⁶ According to the London settlement, the Carl Zeiss JENA could use the trade mark in almost every socialist country, in Syria, Kuwait and Lebanon. Zeiss Oberkochen could do the same in the member states of the European Community, with the exception of France and in Austria and Greece. In several countries both companies were allowed to advertise and sell its products, with the exception of the former French colonies. Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, 279.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 115.

ownership. The majority of the workers did not, however, greet the program of nationalization and integration into the planned economy with unanimous enthusiasm precisely because of the former, generous social policy of the factory even though the party increased its propaganda to overcome their resistance.¹³⁸

The East German economic reform and the re-organization of the enterprise structure opened up new perspectives for the town and the enterprise, which had already been renowned for its export performance. Ulbricht wanted to give the Zeiss factory a significant role for in the new economic system, which manifested itself also in personnel policy. Ernst Gallerach, the deputy-in-chief of Zeiss, who was a loyal supporter of Ulbricht and his reform policy, regarded the implementation of the principles of the “new economic system of planning and management” in the enterprise as his chief task. In 1966 Gallerach replaced Hugo Schrade, who was regarded as an “old Zeissianer”, in the managerial post – according to some memoirs he indeed urged the retiring of the chief manager even though Schrade was 65 in 1965.¹³⁹ The enterprise was held to be one of strategic importance not only because of its export output but also because it served as a “laboratory” of the new system of planning and management. That said, already in 1964 a socialist working group was formed with the task of developing the principles of the application of the new system in the enterprise. Even more important was the task of elaborating a prognosis for the long-term (15-20 year) development of the Zeiss factory, which Gallerach presented at the Seventh Party Congress in 1967. The members of the working group received state awards for their work – according to later memoirs they spent many nights at their workplace in order to accomplish the task.¹⁴⁰ In April 1968 the Political Committee decided that the

¹³⁸ On the integration of the social policy see: Philipp Neumann, 'Betriebliche Sozialpolitik im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena 1948 bis 1953', M. A, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena, 2002.

¹³⁹ Wolfgang Mühlfriedel- Edith Hellmuth, op. cit.,199.

¹⁴⁰ Ulbricht held economic prognoses so important that he himself undertook the leadership of the working group created within the Political Committee, which dealt with long-term (15-20 year) strategic planning. For a discussion of the development of prognosis in Carl Zeiss see: Philipp Neumann, ',... bisher nicht Gedachtes

enterprise would be the center of the research of the rationalization and automation technology in the GDR, and relevant production would be also concentrated in the town.¹⁴¹ When Ulbricht visited Jena, he also promised to invest in the development of the town, he criticized the crumbling houses of the city and he declared that such conditions were unworthy of a town, which hosted the internationally recognized Zeiss factory.¹⁴²

The reform of the economic management thus initiated significant developments in the enterprise, for which Gallerach, who enjoyed Ulbricht's confidence, bore the main responsibility. In 1964 seven plants joined Zeiss, which thus became the leading enterprise of optical and precision instruments. In 1965 it received the right of foreign trade, first under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but from 1968 the enterprise was solely responsible for its foreign trade. In 1967 the department of export-import was established, which from 1972 was accountable only to the chief manager. The research center was officially opened in 1971, after two years of preparatory work. In 1975 the center employed 4,741 people.¹⁴³ In 1980, this number was around 3,500 and 40% of the employees had a university or a college degree.¹⁴⁴ The industrial and educational complex in Göschwitz was opened in 1970, where 2,100 trainees and 4,000 comprehensive school¹⁴⁵ students could be accommodated (there were also dormitories).¹⁴⁶ With that, Zeiss controlled supervision over the largest vocational training institution of the GDR.¹⁴⁷

denken ...": Zur Bedeutung der Prognostik im Neuen Ökonomischen System. Das Beispiel des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena' (Manuscript, Jena, 2000).

¹⁴¹ The Political Committee's resolution of 26 April 1968 is quoted in: Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 206.

¹⁴² The first secretary visited the factory with his wife on 25 April 1968, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the building of 6/70. Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 205.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 235.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 44. Table, 375.

¹⁴⁵ These schools gave a high-school leaving certificate as well as vocational training.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 222.

¹⁴⁷ *40 Jahre in Volkes Hand: Aus der Chronik des Kombines VEB Carl Zeiss JENA, Teil 1: 1948 bis 1970.* (Jena, 1988). 91.

The enterprise also played an important role in military research and development. Brezhnev's visit on 20 April 1967 is a clear sign of the Soviet interest in the enterprise.¹⁴⁸

Despite these results, the reform of the economic management in the enterprise was not an unambiguous success story – on the contrary, in the light of the local sources, the chaos of the last years of the NES was strongly felt in the factory. The price reform had a very negative effect on the management of Zeiss because the costs of raw materials significantly increased while the prices of industrial products could not be increased accordingly because of political considerations. The increase of the prices put Zeiss in a difficult situation because they worked with very expensive materials: the price of raw diamond increased by 46% while a special opal glass cost 19,29 M instead of the previous 2,1 M.¹⁴⁹ The increase of energy prices, on which they likewise could not spare much, added to the financial difficulties of the enterprise: in 1964, the cost of energy increased by 1,6 million M, while the enterprise could only spare 125,000 M with rationalization.¹⁵⁰ In addition, there were huge arrears in export performance. The ambitious and taut plans of 1969 and 1970 worsened the situation of the factory to the extent that it could only avoid bankruptcy with a significant state support.¹⁵¹

The evaluation of Gallerach's managerial achievement is ambiguous even in light of the above "negative" facts because several economic problems of the factory were connected with the structural contradictions of the reform. The reform itself was not consistent and foreign events (mainly in Czechoslovakia and Poland) largely influenced its outcome. Even though Gallerach was criticized by the central political bodies, it was not the economic problems of the factory but Ulbricht's political fall that decided his fate. It well characterizes the end of the reform that Gallerach received criticism not because of his

¹⁴⁸ Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 204.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 186.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 214-215.

economic performance but quite the contrary, because “he was too much absorbed in the economic tasks at the expense of political work”.¹⁵² The report also charged the manager with liberalism, which was a clear sign of the dissatisfaction of the party leadership after the fall of the reform. Gallerach was relieved of his managerial post on 1 July 1971. His successor, Helmut Wunderlich, likewise proved himself too liberal to manage the ever expanding enterprise and he, too, had to leave the senior management in 1975. Contrary to his “liberal” predecessors, the new manager, Wolfgang Biermann¹⁵³, who was a candidate for the Political Bureau in 1966, was a supporter of the one-man management, and he ruthlessly removed the managers whom he held to be politically unreliable or who dared to contradict him.¹⁵⁴ It is not accidental that no negative criticism of the manager manifested itself in the local sources until the fall of the Honecker regime.

With some right it can be argued that the huge developmental projects started in the NES yielded fruit under Biermann. The workforce of the enterprise continued to grow because further plants joined Zeiss; the phase of concentration ended in 1985. In 1976 the Zeiss *Kombinat*¹⁵⁵ employed around 35,000 people, in 1980 42,000 and in 1985 53,000. Out of this number, the workforce of VEB¹⁵⁶ Carl Zeiss amounted “only” to 33,000 in 1985; 26,000 people had their workplaces in Jena while around 7,000 worked in the plants of Eisfeld, Gera, Lommatzsch, Saalfeld and Suhl.¹⁵⁷ The state housing projects that Honecker launched mitigated the great pressure on housing in Jena: the modern housing

¹⁵² Unternehmensarchiv der Carl Zeiss Jena GmbH, Jena (UACZ), VA Nr. 1231, Geschäftsbericht des VEB Carl Zeiss JENA für das Jahr 1970, quoted in Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 215-216.

¹⁵³ Wolfgang Biermann, who was the chief manager of Zeiss between 1975 and 1989, was also a member of the Central Committee of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands= the name of the Communist party in the GDR). Between 1965 and 1975, he was chief manager of the VEB „Oktober 7” in Berlin, which produced large turner’s lathes. Biermann was 48 years old, when he was appointed the chief manager of Zeiss. (Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 284).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 342-344.

¹⁵⁵ The *Kombinat* encompassed every plant which joined Zeiss, although many of them retained its legal autonomy, for instance Jenaer Glaswerk, Feinmeß Dresden, Pentacon Dresden (Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit. 39. Table, 372).

¹⁵⁶ VEB=(Volkseigener Betrieb) state-owned enterprise.

¹⁵⁷ Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 300.

estates in Neulobeda and Winzerla were built in the period. While in 1968 fifty people refused to work in the factory because they did not get the promised flats¹⁵⁸, between 1970 and 1974 5,207 new state flats were handed over to the Zeiss-employees.¹⁵⁹ Zeiss, like Rába, offered various facilities and benefits to their employees: in order to enable full female employment, the factory ran nurseries, kindergartens for Zeiss-employees, it operated sport clubs, a cultural center, a football team, summer camps and a polyclinic.¹⁶⁰ The enterprise was not only the major employer of the town but it was also the main sponsor of cultural and sport events. The Zeiss Planetarium, which was renovated and modernized in 1983-85, attracted not only the local people but it has become a favorite tourist spectacle.

Thanks to the ideological discipline and strict censorship, the political weakening of the regime was less observable in the GDR than in Hungary. In 1989 October the chief manager loyally reported of a handwritten pamphlet that was found in the staircase of one of the plants.¹⁶¹ The “transition” was so quick that a few months later the employees were informed that a warrant was issued for the arrest of the manager, who was accused of fraud. The whereabouts of the chief manager were unknown.¹⁶² The evaluation of Biermann’s managerial is ambiguous¹⁶³; it was clear, however, that his prominent political role in the regime could not be forgotten.

¹⁵⁸ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-4/13/079, Protokoll der IKL-Sitzung, 15. und 18. 8.1969.

¹⁵⁹ *Gleichberechtigt. Die Entwicklung der Frauen und Mädchen im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena* (Weimar, 1975), 19.

¹⁶⁰ UACZ, VA Nr. 1583, Rechenschaftsbericht der Direktor Kultur- und Sozialwesen, 3.3. 1976; also information from the interviews.

¹⁶¹ UACZ, VA Nr. 4722, Fallmeldung, 4.10.1989.

¹⁶² UACZ, VA Nr. 4743, 13.2.1990. According to the letter, he allegedly escaped to Munich.

¹⁶³ See: Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 342-344. In the interviews the manager’s image was likewise contradictory: while it was generally recognized that he had an autocratic leading style, many workers held him to be a good patron, who fulfilled the justified demands (e.g. allocation of flats, transfer to other plants within the enterprise, etc.)



Figure 3. Logo of VEB Carl Zeiss

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation studies labor policy in the two countries at county (or district) and at factory level. It primarily relies on archival materials collected from the local (county and factory) archives. I conducted forty-four life-history interviews in the two factories; but since the memories have been inevitably shaped by the experience of transformation, the materials of the interviews are only used to complement the information of the archival sources, and to contrast the remembrance of the two systems in the concluding part.

The Hungarian and East German case studies are presented separately in order to provide a continuous chronology and narration but the four main chapters are organized around common themes. The first chapter in each part discusses the responses of the working class in the county and the district to the economic reform. The second chapter in both cases focuses on the regime's policy towards the working class at county (district) level, while the third one examines the functioning of this policy at factory level. The last chapter in each part is engaged with the study of the political organization of the workers and the relation of the grass-roots membership to the government and its policy. Given the nature of the sources, not every part could have been matched properly, of course, so, for instance, there is more data on the economic incentives in Hungary, while labor policy for women or the housing of the workers is much better documented in East Germany. Perhaps the most important difference lies in the last chapter: while in Hungary there is a very good documentation of the political mood among the grass-roots membership in the 1980s and it is possible to trace mounting social discontent, the party materials of the Zeiss

factory are very fragmentary in the period and on the basis of the more complete materials of the district, they would not have been more informative either had they survived in a higher number. While this reflects the difference between the political climates of the two countries, it is the main reason of why the Hungarian case study is presented first.

WORKERS IN THE KÁDÁR REGIME



Figure 4. The headquarter of Rába MVG

1. Reform and Materialism

Hungary's new economic mechanism – particularly its ambition to strengthen market relations and expand the private sector in agriculture – had a contradictory reception within the party, which was one reason for the beginning of a more critical social dialogue. The hardliners thought with some reason that the economic reform would harm the social basis of the party and endanger the social consensus that was reached between the party and the working class after the defeat of the revolution of 1956.¹⁶⁴ The reformers were also responsive to working-class reactions because they needed support for the continuation of the reform. This gave space for a more open discussion between the party and the people, which manifested itself in the abundant criticism that appeared in the party documents.

The chapter studies working-class responses to the reform in the light of the party materials of the county of Győr-Sopron. Since the local party leadership was particularly concerned with the working class in the period, the chapter makes use of the reports of the large industry of the county; Rába is stressed only insofar as its name was specifically mentioned in these documents. Although much of the criticism was indeed targeted at the undesired social consequences of the reform, the discussion could not wholly satisfy the hardliners' expectations because social criticism went beyond the reform, addressing many non-socialist features of the socialist system. Workers criticized the managers' detachment from the masses, their growing wealth, the embourgeoisement of party leaders and the lack of enterprise democracy.

¹⁶⁴ The argument is developed in: Mark Pittaway op. cit. 2006. According to the author, the government's willingness to fulfill working-class demands largely contributed to the consolidation of the regime.

The chapter mainly intends to develop two arguments. It seeks to show that the lack of socialist ownership and the formality of enterprise democracy were actually criticized in the party reports of the working class. The gulf between the workers and the managers was likewise subject to criticism, which was further increased by the growing material inequalities. The second argument is that the reform was linked with the spread of materialism and individualism. Society was held to be increasingly materialistic, where money mattered more to people (including the members of the party) than community life. As a consequence, socialist campaigns and social work lost their attraction in the eye of the public. People were more interested in acquiring the consumers' goods that became the new symbols of status than in the class category. This inevitably started to erode the working-class ideology of the party.

Downgrading the working class?

In the county the local power relations largely influenced the interpretation of the economic reform. The plan of Horváth, the manager of Rába to change the production profile and buy a license from a West German factory triggered a conflict between the manager and the party functionaries. Ferenc Lombos, who was the first secretary of the county party committee between 1956 and 1966, was not indifferent to the Wagon Factory because he started working there. Lombos took the side of Horváth's opponents, who went as far as to attempt to relieve him of his post. According to Horváth's recollection Jenő Fock, who later became the Prime Minister (1967-1975), represented the central leadership at the special meeting of the executive committee in 1963, where Horváth was attacked.¹⁶⁵ Fock defended Horváth but only a temporary agreement was achieved. In 1965 the discord renewed when Lombos made attempts to intervene in the management of the enterprise

¹⁶⁵ Ede Horváth, op. cit., 29-32.

which Horváth considered to be his exclusive authority. The situation became so tense that it was reported to the Central Leadership (*Központi Vezetőség*). After the party leadership investigated the case, both Lombos and Horváth received a strong reprimand. The ultimate winner was, however, Horváth, because in 1966 Lombos was replaced with László Pataki, who was in office until 1974. Lombos was left out of the Central Committee and Horváth also lost his membership (He was a deputy member and deputy membership was abolished). In 1970, however, Horváth was elected into the Central Committee.¹⁶⁶

Pataki, who was previously the secretary of the Central Committee of the League of Communist Youth, had less ambition to intervene in local affairs. His comments, however, suggest that he belonged to the group of the leaders who were anxious about the loss of working-class support and he frequently pointed out that the workers were angered by the increase of prices and the growing income of the peasantry: “On page 11 there are problems related to price policy. I think, we have a greater problem in reality, and we should say this clearly in the report. With the increase of prices the discontent of employees and particularly that of workers increases. The value of forint is decreasing. Workers don’t believe that prices increased only by 1,5-2% as it is stated by the Statistical Office. We are trying hard to explain it to people in our agitation work but our experience is that the harder we are trying the more the party loses its credibility on the topic. I have told it many times and supported it with a lot of facts at the conferences of the party secretaries of the counties where we reported on economic political issues to comrade Nyers¹⁶⁷ that primarily the prices of those articles increased significantly that workers buy the most frequently and in the largest quantities. We should propose that the leadership

¹⁶⁶ The conflict also had another personal dimension because the wife of Lombos was the chief human resource manager of the Wagon Factory and Horváth attacked the first secretary of the county through his wife, who allegedly misused her leading position in the factory and triggered the strong disapproval of the workers with her improper behavior. The case is described in: János Tischler, op. cit., 2005. Tischler, however, does not mention the economic reasons of the conflict.

¹⁶⁷ Rezső Nyers was the secretary of the economic policy of the Central Committee in 1962-1974.

slow down this process. We should underline the material discontent of the workers in our report to tell honestly to the highest leadership that the increase of prices is very harmful to the relationship of the party with the people”.¹⁶⁸

Apparently, the weakening of working-class support was not only a slogan of the first secretary. In 1972 a survey was conducted on the conditions of the working class in the county. The survey found that material and social discontent was widespread among the working class. “Significant masses of the working class (those who have low wages and big families) disapprove of the increase of prices, particularly that of clothing. They won’t accept that it is not possible to improve their situation ‘because of the interests of the people’s economy’. The greater part of the working class does not hold workers to be a leading power, or to be proprietors, because the shortcomings that they experience in their workplaces confuse their judgment. For instance, when nobody asks for their opinions and they have no say in production, enterprise democracy does not function and there are unreasonably high wage differentials between workers and managers. *In many places workers feel that they have a right only to work*”.¹⁶⁹

According to a report of the political education of the party membership of the county many people questioned the leading role of the working class: “A large part of the blue-collar workers and some intellectuals of working-class origin limit the term working class to blue-collar workers. They criticize their declining number in the leadership and wrongly conclude that the leading role of the working class is decreasing. They argue that with the change of economic management and the increase in technological requirements the working class lost its leading role and political leadership was taken over by the more

¹⁶⁸ GYML, X. 415/118/13, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Feljegyzés ‘A párt tömegkapcsolata, a pártszervezetek és tömegszervezetek, tömegmozgalmak politikai vitája’ című vita anyagáról, 3. 1971. december 8.

¹⁶⁹ GYML, X. 415/124/12, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A munkásosztály helyzetéről szóló KB. és megyei pártszervek határozatai végrehajtásának főbb tapasztalatai, 5. 1972. február 25. Stress is mine.

educated economists, engineers, intellectuals and state officials. Some are even more pessimistic about the leading role of the working class in the future because they think that with scientific-technological development, society will be increasingly controlled by the economic and technical intelligentsia.” According to the report, many intellectuals look down on the working class: “There are opinions among the intellectuals that the lack of education renders the working class unfit for leadership. This opinion can be also found among intellectuals who are members of the party”.¹⁷⁰

The gulf between workers and managers was, however, deeper than the gulf between workers and intellectuals. Economic reform increased managerial rewards and reinforced the social distance between workers and managers. Trips to Western countries, luxurious offices and expensive cars suggested that it was primarily the managers who profited from the factories: “The employees told us that they think little of protocol visits. A significant part of the party and state leadership and the members of the apparatus pay only hasty, administrative visits. They speak with the lower managers but they rarely see the employees. Mainly blue-collar workers complained that since the economic reform, managers had refused to deal with the problems of employees because they were too busy. There is a wide-spread – sometimes exaggerated – view in the working class that high incomes have rendered leaders too materialistic and that they live a petty bourgeois life. (Signs of materialism can be found among workers too. Many of them undertake private work or they do odd jobs for artisans.).”¹⁷¹

At party meetings workers also criticized the privileged treatment of the leaders: “In the Sopron Cotton Factory people said that at production conferences only workers are

¹⁷⁰ GYML, X. 415/122/6, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, 8. 1972. augusztus 15.

¹⁷¹ GYML, X. 415/117/7, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A párt tömegkapcsolata, a pártszervezetek és tömegszervezetek, tömegmozgalmak politikai vitája, 7-8. 1971. augusztus 31.

criticized, managers are not. They consider the wage differentials between workers and managers to be unjust, for instance in some party organizations in Sopron: the Wagon Factory¹⁷², etc. Managers who are relieved of their positions because of their mistakes will be given leading positions somewhere else. Why don't they send them back to the shop-floor?"¹⁷³ In theory, the enterprise council exercised control over the management, but in practice employees were afraid to criticize managers in public. The party organizations received many negative opinions about the functioning of enterprise democracy. "A significant part of the party membership holds that people risk their livelihood with their criticism. It is only a formal requirement that the mistakes in the administration of the party, the state and the economy should be revealed to those competent to deal with them. In practice people won't exercise this right. They say that the party cannot protect the rightful critic from the consequences".¹⁷⁴

It was not only high managerial incomes that irritated the workers. In the county of Győr-Sopron, the growing wealth of the peasantry also triggered the disapproval of the urban working class. According to several information reports, urban workers charged the government with an outright pro-peasant policy, which threatened to undermine the worker-peasant alliance. "Urban workers who are members of the party measured the worker-peasant alliance against the standard of living of the two classes. In some places people were biased against the peasants and they compared the low factory wages with the prosperity of the villages. We often heard the remark: 'It is always the working class that has had, and still has, to make sacrifices.' People thought that state subvention of agriculture only served the interests of the peasants. Even though in general they agreed

¹⁷² The popular name of Rába MVG. It was established as the Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory in 1896.

¹⁷³ GYML, X. 415/122/5, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Összesítő jelentés a PB levelével és a KEB állásfoglalásával foglalkozó május havi taggyűlések főbb tapasztalatairól, 1972. június 6.

¹⁷⁴ A párt tömegkapcsolata, a pártszervezetek és tömegszervezetek, tömegmozgalmak politikai vitája, op. cit., 9-10.

with the improvement of the standard of living of the peasantry, they added that workers' power should do more for the working class".¹⁷⁵ The secretary of the executive committee of the county also underlined that the better material opportunities of the peasants created tensions between the two classes: "According to the five-year plan the wages of the working class and the peasantry should be equally increased. I don't think that this is the case now, nor that we can ensure it in the future. Industrial wages increase by 3-4% on average, but we cannot regulate the income of the peasantry. In our county the wages of the workers have increased by 4% this year, while the income of the peasantry has increased by 16%. This leads to increasing tension and workers say that we have a 'peasant' policy".¹⁷⁶

Anti-peasant feelings were undoubtedly present in the party. Many party functionaries were biased against the villages, which they considered to be culturally backward and ideologically unreliable. The influence of the church was also strong in the villages.¹⁷⁷ According to a report on the conditions of the commuters of Rába MVG, it was difficult to engage them in social or party work because their agricultural activity took up all of their free time.¹⁷⁸ The bias of the functionaries that the working class was more politically developed than the peasantry was often manifest in the meetings of the executive committee. For instance, one member of the executive committee argued that backward political ideas came from the villages to the factory: "The report states that political inconsistency and ideological wavering can also be found in the working class. I

¹⁷⁵ A munkásosztály helyzetéről szóló KB. és megyei pártszervek határozatai végrehajtásának főbb tapasztalatai, op. cit., 11-12.

¹⁷⁶ GYML, X. 415/118/13, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Feljegyzés 'A párt tömegkapcsolata, a pártszervezetek és tömegszervezetek, tömegmozgalmak politikai vitája' című vita anyagáról, 3. 1971. december 8.

¹⁷⁷ GYML, X. 415/121/2, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A kispolgári szemlélet és magatartás megnyilvánulásai, az ellenük való harc tapasztalatai és a további feladatok, 9-10. 1972. december 22.

¹⁷⁸ GYML, X. 415/204/4/3, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Jegyzőkönyv a Vagongyári Párt V. B. üléséről. A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete. 1980. szeptember 12.

think you need to take a more differentiated approach and examine how things look within the working class: in the old guard, among the skilled workers, among the unskilled, the semi-skilled and the commuters. It would be good to know if the latter take home socialist ideas or bring in the backward views that negatively influence the political mood of the working class”.¹⁷⁹ The material prosperity of the “backward” peasantry was therefore held to be politically unjust.

The conflict between the working class and the peasantry was, however, an artificial one. A study of social stratification in the county found that “pure” working-class households constituted only 43% of the population in the villages of the Győr district, while worker-peasant “mixed” households amounted to 20%. “Pure” peasant households amounted to 23% in the district of Győr, 22% in the district of Mosonmagyaróvár, 24% in the district of Sopron, and 31% and 40% respectively in the districts of Kapuvár and Csorna. The ratio of the worker-peasant “mixed” households varied between 18-24% in every district.¹⁸⁰ The prosperity of the villages mainly came from the double incomes earned in agriculture and industry: people worked in the factories of the nearby towns and they cultivated their household plots (*háztáji gazdaság*) in their free time. This was also frequently stressed in the party documents: “The primary party organizations of MVG should deal more with the role of the household plots and the evaluation of the agricultural activity done there. You should explain to the workers that more and more working-class families have an income from subsidiary farming. Statistical surveys prove that there are less and less pure worker and pure peasant households in the county. The income of the overwhelming majority of the households comes from mixed sources because family

¹⁷⁹ Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, op. cit., 21.

¹⁸⁰ GYML, X. 415/12/20, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Jelentés a megye társadalmi struktúrájának, az osztályviszonyok alakulásának helyzetéről, a változások fő irányáról, az ebből adódó politikai feladatokról. 3. sz. táblázat. A községi családok társadalmi rétegződése (1975. január 1.), 1977. július 19.

members work in industrial, agricultural and intellectual workplaces”.¹⁸¹ The aggregated information reports of the county, however, show that both workers and peasants thought that the other class lived better: “In many places workers complained that the income of the peasantry was higher than that of the working class. The members of the party in the cooperative farms thought, on the contrary, that the working class received higher social benefits and they had better working conditions. They criticized the fact that, in this respect, the peasantry lagged behind”.¹⁸²

Information reports show that urban workers often identified commuters as peasants. “In the villages around industrial centers, the income of the peasantry is significantly higher than that of industrial workers. It is true but you should admit that they work more than eight hours. They make more money with more work. Urban workers do not have this opportunity. They have hobby gardens but it is not the same”.¹⁸³ It was widely believed that the peasantry had a higher income than the workers. According to information reports, urban workers discussed the sizes of houses people had built in the villages and wanted to know how they could afford them.¹⁸⁴ “Many workers argue that the standard of living of the co-operative farmers is higher than that of the workers. They think that this is because they have more opportunity to work for themselves and they cultivate their private plots at the expense of the work of the collective”.¹⁸⁵ The conflict was, however, not between the workers and peasants but rather between two specific groups

¹⁸¹ GYML, X. 415/118/13, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Az életszínvonal-politikánk értelmezése a gépipari nagyüzemek párttagsága körében. 1976. április 27.

¹⁸² GYML, X. 415/12/20, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Havi összefoglaló jelentések a kül- és belpolitikai eseményekről, a lakosság hangulatáról. 1975. február 7.- 1976. január 7. 1975. január havi információs jelentés.

¹⁸³ GYML, X. 415/528/13, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Jegyzőkönyv a Szerszámgépgyár Egység Pártalapszervezetének 1983. februári taggyűléséről, 8.

¹⁸⁴ Jelentés a megye társadalmi struktúrájának, az osztályviszonyok alakulásának helyzetéről, a változások fő irányáról, az ebből adódó politikai feladatokról, op. cit.

¹⁸⁵ GYML, X. 415/198/22, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Információs jelentés a Hátsóhid Gyáregységből, 1978. február.

within the working class: the commuters and the urban workers. It is therefore misleading to speak of the “peasant” policy of the government because fellow workers were also considered to be peasants.

While much of the criticism was connected with the economic reform, the workers also addressed the contradictions of the established socialist system. The formality of enterprise democracy was criticized even within the executive committee.¹⁸⁶ Even though the plan was discussed at production conferences, employees had no opportunity to influence decisions. As one report complained, in many places there was no preliminary information given to the employees, who consequently could not prepare for meetings: “So the majority will hear the account only once and won’t be able to make substantial comments. It decreases the importance of the conferences that in many places the leaders announce the final plans and the already decided facts to the collective. They won’t discuss how they determined the objectives of the enterprise. The proportion of attendees who are prepared to speak is often below 10%. People generally don’t criticize their direct leaders. [...] The managers are not responsible [...] the employees and this can render the leadership

186 The cited research of Lajos Héthy and Csaba Makó (Lajos Héthy-Csaba Makó, op. cit., 1975) that was conducted in the Rába factory (“Automation – How the workers think of it”) likewise found that the workers in general had a poor opinion of workers’ participation in decision-making. The survey included a variety of questions measuring the people’ satisfaction with the party, the trade union, the management and the perception of enterprise hierarchy and social distance. It is probably not much surprising that the workers declared themselves to be more satisfied with the party than with the trade union and that the majority of them stated that they would like to participate only in decisions concerning their immediate work. It is, nevertheless, more remarkable that only a third of the respondents thought that the enterprise management was willing to consider the workers’ conceptions and proposals and less than one third believed that the enterprise took an interest in their personal prosperity. The perception of the social distance between the workers and managers also testifies to a solid enterprise hierarchy: more than half of the workers said that they did not interact with the managers and white-collar workers out of work and only 10% was invited to their flats. With respect to the perception of social distance there is one more ambiguous data: 80% of the workers said that nobody looked down on them because they were workers while 20% claimed to have had such experience. While people probably refrained from open political criticism, it can be safely argued that the workers considered it less dangerous to criticize the managers than the party.(Lajos Héthy-Csaba Makó, op. cit., 1975). For workers’ participation in wage decisions in Rába MVG see also Ágnes Simonyi, op. cit., 1977.

despotic. In the various democratic forums people refuse to evaluate the leadership and criticize their mistakes. The management often does not even ask the trade union”.¹⁸⁷

The weak influence of the trade union over management decisions was strongly criticized in the county executive committee, which shows how far criticism went in the period. The sarcasm of contributions suggests, at any rate, that the inability of the trade union to enforce interests was widely known: “Various surveys show that 60-65% of employees have no opportunity to influence the management of the enterprise. This makes one wonder how we are to realize enterprise democracy? The comrade who spoke before me asked if employees can influence the production conferences. They can’t, unfortunately. Let’s take, for instance, awards of socialist distinctions such as ‘eminent worker’ and ‘socialist brigade’. In our county, 5,225 people were awarded the title of ‘eminent worker’ and only 3,300 of them work in industry, including the technicians and engineers. Is it really workers who are winning these titles or are we trying to realize our own ideas? There is not even one case of a production conference where managers have introduced two or three alternatives enabling employees to really make a choice. You can ask to what extent leaders depend on employees today. I mean the management, the party leadership and the leadership of the trade union committee. For how long can employees keep their positions? Does it depend on the employees themselves? No, it depends only on the higher leadership. If employees are not satisfied with the work of managers, it is in vain that they turn to the trade union committee because the trade union cannot call them back. But if a low-level manager dares to criticize his boss, he will get his notice the next day. You can say that the trade union has the right to criticize the managers. As long as we have a system of appointments and the party controls the appointment of the managers, this right

¹⁸⁷ GYML, X. 415/134/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Az üzemi demokrácia helyzete, az egyszemélyi vezetés érvényesülése és a továbbfejlesztés feladatai, 8-9. 1974. március 29.

only exists on paper. You cannot name one person in the county who has been rejected or appointed upon the recommendation of the trade union”.¹⁸⁸ The speaker was also bold enough to make fun of the system of democratic centralism: “Last time when we discussed the internal management of the enterprises, it was said that it is useless to make a decision until we know the standpoint of the ministry. But if we know it, then why should we make a decision?”¹⁸⁹

The above quotations illustrate well how far social dialogue went in this period – very probably against the intentions of the hardliners. Criticism reflected genuine discontent on the part of workers with their economic and political situation; it is remarkable, for instance, that party documents recognized that a large part of the working class did not hold workers to be socialist proprietors. Nor was the leading role of the working class – propagated by the party –reflected in the standard of living, particularly when the workers saw signs of prosperity among other social strata. Growing materialism reinforced internal divisions within the working class, too: for instance between commuters, who were often identified as peasants, and urban workers. In this competition the working class could rightfully feel disadvantaged because managers and their families, who could supplement their income in agriculture, were in a better position to accumulate wealth. The social position of people was increasingly determined by material means, downgrading the importance of the class category.

The appearance of the new rich

In the era of the economic reform, increasing material differentiation was one of the main targets of social criticism. The extravagant lifestyle of the new rich triggered envy:

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

symbols of status like big houses and weekend cottages, trips to the West and Western consumer goods were among the most frequently condemned features of this lifestyle. Wealth became visible in society: people no longer sought to conceal their private property; on the contrary, good financial circumstances expressed the social status of people. According to information reports, people counted a large part of the nomenklatura among the new elite: “We can conclude from the brigade inquiries that the number of anti-leader manifestations, particularly with respect to economic management, has increased within the party membership. People believe that the interests of the leaders and employees are distinct and even conflicting, even if they are members of the party. They also said that today our society is only theoretically divided into classes and strata; in practice, it is divided into the wealthy and the non-wealthy. Grass-roots members of the party argued that a new elite has emerged, whose income is much higher than that of an average employee. The majority of state leaders and enterprise managers and part of the petit bourgeois belong to the new elite”.¹⁹⁰

The party documents give abundant material for the criticism of the appearance of “capitalist features”, most notably materialism and individualism. The scramble for money was condemned as an attitude characteristic of the petit bourgeois but the party organizations of the county all agreed that it was becoming more and more widespread and affected the whole of society.¹⁹¹ The information reports similarly underlined that people were becoming more interested in material values: “According to blue-collar workers, the petit bourgeois mentality was widespread in the party leadership, where materialism and occasionally enrichment without work has gained ground. Factory workers who were members of the party sharply criticized the phenomenon that it is not work but the car, the

¹⁹⁰ Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, op. cit., 13.

¹⁹¹ GYML, X. 415/123/8, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A kispolgári szemlélet és magatartás elleni harc tapasztalatai, további feladatok, 6. 1972. október 24.

plot and the weekend-house that matter, and that a modest lifestyle is almost regarded as a social disgrace. Cunning, back doors and socialist connections play an ever-increasing role in the achievement of individual success. Collective solidarity has declined: people care less about the problems of the others”.¹⁹² This attitude, however, also appeared in the working class: “While working-class party members and collective farmers condemned petit bourgeois egoism in others, they refused to see the same mistake in themselves. They did not consider it immoral to make things on the side or violate labor discipline”.¹⁹³

The appearance of the new rich was a widely criticized social phenomenon and even the executive committee and the party school discussed the question of how to fight against the “petit bourgeois” mentality. Even though no cure was found, it was clear that people observed the increasing prosperity of certain social strata and were angry that it did not belong to them. Party organizations argued that the economic reform increased social inequalities. “People think that the increasing differentiation of income is the main source of mistakes (executive committee of Sopron) - ‘many people think that the economic mechanism reinforces the capitalist view because the chief criterion is profit, and socialist humanism is lost’. It is also possible to read into this that the economic mechanism has given rise to more opportunity for fraud and unlawful profit-making. The party school of Sopron went even further, arguing that society has become immensely corrupt”.¹⁹⁴ According to the reports, another manifestation of materialism was the declining interest of people in communal affairs and unpaid social work. The party committee of Sopron reported that people often ridiculed those who worked unselfishly for the collective. The party committee of Győr put it bluntly that socialist consciousness “is not fashionable;

¹⁹² Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, op. cit., 22-23.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁴ A kispolgári szemlélet és magatartás elleni harc tapasztalatai, további feladatok, op. cit., 5.

whoever wants to live like that will often be isolated”.¹⁹⁵ According to many primary party organizations, “unselfishness has disappeared and people are only willing to work for money. It is a social illness which infected every social class. There are passionate debates about egoism everywhere, including the party membership”.¹⁹⁶ The reports also complained about the declining social activity of people, which they explained in relation to the fact that “more and more people look for profitable occupations outside of the workplace instead of working for the collective”.¹⁹⁷ It was noted critically that some socialist brigades only worked for bonuses.¹⁹⁸ The secretary of the county observed that managers were also chiefly interested in bonuses: “We criticize workers for doing private jobs but it is normal when managers first ask how much the bonus is. They forget that it is their duty to do a decent job. We’ve got a thousand and one problems here”.¹⁹⁹ No wonder that the reports underlined that society had become more materialist: each social class charged the others with being interested only in money. Even though agitators spoke of the socialist mode of consumption, it was clear that consumer society did not work according to socialist principles.

The extravagant lifestyle of the new rich was also addressed critically in information reports. Conspicuous consumption was one of the chief characteristics of the “petit bourgeois” mentality, and conspicuous consumers were charged with ideological deviation and political disloyalty to the party. Students of the party school argued that it was not the petit bourgeois as a stratum that was dangerous, but embourgeoisement as an attitude: “One of the most characteristic features of the petit bourgeois attitude is the absence of sincerity. There are people who always follow the ‘party line’ in public while

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹⁹ GYML, X. 415/122/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés Győr városban a pártszervezeti fegyelem, a kommunista munkamorál, magatartás, életmód helyzetéről, 18-19. 1972. április 11.

they give their ‘earnest’ opinion in private. This group spreads the wildest rumors and depicts an exaggerated picture of the difficulties. They glorify the West and underestimate our results, infecting the others with their defeatism”.²⁰⁰ Although the party condemned the “petit bourgeois” mentality, it had a rather conservative ethical code. Members of the party – particularly leaders - were expected to live an irreproachable family life. Adultery was condemned as a manifestation of petit bourgeois conduct: “We receive several warnings from the county that the benchmark of social ‘rank’ is what kind of car, villa, weekend-house and lover someone has. These manifestations of the petit-bourgeois lifestyle are all the more dangerous when it concerns party members, state, economic and social leaders because people generalize from the negative examples and they believe that the leaders today live like the gentry of the old world (party school of Sopron). In Győr people say that a society of the socialist gentry has been created. Employees criticized extravagance in the workplace, the luxurious equipment of offices and frequent, but unjustified, foreign trips, paid for from the budget of the people’s economy”.²⁰¹ Members of the new rich were also charged with religious connections, even if they were members of an atheist party. “19.7% of school-children regularly attend Bible-classes. The church even organizes beat-masses to win over youth. We have received information that the contacts of the Benedictine teachers and their former students (doctors, leading engineers) are legalized and regular features of the organ concerts of Pannonhalma. In recent years, participation in religious ceremonies has started to be fashionable, expressing membership of a wealthier, ‘superior’ class. The negative example of the local elite (doctors, veterinary surgeons, non-party member leading engineers) is very harmful because people believe that for them

²⁰⁰ A kispolgári szemlélet és magatartás elleni harc tapasztalatai, további feladatok, op. cit., 9.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

everything is allowed.²⁰² The appearance of the new rich did not only violate the principle of social equality but its members were also considered to be ideologically unreliable.

The “struggle against a materialist mentality” was not very successful because the topic was also on the agenda of the party school in the following year. Attendees at the party school consequently distinguished between class position and mentalities. “Students drew the right conclusion that it is not enough to consider only the class position of people; you can find a Marxist among the petit bourgeois and, conversely, it is also possible to find petit bourgeois attitudes in the working class”.²⁰³ The debates show that criticisms of these kinds of social phenomena persisted and that social differences kept on growing: “Many students noted that our social system had also created its own ‘aristocracy’. Managers and state leaders of working-class origin have become detached from the masses. There are leaders who look down on the collective, they believe themselves to be infallible and they behave haughtily towards their subordinates. Students also asked why leaders preferred trips to the West. The petit bourgeois attitude becomes a problem when people reach a certain standard of living and start to ape the lifestyle of the ‘upper class’, imitating ‘gentlemen’. Some leaders have family members who also do not know the limits and who dress and act very extravagantly. Students criticized the fact that ‘socialist connections’ mattered more than the true principles of the party”. The indifference of society was also addressed in the discussion: “The students see an increasing introversion in society. They explain it with the fact that the acquisition of material goods completely absorbs people, who retire from social work and the administration of public affairs. Some students argued that artists and sportsmen, who lived in very good material circumstances, had still decided

²⁰² A kispolgári szemlélet és magatartás megnyilvánulásai, az ellenük való harc tapasztalatai és a további feladatok, op. cit., 10.

²⁰³ GYML, X. 415/131/39, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Jelentés ‘A kispolgárság és az ellene folyó harc feladatai’ c. téma feldolgozásának tapasztalatairól, 2. 1973. április 6.

to leave the country illegally”.²⁰⁴ It was apparently ingrained in public consciousness that society had become more egoistic.

The image of the “idle rich” also appeared in information reports. Like the complaint that managers’ foreign trips and expensive offices produced no profit for the country but only enriched managers, people also condemned conspicuous consumption as harmful for the people’s economy. “The appearance of expensive furniture in shop windows, which is a capitalist export, was negatively received among the blue-collar workers. It is a general question which worker can afford to buy any of the products on display. According to the workers, the country should instead be buying industrial tools from the West, given that, in the first place, we have to be sparing with Western currency”.²⁰⁵ Conspicuous consumption was confronted with the interest of the larger collective: the criticism that the rich lived well at the expense of the people’s economy and produced no profit for the country, only for themselves, expressed a moral judgment of their egoism.

Even propaganda material suggests that the unequal distribution of wealth was already an accepted fact, and that the main objective was not to change this social reality but to demonstrate the moral superiority of non-materialist values. Propaganda intended to render wealth less attractive in the eyes of the public but even in this it was not really successful, since increasing wealth was an integral part of consumerism. It was characteristic of agitators, for instance, that they criticized the publication of the following article and not the social phenomenon that it described: “The employees were outraged by the article *Living room with full comforts and a swimming pool* published in *Lakáskultúra* (1973, no. 3). The value of the flat the article introduced is about 1,000,000 Ft. According

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁵ Havi összefoglaló jelentések a kül- és belpolitikai eseményekről, a lakosság hangulatáról, op. cit., 1975. július havi információs jelentés.

to the author, a young couple built the flat and they saved the money for it. The workers can hardly believe this. They see no point in publishing such annoying articles”.²⁰⁶ Parents also complained that local Roma were selling real Western jeans for double the price of what Hungarian jeans cost in the state store.²⁰⁷ The material differences between families manifested themselves among their school-age children.²⁰⁸ Excessive consumption was condemned, but no one knew precisely what rendered consumption excessive. The creation of an egalitarian society was postponed to the distant future: the social message of propaganda was not to change property relations but rather to learn to live with existing inequalities.

A survey of 1972 revealed that even the party membership related critically to socialist propaganda, which was unable to respond to the new social environment. The representative sample included 1,000 party members. Only one-fourth (26.3%) thought that the leading role of the working class meant that the working class had decision rights in the most important social and political issues and even less (14.6%) believed that the working class had a leading role in economy. One-fourth failed to give a clear or relevant answer (18.1%: “schematic”, 8.7%: “inadequate”). According to the majority of the respondents, employees were left out of enterprise democracy: 40.7% answered that enterprise democracy depended on the management, 26% that it depended on the party and mass organizations and only one-fifth (21.1%) that it depended on the political activity of employees. Half of the respondents (52.2%) agreed with the statement that the employees

²⁰⁶ GYML, X. 415/132/54, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Információs jelentések a pártéletről, a lakosság hangulatáról, 1973. július havi információs jelentés Győr városából, 2.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 4

²⁰⁸ Even the official Hungarian literature reflected this social reality. A good example is the youth novel *Karambol* (Budapest, 1979) by Anna Dániel, which received the Gorkiy prize. The novel depicts a society, which is socialist only in its state order while more and more “capitalist” elements appear that question the socialist set of values. This is manifest in the increasing social differences and the privileges that some of the young characters of the novel enjoy and others do not. The message of the book is, however, not to change the unequal world of the adults but to recognize the human emptiness of the world of the rich and renounce the materialistic values. In *Karambol* it is already remarkable that the moral superiority is the only consolation that society can offer to the poor heroes of the novel.

had hardly any opportunity to influence the enterprise decisions that concerned them. Many respondents did not think that party membership played a decisive role in shaping political opinions: 92% saw a difference between the thinking of Marxists and non-Marxists, but only 54.6% thought that the difference was manifest in political ideas. Even though the party sought to sustain the moral respectability of its members, the respondents evidently did not connect human conduct with party membership: only 4.6% saw a difference in moral attitudes and 3.3% in the attitude to work between Marxists and non-Marxists.²⁰⁹ Finally, the survey could not clarify concepts of socialism, which suggests the ideological uncertainty of the party membership: “Some people seek a realized socialism where there is no conflict of interests, others think that socialism will be realized only in the distant future and there are also people who universalize economic interests. The result is either self-deception or unreasonable pessimism. People have a narrow understanding of socialist existence and consciousness and tend to limit existence to purely materialistic issues. Part of the membership thinks in terms of rigid categories, drawing exaggerated conclusions from the surface phenomena”.²¹⁰

Given the closeness of prosperous, capitalist Austria, it was very difficult to argue that socialism offered a higher standard of living to its subjects than did capitalism. It is clear from information reports that Western consumer goods were regarded as symbols of status, and those who could travel frequently to the West were envied because they could acquire the desired products. The youth in particular was charged with ‘excessive Occidentalism’: party hardliners argued that Western lifestyles were seen as too attractive by young people, and that many young people – including working-class youth - were

²⁰⁹ Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, op. cit., Melléklet 1-5.

²¹⁰ Ibid.,12.

interested in above all money.²¹¹ Tourists evidently returned with positive images of the West: in Győr informants found it important to report that people were less fascinated by Western lifestyles than had previously been the case.²¹² Agitators pointed out that one should compare not only the wage difference between Austria and Hungary but also the cost of living – which indicated that people generally knew that the wages in the West were much higher. An information report from the Wagon Factory argued that the comparison of wages and prices “only served the interests of the capitalist countries”.²¹³

The “fight against materialism” could not become successful because people became increasingly interested in consumption, and the party itself sought to gain popularity with the standard-of-living policy. A member of the executive committee, for instance, argued that the car, the weekend-house and the trips were no luxuries.²¹⁴ The party fought against the “petit bourgeois” attitudes with words rather than with deeds. As criticisms show, in the eyes of the public a segment of the new rich was in fact closely connected with the system. It was difficult to expect exemplary communist conduct from grass-roots members when many leaders were only interested in their own prosperity. That said, the abundant criticisms of the “new rich”, which appear in the reports, show that people in general did not regard the industrial working class as a beneficiary of the economic reform.

²¹¹ GYML, X. 415/197/3, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Jegyzőkönyv a Vagongyári Párt V. B. üléséről. A munkásfiatalok között végzett nevelőmunka tapasztalatai és a további feladatok. 1978. szeptember 8.

²¹² GYML, X. 415/132/55, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Információs jelentések a pártéletről, a lakosság hangulatáról, 1973. szeptember havi információs jelentés Győr városából.

²¹³ GYML, X. 415/211/33, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Információs jelentés a Jármű II. Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. április.

²¹⁴ GYML, X. 415/134/2, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, 7. 1974. október 9.

Ending the social dialogue

Since the open discontent of the working class posed a problem of legitimacy to the regime, the party apparatus effectively controlled the communication between the working class and the party. The internal division of the party over the economic reform opened up formerly blocked channels of communication, and there was an attempt to engage the masses in a real social dialogue on the social effect of the reform. The materials of the reform era reveal a remarkably high level of concern among the party regarding the attitudes of the working class. It was in fact the last time the leading role of the working class was discussed by the party membership. According to information reports, the subject was also on the agenda of public meetings. “Many speakers dealt with the issue of the leading role of the working class. We should influence the activity of the workers primarily with the demand of political consciousness and other factors. We need to increase the social appreciation of physical work and introduce the perspective of a worker’s career. The speakers recognized that it is important to engage the workers in the leadership of the party, state and social organizations but they underlined that it is an equally important political requirement to prepare them for the fulfillment of a given position and ensure their competence”.²¹⁵ The party evidently sought to renew the social settlement with labor and demonstrate that workers’ welfare was central to its policy. By widening the public space of social debates and encouraging more open criticism, it aimed to demonstrate to the workers that their opinions mattered and working-class support remained crucial for the regime. We can speak of a social dialogue between the party and the workers not only with respect to the economic reform but also because the party made considerable efforts to improve its communication with the working class.

²¹⁵ Havi összefoglaló jelentések a kül- és belpolitikai eseményekről, a lakosság hangulatáról, op. cit., 1975. január havi információs jelentés. A pártélet eseményei.

The attempt of openness did not, however, last long and at the ideological level an outright re-dogmatization can be observed: from the mid 1970s the functionaries are recorded in the party materials as repeating the same old political slogans. The new first secretary of the county party committee, who assumed his duties in June 1974, introduced himself with a lengthy attack on private property, which displayed the widening gap between socialist propaganda and the reality of consumer society: “At the Ninth Party Congress²¹⁶ comrade Kádár said that communists seek to ensure that everybody has the same amount of food on his plate as they have. Some people are not interested in how much others have on their plates; only in what they have on their own. They separate their own interests from the interests of the community. The problem with private property is not that it increases, but that it becomes omnipotent – even if someone has acquired money by honest means. For instance, people build weekend houses not in order to rest in them, but in order to keep up with the Joneses. I visited one county and had a chat with a leading comrade. I noticed that he wasn’t listening to me, but kept on looking out of the window. I asked him what he was thinking about. He said that he was worried it might rain, because he had sprayed insecticide on his plants. If it rained he would have to spray them again. Unfortunately we do find such phenomena”.²¹⁷ Party leaders of course had to represent the party line, but the secretary was apparently over-zealous and his speech showed little understanding of the economic policy of the party. Economic equality was obviously not on the agenda; the speech merely reflected that the secretary had no relevant message regarding the new social relations.

Similarly, the old political dogmas had no relevant message to offer the working class. One objective of the party-controlled media was to give a positive image of labor,

²¹⁶ The Ninth Party Congress was held between 28 November and 3 December 1966.

²¹⁷ Az üzemi demokrácia helyzete, az egyszemélyi vezetés érvényesülése és a továbbfejlesztés feladatai, op. cit., 23.

but as the following contribution of an editor shows, propaganda was very much detached from the life of workers. The false image was more inclined to anger rather than win workers over to the cause, particularly given that they increasingly experienced a different social reality: “When I received the report on the conditions of the working class in the county, I listened to a radio report. It was about why the workers of the Water Conservancy Directorate - drivers, cleaners and dam-keepers – decided to finish the seventh and eighth classes of primary school. These people won’t get promoted, they probably won’t get more money and they still decided to go to school because, as one of the drivers said – and I quote, ‘it goes with our world-view that we yearn to study.’ Mark the formulation: we yearn to study! You yearn for sweet fruit, tasty meat, fresh water or a nice landscape and - in the words of this driver – you yearn to study. A simple man has formulated this very fittingly and truly. Yes. Our strength and truth lie in rendering people able to yearn for everything that is beautiful and good. This is the point of the party resolution on public education and our repeated discussions of the conditions of the working class that is our topic today in the executive committee of the county. Because – and it is good to know this – the party is aware of the fact that the first and most important condition of the harmony of our social system, which is not contradicted by the dynamism of our development, is the general satisfaction of the working class and a further condition is the stability of the worker-peasant alliance. We often declare that there is a good political climate and public mood in our country – and how very true it is!”²¹⁸

The quotations reveal the basic contradictions of socialist propaganda. Functionaries typically considered workers to be too immature to understand their wider social context, and the ideological triumph of the hardliners reinforced this attitude. When enterprise democracy was again on the agenda, the strongest criticism was that not every

²¹⁸ Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, op. cit., 5.

party group had reconciled their opinions with the party steward.²¹⁹ Even in the official party documents there were comments that simple people were rarely expected to have something to say about politics. “All of our employees agreed – and this was also the opinion of the delegates – that until now there had not been such a well-organized and professionally excellent conference in our county, at which problems could have been aired with such honesty. *It was a very surprising fact that simple workers gave their opinions on their work and also on the problems of the county and the country. It was even more surprising that several blue-collar workers contributed with such clever opinions*”.²²⁰ The sentences in italics show that a certain bias against the “simple workers” existed within the party apparatus.

This patronizing attitude effectively hindered communication between the party and the working class – all the more so when social experiences increasingly contradicted propaganda. Even though there were attempts to explain growing material inequalities between the social classes through the economic reform, the examined documents show that in public consciousness the increasing importance of private property was the product of a social process that had already begun. Apparent materialism was much criticized, but it influenced the behavior of every social class. With respect to the response of labor one can, indeed, speak of two contradictory arguments. On the one hand, the fact that society had become more materialist and the accumulation of wealth had gained an ever increasing social significance was criticized. On the other hand, growing inequalities triggered the material discontent of the industrial working class because wages in state industry lagged behind the private sector. Consumerism gradually pushed unpaid social and political work

²¹⁹ GYML, X. 415/156/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A munkahelyi demokrácia továbbfejlesztéséről hozott 1049. sz. MT-SZOT Elnökség együttes határozata beindításának és gyakorlati alkalmazásának 1983-84. évi tapasztalatai a Rába Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár és a Győr megyei Állami Építőipari Vállalat területén. 1984. július 11.

²²⁰ Havi összefoglaló jelentések a kül- és belpolitikai eseményekről, a lakosság hangulatáról, op. cit., 1975. március havi információs jelentés. Stress is mine.

into the background: people sought to be part of consumer society rather than social activists. The party could condemn materialism, but it did little to reverse this social process. Since part of the new rich belonged to the ruling elite of the system, the party lost the moral ground to attack the growth of private property.

Materialism and individualism were therefore not the products of the economic reform; the relatively liberal atmosphere of the reform era merely rendered visible ongoing social processes. Even party materials reflect the recognition that the new dividing lines in society could not be linked directly to the traditional classes. A good example is the perceived tension between workers and peasants. Many workers regarded commuters as peasants; thus, according to traditional interpretations, it was a conflict within the working class. Since employment in the private sector meant additional income, individualism also spread in the working class. Introduced surveys, too, support the argument that the traditional class categories failed to grasp the new social inequalities (e.g. a worker could also be a private entrepreneur or work in agriculture). The class category therefore became less important for the self-identification of people.

The individualization of society triggered many negative responses among people; in the light of the introduced sources, it was one of the most widely criticized social phenomena. This criticism may well have been reinforced by party functionaries, but it is remarkable that members of the party (and even its leaders) were charged with showing indifference to community work and party activities. Indeed, there were abundant complaints about the decline of the life of the movement and the devaluation of community work in the eyes of the people. According to party reports, people had become more egoistic and solidarity had declined; this was expressed in withdrawal from social work

and communal activity.²²¹ The accumulation of wealth triggered the envy of other, less successful groups: the building of large houses in the villages outraged the public, but also motivated many to try to follow the example. This had a negative impact on community life because people worked more and had less time for social relations outside of the family. Hypocrisy had a detrimental effect on social moral perspectives within society; leaders who were themselves considered to be selfish and greedy could not expect their subordinates to resist the “petit bourgeois” mentality. The contrast between communist ideology and social reality created a crisis of values, which rendered many people disillusioned with that ideology.

The response of labor was surely not the only factor that stopped the economic reform, even though more radical steps were planned. Fearing the loss of popularity in 1972 the government decided to increase the wages of industrial workers, and it unambiguously committed itself to the standard-of-living policy.²²² This meant that the party refused to consider the political criticisms of the industrial working class, choosing instead to offer material concessions in exchange for its silence. This manifested itself in the closing of social dialogue and ideological re-dogmatization.

The triumph of the hardliners proved illusory for two reasons. First, the standard-of-living policy was not in line with the economic realities of the country, and it led to overspending and growing indebtedness. Since the government unambiguously based its popularity on the increase of consumption, it automatically risked losing the support of the

²²¹ Erzsébet Szalai also argues that the individualization of the late Kádár regime largely eroded working-class consciousness (see: id., op. cit., 2004). Mark Pittaway develops a similar argument in: id., op. cit., 2005.

²²² The official justification of the decision stated that the standard of living of the workers of the state-owned industry had not kept pace with the general improvement. “Therefore the masses very much agree with the statement that when the standard of living of the people has been improving, it is not right that the workers of the state socialist industry lag behind.” (Közlemény az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága üléséről 1972. November 14-15. In: *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1971-1975*, Budapest, 1978, 382.) On the execution of the resolution in Győr-Sopron county see GYML, X. 415/128/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A bérfelzárkózás és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása a dolgozók helyzetére és a munkaerőmozgásra (a KB november 14-15-i határozata alapján), 1973. június 28.

people with the failure of the standard-of-living policy. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the decision to end social dialogue reflected the party's failure to give communication with the people a new basis in a situation when the party was in urgent need of finding a new social message to address the working class. Having failed to realize its egalitarian social program, the system failed to represent convincingly the superiority of human values over materialism. Propaganda stressed the better quality of life under socialism, but was unable to tell people how they might experience this better quality of life. With the expansion of the market, the state could not control the income of significant social groups, and in the light of the new differences the creation of an egalitarian society seemed illusory. The old ideology was inevitably doomed to failure in this new social reality and the triumph of the hardliners meant precisely the return of the old political slogans.

The working class as a social category became problematic also for the party; at least the conditions of the working class were no longer addressed in the executive committee. In the 1980s the working-class topics disappeared altogether from the agenda. The silence well reflected that the party had no relevant social message for the workers. The end of the reform period showed that the party refused to consider any leftist alternative and it rather orientated the workers towards the increase of consumption. The expansion of the market rearranged the class positions rendering wealth more important in the eyes of people. This was accompanied by a gradual change of social values, most notably growing individualism, which decreased the identification with a class. The period marks the beginning of the dissolution of the working class as a traditional class; in this sense the end of the social dialogue can be considered symbolic.

2. Labor Policy in the County

After the failure of the social dialogue, the regime attempted to win the support of the working class with the strengthening of the standard-of-living policy and various social programs that were aimed to benefit the workers. One spectacular measure, which intended to improve the situation of the industrial working class en masse, was the increase of industrial wages in 1973. Since one aim was to level wage differentials, the sources enable the comparison of the income of the different working-class groups in the county. The standard-of-living policy, however, ran out of steam already in the second half of the 1970s; as a questionnaire of 1976 shows, the majority of the respondents declared themselves to be discontented with their wages. In the 1980s the regime responded to the increasing economic difficulties with further market reforms thus encouraging people to rely on private initiative in order to improve their financial situation.

One of the most positive initiatives that the regime revitalized as part of their pronounced social policy towards the working class in the 1970s was the support of education and culture. This initiative – which was widely used in the period of socialist industrialization - sought to promote the communist ideology among the people as well as to strengthen the socialist collective. The socialist brigade movement had much in common with this general educational project because the members of the brigades were expected to collectively attend various cultural events (theatre, concerts, lectures and movies), which were overwhelmingly sponsored by the state. While according to later memoirs brigade life was often formal, many people recalled these communities with a sense of loss. In the light of the life-history interviews people were more responsive to community-building than to the ideological message of the party.

The discussion of labor policy of the county is separated from the study of the factory mainly because of the use of sources. This chapter relies on reports that deal with the state of the industrial working class of the whole county. The labor policy of Rába is introduced in a separate chapter, which uses only the materials of the party organization of the factory, in order to enable a more detailed focus on everyday working-class life. Since the reports of Rába were integrated into that of the county, it was, of course, not always practical to separate the two cases. The last section of this chapter therefore discusses the education of the working class in the county and the factory together.

The standard-of-living policy

In November 1972 the Central Committee decided to increase wages in industry. The resolution of the Committee stated that the standard of living of the workers in state enterprises had not kept pace with the general increase of the standard of living: “Therefore the masses very much agree with the statement that when the standard of living of the people improves, it is not right that workers in socialist industrial enterprises lag behind”.²²³ The resolution shows that the party took into consideration the frequently declared criticism that the economic reform created income differences that were too high, and therefore unjust, while the managers and the peasantry prospered at the expense of the industrial working class. The increase in industrial wages was intended to strengthen the support of the regime among the working class. This measure indicated the main direction of the social policy of the party, which was called appropriately the standard-of-living policy. This policy promised the workers in state-owned enterprises that their standard of

²²³ GYML, X. 415/128/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A bérfelzárkózás és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása a dolgozók helyzetére és a munkaerőmozgásra (a KB november 14-15.-i határozata alapján). 1973. június 28.

living would be increased in proportion to wealthier social strata, which benefited from the expanding private sector.

The party attached an understandable significance to this measure. The execution of the resolution was in fact the last occasion when the executive committee of the county made an attempt to determine the wages of workers across industry in Győr-Sopron. It was the last time when industrial wages were placed on the agenda of the executive committee. There is remarkably little information about the wages in the materials of the party organization of Rába MVG, too. The aspects of the distribution of the annual bonuses were also not discussed; allegedly, the chief manager personally checked the lists every year.²²⁴ Secrecy may well have been the policy of the enterprise. The wage increase of 1973 is therefore important because it is well documented and it gives a general picture of the distribution of wages in the industry of the county. (See table 1).

In Győr-Sopron county a survey conducted in 1972 found the following inequalities in the distribution of income: The annual income of the peasantry was higher (19,060 Ft) than that of the average working-class and intellectual household (18,625 Ft). The average wage in a month amounted to 2146 Ft in industry, 2419 Ft in the construction industry, 2538 Ft in the state farms, 2593 Ft in transport and 2271 Ft in the cooperative farms. Wages in light industry lagged behind significantly. The workers' wage levels did not keep pace with the top managers. The wages of the direct production managers also lagged behind, which created a problem of recruitment. Differentials between the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor were low, which injured the pride of the skilled workers. The report also noted that there was a differential between men and women workers and that "the principle of equal pay for equal work was not always effective".²²⁵

²²⁴ Information from the interviews.

²²⁵ A bérfeljesztés és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása, op. cit. 3-4.

It was decided that from 1 March 1973 the wages of the industrial and construction workers and the direct production managers of the enterprises administered by ministries and local councils should be increased from the central budget. Industrial workers and direct production managers were given a minimum increase of 8%, the semi-skilled and unskilled workers 4%, the construction workers 6,5%, and the semi-skilled and unskilled construction workers 3%. The enterprises received 20% of the central fund that was allocated for the increase of wages to finance an additional increase of wages that they could regulate on a local basis.²²⁶

In the county 61,000 workers and direct production managers received pay increases. In state industry production managers received a monthly increase of 269 Ft, the skilled workers 225 Ft and the semi-skilled and unskilled workers 109 Ft on average. The female workers received the same percentage rise (8%) but because their wages were lower than that of their male counterparts it amounted to an increase of 137 Ft on average.²²⁷ In addition, the enterprises increased the wages of the workers from their own funds, which was the highest in heavy industry (5-6% in the Tractor Factory of Mosonmagyaróvár, Rába MVG, and the Sopron Iron Foundry) and only 2% in light industry (the Cotton Mill and Artificial Leather Factory, and Richard Cloth Factory – all located in Győr). In heavy industry it meant an additional monthly pay increase of 102 Ft for skilled workers and 75 Ft for the semi-skilled and unskilled workers.²²⁸

Even though the pay increase was supposed to level wages in industry, statistics show that the party mainly aimed to win the support of the heavy industrial core of the working class. The pay increase was thus the highest in heavy industry, 15%: the average wage increased from 2,354 Ft to 2,707 Ft in a month. The workers in light industry

²²⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

²²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²²⁸ Ibid., 10.

received an average increase of 11,9%: they could take home 2,109 Ft instead of 1,884 Ft in a month. In the total ministerial state industry²²⁹ the average wages increased by 12,9%, 249 Ft but the average increase was lower among women, 203 Ft because the women's wages were originally lower than the men's wages.²³⁰ The white-collar workers received pay increases only from the funds of the enterprises: 141 Ft on average. It was decided that the managers should make up for the lost profit: if they failed to increase efficiency, they were threatened with wage cuts.²³¹ Since the above figures indicated average wages, we do not know how final nominal wages fluctuated (overtime, bonuses, piecework, shift work, etc.). One may indeed doubt whether the above figures were fully reliable: another report gives 2,510 Ft in heavy industry and 2,075 Ft in light industry for an average wage in the county in 1973.²³² (See table 2).

Despite the above inconsistencies, the significance of the pay increase is that it was given to the working class, for the purpose of compensating them for the social effects of the new economic mechanism. Even though it was declared that the badly paid groups of the working class should also catch up with the average, in reality the party continued to give priority to heavy industry. The workers in heavy industry were considered to be the backbone of the social support of the party; and the pay increase shows that it was important also for the party to preserve the sympathy of this group.

There was no survey of the reception of the measure but the members of the executive committee from the trade unionists to the representatives of the large enterprises (Rába MVG, for instance, had a representative in the executive committee of the county) all underlined that the pay increase was very well received in the factories because the

²²⁹ Most state industry was ministerial industry; the council industry had local significance.

²³⁰ A bérfeljesztés és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása, op. cit., 12-13.

²³¹ Ibid., 15.

²³² Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, op. cit. 3. melléklet, Munkások havi átlagkeresete.

workers thought that they were rewarded for their good work and that they felt motivated to work even better. With respect to the other social groups, a member of the executive committee stated that “the white-collar workers and the peasants were not happy, but they understood the necessity of this measure”.²³³ In the light of the statistics, heavy industry paid better than state agriculture: in 1973 the average monthly wage in a state farm was 2,538 Ft, while in heavy industry it was 2,707 Ft after the pay increase.²³⁴ The peasants of the cooperative farms wanted to know why the government was concerned with the standard of living of the working class only. The speaker pointed out that even though women’s wages received a special consideration, the differential between men and women continued to exist and the party should make further efforts in the future “so that women receive equal wages in the socialist wage system”.²³⁵

Even though there could be some unreliability in the statistical data, they still displayed basic trends. The pay increase favored skilled workers; the direct production managers received only a bit more money than skilled workers. In heavy industry skilled workers got roughly twice as big an increase as their semi-skilled or unskilled counterparts. In light industry the semi-skilled and unskilled workers received nearly as big a pay increase as unskilled labor in heavy industry. It is remarkable that the pay increase of women was lower in every category than that of the men with the exception of ministry-run construction enterprises. (We do not know how many women workers were employed in this industry). The wages of women workers lagged behind that of their male counterparts for two reasons. First, heavy industry preserved its male dominance; women were mainly employed in the badly paid industrial branches like light industry. Second, the majority of women workers were unskilled: in 1973, 35,8% of the blue-collar workers in

²³³ A bérfelvezetés és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása, op. cit., p. 3.

²³⁴ Ibid., A havi munkás átlagbérek alakulása.

²³⁵ Ibid.

the county were women but only 16,5% of them were skilled workers.²³⁶ These data show that traditional gender hierarchies were preserved in industry. There are no separate data about the men's and women's wages; but if one takes the differential between heavy and light industries, it is a reasonable assumption that men workers earned 25-30% more than their female counterparts on average.²³⁷

A report of 1974 gave the following picture of the conditions of the working class of the county in statistical data: 98,000 workers were employed in state industry, and together with retired workers 130,000 people belonged to the working class. There were twenty-seven large enterprises, which had more than five hundred workers, and 40,000 people worked in the large industry. The number of commuters was estimated at 30-35,000. In the plan period²³⁸ the proportion of workers, who earned 2000-4000 Ft in a month, increased from 43% to 60% while that of those who earned less than 2000 Ft decreased from 56% to 40%. According to the report social benefits increased by one and a half times but the average income in big families was still less than 800 Ft per person. The average pension of retired workers amounted to 1365 Ft. The overwhelming majority of the workers (94%) had a forty-four-hour working week but there was much overtime. One quarter of party secretaries were blue-collar workers.²³⁹

Since the standard-of-living policy became the new social message of the party, it was important to know how people received this policy.²⁴⁰ In 1976 there was a survey

²³⁶ GYML, X. 415/128/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Tájékoztató a KB 1970. február 18-19-i, a nők politikai, gazdasági és szociális helyzete megjavítására hozott határozata végrehajtásának tapasztalatairól, 17, 1973. május 4.

²³⁷ According to the interviews, men objected to the equal pay even if their women colleagues had the same qualification and performed the same job as they did. A woman electrician for instance recalled that when she joined a men's brigade in the Vehicle Unit of Rába MVG, who all received special bonuses because of their qualification, the members of the brigade strongly objected to giving the same money to a woman. The brigadier who later married her confirmed the story adding that at that time he also resented the equal pay.

²³⁸ The fourth five-year plan in Hungary (1971-75).

²³⁹ Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, op. cit.

²⁴⁰ From the contemporary literature see, for instance, József Berényi, *Életszínvonal és szociálpolitika* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1974); Edit Jávorka, *Életszínvonal a mai magyar társadalomban* (Budapest:

conducted of the party members in machine-manufacturing enterprises across the county. In six enterprises 1013 people (almost half of them, 471 from MVG) were asked to evaluate their material circumstances. 84% of the respondents were men and 16% were women. The distribution according to the age-group was the following: 21-30 year-olds: 18%, 31-41 year-olds: 35%, 41-50 year-olds: 32%, 51-60 year-olds: 12%. 21% had finished primary school, 26% had a three-year vocational training certificate, 35% had finished secondary school and 13% finished college or university. 35% were skilled workers, 13% were semi-skilled and 3% were unskilled workers and 49% belonged to the “other” category. (Blue-collar workers amounted to 53% of the party membership in the machine manufacture of the county.)

The survey confirmed that workers in this sector were in a better financial situation than the working-class average. The respondents belonged to the old guard of the factories because 35% had worked in the same enterprise for more than twenty years, 18% for 16-20 years, 21% for 11-15 years and 16% for 6-10 years. The qualification of the respondents was clearly above the average: in 1972, one-third of the employees of Rába MVG did not finish primary school²⁴¹ while in the sample it was only 5%. The wages in the sample were also higher than the average wages in the county: almost the half of the respondents (46,8%) earned 3100-4000 Ft in a month while only one-quarter of the industrial workers of the county fell into this category. In the county only about 40% of the industrial workforce earned more than 3000 Ft; in the sample 66%. In the sample 16,5% earned 4100-5000 Ft while in the industry of the county 9,3% fell into this category. Interestingly, there were reverse proportions at the top: in the sample 0,7% earned more than 6000 Ft while in the county the figure was 2,4%. The difference can be explained through “top”

Kossuth Kiadó, 1970); Ágnes Losonczy, *Az életmód az időben, a tárgyakban és az értékekben* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1977).

²⁴¹ GYML, X. 415/118/27, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, 1972. április havi információs jelentés.

managerial wages; even though it should be noted that even these wages were only about twice as much as the average wages in the sample.

The record of continuous employment and relatively high wages enabled the respondents to live in good material circumstances – or at least at the level, which was at the time characteristic of the socialist middle class. Living conditions can be certainly described as good because the majority of the respondents were owner-occupiers. One-third of the respondents (31%) lived in their own houses, one-quarter (24%) in their own flats, one-third (30%) were life-long tenants of state or council flats, 11% lived at home as family members, and only 4% rented a room. No one lived in workers' hostels. This means that the overwhelming majority had settled living conditions. The households of the respondents were well equipped with durable consumer goods: 93% had a television, 94% a radio, 91% a washing machine, 69% a spin-drier, 87% a fridge and 83% a vacuum-cleaner. One-quarter of the respondents (24%) owned a motor bike and 26% had a car. 22% of the households possessed a record player.²⁴²

Even though the material conditions of the respondents were “objectively” good, their subjective evaluation of the standard of living policy was less positive. Although almost everybody (99%) agreed with the statement that the standard of living had increased, opinions differed as to the extent of the increase. 21% of the respondents thought that there was a significant increase in the standard of living during the plan period, 64% described it as average and 14% said that the increase was insignificant. Two-thirds of the sample (68%) described the supply of consumer goods as satisfactory, 31% as not satisfactory and 1% said that it was bad. The opinions of real wages differed from the opinions of the general standard of living: 33% said that the pay increase exceeded the

²⁴² GYML, X. 415/7/14, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Az életszínvonal-politikánk értelmezése a gépipari nagyüzemek párttagsága körében, 1. sz. melléklet, 1976. április 27.

increases in prices, 28% thought that the pay increase balanced the higher prices and according to 39% pay did not keep pace with increasing prices. In Rába MVG 44% of the respondents agreed with this statement. The survey concluded that the population – even the party members – evaluated the increase of prices more negatively than “it was shown by the facts of economic policy. They spoke of the increase of prices even if they could satisfy their needs at a higher level and they bought more valuable products. They disregarded the improvement of the technical standard of the products and they evaluated only the prices”.²⁴³ People were only “moderately” content with their wages: 75% of the respondents described their wages as average (even though in reality they were higher than the average industrial wages in the county), 19% thought that their wages were good and 6% said that they were paid badly. The majority of people (57%) were not content with the pace of the pay increase. Worker-peasant conflict was again manifest in the survey: according to two-thirds of the respondents (68%) the peasantry had a higher income than the working class, and only 7% said that the workers earned more than the peasants. The survey noted that according to the statistics the income of the peasantry was 10% lower than that of the working class. During the discussion of the material the representative of the Rába MVG argued that the workers regarded the commuters also as peasants: “It is not the real peasants who live better but those who work in the factory and live in the countryside. According to the statistics the workers possess more land than the peasants. The survey reflects that the workers who live in the countryside also farm their land to increase their income”.²⁴⁴ Worker-peasant conflict showed that the social integration of commuters into the working class had been a problematic process, and the commuters were still considered to be peasants in the eyes of urban workers.

²⁴³ Az életszínvonal-politikánk értelmezése a gépipari nagyüzemek párttagsága körében, op. cit.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

The survey revealed some interesting psychological relationships between the skills, gender and the evaluation of wages. While the semi-skilled workers described the material situation of their families as good, the majority of the skilled workers said that it was average. The survey explained this difference through the almost equal wages of the two groups: skilled workers expected higher hourly wages than their semi-skilled counterparts and therefore they were more discontented with their wages. There was also a difference between the satisfaction of men and women: even though the majority of women earned less than the male average (2100-2500 Ft), they were more content with the financial situation of their families than the men. It is an interesting contradiction that while 99% said that the standard of living increased, more than half of the respondents were discontented with the pay increase. The survey stated that people evaluated the standard of living only according to the pay increase and they did not count the improvement of the communal infrastructure, schools, health service, roads, and, parks. Since the main social message of the party at the time was the standard-of-living policy, party members were unlikely to contradict assertions that the standard of living had increased. The detailed answers, however, show a more contested picture: it seems that people expected more from the standard-of-living policy than what it delivered. In the meeting of the executive committee the representative of the Rába MVG called the attention to the psychologically harmful effect of the non-differentiating wage system: "In our factory there are direct production managers who earn less than the blue-collar workers. It is no wonder that the workers often refuse to study or accept higher positions. What is the reason for this? One should investigate that the wage is disproportionate to the greater responsibility. The majority of the workers measure the standard of living with their wages, cars and weekend plots".²⁴⁵ To achieve all these people were willing to work

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

more: nearly half of the respondents (48%) said that they worked in their free time. At the same time many people saw little relation between the work performed and their wages: according to 22% of the respondents the achievement rarely or never determined the wages (in Rába MVG 25% gave this answer) and only 19% thought that people were paid according to their work.²⁴⁶ This, in general, shows that many people had doubts about the social value of labor.

The survey revealed that the standard-of-living policy failed to satisfy people to the desired level as to convince them of the superiority of socialism even when there was an effective increase in real wages. According to national statistics the real wage increase was the greatest in 1970-75; in the second half of the 1970s the real wages still increased but at a lower rate because of the rapidly increasing prices.²⁴⁷ Throughout the 1980s real wages stagnated and in 1988 they actually fell. But even in 1976 when the survey was conducted the majority of people achieved a higher standard of living with more work, because the pay increase alone did not guarantee the desired level of consumption. Even this survey showed that the standard-of-living policy was not the best political slogan; the actual counter-effect became manifest in the 1980s when people became more discontented with their economic situation. In the 1970s the slogan that the oil-crisis would not creep in to the socialist countries was much repeated; it did not improve the credibility of the government when it still did. The warning of the reformer economists came true²⁴⁸: people thought that the government “determined” the standard of living, and when they started to live worse, their anger understandably turned against the political regime, which deceived them.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ *Statisztikai évkönyv 1980* (Budapest, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal), 355. The index of real wages increased by 17% between 1970 and 1975 (100%=1970) while only by 4% between 1975 and 1980 (100%=1970). In 1980 the real wage index was lower than in 1979 and the net nominal wage index increased less than the consumer prices.

²⁴⁸ 'Jelenlegi gazdaságirányításunk kritikája', op. cit.

Educating the public

The revitalization of the educational project in the 1970s was supposed to benefit the working class as well as to render the cause of socialism attractive in the eyes of the people. The project sought to shape people's consciousness in two ways: first, by increasing the general level of education, and second, by providing for the cultivated entertainment of the people thereby increasing the level of general knowledge. The popularization of "high culture" (theatre, concerts, ballet, art movies) was meant to demonstrate that workers were fully integrated into the socialist middle class.²⁴⁹ At the same time the project carried the propagandistic message that intellectual values were more important than material ones, which was, unfortunately, contradicted by the social experience.

Increased educational performance on an individual level, of course, enhanced a person's employment prospects; evening courses were in fact offered in order to train working-class managers.²⁵⁰ Education was important for ensuring their professional competence, which the county secretary formulated in a rather clumsy way: "The other thing is the training of working-class managers. The resolution of the Central Committee attaches great significance to this. But there are excesses in the leadership. I have heard such opinions from some workplaces and enterprises that their workers will fill every leading position. Then why do we need to train ten thousand university graduates? We should not generalize but we always have to consider the concrete situation: if a worker is

²⁴⁹ For an analysis of the role of working-class culture under socialism see Dietrich Mühlberg, 'Konnte Arbeiterkultur in der DDR gesellschaftlich hegemonial sein?' *Utopie kreativ*, Heft 145 (November 2002), 965-976.

²⁵⁰ Several interview partners reported about similar careers. Even the appointment of foremen required a high school certificate. GYML, X. 415/200/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, A közvetlen termelésirányítók helyzete, politikai-szakmai felkészültségük értékelése – az emberi kapcsolatokra gyakorolt hatásuk, 1979. szeptember 21.

suitable for the job, we will choose him. But if we make a wrong choice and the new manager cannot bear the burden, we will put him in a very unpleasant situation. He has to go back to the shop floor and the workers will tease him and make fun of him. If we increase the number of working-class managers only statistically, we may discredit this noble political goal".²⁵¹ Adult education was indeed supposed to strengthen political loyalty: selection to institutions of high education depended on the recommendation of the party. With the increasing number of young university graduates the importance of evening universities in individual mobility did, however, decline.²⁵²

In the light of statistics there was enough room for improvement also at the lower level of education, which the project strongly promoted. In 1974, 37,000 skilled workers finished primary school or even had secondary or other further education, but nearly 11,000 skilled workers did not have basic education (the compulsory eight classes of primary school). Between 1968 and 1973 5,200 people attended a primary school for adults (90% were blue-collar workers). 8,500 trainees were admitted to the training schools of the county in a year.²⁵³ This working class was mainly of working-class origin itself; 80% of the trainees came from working-class families.²⁵⁴ The report noted that the proportion of students from working-class families was very low in medical and language faculties at university.²⁵⁵ The enterprises supported the education of their employees in

²⁵¹ Az üzemi demokrácia helyzete, az egyszemélyi vezetés érvényesítése és a továbbfejlesztés feladatai, op. cit. 25-26, 1974. március 29.

²⁵² Many retired interview partners reported of a managerial career that they followed after they finished an evening university course in the 1960s or 1970s. Some of them actually said that party membership was a prerequisite.

²⁵³ Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, op. cit.

²⁵⁴ On the perspectives of working-class youth see: Dénes Maros, 'Fiatalok a munkáspályán. Gondolatok az ifjómunkások társadalmi beilleszkedéséről', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 3 (1976), 51-58.

²⁵⁵ The social inequality in the Hungarian educational system was discussed by the sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge. There were important differences between the types of secondary schools: training schools did not offer a high school certificate, which was the pre-requisite for university admission. Comprehensive schools did but they mainly trained technologists. The elite grammar schools, which more or less guaranteed university admission, were mainly attended by the children of the intelligentsia (See: id., *Az iskolarendszer és az iskolai tudás társadalmi meghatározottsága*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976.). For a more ethnographic approach on the social inequality of the Hungarian school system see also: Katalin Dogossy, *Baj van a gyerekekkel*

economics and engineering. Working-class children therefore had more chance of gaining access to the technical intelligentsia, rather than to more traditional intellectual occupations.

Another report from 1974 likewise painted a gloomy picture of the state of public education. It was estimated that 40% of the semi-skilled workers and around two-thirds of the unskilled workers (33,000 people) in the county did not finish primary school. In the machine industry 25% of the workforce did not have basic education. The report noted that 24% of the workers in the county commuted, and traveling consumed much of the free time that they could have spent cultivating their mind. It critically remarked that many social organizations neglected the cause of culture: “The enterprises do not always support adequately the local cultural institutions, which could offer a basis for the strengthening of the workers’ collective and community life, and the comprehensive development of workers’ education”. Within the enterprises, the report stated, the socialist brigade movement provided an organizational basis for workers’ education. There were 2585 socialist brigades in the county, with around 32, 000 brigade members. The report, however, criticized the “over-formality and often mechanic administration in the cultural initiatives of the brigades”. The general cultural level of the population also received critical comments: “We experienced striking deficiencies in the economic, pedagogic and linguistic competence of the population; their development is essential for the further expansion of enterprise democracy”.

The intellectual critics, however, contradicted themselves or they had too high expectations. The following data that they listed namely does not support the above negative picture: it was estimated that 25% of the population regularly read books while around 40-45% was reported to rarely read. The proportion of theatre audiences containing

(Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1987). The argument of the book is similar to that of *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* by Paul Willis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1977).

blue-collar workers was higher. 10% of workers regularly listened to classical music. “Municipalities started organizing concerts but they suffer from a lack of experience. One major obstacle to popularizing classical music is that there are not enough town halls in our county - including Győr - that are suitable for concerts”. The report noted that even though fine arts improved, “the decoration of the public squares left much to be desired”. The movement of amateur film-makers “was developed on a narrow basis but it was noticed nationally”. In 1972 there were 434 amateur artistic groups in the county, with 8572 members. 6000 of them were below thirty, which shows that it was primarily a youth-based movement. In 1973, the county had 90,315 TV-subscribers.²⁵⁶

Thanks to the massively propagated cultural program²⁵⁷, there remains considerable information on the education of the Rába-employees in Győr. In 1972 it was reported that out of the 17,000 employees of the MVG, 5,500 (32,3%) did not have elementary education. Even the report noted that “this number was strikingly high”.²⁵⁸ Over the following five years this percentage decreased to one-fourth of the total workforce (24,7%). The educational statistics of the employees according to age-group showed the general improvement of education. (See table 3). The overwhelming majority of the employees who did not have basic education belonged to the older generations. More than half of the employees who were over fifty, did not finish primary school; this ratio was 33,2% in the age-group between thirty and fifty, 5,3% in the age-group between twenty and thirty and 6,5 % in the age-group below twenty. Even though the education of younger generations clearly improved, the enterprise continued to admit young unskilled workers who did not have elementary education. That 25% of the employees without basic

²⁵⁶ GYML, X. 415/134/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Közművelődésünk helyzete, 1974. július 10.

²⁵⁷ See, for instance, József Füleki, ‘Mérlegen a közművelődési határozat végrehajtása. Beszélgetés három nagyüzem pártbizottságának titkárával’, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 7 (1976), 86-93.

²⁵⁸ GYML, X. 415/118/27, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, 1972. április havi információs jelentés.

education in MVG could still be considered a high percentage. 27,5% of the employees over fifty finished primary school; this ratio was 46,3% in the age-group between thirty and fifty, 60,4% in the age-group between twenty and thirty and 75% in the age-group below twenty. While in the age-group over fifty 14% finished secondary school, this ratio doubled (27,7%) in the age-group between twenty and thirty. In the age-group below twenty it was still only 18,5%, which suggests that many people in the age-group between twenty and thirty finished secondary school during work. The development of the ratio of university graduates reflected similar trends: it was 2,7% in the age-group over fifty and 6,6% in the age-group between twenty and thirty.²⁵⁹ The education of blue-collar workers was characterized by a similar generational pattern: the overwhelming majority of the workers without basic education were over thirty and there were many more workers in the age-group below thirty who finished secondary school than in the age-group over thirty.²⁶⁰ The educational difference between the older and younger generations was also considered in the appointment of managers: even though foremen had to have a high school certificate, it was noted that one cannot expect this from older workers.²⁶¹ At the same time the acquisition of a college or university degree almost automatically meant promotion for the skilled workers: this is supported by the fact that amongst the blue-collar workers there were only fifteen college graduates (all of them in the age-group below thirty).²⁶² (See table 4).

The MVG directly supported the education of young people. It supported its own training school and the trainees were employed in the enterprise during their training time.

²⁵⁹ GYML, X. 415/195/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyárban, Melléklet, MVG összes dolgozójának iskolai végzettség szerinti megoszlása korcsoportonként, 1977. július 6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ A közvetlen termelésirányítók helyzete, politikai-szakmai felkészültségük értékelése, op. cit., 2.

²⁶² Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyárban, op. cit., 1. táblázat, Fizikai dolgozók iskolai végzettsége.

Between 1972 and 1976 the school admitted 350 children in a year on average and around 75% of the young skilled workers chose to stay with the enterprise. The choice was also motivated by the so-called social scholarships that the enterprise offered to the trainees: they received a regular financial support during their three-year vocational training and they had to commit themselves to working in the enterprise for an equal period of time.²⁶³ This type of scholarship was also offered to university and college students.²⁶⁴ The enterprise evidently increased its support for training and education: in 1976 there were one hundred more trainees who received support than in 1972. While in 1972 the MVG spent 689,700 Ft on social scholarships, in 1976 it spent more than double, 1,751,000 Ft.²⁶⁵

Adult education, which was specifically targeted at the working class, likewise received support in the period. This was not limited to high education; given the high number of employees without basic education, they were encouraged to finish primary school or do vocational training. The party organization of the factory listed two main problems in this respect: the first was that it was difficult to convince old people to study (and the majority of people without basic education belonged to the older generations) and the second was the problem of commuters. The party organization contacted the local village schools but only two of them answered declaring that they could not start the workers' primary school because people refused to go back to school.²⁶⁶ The enterprise offered financial incentives, too: basic education was a pre-requisite of vocational training within the enterprise, and those who received the skilled worker certificate, received a pay increase of 10%.²⁶⁷ The attendance of secondary school and the university degree

²⁶³ Ibid., A szakmunkásképzés adatai 1972-1976.

²⁶⁴ GYML, X. 415/122/6, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár vezérigazgatójának jelentése a termelőkapacitás kihasználásának helyzetéről, 16, 1972. július 18.

²⁶⁵ Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit., A szakmunkásképzés adatai 1972-1976.

²⁶⁶ Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit. 5, 1977. július 6.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

programs was supported with paid study leave. Many socialist brigades committed themselves to increasing the education of the members, which aimed to strengthen the individual motivation. According to the report the interest of the employees in adult education was satisfactory, which can be supported with statistical data. Between 1972 and 1976 3,999 people participated in adult education in MVG: 387 men and 175 women finished primary school, 1524 men and 741 women finished secondary school and 1010 men and 162 women attended university or college courses.²⁶⁸

While much had been done to mobilize the collective for the educational project, there were also administrative means to enhance the participation. In December 1976 an educational committee was formed in the party organization of MVG to promote education and culture among the employees.²⁶⁹ Whether it can be explained through the generally improving education or the support of the enterprise or both, statistics continued to improve throughout the 1970s. (See table 5). In 1975 24% of the workforce did not finish primary school; in 1979 this fell to 18,3%.²⁷⁰ In 1975 18% of the employees finished secondary school; in 1979 23,6%. The most significant improvement was in the ratio of university or college graduates: while in 1975 3,4% of the employees had a university degree, in 1979 this was nearly double at 6,1%. The percentage of highly qualified workers increased. In 1979, 23% of the employees were white-collar and 77% were blue-collar workers. 25,2% of the workforce were below thirty and 24,2% were women.²⁷¹ Between 1975 and 1979 1,961 employees participated in technical training programs, 410 skilled workers obtained further qualifications and 334 semi-skilled workers received the skilled

²⁶⁸ Ibid., Melléklet, Esti, levelező oktatásban résztvevők 1972-1976.

²⁶⁹ GYML, X. 415/200/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, A közművelődés helyzete. Az MVG végrehajtó bizottságának jelentése az 1975-ös pártértekezlet után, 12, 1979. december 11.

²⁷⁰ This improvement could have also been explained with the retirement of the older generations. See the cited party meeting of 6 July 1977 (Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit. 3.) where one speaker said that the retirements will improve the ratio.

²⁷¹ A közművelődés helyzete. Az MVG végrehajtó bizottságának jelentése az 1975-ös pártértekezlet után op. cit., 12.

worker certificate. Within the framework of production development eleven courses were organized with 360 participants. 30-40 university students received scholarships from the enterprise in a year who committed themselves to working in Rába MVG after graduation.²⁷²

Despite the improving statistics, even the reports admitted that there were two specific types of educational inequality that adult education could hardly reduce. The first was the education of the commuters. The commuters were less likely to participate in adult education than Győr residents because they had less free time and they depended on the public transport timetables: “The ratio of the commuters is rather low in adult education. The reason is that they cannot reconcile the afternoon classes in the workers’ primary school or secondary school with the schedule of public transport. Their trains and buses depart around 5 pm and if the commuters miss their buses and trains, they have to wait for the end of the afternoon shift”.²⁷³ This inequality was also reflected in the statistics. Even though 39% of the employees in Győr were commuters, in the academic year of 1978/79 25 Győr residents (90%) and only 3 commuters (10%) obtained a university degree during work. In the same year 26 urban workers (90%) and 3 commuters (10%) obtained a degree from the workers’ university. 57 local residents (70%) and 24 commuters (30%) finished secondary school and 12 Győr residents (70%) and 5 commuters (30%) finished workers’ primary school. The low ratio of the commuters among the university graduates shows that they had fewer opportunities in the enterprise than the local residents. The training courses that were held in the enterprise more successfully engaged the commuters because they were adjusted to the schedule of their trains and buses. 50% of the participants in these

²⁷² Ibid., 13.

²⁷³ GYML, X. 415/204/4/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete, 4, 1980. szeptember 12.

courses were commuters.²⁷⁴ A certain bias against the commuters, which was reflected in the worker-peasant conflict, persisted in the party organization of MVG. Commuters were allegedly interested in cultivating their plots rather than their mind: “The agricultural activity of the commuters is a serious obstacle to their professional development. Husbandry, gardening and farming consume much of their time on a regular basis, which renders any intellectual activity impossible after work in the factory”.²⁷⁵ Among the young skilled workers there was an equal proportion of local residents and commuters: in 1978, 56 commuters (59,6%) and 38 local residents (40,4%) started working in MVG, while in 1979, 39 commuters (55%) and 32 Győr residents (45%) took up work in the enterprise. The report, however, noted, that in reality a much higher number of trainees came from the villages but they returned home after they finished training.²⁷⁶

The second specific problem was that of gender inequality. The educational statistics of MVG show that the education of women workers was in general lower than that of men. In 1977, 38% of women workers did not finish primary school, 56% had only elementary education, and 6% finished secondary school. At the same time, 29% of male workers did not finish primary school, 59% had basic education, 11,8% finished secondary school and 8,2% had a college or university degree. Within the group of skilled workers the proportion of women, who had a high school certificate, was higher: 25,6% of skilled women workers finished secondary school while this proportion was 16% among the skilled men workers. The educational inequality between men and women could be clearly demonstrated in their participation in higher education: 8,5% of the skilled men workers and 8,1% of the semi-skilled men workers had a college or university degree while the highest education of women workers was secondary school. The educational statistics of

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

the total workforce of MVG reflected the same inequality: while 1,9% of the women had a college or university degree, this ratio was more than double (4,6%) among the men. At the enterprise level, the educational statistics were more balanced in the lower educational categories because the white-collar workers improved the statistics of women. 26% of the women did not finish primary school, 52,1% had basic education, and 28% had a high school certificate while 24,2%, of the men did not finish primary school, 52,1% had basic education and 28% had a high school certificate.²⁷⁷ Adult education maintained a certain inequality at the university level: even though one-quarter of the employees were women, only 16% studied in college or university during work between 1972 and 1976 (the ratio at the high school level was better because half of the adult students were women).²⁷⁸ Since higher management was recruited from the university graduates, the lower ratio of women who finished college or university also meant lower career chances in the enterprise.

While statistics can tell us something of the improvement of education, they can be hardly used to describe the cultural life of the factory. Since no survey survived among the employees, apart from the later memoirs, one can only rely on a rather general report, which summarized some basic facts. In Rába (like in any other state-owned enterprise) the socialist brigades were regarded as the main basis of the cultural initiatives and undertakings.²⁷⁹ The members of the brigade committed themselves to studying, obtaining a higher degree and participating in cultural events (attending theatre, concerts, artistic films, visiting museums, etc.); these cultural offerings counted towards the ranking of the brigades.²⁸⁰ Whether it was motivated by genuine interest or the administrative measures,

²⁷⁷ Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁸⁰ GYML, X. 415/204/4/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, A szocialista munkaverseny és a brigádmunka fejlesztésének feladatai vállalatunknál, 1980.

the number of the regular visitors of theatre increased: in 1976, 435 season tickets were sold in the enterprise while in 1977 this increased to 585. The report noted that the enterprise established regular contacts with the artists of Kisfaludy theatre²⁸¹, which helped popularize the theatre among employees.²⁸² Three artistic groups functioned within the framework of the enterprise: a choir, a brass band and a dance group. In 1976, more than 30,000 people saw the programs of these groups. The workers' concerts were also reported to have had a positive reception.²⁸³

The most successful form of propagating general knowledge were the popular scientific lectures; not surprisingly, primarily the technical and economic subjects attracted many employees. 2600-2800 participants attended the lectures in eighty sections in a year. On 1 March 1977 a TIT-group (Tudományos Ismeretterjesztő Társulat = Scientific Association for the Propagation of General Knowledge) was formed in the enterprise with 22 members.²⁸⁴ The enterprise had a well-equipped technical and a trade union library. (See table 6). The technical library had a stock of nearly 50,000 volumes, while the trade union library had 66,000 volumes. Nearly 40% of the Rába-employees were library members and the majority of them regularly attended the library. The members borrowed ten books in a year on average.²⁸⁵ The libraries organized writer-reader meetings, which were attended by around 600 employees in a year.²⁸⁶ The larger cultural events took place in Ady Endre Community House, which hosted the various clubs, artistic groups and

augusztus 29. The cultural activity of the socialist brigades also received a positive evaluation in the interviews.

²⁸¹ The new building of the theatre was inaugurated in 1978. In 1979 the Győr Ballet was founded, which soon became very popular in the town and also won international recognition.

²⁸² Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit. 4.

²⁸³ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁸⁴ A közművelődés helyzete. Az MVG végrehajtó bizottságának jelentése az 1975-ös pártértekezlet után op. cit., 14.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, op. cit. 3.

hobby groups. The report noted that the enterprise requested a new building for the organization of cultural programs”.²⁸⁷

In the light of the later memoirs the picture is more mixed. Many interviewers reported of positive experiences concerning community-building, where the members of the brigade did indeed support each other and the common cultural undertaking was regarded as real entertainment and not one more task that had to be fulfilled.²⁸⁸ It was, however, admitted that not everybody was enthusiastic about the common cultural undertaking; even a contemporary report recognized that after one day of hard work, many people were happy to go home and spend time with their families rather than attend high cultural events. Despite the good intention of the party, the administrative measures were likely to have the opposite effect: in the eyes of many, the fulfillment of the cultural tasks was regarded as a constraint. Workers’ education admittedly sought to increase the political consciousness of the people; it seems, however, that it missed its political goal. Even those, who had positive experiences of brigade life, stressed the loss of the community while dismissing Communist propaganda. Many pointed out that the members who failed to attend the events were also “recorded” in the diary of the brigade, which reveals that (self)-deception has become part of the functioning of the system.

²⁸⁷ A közművelődés helyzete. Az MVG végrehajtó bizottságának jelentése az 1975-ös pártértekezlet után op. cit., 16.

²⁸⁸ The role of socialist brigades in community-building is discussed in a separate chapter.

3. Labor Policy in the Factory

Economic incentives

With the growth of the production of Rába there was a massive increase of the workforce particularly in the early 1970s. In this period the labor problems of the enterprise were discussed also in the executive committee:²⁸⁹ Rába enticed many women workers from the textile factories in Győr, and it also opened new plants in other, smaller towns, which had little industry, like Sárvár and Kapuvár, where it was easier to recruit new workers. Despite these efforts, a production report of 1972 complained that there was a chronic shortage of labor in some professions such as metal cutting and at the smelters.²⁹⁰ Another problem that the report singled out was the high fluctuation of labor: it was regarded as a good result that between 1969 and 1971 the percentage of employees who gave notice decreased from 29% to 19,2%.²⁹¹ Shift work was likewise problematic

²⁸⁹ The enterprise even had a delegate in the executive committee of the county.

²⁹⁰ For contemporary debates on labor shortage under socialism see e.g.: István Buda, 'A munkaerő-gazdálkodás és a bér-gazdálkodás időszzerű feladatai', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 5 (1977), 38-48; Katalin Szikra Falusné, *Munkabér, ösztönzés, elosztás* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1969); Károly Losonczy, *A munkaerőmozgásról* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1973); Csaba Makó, 'Technika – munkásigények – munkakövetelmények I-II', *Ergonómia*, 12, no. 3-4. (1979), 190-197; Ferenc Munkácsy, 'A munkaerőhiány és a munkapiac sajátosságainak összefüggései', *Munkaiügyi Szemle*, 20, no. 6 (1976), 1-5; id., 'Munkaerő-átcsoportosítás tervszerűen, szervezeten', *Munkaiügyi Szemle*, 23, no. 3 (1979), 1-5; Sándor Oroszi-József Veress, 'Szükségszerű-e a munkaerőhiány a szocialista gazdaságban?' *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 26, no. 12 (1979), 1462-1473; György Pogány, *Munkaerő-gazdálkodás és munkaerő-politika* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1982); Albert Rácz, 'Munka szerinti elosztás, ösztönzés', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 35, no. 1 (1980), 81-89; Tamás Sárközy, 'Felelősség a vállalati vezetésért és gazdálkodásért', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 3 (1976), 67-76; Éva Szeben, 'A munka szerinti elosztás érvényesítésének néhány problémája a fejlett szocialista társadalom építésének időszakában Magyarországon' (Manuscript, 1979); János Tillmann, 'Teljesítménykövetelmények és munkaidőalap-kihasználás' *Munkaiügyi Szemle*, 21, no. 3 (1977): 14-18; János Tímár, 'Foglalkoztatáspolitikánkról és munkaerő-gazdálkodásunkról', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 24, no. 2 (1977), 129-150; László Iványi, 'A vállalati profitbővítésre és az önellátásra való törekvés hatása a munkaerőhelyzetre', *Munkaiügyi Szemle*, 23, no. 4 (1979), 1-6.

²⁹¹ GYML, X. 415/3/23, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár vezérigazgatójának beszámolója a KB 1974. december 5.-i határozatáról a minőség, a takarékoság és a munkaerő-helyzetről, 16, 1975. július 22.

because many employees continued to rely on agriculture so that the report proposed the pay of bonuses for different shifts in order to fully exploit machine capacity: “Employees frequently refuse to work in two-three shifts referring to objective problems such as child care, lack of nursery or kindergarten places, long traveling times, etc. but it can be stated that the low differentials play a role in the refusal. The enterprises cannot give a shift bonus from their own funds. In our view it would be justified to pay a 10% bonus for the afternoon and a 20-25% bonus for the night shifts to motivate people. This should be solved centrally because today there is a high income from private farming, which definitely influences the willingness of the workers to work in different shifts”.²⁹²

The use of economic incentives was strongly supported by the manager of Rába, who represented this opinion also in a meeting of the executive committee: “In my view the enterprise organization marks time nationally. We could not find a solution to fundamentally change the present system, which had been established in 1945. More or less this is where we stand today... In my view there are two basic conditions of a modern enterprise organization. The first is to make people interested in higher achievement: the reward should be manifest not in a typed speech but people should get it in their pocket. I agree that there is surplus labor. It is an old problem. We have to say with self-criticism that we cannot do much. There is no material interest to get rid of unnecessary labor. If we could pay the wages of 2000 people to 1800, every economic unit, party organization and manager would be keen to solve this persistent, sensitive issue. The other thing is labor discipline. If we can't keep discipline, the best organizational concepts will be useless or even worsen the present situation”.²⁹³

²⁹² Ibid., 19.

²⁹³ GYML, X. 415/121/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A vállalatok üzemi és munkaszervezésének korszerűsítésére indított mozgalom feladatairól, 11-14 1972. március 24. See also Katalin Bossányi's interview with the manager: Bossányi, op. cit., 1978 and that of Lajos Horányi in Horányi op. cit., 1976.

The delegate of the Wagon Factory supported Horváth's view of performance-based wage policies in the executive committee. He explained the problem of labor shortage in skilled professions through the low wage differentials: "I point out the negative phenomena in the Wagon Factory that are related to the psychology of labor. Many employees leave because they are not satisfied with the wages and the professional development. The comrades here also know that the fact that 40% are unskilled workers is connected with a bad psychology: they received the highest wages and therefore complete unskilled brigades left the enterprises".²⁹⁴ The chairman of the county council of the trade unions (Szakszervezetek Győr-Sopron Megyei Tanácsa) also spoke of the positive effects of greater differentials: "On behalf of the trade unions we recommend that it would be reasonable to introduce the wage volume management in other enterprises, too. For instance, since the wage volume management had been introduced in the foundry, we have had no labor problem. The workers are paid good money, they produce more with a smaller staff and there is no fluctuation. We should consider this and introduce it in other workplaces, too, particularly where there is a shortage of skilled labor. We should make people interested in working well. We should give a good estimate of the supply of skilled labor and make a proposal to the higher bodies".²⁹⁵

The chief manager put his ideas into practice wherever he could. The annual premium could amount to a substantial extra income²⁹⁶; allegedly, Horváth personally revised the list of annual premiums.²⁹⁷ The regulation of premiums was also used to strengthen labor discipline because he introduced the practice of stopping workers who

²⁹⁴ GYML, X. 415/117/7, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A munkaerő-gazdálkodás helyzete és az első félév fő tapasztalatai a megye ipari vállalatainál, 1971, augusztus 3.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. 19.

²⁹⁶ According to the ground-cell information reports many workers thought that the managers received too much premiums.

²⁹⁷ Information from the interviews.

went off-sick for more than five days a year, getting a premium. Quality could influence 30% of the final wage, which Horváth defended with the argument that the wage cuts also improved the work of those who otherwise did not understand the significance of quality.²⁹⁸ That having been said, he sought to pay competitive wages until he could, which he regarded as a prerequisite of high performance: “In 1981 we will increase the wages of skilled workers by 17,2%. But for this money we demand work. We need three shifts, piecework and quality! If someone cannot accept this, there is turnover. The executive committee should consider that there are problems on our side, too, and we cannot do much about them. We have to accept that if a worker gets more money somewhere else, he will want to go there”.²⁹⁹

Mention must be made of a specific group, the direct production managers, whose low wages has been much criticized in the period. Allegedly, there were even cases when workers refused to be promoted with the argument that it does not pay to undertake more responsibility.³⁰⁰ This, in fact, hindered the professional career of workers because the overwhelming majority of the lower management was recruited from the shop-floor. In the Wagon Factory 99% of the foremen were recruited from the blue-collar workers.³⁰¹ The political reliability of the foremen was also important because they were usually entrusted with the organization and leading of the party cells. This involved more work, and therefore it was an important argument that the pay was not proportionate to responsibility. The interest of the party in the pay increase of the foremen was connected to the interest of the factory. According to a 1979 report, during a “purge” of personnel in the Wagon Factory between 1974 and 1977, 72 foremen were removed from their posts because of

²⁹⁸ A Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár vezérigazgatójának beszámolója a KB 1974. december 5.-i határozatáról, op. cit., 3.

²⁹⁹ GYML, X. 415/26/29, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Rába Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár értékesítési, termékszerkezeti, korszerűsítési, termelésfejlesztési és szervezetfejlesztési célkitűzése a VI. ötéves terv időszakában, 1980. november 18.

³⁰⁰ Az életszínvonal-politikánk értelmezése a gépipari nagyüzemek párttagsága körében, op. cit.

³⁰¹ A közvetlen termelésirányítók helyzete, politikai-szakmai felkészültségük értékelése, op. cit., 2.

professional incompetence. The rest of the lower managers were regarded to be professionally (88-90%) and politically (75-80%) competent.³⁰² The proof of professional competence was a high-school certificate, even though the report noted the difficulties of imposing this on older workers.³⁰³ The executive committee of the party organization of the MVG also evaluated the competence of the managers. One speaker argued that a manager was politically competent if he could lead his team regardless whether he organized anything else in the factory while another thought that the most important was that the manager had a good relationship with those he managed.³⁰⁴ They did not like that fact that many foremen were expected to drive trucks to ensure the supply of material even though it was part of their job description. The examination of eight plants of the Wagon Factory (Foundry, Auto, Rear Bridge, Blacksmith, Iron structure, Wagon, Motor, Vehicle) showed that one foreman was responsible for 23-45 workers on average. (See table 7). The eight plants employed 5,729 blue-collar workers, 194 foremen and 46 managers. The average age of the foremen was 41 and that of the managers 44.³⁰⁵ The average wages of the foremen in the eight plants varied between 5,100 and 5,400 Ft, while that of the managers stood at between 5,900 and 6,600 Ft. In the Motor Unit there were foremen who received even 6,300 Ft and managers with a salary of 6,700 Ft. At the same time the average wage of the blue-collar workers was 4,000 Ft. According to the report there were only 25-30 workers in the enterprise who earned more than their superiors with overtime and working on Sundays.³⁰⁶ Counting with these wages the foremen earned 30% more and the managers 60% more than the blue-collar workers. The material recognition of the foremen, which “the party and the government rendered a central question in 1970”³⁰⁷ was

³⁰² Ibid., 6.

³⁰³ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., Melléklet.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

therefore realized in the Wagon Factory. Other enterprises were in a less fortunate situation. In light industry, for instance, the basic wage of direct production managers was 4,800-5,000 Ft in 1984. One member of the executive committee of the county argued that blue-collar workers could earn the same money and therefore it was difficult to find managers.³⁰⁸

The manager's attempt to introduce a performance-based wage system in Rába evidently formed the consciousness of the employees. The representative of MVG in the executive committee, for instance, challenged a manager, who boasted that the members of the VGMK in his factory finished a weekly job in one weekend, with the question of what his employees had been doing during the week.³⁰⁹ Stagnant real incomes, however, reinforced the voices of discontent. Even though in 1986 Horváth was made an honorary citizen of Győr and elected the man of the year, his titles did not compensate the Rába-workers for the material recognition. Rába was presented in the national media as one of the most successful modern enterprises, which produced much revenue in Western currency for the country but the workers thought that they profited little from this revenue.³¹⁰ In fact, when economic reform was placed again on the agenda, and the reform communist wing of the party started to leak information about the poor economic performance of the country in the second half of the 1980s, Rába-workers believed that they were the losers of national economic policy. "At the meeting of the commercial chamber comrade Havasi spoke of the difficult economic situation that everybody knows.

³⁰⁸ GYML, X. 415/12/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A vállalati belső irányítási és érdekeltségi rendszer fejlesztésének eredményei Győr város könnyűipari vállalatainál, 1984. május 29.

³⁰⁹ GYML, X. 415/12/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Sopron városi Pártbizottság Végrehajtó Bizottságának jelentése a munkaidő utáni tevékenységből származó jövedelem növelésének lehetőségeiről, 1983. május 17.

³¹⁰ Bossányi's interview with Horváth is a good example for this positive image of the profitable socialist factory (Katalin Bossányi, 1986, op. cit). Bossányi also published articles about the enterprise in *Népszabadság*, the national daily. The county daily *Kisalföld* regularly reported about the economic results of Rába and the international recognition of Rába products. (Collection of Rába archive).

He explained why it is so difficult to realize the 3% production growth. According to our employees Rába always produced more for the people's economy. If this is not the case in many other factories, the ones who have good results rightfully expect the government to intervene on their side. It is untenable that there are enterprises (and not so few), which produce losses³¹¹ and they receive various favors (flexible working hours, VGMK, etc.) At the same time, the employees of factories like the Wagon Factory, where there is a strict economic order and strong discipline, are at a disadvantage".³¹² The workers in the Industrial Tool Factory thought that the economic regulators had a contradictory effect because they indeed punished those who worked well.³¹³ Many employees went as far as to relate the poor economic performance of the country to the unfair redistribution of state revenues: "The interview with the manager of our enterprise in *Népszabadság* had a very good reception. The employees fully agree with the statement that it is time to give more opportunities for the prospering enterprises because the capital invested in them produces greater profit. It cannot be in the interest of the people's economy to support the loss-making enterprises at the expense of the profitable ones. It is bad news for the employees who work decently that the various regulators will again prevent the recognition of the high achievements. The conference of the labor management stressed that the reward

³¹¹ The profitability of Rába was also frequently emphasized in the factory newspaper *Rába* (Collection of Rába archive). Horváth himself took very seriously the economic criterion. According to his recollection he initiated the closing of the Kispeszt Tractor Works in spite of the objection of the local party organs: "After the film many people asked me how I was able to smile. Well, I am in the habit of smiling either at myself or my partner when I have to repeat something twenty times. When we had the great conflict with Kispeszt, everybody propagated with a big mouth that we have to close the loss-making factories. At the same time, they were making a big sensation out of one case when exactly this happened". Ede Horváth, op. cit., 1990, 107.

³¹² GYML, X. 415/537/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Motorgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1986. július.

³¹³ GYML, X. 415/537/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1986. november.

should be proportionate to the achievement. This is exactly the opinion of our employees, too”.³¹⁴

The quotations reveal the process of how the political climate has been “darkened” for the regime, what the manager also tried to explain in the quoted interview of the summer of 1989.³¹⁵ People regarded the financial restrictions that were necessitated by the economic situation of the country as unjust since they had not worked less than before. When the reformers criticized the economic structure, they agreed but they thought that their enterprise was one of the profit-making factories, which had to sponsor loss-making industries. They therefore expected to benefit from the reform of the economic structure, and a more just redistribution that they linked with it.

Fringe benefits

The two most important fringe benefits were the support of housing and public transport. With respect to the first, it is clear that Rába had far fewer flats to offer to the employees than the Zeiss enterprise, which could distribute whole blocks of flats as a result of the state housing program. There is no survey of the housing conditions of the Rába-employees but there is indirect evidence that the housing conditions of at least the skilled core of the working class corresponded to the standards of the socialist middle class. The quoted survey of the evaluation of the standard of living among the membership of the machine-manufacturing enterprises in the county involved 471 Rába-workers (nearly half of the respondents). The survey found that people had settled living conditions: the majority of the respondents lived in their own houses or flats.³¹⁶ The high number of

³¹⁴ GYML, X. 415/537/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1986. október.

³¹⁵ ‘Beszélgetés Horváth Edével, a Rába MVG vezérigazgatójával’, op. cit.

³¹⁶ Az életszínvonal-politikánk értelmezése a gépipari nagyüzemek párttagsága körében, op. cit.

commuters (39% in the Győr factories) also improved living conditions because building was cheaper in the villages: it was often the parents who gave the building-plots and young people could rely on the help of relatives and friends.³¹⁷

The enterprise offered two specific types of help to employees. They could get tenancy in one of the flats that belonged to the enterprise; it was, however, a very limited opportunity because Rába only had 93 flats in Győr. Between 1971 and 1977, 10 blue-collar and 23 white-collar workers could move to these flats.³¹⁸ The occupants were usually life tenants: in 1979, 18 of the tenants of the enterprise flats worked no longer in the enterprise.³¹⁹ The second, more widespread form of support was the enterprise loan that Rába offered at preferential rates to the employees to buy flats. The support was not unconditional because the recipients had to sign a contract with the enterprise and agree to work there for a determined period of time.³²⁰ Between 1970 and 1979, 1,093 employees put in a claim for a flat out of which the problem of 601 employees (392 blue-collar and 209 white-collar workers) was solved. 447 people received a total of 22,465,000 Ft from the development funds and 170 employees received 2122,000 Ft from the solidarity funds.³²¹ Between 1971 and 1977 148 blue-collar and 101 white-collar workers received enterprise loans to buy OTP-flats and 131 blue-collar workers received support for housing co-operatives.³²²

The enterprise launched one workers' housing project in co-operation with the state construction company of Ipar street (Ipar=industry) in 1976. The project solved the flat

³¹⁷ A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete, op. cit.

³¹⁸ GYML, X. 415/197/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, Jelentés a vállalati lakásépítési hozzájárulás felhasználásáról, 3, 1978. január 30.

³¹⁹ GYML, X. 415/200/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, Szóbeli tájékoztató vállalatunk dolgozóinak lakáshelyzetéről. A vállalati lakástámogatás felhasználása, 3, 1979. március 21.

³²⁰ Jelentés a vállalati lakásépítési hozzájárulás felhasználásáról, op. cit.

³²¹ Szóbeli tájékoztató vállalatunk dolgozóinak lakáshelyzetéről, op. cit., 1.

³²² Jelentés a vállalati lakásépítési hozzájárulás felhasználásáról, op. cit., 2.

problems of 120 people.³²³ In the following years the enterprise had to rely on the city council for the provision of flats, which could help substantially fewer people in a year. In 1979, for instance, the council offered only 14 flats to the Rába-employees.³²⁴ A report of the flat committee of the enterprise did, however, stress that the employees have not experienced the “severe flat problem that has become so fashionable today”: between 1970 and 1979 the enterprise solved every second flat claim and there was no flat claim put in for more than three-four years.³²⁵

Other criticisms emerged in the 1980s, which was mainly targeted at the unequal chances of young people to acquire the desired flats. Even a report on the social situation of youth in the county admitted that the social background increasingly mattered in the establishment of an independent household: “The chance of youth to buy a flat is not uniformly negatively evaluated. We can summarize the opinions in the following ways: the young people in the big cities, who live from their wages, and whose parents have similar material circumstances – namely, they cannot count on the help of their parents and they have no extra income - are in the most difficult situation. The small towns give a better chance to youth: people can usually get flats in two-five years (e.g. in Csorna). In the villages the cheaper ground-plots, the extra income from farming, and the friends’ help improve the chance of youth to get settled”.³²⁶ The party organization of MVG reported that the extra work to establish their own home occupied working-class youth too much and they often did not have time and energy for the social and party activities.³²⁷ With the “creeping in of the oil crisis” – as it was called – the government increased the price of

³²³ Szóbeli tájékoztató vállalatunk dolgozóinak lakáshelyzetéről, op. cit., 3.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid., 4.

³²⁶ GYML, X. 415/156/1/3, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Tájékoztató 'Az ifjúság társadalmi helyzete, a párt feladatai' c. anyag vitájáról, 1984. június 26.

³²⁷ GYML, X. 415/236/4, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, Jelentés a KISZ munkájáról, 1, 1986. december 27.

petrol and utilities. The increase of the rents of the state flats found a particularly negative response among the population because the cheap housing was one propaganda slogan of the party: “Out of the planned measures the increase of the state rents triggered loud debates among the employees. The responses, of course, depended on the involvement of people. Those who live in state flats are angry while some others would say that ‘one has to pay the price of every service’. Many people think that the state flat is an achievement of the socialist society. We often used the cheap rents as an argument against the higher incomes in the capitalist countries”.³²⁸

In 1984, workers said that a flat cost 10-15 times more than their annual income.³²⁹ The problem was brought up in the information report of MVG in October 1985: “The flat issue is the most important problem of today’s youth. The topic came up in the preparation for the Thirteenth Party Congress but since then there has been no progress. On the contrary, the flat prices increased. The great burden of saving for a flat deprives this age-group of healthy education and entertainment”.³³⁰ The flat problem was often used to explain the political indifference of youth: a report from the Mosonmagyaróvár plant, for instance, related the low level of interest of working-class youth in the communist organizations to the lack of material prospects.³³¹ Young people may not have seen as much for a future as their parents’ generation had when they were young.

Interestingly, reports on the state of public transport allows for a similar line of argumentation. On the one hand, the enterprise did indeed give generous support for the public transport of the employees; on the other hand, informants reported of an increasing

³²⁸ GYML, X. 415/528/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1982. október.

³²⁹ GYML, X. 415/533/30, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Futómű Pártalapszervezetétől, 1984. szeptember.

³³⁰ GYML, X. 415/534/12, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1985. október.

³³¹ GYML, X. 415/529/8/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, A Mosonmagyaróvári Mezőgazdasági Gépgyár (MMG) pártbizottsági ülésének jegyzőkönyve, Jelentés a Rába MMG ifjúságának társadalmi helyzetéről, 1985. október 8.

discontent with the conditions of traveling as if it had expressed the bad political mood of the people for the regime. (Public transport constituted a separate topic of the information reports.). The overwhelming majority of the employees traveled by public transport, trains or buses, to their workplace, or cycled.³³² From 1968 the employees could buy seasonal rail, bus, or combined tickets at a discount in the enterprise. (A combined ticket was valid for both the bus and the train). The percentage of reimbursement was higher for rail because the state covered 20% of the fare, the enterprise covered 66% and the employee had to pay only 14%, while there was no state support for bus travel. The enterprise paid 40-60% of the bus fares of an employee, depending on the distance.³³³

The travel allowance was, apparently, significant. In 1980, the enterprise supported the rail fares of 2,595 employees, the bus fares of 2,108 employees, and the combined tickets of 365 Rába-workers.³³⁴ This in practice meant that the support covered a significant part of the fares. The employees who traveled by train paid only 10% of the fares (the enterprise paid a total of 523,932 Ft, while the employees 54,732 Ft) and those who traveled by bus paid around 50% (the enterprise paid a total of 290,880 Ft, and the employees paid 324,811 Ft). 39% of the employees of the Győr plants were commuters. In 1979 the enterprise had twelve buses to solve the transport of the employees to the airport plant³³⁵, which employed 3,440 people (30% of the total workforce in Győr). In the same year the enterprise ordered eight new buses to provide for the comfortable transport of the employees.³³⁶ According to the report the same could not be said of the railway transport. There were many complaints that the workers' trains were overcrowded and dirty, and the carriages were old and damaged. Many wagons had no or poor heating and the windows

³³² According to the interview partners, the yard of the enterprise, and the neighboring empty estate were full of bicycles during working time.

³³³ A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete, op. cit., 1.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ The airport plant was located outside of the town.

³³⁶ A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete, op. cit., 3.

could not be closed properly. The management criticized that there were frequent delays in winter. In the first quarter of 1980, 1,591 employees started the work one hour later causing a production loss of 810,000 Ft to the enterprise.³³⁷

The conditions of city transport may well have been poor throughout the period; criticism, however, became abundant in the 1980s. Information reports frequently addressed the problem of overcrowding as a source of everyday anger: “It is not the first time that we criticize the poor standard of public transport from Adyváros to the airport plant. Why can’t Volán³³⁸ take into consideration that more people travel by bus in winter and increase the number of lines?” The informant added that “people expect human traveling conditions for their money”.³³⁹ After two years we can read the same criticism: “Line 20³⁴⁰ is extremely overcrowded in the morning hours. People complain that it is impossible to get on the bus at the Verseny ABC bus stop³⁴¹. With the coming of the winter, this over-crowdedness can become intolerable”.³⁴² One angry informant did indeed write a long report on the state of public transport, which reveals the general increase of frustration: “Civilized public transport has been neglected on 80% of the bus lines for years. We don’t speak of comfortable traveling because it is only a wish. But we would like to achieve tolerable conditions on the morning and afternoon workers’ routes. Volán allegedly solved public transport between Ménfőcsanak and Győr, but all they did was to provide long-distance buses, which arrive so over-crowded in Csanak that people can’t get on them. The passengers of the buses who pay 400-500 Ft for a season ticket also have a reason to be angry with the Csanak people who occupy their places when they go home

³³⁷ Ibid., 2.

³³⁸ The name of the state bus company.

³³⁹ GYML, X. 415/528/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1982. június.

³⁴⁰ Bus line between Adyváros and the airport plant.

³⁴¹ ABC=chain of state food shops. Verseny=competition.

³⁴² GYML, X. 415/534/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1984. október.

from work. But what can they do if they only want to travel to Csanak, and they have no other option than to trample on the others and swallow their scolding and grumbling? This creates a very good mood for work or the ‘second shift’ at home. It would be good if a town route was indeed a town route and not a compressed passenger carrier equipped with a town number! It is characteristic that in an interview with the managers of the Volán in Debrecen and Győr, the former said that they plan to buy new buses while the Győr manager reassured his audience that they would solve the problem with a ‘better organization’ of city transport. Ever since then nothing has changed, only the passengers’ anger has been mounting”.³⁴³

This kind of irony manifested itself in other information reports. The forge-shop ordered soda machines in the summer in order to provide the employees with cold drinks. The machines did indeed arrive but they remained in their packaging for a year. “There was presumably a shortage of carbonic acid”, - an informant commented on the case with understandable irony.³⁴⁴ Canteen food was another frequent source of ridicule³⁴⁵: “On Good Friday they probably fried stale meat because it tasted like the old leather shoe sole. In the canteen people wondered whether it was necessary to hurt the feelings of religious people by serving a meat dish. But during the meal it turned out that they hurt those who did not refrain from consuming meat on that day (although it turned bitter in the mouth of many people)”.³⁴⁶ Another informant proposed that the kitchen drop the “Győr” small roast from the menu because “it destroys the reputation of the town”.³⁴⁷ The canteen jokes had sometimes a political connotation similar to the comment on the shortage of carbonic acid,

³⁴³ GYML, X. 415/534/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a T. M. K. Pártalapszervezettől, 1984. április.

³⁴⁴ GYML, X. 415/211/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Kovács Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. július.

³⁴⁵ Canteen food gave rise to political jokes also in the Zeiss enterprise.

³⁴⁶ GYML, X. 415/533/30, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Futómű Pártalapszervezetétől, 1984. április.

³⁴⁷ GYML, X. 415/211/33, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Jármű II. Pártalapszervezetétől, 1982. november.

for instance, the observation that the “overcooked pasta and tasteless meals cannot be explained through the increase in prices. These mistakes can be explained through the incompetence of the cooks”.³⁴⁸

The critical comments support the experience that Burawoy had among the furnacemen of the Lenin Steel Works. People realized the gap between the promises and the actual results of the system, which no longer could console them with a distant “bright future”, as it had been done during the period of forced industrialization. Since informants were members of the party (and often low-level party functionaries), this criticism revealed that loyalty to the system had started to crumble.

Socialist brigades

The surviving contemporary sources of brigade work in Rába tell us indeed little of what role the brigades actually played in the lives of workers.³⁴⁹ Socialist brigades were supposed to be the main basis of workers’ education and culture but it was difficult to give general criteria for how to measure their efficiency. In principle, the members of the brigades committed themselves to accomplishing extra tasks in production and education. The accomplishment of the tasks was then evaluated and the best brigades received moral and material recognition (the title of excellent brigade, premium, etc.). The movement admittedly sought to increase competition but at the same time it was aimed at community building because the members of the brigades were expected to meet regularly and to

³⁴⁸ GYML, X. 415/211/41, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1982. december.

³⁴⁹ For contemporary literature on socialist brigades see: Gabriella Béky- Zoltán Zétényi, ‘Szocialista módon dolgozni, tanulni, élni. Helyzetkép a brigádmozgalomról’, *Valóság*, 20, no. 11 (1977), 53-63; Dezső Kalocsai ‘A nagyipari üzemek munkáskollektíváinak társadalmi-politikai aktivitása’, *Társadalomtudományi Közlemények*, 8, no.2-3 (1978), 199-205; id., ‘A szocialista brigádok közösséggé fejlődéséről’, *Társadalomtudományi Közlemények*, 8, no. 1 (1978), 10-26; Edit Sötér, op. cit. 1977. From recent literature see: Eszter Zsófia Tóth, ‘Egy állami díjas női brigád mikrotörténete’ (Ph. D., ELTE BTK, Budapest, 2004).

organize common programs in order to keep their commitments. These programs were recorded in the diary of the brigade.³⁵⁰

In 1975 the Wagon Factory won “the wandering red flag of Work”, and it was given the title of “Outstanding enterprise”.³⁵¹ The available party documents of MVG, however, suggest that the management had an ambivalent relationship with the brigade movement, particularly when the workers attempted to intervene in production decisions that the managers regarded as their own authority. Brigadiers often openly charged the management with hindering brigade work: “As a former brigadier, I can tell that a collective can work even without special warning. Our brigade was formed nine years ago, since then sixteen people finished secondary school or college, almost everybody has his own library, we made excursions across the country. The members of our brigade did not spend the premium on feasts but they used the money more reasonably. They knew each other’s family problems. The former speaker brought up the issue of the contact with the management. We met the managers only if the task was very urgent. There was no regular contact. There was simply no opportunity to discuss the problems of the movement with the higher bodies. We could not speak about the problems that we had in production. It angered the management that we informed them of the problems in their field. We received answers that we are not competent in this, it is not our business. Or another case: there was a manager who declared in the evaluation form that there was no socialist brigade in his field”.³⁵²

In a base-cell meeting a brigadier reported of a similar conflict with the management over the issue of authority: “I do agree with the report and also with the refusal to evaluate the work of the party groups. In the axle and bridge production line

³⁵⁰ Information from interviews with former brigadiers.

³⁵¹ A szocialista munkaverseny és a brigádmunka fejlesztésének feladatai vállalatunknál, op. cit., 3.

³⁵² Ibid., 4.

political work is totally ignored at the level of the factory. I base this on the fact that one year after the formation of our brigade we had a meeting where they said that there is no brigade work even though I attended every brigade meeting. Then I resigned from my post because it was a great thing that we could form this brigade at all. The reasons of why our brigade work was not better lie in the management and the trade union because it did not care about us. [...] In my view, every worker has his own problem but he would not speak of it because it won't be solved anyway. I also had a tool problem, I was promised to get one and I did not get any. Why should we tell about our problems if they won't be solved anyway?"³⁵³

The main tasks of socialist brigades triggered debates in the executive committee of the party organization of MVG. One speaker openly expressed his doubts about the comparability of brigades (and thus, about the validity of impressive statistics): "As for me, I cannot agree with the following. The report states that there is excellent brigade work in some fields. I would like to examine this question. It is not easy to compare the work of a white-collar worker with that of a blue-collar worker and similarly, it is disputable what we call excellent brigade work. We often have problems – when they request our figures, we declare that the organization of the socialist work contest is 55% in our enterprise. What do the other 45% do? If we compare individual work, we may find that many of those, who are not organized in brigades, also work well, or even better. Their work equally counts towards our results".³⁵⁴ Another speaker proposed that the brigades, whose members perform hard physical work, should be given a more lenient evaluation: "I think what we see here is only a search for solutions. They can't decide what the brigades should do. There are many documentaries of brigade life on TV. There is nothing in the films that

³⁵³ Jegyzőkönyv a Motor Pártalapszervezet 1977. január 26.-i taggyűléséről, op. cit., 5-6.

³⁵⁴ GYML, X. 415/202/3/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. A szocialista munkaverseny 1977. évi előkészítésének tapasztalatai, az anyagi-erkölcsi ösztönzés forrásainak további fejlesztése, 14-15, 1977. február 18.

we have not done. Or do we maybe set too high standards? We have to admit that it is difficult to realize the socialist work contest in our enterprise. We have to use different aspects of evaluation. There are brigades that keep a regular record of the fulfilled tasks – theatre, borrowing from the library, - and there are others where people finish work and they are happy to go home to have a rest. They don't have time for the common meetings. We should understand that".³⁵⁵

Despite the positive figures of the socialist work contest, even the surviving sources suggest that brigade life was more important for community-building than for production.³⁵⁶ In life-history interviews many former brigade members reported having participated in an intensive community life – an argument, which was also developed in the cited accounts of former brigadiers. The common leisure and sometimes even family programs strengthened social contacts among colleagues, thus reinforcing cohesion and solidarity. Interview partners also reported of cases when these supportive social networks helped them (or others) through private hardships. “It was much better with the socialist brigades, we all knew each other. At that time they said that we have to pay attention to the others. On paper. But people also wanted to pay attention to the others. Because I remember that we went to see the babies of the colleagues, we went to the cinema, and what you can imagine, everywhere. To concerts...and the community was at that time more united, we went to bowl, to play football, at that time we always went somewhere. Not because people undertook the tasks on paper. Ridiculous. Because they had a nice time together. And there were very few who wanted to be left out of this company”.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ A szocialista munkaverseny és a brigádmunka fejlesztésének feladatai vállalatunknál, op. cit., 5.

³⁵⁶ For an interesting study of contrasting the representation of socialist brigades in the contemporary media with postsocialist memories see: Eszter Zsófia Tóth, ‘Egy kitüntetés befogadástörténete: Egy állami díjas női szocialista brigád képe a sajtóban és a tagok emlékezetében’, in: Sándor Horváth – László Pethő – Eszter Zsófia Tóth (eds.), op. cit., 2003, 126-139.

³⁵⁷ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (55).

Many interview partners directly contrasted the old times, when communities at the workplace had been more important to the people, with the experience of the new, capitalist regime: “At that time it was possible to establish better communities in a workplace than today. I can say this as a brigadier. I invited them to this anglers’ camp³⁵⁸ a couple of times in a year. When the first was successful, they were likely to come again. They had an opportunity to get to know each other, and they were also interested in it. Now the same company – okay, not the same because 3-4 already retired, but there are new people – so, 10 years ago 60-65 came because many brought their families, too – last time it was only 22. One has no time, the other is tired – only one had a really serious excuse, even though he still came in the afternoon. It is no longer fashionable today, perhaps people don’t want to go to company because of their individual problems. But this also holds for our house. 80 flats. When we moved in, I visited at least 35 flats in New Years’ Eve. But people also came to us, we went from flat to flat together, we had a great time”.³⁵⁹ The decline of community life was addressed in many other life-history interviews: people generally agreed that society had become more individualistic: “That old community spirit, that brigade spirit that I represented, too – since I was the brigadier in this group - , so it was possible to regularly bring together people, I invited them or we went to a restaurant, and we had a good chat. We don’t have this today, people don’t have time, even though we are not that many, everybody runs home after work, has other business”.³⁶⁰

While many interview partners recalled community life with a sense of loss, brigades were not linked with Communist ideology in the eyes of people. As one interview partner formulated, people had a nice time together and they cared little about the ideology. Other interview partners consciously distanced themselves from the propaganda of the

³⁵⁸ The interview was conducted in the weekend house of the interview partner.

³⁵⁹ Quotation from an interview with a former brigadier, who represented MVG in the executive committee (62).

³⁶⁰ Quotation from an interview with a former brigadier (53).

regime, while maintaining that community life was different back then: “In the past the collective was very different, for instance the socialist brigades, it is easy to say now that it was all communist propaganda, but I think, no, today you can’t organize anything like that, I am not nostalgic, really not, because those times were also not very good, but it was different, people were related somehow differently, now they don’t care about others, it is a different age, a different style, everybody says, it was not so bad in the past, we were young, we used to go out, it was not bad at all. We went to the pub, to the wine-cellar, drinking, having barbecues, we also went to the library, there were eminent librarian members [laughs] so I was an eminent librarian member, too, I like reading very much, I wrote in the diary of the brigade, we had lectures, we planned socialism [laughs], it was not so bad, excursions with the brigade, cinemas, the collective was very different in the past, okay there was a lot of Marxism, but we did not take it seriously, they could not fool us with everything”.³⁶¹

Both the life-history interviews and the local sources support the argument that the brigade movement did not increase workers’ influence on production decisions and it did not improve their proprietary consciousness. It did improve community life but it failed to achieve its propagandistic goal because people were much more likely to identify themselves with their group (where everybody was in a more or less similar situation) than with the regime. It can be indeed argued that solidarity was often reinforced by the common feeling of powerlessness; in this sense it is worth pointing out the complaint of the brigadier, who spoke of his problem obtaining tools at work. It is likewise remarkable in the quoted sources that brigadiers would typically speak of “us” and “them” in relation with the workers and the management, which may be indicative of the weak influence of the brigadiers. This suggests that the brigade movement was regarded as a “circus for the

³⁶¹ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (49).

people” even by the party, and in the light of the life-history interviews, people actually understood the message. We do not, of course, know how much politics was discussed in brigade meetings but it can be assumed that this – and the growing economic difficulties – did not trigger a political climate that was favorable for the regime.

Opposing the management

In principle, the party leadership of the county could intervene in the labor policy of the enterprise, and it could also influence indirectly the personnel policy through the party organization of Rába MVG. After the memorable conflict between the first secretary of the county and Ede Horváth, which ended with the defeat of the secretary, the leadership of the county, however, rarely attempted to intervene in the policies of the factory, which Horváth considered to be his territory. Horváth was, of course, himself a high-ranking official of the party because since 1970 he was a member of the Central Committee, a position that he kept until the dissolution of MSZMP in 1989. Some cases can be still documented, when the conflict between the manager and the employees did not remain within the gates of the factory but it was reported to the leading county party organs. The section introduces three cases: an attempted strike in 1977; a series of dismissals in 1979; and the manager’s regulation of paid holiday in 1986, which had a particularly negative reception in a political climate that called for more freedom. Given the strict managerial control only few dared to oppose the manager in his heyday; the vehement objection to his autocratic leadership style manifest in the last case was inseparable from the political weakening of the regime and the attack against old hierarchies.

On 4 July 1977 64 workers in factory unit 28 of MVG stopped working for one and half hours because they did not agree with their wages. Ede Horváth talked to the workers,

who finally agreed to return to work. The case was reported to the economics department of the party committee of the county, and an investigation followed (meanwhile there were two weeks of maintenance in MVG).³⁶² The investigation found that there was a coincidence of several factors that triggered the conflict. In 1977, MVG gave an average pay increase of 6% but decided to increase the norms by 10%.³⁶³ The workers of the given unit received new work, where the wage-scales were low and they could not earn the average wages because they lacked the relevant experience. They complained to the company's labor department, but they received no answer. A further problem was that planned production value was increased from 6,335 million Ft to 6,760 million Ft in the first half year of 1977. To motivate the employees, MVG set a premium of a two-week wage for the units that could fulfill the increased target. The enterprise succeeded in fulfilling 95,4% of the plan (6,446 million Ft). 44% of the set premium, 12, 9 million Ft was distributed among 7,671 employees (43% of the total workforce). The managements and workers of the units that did not fulfill this plan did not receive this premium. In the Rear Suspension and Vehicle Factories the managers failed to explain this situation to the workers, who thought that they had been deceived by the management.³⁶⁴ According to the report a settlement was finally reached between the workers and the management: the wage-scales in the unit where the workers protested were revised, and it was promised to all employees who did not receive the set premium that if they succeeded in fulfilling the plan in the third quarter of the year, they would get both the promised one-week wage plus the two-week wage that was denied from them. We do not know to what extent the

³⁶² GYML, X. 415/12/22, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Gazdaságpolitikai osztály, Tájékoztató az MVG Vagon 28-as üzemében végzett vizsgálatokról és a 2 heti jutalom kifizetéséről, 1977. augusztus 16.

³⁶³ GYML, X. 415/197/4, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Jelentés az 1977. évi bérek és jövedelmek alakulásáról, az alkalmazott ösztönző bérrendszerek hatékonyságáról, normakarbantartás végrehajtásának szükségességéről, 1977. június 15.

³⁶⁴ Tájékoztató az MVG Vagon 28-as üzemében végzett vizsgálatokról, op. cit., 2.

stoppage influenced the decision; at any rate, the blue-collar personnel of MVG decreased by 222 people in that summer.³⁶⁵

According to the information reports the workers' discontent with wages frequently manifested itself in critical political comments: "It spoiled the mood of the unit that on 12 December the workers did not receive the high but rightful wages that the quality control had already signed. The workers say that the department of labor can revise the norms, strengthen the quality control, etc. but it cannot refuse to pay the wages for which they worked and the quality control signed. They are all members of the trade union and some of them are members of the party, too. They responded to this decision by refusing to pay the party dues and rejecting the papers to which they subscribed. People also discussed the communiqué of the meeting of the Central Committee. They consider the 4,5% increase of the prices of consumer goods too high because incomes will increase only by 2%, which means that in 1979 we will live worse than today. In sum: the mood of the workers of the unit is not good!"³⁶⁶ After half year the mood of the workers was again reported to be bad: "Our workers are mainly concerned with recent events that negatively influenced their wages. This was for instance the increase of the norms - which was unreasonably high in some cases - and the increase in quality requirements. This can decrease wages by 30-40%. According to the workers it should not be allowed that an experienced skilled worker, who has worked for many years, is paid 15-16 Ft for an hour! He cannot even buy his breakfast from this money. It is absurd that the wage of a crane operator is the same as that of a skilled worker, and a trolley driver sometimes earns more".³⁶⁷ Workers from the forge-shop likewise complained that they could not buy a proper breakfast from their hourly wage: "In the past weeks our employees were mainly concerned with the change in

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁶⁶ GYML, X. 415/198/7, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Vagon Fémipari Alapszervezettől, 1978. december.

³⁶⁷ GYML, X. 415/198/7, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Vagon Fémipari Alapszervezettől, 1979. május.

prices. They agreed with some of the items but they found the increase in the price of meat to be definitely too much. They said that their hourly wage does not cover a normal breakfast and – as they say – one cannot do hard physical work while living on bread and jam”.³⁶⁸

Horváth’s decision to “revise the personnel” triggered similarly negative political comments in 1979. The decision was not targeted at the blue-collar workers; Horváth sought to decrease the number of the administrative staff. He ordered a check on the work duties of every employee, an evaluation of their work and then lay-offs of surplus labor. The city council had to find employment for the Rába-workers, who lost their jobs. The revision affected 1318 employees: 170 retired, 124 were transferred from the administrative staff to production, 344 received new work in the enterprise, 98 people did not accept the offered position, 102 positions were closed, and 480 people were laid off.³⁶⁹ Many regarded the measure as a result of the problems of the people’s economy: “The employees talk a lot about our economic policy. They do not fully approve of the current actions of the people’s economy. Perhaps they are a bit afraid of the open information about the situation of the people’s economy. They do not understand, for instance, how it is possible that a dynamically developing enterprise like MVG dismisses people”.³⁷⁰ The revision of the personnel likewise reinforced anti-manager attitudes: “We need precise information because everybody asks our party members: what do you know, who will be dismissed? It cannot be the aim of our society to increase insecurity. We would also like to

³⁶⁸ GYML, X. 415/199/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a V. J. Kovács Pártalapszervezettől, 1979. július.

³⁶⁹ László Tóth (ed.), *Győr-Sopron* (Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1984), 107. In an interview Horváth said that the revision found a surplus of 804 employees (Bossányi, op. cit., 38). The *Rába* newspaper gave a rather one-sided picture (and limited information) of this step. Some characteristic titles are: ‘Capacity and quality decide: Only the necessary number of people should be employed for a given job’ (2 March 1979), ‘We should reinforce a basic economic principle’ (16 March 1979), ‘The experiences of the revision of the personnel: We have to get the support of the decent employees’ (30 March 1979), ‘Comments on the revision of labour management’ (6 April 1979), ‘The revision of the personnel was finished also in Szombathely’ (May 25 1979).

³⁷⁰ GYML, X. 415/202/32, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1979. április.

know what happens to the managers, who employed surplus labor. They also did a bad job.³⁷¹ The same people, who complained about the shortage of labor two-three months ago, suddenly realize that on the contrary, there is a surplus of labor (not a surplus of the managers – only a surplus of the employees!)”.³⁷² Even though the blue-collar workers were little affected, their comments revealed that people perceived the political climate to be more insecure.

The regulation of paid holiday triggered more vehement protests in 1986 during which the employees did not refrain from expressing their opinions of one-man management. In order to improve the management of labor, Horváth decided that the employees should take their holiday once a year and they should inform management of the dates at the beginning of the year. Apart from the poor communication of the measure, the manager’s regulation of paid holiday had a very bad timing: the economic prospects of the country deteriorated, and the call for political reforms found a positive reception even among large parts of the party membership.³⁷³ In this atmosphere the “senseless and heartless” regulation and the manager’s ignorance of enterprise democracy met the fierce opposition of the employees. Even the information report of the county dealt with the issue: “The decision of the manager of MVG to regulate paid holiday very negatively influenced the political mood of the town. People were angered by the absence of democratic preparation, the disregard of the trade union and the rigid enforcement of the rules. Almost all of the base-cells in MVG brought up the issue. Many people gave back their trade union cards and refused to pay the trade union and party dues”.³⁷⁴ The trade union estimated the decrease of dues to be 24-64% in April in the various production units

³⁷¹ Stress is in the original.

³⁷² GYML, X. 415/202/29, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a T. M. K. Pártalapszervezettől, 1979. május.

³⁷³ The county reports that support this statement are introduced in the following chapter.

³⁷⁴ GYML, X. 415/187/2, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, 1986. április.

and 20% at the level of the enterprise (3,800 employees refused to pay).³⁷⁵ Another report warned against provoking people in the unfavorable economic situation: “In our county the regulation of paid holiday met the disapproval of the majority of the employees in MVG. Willingness to pay trade union dues declined. The unfavorable economic situation led many people to question the high number of awards on 1 May”.³⁷⁶

The base-cell reports formulated the problem even more sharply. The regulation evidently turned the feelings of the workers against the manager, who considered the interests of production more important than the interests of people. According to the report of the Rear Suspension Factory, the decision “triggered vehement protests and resistance, which has not subsided. People say that the management did not ask for their opinions before this significant decision. They consider it to be an anti-democratic step. Extremist opinions are expressed in the following ways: people speak of the weakness of the trade union and they criticize the managing director. They compare the declaration in the radio that the ‘family comes first’ with the manager’s decision that they consider to be inhuman. Fourteen members of the trade union gave back their membership cards as a sign of protest”.³⁷⁷ Employees evidently thought that the manager’s decision was an attack against the trade union and enterprise democracy: “The topic of holiday still frequently comes up in the conversations. Particularly those people are angry who had to give back their holiday vouchers. They don’t understand this unreasonably rigid attitude and that some people can just ignore the wish of the large majority. We can not simply let it go, this decision torpedoes enterprise democracy! Everybody thinks now that although we have an enterprise council, collective decision-making plays no role in our enterprise even in cases

³⁷⁵ GYML, X. 415/187/3, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, 1986. május.

³⁷⁶ GYML, X. 415/187/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, 1986. június.

³⁷⁷ GYML, X. 415/537/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Hátsóhid Alapszervezetétől, 1986. május.

which obviously violate the interest of employees. Our workers think that in the case of the holiday the interest of the individuals is not contradictory to the interest of the collective”.³⁷⁸ With respect to the measure, the managerial censorship of *Rába*, the newspaper of the factory, was also strongly criticized: “We cannot agree with the sanction against people who are on sick leave for more than five days, which is a typical regulation of the Wagon Factory. At the same time the *Rába* newspaper received a lot of criticism. This publication is not at all the newspaper of the workers. If it were theirs, it would report on the issues that really concern the workers. For instance: the period of notice or the decision about next year’s holiday. Can’t we recognize the socially damaging effects of these issues!?”³⁷⁹

At the end of 1986 agitators in MVG reported that “pessimism has spread, the mood of the employees has become tense, and there is a wide distrust of the measures of the government and the interest representation of the trade unions”.³⁸⁰ The case of paid holiday ended with a compromise: in the beginning of the year a “phantom holiday plan” was created and the managers overlooked the changes during the year.³⁸¹ The regulation thus only succeeded to reinforce opposition to the manager and his leadership methods without any practical use. The case is indicative not only of the changing political climate but also the manager’s failure to recognize or respond to it.

³⁷⁸ GYML, X. 415/537/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1986. június.

³⁷⁹ GYML, X. 415/537/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1986. október.

³⁸⁰ GYML, X. 415/187/5, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1986. december.

³⁸¹ András Dusza, op. cit., 12.

4. The Party and the Workers

In socialist regimes the ruling parties were mass organizations, whose membership encompassed a significant part of the adult population. The control of the party over the economic and social life was also maintained through the party organizations, which operated in the workplaces. The party made significant efforts to win the blue-collar workers for the membership: large enterprises such as Rába had their own party committees with a full-time party secretary. Thanks to the surviving party archives, organizational life can be well documented in the period.

The chapter makes use of the party documents of the county and the factory in order to describe the main characteristics of party life: the criteria and methods of recruitment, attending meetings, party discipline and the ways of losing the membership of the party. Despite the efforts to popularize the party among the working class, individualism was claimed to have affected organizational life after the economic reform: functionaries regularly complained that the membership neglected party work, and they were indifferent to political issues. There was a high percentage of workers among those who left the party, which, as the secretary of the county formulated, showed, that the membership was not an existential question for them.

The decreasing appeal of the party became more visible in the 1980s, when the party organizations regularly reported of the problems of recruiting workers in large industry. An even more serious warning was that discontent mounted also among the grass-roots membership of the party. Particularly valuable sources in this respect are the information reports, which the party organizations regularly collected in order to monitor the political mood of the population. The reports nicely illustrate the process of how the

economic criticism of the people developed into a more encompassing criticism of the political regime: people recognized the failure of the standard-of-living policy, and they refused to believe in further promises. In the second half of the 1980s a large part of the population (including the party membership) was reported to be pessimistic about the future prospects, and many questioned the ability of the government to improve the situation. The party's authority declined and the first signs of disintegration manifested themselves: youth refused to join (the membership of the youth organization significantly decreased), recruitment fell, and more and more people requested the termination of their membership. An ever increasing part of the population sympathized with the call for political reforms. In the light of the information reports it can be indeed argued that the attraction of the party and the system that it represented had decreased long before it lost political power in Hungary, and even those people supported the reforms who envisaged a different, democratic socialism.

Quotas

The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt = MSZMP) was by definition a mass party and a workers' party. In 1986, the party had 883,131 members across the country, which constituted 11,1% of the Hungarian population. The membership of Győr-Sopron county numbered 31,893 in the same year.³⁸² Throughout the 1980s there was very little fluctuation: in 1981 the membership in the county amounted to 30,808³⁸³ and in 1983 it numbered 30,800 people.³⁸⁴ In 1984, a figure

³⁸² GYML, X. 415/186/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Tájékoztató az 1986. évi tagfelvételekről és a pártból való kikerülésekről.

³⁸³ GYML, X. 415/32/10, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A párt tömegbefolyása, szervezettsége, a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a munkások körében, 1982. február 9.

of 31,000 people was given for the membership of the party in the county.³⁸⁵ Despite every effort of the party to increase the percentage of the workers in the membership, between 1975 and 1981 the number of party members in the county increased by 9% while the number of the working-class party members increased only by 6%. In 1981 less than half of the county membership (40,2%) were blue-collar workers. 10% of all workers were party members (the percentages varied between 6 and 20% in the factories). The majority of the workers admitted since 1975 were skilled workers and foremen. The overwhelming majority of those who left the party during the period were also workers (70%).³⁸⁶

Since MSZMP was defined as a workers' party, the party aimed to maintain what it deemed a healthy percentage of the blue-collar workers within its organization through various forms of affirmative action, typically quotas for recruitment. In reports on enrollment party functionaries freely spoke of the quotas that the party organizations filled and those that they had to "correct" in the future. Quotas were set for the blue-collar workers, women and youth. These forms of affirmative action had often a contradictory effect because many workers were convinced only of the need to join the party because of the pressure on recruiters to meet the quotas. Their lack of commitment was also reflected in the statistics: the percentage of the blue-collar workers was very high among those, who left the party after only a short period of membership (65-70%). The most frequent reasons that people gave for a voluntary withdrawal were the refusal to pay the party dues, lack of time to participate in the party meetings and ideological disagreement with the party line

³⁸⁴ GYML, X. 415/36/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A pártonkívüliekkel folytatott beszélgetések tapasztalatai, javaslat a további feladatokra, 1983. április 5.

³⁸⁵ László Tóth, op. cit., 70.

³⁸⁶ A párt tömegbefolyása, szervezettsége, a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a munkások körében, op. cit.

(this usually meant religious commitment).³⁸⁷ This shows that in many cases the requirements of admission to the party were not so seriously enforced.

The declining percentage of working-class party members was a particular concern among the party functionaries after the economic reform of 1968. Many thought that the decrease of working-class support was the result of the reform, which people linked with the increase of prices. The party secretary of MVG argued that the bad political mood of people was reflected in the declining political activity of party members: “In my view we should indicate that after the Tenth Party Congress³⁸⁸ the relationship of the party with the masses did not improve to the extent that we had expected after the successful congress. Quite the contrary, our experience is that after the parliamentary and local council elections the political activity of the masses decreased and our relationship to the masses became weaker. Our political work fails to increase the activity to the desired level. I think that we should say it bluntly to the highest party leadership so that they can draw the right conclusions”.³⁸⁹ The old party workers explained the declining force of political mobilization by referring to the material discontent of workers: “Concerning people who have dropped out of the party, I fully agree with comrade Gy., who spoke of the problem of the enrolment of blue-collar workers in that it expresses the political mood of people in an area. I would even go further to argue that it reflects their opinion about the policy of the party. In general employees agree with our political line but workers have a different view of particular issues, for instance, the question of wages and the setting of prices. It

³⁸⁷ GYML, X. 415/48/2, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Jelentés a tagkönyvcseré munkálataival kapcsolatos számszerű adatokról, 1976, július 6. 70% of those, whose membership terminated, were blue-collar workers. 28% referred to family reasons (religion), 20% could not participate in party life and 22% referred to old age and sickness. In 1985, 70% of those, whose membership terminated, were blue-collar workers. The main reason for the withdrawal was their refusal to fulfill their party duties (GYML, X. 415/194/5, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1985. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról, 1986. március 4.

³⁸⁸ The Tenth Congress of MSZMP was held on 23-28 November 1970.

³⁸⁹ Feljegyzés 'A párt tömegkapcsolata, a pártszervezetek és tömegszervezetek, tömegmozgalmak politikai vitája' című vita anyagáról, op. cit., 2.

influences the local political mood of people. Party membership is not a matter of livelihood to workers, who ‘go from one work-bench to the other’. When we prepare the candidates for the enrolment, I am not sure that they know their obligations to the party. Suppose we asked party members in MVG, five out of ten would not give a right answer”.³⁹⁰

The social and material discontent of the workers undoubtedly influenced recruitment. The party organization of Rába MVG frankly reported on the problems of building local organizations: “In case of the majority of the new members it is the party organization that initiates the recruitment and only a small part volunteers. These are primarily young people who are either discharged from the army or apply for membership on the basis of their work in KISZ (Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség = the youth organization of the party). There are sometimes problems with the responsibility of the patrons and the supervision of the candidates’ work because out of the new members whom we admitted in 1969-1970, we had to exclude one, strike off four and take party disciplinary action against two. Another problem is that some party secretaries do not consult with the party members and the leaders of other party groups. That’s why it happens that instead of the set quotas of workers, they enrol white-collar employees. The effort of the party leadership to increase the number of the blue-collar workers in the party was not successful enough. Although we succeeded to increase our membership, the percentage of the newly admitted workers shows only a slight increase (1970: 61,5%, 1972: 62%). In 1971 and the first quarter of 1972 we admitted 170 new members out of which 105 (62,5%) are workers”.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ GYML, X. 415/117/8, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés a 10. kongresszus óta felvett párttagok szociális összetételéről, valamint a pártból kikerültek összetételéről és okairól, 9, 1971. október 13.

³⁹¹ GYML, X. 415/124/14, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés a Vagongyári Pártbizottság párttaggá nevelési munkájáról. 1972. március 30.

The low percentage of working-class party members was criticised at county level, too: “We fulfilled the enrolment quotas in the county sooner than the national average but the percentage of the workers among the new members is 0,5% lower, which is significant in an industrial county. Our experience is that the blue-collar workers are more difficult to win and they leave the party more easily. In the enterprise party committees the intellectuals constitute the majority, and they often encourage the enrolment of the intelligentsia”.³⁹² A further problem was religious commitment, which was reported to be strong in the county. An information report urged the purge of religious party members: “In our county there are around 500 party members who send their children to Bible-classes and regularly participate in church programs. We should be more consequent to get rid of this influence”.³⁹³ Religious commitment was an obstacle to recruitment as late as the beginning of the 1980s: “Religiousness is still widespread in the villages. This could not influence the new admissions: many people had to be rejected in the town just for this reason. A further problem is that many of those who moved from the villages to the town only want to be members of the party in the hope of certain advantages”.³⁹⁴

The summary report of the new admissions in 1983 also complained about the under-fulfilment of the most important quotas in the county: “We did not succeed in increasing the percentage of workers among the newly admitted members; on the contrary, there is a decrease mainly in the cities of Győr and Sopron. We could not ensure that of the new admissions in the large enterprises, a majority would be workers (25-28% of the newly admitted members are employed in the nineteen large enterprises of the county). We

³⁹² GYML, X. 415/4/31, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A Győr városi VB jelentése az üzemi pártbizottságok alapszervezeteket irányító tevékenységéről. 1975. november 26.

³⁹³ GYML, X. 415/132/54, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Havi összefoglaló jelentések a kül- és belpolitikai eseményekről, a lakosság hangulatáról, 3. 1973. február.

³⁹⁴ GYML, X. 415/156/2/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Tájékoztató az 1984. 1. félévi tagfelvételek összetételének alakulásáról. 1984. szeptember 4.

could not – or hardly – hit the target that two thirds of the new members be young people (below thirty). In the past years – because of the weakness of the leadership of the party organizations and the political education of the base-cells – we could not ensure the significant majority of the workers and the two-third majority of youth among the new members mainly in the cities of Győr and Sopron”. The percentage of youth among the party membership of the county decreased from 12,3 to 8,9%, while nationally it decreased from 12,4 to 10,7%. The ratio of the age-group between 18 and 26 decreased from 5,9 to 3,4% in the county.³⁹⁵ Even though 73,8% of the party members enrolled in 1983 were originally workers, only 44,4% worked in production at the time of their enrolment. The county also failed to reduce the percentage of workers leaving the party: nearly 80% of the drop-outs were workers or peasants of the collective farms. The report stated that in spite of the requirements, *“the number of the new admissions in the large enterprises did not increase but it rather showed a decreasing trend in the past years”*.³⁹⁶

The decrease of the new admissions in the large enterprises was a particularly negative sign because the working class of the large enterprises was the traditional social base of the party. In the city of Győr there were seven enterprise party committees: MVG, Construction Works, Richards Cloth Factory, Cotton Mill, Textile Industry, MÁV (Hungarian Railways) and VOLÁN (state bus company).³⁹⁷ In 1975, the membership of the enterprise party organizations numbered 4,300 people, which constituted 37,14% of the party membership of the city. The enterprises had 80 base-cells, around half of the number of the base-cells citywide. The seven large enterprises employed 33,000 people, and 77%

³⁹⁵ GYML, X. 415/37, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés az MSZMP Politikai Bizottsága 1983. jún. 21-i határozata alapján a tagfelvételi munkáról, a párt összetételének alakulásáról, a további feladatokról a megyében. 1983. október 4.

³⁹⁶ GYML, X. 415/37, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés a tagfelvételi munkáról. 1983. december 13. Stress is mine.

³⁹⁷ On the role of enterprise party organizations see e.g. József Balogh, 'A vállalat gazdasági és politikai funkcióinak kapcsolata', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 32, no. 12 (1977), 67-70; Sándor Borbély, 'A pártszervezetek gazdaságirányító és -ellenőrző munkájáról', *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 6 (1976), 3-16; Pálné Vitkovics, op. cit., 1978; Lajos Héthy, op. cit., 1979.

of them were blue-collar workers. This meant that the overwhelming majority of the local working class worked in the large enterprises.³⁹⁸ Since MVG was the largest one of them, it had the largest party organization. In 1975 it had 28 base-cells (the base-cells of the six other large enterprises in the town varied at between 6 and 11) and a full-time party secretary. In 1975 the party membership of MVG in its Győr plants numbered 1,965 people. The overwhelming majority (86%) of the party members were men.³⁹⁹ In 1983, the party organization of MVG numbered only 1,786 people (while the membership of the county increased during the period). The party organization could not replace those of its members who left: between 1975 and 1980, it admitted 6,412 new members, while 9,573 ceased to be members (the reasons could have been the change of workplace, retirement, death, exclusion or voluntary withdrawal).⁴⁰⁰ The party organization admitted that it was difficult to win over young workers: “It is a problem that few young skilled workers are admitted to the party. Many of them are commuters, after their marriage the family, the building of the house takes up much of their free time. Their environment accepts that they have no time for political work, only ‘after they got settled’. The reorganization of labor within the enterprise, the conflicts about the dismissals and the wage disputes increased the number of drop-outs. Many people thought that the party did not defend them, therefore they resigned their membership”.⁴⁰¹ There is some evidence that white-collar employees were admitted to fill the ranks of the party: in 1983, 17% of the employees of MVG were members of the party while the percentage of the party members among the blue-collar workers was 15%. The workers still constituted a majority among the party members: 64%

³⁹⁸ A Győr városi VB jelentése az üzemi pártbizottságok alapszervezeteket irányító tevékenységéről, op. cit.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., melléklet.

⁴⁰⁰ GYML, X. 415/25/13, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Kimutatás a megye területén lévő nagyvállalatok párttagfelvételének alakulásáról 1975-1979 között. MVG győri telephelyén be-és kilépők száma. 1980. március 14.

⁴⁰¹ A párt tömegbefolyása, szervezettsége, a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a munkások körében, op. cit.

of the membership belonged to the working class. The percentage of youth (below 30) was around 10% among the party members.⁴⁰²

In the second half of the 1980s policies of affirmative action in favor of workers were less and less observed. This was paralleled by the decreasing rate of expansion of the party. In 1980, the rate of increase was 1,8%, in 1982, 1,5%, in 1984, 1% and in 1986, 0,5% in the country. The main reasons for this were resignations, deaths and a decreasing number of the new admissions.⁴⁰³ In the county the number of the new admissions continually decreased from 1983. “The enrolment of the workers did not increase according to the requirements. More workers ceased to be members of the party than those who were enrolled. In spite of our efforts we could not significantly improve the building of party organizations in the large enterprises of the county. *New admissions decreased in MVG, the Textile Industry Factory, Graboplast, Rába MMG.*⁴⁰⁴ The reasons are closely related to our socio-economic problems, in some places the weakness of the base cells, the indifference of the party members and their failure to set an example to people”.⁴⁰⁵ The national data likewise showed a decrease in the percentage of the workers: between 1980 and 1986 the percentage of the workers among the new members decreased by 6% and in 1986 they constituted only 42% of the party membership of the country.⁴⁰⁶ This shows that despite the quotas the traditional social basis of the party started to crumble.

⁴⁰² GYML, X. 415/532/2/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai, Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Tájékoztató az 1983. évi párttaggá nevelés, a párttag felvételek tapasztalatairól, 1984. február 2.

⁴⁰³ Tájékoztató az 1986. évi tagfelvételekről és a pártból való kikerülésekről, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁴ Stress is mine.

⁴⁰⁵ GYML, X. 415/224/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1987. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján, 1988. február 23.

⁴⁰⁶ Tájékoztató az 1986. évi tagfelvételekről és a pártból való kikerülésekről, op. cit.

Organizing women

There were special quotas used to increase the percentage of women in the party and the leadership. The improvement of the situation of women was on the political agenda of the party. The party statistics of the large enterprises in the county in the mid-1970s show that in traditional industries the number of female party members and leaders significantly lagged behind the men.⁴⁰⁷ In MVG, 25% of the employees were women while they constituted only 14% of the membership in 1975. Out of the 41 members of the party committee of MVG only 5 were women. The percentage of women in the party committees lagged behind also in traditional “female” industries: in Richards Cloth Factory 60% of the party members were women but the percentage of women members of the party committee was only 50%. In the Cotton Mill, 35% of the membership and 30% of the party committee were women. In MÁV and Volán the percentage of the women party members hardly reached 10%.⁴⁰⁸

A report of 1973 found that even though there were improvements in the situation of women, more effort was needed to assert the policy of equal rights in every field. “In spite of the increase of the percentage of women in the party, state and social organizations, it is a frequent experience even today that the engagement of women is considered to be a matter of statistics. In these fields many women get no help to improve their skills and leading competence. We consider the preparation and employment of women leaders to be unreasonably slow”.⁴⁰⁹ According to the report, the percentage of women in the party committees of the county increased from 10-12 to 20%. A closer look

⁴⁰⁷ Full female employment was strongly supported by the party as a means of female emancipation. Since the equal division of labor proved to be more difficult to realize within the family, in practice this often meant double work for the women in the workplace and in the “second shift” of the household. From the contemporary literature see: Zsuzsa Ferge, ‘A nők a munkában és a családban’, *Társadalmi Szemle*, 31, no. 6 (1976), 40-50. For a study of working women in Hungary see: Éva Fodor, op. cit., 2003; Eszter Zsófia Tóth, op. cit., 2004.

⁴⁰⁸ A Győr városi VB jelentése az üzemi pártbizottságok alapszervezeteket irányító tevékenységéről, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁹ Tájékoztató a KB 1970. február 18-19-i, a nők politikai, gazdasági és szociális helyzete megjavítására hozott határozata végrehajtásának tapasztalatairól, op. cit., 2.

at the statistics shows, however, that women occupied the low-level leading positions, and their activity mainly focused on organizations directly involved in work in local communities. 43% of the members of KISZ, 40% of SZMT (Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa = County Council of the Trade Unions) and 32% of the municipal committees of the People's Front were women. At the same time, women constituted only 17,2% of the full-time party workers in the county. The comments in the report showed that a certain bias continued to exist against women leaders in the county: "Even though we can meet less open misogynist remarks and backward opinions mainly among the leaders and the leading bodies than in the previous years, in practice they frequently set higher requirements for women than for men, and they sometimes only look for excuses to reject women". The report stated that there was a low percentage of women in the party apparatus (with the exception of KISZ), in the apparatuses of the councils and among the leaders. It was a further problem that there were not enough women candidates for membership, who had the necessary political education. There was an initiative to increase the number female students at party schools: their percentage increased from 5-8 to 20%.⁴¹⁰

Concerning the construction of party organization among women, the report argued that the party organizations had to concentrate their efforts on recruitment among women workers because they were often disadvantaged: "Even today we can often meet the opinion that the party uses double measures for men and women. This opinion causes much harm to the party because with this we renounce the political mobilization and the communist education of women. We agree that the special situation of women should be considered individually and we should adjust their party work to their situation but this cannot lead to any distinction between the members of the party. This distinction renders

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

many women timid and indifferent. It reveals the weakness of our political work among women that there are still many passive, politically indifferent women. In many places the party and mass organizations simply accept that a significant number of women 'have no time' or 'they are not interested in public affairs'. They often won't even invite these women to the meetings of the enterprise. The behavior of the majority of the passive women can be partly explained with the fact that their political knowledge and intellectual horizon is lower than the average. The reason is often in the family circumstances, the conservatism of their husbands, their relatives, and their household duties".⁴¹¹

Women workers had another disadvantage: their lack of skills. The party mainly sought to win the skilled core of the industrial working class, while even though 35,8% of the workers of the county were women, only 16,5% of them were skilled workers. "The number of the skilled workers among women increased but their percentage did not change much. The reasons are the following: there are still attitudes both among men and women that negatively influence the choice of profession. Many parents allow their daughters to go to training schools only in the worst case, and even then they look for jobs in other fields after they finished training. Even today it is a problem that the girls and their parents are interested in fashionable trades. We expect some results from the increase of the number of comprehensive schools⁴¹² but we have to wait for their effect".⁴¹³

In MVG the percentage of women slightly increased in the admissions between 1980 and 1983: out of the 250 new members 50 were women.⁴¹⁴ At the level of the county the percentage of women in the new admissions was 40% between 1983 and 1986 and it

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴¹² Comprehensive schools also gave a high school certificate.

⁴¹³ Tájékoztató a KB 1970. február 18-19-i, a nők politikai, gazdasági és szociális helyzete megjavítására hozott határozata végrehajtásának tapasztalatairól, op. cit., 18.

⁴¹⁴ Tájékoztató az 1983. évi párttaggá nevelés, a párttag felvételek tapasztalatairól, op. cit.

even increased to 42% in 1987.⁴¹⁵ There is no data about the percentage of women in the leading bodies. From the report of 1973 it can be, however, concluded that traditional biases against the political activity and role of women continued to exist in the county, and even though the party set quotas for women, attitudes did not change together with the statistics.

Party life

The forum of the base cells were the party meetings, which members were obliged to attend regularly, at least in principle. In MVG few minute books of the meetings of the base cells survived, but the existing documents suggest that party members often voiced their grievances in these meetings, and there was room for real debate. One example is the critical contribution of the mechanic, which was quoted in the introduction, in which he openly expressed his discontent with his economic situation as opposed to what propaganda said of it. The quoted comments of the former brigadiers likewise suggest that people did not refrain from speaking of problems that they had in production (e.g. the comment that “in my view, every worker has his own problem but he would not speak of it because it won’t be solved anyway. I also had a tool problem, I was promised to get one and I did not get any”⁴¹⁶). As the contribution of the mechanic shows, criticism sometimes even went beyond to address more general problems with the building of socialism.

From the surviving documents it is, of course, difficult to estimate the political activity of the membership in these meetings or in general. The reports were generally more optimistic than the comments of the party officials. In the discussion of a report on exemplary communist conduct, the first secretary of the county stated bluntly that one had

⁴¹⁵ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1987. évi tag alakulásáról a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján, op. cit.

⁴¹⁶ Jegyzőkönyv a Motor Pártalapszervezet 1977. január 26.-i taggyűléséről, op. cit., 5-6.

to look for it with a magnifying glass. Although he did not relate his comments to economic reform, his moral criticism well expressed the view of the old party workers that the life of the movement was undermined by the spread of materialism and indifference: “We can experience passivity also in the party. I don’t want to argue about the 5%⁴¹⁷ but we can multiply it safely by five and even then we are too optimistic. No numbers can express the indifference to party work and political questions. When it comes to a political debate, party members just stand there open-mouthed and they do not stand up to defend the party’s standpoint. This question does not even come up in the factories and still we are all satisfied and declare that everything is all right”.⁴¹⁸ A member of the executive committee argued that in his opinion the grass-roots members learned only one quarter to one third of the important central decisions. “The secretaries of the ground cells have to write down or memorize very important tasks at one hearing. Unfortunately, the majority of them are unable to do this”.⁴¹⁹

In the discussions there was much criticism of the formality of the party life and the difficulties of mobilizing party members. Indifference was allegedly characteristic of both the managers and the workers. The party secretary of MVG took the side of the workers in a meeting of the executive committee: “It is difficult to engage the workers in party work but you can look at the workers’ militia, which the people have to do after work: most of them are workers. At the same time we write down that it is difficult to convince the workers of the importance of party work. What is written here does not agree with the facts even if a committee of fifty-two people examined it. The other problem: the report discusses the activity of the party membership, the number of party commissions and the

⁴¹⁷ The report states that the passive party members constitute 4-5% of the total membership that belongs under the party committee of Győr town (104 base cells with a membership of 9804 people).

⁴¹⁸ A Győr városi Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság jelentése a pártszervezeti fegyelem, a kommunista munkamorál, magatartás, életmód helyzetéről, op. cit., 18-19.

⁴¹⁹ Jelentés a 10. kongresszus óta felvett párttagok szociális összetételéről, valamint a pártból kikerültek összetételéről és okairól, op. cit.

ratio of the participants. According to this report it is like sport. We declare that we organized three foot races with 100-100 participants but if the same people went there three times, we will still report that there were 300 participants. We put down that 2,300 people have party commissions but in reality it could be only 1,000 people. We could fold our hands if 85% of the party membership actively participated in the party and mass organization work. I have a feeling that the 85% does not show the reality. You should not think that my hobby-horse is the worker policy but we write down that we stroke ninety-seven members off the party list. The majority of them, seventy-something were stroke off for their failure to attend the party events, and sixty-seven of them are workers. At the same time when the leaders don't come because they are busy, nobody asks them: do you want to remain in the party or not? I think that our party organizations counter the workers a bit more assertively".⁴²⁰

Allegedly, it was more difficult to recruit commuters because they did not want to stay for the regular party meetings after they finished work. Since the same reason was used to explain their withdrawal from adult education, it may well have expressed the anti-peasant bias of the party functionaries, who thought that the "village people" were politically less developed than the urban working class. Since the economic reform, commuters were reported to be more materialistic, who are interested in their private wealth rather than community life.⁴²¹ In the 1980s, the criticism of materialism became more lenient in relation with the growing social inequalities: party functionaries did indeed explain the reluctance of working-class youth to join the party through the increased burdens of establishing an independent household.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ A Győr városi Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság jelentése a pártszervezeti fegyelem, a kommunista munkamorál, magatartás, életmód helyzetéről, op. cit., 14-15.

⁴²¹ A vidékről bejáró dolgozóink helyzete, op. cit., 5.

⁴²² Jelentés a KISZ munkájáról, op. cit., 1.

The few surviving registers give no information about how often the base cells actually met. With respect to the brigade meetings, the party committee of the factory demonstrated a remarkable lenience when it was recognized that people who performed heavy physical work during the day did not always have time for the common meetings.⁴²³ There is some evidence that the obligations of regular party life were likewise not so seriously enforced; at least the report of the leadership of the enterprise party committees sharply criticized the leadership of MVG in this respect. It was reported that thanks to their lenience, there were party groups in the factory, which had not meet for months: “Regarding the monthly party meetings in MVG we saw the problem earlier. We even made a compromise when we thought that comrade K. can solve the problem that we indicated to him. Unfortunately, there was a very weak leadership in MVG. Things declined to the point that there were base cells that did not have regular party life. We had to send a comrade from the town committee to reproach the local comrades. We think that this question is solved with the appointment of comrade L”.⁴²⁴ The monthly party meetings of the base cells of MVG triggered a debate even in the executive committee of the county. One member of the committee observed that “it almost looks like a punishment to participate in the party meetings. Where there are problems in the base cells, they should be solved. The party groups should hold a meeting in every month”.⁴²⁵ Given, however, that comrade L was nicknamed comrade simpleton in the factory, it can be questioned that he had the authority to significantly improve party life.⁴²⁶ In 1977 it was reported that the relationship between the party and the mass organizations was good and 50% of the leaders of the mass organizations were members of the party. The report, however, indicated that there was less agreement between the party and the management: “We still need to develop

⁴²³ A szocialista munkaverseny és a brigádmunka fejlesztésének feladatai vállalatunknál, op. cit., 5.

⁴²⁴ A Győr városi VB jelentése az üzemi pártbizottságok alapszervezeteket irányító tevékenységéről, op. cit.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Information from the interviews with the workers of the factory.

the political leading activity of the managers. They tend to neglect political work referring to the production tasks”.⁴²⁷ Even though the manager of MVG was member of the Central Committee between 1970 and 1989 – or perhaps because of it – the interest of production preceded party work.

Losing members

The high percentage of the workers among those who walked out of the party shows that the membership was not an existential question to the workers. They could be persuaded to join but the commitment was often not strong enough to keep them in the party. One could leave the party voluntarily (withdrawal) or upon the initiative of the party (through exclusion or being struck off). Withdrawal usually happened upon retirement or after a change of place-of-work, but people sometimes resigned because they did not have time for party life or they did not want to pay dues. With their withdrawal the workers could also express their disagreement with the ideology of the party (religious commitment), its policy or the policy of the factory (e.g. dismissals in MVG). According to the information reports resignation was frequently a sign of protest (wage disputes, the distribution of premiums, etc.): in the introduced case of the regulation of paid holiday of 1986, many people gave back their trade union cards and refused to pay the trade union and party dues in order to show their disagreement with the measure.⁴²⁸ Such cases reveal that people expected the defense of labor interests from the party and the mass organizations, and their failure to do so frequently motivated voluntary withdrawals.

⁴²⁷ GYML, X. 415/195/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Jelentés a tömegszervezetek pártirányításáról a Vagon gyáregység és az Irodák III pártalapszervezeteknél, 1977. május.

⁴²⁸ GYML, X. 415/187/2, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, 1986. április.

Many people decided to resign membership upon retirement, and they constituted a significant group of those, whose membership terminated. In 1982, 23,3% of the drop-outs were retired people, in 1984 nearly one third (27,8%)⁴²⁹ and in 1987 almost the same (27,4%).⁴³⁰ The high percentage of the retired among the drop-outs shows that the party organization was closely connected with the workplace in the eyes of people. When they finished their active working life, they were unwilling to continue political work in their local party organizations. The most frequent reasons that they gave for their withdrawal were the high party dues and their bad health. A report of 1985 gave the following reasons for the withdrawal of retired people: “27,8% of the drop-outs are retired; many of them were engaged in social and political work full of struggles for decades. A significant part of them suffer from chronic health problems by the time they retire. They grow tired, indifferent, passive, which is largely understandable. Of course, this does not justify their complete withdrawal from political and social life. Some of them are offended without due reason”.⁴³¹ But there were people who had a reason to be offended. In the executive committee of MVG, the party secretary told of a comrade who performed a very good work until his last work day and in the farewell dinner he said that “I worked here for 45 years, there is one thing that hurts me that I tell you now. After I was 58, I did not get a pay increase because they told me, I was too old”.⁴³² The secretary added that this was a justified complaint. The executive committee of MVG was also responsive to the financial problems of the retired. The average pension in the factory was 3,000 Ft, but those who retired earlier often had a very low income. The party due of 100 Ft could, argued that

⁴²⁹ GYML, X. 415/161/2/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A pártból kikerülés elemzése és az abból adódó feladatok. 1985. június 28.

⁴³⁰ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1987. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján, op. cit.

⁴³¹ A pártból kikerülés elemzése és az abból adódó feladatok, op. cit., 5.

⁴³² GYML, X. 415/203/2/7, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. A párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunka és a párttagokkal való foglalkozás tapasztalatai, 5. 1980. november 28.

party committee, indeed burden their budget.⁴³³ The grass-roots members would also complain about the lack of attention that they experienced from the leaders. In the Rear Bridge Unit, a party member who had worked there for 18 years noted that during this time nobody asked him if he and his family were well. The questions asked is only “how long you stay, how many pieces you do, etc”.⁴³⁴

The withdrawal of the active workers was an even more sensitive loss to the party because it was usually a direct sign of disagreement or discontent with its policies. The high percentage of the workers among the drop-outs therefore also reflected the weakness of political work. A reason for resignation had to be given - even though by 1987 many people refused to give a reason.⁴³⁵ The party could also initiate the termination of membership. Exclusion was used as a punishment if a party member seriously and repeatedly offended the community (e.g. by committing criminal offences, stealing from the property of the collective, etc.). Those who emigrated to the West were also excluded from the party.⁴³⁶ There was a less drastic way to leave the party: to become an inactive party member – those, who regularly did not attend the party meetings, did not participate in party life and did not pay the party dues were struck off. The judgment of the activity of the members could be, of course, subjective. The party secretary of MVG was probably right to argue that the managers could find better reasons to miss the party meetings than

⁴³³ Ibid., 6.

⁴³⁴ GYML, X. 415/203/2/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Az emberi kapcsolatok alakulásának tapasztalatai. Politikai feladatok a zavartalan munkahelyi légkör elősegítésére, 4. 1980. május 22.

⁴³⁵ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1987. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján, op. cit.

⁴³⁶ The immigration of the leaders caused an even greater loss of prestige to the party. In Mosonmagyaróvár, for instance, the immigration of the party secretary of the base organization of the Water Works and his wife, who was also a member of the party, was discussed also in the party organization of Rába MMG. GYML, X. 415/529/1/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Mosonmagyaróvári Mezőgazdasági Gépgyár (MMG) pártbizottsági ülésének jegyzőkönyve. A párttaggá nevelés és a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a Rába MMG-ben. 1984. május 3.

the workers.⁴³⁷ The party reports of MVG likewise complained that the weight of the management increased at the expense of the party organization: “In the past when the party secretary wanted to talk to a manager and asked him in his room, the manager would grow white with fear why the secretary wants to see him. Today the manager would answer without hesitation that he does not have time”.⁴³⁸

The statistics suggest that the party rarely resorted to purging its members. In 1985, 192 members withdrew from the party, 150 were struck off and 52 were excluded in the county. Between 1980 and 1984, 699 people withdrew from the party in the county. 20,2% of them explained it through family and religious reasons, and 14,3% said that they cannot meet the party requirements.⁴³⁹ There is some evidence that at that time the party showed more flexibility on religious issues: a report of 1984 noted that in the villages the parents often expected their children to marry in church and to christening their grandchildren in exchange for their financial support.⁴⁴⁰

People were mainly struck off because of the negligence of organizational life or their failure to ask for a transfer to the relevant party organizations upon changing their workplace.⁴⁴¹ It was mentioned in a report of 1977 that part of the people would not transfer to the party organization of the new working place, and thus drops out of the party.⁴⁴² This suggests that the workplace was often central to the organization of people. It would be wrong to assume that the party encouraged the exclusions: from the 1980s a defensive attitude can be observed in the documents. The party aimed to keep rather than

⁴³⁷ A Győr városi Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság jelentése a pártszervezeti fegyelem, a kommunista munkamorál, magatartás, életmód helyzetéről, op. cit.

⁴³⁸ A párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunka és a párttagokkal való foglalkozás tapasztalatai, op. cit.

⁴³⁹ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1985. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁰ GYML, X. 415/237, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Tájékoztató az 1983-as pártfegyelmi eljárásokról. 1984. március 5.

⁴⁴¹ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1985. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról, op. cit.

⁴⁴² GYML, X. 415/195/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A tagkönyvcserével kapcsolatos elbeszélgetések és taggyűlések tapasztalatai. 1977. január 26.

lose its members. Between 1979 and 1983 the party membership of Rába MMG was reduced from 502 to 411 people. 123 were transferred to other party organizations, 20 were struck off, 9 withdrew, 3 were excluded, and 7 people died. The organization admitted 49 new members, and 22 arrived from other party groups. The balance was still an almost 20% decline of the membership.⁴⁴³ With a shrinking membership, it is unlikely that the party organizations looked for reasons to exclude or strike off party members.

The less strict form of punishment was the party reprimand. The party disciplinary proceedings suggest that the main aim was to maintain the moral respectability of the party rather than to reinforce organizational life. Improper conduct and an unorganized family life were likely to be punished with a strong reprimand, but these offences could also lead to exclusion from the party. People who outraged the public with their behavior received a warning and they risked being excluded from the party. It was, for instance, reported to the party that the new party secretary of a collective farm “got so drunk after a council meeting that he vomited through the window of the building of the party committee. This was a very bad introduction and it triggered very negative responses in the village”.⁴⁴⁴ The case was investigated and the secretary received a strong reprimand. The party also respected – and promoted - settled family life and relations. Adulterers also risked a strong reprimand. This, in turn, often led to denunciations to the party committee by jealous partners.⁴⁴⁵ Between 1980 and 1984, 268 party members (among them 180 workers) were excluded from the party in the county (so perhaps it is true that the party organizations countered the workers more assertively.) More than one third (35,7%) were excluded because of offences against socialist property. Indecent private life was the second most frequent reason for exclusion: it amounted to 25,9% of the punishments. 6% were excluded because of

⁴⁴³ A párttaggá nevelés és a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a Rába MMG-ben, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁴ GYML, X. 415/47/36, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Dolgozók által tett bejelentések, panaszok, 1975.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. A woman, for instance, denounced her divorced husband (a party member) for making anti-party comments; the investigation, however, stated that she denounced him out of revenge.

negligence of party duties, 5,3% for causing accidents, 4,5% for violating labor discipline and 3% for their failure to meet the ideological requirements of the party (this meant the demonstration of religious commitment, participation in church ceremonies, etc.).⁴⁴⁶ The party evidently watched over the moral respectability of the membership, and it adhered to the “bourgeois” rules of conduct regarding family life. The referees were frequently warned to consider the moral character of the candidates so that they could not bring disgrace to the party with their behavior.⁴⁴⁷ Since most of the members were excluded for offences against socialist property, political education in this sense was not always effective.

Even though the party strove for moral respectability, being a party member was not in itself enough to win social respect. This was true also for the membership: according to a survey of 1972 conducted within the county membership, a tiny minority (3,3%) thought that there was a difference between the Marxists and non-Marxists in their attitude to work and only half of them thought that there was a difference in political opinions.⁴⁴⁸ In 1983 people who were not members of the party rejected political discussion with party members on the basis “that they would not talk to those, who can’t do their daily work properly. Some people said that no one asked them when they spoiled the standard of living. Others refused to state their opinion saying that they would not consider it all the same”.⁴⁴⁹ In the second half of the 1980s party reports in fact complained of instances of discrimination against the members of the party. With the increasing economic problems

⁴⁴⁶ A pártból kikerülés elemzése és az abból adódó feladatok, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁷ A párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunka és a párttagokkal való foglalkozás tapasztalatai, op. cit.; GYML, X. 415/161/2/5, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A párttaggá nevelő munka tapasztalatai a munkások és az ifjúság körében a Politikai Bizottság 1983. június 21-i és a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján. 1985. október 16.

⁴⁴⁸ GYML, X. 415/122/6, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. Jelentés a párttagság körében végzett ideológiai nevelőmunkáról, 1-5. melléklet. 1972. augusztus 15.

⁴⁴⁹ GYML, X. 415/36, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve, napirendi anyagai. A pártonkívüliekkel folytatott beszélgetések tapasztalatai, javaslat a további feladatokra. 1983. április 5.

of the 1980s (increasing prices, high inflation, and the stagnation of real wages), more and more people raised the question of responsibility: grass-roots members charged the leaders with incompetence, while those who were not members of the party blamed the whole party membership. People would ask why they had to “pay” the price of the bad decisions of the leaders. It was reported that in the Industrial Tool Factory “people complained that the leaders again want to shift the responsibility onto the producers. *But the making of the plans and the command of the economy are not done from the machines.*⁴⁵⁰ It would be good if the leaders took responsibility for their bad decisions and removed the hair-cracks that had appeared between the party and the people”.⁴⁵¹ Another report noted that “today it is not rewarding to be a Communist. Many people refuse to take the responsibility for the mistakes – this explains the high number of withdrawals”.⁴⁵² Ever more people refused to identify themselves with the policy of the party; the increase of resignations was indicative of the political weakening of the regime.

The failure of the standard-of-living policy

With the help of the information reports it is possible to give a very good documentation of the mounting economic discontent of the population. Since the reports were mostly written by low-level party functionaries, the criticism that they formulated reflected the deteriorating political mood of the grass-roots membership for the regime. It is worth comparing the reports of the early 1970s with those of the late 1970s and 1980s in this respect: while the former mainly addressed local issues that had to be improved, the latter critically reported on the “general questions” of the social and economic

⁴⁵⁰ Stress is mine.

⁴⁵¹ GYML, X. 415/537/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1986. május.

⁴⁵² GYML, X. 415/235, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, Sopron, 1987. december.

development of the country. In particular two criticisms were stressed: the first was the failure of the standard-of-living policy, which people bitterly experienced as opposed to the government's promises, and the second was the issue of growing material inequalities - again as opposed to the egalitarian ideology that the party propagated. In the light of the information reports these factors effectively undermined the credibility of the government.

The increase of prices, understandably, never had a positive reception among the population. The reports of the late 1970s, however, stressed that the measure was socially unjust because it hit mainly those who lived from wages, while other, wealthier strata who worked in the private sector could compensate for the increase of prices by increasing their prices, too. "In the past weeks our employees were mainly concerned with the increase of prices. They agreed with some of the items but they found the increase of the price of meat definitely too much. They said that they cannot buy a sandwich from their hourly wage. They also disagreed with the increase of the prices of cars; they said that they had saved for a car for years but with these prices and the increase of the price of petrol they would not afford to buy a car. They thought that the peasants and the self-employed would have no problem to pay this higher price but for an urban worker, who had to work one hour for 1 kg of paprika, it would cause an almost unsolvable problem. They also found the increase of the price of utilities too much".⁴⁵³ It was likewise pointed out that the disappointment of the population would increase the number of those who have lost their interest in politics: "But more importantly, we have to accept that the key to solve this 'more difficult' economic situation is not the increase of prices! Because sometimes society can expect restraint from its members if it is demanded by the economic situation but this cannot be an alternative – because in the long run, modesty will be replaced with the lack of demands – which goes together with 'indifference'. Indifference can be an

⁴⁵³ Információs jelentés a Vagon Fémipari Alapszervezettől, 1979. május, op. cit.

almost incurable disease of society”.⁴⁵⁴ Another informant put it bluntly that economic dissatisfaction was widespread among the party membership: “It influences the political mood and production that many of our party members and foremen do not understand the objectives of our economic policy. Their economic ‘agitation’ means that they emphasize only the mistakes together with the discontented people. They blame the higher leaders for our economic difficulties. They are convinced that they have always worked well and efficiently”.⁴⁵⁵ That this was not an isolated phenomenon is supported by the minute books of the base-cell meeting of the forge-shop on 22 February 1978: “Indifference is spreading among people. Nothing makes them interested in community and socialist work. The most important for them is economic work: this is what they want to do well. This is the opinion of the blue-collar workers but it is also characteristic of the managers. The older people are tired and the youth believes that it has no perspective. A still tongue makes a wise head, this is what the people think here. They don’t even argue, just nod to everything. Political work is a secondary issue here”.⁴⁵⁶ The passivity of the party members was likewise criticized in the Industrial Tool Unit: “Many expect – even among those who finished a political school – to be themselves convinced by somebody else”.⁴⁵⁷ The comments, similarly to the quoted contribution of the mechanic, revealed that the failure of the standard-of-living policy had become evident already in the late 1970s, parallel with the recognition that the party had nothing else to offer to the people.

⁴⁵⁴ GYML, X. 415/199/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Kovács Pártalapszervezettől. 1979. szeptember.

⁴⁵⁵ GYML, X. 415/202/32, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1979. május.

⁴⁵⁶ GYML, X. 415/199/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Jegyzőkönyv a Kovács II. üzem MSZMP alapszervezetének taggyűléséről. 1978. február 22.

⁴⁵⁷ GYML, X. 415/199/12, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1979. február.

Direct political criticism, which used to be a rare phenomenon, also manifested itself more often throughout the 1980s.⁴⁵⁸ People openly started to express their doubts about the credibility of the socialist media, and the informants' comments suggested that many of them, too, shared these doubts, for instance the question of "why the balance of the foreign trade is getting worse from year to year, our employees ask"⁴⁵⁹, or that of "will they increase the price of petrol?"⁴⁶⁰ Officially nothing is said but the increase of the price in the world market makes one worried".⁴⁶¹ The comments likewise revealed that people refused to believe the economic explanations, particularly when the media had previously declared that the oil crisis would not influence the socialist countries. "It is difficult to understand and even more difficult to bear for a 'simple' worker that the unfavorable changes of the world economy have reached us, too. The workers don't deny that it is necessary to spare reasonably but unreasonable sparing triggers antipathy only. The unduly high increase of prices and the stagnation of the standard of living reinforce a climate of insecurity. Those who live from their wages will never afford to buy a flat, which costs 500-800,000 Ft. The number of shortage goods increased, which means a big problem for the consumers and higher profits for private traders".⁴⁶² Informants clearly expressed that people refused to believe that the economic problems were only temporary: "In our opinion, our leaders, who declare even today that we can preserve the standard of living of the 1970s, themselves do not think it seriously".⁴⁶³

458 This statement is supported by the findings of the oral history project of Erzsébet Szalai. The author studied the evaluation of VGMK among the workers. Erzsébet Szalai, *Beszélgetések a gazdasági reformról* (Budapest: Pénzügykutató Intézet Kiadványai, no. 2, 1986).

459 GYML, X. 415/206/12, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerelde Pártalapszervezetétől, 1980. február.

460 Stress is in the original.

461 Információs jelentés a T. M. K. Pártalapszervezettől, 1979. május, op. cit.

462 GYML, X. 415/206/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1980. július.

463 GYML, X. 415/206/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1980. március.

An even stronger argument was that failure of the standard-of-living policy mainly affected the industrial working class as the largest social group, which lived from the state sector. Throughout the 1980s it was frequently stressed that they were the main losers of the state's attempt to reduce expenditures while the state could not control the incomes of those who worked in the private sector. Growing material inequalities did not only trigger envy but they also revealed that the "building of socialism" was limited to the propagation of socialist ideology. In the light of the information reports skepticism towards the regime increased among the workers. They found it ever more ridiculous to believe that they were the beneficiaries of the economic policy of the state; the real beneficiaries, in their eyes, were the managers, the high functionaries and those who worked in the private sector. Informants often consciously refused to write more "nuanced" reports: "There is no positive change in the prices and transport so the people's opinions (which we have reported earlier) have not changed, either. I request the acceptance of our information report!"⁴⁶⁴ The informant elaborated his position in another report: "In the training courses we received many instructions concerning the structure of information reports. It is, however, difficult or impossible to satisfy these demands if people fail to react to events according to the given criteria. It was often criticized that information reports are limited to complaints about the provision with consumers' goods and public transport. If we do not want to forge the reports (and we certainly don't), we can only write about the things that really concern people. These are the increase of prices, the provision with consumers' goods, transport and the "preservation" of the standard of living. We cannot write new things about them because the circumstances have not changed; or better to say, they have

⁴⁶⁴ GYML, X. 415/211/38, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1982. február.

deteriorated after the increase of the price of fuel. I request the acceptance of our information report!”⁴⁶⁵

According to the reports, workers often directly contrasted their economic situation with that of the wealthier social strata. Such comparisons evidently reflected the workers’ mounting social discontent: “The pay increases are not proportionate to the increase of the prices, so the majority of the employees experience a gradual decline of their standard of living. This applies only to the people who live from their work and wages and not to the speculators – and there are many of them, unfortunately. According to the report of the OTP the savings of the people in the bank have increased, despite the price increases. Whose savings have increased, and how many of them earned their money with honest work?”⁴⁶⁶ The informant argued prices had constantly increased since 1973, which made it more difficult for industrial workers to earn their living.⁴⁶⁷ In a base-cell meeting party members argued that the increase of the prices hit most the urban industrial working class because they could only rely on the wages that they earned in the factory: “They are not satisfied with the reasoning of the price increases. They refuse to understand the necessity of these measures”.⁴⁶⁸ Similar reports from other plants suggest that dissatisfaction and pessimism was widespread among the workers: people did not understand why they were expected to make sacrifices in the interest of the country while others – as they perceived - prospered at their expense: “The most important topic among the workers is invariably the standard of living. They complain that prices have changed without any announcement. The newspapers and the TV always talk about the savings of the people, how much they

⁴⁶⁵ GYML, X. 415/211/38, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Új Acélöntödéből, 1982. április.

⁴⁶⁶ GYML, X. 415/211/4, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Technológia Pártalapszervezetétől, 1982. február.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Jegyzőkönyv a Szerszámgépgyár Egység Pártalapszervezetének 1983. februári taggyűléséről, op. cit.

increased but no one investigates how much money the workers have in the bank.”⁴⁶⁹ In the Industrial Tool Unit the workers also complained about the decline of the standard of living: “Our statistical office always publishes data about the savings of the population, and then they can argue that people can afford to pay the higher prices. Our workers say that if someone investigated, who were the lucky ones, who had money in the bank, one would find very few Rába-workers among them”.⁴⁷⁰

The visible material differences between the social groups urged many to question social justice. Few people believed that the rich earned their money with honest means; at least in the light of the information reports people spoke of non-productive work with disapproval. A report of the ideological training of the party membership concluded that the workers did not feel that their situation improved in spite of overtime: “In their judgment the basis of distribution is not the work that one performs. They think that the money goes to the non-productive sphere, and the working class, which produces the national income, receives an ever decreasing share. An ‘upper class’, which is not affected by the economic situation of the country, has emerged. The economic restrictions reduce only the income of the people who work in the overregulated industry. They are worried about the expansion of the private sector, which will broaden this upper class”.⁴⁷¹ The reference to solidarity was rejected with the reasoning that social justice has disappeared from society: “In a TV-interview it was argued that our economic situation and the standard of living won’t improve in the near future. According to the interview there is a group, which does not notice the economic situation, another, where the standard of living stagnates, and a third, largest group, where it declines (which affects the majority of the

⁴⁶⁹ GYML, X. 415/212/15, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Kovács Pártalapszervezettől. 1982. november-december.

⁴⁷⁰ GYML, X. 415/528/2, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől, 1982. március.

⁴⁷¹ GYML, X. 415/210/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Jelentés a párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunkáról, 2. 1982. október 14.

employees). Question: why can't all the strata share the burdens equally? E.g. while one builds a villa, another has a problem to buy one kilo meat".⁴⁷² People also argued that not everybody could find work in the private sector, which thus only increased existing inequalities: "It is a general opinion that today the urban workers have a problem to make ends meet. We don't think that this can be explained with the increase of the demands. Everybody who wants to achieve something - whether a car, family house or the support of the children and we are back to the flat problem (parental support!) - needs an extra income. An opportunity⁴⁷³ is needed to participate in the private economy".⁴⁷⁴ It was also pointed out that the high incomes that could be earned in the private sector rendered people more responsive to the capitalist ideology: "Here we have a political question: if the proportion between the state and private economy further shifts, which will be more dominant in the consciousness of a worker: where he goes to work or where he earns the money?!"⁴⁷⁵

The economic dissatisfaction of the working class was linked with the argument that their social and political role also declined. It was disputable even in the light of the reforms of the 1970s whether the workers regarded themselves as members of the ruling class; in the 1980s, however, there was an increasing complaint that instead of a solid integration into the socialist middle class, they found themselves at the bottom of the social ladder. The growing material differences rendered painfully evident this social decline: "Unfortunately, price increases continue in 1983, too. The monthly wage of an average worker – without overtime – is 4500 Ft. As compared to this, engineers earn 6500-7000 Ft in a month. We don't think that this big difference is justified. It seems that the leading role

⁴⁷² GYML, X. 415/211/33, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Jármű II. Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. november.

⁴⁷³ Stress is in the original.

⁴⁷⁴ GYML, X. 415/212/5, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Motor Pártalapszervezettől. 1982. február.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

of the working class is manifest only by the work-benches but it plays no role in the distribution of the incomes”.⁴⁷⁶ The party membership of the Vehicle Unit criticized that everything was explained through the economic situation of the country, which became more important than the leading role of the party: “They therefore do not experience the leading role of the party”, the report concluded.⁴⁷⁷ The unequal chances of young people to buy flats were likewise repeatedly stressed: the children of working-class families were reported to belong to the disadvantaged groups.⁴⁷⁸ But workers had to cut back their demands in other fields of life, too, which reinforced their bitterness against the more fortunate social groups, who had enough means to finance their luxuries. According to an extraordinary information report of the forge-shop, the workers were very surprised to hear that the price of petrol increased while it went down in the world market: “The question is who are the most affected by the price increase? Those who have a higher income will have no problem to drive in the future. For the low-income groups the car is often the only means of entertainment. According to the employees these groups are the working class, the retired and the big families”.⁴⁷⁹ In the Industrial Tool Unit people wondered “how high the prices can be increased”.⁴⁸⁰ Holiday trips also started to be regarded as a luxury; people particularly complained of the increasing prices of the holiday resorts at Lake Balaton, which were also frequented by foreign tourists: “There is no cheap accommodation and catering, for instance, one week of camping costs 1000 Ft. The prices in the restaurants are beyond the means of a simple Hungarian worker. The private shopkeepers perhaps exploit this because their prices are dishonestly high. A pancake costs 6-8 Ft, the maize 10-15 Ft

⁴⁷⁶ GYML, X. 415/528/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Hátsóhid Alapszervezetétől, 1983. január.

⁴⁷⁷ Információs jelentés a Jármű II. Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. november, op. cit.

⁴⁷⁸ A Vagongyár Pártbizottságának információs jelentése, 1985. október, op. cit.

⁴⁷⁹ GYML, X. 415/211/28, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Rendkívüli információs jelentés a Kovács Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. december.

⁴⁸⁰ GYML, X. 415/528/13, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől. 1983. április.

and the fruit costs 2-3 times more than in Győr. The local councils should do something against these unfair profits!”⁴⁸¹

The mounting discontent of people was manifest in their political opinions, too. The information reports of the 1980s speak of the gradual deterioration of the political mood: the criticism that the economic situation of the industrial working class deteriorated was followed by openly critical political comments: “The constant price increases negatively influence the public mood. In our opinion, the workers are not enlightened enough to regard this process as natural. Particularly if we take into account that the only “effect” of the world market on our country is the increase of the prices; we can never experience its opposite effect. The workers say that according to our leaders the prices of our products are going down in the world market but nevertheless, they continue to increase in Hungary”.⁴⁸² Price increases were reported to strongly influence the mood of the employees of the Energy Unit because “they feel that they cannot preserve their former standard of living”.⁴⁸³ According to the informant of the Motor Unit “the public mood of the majority of the workers is deteriorating from day to day. They relate this to the ever greater and varied taxes, price increases and the attempt of the state to put the public burden on the working class”.⁴⁸⁴ The discussions with the party members concluded that it irritated the workers that while their standard of living declined, there were more opportunities for the “speculators” and self-employed to get rich. This contributed to the passivity of the membership.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ GYML, X. 415/528/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Hátsóhid Alapszervezetétől, 1983. augusztus.

⁴⁸² GYML, X. 415/537/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Jármű Pártalapszervezetétől, 1985. november-december.

⁴⁸³ GYML, X. 415/211/39, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az Energetikától. 1982. október.

⁴⁸⁴ GYML, X. 415/537/16, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Motor Pártalapszervezettől. 1986. október.

⁴⁸⁵ GYML, X. 415/536/11, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunka feladatai. 1985. október.

It was argued that after the economic reform, there was a relatively sharp criticism of the managers; political criticism, however, remained a taboo. This has changed strikingly in the 1980s: in the light of the information reports, people openly questioned the credibility of their leaders and the official media: “We do not understand why we can’t know how much debt the Hungarian state has while they tell us the debts of Poland and Romania. Why can we know only the military expenses of the USA and not that of Hungary?”⁴⁸⁶ It was also criticized that the state leaders were actually afraid of the people, and they enjoyed unjustified privileges: “It can be safely argued that people were outraged by the exaggerated security measures concerning the Austrian visit of György Lázár in a private train. This is not only the opinion of the grass-roots membership but also that of those who had to wait 30-45 minutes because of the closed bridges. People criticize this sterile isolation of the leaders during the visits of other state leaders, too. A state leader should have more confidence in the people even if it implies some risks”.⁴⁸⁷ It was also reported that people refused to believe the reasons that the leaders and the media gave for the restrictive measures, and they blamed the leadership for the wrong economic policy of the country even though they suffered the least from it. The following comment shows how “far” people went in political criticism: “Today the Hungarian people work very hard in Europe and they still get to nowhere. Our socialist way of life means that everybody works himself to death and achieves nothing while society goes to the dogs”.⁴⁸⁸ The “Hungarian lifestyle” was evidently associated with too much work and low pay: “Our employees find it remarkable that with respect to the health condition of the middle-aged,

⁴⁸⁶ GYML, X. 415/208/35, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Motor Pártalapszervezettől. 1981. november.

⁴⁸⁷ GYML, X. 415/211/33, Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Végrehajtó Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Jármű II. Pártalapszervezettől, 1982. szeptember.

⁴⁸⁸ GYML, X. 415/236/8, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés az MVG KISZ szervezetétől. 1986. december.

we are among the last in Europe. According to our employees, it is not only the result of the “unhealthy” Hungarian “cuisine” but also that of too much work”.⁴⁸⁹

The quotations well illustrate the process of how the regime increasingly lost working-class support. People recognized that while the state failed to improve the standard of living of the industrial working class, its economic policy opened new opportunities for other social groups, which lived significantly better than the workers. The situation of the 1980s was in some aspects similar to the reception of the economic reform of 1968 when growing social differences were criticized strongly. There were, however, two important differences: first, at that time the state had still reserves to appease the working class; and second, there was still space for a social dialogue. The reports of the 1980s reflect that the increasing gap between the policy and ideology of the party effectively undermined the credibility of the regime. This deeply rooted disappointment rendered it unlikely that the majority of the workers would have accepted the party as a conversation partner; and, contrary to the era of the new economic mechanism, the party in fact made no noticeable attempt to start a dialogue with the workers.

“Would you call the capitalists back?”

In the 1980s the decreasing appeal of the party became more visible. Functionaries reported of the increasing problems of recruitment, in particular the diminished appeal of the party for young people. The executive committee of MVG reported that young people attached too much importance to material things upon leaving school and if the party failed to organize them in their twenties, “it is very difficult to persuade them when they are 30”. It was, however, added, that materialism was characteristic of older people, too: “today

⁴⁸⁹ GYML, X. 415/231/5, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák. 1987. január.

people count too much, e.g. a blue-collar worker would pay his car tax from party dues.” That indeed some workers or candidates would make this point is supported by the awkward defense of the workers: “We have to say that these people are not at all against the system but it is the consequence of exaggerated materialism that has become characteristic of society”.⁴⁹⁰ A concrete case was mentioned that threw bad light on the party: a direct production manager, who was a candidate, declared that he did not want to be a party member.⁴⁹¹

The party organizations were apparently aware of the “difficult political situation” and the decreasing appeal of the party membership. The executive committee of Rába MMG openly spoke of interest in relation to the membership and he recommended that the party should make the membership attractive to people, which implied that it was not attractive enough. The membership of the party organization of Rába MMG decreased by 20% between 1979 and 1983. “The party members are the same people as everybody else. The individuals always have an interest and if we want to increase the attraction of the party, we should tell people where it brings advantages. We have to be ‘cunning’ to win the new party members. We have to make the party attractive to the individuals and the collective”.⁴⁹² One member of the executive committee proposed it be more lenient with its requirements: “Besides showing to the individuals that their interest and ambition can be realized in the party, we could increase the attraction of the membership if we accepted the party members together with all their faults and lapses on condition that they do not violate the party regulation [...] It is very dangerous what natural selection means. It means the reduction of the party membership. We can afford it only if there are sufficient new

⁴⁹⁰ A párttagok körében végzett politikai nevelőmunka és a párttagokkal való foglalkozás tapasztalatai, op. cit., 5.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹² A párttaggá nevelés és a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a Rába MMG-ben, op. cit., 5.

candidates”.⁴⁹³ Other speakers openly admitted that this was not the case. The members complained that it was difficult to win over working-class youth for the party: “We had a negative experience with the political education of the young skilled workers. They do not know the basic concepts and it is very difficult to involve them in political work. We experience an increasing materialism. Young people are unwilling to undertake a task that has no financial benefit. They find their wages too low and then they run to their second workplace where they would undertake any work. They need more money because they established a family, started building a house, etc.”⁴⁹⁴ It was also reported from MVG that people thought that a young couple has to work so much to establish their life that they hardly have time to undertake social and political tasks.⁴⁹⁵ In 1987 the party members in Rába MMG criticized that youth is passive, they don’t feel the honor of work, and the materialistic attitude is developed already in primary school.⁴⁹⁶

The members of party committees usually explained the withdrawal of youth through increasing materialism. There is some evidence, though, that it was not the only, nor the most important reason; it indicated the declining prestige of the membership and political work. A report of the influence of KISZ in Győr frankly stated that young people were “in general not indifferent; they are interested in the issues that directly influence their life. Passivity means a distance from the official organizations”.⁴⁹⁷ In 1987 the party committee of Rába MMG reported a radical decline of the interest in the mass organizations. Only 12,4% of the youth of the factory (below 30) were members of KISZ, whose membership had decreased by more than 50% since 1985: “The figures show the

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 5

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹⁵ Jelentés a KISZ munkájáról, op. cit. In 1984, the workers said that a flat cost 10-15 time more than their annual income. GYML, X. 415/533/30, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Futómű Pártvezetőségétől, 1984. szeptember.

⁴⁹⁶ GYML, X. 415/529/14/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Jelentés a gyár ifjúsága társadalmi helyzetének javítására tett intézkedésekről. 1987. november 19.

⁴⁹⁷ Jelentés a KISZ munkájáról, op. cit.

indifference and the lack of interest of the youth and the continued decline of the influence of KISZ”.⁴⁹⁸ Since KISZ was the youth organization of the party, its decreasing membership indicated the problem of the new enrolments.

Given the closeness of prosperous, capitalist Austria, it was very difficult to argue that socialism offered a higher standard of living to its subjects, than did capitalism. One member of the executive committee of Rába MMG mentioned the cases of two party leaders in Mosonmagyaróvár, who emigrated to the West.⁴⁹⁹ There is some evidence that the reformers’ news of the bad economic situation of the country confused part of the grass-roots membership: “We were very surprised to hear the justification of the increase of the price of petrol (22 April, *Hírháttér - Behind the news*). For years we have told to people that one should not compare the Western prices with ours because it gives an unrealistic picture. Now the chairman of the price office does this on TV. What can we say to the argument that ‘we have to increase the price of petrol because it costs 10 schilling in Austria, which is 22 Ft’? If we take this into account, an Austrian worker can buy 1000 liters of petrol from his wage while his Hungarian counterpart can buy only 200 liters. Why should one make such comparisons? After this how can we argue that the prices are incomparable? People understand that the prices will increase but they don’t want to be treated as fools. It is more and more difficult to make a living with honest work!”⁵⁰⁰ Rába MMG reported that the Austrian standard of living was envied by workers: “The more courageous (and the least informed) even question the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism. These arguments are supported by the transitional economic difficulties. Because of the deficiencies of our propaganda, they do not judge the situation according to the decisive role of socialist property, the power of the proletariat, and social redistribution.

⁴⁹⁸ Jelentés a gyár ifjúsága társadalmi helyzetének javítására tett intézkedésekről, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁹ A párttaggá nevelés és a pártépítő munka tapasztalatai a Rába MMG-ben, op. cit.

⁵⁰⁰ GYML, X. 415/234, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák. 1986. december.

The overrating of the economic and technological achievements of capitalism renders it more difficult to realistically evaluate our situation”.⁵⁰¹

In the second half of the 1980s the decline of the regime evidently accelerated; in the various reports both the economic and social problems received an ever greater emphasis. The reasons of the declining social support of the party and the government were well summarized in the county report of 1986: “The decrease of the real wages of the workers and the employees increases the sensitivity of the population. They frequently mention the social injustices, which seem to be known to everybody and still nothing happens. There are opinions that the dependence of the employees becomes stronger and the will of a narrow stratum (those with property) is realized. Moral judgment does not correspond to the rules of law and private business and incomes are uncontrollable. There is ever decreasing number of people who have the moral right to call anybody to account”.⁵⁰² More and more people demanded the punishment of the responsible leaders, which showed the declining authority of the party: “Our economic problems should be discussed more frankly. People want to know who got the country into this situation. The leadership is largely to be blame for this. Why don’t they take the responsibility? There is much cunning in this country, ever more people are making illegal profits. How long will it go on like this? There is much expectation for the program of the government but people would like to hear a clear speech. Not that one leader says this and the other leader says that”.⁵⁰³ The lack of confidence in the leadership manifested itself in many other information reports: “Our employees are displeased with the fact that the leaders relieve themselves from the responsibility referring to the unpredictably and unfavorably changed

⁵⁰¹ GYML, X. 415/529/2/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A Mosonmagyaróvári Mezőgazdasági Gépgyár (MMG) pártbizottsági ülésének jegyzőkönyve. Az ideológiai munka és az agit. prop. feladatai, 2. 1985. július 16.

⁵⁰² GYML, X. 415/232/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák. 1986. november.

⁵⁰³ GYML, X. 415/538/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Motor Pártalapszervezettől. 1987. április.

circumstances. Comrade Gáspár admitted in his recent TV-speech that the leadership was not always truthful to the public. Many people ask: how can we believe the official declarations after this? The mood of our employees is not optimistic, to put it mildly. They do not see the beginning of the real development and they say that they are afraid of the future. Neither can the leadership guarantee the success of the development”.⁵⁰⁴ The workers of the Gear Unit doubted that the leadership that let the conditions deteriorate to this point, would be able to make a tangible progress.⁵⁰⁵ These were not sporadic manifestations of social discontent; according to a county report of 1987 the process of disintegration irresistibly continued, and the party possessed an ever decreasing authority while distrust in the government increased: “Even though the population understood the decrease of the standard of living from the planned increases of the prices, in practice they refuse to accept it. The concrete announcements receive negative comments and the drastic increase of the prices of some products triggers repulsion. People think that the 15% increase of the prices is too high as compared to the strict regulation of the wages. The permanent increase of the prices tested the patience of people in the last two-three months. There is no trust because the government did not do anything against the uncontrollable increase of the prices. People are afraid that it triggers a spiral of inflation, which renders it impossible to plan the future. Some people believe that since the acceptance of the September program of the government there have been no substantial results. [...] The decrease of the real wages of the workers and employees increases the sensitivity of the population. People more frequently mention the social injustices, which everybody knows but there are no efficient measures against them, for instance getting income without work.

⁵⁰⁴ GYML, X. 415/538/3, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Szerszámgépgyár Pártalapszervezetétől. 1987. szeptember.

⁵⁰⁵ GYML, X. 415/538/6, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. Információs jelentés a Futómű Pártvezetőségétől. 1987. május.

Some people think that people are becoming more dependent, the will of a small minority (the wealthy) is enforced, and the incomes in the private sector are uncontrollable”.⁵⁰⁶

The diminished appeal of the party was manifest in statistics, too. In 1987 – for the first time in the examined period – the enrolments failed to balance the reduction of the membership, and the party membership decreased by 1,3% in the country. The decreasing trend could be observed in the county, too: on 1 January 1988 the membership numbered 31,862 people - 445 people less than one year before. Those, who resigned their membership, were more willing to give their political discontent as a reason. In 1986, it was only three people in the county who justified their withdrawal with political reasons while in 1987 thirty-five people said that they did not agree with the policy of the party.⁵⁰⁷ The number of people who resigned their membership also showed an increasing trend: in 1985, 192 people withdrew from the party, in 1986, 241 and in 1987, 504 (half of them workers).⁵⁰⁸ In the beginning of 1988, discussions with party members revealed that many of them thought that the leading role and the authority of the party weakened and so did public confidence in it. It was a general opinion that the party failed to call to account the leaders who were responsible for bad decisions and that the development was slow. The grass-roots members expected more personal changes. But the most important criticism was that the leading role of the party was only manifest in the possession of power, it slowly reacted to the changes and lacked initiative: “They see the weakening of the leading role of the party in the decrease of the trust in the party leadership, the declining authority of the local party organs, the insulting comments of people who are not members of the party and the difficulties of the party building. Party members think that the failure to explain the economic and social processes of the past years confused the membership and

⁵⁰⁶ A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák, Sopron, 1987. december, op. cit.

⁵⁰⁷ Szóbeli tájékoztató az 1987. évi tagfelvételek alakulásáról a Megyei Párt-végrehajtó Bizottság 1983. december 13-i határozata alapján, op. cit.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

hindered their emotional identification with the party. The difference between the taught concept of socialism and today's reality causes a conflict to part of the membership."⁵⁰⁹ From 1987 the "value" of arty membership radically deflated. In 1985 the industry of the county admitted 350 new members; in 1988 the increase was only 124. The loss of the membership of the county significantly exceeded that of the previous year with the withdrawal of 2,051 people. Thus, the number of those who resigned the membership quadrupled in one year.⁵¹⁰ In the first three quarters of 1989, 2,372 people resigned their membership in the county, and 542 gave the reason that they did not agree with the policy of the party. In Győr 1,194 people withdrew from the party and 241 for political disagreement. In Sopron, these numbers were 598 and 156 respectively.⁵¹¹

According to party reports the economic policy of the reformers failed to win popularity; in fact, the population identified reform with increasing restriction. The discussions with grass-roots party members concluded that the conflict between its reformist and conservative wings impacted negatively on the political mood of the membership: a significant number of them were skeptical about the economic policy of the party and their future prospects: "In the past quarter of the year public opinion deteriorated to an unprecedented degree for the regime. The more hopeful mood after the national party meeting quickly disappeared because the execution of the former decisions had no palpable impact on the economy (change of production profile, the improvement of the balance). The population felt that the distance between ideas and practice was increasing. From the government program only the decline of the standard of living, the price increases, the taxation and the inflation were realized. The majority of people identify reform with these

⁵⁰⁹ GYML, X. 415/220/4, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A párttagkönyvcserével kapcsolatos elbeszélgetések tapasztalatai. 1988. március 28.

⁵¹⁰ GYML, X. 415/238, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Párttagság összetétele 1988. decemberi állapot szerint.

⁵¹¹ GYML, X. 415/238, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. Háromnegyedévi összesítők 1989.

negative phenomena. They think that instead of stabilization, only social injustice and tension is increasing, which approaches a crisis. This lack of any prospects irritates people and it increases their insecurity. Apart from the lack of economic prospects, the government, unfortunately, broke its past promises and took contradictory measures with which it generated inflation and lost the confidence of people. The loss of trust did not spare the party either because it seems that the economic reform was driven to a political level and now the people blame the party for the lack of perspective”.⁵¹² The report from Sopron also argued the case that the old leadership lost credibility and social support: “Party members ask: how does the government want to realize this ambitious program if it loses the trust of the membership? We are frequently told what we have done wrong but the reasons are not discussed. It is not the working class to be blame. They have been working hard up to now. It is not their fault that they produced non-marketable goods, there was no structural change and a large part of the budget was spent on the subvention of state enterprises! Did not we have scholars, economists and respected experts, who could have called attention to the problems? And if they did, why did their opinions receive no consideration? Is it not the party or the government or both to be blame in the first place?”⁵¹³

An even more important question was how the grass-roots members responded to the announced reform of the party and its call to democratize. Few base cell materials survived from this period, but they suggest that the majority of the population did not comprehend the accelerated political crisis of the regime. The system of democratic centralism was criticized but at that time the reform of the party was not linked with the reform of the whole political system: “People expect a change in the work style of the

⁵¹² GYML, X. 415/234/3, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága. Apparátus iratai. A lakossági közhangulatot jellemző főbb tendenciák. 1988. szeptember.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

party that would testify to a more direct knowledge and representation of the problems of simple people, strengthen their security and trust in the party. Many people think that the present political system does not even represent the democratic values that could be realized within the framework of this system”.⁵¹⁴ The demand to democratize the party rapidly developed into a more radical demand to increase political participation of the whole of society. In the political debates of how to transform the political system the intellectuals were the main actors. Even though some voices can be documented in the period that spoke of the necessity of the workers’ political representation in the new system, it seems that the majority of the population was unprepared for the rapid and radical political change to come. Among the few documents that expressed concern about the future role of the working class, one can mention the discussion of the reform of the political system among the base organizations of MVG. The party organization of the Industrial Tool Factory did indeed anticipate a situation in which the social decline of the working class became inevitable: “We do not see unambiguously if the legalized multi-party system means a real economic opportunity for every Hungarian citizen or it gives an opportunity for a very extreme situation: impoverished workers or unemployed on the one hand, and rich proprietors, bankers, speculators, etc. on the other hand. The rightful claims of the decent citizens of the Hungarian nation, including the right to work, should be fully considered because if not, for long chaos and not decent, productive work will be characteristic of the Hungarian economy”.⁵¹⁵ From the New Foundry the following was reported: “Life has created the conditions for the change of property relations and the establishment of the plurality of the parties. This does not depend on the will or objection of the people’s democracy. [...] The mixed property relations already exist; this is no

⁵¹⁴ GYML, X. 415/526/3/1, MSZMP Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyári Bizottságának anyagai. A politikai nevelőmunka tapasztalatai, az agitáció, propaganda és tájékoztatás fejlesztésének feladatai. 1988. február 2.

⁵¹⁵ GyML, X. 415/526/4/3, AZ MVG Pártbizottságának iratai. Pártbizottsági ülés jegyzőkönyve. Állásfoglalás az MSZMP KB 1989. február 10-11-i, 'A politikai rendszer reformjának néhány időszzerű kérdéséről szóló állásfoglalás' tervezetéről, 3. 1988. március 2.

longer a political question. The functioning of the system can still be, however, determined".⁵¹⁶ Another party organization argued that the party had to initiate a substantial renewal otherwise people would desert the party in the election.⁵¹⁷

On the basis of the surviving documents it is difficult to say what kind of social and political alternatives were discussed among the workers. The opinion that there was a need for the political representation of working-class interests in the new system was voiced in the county conference of the party on 10 June 1989, which was held in the congress hall of MVG. The contribution is interesting not only because the speaker criticized increasing populism and the practice of formulating demands in the "name of the working class" without considering their real interests but also because it shows that there were supporters of democratic socialism among the workers, who demanded a political change but considered it equally important to ensure the social rights of people: "Today in this country uninvited speakers agitate, act and demand in the name of the working class and the nation. I am a worker. In my place no one should make declarations, let alone demands. It would be good if people understood that in the past forty years we have learnt to think and work for ourselves, and not robots but thinking people stand by the machines. And one more thing: we learnt to appreciate and respect the intellectuals who serve social progress with their work and knowledge and they recognize us, workers as partners in their work. It does not move me if someone declares himself to be pro-labor even if he has a leading position. According to us a leader is pro-labor if he demands work from everybody, provides for decent conditions and performs his task in the market. The workers want no favors but work and livelihood [...] I would like to mention how the Minister of Finance explained the restrictions: 'The achievement of the country has not increased!' Whose achievement has not increased? That of the workers, the institutions, the budget or the whole of society

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

within the existing bad structure? I think the latter is true and we should not blame each other. Because it is not a good perspective that if something is good, we did it and there are plenty of applicants and if something is wrong, then we blame the executors, mainly the workers and the peasants. What kind of society do we want? Democratic. Socialist. I think that we want a society where everybody receives a fair share of the reward from what he produced. We want a society where a worker receives a real share of the political power that he deserves on the basis of his work. For us the socialist direction means a development built on communal democracy. It is incomprehensible to me that some smart, nationally recognized politicians, who declare themselves to be reformers, do not even dare to speak of socialism as a possible way of development. We, however, think that this is the real reform task. We would like to participate in its realization, in our own way - of course, only if the party also accepts and does not reject us”.⁵¹⁸ It is remarkable that the speaker spoke of a possibility of a reformed party finding a new social basis that was not the working class (and in the original text a strong expression is used for being rejected). This shows that the workers who did not give up socialist demands felt that the first cracks appeared between the party and the working class.

While the quoted contribution shows that there existed a leftist critique of the existing system among the workers, we do not know how many people shared these ideas, or whether they were known to the grass-roots membership. The “hard facts” (the massive decrease of the membership), however, show that the general political mood was not pro-socialist. Even though there was a political move to attack the regime in the name of the working class, it was, nevertheless, true that the regime was not popular among the workers, which was also recognized by the manager of Rába in the quoted interview that

⁵¹⁸ GyML, X. 415/226/1, MSZMP Győr-Sopron Megyei Bizottsága iratai. Megyei Pártértekezlet anyaga, 6-7. 1989. június 10. Rába MVG Kongresszusi terem. The conference was held in the Congress Hall of the factory.

he gave in the summer of 1989.⁵¹⁹ In the interview the manager admitted that the workers had a good reason to feel deceived because many of the regime's promises (including socialist proprietorship) remained unfulfilled. It was perhaps symbolic that the interview was published on the same page as the readers' answers to the timely question of "*Would you call the capitalists back?*". We do not know the occupation of the respondents but the following answer did not differ much from the arguments of the information reports and the manager about the reasons of the bad political climate for the regime: "If one provides for the workers the same way as Zwack promised on TV, he can come tomorrow. Many Hungarians have been in the West, everybody can see the standard of living and social security there even if there is unemployment. I have read somewhere that the labor movement achieved real results precisely in the capitalist countries. And I don't think that the defense of the workers' interests would be only demagogy on behalf of the capitalists".⁵²⁰

It is a theoretical question why a leftist alternative failed to attract the majority of the working class. In the light of the information reports it can be argued that it reflected a deeply rooted dissatisfaction with socialism, the signs of which were visible throughout the 1980s. The party's policy towards the working class, which was strongly propagated after the economic reform of 1968, failed to achieve real results, and in the 1980s the party made no more attempt to fill the socialist ideology with a new content. Even the term "working class" disappeared from the rhetoric of the party. As it is evident from their mounting social discontent, workers believed that they had to pay the price of the wrong economic policy while those who worked in the private sector enjoyed a much higher standard of living than did the working class. The party and its ideology thus increasingly

⁵¹⁹ 'Beszélgetés Horváth Edével, a Rába MVG vezérigazgatójával', op. cit.

⁵²⁰ 'Visszahívna a kapitalistákat?', *Tér-kép*, 1989. június 1.

lost the support of the workers: as the abundant criticisms show, people were conscious of the political decline of the regime.

This political climate was not very favorable for socialist alternatives. It can be, at any rate, doubted that alternative concepts (such as self-management) were known to the majority of the workers. The failure of the party to respond to the political criticism of the working class after the economic reform of 1968 deprived people of further illusions: the improvement of enterprise democracy was limited to theoretical discussions, which could do little to challenge established power relations in the factory. In the light of the information reports, the party “successfully” discredited the socialist ideology in the eyes of many people. It was therefore unrealistic to expect that they would have been responsive to a new, leftist political program. In the era of the first economic reform there may have been a chance to renew the social settlement between the working class and the party; in the 1980s none of the two parties demonstrated a willingness to re-start the dialogue.

WORKERS IN THE HONECKER ERA



Figure 5. The South Works of VEB Carl Zeiss Jena

5. Reform and Retreat

“What do we get out of socialism?”

In August 1968 the party committee of the district of Gera⁵²¹ received the following report on the political mood of the population: “The agitators’ discussions brought to light several theoretical problems that revealed that people could not yet fully comprehend a number of fundamentals. This is supported by the following: First, expressions of doubt about the increasing strength of the socialist world system and the change of power relations in favor of socialism at the global level; Second, inadequate knowledge of the complexity and intensification of the class struggle between socialism and imperialism; Third, comparisons between the principle of socialist internationalism and the concept of bourgeois sovereignty”.⁵²² The analysis of the “efficiency of our ideological work and people’s understanding of the basic questions of our development” was even more critical of the political climate: “In this respect the workers said that in the GDR other strata such as the artisans, the self-employed, the private traders and part of the intelligentsia are privileged and they have a higher standard of living than the workers. Many workers put the straightforward question: *‘what do we get from socialism?’* *The workers have to be on overtime in order to decrease the losses that resulted from the wrong decisions of leading cadres. We frequently hear the argument (mainly from women): the decisive question is how we live today.*⁵²³ People criticize poor provision with consumers’ goods, for instance,

⁵²¹ In 1952 the former structure of provinces (Länder) was dissolved, and instead of them, districts were formed. Jena belonged to the district of Gera.

⁵²² Thüringisches Staatsarchiv (ThStA) Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/9/1/550, Material zur Einschätzung der politischen-ideologischen Situation unter der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Gera, 2 August 1968.

⁵²³ Stress is mine.

with children's clothes, women's clothes and women's underwear; poor supply of several food products; the prices of industrial products are too high; we export too much, for instance, we export of carpets while there are not any in our shops. Discontent is widespread among the workers because there was a lot of overtime work (extra shifts, weekend work, etc.) in the second half of last year and this year, too. 'This won't solve the great tasks; it is always at the expense of the workers. How does the weekend work help us when we don't do anything during the week, or on Monday because there is no more material? We should stop talking about the five-day week and make a new law instead that one should work 60 hours in a week, and then the workers will do that'. 'We work overtime in order to fulfill the plans and the state leaders will spoil things again with their bad management. When the managers want us to do overtime, they come to the shop-floor and talk with us; otherwise we hardly get any information from them. We get the allocated task from above, no-one asks for our opinions'. 'If one wants to give a professional contribution, one needs to be familiar with the materials. We don't have time for that. We discuss the tasks of our brigades or departments but apart from this, we hardly discuss anything else'.⁵²⁴

In comparison with the Hungarian sources from the era of the 1968 economic reform, the document did not contain any radical criticism of the existing system. The ideological climate of the two countries, however, strikingly differed: in the light of the East German party jargon, which strictly sought to follow the party line, the criticism of the quoted report was unusually sharp. The report was written in 1968, the heyday of the new economic system, and, just as in the Hungarian case, this criticism was undoubtedly motivated by disagreement between hardliners, and supporters of the reform. The economic upheaval of the last years of the NES reinforced concerns about the reaction of

⁵²⁴ Material zur Einschätzung der politischen-ideologischen Situation unter der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Gera, op. cit.

the working class; this largely explains the remarkably open criticism, which was reported to the higher political bodies.

Since Carl Zeiss was in many aspects an “experimental field” of the new economic system, and it was also an important export firm, it strongly felt the effects of the reform, many of which resulted from inconsistencies between the subsequent phases of the NES. The reform started as the “new economic system of planning and management”, and Gallerach, first as deputy-in-chief, and from 1966, the chief manager of Zeiss, set out to implement this policy in the enterprise. The economic troubles, which affected the whole of the GDR in the last years of the NES, hit Zeiss particularly hard: the enterprise repeatedly could not fulfill the plans, there were huge arrears of orders, investments were not finished, and the enterprise accumulated huge debts. Even though many of these problems resulted from the structural inconsistencies of the NES, they undermined Gallerach’s authority, who permanently received criticism from higher party organs in this period. In addition, in the light of the local sources the middle management, who belonged to the old guard of Zeiss, also questioned the managing director’s professional competence, who in response accused them of holding backward views and being attached to outdated methods. Gallerach’s position turned out to be shaky with the retreat of the reform: eventually, he was relieved of his post after Ulbricht’s resignation. There is some sad irony in the fact that he was criticized not for his economic achievement but for “disregarding the leading role of the party”, which was manifest in his “neglect of political work”. This rhetoric was, however, characteristic of the general attack on reform.

This chapter examines the reception of the “new system of management” among the managers and the workers of the enterprise in the last critical years of the NES. This period is all the more interesting because – contrary to the situation in Hungary, in which the ideological hardening of the early 1970s was followed by a relatively open discussion

of economic and social problems during the 1980s – the sources of the Honecker era, at least in the light of the local (district and factory) party documents, tell us very little about everyday life and working-class attitudes. In this sense, Gallerach can be correctly termed a liberal for, while he tolerated attacks that undermined his managerial authority, the same could not be said of Biermann, whom nobody dared attack. The information report quoted at the beginning of this chapter– which had an almost revolutionary tone in comparison with later sources – undoubtedly reflected internal party disputes, but it also revealed that at that time the local party organs were sincerely interested in working-class opinions about party policy, and they even attempted to engage them in a dialogue. Even more importantly, it seems that some of the workers accepted the party as a conversation partner: it was evidently workers who made the quoted comments, and not party functionaries. The reform period was, however, the last time when the party demonstrated a genuine concern for its loss of working-class support. The Honecker regime did not even make an attempt to treat people as equal conversation partners: local party materials contented themselves with echoing official propaganda. The fall of Ulbricht’s reform therefore ended the limited dialogue between the party and the East German workers.

Ideology and management: The lot of a socialist manager was not a happy one

The NES was a difficult period in the history of Zeiss: on the one hand, large investment projects were initiated, and more and more plants were integrated into the enterprise; on the other hand, however, many of the new investments were not finished in time, the enterprise accumulated huge export arrears, and it had great financial difficulties. Even though many of these problems were the product of structural economic problems

beyond Gallerach's control, the manager was frequently attacked, especially after 1968, when he had to reckon with both the weakening position of the reformers and the economic problems that his enterprise caused to the national economy, given its repeated under-fulfillment of its plan. Gallerach tolerated criticism, and this ability served him well because the middle management of the enterprise was not enthusiastic about the ambitious investments and new methods. They were, at any rate, discontented with the "outsider" manager (contrary to his predecessor, Gallerach was not an old Zeissianer), and they were ready to see him as the chief scapegoat for the unreasonable projects and the economic problems that resulted from the contradictions of reform. Gallerach was conscious of the conflict because on his part, he frequently and publicly criticized the old management of the enterprise for their failure to understand and apply the principles of new economic management in their fields. On the "Day of the Socialist Leader" (*Tag des sozialistischen Leiters*) – one year before he himself had to exercise self-criticism – Gallerach argued that the managers of VEB⁵²⁵ Carl Zeiss Jena had no reason to be self-satisfied, let alone conceited: "There are managers even among our colleagues, who accustomed themselves to passivity, and they examine every question of our development from the perspective of an observer. We don't need observers and yes-men here, but we need active combatants".⁵²⁶ It was perhaps an achievement of the NES that criticism could be expressed in public, because otherwise it was not customary to trouble people with problems, especially on an official holiday. The conflict between Gallerach, and the old guard among management was, however, very real one, as one month later the chief manager again laid into the old-fashioned methods and the lack of initiative of much of management in front of the factory party committee: "Today's most important problem is the elimination of deficiencies in the organization of production in our enterprise. I think

⁵²⁵ VEB=Volkseigener Betrieb (state-owned enterprise).

⁵²⁶ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/255, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL (Industriekreisleitung) Zeiss, Tag des sozialistischen Leiters, 16 Oktober 1968.

that the greatest obstacle to this is self-satisfaction and managers' attachment to traditional, outdated methods. We need to pay more attention to the education of managers. In the factory I experience signs of resignation among part of the management. We need to treat this question as a political one. A manager needs socialist education, if he wants to educate others".⁵²⁷ East German leaders deployed a more militaristic rhetoric than the Hungarians even in the reform era; nevertheless, despite the rhetoric, the chief manager was not very successful in winning over the old guard for his new economic management style. More importantly, there was no sign that he had any effect on patterns of promotion, which suggests that managerial practice was more lenient than the rhetoric.

In the reform era even East German party jargon, which conformed to ideological requirements, sometimes turned into self-parody. Gallerach failed to give a more concrete description of how socialist managers had to be educated, but one year later when the problems of production again had to be discussed in a factory party leadership meeting, Gallerach's complaint suggested that he himself felt he should go on a shortened course⁵²⁸: "Even comrade Gallerach said that he was disappointed with the results and he listed several examples in order to prove that the under-fulfillment of the plan was primarily due to political factors. 'There is no discipline in the instrument plant, the managers do what they want, they permanently disregard the plan, the direct production managers and shop managers are making their own plans (I can prove it with a number of concrete examples), of which the majority of the workers are not informed. In addition, shift work is unsolved, and the management of the plant has not dealt with the E-system⁵²⁹ for a year'. Comrade Gallerach finished his speech with the argument that there were problems with the political

⁵²⁷ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/255, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 12 November 1968.

⁵²⁸ Concerning the problems of management see: Peter Hübner, 'Durch Planung zur Improvisation: Zur Geschichte des Leitungspersonals in der staatlichen Industrie der DDR', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), 197-233.

⁵²⁹ Electric data system.

stance of officials in the instrument plant, and they needed to be critically evaluated”.⁵³⁰ The managing director attempted to shift responsibility (and work) to the party organization as far as was possible, which was diplomatically commented by the first secretary of the party organization of the factory: “We have to start from the present situation and consider how we can show ourselves worthy of the confidence of our comrade Walter Ulbricht. We have to educate our managers so that they become fully conscious of what is at stake. Since they are not hard enough on themselves, they cannot educate the collective in state discipline”.⁵³¹ Another member of the leadership pointed out that the socialist work contest lacked “fighting spirit” because the evaluation of the results of January was published only in June.⁵³² It seems that not only production, but officials also could not fulfill their plan targets.

However comical these reports may sound today, there were real production and financial problems in the background, for which both sides of the dispute blamed the other. Even though the enterprise attempted to depict a rosy picture of the situation, one did not need to read between the lines in order to find criticism. In 1968, for instance, it was reported that the enterprise “largely” fulfilled the plan but the financial manager owed this more to the unselfish work and overtime of the employees, than to the management. That having been said, the report admitted that despite every effort, the enterprise could not fulfill the plan, which was explained primarily by the following reasons: “It has been a problem for years that the methods of the direct production managers are outdated and they need a fundamental revision. It is alarming that in some fields the managers lacked a clear overview of the whole production process as late as in December. In 1968 there was a further decline in the quantity of production causing a loss of 20 millions Marks. The

⁵³⁰ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-4/13/79, IKL-Sitzung, 15 and 18 August 1969.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, Nr. IV B-4/13/79, Protokoll der IKL-Sitzung, 15 und 18 August 1969.

results of plan fulfillment in December show that we can save a lot of money and reduce overtime with better organization of labor, so we must definitely improve co-operation between the different plants. In many places there are obstacles to the introduction of innovations; this is shown by the fact that the number of our instruments that bear the trade mark Q has decreased from 338 to 301". In addition, the report argued that employees had different attitudes to the fulfillment of the plan, and that the continuous overwork of the past three months tested the patience of workers; therefore their political mood was not good: "On the one hand, there are those who are determined to fight for the plan; on the other hand, we can hear several doubts and complaints". Concerning the mounting discontent among the workers, the report considered it necessary to mention that the management would increase the wages of those in the 4 to the 7th wage groups and also those of the direct production managers in 1969.⁵³³

This, of course, did not mean the end of the affair. The management of the enterprise was compelled to give an explanation to the district party committee of the district for Zeiss's persistently poor plan fulfillment. The supervisory committee – not surprisingly – blamed middle management for the failure: "The ideological reasons lie primarily in the missing political and professional qualifications and the weak fighting spirit of middle management, who fail to recognize their responsibility for the political education of the collective and they content themselves with the management of the technological-economic processes only. This is manifest in the deficiencies of socialist democracy, the lack of commitment in problem-solving, the adoption of a passive attitude and the toleration of mediocrity, self-satisfaction and conceit. Many employees think that they only have to wait and see. This attitude results from the failure of the management to put the resolutions of the party into practice creatively, because they have not yet fully

⁵³³ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/3/269, Referat des ökonomischen Direktors des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, 17 Januar 1969.

understood our structural policy and they don't trust enough in the working ability of the Zeiss-collective".⁵³⁴ The factory party organization, was, however, opposed to further testing peoples' patience because the report of the following month took the side of the employees, including management, stressing that they did everything they could to fulfill the plan (which implied that they could not be expected to work more without additional pay): "We invested much in the improvement of political-ideological work in our enterprise, which helped our employees better understand and apply the principle of the unity of politics and the economy. This manifested itself in the willingness of the workers to sacrifice their individual interests for the interests of the collective, and they did everything in order to realize the 1968 plan, as well as to fulfill the pre-requisites for the successful realization of the 1969 plan. We could not, however, achieve this difficult goal, despite the outstanding performance of our employees. Even though we had good enterprise results, there are a huge number of unmet orders, the production of articles that are in demand, etc.".⁵³⁵

The "battle" was fought at the level of ideology, rather than at the front of production, and despite its military rhetoric, the party in fact took care not to anger the workers too much. The factory party leadership energetically objected to the polite hint that the Zeiss-collective was capable of higher performance; they immediately pointed out that people had already gone to their limits, and it was not their fault that the plan could not have been fulfilled. This situation did not change during the last years of Gallerach's management, and neither did the rhetoric of the party. In 1970, the following problems

⁵³⁴ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/79, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Bericht der IKL VEB Carl Zeiss JENA über Probleme der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit und der Erziehung der Leiter bei der Gestaltung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus als Ganzes, 30 Januar 1969.

⁵³⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/84, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Bericht der IKL VEB Carl Zeiss JENA über Probleme der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit und der Erziehung der Leiter bei der Gestaltung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus als Ganzes sowie Schlussfolgerungen für die Führungstätigkeit der IKL zur kontinuierlichen Erfüllung des Volkswirtschaftsplans 1969, 27 Februar 1969.

were singled out, which show that Gallerach was not in an enviable situation during this period: “The main obstacle to the fulfillment of the 1970 plan is the continual production stoppages, and because of that we cannot fulfill the export plan in time. Today the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena is one of the largest debtors among the enterprises of the people’s economy, which causes sensitive losses both to the people’s economy of the republic and to other socialist countries. It is true that by 31st March 1970 we over-fulfilled industrial production by 4 million Marks but there are significant arrears of exports, and the enterprise cannot fulfill all of its orders by the given deadline. In sum, we have to conclude that our war plan, to make up arrears of the plan, has not been realized. Our political-ideological work, from the managing director down, is targeted at the following problems, which hinder the realization of the program: the fight against outdated methods and the comfort of mediocrity; mistakes that are characteristic of many managers who are unable to identify themselves with the objectives. They explain everything by ‘objective’ difficulties and they always look for excuses for why a given task cannot be solved instead of pondering how they can mobilize every reserve for the solution of the problem, using purposeful information and education of the employees. Another problem is that part of the managers narrow-mindedly deal with their small fields only and they don’t have an overview of the whole production process. Because of this, the individual plants often only shift the responsibility for the delay to each other”.⁵³⁶ Since the consultation with the party organs was chiefly limited to the repetition of the same phrases, it is at best doubtful how it helped Gallerach in his fight to introduce the principles of the new economic management into the factory.

The above, ‘friendly’ reprimand was already a sign of the declining authority of the managing director, which was further undermined by the failure of the enterprise to

⁵³⁶ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/269, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 16 April 1970.

execute a project for delivery to the Soviet Union by the deadline. The affair forced Gallerach to give a self-critical speech in front of the district party leadership: “We have done significant damage to the Soviet Union because we could not find a satisfactory solution to the problem of the E-system. The GDR has always distinguished itself as a reliable partner of the Soviet Union. Our behavior undermined this confidence, seriously threatening the reputation of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in the Soviet Union. We have to admit that we underestimated the difficulty of the task, we badly managed the project, and we failed to mobilize the resources of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in order to solve this problem”.⁵³⁷ Gallerach and the first secretary of the factory party organization established a routine of diplomatically reporting bad news because the enterprise, as had been already predicted, failed to fulfill its 1970 plan: “Even though the base organizations have their own action plans, in many places we lack clear analysis and a fighting spirit. We decided to fulfill the tasks by the end of the year. Meanwhile it clearly turned out that we cannot meet the export targets and cut production costs. The managers explain many problems through external factors and they talk much less of the tasks that need to be solved within the enterprise such as shift work, the improvement of labor productivity, etc. The common battle program of the IKL⁵³⁸ and the top management helped us achieve good results in the plants where the managers themselves took the lead and they honestly informed the employees of our real situation. Despite the measures we introduced, we could not, however, fulfill 50% of the annual plan in every field. We achieved 49,8% in industrial production, 40,7% in export, and the general enterprise result was 42,3%. The export arrears amount to 38,3 millions Marks”.⁵³⁹ The national leadership was concerned about

⁵³⁷ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/269, Kreisleitungssitzung, 22 Mai 1970.

⁵³⁸ IKL=Industriekreisleitung (the leadership of the party organization of the factory).

⁵³⁹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/3/150, Bericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss und des Generaldirektors des VEB Carl Zeiss über die Durchführung des Beschlusses des Politbüros

Zeiss's poor performance. A report at the end of the year expressed even stronger criticism than before, blaming the entire management of the enterprise for the repeated failures. It is also remarkable that the report stressed the responsibility of the top personnel, particularly when we take into account the fact that Gallerach's mission was to reform the management of the enterprise according to the principles of the NES: "The export plan was not fulfilled mainly because of the mistakes of management. These mistakes are the following: deficiencies in the professional qualifications of management, and their Marxist-Leninist organizational work; failure to realize democratic centralism; chaos in management, lax discipline, a lenient, and sometimes careless working style; formalism in the management of the socialist labor competition. Efforts to improve labor organization have not yet ensured continuous production. It takes too much time to solve problems, even with the help of electronic data processing. The result is that production stoppages alone caused losses of 50 millions Marks in the instrument plant. Why? The reasons are that they could not set the technical parameters that were negotiated with the Soviet partner; the central plants did not allow for sufficient capacity; there was not enough cooperation between the producers of the various optical components; we could not solve the material supply problems; the prefabricating and mounting plants performed very poorly (they under-fulfilled the plan by 550,000 hours). The labor plan was likewise not realized". In respect of the workers, it was reported that the construction at Göschwitz and automation significantly improved working conditions, but despite that, some of the workers – mainly women – refused to work more shifts, "which can be explained by objective reasons: there are not enough nurseries and kindergartens. Today we keep a record of 492 applications from women who would be willing to take up their work again in the enterprise if they

vom 26.5.1970. zu Problemen des Planungs- und Leistungstätigkeit im Zusammenhang mit der Durchführung des Volkswirtschaftsplanes 1969/1970 im VEB Carl Zeiss, 1 Oktober 1970.

could solve their child care problems”.⁵⁴⁰ The aspects of class struggle were not, however, forgotten even in this critical situation: the report stressed that all information was collected about the representation of the “West German pseudo-enterprise” Oberkochen at the Bucharest international fair”.⁵⁴¹

Despite the enterprise’s difficult situation, Gallerach might have received one more chance to “prove himself worthy” of the trust of the central party leadership, had it not been for the weakening of Ulbricht’s position, which strengthened the political attacks against him. At the beginning of 1971 the first secretary of the factory party organization sent a personal letter to the district party secretary, in which he criticized the political work of the managing director: “Today we have to face a number of ideological problems. In my judgment, the managers and colleagues of the departments of research, development and foreign trade even today do not understand that what we need here primarily is achievement and efficiency. The elections especially showed us that the employees do not have the fundamental information to engage with economic plans, and management were therefore unable to ensure that the VEB Carl Zeiss met the higher expectations that followed from the policy of the party”.⁵⁴² The district party secretary finished a speech he gave to the rest of the local party leadership in similar terms: “we have a number of base organizations, which are busy with production tasks only, while they forget about their actual task, the political leadership of the people”.⁵⁴³ This – at least in the light of the criticism that the chief manager received from the central party leadership⁵⁴⁴ - could have

⁵⁴⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/269, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 12 November 1970.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/283, Persönlicher Brief des 1. Sekretärs der IKL/SED des VEB Carl Zeiss JENA an den 1. Sekretär der BL (Bezirksleitung), 17 Februar 1971.

⁵⁴³ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/1/19, Protokoll der Bezirksleitungssitzung, Auswertung der 15. Tagung des ZK der SED. 1 Februar 1971.

⁵⁴⁴ He was likewise criticized for his disregard of the leading role of the party and his negligence of political work. Unternehmensarchiv der Carl Zeiss Jena GmbH, Jena (UACZ), VA Nr. 1231, Geschäftsbericht des VEB Carl Zeiss JENA für das Jahr 1970, quoted in: Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 215-216.

been addressed to Gallerach as well. The economic results of the enterprise were not better in 1971 than in the year before, so the first secretary of the IKL did not need to ponder much over his report: “Despite this positive development, we think that the factory – under the present conditions of efficiency and production capacity – cannot satisfy the demands of the people’s economy of the GDR for scientific instruments. We simply cannot meet the demands of the country as stipulated by the party for the period between 1971 and 1974, despite the fact that we have increased production of industrial goods because we have to make up export arrears and have to fulfill our earlier obligations. Our big problem is labor shortage: in 1971 we need 1708 full-time employees, mainly skilled workers and college graduates. The secretariat does everything in order to mobilize every reserve in the neighborhood, to win over new people and to decrease the present 4% of fluctuation to 2%. In addition, we are trying to make settling in the city attractive for the newcomers. We would like the city council to open more nurseries and kindergartens so that the VEB Carl Zeiss can fully exploit the local workforce”.⁵⁴⁵

Gallerach’s eventual removal was decided at a higher political level than the local party leadership because the enterprise belonged to the central administration of state industry. At the beginning of 1970 the Central Committee sent a commission to investigate the situation of the enterprise. Their report strongly criticized the managing director and it stated that the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena failed to fulfill its obligations to the party and the government, which vested the enterprise with tremendous responsibility.⁵⁴⁶ Linguistic creativity was not one of the strengths of East German party jargon; the charge that economic tasks took precedence over political work was part of the rhetoric of the generalized attack against the reformers. It is worth adding that in this respect the criticism

⁵⁴⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/3/283, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 10 März 1971.

⁵⁴⁶ Geschäftsbericht des VEB Carl Zeiss JENA für das Jahr 1970, op. cit.

of the district first secretary that he stated in public – namely, that several party organizations “forgot about” the political education of employees – clearly showed the conflicts within the party because no other negative phenomena in party life was ever mentioned in his later speeches.

Despite the fact that when we compare Gallerach’s statements with the situation in Hungary, one may harbor doubts as to his liberalism, his deeds often seem to contradict the military rhetoric, which shows that the reform era in the GDR was characterized by tension. Firstly, it is remarkable that despite the repeated failures, criticisms, and self-criticisms, there was no change in the people managing, neither were such proposals ever made in writing: the party organizations aimed to “re-educate” the managers who lacked the necessary combative spirit, rather than remove them. When the enterprise disappointed even its Soviet client, Gallerach admitted the failure in a self-critical speech, but the affair had no serious long-term consequences – the managing director was dismissed after Ulbricht’s resignation and not because of his professional mistakes. A similar point of tension could be seen in the complaint that the January results of the socialist labor competition were published in June only; if something like this could have happened under strict party discipline, then we have to assume that this discipline was not that strict at all. While the rhetoric of the party did not spare the management, the workers received totally different treatment: no-one blamed them for shortfall in production, on the contrary, the factory party organization took their side, increasing workers’ wages at a time when the Zeiss factory was at its least successful in fulfilling the plan. If we compare this with the fact that the reform had been originally launched with a wage freeze, we have to conclude that the party was forced to give significant material concessions to workers.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁷ On the wage policy of the GDR in the 1960s see: Hübner, *op. cit.*, 77-88.

The reform era can be therefore regarded as a period of experimentation. Even though we cannot speak of political liberalization, it is remarkable that discontent among the workers – and sometimes even the rather negative criticism of “actually existing” socialism - was sincerely reported to higher bodies. The question of “what do we get from socialism?” and the comments regarding the formal role of the workers in enterprise management (the lack of information about production plans and plan-related tasks) were, at any rate, not linked to the economic reform, and they revealed that there was more substantial and deep-rooted criticism of state socialism among the workers, than a concentration on their anger at shortages might suggest. It remains, of course, a theoretical question how far the reform – had it been continued – would have addressed these criticisms, or how far it would have engaged workers in decision-making. It was, at any rate, a merit of the reform era – particularly when compared to the “consolidated” Honecker regime - that these questions at least emerged, and there was a kind of dialogue between the party and the working class.

Planning the impossible? An investigation in the instrument plant

While the first part of this chapter examined the effects of reform on the factory management, the second part is an attempt to examine working-class attitudes during the period using the minute books of an investigation conducted in the instrument plant. It has to be admitted that there is not much information about the everyday lives of workers in the party documents of the period: the materials of the *Konfliktkommission*⁵⁴⁸ have been lost and letters of complaint⁵⁴⁹ that survived in large numbers mainly addressed the

⁵⁴⁸ Commission that mediated labor conflicts in the GDR.

⁵⁴⁹ Correspondence between the authorities and ordinary citizens constitute a very interesting type of source that offers insights into the everyday life of people. See, for instance, the collection: Ina Merkel (ed.), *Wir*

housing problem of the employees or the latter asked the managing director to alleviate their unbearable living conditions. A large number of factory party organization documents are simply statistical reports; from the 1970s onwards, these materials were not even transferred to the provincial archive. The surviving minute books of the 1969 investigation constitute a unique set of sources, because in complete contrast to other party materials from the period, they speak of the problems of the relationship between the party and the workers. The investigation was conducted by a commission that the party appointed to examine the situation in the instrument plant, which produced strikingly bad results. The managing director also criticized the poor performance of this plant in a speech in front of the factory party leadership.⁵⁵⁰

The members of the commission visited several departments and they talked with many people in different positions, from managers to workers. The minute books obviously give no information about the conditions in which the conversations were held; it is, however, remarkable that workers and grassroots party members furiously criticized their managers, whom they charged with incompetence and even with the deception of their superiors. It is interesting that by comparison contemporary party documents from Győr-Sopron county, on the contrary, reported that the workers were afraid to criticize managers because they thought that the party could not protect even those who made justified criticism from managerial retribution. According to the minute books, workers in the instrument plant were not afraid to criticize their superiors and the deficiencies that they experienced in terms of the organization of labor, which was all the more remarkable, because their criticism was targeted at precisely that system which tolerated such absurdities in the production. The inquiry in the turners' shop, for instance, concluded:

sind noch nicht die Meckerecke der Nation.' *Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2000).

⁵⁵⁰ Protokoll der IKL-Sitzung, 15 und 18 August 1969, *op.*, *cit.*

“The workers think that it is impossible to work properly under these conditions. The instructions are being changed from one day to the next, and they often completely contradict each other. The plan tasks do not at all correspond to the regular norms, which are always changed”.⁵⁵¹ Workers in the turners’ shop had a low opinion of their party leaders: “The APO-leaders⁵⁵² and the party groups summon people to regular meetings where they say nice things to us, but nothing happens afterwards. Nobody feels the fighting atmosphere that they speak so much about. Neither are the meetings of the party groups of a particularly high standard. At these meetings officials and the state leaders speak only, workers never make any comments. The reasons lie in the fact that many comrades think here that nothing will change, everything will stay the same”.⁵⁵³

What makes the comments especially interesting is that the workers told them to members of a commission that was created by the party. In East German party documents we hardly meet any sign of open criticism: such open formulations of the differences between officials and workers were unthinkable under the Honecker regime. The contrast between ideological language and the social experience of workers often resulted in intentional or accidental irony: the phrase - “the reasons lie in the fact” - was one of the favorite expressions in party documents. A similar contrast can be found in some of Gallerach’s statements: while he complained that there was no discipline in the instrument plant and the managers did what they wanted⁵⁵⁴, here it was the workers who revealed that the ideology of the regime had no basis on reality, and that the party meetings were no place for workers to express their opinions. If, however, this criticism was voiced at all in the presence of a party commission, we, nevertheless, have to assume that ideological discipline loosened during the reform era.

⁵⁵¹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-4/13/79, Bericht, 19 September 1969.

⁵⁵² Abteilungsparteiorganisation.

⁵⁵³ Bericht, APO-Leitung, 19 September 1969.

⁵⁵⁴ Protokoll der IKL-Sitzung, 15 und 18 August 1969, op., cit.

This argument is strengthened by the fact that the investigation detected several other “ideological deficiencies”, which reveal much of the tense relationship between the party and the workers, including the practice of simply thrusting party membership involuntarily on workers. “We can experience”, they reported, “serious ideological deficiencies in many respects, for example, we have permanent disputes with many comrades over the payment of party dues. Let’s take, for instance, the case of comrade X, who has been employed as a turner in Zeiss for over a year. Already in January it turned out that he paid only 2,5 Marks instead of 11,85. In this month he should pay 17 Marks. The comrades tried to appeal to his better nature every day. In the beginning, he wanted to pay 3 Marks only and now he maintains he won’t pay a penny. Even though he joined the party, he is free to terminate his membership whenever he wants to”.⁵⁵⁵ Here we can also detect some – probably unintentional –irony because people usually represented certain opinions in party documents. Much is revealed about ideological discipline by the fact that the worker did not budge on the question of paying party dues, despite daily exhortations to do so, and he even spoke of his intention to resign from the party. If the party group still considered it necessary to stress how much they invested in persuading comrade X (who had not paid the full party dues at the beginning of his membership), then it seems that the party had a greater need for workers than workers had for the party.

Workers’ criticism of management was not only – or not primarily – targeted at the general lack of interest of the managers in workers’ opinions, but workers directly addressed the perceived professional incompetence of their superiors. Turners, for example, argued that management had bought two turner’s lathes, which had very high outputs, without asking the turners’ shop if these machined could be used: “One of the machines has been at a standstill ever since in the hardening shop, which is frequently

⁵⁵⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-4/13/79, Bericht der IKPKK (Industriekreis-Parteikontrollkommission), GDREH 1, 19 September 1969.

discussed among the workers. They don't understand whether the management is completely incompetent or whether it is outright sabotage".⁵⁵⁶ One member of the party leadership of the base organization, who worked in the mill shop, commented that the machine cost a lot of hard currency, which was wasted, and because of the increased time spent with maintenance and production stoppages, the norms changed, too. He frequently criticized the managers for disregarding workers' opinions, and he even analyzed the machines in his shop in support of his criticism.⁵⁵⁷ Of course, it cannot be determined in retrospect how much the workers shared the opinion of the party leader, but he did have some support, as was shown by the results of the investigation in the other plants that there were problems with labor organization and the supply of material: "There are always breaks in production because there is not enough material, chiefly casting, and they cannot arrange for the right piece on the machine at the right time". While opponents of reform criticized managers for neglecting party work because they were allegedly too busy with economic tasks, the workers, on the contrary, thought their leaders were occupied too much with ideological work that they regarded as unproductive: "People complain everywhere that leading officials, including the leaders of every social organization, can hardly be seen on the shop-floor".⁵⁵⁸ Even though such criticism mitigated the social difference between worker and official, it revealed that the workers did not hold ideological work to be work at all.⁵⁵⁹

The situation of the East German managers, on whom political pressure was much higher than the workers, cannot be called enviable. According to the minute books, one economist (who was a member of the party) of the instrument plant apparently suffered from nerves and while he talked with the members of the commission, he could not hold

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., Bericht (GDREH 1, Y, Abteilungsleiter).

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. R. és Gen T. GO-Leitungsmitglieder).

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., Bericht (APO-Leitung).

⁵⁵⁹ Many interview partners said that the workers considered the functionaries to be idlers whom they had to provide for.

back his tears. His testimony revealed that managers overlooked several irregularities in order to appease the workers: “They do not keep 33% of the technological working plans, and the norms are changed on 25% of the wage sheets. In the grinding shop they keep to the official norms in three cases out of one hundred. The result is that the wages are rocketing, there are workers who bring home 1400 Marks. In the distribution department, they do not keep to 15% of the official norms. The colleagues represent the opinion that an economist who comes from outside cannot understand their calculations, because he does not know their work. This is unambiguously an ideological problem. In this respect, comrade Z commented that this department is a state within the state”. At the same time the economist confirmed workers’ statements that there were not enough professionals among the middle management: “They don’t keep to the deadlines to deliver orders and fulfill contracts, and neither can they manage the supply of material properly. The instrument plant failed to solve the professional and political training of the middle management and therefore they are not in the position to be able to solve everyday tasks. Everything has to be decided from above, that’s why everybody is overburdened at the top. My job is to patch up holes while new ones are created all the time”. In his testimony the economist also declared that “the instrument plant has not fulfilled the plan for eight years and many colleagues doubt whether it is possible at all to meet their targets”. The management had given significant material concessions to the workers, for labor costs had just increased by 48%.⁵⁶⁰

The conversation with the technical manager of the instrument plant fundamentally reinforced the information provided by the economist. The manager said that there was widespread skepticism among people. Workers did not understand why they had not fulfilled their plan for eight years running, despite constant overtime and weekend work.

⁵⁶⁰ Bericht der IKPKK (Gen. Z, Ökonom), op., cit.

With respect to the rocketing wages, the manager commented that there were no concrete work plans in the grinding and mounting shops, and this explained high average wages. Direct production managers did not want conflict with the workers; consequently they always consented to informal wage rises. The technical manager added that the direct production managers did not have sufficient respect for the workers, because they frequently earned less than them.⁵⁶¹ He also complained about managers' workloads: according to his information every "professional" manager spent 12 to 14 hours at least in the plant in a day in order to cope with their daily tasks.⁵⁶² One member of the party leadership of the base organization mentioned concrete cases when direct production managers had not had the necessary qualifications, for example, in the grinding shop "35% of the technological documents are false" and "despite every instruction, the colleagues themselves write their own time sheets".⁵⁶³

According to workers in the polishing workshop the management acted hurriedly and inconsistently, and they kept on changing instructions. "The workers know that there are shortfalls in plan fulfillment, but they don't know of a common project, which would clearly tell everybody what they should do in order to work better. Therefore everybody wants only to finish his work as quickly as possible and they let the brigadier or the direct production manager do the calculations. The most important ideological obstacle is the extra shift particularly because there are many women workers, who refuse to work in shifts because of their household duties. That's why we have no special program for how the workshop can make up the shortfall".⁵⁶⁴ Furthermore, the brigadier of the brigade named after the "Sixth Congress" did not attend party meetings, which the commission could not leave without comment: "how can someone lead a brigade without party

⁵⁶¹ The party organization of the Rába factory also criticized the low wages of the direct production managers in the beginning of the 1970s.

⁵⁶² Bericht der IKPKK (K, technischer Leiter der GB), op., cit.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. N, GO-Leitung).

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. Q, PO).

information?”.⁵⁶⁵ The brigadier listed the following problems in the workshop in his reply: “poor supplies of materials; too much additional work; in the old times they produced for stores, which is not the case today; the brigade plan is too high; trainees without sufficient work experience were put on the job; the responsible managers come to the workshop only if they need extra shifts. All of these are factors that make it impossible for us to realize the plan”. In addition, the brigadier called attention to the fact that the “Sixth Congress” brigade undertook 800 extra hours alongside the 1200 hours that they had already accomplished. He also spoke of his problems concerning party-work in the brigade: out of the eleven members of the brigade only two were members of the party and when they asked three workers to be candidates, they refused, saying that party membership would mean too much extra work for them.⁵⁶⁶ The investigation in the mill shop revealed similar phenomena: the workers complained that they could not work continuously because the components the plant had received were not of the right size, and the supply of material was inconsistent. According to the workers the managers underestimated the time needed for preparatory work, at the same time they naively revealed that they received higher pay themselves. Workers in the milling shop denounced the “Sixth Congress” brigade as well: it turned out that they undertook weekend work instead of the second shift only because it was better paid by the enterprise. With respect to party life, the mill shop could not boast of better results than the “Sixth Congress” brigade: their workers likewise did not hold regular party meetings. There were evidently more “ideological problems”: the meetings of the party leadership of the base organization were often not recorded and the campaign plan for the elections of 1969 was “nowhere to be found”. According to the information of many grass-roots members the secretary of the base organization could hardly be seen in

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. L, Brigadier).

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

the workshops: in the previous year he attended the mill shop only once even though he was invited many times to come.⁵⁶⁷

The employees criticized the results of the factory in other fields as well. Even though they worked a lot on the E-system⁵⁶⁸, their effort did not bear fruit: “The employees keep on asking whether their work makes sense if there is an ever increasing deficit in respect of the plan”. The plant’s technical manager laconically commented that Zeiss was promised 50 designers, who eventually did not come because the enterprise could not give them flats. The managers, he argued, could not be expected to maintain discipline if they did not have the means. He, for example, once cut the wages of three direct production managers because they did not fulfill the plan, but he refused to do it again, because of his experiences with the Labor Court.⁵⁶⁹ One party leader of the base organization of the plant also criticized bureaucracy; “the contracts often travel 1 km between the various offices of the plant and he knows of examples when contracts simply got lost during their trip. According to him, the various offices that are located scattered in the area of the plant should be moved to one floor, which would be already an achievement.”⁵⁷⁰

The investigation also revealed that transferred goods had been falsely recorded in the accounts of the enterprise since 1959, and this practice was known to the entire party leadership of the plant. Thus, the goods were reported to be completed and transferred if little work or minor parts were missing that could have been completed before the 10th day of the following month. According to one of the managers, such manipulation was forgivable in every instrument plant. He explained the difficulties of production through the lack of technicians: while worldwide there were eight technicians to every one hundred workers, in the GDR there were only four per every hundred. In 1966, the plant only

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., Bericht (GFRÄS1).

⁵⁶⁸ Electric data system.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., Bericht (K, technischer Leiter der GB).

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. A, Mitglied der GO-Leitung).

employed 20 technicians, by 1969 their number had increased by 70-80% but there were still 50 designers missing, who did not come because of a lack of housing.⁵⁷¹ One member of the party leadership went as far as to argue that the political pressure from above forced the management of the plant into this manipulation: “The managers are expected to do everything and even more than they can in order to keep the red star burning. When we give our preliminary estimates for the plan, they frequently refuse to accept them and they demand 2-3 millions more. The managers have no choice but to consent to the plans even if the pre-requisites are missing. According to comrade D the missing pre-requisites are the responsibility of the central management. One example: the hardening shop was closed in the main plant half year ago, while the new shop will open only now in the southern plant. The production of a number of plants, including the instrument plan, does, however, depend on the hardening shop and since we don’t get the work pieces because the workshop is closed, we cannot complete our products. This is just one example out of many similar cases. According to comrade D this has nothing to do with planning, chaos is centrally organized and then the responsibility is shifted on the individual plants”.⁵⁷² Another party leader evaluated the meetings of the party leadership similarly to the workers: “A lot of talk without much being decided. There is no point making comments, let alone criticize something, because the state leaders are always right. Nothing will change here, the party leadership readily agrees to everything that the manager of the plant decides”.⁵⁷³ With respect to the relationship between the party and the factory it is worth quoting the summary of comrade W, who singled out the following problems in the plant: “Part of the workers believe that socialism has been already realized and now people can have a rest, but they should get their rightful reward; *many colleagues work conscientiously because of their old loyalty to Zeiss, but not because of political*

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. W).

⁵⁷² Ibid., Bericht (Gen. D).

⁵⁷³ Ibid., Bericht (Gen. H).

*consciousness or in the defense of a political standpoint on the basis of their class category*⁵⁷⁴; since the collective could not fulfill the plan for eight years, many of our colleagues have doubts about our economic policy, they think that the requirements are too high and it is impossible to fulfill the plan; many direct production managers are unfamiliar with the technical regulations and they can't keep discipline (bad norms, rocketing wages, etc.)”.⁵⁷⁵

Many negative comments can be explained through bad economic results in the instrument plant, and it is likewise not surprising that while the workers blamed the management, the managers attempted to shift the responsibility onto the center as far as they could. The conversations with people in indifferent positions did, however, reinforce the two central arguments of the chapter. The first argument is that the regime had a pronounced policy towards the workers, which manifested itself not only in ideology – there was, for instance, no attempt to shift the responsibility for failure onto workers – but the managers offered several material concessions to the workers, and they indeed overlooked “minor” irregularities in wage calculation, which suggests that the bargaining position of the workers was not at all bad in the plant. Production stoppages, which were the consequence of raw material shortage, meant not only extra work but also extra money for workers, because they received good pay for weekend work. Because of shortages of technicians, managers undoubtedly needed the experienced skilled workers, and this probably explains why they overlooked the subversion of the official wage system. It can be argued that even though the workers could not participate meaningfully in the management of the plant, they were more successful in persuading the management to recognize their economic demands. That is why the factory gave workers a pay increase, even when the enterprise had very poor plan results.

⁵⁷⁴ Stress is mine.

⁵⁷⁵ Bericht der IKPKK (Gen. W), op., cit. Welche Probleme sieht der Betriebsleiter?

The second argument is that the party was forced to give small political concessions to workers – despite militant rhetoric and inflexible dogmatism – where worker party members did not pay party dues, or regular party meetings were not held. The Zeiss enterprise was, of course, not a “typical” factory: it was argued that because of the special social policy of the enterprise the majority of workers had been disappointed with the nationalization of their factory. The investigation in the instrument plant suggests that much of the distrust (or outright antipathy) of the workers towards the party persisted, and the factory party organization had to beg workers to join the party. Yet one cannot place too much weight on this, for the Zeiss factory was never a Communist stronghold. Party membership was not necessarily advantageous for workers, and as the Hungarian party secretary maintained, it was not an existential question for them.⁵⁷⁶ Frequently voiced criticism that state leaders were not interested in workers’ opinions, at any rate, revealed that there was a pronounced difference between the workers and officials - or at least the workers regarded this difference as pronounced. It is worth stressing that such criticism or rather, *any* kind of criticism of the party could be detected very rarely in the East German party documents, and indeed they disappeared entirely with the consolidation of the Honecker regime. If people were not afraid to make these comments in front of members of a party commission, then the party was more responsive to criticism during the reform era, than it became later. This is supported not only by the surprisingly open statements of grass-roots party members, but also that of the party leaders. The comment that the managers were expected to keep the red star burning at any price did not really demonstrate that the party was respected. Often older Zeissianers identified themselves more with the factory, than abstract categories like the working class in the way that official propaganda promoted it. If leaders voiced such heretical thoughts, then it seems

⁵⁷⁶ The East German party statistics is similar to the Hungarian in that the proportion of the workers was the highest (65-70%) among those, who were excluded from the party or terminated their membership.

that some signs of liberalization appeared within the party during this period, and people started to believe that they could express their opinions even in the rigid climate of the GDR.

The end of the experiment

The over-ambitious taut plans of the last years of the reform undoubtedly increased shortages of consumer goods, and they deepened the divisions within the party. The opponents of reform referred not only to events in Czechoslovakia, but also to the mounting discontent of the population, which was reflected in information reports from the whole of the Gera district. In addition, the signs of liberalization within the party worried hardliners; at least the frequently repeated phrase that some party organizations and managers neglected the ideological leadership of collective and political work points in this direction. Workers' discontent was undoubtedly exploited to settle political differences, but the surprisingly informative sources (as compared to those of the Honecker regime) suggest that during the period of economic experimentation the party indeed sought to widen the boundaries of officially-permitted discourse, instead of relying on repression exclusively.

One reason why it is difficult to judge how open this discourse could be is that in comparison with the Hungarian sources, in the GDR the party found it difficult to engage the "masses" in a dialogue on any level at all. Frightened of the prospect of economic chaos, the East German leadership did not dare to take the risk of further experiment while Ulbricht insisted on the full implementation of the NES. His resignation put an end to the East German reform attempt and - with Honecker's takeover - the possibility of a meaningful social dialogue was closed off. In the light of the rigid ideological dogmatism

that became increasingly characteristic of the party from the 1970s (where the party leaders from year to year repeated the very same phrases – interspersed with the “compulsory” quotations from Marxist classics), it is illuminating to recall a meeting of the district party leadership, which was held to consider resolutions from the Eighth Party Congress. The meeting was attended by Professor Kurt Hager, a member of the Politbüro. In his concluding speech the guest admitted the failure of the party’s economic policy, and he actually gave a critical evaluation of the situation that was in sharp contrast to the usual triumphalist reports that abounded in East German party materials. “We cannot provide the population with a regular supply of drinks, bakery products and various industrial goods such as electrical products, house wares, furniture, heaters, sewing-machines, baby carriages, and table wares”, he admitted. He continued: “We cannot satisfy the demand for these articles. I won’t even mention the shoes now, the problem came up yesterday during a conversation and I think that you know much more about the topic in this district than I do. This means that the struggle that we continue in order to fulfill the plan targets for consumer goods’ industries and services, so that we can provide the population a continuous supply of consumer goods is the fundamental and decisive question of our work today. We have to provide for the stable and continuous supply of people with basic food products, fruits, greengrocery, daily consumer goods, children’s clothes and spare parts, in short, we have to satisfy the needs of population, that is the main question and task that we have to face today. And, comrades, I consciously declare here, in front of the district party leadership that the success of the Eighth Party Congress depends on how we can realize this task”. Despite his admission of increasing shortages of consumer goods, the professor made one more attempt to illustrate the advantages of de-centralization precisely using the example of shoes that he had already mentioned in his speech: “In the Schäfer shoe factory of Erfurt, for instance, it is the responsibility of the management and

the workers to decide what sort of shoes they produce and not that of the Ministry of Light Industry". The rapid increase in consumption could not, however, be reconciled with Ulbricht's structural policy, which sought to increase investment first.

In the light of East German ideological discipline it is not surprising that no one spoke of the fall of the reform, or the resignation of Ulbricht - local sources carefully avoided these topics even later. In order to relax the mood, Professor Hager did, however, tell a story of one of his factory visits, which, even though it may be somewhat naïve ideologically, revealed that at that time the workers were very "realistically" present in the policy of the party, while under the Honecker regime the "working class" became only an abstract category of reference and a basis of legitimacy: "Comrades, I visited a micro-electronics factory six or eight weeks ago, where I stood in the place of one of the workers and my back started aching. I asked the workers how they can work in this horrible draught, and besides, there was an awful noise in the workshop. And today I learn from the conversation with the comrades that they could not yet solve the problem in the factory! But comrades, this is a very serious problem, here we are building a modern factory, and in this plant there are mainly women workers, who mostly have to sit – am I right? – and the poor creatures have to sit in this horrible draught and noise during the whole day. I ask you, comrades: are there no technologists and engineers in this plant, who could solve this problem? Do we have to wait for a quarter of a year, or even more until it can be arranged? Surely, one can find enough reasons or explanations but I think that if we have such modern factories, where labor productivity is 100% or even higher, we should provide for normal living and working conditions for the employees so that they don't contract rheumatism for the rest of their lives and instead they'll feel comfortable in their

workplace”.⁵⁷⁷ The story could be of course conscious propaganda, but even then it is striking that the highest party leadership considered it necessary to demonstrate that they had the workers’ welfare at heart and besides, the idea of emancipation also received a pronounced role in the professor’s narrative.

With the consolidation of the Honecker regime it was not only criticism that disappeared from the sources, but any debate of the role of the workers did, too. It is, at any rate, difficult to judge how far the party would have been responsive to further criticism and how they would have addressed problems that went beyond the shortage of consumer goods. Since increased criticism within the party was characteristic of the last years of the NES, it is difficult to tell to what extent there was a real chance for a process of radical renewal within the party; itself a pre-condition of any attempt to reformulate the political relationship between the party and the working class. Even though there were differences between the types of economic reform in the GDR and Hungary, their reception among workers shows many similarities. Firstly, the workers of both countries used the opportunity to express their discontent with the system that pointed beyond criticism of the economic reform. Secondly, they formulated an essentially similar criticism of the system arguing that other strata lived better than they did, and that - contrary to the official phrases of socialist propaganda - workers’ opinions did not matter even in the factories. Even though the East German sources did not speak of socialist ownership, the investigation in the instrument plant gives enough evidence that the East German workers less regarded themselves as proprietors, than the Hungarians. Lastly, in the case of the GDR the reform era was the last time when the functionaries spoke of the problem of the relationship between the workers and the party. Even though Zeiss was not

⁵⁷⁷ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-2/1/20, Protokoll der Bezirksleitungssitzung, Die sich aus den Beschlüssen de VIII. Parteitages ergebenden Schlussfolgerungen für die Arbeit der Bezirksparteiorganisationen, 19 Juli 1971.

a “representative” factory, the sources suggest that many workers consciously tried to keep a distance from the party, and it should be stressed again that the party membership was not an existential question to them. It is quite telling, for instance, that three workers of the “Sixth Congress” brigade refused to become candidate-members and the party had to beg of the workers to pay the party dues. It can thus be assumed that party membership did not always carry prestige among the workers. In this aspect one can indeed doubt the efficiency of the omnipotent East German state, especially as, in Zeiss workers remained loyal to “their” factory. The massive repression under the Honecker regime, while silencing any criticism, effectively prevented a dialogue even amongst the grass-roots membership, thereby demonstrating the party’s refusal (and inability) to change.

6. Labor Policy in the District

Even in Hungary where the economic reform did not shake the position of the first secretary, the government responded to criticism from the workers with the announcement of the standard-of-living policy. The situation was more critical in the GDR where the fall of the economic reform had political consequences: Ulbricht resigned in protest against the new economic policy. Frightened of the mounting discontent of the population the party leadership decided to increase the plan targets for consumer goods while they lowered investment. Honecker came to power in the spirit of this new, consumption-oriented policy, which he sought to follow until the end of his regime: he was, for instance, consequently opposed to price increases, which he defended with the argument that all counter-revolutionary attempts in other socialist countries such as Poland started with such increases.⁵⁷⁸ It seems that the East German “recipe” was similar to the Hungarian standard-of-living policy even though Honecker preferred to call it the “unity of the economic and social policy”: the party promised a higher standard of living to the people in exchange for their political loyalty (or at least for their silence).

In many aspects the recipe worked only too well in the GDR. Judged from the minute books of the meetings of the executive committee of the district, the party leaders took heed of the warning of Professor Hager that the success of the Eighth Party Congress would be decided by the continuous and stable provision of people with the required consumer goods. From the second half of the 1970s, the party materials of the district essentially inform us only about the fulfillment of plan targets, production results and the celebration of the topical state holidays. Even though the speeches of the party leaders

⁵⁷⁸ André Steiner, *op. cit.*, 2004, 190.

abounded in quotations from Marxist classics, the “working class” was increasingly used as an abstract category; real workers disappeared not only from the party documents but also from the rhetoric of the party. It seems that with the new, consumption-oriented policy the working class lost its social reality even from the perspective of the party, and the idea of emancipating them received an ever decreasing emphasis in the official ideology. The dogmatic speeches of the party leaders suggest that they did not even feel a need to address the workers as a class.

Interestingly, even though the party had a pronounced social policy towards labor, labor-related issues were discussed much less in the meetings of the party leadership of the East German district than that of the Hungarian county (if we disregard the continuous reports of the provision of the people with consumer goods). There was more scattered information about the working class of the former than about that of the latter. It was already argued that the party leaders were evidently over-zealous to lead the Eighth Party Congress to victory; they, however, succeeded to over-fulfill the ideological expectations as well. While in 1972 it could have happened that when the members of the old factory guard of a Silbitz plant did not get the premium, the workers threatened with a strike and they even referred to 17 June⁵⁷⁹ in front of the party members⁵⁸⁰, in the later times the local party leaders saw no reason to disturb the piece of mind of their superiors. Judged from the sources, it seems that they themselves believed their own propaganda that the satisfaction of consumers’ needs rendered the people satisfied with the system. In this sense the Honecker regime did indeed precede the Hungarians: it provided for a higher standard of living “in exchange” for a much more suffocating political climate.

⁵⁷⁹ On 17 June 1953 the East German workers protested against the higher norms and price increases with an uprising.

⁵⁸⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV C-2/6/441.

Despite the fragmentary nature of the sources in the GDR, the discussion of the labor policy of the district is separated from that of the factory similarly to the Hungarian case. While this chapter examines the realization of the “unity of the economic and social policy” at the district level, the following chapter focuses at the level of the factory. There is some sad irony in the fact that the most numerous sources of working-class lives are the surviving letters of complaint, which mainly addressed the flat problems of the writers (even though the housing conditions in the GDR were not at all bad when placed in comparative perspective); but it seems that despite its pronounced policy to labor, the regime preferred to communicate with the workers in the form of applications only.

The “unity of the economic and social policy”

While in Hungary the leading political slogan of the early 1970s was the standard-of-living policy, the GDR party leadership lived under the spell of the increase of the production of consumer goods. In the very same meeting where Professor Hager so passionately addressed the gaps in the supply of the population with daily consumer products, the first secretary of the party organization of the Zeiss factory could proudly announce that they already drew the “right conclusions” from the resolutions of the Eighth Party Congress: “In our political-ideological work we paid a special attention to the evaluation of the resolutions of the Eighth Party Congress, and thanks to this, we succeeded to win the support of the management for the solution of the problem. Our employees made a pledge to work more, and therefore we could decide at the plenum of the IKL that our factory will increase the plan targets of consumer goods by 2 millions Marks already in this year. We undertake to produce 7000 extra telescopes in 1971, and we will also increase the plan targets of cameras and lenses in order to provide for a better supply of the population with these articles, which are in high demand. We promise the

party leadership that we will do our utmost together with every comrade and employee of the factory to realize the plan targets of 1971 and to concentrate our efforts on the tasks that follow from the resolutions of the Eighth Party Congress”.⁵⁸¹

Even though the party leaders promptly followed the party line, it is, of course, a question as to the extent the supply of the population with consumer goods did indeed improve in the early 1970s. Despite the fact that the reports were in general optimistic, there is some evidence that the “fight” for the stable and continuous provision of the population with daily articles was indeed a difficult one. A report of 1974, for instance, called attention to the fact that “despite the overall positive results of the fulfillment of consumer goods targets and the related improvement of the supply of people with these products as well as better services”, there were still problems that the party leadership had to solve with consequent and purposeful work: “The demand for the 1000 small things cannot be covered. There are not enough can openers, corkscrews, scissors, kettles and fittings needed for electric installation. We likewise can’t satisfy the demand for television sets, tape recorders, wine, champagne, building materials, carpets, men’s suits and women’s coats, leather clothes, bath tubs, fire-proof glass and bulbs. People frequently criticize the public services in the towns, in particular the inadequate lightening of the streets”.⁵⁸² The list, at any rate, seemed to contradict the overall positive results, and the complaint about the inadequate lightening suggests that the shortage of electricity was still a problem at that time.

In 1976 the government could feel confident enough to announce further welfare measures (including a large-scale housing program, which was expected to solve the

⁵⁸¹ Die sich aus den Beschlüssen des 8. Parteitages ergebenden Schlussfolgerungen für die Arbeit der Bezirksparteiorganisationen. op. cit.

⁵⁸² ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/1/154. Die Sicherung der Versorgung der Bevölkerung im 2. Halbjahr 1974 und über die Verwirklichung der Aufgaben an den Versorgungsplan des Bezirkes zur Verbesserung der Versorgung mit Dienstleistungen und Baureparaturen, besonders in den Zentren der Arbeiterklasse. Sekretariatssitzung, 20 Juni 1974.

problems of the population). The party leadership of the district likewise wasted no time in evaluating the resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress: “We have every reason to believe that socialism has decisively shaped the ideas and behavior of our citizens. The general party line of the Ninth Party Congress with its resolutions that serve the interests and welfare of the working class and that of the whole population found an unambiguously positive reception among the working people, who passionately defend our political line [...] As we all know, the state housing project is the core of our social political program. Between 1976 and 1980, we will provide 20,000 citizens with new and comfortable flats so that every third family in the district can enjoy better living conditions. In addition, in 1980 the net income of the population will be twice as much as in 1960, and we promise to keep the same price level. We will introduce new basic wages for 70,000 employees in the district, and we will also increase the minimum wages. For these purposes we received 200 millions Marks. We have an additional 360 millions Marks for the improvement of the conditions of retired people. In order to fulfill the resolutions of the social political program we will need 40 millions Marks for the support of the adult education of 18,000 working people. From 1 May 1977 we will introduce the 40-hour week for 54,000 employees of the district. During the Five-Year-Plan we can support the extended weekend holidays and baby leave of working mothers with 60 millions Marks. Besides, we have to mention that the 60 social political measures that have come to force since the Eighth Party Congress we need an additional 36,3 millions Marks. Comrades, all of these are grandiose objectives but they can be realized and if we succeed to increase labor productivity accordingly, we can even ponder over new social political measures in order to further improve the living and working conditions of the people”.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/6/440. Zur Einführung von Grundlöhnen 21 September 1976.

Even though the functionaries were not sparing of impressive figures when they praised the achievements of the social policy of the party, they were much less interested in the actual conditions of the working class in the district. It is, indeed, striking, particularly in the light of the omnipotent class-based ideology, how *little* labor-related topics were in fact discussed in the meetings of the party leadership of the district. Even on these occasions the party leaders mainly discussed “purposeful” things, for instance, what kind of ideological work can improve the workers’ willingness to undertake shift work or how to propagate full-time work among the women of the district. It seems that the “improvement of the living and working conditions of the people” increasingly drove the real workers out of the vision of the functionaries, and working-class responses to the policy of the party were dissolved in the bureaucratic language of the official ideology.

In comparison with the Hungarian sources, there is remarkably little information on the working class of the district. In 1971 one document gives a figure of 303,000 for the total number of workers, employees, and trainees in the district out of which 186,000 were employed in industry, construction industry and traffic. The party had 89,000 members in the district out of which 77,000 attended party schools, which shows that the party paid much more attention to the ideological training of its members in the GDR than in Hungary.⁵⁸⁴ Thanks to the overall efforts of the party to increase female employment, there are some more data about the working women in the district. Between 1970 and 1973 the percentage of women of working age employed increased from 73% to 82,5%, and in 1975 it reached 90% in the district. Already at the end of 1972, 50,8% of the employees of the district were women. A survey, which was conducted in 44 selected enterprises of the district, found that 34,9% of the female workers belonged to the skilled working class. In the Zeiss factory the proportion of the skilled female workforce was much higher, 49,3%

⁵⁸⁴ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/3/170, Über Erfahrung bei der Qualifizierung der Arbeiterklasse, 25 März 1971.

but it was also high with 45,3% in the Jenapharm factory and in the textile industry of the district.⁵⁸⁵

The problem of how to reconcile the family and household duties with that of a full-time job was discussed even in the meetings of the party leadership of the district. Women who were employed part-time were constantly encouraged to take full-time jobs; the women's commission of the Zeiss factory, for instance, loyally reported that in every half year they had a long ideological discussion with the part-time workers for this end.⁵⁸⁶ The reports complained that even more ideological work was needed to persuade the working mothers to undertake shift work: in the Zeiss factory the shift nursery (which was opened also during nights) had to be transformed into a normal one because "the discussions with mother who had two or more small children led to the conclusion that the mothers are not ready to entrust a nursery with the night care of their offspring".⁵⁸⁷ The agitation for shift work, nevertheless, continued: according to a report of 1972, 15,8% of the women workers of the district worked in two-shift- and 6,7% in three-shift-system. In this respect the report commented that the proportion of employees who ate in the canteens increased from 39,2% to 43,2%. Apart from the agitation and the extra money other bonuses were also offered to make the shift work more attractive in the eyes of people: in 1972, 70% of the holiday vouchers, which were distributed in the district, was given to workers, and those who did shift work had an advantage over the others. Thermal bath vouchers to other socialist countries were in the highest demand (in the trade union elections of 1972 the workers even criticized the low proportion of workers among the

⁵⁸⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Frauenarbeit.

⁵⁸⁶ UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten. According to the report the proportion of part-time women workers was 20,8%, which was higher than the average of the GDR (29,5%) but it showed a slightly increasing trend.

⁵⁸⁷ Frauenarbeit, op. cit.

beneficiaries). The holiday commissions arranged with the child care institutions about the accommodation of the children of the working mothers during the time of the holiday.⁵⁸⁸

Shift work gave another advantage, which in many cases (for instance in that of Zeiss) surely took precedence over the holiday vouchers in the eyes of people: namely, that shift workers were positively discriminated in the allocation of state flats. In the letters of complaint to the chief manager, shift workers never missed the opportunity to stress the priority of their claim, and from the replies it is evident that the flat problem of the shift workers was indeed more likely to be solved. This had a very practical reason: when the young family lived in a one-room flat with a baby, the parents could not get a normal sleep. Judged from the high number of complaints, people who lived in workers' hostels had the same problem because it often happened that the room- or flat mates worked in different shifts. According to the report of the women's commission of the VEB Carl Zeiss girls were more likely to give up their career in the factory than did boys because of this problem: "The young women workers who live in the workers' hostels complain a lot about the problems of co-habitation when their roommates work in different shifts. The tension that comes from this situation increases their objection to shift work, and they often choose to leave the factory because of their living problems. We would like to ask for a quick help from the leaders of the trade union and the responsible officials in the field of cultural and social policy. Every worker whom we lose because of this problem is a great loss to us".⁵⁸⁹ Since the training opportunities of Zeiss were widely advertised across the GDR, the factory attracted trainees from many places, and it was interested in the settlement of the new workforce. Another report likewise stressed that girls were more

⁵⁸⁸ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/959, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 29 Juni, 1972, Ergebnisse und Probleme auf den Gebiet der Verbesserung der Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen der werktätigen Frauen insbesondere der Arbeiterversorgung, der Betreuung der Schichtarbeiter und der Entwicklung des geistig-kulturellen Lebens in den Arbeiterzentren des Bezirkes.

⁵⁸⁹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/1/15, Protokoll der Sitzung der Bezirksleitung, 8 Januar 1974.

likely to return to their homes if they encountered problems⁵⁹⁰, which suggests that despite the emancipatory rhetoric, traditional gender stereotypes continued to shape people's attitudes.

On these grounds, it is very difficult to say how working people did indeed respond to the labor policy of the party. While in Hungary a survey was conducted among the party membership of the county to learn how they evaluated the standard-of-living policy, we cannot find equivalent surveys among the materials of the party leadership of the district of Gera. It is clear from the quoted report of the evaluation of the resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress that the social political measures consumed enormous sums of money. A report of the Zeiss factory also commented that because of the extended holidays of the working mothers the enterprise lost 20,000 working days, and the shortened working hours caused a loss of 2000 hours in a week. The various benefits (child benefits, sickness benefits, the support of single mothers and maternity grants) cost the enterprise an additional 1 million Marks in a year.⁵⁹¹ In the light of these sums, it is all the more remarkable that the party leadership was not interested in how the working people actually evaluated what had been done for them. There is some evidence, though, that people were not as enthusiastic about the socialist achievements as leaders claimed they were, and interestingly, it was mainly women who were more discontented with the conditions. In VEB Carl Zeiss Jena many women complained that they arrived home so late that they could not manage the household: "Even though we did much for the improvement of the living and working conditions, health care and labor protection, part of the women employees have demands that we currently cannot satisfy. They complain that the rate of

⁵⁹⁰ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Probleme die sich aus der Entwicklung der Berufstätigkeit der Frau in der sozialistischen Industrie ergeben. 21 April 1976.

⁵⁹¹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/66, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 24 Juli, 1972, Ergebnisse und Probleme bei der Entwicklung der sozialpolitischen Maßnahmen von Partei und Regierung zur Erleichterung des Lebens der berufstätigen Frauen und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Entwicklung der Berufstätigkeit der Frauen im Kombinat.

development is too slow, and they criticize the shopping opportunities and the opening hours. They say that there are not enough afternoon schools and holiday places for children and big families”.⁵⁹² It is remarkable that the supply of consumer goods was mostly criticized by women, which suggests that shopping remained more or less a women’s job. This is also supported by the reasons with which part-time women workers refused to undertake full-time jobs. The “objective reasons” that were mentioned in a report of 1972 included the “unsolved daily care of the children, the lack of places in the afternoon schools, and the poor supply of consumer goods”. In addition, there were “ideological problems” with the division of labor within the family: “many men are strongly opposed to the employment of their wives because they want to have a comfortable rest after work”.⁵⁹³ This, at any rate, explains the apparent contradiction of why working women, who counted among the beneficiaries of the labor policy of the regime, were more likely to voice their discontent with the provision of the population; at the same time the criticism also revealed the boundaries of the “unity of the economic and social policy”.

There were positive responses among the working women, of course, which were evidently exploited by the regime for the purposes of propaganda. At a district party meeting in 1972, the delegate of the Zeiss factory, who herself was a woman worker, gave the following speech: “I work in the optic plant of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena. I would like to tell you about the very positive reception of the social political measures of the Fifth Conference of our Central Committee among our colleagues. We were happy to hear of the outline of the social political program. Our colleagues hold this program to be the fulfillment of the resolutions of the Eighth Party Congress, and they fully comprehend that it pays to work diligently. I believe that we can all hold ourselves to be happy to live in this

⁵⁹² ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Einschätzung der Durchsetzung der Frauenpolitik im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena durch die Leitungen der Gewerkschaft, 28 Juni 1974.

⁵⁹³ Ergebnisse und Probleme bei der Entwicklung der sozialpolitischen Maßnahmen von Partei und Regierung, op. cit.

country, the GDR [...] I myself come from a working-class family, where there were four children. If I compare now how difficult it was for my parents to secure the future of their children with that of our situation today, then I can only say that the current measures in the interest of the working mothers are fully in line with the essence of socialism. Of course, they did not fall into our laps. I regard myself as happy because my work also contributed to these results, and I believe that this gives a meaning to our lives. Many women and mothers think like me, and they are ready to do everything to the utmost of their power to prove themselves worthy of the resolutions of our party”.⁵⁹⁴ Since the speech is full of phrases that were characteristic of the language of the functionaries (such as “we prove ourselves worthy”), it is at best doubtful that it was written by the speaker only; further, the bureaucratic language renders it difficult to believe that it reflected the true feelings of people (even if the social political measures did undoubtedly find a positive reception among the women employees).

In this sense it can be argued that the disinterest of the party leaders in working-class opinions was symptomatic because the labor policy was “subordinated” to the higher interest of the ideological struggle, and it was indeed held to be primarily a means of propaganda in the eyes of the functionaries. The chief aim of the labor policy was to appease the workers, not to emancipate them, and this difference was well reflected in the lack of the representation of the workers in the party materials. People evidently felt this, and they increasingly distanced themselves from the ideology of the party, which so blatantly held the workers a means of propaganda only. The propagandistic goals of labor policy were openly described in an information report of the first secretary of the party organization of the Zeiss factory, in which he reported of an interview for the Italian newspaper *L’Unita*, where “comrade X, a 26-year-old worker was chosen to demonstrate

⁵⁹⁴ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/1/7. Sitzung der Bezirksleitung, 4 Mai 1972.

that there is a new generation of well-paid, skilled, young workers, who are fully conscious of their role in the building of their socialist state. The interview introduces how comrade X finished an evening school, and how he participates now in high education. It describes the various social institutions of the factory such as the polyclinic, the nurseries, kindergartens and canteens, and it argues that the real income of a worker in the GDR is actually higher than that of his West German counterpart. The interview concludes with the argument that the cause of the ‘production miracle’ of the GDR lies in the highly qualified personnel and the satisfaction of workers’ needs, which was confirmed by every worker whom the author asked”.⁵⁹⁵ Both cases – the speech of the woman delegate and the interview with the selected worker – show that communication between the party and the workers was effectively controlled by the party bureaucracy, and that the party did not trust the workers to formulate their opinions even if their responses would have been positive. This revealed that the reception of the labor policy among the workers had a propagandistic value only.

Managing discontent

The sources well reflect the “transition” from the naïve working-class ideology of the party under the NES to the bureaucratization of the communication between the workers and the party in the Honecker-era. The documents of the late 1960s (and partly also that of the 1970s) demonstrated with real examples what the party could do for the improvement of the living and working conditions of the people (similarly to the quoted story of Professor Hager), and there were even reports of sporadic manifestations of workers’ discontent. It is characteristic, however, how these complaints were managed: the

⁵⁹⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/721. Informationsbericht der IKL Zeiss, Februar 1975.

party did not even consider ideological criticism if it came from workers but it concentrated on their appeasement only. Therefore it may well have been a logical outcome that the reports of the “mature” Honecker era contented themselves with the repetition of the general ideological slogans and the listing of production figures.

Since the party leadership evidently held the agitation of the workers for shift work to be an ideological task, it is not surprising that the conditions of the shift workers received special attention. In the Zeiss factory an investigation found that in many cases there were no responsible managers present on the afternoon and night shifts. The enterprise tried to explain away the bad report: “A shift manager or a direct production manager is present on the second shift but it frequently happens that we can’t put managers on the job during the night shifts when only a few colleagues are working. For instance, at the time when the inspectors visited the plant, there were only ten colleagues who did night shift in the grindery of the instrument plant. They promptly received their tasks from the responsible manager of the second shift, and they could work without supervision. Reasoning: they are all experienced workers who can work on their own”. It was also reported that the inspectors were satisfied with the provision of the shift workers with food and drink: “People in the afternoon and night shifts receive qualitatively nourishing, warm food, and the continuous supply of drinks is solved with the help of vending machines”.⁵⁹⁶ It seems that the inspectors were indeed concerned about the wellbeing of the workers because it was suggested that the coffee in the vending machines should be freshly brewed for the night shift. Such small gestures could have expressed much better the essence of the labor policy of the party than any ideological phrases.

The women’s commissions likewise had ideological tasks but the latter did not prevent them from reporting on the negative experiences that they had during visits to

⁵⁹⁶ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/6/489, Die Leitung und Organisation der Produktion im Rahmen der Schichtarbeit. 2 August 1968.

factories. A visit to a paper factory of 1976, for instance, concluded that even though the factory had a very good collective, the working conditions could hardly be described as satisfactory, and the state of the plant rightfully shocked the committee: “We learnt from the discussions that the whole brigade has achieved very good results in the improvement of quality and the increase of labor productivity. The colleagues have regular political discussions of the actual questions of our development, which help them clarify the ideological problems. We should add that the brigade won many times the title of the “collective of socialist work”, which is a recognition of their excellent work. Despite their tiring physical work and the not yet satisfactory wages the women workers show a very positive attitude to their work and our development. Furthermore, the working conditions are not the best, for instance, an unfriendly hall and bad hygienic conditions (since it is mainly the colleagues who are cleaning the rooms). We were shocked at the sight when we walked through the plant and the paper hall. In our judgment, the hygienic equipments in these rooms are unworthy of human beings, and they recall the misery of the postwar years. The toilets and washbasins are dirty and broken. Furthermore, it seems that no one had time for a proper clean since the machines had been dismantled: waste has been piled up in the corner, in such a shocking condition that one is disgusted even to take a look. It is also a question of hygiene because it is a breeding place for vermin. We believe that even though the building of the factory is old and not modern, our concern about the people should – and indeed must – manifest itself also in the improvement of their working conditions so that they meet the socialist requirements”.⁵⁹⁷ We don’t know whether the visit had positive results (for instance, the ordering of a clean-up) or the dirty washbasins counted among the ideological problems that should have been discussed rather than solved. The report of the women’s commission, however, does reflect something of the

⁵⁹⁷ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/7/612. Frauenarbeit: Aussprache mit Produktionsarbeiterinnen im Papiersaal. 29 Oktober 1976.

emancipatory objectives that could have been found in the professor's story as well, and it is also important to stress that the achievement of the women workers was highly praised even though it was admitted that they had to work under difficult conditions and for unsatisfactory wages. Their tolerance may well have been a sign of their political loyalty to the regime; and in the latter case it was indeed underlined that the collective demonstrated a political commitment. It is, however, remarkable that while both stories stressed the unselfishness of women, it turned out that sometimes even small things could not have been arranged for them in the factory, and they needed a wider public for their problems to be solved. It seems that it did not always pay to be tolerant.

People, however, not always had the virtue of tolerance: at least in the early 1970s some cases were reported, in which the workers gave clear signs of their discontent. These cases of protest all concerned disputes about the material rewards (wages or premiums), and their investigation suggested that the party sought agreement with the workers rather than to sharpen the conflict. This shows that the appeasement of workers was important, even in cases of open conflict. The workers of a Silbitz plant were so outraged by an unpaid bonus that they declared in front of the local party leaders that "if we don't get our due, you will learn something tomorrow" - a reference to 17 June as the report commented. The reason of the conflict was that while the furnacemen received a loyalty premium of 750 Marks, the others were denied the payment of this premium. Similarly to the Hungarians, the East German workers expected the party to intervene on their side, and when it failed to do so, they reacted with an understandable resentment: "We don't need to organize any APO-meeting because nobody comes anyway. I have not picked up the party literature because no one buys it any more. Out of the 33 comrades of the APO only 3 are willing to pay the party dues". In the turners' shop, broken turner's chisels were found, and it was suspected that the workers vented their fury on the tools. The discussions with the

workers led to the conclusion that the positive discrimination of the furnacemen “hurt the professional pride of the skilled working class because the least qualified workers received the highest benefits”. It is remarkable that during the discussions the workers did not refrain from making direct political comments (such as the comment “they won’t talk with us but they put the Staatssicherheit on to us” or the reference to 17 June).⁵⁹⁸ While no record of the resolution of the dispute exists, the party obviously demonstrated a readiness to negotiate with the workers (e.g. discussions). Further, the workers did not hesitate to openly show their disagreement with the party (and even make direct and very negative political comments). This suggests that they also knew how to put pressure on the party to recognize their rightful material demands.⁵⁹⁹

The distribution of the annual bonuses of 1972 in the metallurgic industry of the district was likewise not an easy task. It was calculated that the average bonus was 5-20% higher than in 1971, and it amounted to 550-800 Marks. There were, however, big differences among the various plants, which were explained through the different calculations of the average wages in the individual plants, the different maximal values set by the enterprises, and the different recognition of overtime, shift work and the years of employment. The managers declared that the guidelines were too general and it depended on the plants how much they gave for the individual criteria. A foundry of Lobenstein, for instance, gave 120 Marks for the three-shift work while in the VEB Blawa Schleiz the shift workers received 300 Marks. The furnacemen caused further troubles for management because their loyalty supplement and shift bonus also counted towards the annual bonus. Since the enterprises received no more money, the bonus of the furnacemen could only be

⁵⁹⁸ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/6/441. Information über die Arbeiteraussprache in der Dreherei im Stahlwerk Silbitz am 12 Juni 1972.

⁵⁹⁹ For a similar argument see: Peter Hübner, ‘Balance des Ungleichgewichtes: Zum Verhältnis von Arbeiterinteressen und SED-Herrschaft’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (1993), 15-28. The party sought to de-politicize labor demands, and to this end it was willing to offer material concessions to the workers. For a study of labor conflicts in the GDR in the 1950s see: Peter Hübner, *op. cit.*, 1995, 178-210.

increased at the expense of the other employees. In some places such as the VEB Elektrobau Greiz, the management had to reduce the bonuses because of the higher material costs but they warned that the employees “won’t understand this measure”⁶⁰⁰ because they had better results in 1972 than the year before. People may well have been discontented in other plants, too, because after the payment of bonuses, “it was heard from many places that despite the fulfillment and even over-fulfillment of the plan, higher bonuses were paid in light industry and commerce than in metallurgy. In many plants the employees threatened to turn to the trade union”.⁶⁰¹ The comparison between the industries was probably not accidental because metallurgy was held to be a stronghold of socialist industry. Such cases show that the workers also knew how to use “political-ideological arguments” against the party in order to stress their demands.

The next case may well have been a good basis for capitalist propaganda because it was about a wage dispute with the workers of nationalized enterprises in 1973. Here the conflict was very simple even though the report tried to beat around the bush: the private enterprises paid more to the workers while the state wanted to pay “in proportion to performance”. Many workers were not convinced by the political agitations: in VEB Stramo Greiz five out of the seven people wanted to give notice reasoning that it would not pay them to commute if they received less money. With other employees the discussions led to “decisive results”; the report, however, commented that one has to wait when people get the new wages, which render them fully conscious of the change. In addition, the leaders of the party and the trade union as well as the managers were requested to pay an “increased political attention” to the new state enterprises, where the employees had to

⁶⁰⁰ This phrase was also used in the Hungarian sources, and it usually meant a vehement protest against the measure in question.

⁶⁰¹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/6/440. Information über die Auszahlung der Jahresendprämie 1972 im Bereich der IG Metall.

count with wage cuts.⁶⁰² It seems that the party also counted with the opportunity that in such cases the indignation of people could override their fear of political repression; besides, the case did not really demonstrate the advantage of socialism over capitalism.

The introduction of the new basic wages (which was, in general, favorable for the workers) in a Freital plant was likewise preceded by the party leaders giving several instructions to the local secretaries in order to avoid any disagreement with the workers: “No question must be left unanswered! Everybody must feel that his word counts! No norm can be changed without justification. Our principle is: the same wage for the same achievement! You should stress the improvement of the working and living conditions and the support of working-class culture. Since the introduction of the new basic wages concerns one of the basic issues of labor, the party secretaries, trade union leaders and the chief manager are personally responsible for the whole process. The chairman of the central working group must be the chief manager so that he can solve every problem immediately. You should explain to the workers how the old norms relate to the new norms and how the new wages are calculated. The leading functionaries have to be present when the workers first receive the new wages so that they could answer any question that might come up. The workers must get a clear picture of the relationship between the old and new wages so that they realize that it is worth working under the new system”. The instructions show that it was as much in the interest of the party to avoid labor conflicts as in that of the workers; even though the new wage forms increased the average wages of blue-collar workers, the report argued that those, who did not have the necessary qualifications, should not be left out either: “Unskilled workers had to be downgraded from the higher to the lower wage groups, which hurt their professional pride and self-respect. Therefore it would be better to change the job requirements with the help of science and

⁶⁰² ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/6/440. Information über die lohnpolitische Probleme in den neuen VEB. 10 April 1973.

technology or to organize training courses for the workers so that they can remain in their original wage groups”.⁶⁰³ It seems more likely, however, that the decrease of the wages would have triggered protests, and the local party organization proposed this compromise so that there would be an unambiguously positive reception of the measure in the plant.

The above cases all illustrate the controversial relationship between the party and the workers: while the latter may well have “agreed” not to intervene in politics, they expected the party to represent the interests of labor and arrange that the workers receive their rightful rewards – as one manager of the Zeiss factory formulated.⁶⁰⁴ The manifestation of workers’ discontent was harmful to the prestige of the party even in its mild forms (e.g. worker comrades terminating their party membership). Therefore, while the party strictly refused to get engaged in any political debates with the workers, it showed more readiness to fulfill their material demands (or at least to examine complaints of this kind). It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of the letters of complaint addressed material needs. One can, for instance, mention here one case from the late 1960s: a worker asked for the help of the party leadership to get a Trabant before the usual waiting time on the grounds of his good production results and social work. He got the response that even though they could not help with the Trabant, he could immediately get a Zaporozhec.⁶⁰⁵

One, of course, does not know whether the above answer had the same comical effect at that time as it has today. It was already argued that during the era of the NES the “party speech” sometimes turned out to be its own parody. Canteen food was an object of ridicule in the Hungarian factory, and it seems that it was not very popular among the

⁶⁰³ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/6/440. Die Einführung neuer Grundlöhne in Verbindung mit der WAO. 15 September 1975.

⁶⁰⁴ See the comment: “Part of the workers believes that socialism has been already realized and now people can have a rest but they should get their rightful reward”. Bericht der IKPKK (Gen. W), op., cit. Welche Probleme sieht der Betriebsleiter?

⁶⁰⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/5/379. Eingabe der Bevölkerung, 2. Halbjahr 1968.

workers of the Zeiss factory either, at least in 1968. The disagreement was described by the party secretary as the following: “In the last time we have received an increasing number of complaints about the bad quality of food, particularly that of the dishes that can be freely selected from the menu. There are indeed objective difficulties: at present there is no skilled chef in the kitchen and we are short of thirty cooking assistants. It renders the situation more difficult that the kitchen staff gets lower wages in our plant than in other similar factories. In the last week the situation intensified and it culminated in a meeting of the party organization of O3 where the workers handed over a dish to the party secretary of propaganda/agitation with the following question: ‘Can you eat this? Because we can’t’. They also gave him a menu from 1959 in order to prove that at that time the selection was much better than today. I immediately took the initiative and I made constructive proposals for the improvement of canteen food in front of the responsible managers”.⁶⁰⁶ It may well have been that the “action” of the workers demonstrated the simple fact only that the bad food had nothing to do with ideology; the story, however, suggests that the party held the management of discontent to be its task even if it could offer nothing but ideology.

New inequalities?

While in Hungary the declining social position of the working class received an ever increasing emphasis in the information reports, it is not surprising that it was much less discussed in the East German sources, which preferred to stress the positive changes in this respect. In both cases it was discussed how the scientific-technical development of society would influence the social role of the working class. In Hungary a survey was conducted among the party membership of the county, which found that many members of

⁶⁰⁶ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/3/255. Informationsbericht, IKL der SED des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, 12 Juni 1968.

the party were skeptical about the leading role of the working class in the future because they thought that with scientific-technological development society was increasingly controlled by the economic and technical intelligentsia.⁶⁰⁷ The party leadership of the East German district did not take the trouble to ask the membership (at least no surveys can be found among their documents). The concept of the technological development was, however, closely integrated into the political agenda (which is not surprising if we think of Ulbricht's scientific socialism). In a meeting of the party leadership of the district the second secretary of the district delivered a long speech in which he argued that the rapid technological development did indeed *strengthen* the social position of the working class: "In the era of the scientific-technical revolution, which is characterized by the rapid growth of the forces of production, the masses of the working people are inseparably connected with the modern socialist industry. Therefore, the working class, the largest class of our state, which is the most closely linked with the building of the socialist system, will be increasingly recognized as a leading class, which performs both physical and intellectual work [...] The bourgeois ideologists are trying to prove to us that the technological development renders the working class dependent on the intelligentsia. We as Marxists believe that the scientific-technical revolution can only be mastered by the people and for the people, and the future technological development can be successful only insofar as it supports and makes use of the ideas, knowledge and creativity of the working people".⁶⁰⁸ It is interesting that while the party documents tactfully avoided mentioning Ulbricht and his scientific system of socialism after the resignation of the first secretary, the faith in the technological development survived: at least, it was widely propagated that this development was the prerequisite for the further improvement of the living and working

⁶⁰⁷ Jelentés a párttagság ideológiai nevelésének eredményeiről, problémáiról, a feladatokról, 1972. augusztus 15, op. cit.

⁶⁰⁸ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV B-2/1/10, Referat zur Auswertung der 9. Tagung des ZK. Die weiteren Aufgaben der Bezirksparteiorganisationen zur Gestaltung des entwickelten gesellschaftlichen Systems des Sozialismus. Sitzung der Bezirksleitung, 18-19 November 1968.

conditions of the people (see, for instance, the quoted interview in the Italian newspaper *L'Unita*).

The Hungarian materials in general show that according to people it was increasingly disadvantageous to belong to the working class (declining material conditions of the workers, the growing wealth in the private sector, etc.). In the case of the GDR there is some evidence that people wanted to remain nominal members of the working class at least, because of its advantages (e. g. in adult education or in the education of their children).⁶⁰⁹ In 1975, for instance, the first secretary of the party organization of the Zeiss factory reported to the district party leaders that members of the party were discontented with the criteria of class qualification: “In this aspect I would like to call your attention to two problems that were discussed among our comrades. The first problem is that of the workers who have obtained university or college degrees with systematic and purposeful work and now they are employed here as engineers. Our worker comrades don't understand how it can be that according to classification they no longer belong to the working class because they are ‘over-qualified’ for that. The other problem is that of the engineers who work in the production either as controllers or they manage the mounting of large scientific instruments. They don't understand why they are qualified as “intelligentsia” even though they do the same job as the technicians, who count among the workers. Even though they accept the criteria of qualification, they don't understand them. We believe that some of these criteria should be indeed changed in order to provide for a

⁶⁰⁹ From 1972, for instance, the employees of the state apparatuses received their class category after the occupation that they had before they were sixteen so that they could count among the workers. According to the investigations of Heike Solga the socialist cadre class started to close its ranks in the period (id., ‘Aspekte der Klassenstruktur in der DDR in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren und die Stellung der Arbeiterklasse’ in: Renate Hürtgen-Thomas Reichel (eds.), op. cit., 2001, 35-52.

realistic qualification that takes into consideration the type of work and the role of the workers in socialist production”.⁶¹⁰

It seems, however, that despite every effort of the government to increase the standard of living of the working people, even in the GDR people grumbled that there were strata, which could afford a higher level of consumption than the working class. According to an information report of 1977 during the discussions with people it came up in the towns of Jena and Gera that even though there was a leveling between the classes, social differences, on the contrary, continued to grow (in incomes, education, leisure time, holidays).⁶¹¹ The opening of Intershops (which sold goods for Western currency) and Exquisit-shops (where the prices were considerably higher than in the normal shops) reinforced social criticism. The Zeiss-employees, for instance, complained that in the GDR there were three classes: 1. those who had relatives in West Germany; 2. those who had incomes above the average and they could buy in the special shops; 3. ‘normal’ consumers. The employees added that the latter were in the worst situation because they could not buy what they wanted in the normal shops and they had to wait eight weeks or longer for the repair of their cars.⁶¹² It seems that the Zeiss-employees had ideologically less conformist opinions of the relationship with West Germany: it was, for instance, discussed among the employees that a worker received an unemployment benefit of 900 Marks in West Germany, which was more than the wages of many GDR workers. It was also raised that if the situation in West Germany is indeed so bad then why were there no revolutionary actions against the system. Concerning the Intershops, the employees commented that they supported the bourgeois ideology because the ‘normal’ workers, who don’t have Western

⁶¹⁰ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/721, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 12 Mai 1975.

⁶¹¹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV D-2/9/1/408, Zur inhaltlichen Fragen der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit die gegenwärtig besonders im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion der Bevölkerung stehen (Jena-Stadt, Jena-Land, Zeis, Gera-Stadt, Rudolstadt), 5 Mai 1977.

⁶¹² ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV D-4/13/76, Informationsbericht von IKL Zeiss, 10 November 1977.

currency, were excluded from these shops. People didn't understand why their money was of less value than Western currency.⁶¹³ The Exquisit-shops were evidently considered to be the symbols of the new inequality in consumption: from the Zeiss factory it was repeatedly reported that the "largest part of our comrades and employees believe that the spread of Exquisit-shops only nourishes social differences and renders them more visible".⁶¹⁴

Even though much less negative criticism was reported from the GDR than from Hungary, the above reports show that the East German workers were not much more contented –at least relatively – with their level of consumption than their Hungarian counterparts. While in Hungary the private sector provided incomes that were above the average, in the GDR people counted those who had Western relatives or other contacts among the "privileged" social strata. It was also raised in life-history interviews that parents who received Western currency from their relatives could buy the desired products that their children saw on TV in the Intershops, and they were much envied by their less fortunate class-mates. While in Hungary the private sector "influenced negatively the socialist consciousness of the workers" – as the party secretary of the county formulated, in the GDR the Western standard of living, which was widely propagated also by the West German media, had the same effect. Ironically, Honecker unintentionally assisted this process by putting the increase of consumption at the center of his labor policy. When it turned out that the standard of living of the GDR could not surpass, nor even catch up with that of West Germany, this labor policy rapidly lost credibility in the eyes of the people; together with Honecker's ideology.

⁶¹³ Zur inhaltlichen Fragen der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit, op. cit.

⁶¹⁴ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/721, Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 24 Oktober 1977.

7. Labor Policy in the Factory

From hostels to flats

Contrary to the Hungarian factory, where the reports uniformly claimed that the employees did not suffer from chronic housing shortages - largely a consequence of the high incidence of commuting - in the light of the East German sources housing shortage was the principal social problem for Zeiss's employees. There were, of course, several factors that explain the huge pressure on housing: most importantly, the dynamic increase of the workforce, the need of the enterprise for expertise - a problem already in the late 1960s: the instrument plant, for instance, did not have enough designers because they could not give them flats⁶¹⁵ -, the high number of new settlers, given that the training facilities of the enterprise as well as the educational institutions of the town attracted young people from across the GDR, and the centralized system of flat allocation.⁶¹⁶ Within the framework of state housing programs, the Zeiss factory received a certain share of newly built housing estates, which were then distributed among the various plants of the factory. In addition, a percentage was reserved for the management in order to solve specific social policy and labor recruitment problems.⁶¹⁷ It should be added that the Zeiss factory was in an incomparably better situation with respect to the supply of flats than the Rába factory in Hungary. In 1976, Zeiss disposed of 11,321 flats and 3,342 places in workers' hostels in

⁶¹⁵ Bericht der IKPKK (Bericht, Gen. W). op., cit.

⁶¹⁶ For a study on housing program for workers in the 1960s see: Peter Hübner, op. cit., 1995, 171-176; under the Honecker era see: Bouvier, op. cit., 2002, 152-201.

⁶¹⁷ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Ihre erneute Eingabe vom 24 April 1980, 8 Mai 1980.

Jena.⁶¹⁸ There are no overall figures for the 1980s in the archive of the enterprise; but we know, for instance, that the optical precision instruments' division received 1,696 flats between 1972 and 1987⁶¹⁹, which shows that the workplace played a key role in the solving the housing problems of workers. This explains the much higher number of the letters of complaint that addressed housing shortage in the GDR, when compared to Hungary.

Given the absence of overall statistical figures for the number of applicants and the average waiting time for a flat, one cannot draw definitive conclusions about the living conditions of the Zeiss-employees from this type of source because the writers of the letters all complained of their miserable situation. It is possible, though, to identify some general patterns of how people acquired flats and also to identify some of the groups, who were particularly dependent on this kind of state allowance. The new settlers undoubtedly constituted the most important group: as the cited reports stressed, Zeiss had an interest in winning over young people who came from distant places for their training to settle in the town.⁶²⁰

The first accommodation that the enterprise could offer to young workers was a place in workers' hostels; as trainees, they were typically housed in dormitories. Here, younger single people usually shared a room, but there were also family hostels for married couples. Lodging in private houses was very rare. Since life in the workers' hostels meant the continuation of dormitory life - with common kitchens, baths, and housemates, who often worked on different shifts- it is understandable that many young people tried to press the flat distribution committees and management to process their applications for a flat quickly. The issue arose in my life-history interviews: early marriages and the

⁶¹⁸ UACZ, VA Nr. 1583, Unterlagen zur Direktion Kultur und Sozialwesen, 20 Mai 1976.

⁶¹⁹ Wolfgang Mühlfriedel-Edith Hellmuth, op. cit. 305.

⁶²⁰ Probleme die sich aus der Entwicklung der Berufstätigkeit der Frau in der sozialistischen Industrie ergeben. 21 April 1976, op. cit.

subsequent birth of a child were frequently motivated by the desire for young people for an independent household as families with children had a much better chance to acquire a flat. Single people obviously stood at the bottom of the waiting lists.

The fact that practically everybody asked for a flat in the newly built housing estates that were under construction, increased the pressure on flat distribution committees and management still more. The enterprise distributed flats in old buildings, too, but, as these were seen as undesirable, applicants frequently declined offers for such flats. Often they had no proper toilets, bathrooms, kitchens and central heating. In such cases, however, the applicants who stressed that they lived under miserable conditions risked an answer that their flat problem was not as urgent as they claimed it to be, and that they should wait patiently until their request for a modern, comfortable flat could be fulfilled. Flats were sometimes rejected on the grounds that they were too small for the needs of a family. It seems from the letters of complaint that many people chose to wait for a new and modern flat in their workers' hostels rather than to accept a flat in an old building. Reconstruction was difficult because of shortages of building materials, which explains the unambiguous preference for modern housing.

Although letters of complaint described individual problems, it is still worth introducing some of the cases not only to give a picture of the living conditions of young East German workers who could not rely on parental help, but also to examine the communication between workers and official bodies. The letters depict a tense relationship: all the letters were requests, but every petitioner believed that they were entitled to a flat. Thus, the letters articulated demands of the state and management; they were not the requests of subordinates who felt themselves to be powerless. Some petitioners threatened to turn to Erich Honecker should they receive a negative answer to their application for a flat. The "tense housing situation" – as it was called - brought some

of the worst sides of human nature to the surface. Many were angered that their colleagues received flats earlier than they did, and they listed their names demanding an explanation. People were very inventive in pressing the factory for a shorter deadline, and there were persistent petitioners who wrote many letters of complaint. This, similarly to the cases introduced in the chapter entitled *Managing discontent*, suggests that the government's policy of appeasement was a double-edged weapon: despite the oppressive ideological climate people could very assertively stand up for their social rights.

Because of the “tense housing situation” in Jena, which was the favorite excuse of the officials who responded to such complaints, shared accommodation in the workers' hostels was an option that many people had to endure regardless of whether they wanted it or not. Conditions in the hostels generated considerable criticism: the equipment and furniture was old and overused, cleaning was neglected and the common rooms were often filthy. The following letter well expresses the disappointment of young people who decided to take up work in the factory after they finished their training: “Having finished the 10th class of school, I trained to be a polisher in your factory. I learnt about this opportunity from the newspapers and TV. I could get no training in my home town and as I come from a big family (I have six siblings), I wanted to be independent. I lived in the factory dormitory until 9 July 1980 and then I received a place in the AWU⁶²¹. Since then I have been living in a six-room flat with three colleagues. The ‘bedrooms’ are separated only with curtains from the common rooms, so I can't even close my door. The whole flat was in a very dirty state (garbage left by the former tenants, broken locks and damaged wardrobe doors). It took me days to make it fit to live in, and I have to live here because I can rarely travel home. I am very much disappointed with the living conditions that the factory offers to the young skilled workers because they do not meet our expectations. I

⁶²¹ AWU=Arbeiterwohnunterkunft, workers' hostel.

would like to achieve good results but for good work one needs good living conditions that I unfortunately do not have here. For this reason I am asking for your support”.⁶²²

Apart from the poor material conditions, the problems of co-habitation also rendered life difficult for young people who dreamt of an independent life and a home of their own. In this respect no gender difference can be observed: young men complained of the poor hygienic conditions of shared accommodation as much as young women. The following letter depicts a very unfavorable picture of life in the workers’ hostels: “I started my training as a polisher in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in 1980. During my training I lived in the Kurt Zier dormitory. I was born here in Jena and I lived for nine years in Kahla. After the divorce of my parents, I was sent to a children’s home. I finished the 10th class of school there. If I include the time of my training, I have lived for more than eight years in shared accommodation (in twelve-, eight-, five- and four-bed rooms). After I finished my training, I was accommodated in the Josef-Klose-Straße.⁶²³ workers’ hostel The conditions were so bad there that I considered giving my notice in. In my workplace you discussed my case and I was promised a flat in 1983. I have not, however, received this promise in writing. As I do not have a family home, the AWU is my main dwelling place where life is anything but easy for me. There is not enough room for my things: I have to store food in my wardrobe because the cupboards in the kitchen are invaded by cockroaches. The kitchen-cabinets cannot be locked properly because their doors are broken. Butter, cheese and drinks stand on the window-ledge in my room. There are four of us living in the flat and we all work on two or three different shifts at once. Since the rooms are separated by paper walls, I cannot sleep when the others listen to music or they have visitors. The wash-basin is often full of clothes so I can take a shower only very late at night. The hygienic

⁶²² UACZ, VA Nr. 3453, Eingabe 17.07.1980.

⁶²³ It should be added that there were differences among the standards of the workers’ hostels because the hostel of Josef-Klose Straße was mentioned negatively in other letters of complaint, too.

conditions are poor and the flat is in a very shabby condition because of the frequently changing tenants. I like my work in the optic plant but I really need a place where I can have a rest after work. And this is indeed impossible in the AWU because of the reasons that I explained above. I do not expect a luxury home, just something that I can call my own”.⁶²⁴ The answer is not known but there is some evidence that the social situation of the petitioner was considered because the sentence “I lived for more than eight years in shared accommodation (in twelve-, eight-, five- and four-bed rooms)” was underlined with the comment that “it is a really good argument!”.

Tenants also complained that they were too strictly controlled in the hostels. One petitioner attacked excessive supervision of hostel life by the police, a complaint directed to the managing director. The letter is cited because it shows how state repression turned workers who were in principle not at all opposed to the system of socialism against the regime: “I have been working as a locksmith for sixteen months in the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena. I live now in block 86/87 in the hope that I would eventually get a one-room flat where I could move in with my girlfriend, for whom I came here to work. I was told that I would get a flat after a year. Therefore I kept on waiting patiently even though life in the hostel cannot be described as pleasant. The toilets and washing facilities are in a very bad condition or they are altogether unfit for use. I put up with all the inconvenience and lack of comfort because at least my individual freedom was not limited. But for a few weeks members of the security personnel of the factory have been sitting at the entrance, and when one enters, one immediately gets the impression that it is a boarding school or a barracks. I feel an immediate attack on my personal freedom. The requirement to register guests annoys my girlfriend and friends who visit me here. At 10 pm every visitor has to leave the hostel and sometimes visits are denied in the absence of an identification card.

⁶²⁴ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe 04.22.1983.

This applies also to the weekends when we, young people would like to spend more time together. Not even an extra ten minutes can be arranged with the security staff. *One is constantly controlled here as soon as one enters the hostel. The police also regularly patrol the neighborhood, which makes one feel like a common criminal. Sometimes the policemen quietly creep from door to door, and they eavesdrop on people.*⁶²⁵ I have come to Jena to build an independent life, which is impossible under these circumstances. Only a flat could give me prospects. I spend the whole year in Jena and I can only travel home for a couple of days, three times in a year. Therefore this small room with the many orders and prohibitions and a real jailer is, after all, my main residence. I think that 23-year-old people have a right to expect something better than this”.⁶²⁶ The letter suggests that many people did not identify the whole system with the image of the “police state” unless they consciously meant to provoke the authorities, which is highly unlikely if they wanted to solve their flat problem.

It is interesting to contrast the above letter that criticized excessive control, with another complaint concerning the supposedly deviant conduct of a room-mate. It may well have been that life in the hostels lacked comfort but, as the following letter shows, it was very difficult to terminate tenancy regardless of the unlawful conduct of the tenants: “I am a 26 year-old worker and I work on the three-shift system. I live in Neulobeda-West, block 10. My reason for writing is the following. At the beginning of this year a young man, Mr K moved to our flat. He does not work in the VEB Carl Zeiss and he does not have a permanent job. He has, however, a hobby, he is a disc jockey. He stores his music equipment in the flat. He frequently comes home very late in the night with lots of other people who are very loud. The noise is really extreme in particular at weekends. There are sometimes as many as ten strange people sleeping in the flat. They often help themselves

⁶²⁵ Stress is mine.

⁶²⁶ UACZ, VA 933, Eingabe zur schlechten Unterbringung in der AWU, 09.03.1974.

to my food and drink from the fridge, and they leave the bath and the kitchen in a filthy state. I have worked for ten years in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena on the three-shift system, which is very tiring, especially when one can't sleep at home. I told to the managers of the hostel about the problem but it seems that they either don't care or they can't help with this problem. Therefore I would like to ask for your help because this situation is getting on my nerves. I really need my rest so that I can concentrate on my work by the machine in the plant".⁶²⁷ In this case we know the answer letter: investigators found that Mr K had married a woman who also worked in the Zeiss factory, and they received a one-room flat in a family hostel. The couple, however, broke up and Mr K was asked to relinquish the common flat, which he refused, arguing that he had nowhere to go. Then he received a room in the hostel of the petitioner. It turned out that Mr K was currently unemployed because he had resigned from Carl Zeiss declaring that he would earn his living by making music. Despite repeated warnings Mr K refused to change his lifestyle: "In March, after several complaints the managers of the hostel went to his room (he lay in bed and he did not make any effort to get out of bed) and they demanded that he should look for alternative accommodation, a new job and should respect house rules while he lives in the hostel. He does not pay his rent on time, and he had to be warned many times to behave himself. In May 1983 he was again asked to leave, but he answered that he considered it unthinkable".⁶²⁸ The reply promised that there would be stricter enforcement of the house rules, but effectively management was as powerless in this case, as the hostel: the letter repeated that Mr K was allowed to stay in the hostel for as long as he had no alternative accommodation. The case shows that despite the deeply repressive climate in the GDR, people not only defiantly asserted their rights but these rights (among others the right to housing) were indeed strictly protected by law.

⁶²⁷ UACZ, VA Nr.3742, Eingabe 09.06.1983.

⁶²⁸ UACZ, VA Nr. 3742, Untersuchungsbericht zur Eingabe des Kolln. X, 24.6.1983.

Not much is known about the cleaning of hostels, but criticism of the dirty and untidy condition of common rooms suggests that like in almost every community it was very difficult to equally share the task among the tenants. The “situation in the kitchen” sometimes declined to the point that the flats were invaded by cockroaches. In one case a single mother who lived with her one-year-old daughter in the AWU asked for urgent help because of the appearance of the insects. The inspectors, however, declared that one could not speak of invasion because they only found two living cockroaches (it was not mentioned how many of them perished). The case again points out the unintentionally comical effect of a party language that explained everything in terms of ideology. The inspectors, at any rate, held the woman to be responsible for the problem: when the cleaning staff had come, they could not spray insecticide in her flat because her kitchenette was full of food and dirty dishes. She was requested to “contribute to the cleanliness of the hostel and to cooperate with the cleaning staff in the destruction of insects and germs in the future”.⁶²⁹

The letters reported also of cases where incompetence on the part of the staff rendered life difficult in the workers’ hostels. The tenants of three houses of the Kernberge workers’ hostel complained that their families had suffered from extreme cold in winter for years because of the laziness of those who stoked and fed the boilers: “Life in our hostels is becoming more and more unbearable because there is not enough heating. The central heating has been replaced, but the staff of the hostel can only achieve a temperature of 15-18°C in the rooms. Heating stops for hours because the manager of the hostel has no control over his people. He just lets them do what they want, he has no authority. These are hard words but they are true. We believe that if we pay a rent of 1,2 Mark/m² (out of this 0,40 Mark/m² for heating), we have a right to the minimum temperature that is set by law.

⁶²⁹ UACZ, VA Nr. 3742, Ausspracheprotokoll zur Eingabe der Kolln. X, 20.6.1983.

Because of the low temperature in the flats people always catch cold. The most vulnerable ones are the children. Although the stokers are paid to work from 8.00 am to 16.00 pm at weekends, the heating only usually comes on at 10.30. The reason is simply a lack of discipline. Since we have suffered from this situation for four years, we ask you now to take the necessary steps”.⁶³⁰ One can wonder what the chief manager of the factory (or his secretariat that dealt with the correspondence) had to do with the lazy stokers; the letter, however, is a further example that social and labor policies were inseparably intertwined.

There were, however, differences among the hostels in terms of the level of comfort and general standards. This is supported by the letter of a student who complained that he received better accommodation as a skilled worker than as a student: “Having finished my military service, I started working as a turner in the VEB Carl Zeiss where I worked until I was admitted to the engineering school of precision instruments of Carl Zeiss. Since my home is 300 km from Jena, I need an AWU-place here. I received a place in Jena-Kernberge but the conditions make me doubt whether my decision to study here was the right one. These are the problems: First, there are only common kitchens, baths, toilettes, poor hygiene (lack of cleaning staff). Second, I have very noisy accommodation in a four-bed room (with shift workers). Third, there is no entertainment at weekends because I can rarely go home. Fourth, there are no opportunities to store valuable objects. When I worked in the factory, I lived in a reasonable two-bed room in the Am Herrenberge hostel. The requirements of the engineering school are high and one needs peace to prepare for the classes. I had this peace in my old hostel, where I could have fulfilled my obligations at school. But the conditions in the Bernhard Kellermann Straße do not enable me to concentrate on my studies. I am asking for your support and an investigation into the

⁶³⁰ UACZ, VA Nr. 3453, Eingabe 06.12.1980.

circumstances that I describe above”.⁶³¹ The student did not get a positive reply, though: he was ordered to meet his homework obligations because other students lived under the same conditions. In order to prevent further damage, it was decided that the tenants should be financially responsible for the state of the rooms.

Because of the bad living conditions it was understandable that many people declined to show the flat distribution committee any respect. Angry letters survived from the mid 1970s that show that not even an expert could get a flat that had been promised to him in his work contract: “I came to work to VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in 1972 when the enterprise promised me that my family would get adequate accommodation. It turned out that this ‘adequate accommodation’ consists of an AWU. My family had to stay in the house of my father-in-law and I was told to wait for one year. Now, after one and half years I still cannot get a flat because of ‘objective conditions’ and because my case is not urgent! Should you give me a negative answer, I have to assume that you approve of the fraud by which the factory bought me. How else can I regard the treatment I have been given, after one and half years of promises, only to declare now that my family can’t move to Jena? Even my contract of employment guarantees adequate accommodation, which after so much waiting cannot be an AWU where I, a family father have to share a room with a strange colleague! If you can find no solution to my problem, I will be forced to turn to the Court of Labor”.⁶³² The answer was, however, negative despite the threat: the writer was informed that the factory was objectively unable to solve every social problem, and that adequate accommodation was in practice an AWU for many employees in the beginning. He was, however, reassured that his problem would be solved as soon as the “objective conditions” enable it.⁶³³

⁶³¹ UACZ, GB Nr. 1569, Eingabe zur unzureichenden Unterkunft in AWH, 21.05.1987.

⁶³² UACZ, VA Nr. 933, Eingabe, 04.04.1974.

⁶³³ UACZ, VA Nr. 933, 15.05.1974.

Even members of the party wrote angry and disrespectful letters concerning their housing problems and the role of the factory in them. One example is the following letter: “Last year I wrote some letters of complaint to which I received the answer that the flat distribution committee does everything it can to help my family. I am doing my military service now but I am forced to write a letter again because my wife had just the opposite experience. When she inquired about our application for a flat, the responsible colleague knew nothing of it and he found our application only after a long search. Then he sent her to another colleague, who told my wife that there were free flats adding that ‘had you moved to an AWU two years ago, you would have lived under difficult conditions for one year and then you would have got a flat!’ I was outraged to hear that such practices exist in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena and that the tenants of AWU are advantaged even though we live under similar conditions in one room of my parental house. Does this mean that there are double standards or that I am not important for my plant now that I am in the army?”⁶³⁴

The letter was finished with the formula “with socialist greetings” (*mit sozialistischem Gruß*), and the writer also referred to his community work and his good results in the factory. The answer was, however, negative: the writer was informed that the tenants of AWU were not advantaged, and that there were other, objective reasons of why his problem could not be solved in that year: “We had to solve urgent production tasks and therefore some plants received more flats. Further, a number of political emigrants from Chile had to be accommodated in the town. Therefore the failure to solve your flat problem does not mean that we do not treat our employees equally but it means that we have to consider first economic interests in order to be able to improve the situation of working

⁶³⁴ UACZ, VA Nr. 934, Eingabe, 05.01.1975.

people”.⁶³⁵ The last sentence was probably meant to be an ideological reprimand from the party.

There were resolute petitioners who decided to fight for their rights: they wrote repeated complaints, they demanded information about the criteria for the allocation of flats and they pestered the flat distribution committee with their perpetual complaints. As the following letter shows, some of them were desperate (or tactical) enough to question the justice of the whole system: “I have lived for five years in an AWU of the VEB Carl Zeiss. My daughter was born last year and since then three of us have been living in a room of 12 m². I think our situation needs no further description. Since we were on the priority list of our plant, we were supposed to get a new flat in 1980. To our great disappointment, instead of the promised new flat we received an offer of a totally miserable, sleazy old, wet flat without a bath, a toilet or functioning wiring. Under no circumstances would I move to this flat with a small baby. What has happened to the flats that our plant received? I was told that out of the 84 flats, 59 were allocated according to the decisions of the management, not by the flat distribution committee. Why do they make priority lists then if the managers allocate the flats anyway and it is connections that matter, not the situation of the family concerned? I cannot at all understand that there are couples without babies who spend only some weeks in the AWU and then they immediately get a flat. Where is justice here?”⁶³⁶ After he received the flat list of his plant, the man turned to the manager with a new complaint: “I do not accept the reply to my former letter because my questions have been only partly or not at all answered. The list that I got confirms my main argument: flats are not allocated according to the social situation of people. Otherwise how can childless couples receive two-room flats while families with a child have to wait for years in the AWU? When I inquired about the

⁶³⁵ UACZ, VA Nr. 934, 29.01.1975.

⁶³⁶ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe 01.04.1980.

concrete cases, the flat distribution committee was unable to justify these decisions. They referred to the ‘summary of criteria’ but they could not be concrete about them. I was told that the age of the child was not important. For us who are concerned, it is, however, a crucial question: How long we have to live with our child under these miserable conditions? I expect a concrete answer to my question!”⁶³⁷

The reply was characterized by the authoritarianism of the managing director, even though it was most probably written by one of his administrators: “In my answer to your repeated complaint I take the opportunity to explain to you once more the flat policy of the factory. According to the regulations of 1973 the factory has full responsibility for its employees with respect to housing. I have decided the following: First, every plant receives a flat contingent in each year. Second, the managers of the plants are fully responsible to me in this question. Third, there is a special contingent at my disposal so that I can personally solve special cadre problems or urgent social problems during the year. I am fully aware of my responsibility, and my decisions are in line with the social political requirements of the Ninth Party Congress. I do not tolerate any deviation in this respect. My colleagues told you about the tense flat situation of the town. That’s why it is all the more incomprehensible to me that you have refused two offers for old flats (a three-room flat in Mühlenstr. 41 and a two-room flat in Dornburger St. 131) because of the external toilet and the lack of a bath. I once more inform you that according to the urgency of your case your name will appear on the list of the next year. That said, I regard your complaint to be once and for all settled”.⁶³⁸

The correspondence between the persistent petitioner and the chief manager does, in fact, prove the *opposite* of his argument: his social situation was, after all, taken into consideration. Further, the many checks in the system (flat distribution committees,

⁶³⁷ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe 24.04.1980.

⁶³⁸ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Ihre erneute Eingabe vom 24.04.1980, 08. 05.1980.

priority lists, letters of complaint and the need to justify decisions) show that the social rights of people were, in fact, strongly protected, and that the applicants who were waiting for flats were all entitled to this benefit. It is, however, remarkable that the sharp criticisms of housing policy did not affect negatively the chances of the stubborn man: this suggests that petitioning also had the psychological function of venting passions, and the official bodies therefore tolerated the disrespectful language.

Unfortunately, there are very few accounts of the activities of flat distribution committees, but there is evidence that some people used the same disrespectful manner during the personal discussions of their flat problem. A certain Miss R, for instance, refused two offers for old flats and another two for AWU-rooms because, “as she put it, the other tenants were ‘dirty pigs’”. However, because of the tense flat situation in Jena many young people and mothers with children live in AWU, and one cannot describe these people as this.... After the members of the flat committee discussed the problem with Miss R, she answered that ‘it is bad enough that other colleagues accept everything and they don’t dare to open their mouths’. She wanted to know whether we, the members of the flat committee had ever lived under similar conditions. She put this question to a 64-year-old comrade, who grew up under capitalism”. The report ended with the statement that “even though the members of the committee are trying to help Miss R, they are not ready to deal with her problem only. She received four acceptable offers in two years that she declined. She would like to have a dream flat that we cannot offer to her at the moment. She said that she would make a new complaint”.⁶³⁹ It is quite remarkable that Miss R did not refrain from openly criticizing living conditions in the GDR in front of the flat committee. Despite the provocative conduct of Miss R, it was important for the committee to demonstrate that they did everything to help her. This again shows that the officials were expected to

⁶³⁹ UACZ, VA Nr. 934, Aussprache mit Kollegin R am 4.2.76.

consider the social situation of people (even though the question of whether the 64-year-old comrade had ever lived in AWU was evidently held to be a negative political comment).

Some letters of complaint had, however, more serious consequences. Members of the party were evidently expected to show a higher level of conformity; and like in Hungary, to lead a “decent” family life. The following case shows that the party attempted to intervene in the private lives of its members to defend the family: “I live with my wife and my two children (a six-year-old son and a two-and-half-year old daughter) in a two-room flat. I am attending a one-year-course at party school, and I have to study a lot at home. My wife also studies. For this reason there are a lot of conflicts in our family. Since after the school I am supposed to be the party secretary of our group, and I am a candidate for high education in engineering, I would like to ask you to give a positive reply to our application for a bigger flat”.⁶⁴⁰ According to the report during the discussion with comrade D, it turned out that the letter was written and sent by his wife without his knowledge. The report commented that his family relations had been tense for one and half years because he spent most of his free time with a lover. During this time members of the party asked him many times to resolve his marital problems. Eventually, he declared that he would seek reconciliation with his wife and he would stay with his family. The report also confirmed that comrade D was a candidate for party secretary.⁶⁴¹ The case introduces a “typical” career with the help of the party (party work, selection for education, responsible post) but it also reveals that the members of the party were expected to respect the moral code of the party.

While petitioners could freely complain of poor living conditions, the threat to leave the GDR was considered to be a political threat, all the more so because the following

⁶⁴⁰ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Eingabe, 28.02.1983.

⁶⁴¹ UACZ, VA Nr. 3741, Untersuchungsbericht zur Eingabe des Gen D, 17.03.1983.

letter was addressed to the Council of Ministers of the GDR: “My husband is a technologist in the optical precision instruments’ plant of VEB Carl Zeiss Jena. I work as a nurse at the women’s clinic of the Friedrich Schiller University. We have lived for seven years in a small furnished room of the nurses’ hostel. Since my childhood I have had lived in poor conditions: when I was six, my parents got divorced and my mother and I got one room in a house. This room was wet with mould fungus on the walls. It took my mother ten years to get a bigger flat. When I came to Jena, I lived for three years in a dormitory, where I had only a bed and a shelf that I could call my home. In 1977 I received a room of 9 m² with sloping walls. Half year later I got married and my husband moved in with me. We lived for three years in this room where we could only sleep on a couch because there was no room for a bed. Then we got a room of 12 m² and we could finally have a double bed. Last year we had a baby so right now three of us have to live under these miserable conditions. The last offer that we received was a two-room AWU-flat but I think that it is senseless to move from one AWU into another. I find it very unjust that after six years of waiting we can only get an AWU-flat and even this is too small. I hope that my family will get an adequate flat before the end of this year because I have no more strength to live in this state with my child”.⁶⁴² The woman also mentioned that she and her husband were both shop stewards in the trade union.

The woman refused to appear in front of the committee because, according to her husband, she recognized that her letter contained incorrect and false statements. The husband himself did not know of the letter and he declared that he would have prevented its mailing: “He found the sentence ‘I have no strength to live in this state with my child’ particularly shocking, and he could not easily accept it. He maintained, though, that the

⁶⁴² UACZ, VA Nr. 4617, Eingabe an den Ministerrat der DDR, 14.03.1983.

sentence had no political message, and his wife did not think of leaving the GDR.⁶⁴³ The chairperson of the committee and another member visited the woman in her home where they were personally convinced of the bad living conditions of the family. The colleagues made it clear to her that her letter had a political message, particularly if one took into account that she was active in the trade union as a shop steward. They concluded that she just wanted to underline the urgency of her case for which she does not blame our state". It was, at any rate, stated that the letter was written because of an administrative mistake since the flat problem of the family had been already solved. In 1983 a single mother with a child received a three-room flat by mistake. This flat was then allocated to the family of the nurse while the single mother moved to a two-room flat. According to the report the problem was caused by the slow flow of information between the offices.⁶⁴⁴ The case, however, reveals that it was also in the interests of officials to be attentive to the social problems of people.

While the cited documents reported many problems relating to the impact of the housing shortage on workers, including the primitive conditions of AWU and long waiting times for new flats, the letters, in fact, unambiguously prove that the social situation of the applicants was an important criterion for the allocation of flats. The comments in the letters suggest that those who were in a difficult situation could rely on the sympathy of administrators. There is evidence that the situation of single mothers received special consideration: a young woman turned to the chief manager with the complaint that she did not receive the one-room flat that the flat distribution committee had promised her, and the management of the hostel where she lived refused to store her furniture that she bought for the new flat: "Two weeks ago colleague Mrs P invited me for a discussion with the

⁶⁴³ People could apply for a permission to leave the GDR (*Ausreiseantrag*), which meant the loss of their GDR-citizenship.

⁶⁴⁴ UACZ, VA Nr. 4617, Untersuchungsbericht zur Staatsrat- und Ministerrats - Eingabe in der Wohnungsangelegenheit Frau X, 27.04.1983.

management of the hostel. She did not let me speak and explain the situation and she was totally reluctant to help me. She told me: ‘You can put your furniture on the street, that’s your problem. By 30 September the room should be cleared’. It was not the first time that she spoke with me in this manner. I am no longer willing to deal with this colleague, and I really need a larger room for my furniture. I would like to ask for your support”.⁶⁴⁵ The letter was marked with the comment “Scandal!!!”. The reply, unfortunately, has not survived but if the investigation proved the complaint to be true, Mrs P would have received a strong reprimand for her heartless words.

The following two cases are cited to show that letters of complaint could lead to real results if the social situation of the writers justified urgent help: “I trained to be an electrician in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, where I work now. I have had good results and I have never have received any reprimands. I live together with my parents even though I am already 27. We live in an old house (built in 1939), which consists of a living room, a bedroom, a children’s room, a small room that can’t be heated, a kitchen, a toilet and a bath in the cellar. The children’s room has no heating either. Five years ago my son was born and our flat became too small because I also have a sister. In 1975 I applied for a two-room flat, and now, after four years of waiting I received the answer that there are more urgent cases that take precedence over my problem. Now I ask you, Comrade Chief Manager, is not my case also urgent?! My father treats me as a child in front of my son and he thinks that he is responsible for his education. I am deprived of my parental rights! I have to add that I have a fiancé who lives with us, so you can imagine the tense situation in our family. Now I ask you again, Comrade Chief Manager, is it not an urgent case?!?”⁶⁴⁶

The inquiry confirmed that the woman worker lived under difficult conditions and she

⁶⁴⁵ UACZ, VA Nr. 3453, Eingabe 23.09.1980.

⁶⁴⁶ UACZ, VA Nr. 3453, Eingabe 09.04.1980.

received a positive reply to her letter: the chief manager promised that he would personally attend to her case.

The second case was that of a woman who lived with her daughter under similar conditions in the parental flat: “I have a room of 8,5 m² in my parents’ flat where I live with my daughter. My sister also lives with her child in the flat and she has an even smaller room than mine. She can’t even put a children’s bed in her room. A further problem is the common use of the kitchen and bath. Since we all start working at the same time, I have to get up very early so that the others can use the bathroom in the morning. The flat distribution committee decided that my case was urgent after they visited our flat. Now I have learnt, however, that my name does not appear on the priority list. Since my fiancé works in the same plant and he has a room of 6 m², this complaint is our only opportunity to improve our situation and unite our family. For this reason I would like to ask you to find a speedy solution to end our misery. The flat committee can visit our flat at any time so that they can be convinced once more of our untenable situation”.⁶⁴⁷ The woman was reassured that her case was regarded as socially urgent and that the chief manager would deal with the case personally.

Even all of the cases described individual situations and problems, they show how the system of the flat allocation functioned in practice. The largest group that was dependent on the factory for housing were either the new settlers, or those local people who could not rely on parental help. Often the latter were in a more difficult situation because, as the letters show, the family lived in cramped conditions in the parental home. Early marriages and the birth of children rendered the waiting time for a flats very difficult, as many generations had to occupy the same space. At the same time, however, a decision to have children at a particular time may have been motivated by the desire to obtain a new

⁶⁴⁷ UACZ, VA Nr. 3455, Eingabe 06.12.1982.

flat.⁶⁴⁸ The social responsibilities of the enterprises towards its workers created a comprehensive work-based social security system, but it enabled a high degree of employer intervention into the private sphere. Letters of complaint addressed family problems such as divorce and adultery, and there were jealous spouses who used the opportunities such a system provided to denounce their partners to the workplace or to the party. Others asked for the help of management in order to expel a husband who drank heavily and engaged in drunken violence against family members from their home: solving one problem created another, for this employee needed a new home. The system of flat allocation rendered the factory to a large extent responsible for the social problems of their workforce. It helped maintain a certain level of social justice (it was shown that the social situation of people received consideration in the factory), but it reinforced patterns of patriarchal dependence.

While the letters of complaint understandably focused on the negative aspects of community life, centralized mechanisms for distributing housing contributed to a strengthening of collective identities based around the workplace. Young people lived together in hostels, and the new housing estates ensured that Zeiss-employees were not only colleagues, but also neighbours, given that the various plants received whole blocks of flats. In a similar fashion to Hungary, the intense community life in the GDR was recalled with a sense of loss in many life-history interviews: “In GDR era there was much greater solidarity among the colleagues. We met more frequently – also in the workplace – people went bowling, they organized garden parties or when the children first went to school, there were youth fêtes or the colleagues went together somewhere after work [...] this is different now, people go to work, then they go home and they lock their doors [...] with the neighbours it is not like as it used to be. In the earlier time we had a – it was called

⁶⁴⁸ Information from the life-history interviews.

a housing community (*Hausgemeinschaft*) in these houses, we were all young people with mainly one, or two children, we were all around 23-24 when we moved to our first flats, people sat together a lot, there were club nights organized, people had a good time together, it is different now, people don't do it any longer because everybody has his or her own problems and people withdraw from community life. People don't chat with their neighbours on the stairs, they say: "Good afternoon" to each other if they meet, and they close the door. I think that today people are much more stressed, they have to think about things that were natural in the GDR, everybody or almost everybody was treated equally, everybody had work and a stable income. Very few people had really big problems. I say again, people had work, every family could send the children to nursery or kindergarten – many things that used to be natural but today they are not. Today everybody is uninterested ... people don't care about their neighbours; they might hear that he is unemployed or she is now again at home but it is not their problem. Today people are concerned only about themselves".⁶⁴⁹

The living communities that were formed on newly built housing estates played an important role in social networks. Regular social contact and common activities in the neighbourhood were mentioned in many other interviews: "People used to organize parties, I mean here, in the garden in front of the house. Or there were small parties on Saturdays, people made a fire, they had a beer and they talked to each other. The neighbours helped each other, there was social work, they did something for the environment. Today a firm does this kind of work in the neighbourhood. I don't know why this has developed in this way. For instance on Saturdays, there were always three or four men in the yard, they repaired their cars, they had a chat. Today people don't repair their cars, they take them to

⁶⁴⁹ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (48).

garage. Sometimes I think that it is difficult to make friends with new neighbours”.⁶⁵⁰ According to many interview partners the housing communities were part of a communal life that declined after the fall of the GDR: “Solidarity declined both at work and in private life. Take the collective of our house – there were 44 flats in the house, families of similar age, we did a lot together, there were parties, we enjoyed ourselves. After ’89 this has disappeared, people did not sit together, everybody stayed in the flats; it was not like as it was, more together, people organized children’s parties in the houses, they were nice and they have disappeared, too. There were house parties twice a year but today people don’t want to sit together and speak of their things, perhaps they are afraid that they give themselves away and that others take an advantage of them. Today people are afraid to share their ideas or problems with their friends, that’s why they turn inside”.⁶⁵¹

Regardless of how one evaluates community in the GDR, the system of flat distribution undoubtedly reinforced feeling of community and strengthened the relationship between workers and the factory. According to the official expectations, the flat generated feeling of gratitude from the population. Indeed people were most probably very happy when they could move to their first flats, particularly if they had to live for years in various types of “mass accommodation”. Yet “dream flats” were not regarded as such forever by their new occupants. While community life in the GDR was seen positively after unification, their nostalgia did not spread to their view of the quality of housing: “I started work at Zeiss in May 1968 and in October I already received a flat. Five months. At that time many people came to Jena because of the flats. That’s a fact, there were many. There were factories like Zeiss in Jena, and the large chemical factories in Eisenhüttenstadt – I don’t know if the name says something to you – many young people moved there. You can see from here the houses... to the left. I moved afterwards because it

⁶⁵⁰ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (49).

⁶⁵¹ Quotation from an interview with a man worker, former brigadier (51).

was a two-room flat, you could get only a two-room flat if you did not have children. [...] My son is not married and he has a flat. I find this good. He is better off now than we were”.⁶⁵²

The letters of complaint and life-history interviews suggest considerable discontent with housing in the GDR. While community was positively evaluated, state social policy was at best an ambiguous means of rallying the population behind the regime. Many people regarded the flats as fringe benefits rather than the realization of an egalitarian social program. Furthermore, in the light of the letters connections continued to matter: experts enjoyed an advantage over the others and, since education (including adult education) was controlled by the party, the selection of the candidates for higher education (and thus, upward mobility) was largely dependent on their ideological reliability. The following letter is cited to show that there were people who felt that they were cast to the margins of the socialist social welfare state, despite waiting for years: “I have read the article about our social policy in the in the 30th January 1987 issue of *Volkswacht* with interest. The report argues that two-thirds of working-class families received new flats between 1971 and 1986 and that adult people have at least 26 m² at their disposal. Further, 76% of the flats are equipped with baths or showers and 68% have internal toilets. 42-45% of the new houses would be given to working-class people. I have to say that the living conditions of my family (four people) are very different. We live in a flat of 48 m² in an old building. We cannot use the largest room (11 m²) in winter because it is wet and cold and it has no heating. So my eight-year old daughter and my two-year-old son have to share a bedroom (10 m²). The flat has neither a bath nor a shower and the toilet is in the common stairwell. There is no drying room so we have to dry our washing in the flat. The building is in a very bad state (the gutters are broken, the plaster falls off, and the windows

⁶⁵² Quotation from an interview with a man worker (58).

can't be closed properly). I received this flat in 1978 that I accepted it, because I lived with my baby in half a room in my parents' house. After my second marriage and the birth of my son, four of us lived in a flat that I received for two people. My husband and I are both blue-collar workers and my husband works on two shifts. I applied for a co-operative flat in 1971 but after sixteen years of waiting I was told to file a new application. I have the impression that the flat distribution committee consciously deceived me, so I just don't trust them any more. Because of the circumstances that I described above, I consider this complaint as my only opportunity to improve my living conditions. I would like to ask for your support in this matter".⁶⁵³ The answer of the chief manager has not survived but the letter reinforces the picture of a tense relationship between the workers and management in which authoritarianism and social justice were often paradoxically combined.

"Du und dein Werk"

Even though community building was an integral part of the labor policy of the factory – as we have seen with the example of housing - given the fact that the minute books of the meetings of the party leadership of the factory have not survived, there is very little documentation of the social activities that were undertaken for this purpose, including the socialist brigade movement. In 1973, when the Zeiss factory celebrated the 25th anniversary of the nationalization of the enterprise, the work plan of a special publication survived, which underlined that its main purpose was to stress workers' identification with the collective and the factory. The title of the publication was called characteristically "Du und dein Werk" (You and your plant). The most important aspects of the concept for the publication were the following. "It should be, above all, introduced how under socialist

⁶⁵³ UACZ, VA Nr. 5170, Eingabe, 30.03.1987.

conditions people – in particular the members of the leading working class – are trained to be socialist personalities with the help of their collective in the workplace. It is a process that cannot take place without conflicts because we have to overcome the biases and influences of bourgeois ideologies. In this respect you should describe the relevant, purposeful activities of the socialist brigades (the work pledges of the collectives) and the results of the socialist work contest. You should represent how the workers in partnership with the intelligentsia – under the leadership of the party – manifest themselves as socialist proprietors, producers and the possessors of power. The idea is not to give a historical outline of the past 25 years of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena but to show that – as a result of a historically determined process – a landmark event took place 25 years ago that decisively determined the future of the Zeiss factory. In order to have an emotional effect, you should use the Du-form⁶⁵⁴, so you will directly address the reader and immediately engage him in the narrative so that he can commit to memory that his work serves the strengthening of the GDR and of the socialist world system and thereby the defense of peace. And he is part of all of these with his work, with his initiative, with his collective, with his personality”.⁶⁵⁵

A report of 1973 gave the following account of voluntary social work that was undertaken by the factory collective: “Since the beginning of the year the number of brigades has increased from 598 to 664 in the plants of Jena (including Saalfeld). Out of them 401 brigades participate now in the contest for the title of the “Collective of Socialist Labor” (*Kollektiv der sozialistischen Arbeit*) while at the beginning of the year there were only 389 participants. At the same time the number of brigades that won the title increased from 219 to 229. Currently, there are 20 schools with around 11,650 children who are patronized by our factory. Within the framework of this program 6,779 pupils participate

⁶⁵⁴ To address someone as „Du” instead of „Sie (speaking on familiar terms).

⁶⁵⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/124, Konzeption zu „Du und die Werk“ VEB Carl Zeiss Jena.

in the training programs of comprehensive schools and 445 pupils who are in the 11th and 12th classes are engaged in the scientific-political programs of our institutions. More than 2,000 employees work in the 82 cultural groups of the factory. The political and cultural activities of our youth manifested itself particularly in preparation for the tenth world festival: there were 480 youth programs with more than 20,000 participants. The high proportion of our youth who participated in “Messe der Meister von Morgen”⁶⁵⁶ (88%), the socialist work contest and the discussion of the youth act show that young people are actively engaged in the solution of the problems. It expresses the increasing consciousness of responsibility that there were 2,100 meetings that discussed the plan of 1974 with the participation of 80% of the members of the brigades. Out of the 7,300 contributions there were 3,309 proposals for the improvement of working conditions, work culture and labor protection”. The report, however, concluded that despite these results, the tempo and the results of the process of socialist rationalization were still inadequate and more ideological work was needed to increase the number of shift workers.⁶⁵⁷

The cited documents suggest that memory of the special nature of Zeiss’s history - that is the form of ownership and the generous social policy of the factory before the Second World War - survived as late as the beginning of the 1970s, and the functionaries considered it necessary to underline that the new, socialist system had established stronger bonds between the workers and the factory than did the capitalist system. Given the oppressive ideological climate and the lack of survey evidence it is difficult to determine to what extent this project was successful. The cited documents of the investigation of 1969 in the instrument plant, at any rate, suggest that the majority of the old guard of the factory kept a distance from the party and politics. With respect to the politics of factory identity

⁶⁵⁶ Fair of the Future Experts. It was organized at the level of the district.

⁶⁵⁷ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/3/126, Sekretariatssitzung vom 29 November 1973, Erfahrungen der IKL/SED des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena bei der ideologischen Leitung, langfristigen Planung und Entwicklung des geistig-kulturellen Lebens in Einheit mit der sozialistischen Rationalisierung und Verbesserung der Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen.

and especially working-class engagement with official ideologies of socialist proprietary consciousness, it is worth recalling the comment of one of the managers that people work conscientiously because of their old loyalty to the factory, rather than because of their political commitment.⁶⁵⁸ Beyond militant party language it is possible to detect the signs of the conflicts and attitudes of previous eras, for instance the admission that the nationalization of the enterprise was a contested process and that socialist rationalization did not have tangible results. Such comments reveal that despite the over-ideologized language, skepticism towards the campaigns of the party manifested itself among the employees.

The leadership of the district was also discontented with the political work of the party organization of the factory; at least at a meeting in 1978 the work with workers to improve socialist rationalization was met with a sharply hostile response: “Certainly we all share the opinion that the concrete organization of the daily offensive work with the masses is of a remarkably low standard in the Zeiss factory. The much debated problems of the supply of consumer goods and the wide range of questions concerning foreign and domestic policies require that all of the employees should get a clear picture and they should be fully conscious of their personal responsibility for the ongoing development of the whole republic. You should explain to them that the increasing needs of the population that, as we all know, increase at a higher rate than our production, demand a high level of achievement from everybody”. The following contribution suggests that the whole town was regarded to be ideologically “unreliable” – or more liberal - in the district: “The IKL should pay more attention to concrete political work with the masses in the future. The criticism that this work needs to be more comprehensive and diverse concerns not only IKL but also the town of Jena, where there is much to be done in this respect because some

⁶⁵⁸ Bericht der IKPKK (Gen. W), op., cit. Welche Probleme sieht der Betriebsleiter?

problems cannot be solved through better economic propaganda alone". The report of the IKL, not surprisingly, stressed the results of political work, amongst others the increase of the number of young workers who received awards for their quality work, the results of the innovation movement (*Neuererbewegung*) and the mass movement entitled "Initiativpaß 30" in the optical instrument plant. Within the framework of the latter the employees undertook the task of sparing 30 working hours with the help of socialist rationalization.⁶⁵⁹

Although political campaigns (including the socialist brigade movement) were expected to lead to increases in production, even the above cited documents suggest that the campaigns mainly aimed to improve the relations between the party and the people.⁶⁶⁰ This, at least, explains that the work with the masses – on the basis of the account – had few, if any concrete results and neither were the methods of socialist rationalization more closely determined. Unfortunately, there are no overall figures regarding activity of socialist brigades in the factory. The "Salvador Allende" brigade was the only brigade whose diary survived in the factory archive. It reinforces the argument that the brigades were more important for community building than for production. Amongst its work pledges there were general objectives listed such as fulfillment of the plan targets and the undertaking of special control tasks.⁶⁶¹ The brigade's cultural and social activities were very similar to those of their Hungarian counterparts: participation in adult education,

⁶⁵⁹ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Gera, IV D-2/3/102, Sekretariatssitzung vom 28 September 1978, Wie entwickeln die GO [GO=Grundorganisation, base organization] der IKL Zeiss eine offensivepolitische Massenarbeit in den Partei- und Arbeitskollektiven zur weiteren Vertiefung der sozialistischen Intensivierung, besonders zur Beschleunigung des wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritts und der sozialistischen Rationalisierung?

⁶⁶⁰ On the establishment of socialist brigades, their structure and their role in production see: Peter Hübner, op. cit., 1995, 212-232. For their role in conflict management see: Jörg Roesler, 'Die Rolle des Brigadiers bei der Konfliktregulierung zwischen Arbeitsbrigaden und der Werkleitung', in: Peter Hübner-Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), op. cit., 1999, 413-438. For a study of cultural life in the factories see: Annette Schumann, 'Veredlung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970', *Postdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien*, no. 29 (2003), 73-78; id., 'Macht die Betriebe zu Zentren der Kulturarbeit': Gewerkschaftlich organisierte Kulturarbeit in den Industriebetrieben der DDR in den fünfziger Jahren: Sozialhistorisches Novum oder Modifizierung betriebspolitischer Traditionen?' in: Peter Hübner – Christoph Kleßmann - Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), op. cit., 2005, 271-289.

⁶⁶¹ UACZ, GB Nr. 1205, Brigadebuch, Abrechnung des Brigadeplanes/Kampfprogramms 1984 der Brigade „Salvador Allende“ zur 10. Wiederholverteidigung des Staatstitels „Kollektiv der sozialistischen Arbeit“ am 04.02.1985, 14.00 Uhr.

movie programs (visits to the Soviet film festival), bowling, the celebration of the International Women's Day, common excursions with the families of the members of the brigade, brigade evenings and the patronage of school children. The members of the "Salvador Allende" brigade also committed themselves to studying the Soviet media, which suggests that more political work was expected from the socialist brigades in the GDR than in Hungary.⁶⁶² The accounts in the brigade diary recorded various aspects of community life: tours, excursions, nights at the cinema, visit to libraries, wine-tasting, walking in the forest, a reading group, and the celebration of International Women's Day. The accompanying photographs showed that brigade life did not exist merely on paper only, but that people did indeed participate in the common activities.

On the basis of contemporary sources it is very difficult to see what extent the socialist project of community building was successful and how it shaped popular consciousness. Even though there is some evidence that the party could not win over the majority of the factory's old guard to its cause, this probably did not influence their attitude to the factory itself. In addition, with the rapid increase of the workforce from the late 1960s the social composition of its personnel changed, too: many young people came from distant towns and villages to be trained in Jena and those who settled in the town grew up practically together with this new collective. The dormitories, the common training and the community life of the AWU inevitably established closer contacts among young people, and reinforced feelings of solidarity. Even though there is no documentation of their integration into the factory collective, the common fêtes, sporting events, and socialist brigades undoubtedly played a role in the process. This type of socialization rendered people more responsive to the values of the community they had joined.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

On the basis of life-history interviews, community building could be regarded as successful because the overwhelming majority of my interview partners stressed that there was a higher level of communality among colleagues and their neighbors during the Honecker era, than under the capitalist system post-unification. In this context the positive values of the socialist brigades (solidarity and communality) were frequently contrasted with the individualism and egoism of the new system: “This collective spirit that existed at the time of the GDR had a very different background. People helped each other because they had common problems to be solved. Today one speaks of team spirit but this team spirit is actually needed to achieve a goal. Not to solve problems but to achieve a goal. In the brigades it was not the goal that was important but collective social work, to have good results as a collective, for instance if someone did not have enough points, the others helped them and together they could achieve a good result. Today the system does not work like that. This is a pity because people had a greater sense of togetherness, in order to help each other. Today this help is not wanted. People are required to work together for the same goal but they are expected to work on their own and to achieve the maximum output”.⁶⁶³

The majority of my interview partners felt a change in people’s relation to their workplace and consequently that solidarity and human contacts among workmates declined.⁶⁶⁴ They maintained that the communities that were built in the GDR had disappeared together with the socialist system: “The collective was much better united in the time of the GDR. We went on excursions, held common festivals to celebrate

⁶⁶³ Quotation from an interview with a man worker (50).

⁶⁶⁴ This is also supported by the findings of Werner Schmidt (see: id., ‘Metamorphosen des Betriebskollektivs. Zur Transformation der Sozialordnung in ostdeutschen Betrieben’, *Soziale Welt*, 45, no. 3 (1995), 305-325; id., ‘Jeder hat jetzt mit sich selbst zu tun’: *Arbeit, Freizeit und politische Orientierungen in Ostdeutschland* (Konstanz: Univ.-Verl.-Konstanz, 1999); Regina Bittner, op. cit., 1998; id., ‘Kleine Leute, Bastler, Pfadfinder – Transformationsfiguren. Ethnografische Versuche im Feld des regionalen Strukturwandels’, *Berliner Debatte Initial*, 10, no. 2 (1999), 18-28.

Christmas in the workplace and other celebrations that we had at the time, we did many things together, we had many common trips and we had a rest. After work we always had a rest. But it is not the same now as it used to be. The collective is not what it used to be. I have work, I do my work – and the others? Earlier it was not like that. You can try but it no longer works. ‘I work here and what I do afterwards – that’s my business, that’s my private life’ – that’s what many would tell you now. It hurts a bit, really. People need time to relax – it would be good if we had a little time for each other!”⁶⁶⁵ In this context the socialist brigades were linked with a higher level of solidarity that was held to be a positive feature of the previous system: “Today people are occupied with themselves. In the period of the GDR we had a community. Neighbors helped each other, we had common excursions with colleagues in the workplace, there were common activities [...] There was a good climate in our plant, we regularly held brigade evenings, brigade parties. There were very many events organized amongst brigade members, among workmates, in the workshop, in the plant and in the whole factory – regular events. Workmates met privately, they mutually helped each other with various household jobs, for instance, repairing things or decorating the flat – that was totally normal. It was totally normal we helped each other. It is not like that today. It has been lost”.⁶⁶⁶ Interview partners also told about cases when the brigades gave psychological support to their members: “Earlier there was a totally different feeling of solidarity between colleagues. Today it is more like a fight because people think that they cannot keep their jobs otherwise. It was different in the GDR era [...] We had a colleague who had an alcohol problem and it was precisely this environment, her socialist brigade that helped her to lead a normal life. After the *Wende* she became a real alcoholic”.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁵ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (48).

⁶⁶⁶ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (60).

⁶⁶⁷ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (45).

Like in the Hungarian case, community building in the GDR was a part of the labor policy of the regime that received strong institutional support. While the mutual assistance of workmates had its spontaneous aspects, the role of the brigade movement – organized from above - was recognized: “One has to admit that earlier everything was a bit more organized. Fêtes in the workshop, brigade parties...such things...and then everybody was there, and there were groups formed that understood each other well. And the framework was also very different then, there were 250 people in the workshop, when there was an excursion, they sometimes hired a whole ship. Workmates meet much less frequently now...”.⁶⁶⁸ There were interview partners who reported of a kind of nostalgia for the organizational framework of the brigade movement: “We made work pledges, newspapers for the walls, sometimes it was a bit childish but [...] we wrote the in brigade diary to record what we did together, there were reports, photos [...] they have been all thrown away, these diaries, it is a pity, for instance, our boss whom we have now, he would be very happy if he could write such a diary now”.⁶⁶⁹

In the light of my life-history interviews, the brigade movement left mainly positive memories behind. It is, however, questionable as to the extent the communities of the factory and the neighborhood influenced working-class political opinions and strengthened their loyalty to the regime. While many interview partners linked these communities with socialist values (solidarity, unselfishness, equality), they did not hold the system itself to be socialist (none of the cited interview partners were members of the party, and many had a negative opinion of the party and the “comrades”). As the following citation shows, community work and participation in common activities had no relationship to the political opinions of people: “I was not a member of the party. I was pressured many times because my husband was a member, and they told me that if my husband is a member, I should be a

⁶⁶⁸ Quotation from an interview with a man worker (57).

⁶⁶⁹ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (54).

candidate, too. Then I told to the woman, okay, convince your husband first that he should join and then I will join, too. I knew that he was not a member of the party. No one forced me. I know this is how they would tell it now – but it is not true. Neither were people forced to celebrate 1 May. Allegedly they checked the names of those who were not there but I have never seen any such lists [...] At that time there was practical training for school children, one day a week, and I was persuaded to become a teaching assistant. I liked it very much, to organize the children, to find relevant tasks for them and to evaluate their work... I enjoyed it very much. But I would not have gone to party meetings on every Monday”.⁶⁷⁰ Surely there were people who could take advantage of their community work but for the majority, these collectives offered no material advantages and they were primarily appreciated as social spheres which were relatively independent of state control. Solidarity among workers was also nourished by the oppressive ideological climate, omnipotent state control and the interdependence of people within the shadow economy of favors necessitated by goods’ shortages. This kind of solidarity, however, helped reinforce a critical attitude toward the regime and its privileged cadres.

Labor policy for women

Helping working women was a central aspect of the labor policy of the regime; it was so for two reasons.⁶⁷¹ First, the government sought to solve the problem of labor shortage with through ensuring that women were integrated fully into the labor market. In addition to propaganda, this was encouraged by an extensive program of state provision of child care: nurseries, kindergartens and afternoon schools. Places in these institutions were in principle offered to every family at highly subsidized prices. This kind of state support

⁶⁷⁰ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (52).

⁶⁷¹ For a study that addresses specifically the issue of gender in the period see: Annette Schöler, op. cit., 2001.

was meant not only to encourage female employment, but also to enable women to complete household chores. The second aim was to level the differences between the sexes in income, education and career opportunities (in fact, full female employment was an important element of the state's general egalitarianism). Thanks to the work of women's commissions⁶⁷² whose task was to assist and control the realization of these goals in the enterprises, the situation of women workers in the Zeiss factory is better documented than that of their male counterparts (for instance, with respect to education).

Between 1960 and 1980 the proportion of women among the employees of the factory showed a slight increase: it was 37,8% in 1960, 39,4% in 1970, 40,3% in 1975 and 43,5% in 1980. The Zeiss-plants located in Jena had a workforce that was 42% female, and in some plants such as the optical plant women constituted a majority (60%).⁶⁷³ In the district the percentage of women of working age employed was 82,5% in 1972⁶⁷⁴, and it increased to 90% in 1975.⁶⁷⁵ The town of Jena had a similarly high proportion of working women: in 1976, 93% of women were employed.⁶⁷⁶ In the light of these figures we can speak of almost full female employment in the district and the town.

The factory made considerable efforts to provide conditions for full female employment. In 1976 it maintained eight nurseries with 407 places, nine kindergartens with 856 places and two afternoon schools with 172 places in the town of Jena.⁶⁷⁷ The town could offer proportionally more places in nurseries than in the GDR as a whole (number of places per number of children) while the proportion of the kindergarten places lay a bit below the national average. Reports critically commented that there were not enough afternoon schools in the town. There are general figures with respect to the whole

⁶⁷² The women's commissions were controlled by the party.

⁶⁷³ UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten, Entwicklung der Berufstätigkeit der Frau.

⁶⁷⁴ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/115, Frauenkommission.

⁶⁷⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Frauenarbeit.

⁶⁷⁶ UACZ, VA Nr. 1583, Unterlagen zur Direktion Kultur- und Sozialwesen, 1976.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

of the factory including plants outside Jena that show a slight growth in the capacity of the institutions for delivering child care in the second half of the 1970s: in 1976 the factory had 1,749 nursery and 2,762 kindergarten places, while in 1980 these numbers were 2,206 and 2,859 respectively. This improvement was demonstrated by the fact that in 1980, 141 women out of the employees of the factory (including all plants outside Jena) could not work because they could not get nursery or kindergarten places for their children⁶⁷⁸ while in 1970 nearly 500 women were in this situation in Jena alone.⁶⁷⁹ It can be correctly claimed that the demand for child-care places could be almost fully satisfied. This was reflected also in the development of female employment.

Full female employment had, however, a negative side, too. Even though one cannot make general statements about how household work was divided within the family, the surviving documents suggest that shopping and provisioning were largely the task of women. (For instance, in the information reports it was usually women who criticized the supply of consumer goods). This explains the high proportion of women among part-time workers: according to a 1973 report out of the 2,347 part-time workers of the Zeiss factory 2,234 (95%) were women. Around one-fifth of the female employees of the factory were part-time-workers: their proportion was 19,5% in 1973 and 20,8% in 1980.⁶⁸⁰ The proportion of part-time workers was almost the same among the women workers: it was 18,1% in 1980 (a slight decrease in comparison with the previous year, when it was 19,3% as the report commented). During this period it was the task of the women's commissions

⁶⁷⁸ UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten.

⁶⁷⁹ Informationsbericht des 1. Sekretärs der IKL Zeiss, 12 November 1970, op. cit. Another report estimated that around 1,000 women could not work in the whole district in 1973 because of the lack of places in the nurseries and kindergartens (Frauenarbeit, op. cit.).

⁶⁸⁰ The proportion of part-time workers among women was considerably higher, 34,1% in the district. (ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/115, Frauenkommission, op. cit.).

to win over women for full-time employment⁶⁸¹: even though the proportion of part-timers among female workers was lower than the national industrial average (25,8%) in the Zeiss, they had regular discussions with part-time workers to this end. The report underlined that new part-time contracts could be given for a determined period of time only and they had to be very well grounded. The following “ideological obstacles” to full-time jobs came up during the discussions: insufficient places in the afternoon schools, the issues supervision of children; an inadequate supply of consumer goods; household chores; the negative attitude of husbands; and financial calculations (the money was enough for the family budget).⁶⁸² This shows that in this case the interest of the state as an employer preceded the interests of working mothers since many women would have preferred working part-time for as long as they had small children.

The political goal of fully integrating women into the workforce was high on the agenda of the women’s commission, but improvement of the conditions of working women was also an integral part of this policy. In the optical plant of the Zeiss factory 15% of the women workers undertook shift work in 1976; the report of the commission added that the plant had one of the youngest staffs in the factory, with an average age of 23 (because of the mass recruitment of young skilled workers) and the mothers who had small children were not willing to work in shifts. The report also mentioned that the shift nursery had to be closed because mothers refused to leave their children there.⁶⁸³ The women’s commission paid special attention to the full use of working hours: “Many women leave their workplace earlier reasoning that ‘I have to pick up my children from the kindergarten or nursery on time because they are always the last’. An inquiry found that all of these

681 On the development of part-time female employment see: Almut Rietzschel, ‘Frauenerwerbstätigkeit und Teilzeitarbeit in der DDR, 1957 bis 1970’, *Postdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien*, no. 9 (1997), 34-42.

682 UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten, Teilzeitbeschäftigung.

683 ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Frauenarbeit, Carl Zeiss Jena, Optik-Betrieb, 21. April 1976.

institutions were open until 17.30 but parents usually picked up their children at 17.00. In the meantime we have arranged that all of the child care centers in Jena should be open until 18.00. Thus, women can spend more time in their workplace, they can participate in social life better than earlier, and they can also go shopping without being worried about their children”.⁶⁸⁴ Despite their political commitment, the women’s commissions did, however, represent the interests of working women sometimes even against management: “*We can conclude from our work with big families that there are a number of ideological problems in the attitude of the managers and state leaders.*”⁶⁸⁵ In many cases the managers refused to recognize that working mothers carried the bulk of the responsibility for household chores and for homemaking beyond their work in the plant. These tasks were only rarely recognized and appreciated. Concerning the extension of shift work, it should be taken into consideration that it is not primarily mothers with small children who should be convinced to work in shifts”.⁶⁸⁶ This comment shows that the commissions also acted as mediators between working women and the party and state leaders.

Even though, as the above comment also suggests, housework remained mainly the responsibility of women, in the life-history interviews child care and the extension of female employment were unambiguously positively evaluated. Most people regarded child care, the education system, health care, and full employment among the positive features of the socialist system. Full female employment was stressed among the differences between East and West Germany: many women interview partners mentioned that it was natural for them to work as opposed to the more traditional family model in West Germany: “It was different here than in West Germany where so many women who are below 50 stay at home or they have other interests. No one wants to sit at home here. Those who grew up in

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Stress is mine.

⁶⁸⁶ Unterlagen zur Direktion Kultur- und Sozialwesen, op. cit.

work and have always worked as young people want to be active again, not to sit at home and play dominoes. I think that it is depressing to live like that". In this context some interview partners consciously contrasted the family policy of East Germany, with that of West Germany: "In the old West Germany there were fixed gender roles. In our country never. I have never had any problems with housework. Equal rights – the whole marriage developed like that".⁶⁸⁷ In many life-history interviews work was an integral part of women's lives; this was why the loss of a job was a particularly painful experience of the new system: "When the children were small, I would have liked to work part-time, six hours in a day but at that time it was not possible. I would have liked to spend more time with the children, I have had a bad conscience because I was too tired in the evening, I could not always pay attention [...] The right to work, this is what I would like. I was unemployed for one and half years, I did not like it. That was not something for me. I was bored, one needs the stress of work somehow, the children have grown up, in the afternoon one can only wait for my husband to come home... that was not self-realization. I wanted to do something on my own. I always went to the Office of Labor, I was looking for jobs, I wrote applications that were sent back in two weeks with a refusal and I was sometimes invited to interviews, three or, four times. Once I received an interview for a date when I was on holiday, so my son went there, and they said that they want to see me because if the son is so attractive then the mother should be as well [laughs] this rarely happens but this is how it was".⁶⁸⁸

In this context, the role of state-provided child care was a hotly debated issue in the two Germanies; many interview partners felt the need to defend socialist child care against the charge that they would be harmful to the education of their children: "In my opinion our daughter only benefited from the nursery. My acquaintances from West Germany,

⁶⁸⁷ Quotation from an interview with a man worker (54).

⁶⁸⁸ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (48).

well, they would say that in the socialist kindergartners children were educated collectively. But my daughter has become a more individual person who knows her strengths and weaknesses, and she learnt to live in a community, to adapt herself to other people. I think that child care did her only good, as it had a positive effect on the development of her personality. It is totally wrong to believe that mothers have to stay at home with their children for three years in the family home. Child care teaches the children how to live and behave themselves in a community, which is important for the co-existence of people and their social relations. My grandson also goes to nursery. I see no harm in it”.⁶⁸⁹ Some interview partners consciously contrasted the Western image of socialist child-care institutions with their own experience: “First we should get to know each other better. The Western Germans likewise don’t know much about us. Take childcare. Beautiful kindergartens, children played and they learnt nice songs, and they [the Western relatives of the speaker] thought that the children learnt communist songs only! They also exaggerated things the same way as it was done here.”⁶⁹⁰ Child care was evaluated positively even by those who would have preferred working part-time when their children were small: “Work was from 7.00 to 16.45. It was a long day, mainly for the children. I had to take them early to the nursery, to the city by tram, undress them, run to the workplace, work until the last minute, then back to the nursery, dress the children, pick them up, catch the tram – it was a long day. But I believe even now that the nursery and kindergarten did no harm to the children. In West Germany they believe that these institutions are bad for the children. I don’t think so, they don’t cause any harm whatsoever. But I think it would have been better if the mothers could have worked part-time”.⁶⁹¹ Others thought that they were in a better situation than young mothers are today: “I have always worked full-time. I left at 6 in the morning, I took my son to the school,

⁶⁸⁹ Quotation from an interview with a man worker (55).

⁶⁹⁰ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (47).

⁶⁹¹ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (52).

kindergarten or nursery and I picked him up at 5 in the evening. In the meantime I was working. But it was nice. There was stress but it was nice. Today I can't imagine this stress and after all [...] many young people who today have children say that 'why should I have all that stress?' At that time I paid 20 Mark (Ostmark⁶⁹²) for the nursery and kindergarten places, today one pays 200-300 Euro. These are not comparable. Many would say: 'I rather stay at home, I don't do anything. I have enough money, I need...' yes, many think like that".⁶⁹³

Apart from promoting full female employment, the party also sought to improve the career opportunities of women the main means of which was through subsidizing education. This was of course linked with the egalitarian policies towards gender relations, as women belonged disproportionately to low-skilled groups. With respect to the training of women there was a clear improvement during the period immediately after the opening of the factory's comprehensive school. In 1966, 31% of the female workforce of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena were unskilled, 45% were semi-skilled, and 24% were skilled workers.⁶⁹⁴ In 1974 22% of the women workers were unskilled, 22% learnt other professions (dressmaker, etc.) and 49% were skilled workers.⁶⁹⁵ In the optical plant skilled workers were 51,7% of all female workers, university or college graduates 3,7% and semi-skilled and unskilled workforce were 44,6% in 1976.⁶⁹⁶ Despite the marked improvement, the proportion of unskilled workers was still much higher among women than among men (in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena it was 6,4% in 1974).⁶⁹⁷ The proportion of skilled workers was also higher among male workers of the factory: it was 81% in 1974.⁶⁹⁸ According to the general figures of the factory (including the plants outside Jena) the proportion of unskilled

⁶⁹² The name of the currency of the GDR.

⁶⁹³ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (54).

⁶⁹⁴ *Gleichberechtigt. Die Entwicklung der Frauen und Mädchen im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena*, op. cit. 6.

⁶⁹⁵ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/115, Frauenkommission, op. cit.

⁶⁹⁶ *Frauenarbeit, Carl Zeiss Jena, Optik-Betrieb*, op. cit.

⁶⁹⁷ *Gleichberechtigt. Die Entwicklung der Frauen und Mädchen im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena*, op. cit. 7.

⁶⁹⁸ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/115, Frauenkommission, op. cit.

workers among women was 17,2% in 1980, which shows a slight decrease in comparison with previous years. The proportion of skilled women workers, however, increased to 68,6%, which shows that the qualification of female workforce started to be comparable with that of their male counterparts.

The further education of women was supported by several means. Apart from the free education of selected candidates and paid study leave, in 1966 the factory organized special women's classes (*Frauensonderklasse*) in which working women could study during the regular working hours. These classes were very positively remembered by their participants (two of the interview partners attended classes of engineering economics and two of them trained to be designers⁶⁹⁹): "In 1979 I took up an engineering course, I trained to be an engineer-economist for four years. It was a special women's class, I don't know if you have heard of it. We were only women, we had class two days in a week [...] I liked it very much at that time, there were many of us in a similar situation, with small children, it was easier to help each other".⁷⁰⁰ Special women's classes were also organized to improve the qualification of women: between 1966 and 1974, 511 women finished their vocational training in these classes.⁷⁰¹ There are no overall figures for students in high education but we know, for instance, that in 1976, 99 women attended *Frauensonderklasse* in engineering economics.⁷⁰² In 1984, 20 women employees of the factory's research center⁷⁰³ studied in classes specially laid on for women, and 9 participated in adult education. In that year 6 other women started studying in *Frauensonderklasse* and 3 in

⁶⁹⁹ The classes also provided lasting friendships (I have found two interview partners with the help of one former student).

⁷⁰⁰ Quotation from an interview with a woman worker (51).

⁷⁰¹ *Gleichberechtigt. Die Entwicklung der Frauen und Mädchen im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena*, op. cit. 6.

⁷⁰² UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten, Qualifikationsstruktur.

⁷⁰³ The research centre that employed 4,741 people in 1975 was one of the most "elite" plants with a proportion of 51% of those who obtained a high-school leaving certificate or a degree of high education. The proportion of skilled workers and direct production managers was 47% (Wolfgang Mühlfriedel- Edith Hellmuth, op. cit., 369, 33. Tabelle).

adult education.⁷⁰⁴ These numbers show that women's classes significantly helped the high education of women.

While with respect to vocational training the differences between the men and women workers were significantly reduced, differences at the top of the hierarchy proved more persistent. In 1972 only 16% of the employees of VEB Carl Zeiss Jena who had university and college degrees were women, and their proportion was likewise low; 18% among those who finished comprehensive school and had a high-school leaving certificate (*Fachschulkader*⁷⁰⁵).⁷⁰⁶ According to the overall figures of the factory, in 1976 6% of the female workforce had only the *Fachschulkader* and 3,5% were university or college graduates. In 1980 the proportions were 8,1% and 5,2% respectively, which shows that the proportions of university or college graduates among women workers nearly doubled over this period.⁷⁰⁷ In 1984, 37% of the women employees of the research center belonged to the above two groups and the figures show that the proportion of educated women increased in the younger cohorts: of those between 40 and 60 years of age, the proportion of women was 13% among those who finished *Fachschule*, college or university while in the age-group between 25 and 45 it was 40%.⁷⁰⁸

On the basis of the statistical evidence, the education of women improved much faster than the appointment of female managers. (See table 8). In 1972, 7,1% of the direct production managers of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena were women⁷⁰⁹, and according to factory

⁷⁰⁴ UACZ, WB Nr. 564, Referat des Direktors W zum Frauenforum am 8. 11.1984.

⁷⁰⁵ This was a special type of school in the GDR that was meant to give education after training school. Apart from vocational training it offered a special high-school leaving certificate to the students with which they could apply to technical colleges and universities.

⁷⁰⁶ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-2/17/612, Frauenarbeit, Einschätzung der Durchsetzung der Frauenpolitik der Partei im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena durch die staatliche Leitung. Wie werden die Frauen politisch-ideologisch befähigt, ihrer Rolle und Verantwortung bei der Durchsetzung der Beschlüsse der 8th Parteitages gerecht zu werden? 28. Juni 1974.

⁷⁰⁷ Qualifikationsstruktur, op. cit.

⁷⁰⁸ Referat des Direktors W zum Frauenforum am 8. 11.1984, op. cit.

⁷⁰⁹ Frauenarbeit, Einschätzung der Durchsetzung der Frauenpolitik der Partei im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena durch die staatliche Leitung, op. cit.

statistics the proportion of direct production managers was still very low among women in 1976 (0,6%) and in 1980 (0,9%).⁷¹⁰ The proportion of women was not much higher either among the managers and leading functionaries: in 1976, 2,041 people had leading positions in the factory and 10,6% were women, while in 1980 out of the 2,376 leaders and managers 12% were women.⁷¹¹ The critical comments of the reports suggest that this was the field where it was the most difficult to implement the policy of equal rights and that misogynist attitudes continued to influence the selection of cadres: “It contradicts the above development [the improvement of the education of women] that out of the 89 graduates of *Frauensonderklasse* (from 1970) only 12 (13,5%) received mid-level or leading positions”.⁷¹² But even a report in 1981 complained that there was not much progress with respect to the promotion of women leaders and managers in the factory: “We cannot be contended at all with the rate of promotion of qualified women from the lowest to the highest levels. On the contrary, we have to say that there are huge shortcomings in this respect. The proportion of female brigadiers and direct production managers has almost totally stagnated for the past four years and the proportion of women among managers and leading cadres has even declined”.⁷¹³ It seems that of all the gender differences, career opportunities were the most difficult to level.⁷¹⁴

The leveling policy was more successful with respect to the differential between male and female workers. The factory conducted several surveys to show that the principle of equal pay for equal work was realized in each individual plant. With respect to the overall figures, no abuses were reported in this respect: a detailed analysis of the wages of men and women in 1978 found that there were very small differentials between men and

⁷¹⁰ Qualifikationsstruktur, op. cit.

⁷¹¹ Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten, Frauen in Leitungsfunktionen, op. cit.

⁷¹² Frauenarbeit, Einschätzung der Durchsetzung der Frauenpolitik der Partei im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena durch die staatliche Leitung, op. cit.

⁷¹³ ThStA Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera, IV C-4/13/115, Frauenkommission, 1981, op. cit.

⁷¹⁴ A separate subchapter discusses the role of women in the party and other mass organizations.

women workers who belonged to the same wage-groups. (See table 9). The differential was the smallest in the lowest wage-group (0,09 Mark/hour in wage-group 3) and the greatest in wage-group 5 (0,75 Mark/hour). In respect of average monthly wages, the differential between men and women workers ranged from 2 to 113 Marks. The greatest differential could be found in the high wage-groups: here the average monthly wages of women were 6-9% less than the average of the men's wages.⁷¹⁵ A report of 1979 found that the average monthly wages of male workers were higher than those of women, but the principle of equal pay for equal work was not violated. The reason for the higher average wages of male workers was that their proportion was higher in the high wage-groups while the majority of women belonged to the lower wage-groups. (See table 10). 84% of the employees in the lowest wage-group were women, while in the highest wage-groups their proportion was 5-10%.⁷¹⁶ There were other factors that negatively influenced the development of the average wages of women workers: the overwhelming majority of part-time workers were women, and the proportion of shift workers was higher among men (shift bonuses counted towards average wages). Besides, the report observed that there were "typical" women's jobs that were badly paid such as secretaries and wages clerks (even though there was a handwritten comment asking "Does it have to be like that? Are these jobs inferior?") The analysis of the wages therefore concluded that the higher average wages of men workers could be explained through their position in production and the women's greater responsibility for the household and the family.⁷¹⁷

The above information, however fragmentary, reveals that the system did indeed do much to level the differences between the sexes in employment, education and income but

⁷¹⁵ UACZ, VA Nr. 3740, Analyse zur Entlohnung und Eingruppierung werktätiger Frauen im Vergleich zu werktätiger Männern, 12. Oktober 1978.

⁷¹⁶ UACZ, VA Nr. 3740, Analyse zur Entlohnung und Eingruppierung werktätiger Frauen im Vergleich zu werktätiger Männern im Kombinat VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, 6. September 1979. Verteilung weiblicher Werkstätiger auf die einzelnen Lohngruppen im Vergleich zu männlichen Werkstätigen.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

it also points out the contradictions that it could not solve, most notably the problem of how to reconcile the professional life of women with the family and household duties. The comments of the cited documents clearly show that in this respect, emancipation was a slow process, and in most cases women were expected to undertake the bulk of the housework. The slow progress of the promotion of women leaders and managers likewise shows that misogynist biases were not easy to overcome. While recognizing the failures of this policy, it should be, however, also emphasized that the majority of the interview partners thought that the socialist system did a lot for working mothers. In this respect, the labor policy towards women was one of the few things that was unambiguously positively remembered.

8. The Party and the Workers

In my East German case study the least well documented chapter of the social and political life of the working class in the Honecker era is the relationship between the party and the workers.⁷¹⁸ The papers of the party organization in the factory were supposed to be transferred to the Rudolstadt archive at intervals of every twenty years, but the change of regimes prevented a transfer in 1991.⁷¹⁹ The materials were not found in the factory archives either. Since party membership of the party was seen as a sensitive issue, there was very little information in life-history interviews either. (When asked if they were members of the party, people gave an answer, but I rarely heard positive answers). This explains the limited scope of the chapter in comparison with the Hungarian case study.

There is one more important difference between the East German and Hungarian case studies that has to be pointed out. In Hungary, ideological discipline within the party was never as rigid as in the GDR, and from the late 1970s onwards, increasing liberalization could be observed that enabled the grass-roots membership to articulate their discontent with the existing economic and political conditions. In this politically more liberal atmosphere it was possible to detect the signs of the increasing unpopularity of the regime among the people, which rendered visible the decline of the system. In the GDR, on the contrary, ideological discipline was maintained practically until the fall of the Honecker regime. On the basis of the surviving party documents of the district, it is unlikely that the materials of the party organization of the Zeiss factory would have been more informative. There is some evidence that ideological life in Jena and the factory was

⁷¹⁸ For a study of the party control over the factories see: Thomas Reichel, 'Die "durchherrschte Arbeitsgesellschaft": Zu den Herrschaftsstrukturen und Machtverhältnissen in DDR-Betrieben', in: Renate Hürtgen-Thomas Reichel (eds.), op. cit., 2001, 85-110.

⁷¹⁹ Information from the colleagues of the Rudolstadt archive.

a bit more liberal; at least the leniency of the latter was criticized in district leadership meetings. Given the lack of minute books of factory party meetings, it is difficult to say, however, what this leniency meant in practice and how far the grass-roots members could or did express their opinions in cell meetings. It is still unlikely that any criticism of existing conditions, let alone of the party would have been recorded if we take into account that a satirical carnival publication almost cost the editor, a physicist, his job of and it was only through the intervention of the chairman of the IKPKK⁷²⁰ that he “got off” with a disciplinary transfer.⁷²¹ This story explains why it is so difficult, if not impossible to detect the signs of the decline of the regime in the official party documents.

The policy of intimidation was not, however, successful. It was possible to hide the signs of the decline, but the collapse of the Soviet control over Eastern Europe revealed in stark fashion the unpopularity of the regime. While in the Hungarian case it is possible to distinguish between the 1970s and 1980s (the latter being characterized by gradual marketization and liberalization of the political climate), in the case of the GDR the two decades of the Honecker regime constitute were more uniform in terms of the approach to both economic policy and the practice of political rule. The regime could, however, maintain the silence of the population only with the help of repressive methods; this was true of grass-roots party members also, where ideological discipline was taken even more seriously. By intimidating grass-roots party members itself, the leadership prevented internal debate, but it also blocked off official channels through which it could have been informed about the true political views of the members. It is remarkable that the party was never mentioned among those GDR institutions that were remembered positively later. The majority of those who contrasted the communality of the GDR with the individualism of

⁷²⁰ Industriekreis-Parteikontrollkommission.

⁷²¹ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV D-4/13/85, IKPKK Informationsberichte, 17.2.1978.

the new, capitalist society were not members of the party. Even though it was recognized that there were some committed Communists, party membership was usually associated with careerism in the eyes of the majority of my interview partners (including some members of the party). This suggests that its political education – despite, or rather because of the practice of oppression – was not very successful and the SED⁷²² was seen rather negatively by many workers even before the collapse of the regime.

The IKPO⁷²³ of Zeiss in numbers

The available figures show that the party was much larger in the Zeiss factory, than in the Hungarian Rába. While in the latter around 10% of the workforce were members of the party, in the Zeiss factory this proportion was 20,2% in 1967, 20,7% in 1975⁷²⁴ and in 1982, every fourth employee was a member of the party, at least according to reports written by the leadership.⁷²⁵ In 1967, the factory party organization consisted of 23 base organizations, 28 departmental organizations (APO⁷²⁶) and 289 party groups. In 1970 there were 13 base organizations, 56 departmental organizations (APO⁷²⁷) and 397 party groups in the IKPO of Zeiss.⁷²⁸ There was not much change in the figures throughout the 1980s: in 1982 the factory party organization was divided into 30 base organizations, 135

⁷²² Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (the name of the ruling party of the GDR).

⁷²³ Industriekreisparteiorganisation (the party organization of the factory).

⁷²⁴ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV B-4/13/96, Statistik.

⁷²⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV E-2/3/49, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Wie ist es der IKL des Veb Carl Zeiss Jena gelungen, in den Arbeitskollektiven und besonders in den Jugendbrigaden der Produktionsbetriebe und der produktionsvorbereitenden Bereiche einen aktiven Kern von Kommunisten herauszubilden, den Parteieinfluß auf die Entwicklung vom Wissenschaft und Technik zu stärken und erfolgreich den Kampf um Spitzenleistungen zu führen? 23 September 1982.

⁷²⁶ Abteilungsparteiorganisation.

⁷²⁷ Abteilungsparteiorganisation.

⁷²⁸ Statistik, op. cit.

departmental organizations (APO) and 572 party groups⁷²⁹ while in 1988 the relevant figures were 32, 152 and 605 respectively.⁷³⁰

In contrast to the Hungarian situation, the party membership in the Zeiss factory shows a constant increase over the period: in 1967 there were 3,121 members of the party and 413 candidates, in 1975 there were 4,730 members⁷³¹, in 1982 7,360 members and candidates⁷³², in 1984, 7,600⁷³³ and in 1988 an information report gave a figure of 8,394 members.⁷³⁴ The first secretary of the factory party organization spoke of “more than 8,000 Communists” in a speech of 1987 in front of the party leadership of the district.⁷³⁵ Meanwhile the total workforce increased significantly, too, but the percentage of them who were party members also rose: in 1967, every fifth employee was a member of the party⁷³⁶ while throughout the 1980s every fourth member belonged to the organization.⁷³⁷ We do not know about the generational composition of party membership in the 1980s but the comment that there were 193 youth brigades and youth collectives in the factory in 1982⁷³⁸ suggests that the decline of the prestige of the party among young people was not as marked in the GDR, as in Hungary where reports throughout the 1980s increasingly complained of a problem of recruitment and of the declining appeal of the youth organization of the party, the KISZ. While in Hungary the decrease in party membership was characteristic of the last years prior to the collapse of the regime, in the GDR it seems

⁷²⁹ Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 23 September 1982, op. cit.

⁷³⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. A. 9258, Informationsbericht, Jena, 8 Juli 1988.

⁷³¹ Statistik, op. cit.

⁷³² Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 23 September 1982, op. cit.

⁷³³ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-E/2/3/97, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Standpunkt der IKL der SED des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena zu den Ergebnissen und Erfahrungen der Parteiarbeit bei der Befähigung und Erziehung der Kommunisten zur Meisterung der Aufgaben in ihrer Einheit vom Wort um Tat, 13 September 1984.

⁷³⁴ Informationsbericht, Jena, 8 Juli 1988, op. cit.

⁷³⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. A. 9970, Sitzung der Bezirksleitung, 11 Februar 1987.

⁷³⁶ Statistik, op. cit.

⁷³⁷ Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 23 September 1982, op. cit.; Sitzung der Bezirksleitung, 11 Februar 1987, op. cit.

⁷³⁸ Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, 23 September 1982.

that the loss of appeal of the party became manifest only with the change of regime. In fact, the first time when the however careful that “there are people who want to resign their party membership” appeared in official reports was the summer of 1989⁷³⁹, and this step required courage even at that time.⁷⁴⁰

The surviving statistics of the factory party organization show that the affirmative action in order to maintain the proportion of members who were working-class quotas were observed in the GDR the same way as in Hungary. In 1967, the proportion of workers among the membership was 54,7%, that of the intelligentsia 20,3%, that of the white-collar workers 23,8% and that of the students 1,2% in the IKPO of Zeiss. The majority of the members (56%) joined the party between 1959 and 1967. 27,5% were between 31 and 40 years old, 20,6% were between 26 and 30, 16,7% between 41 and 50, 16,3% between 51 and 60 and 13,2% were below 25 (the remaining 5,7% were older than 60). 13,7% of party members had finished comprehensive school with a high-school leaving certificate and 6,6% were university or college graduates. In the light of these figures, the intelligentsia and those with technical-school training were overrepresented among the membership; a fact that shows education was often linked with the membership: 27,8% of those with only technical training and 32,9% of the *Fachschulkader* and graduates were members of the party (19.2% of workers were members). 12% of 18 to 25 year olds were members of the party. In 1970, 51,3% of the total membership were workers, while 29,1% belonged to the intelligentsia and 18,7% were other white-collar workers. The average age of the membership was 38.1 years. In 1975, 20.7 percent of workers were party members, 29.5 percent of members of the intelligentsia, and 8,7% of young people.⁷⁴¹ It seems that the party paid close attention to these percentages, as in 1977 similar figures were reported: 51

⁷³⁹ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. A. 9938/2, Informationsberichte, Carl Zeiss Jena, 26 Juli 1989.

⁷⁴⁰ According to some interview partners, those who announced this intention were either agitated to stay in the party or they were excluded from the organization.

⁷⁴¹ Statistik, op. cit.

percent of the membership were workers, and 20,7 of the workers belonged to the organization. The proportion of the under-30s in the party was 29,4%, which was much better than the district average (20,4%). It was, however, noted that some plants contained higher proportions of members than others: in the research center, for instance, only 13,3% of employees were members of the party and their proportion was also low in the base organization of electro-technology unit.⁷⁴² The fact that the percentage of members as a proportion of all employees was at its lowest in the “elite” plants was not flattering to the party at any rate; even though it may well have changed throughout the 1980s.

There is not much data about recruitment during the period, but it can be assumed that if every fourth employee was a member of the party, the requirements could not have been very seriously enforced. Just like the Hungarian party secretary, who said that in MVG five out of ten members were unaware of their obligations to the party,⁷⁴³ a report in 1968 complained of the mechanical way in which members were accepted into the party: *“There are cases when the economic functionaries and party secretaries, contrary to the instructions of the leadership, instead of helping the candidates, fill out the enrolment forms themselves so that the candidates only need to sign them”*.⁷⁴⁴ In this way they exerted a moral pressure on the candidates, which had a negative effect on their future political development. “It was also a widespread practice to not inform, or at best, to only partially inform candidates for membership of the basic questions of party policy, and members’ rights and obligations. The violation of the principles of the party during recruitment, and the harmful practice of “candidates at any price” could also be explained by the fact that the base organizations in their attempts to increase the proportion of workers in the party, forgot to consider each application on a case-by-case basis and to

⁷⁴² ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/2/5/300, Information über die Entwicklung der Mitgliederbewegung, 10 Mai 1977.

⁷⁴³ Jelentés a 10. kongresszus óta felvett párttagok szociális összetételéről, valamint a pártból kikerültek összetételéről és okairól, op. cit.

⁷⁴⁴ Stress is mine.

respect the rules. The result was a high proportion of workers, among those excluded from the party, or struck off". The document also criticized the selection of candidates for full membership, arguing that there were workers enrolled who were neither professionally nor privately respected by their fellow workers and that the party admitted even candidates who "disagreed with basic questions of the policy of our party". In many cases there was no interview with candidates, before acceptance even though "during the personal discussion one can check whether the candidate has faith in the party, or whether he really thinks that he is part of the collective".⁷⁴⁵ On the basis of this document, the policy of the SED towards working-class members shows much similarity with the practice of the MSZMP in Hungary. Both parties sought to win over "respectable" working class to set an example to other workers. The East German officials encountered the same difficulties of party organization among the workers as did the Hungarians; most notably, the refusal of many workers to join the party. It is remarkable that the document mentioned and criticized the practice of "forcing" candidates to join the party by handing out forms that had already been filled in to them. This and the information that the party admitted "ideologically unreliable" candidates suggest that in the GDR, just as in Hungary, "worker comrades" were frequently pressured to join the party simply in order to fulfill centrally-stipulated targets.

Women in the party

The proportion of women in the factory party organization was lower than that of men: in 1970, around 40% of the employees were women⁷⁴⁶ and they constituted only 20%

⁷⁴⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/2/4/290, Bezirksparteikontrollkommission, Gewinnung von Kandidaten, 12 November 1968.

⁷⁴⁶ *Gleichberechtigt. Die Entwicklung der Frauen und Mädchen im VEB Carl Zeiss Jena*, op. cit. 4.

of the membership.⁷⁴⁷ - in Rába MVG the proportion of women was 25% in the factory and 14% among party members.⁷⁴⁸ In 1977, the proportion female party members stood at 26%⁷⁴⁹ in the Zeiss factory, but it was still lower than the district average (36,4%). 40% of female members in the factory were blue-collar workers.⁷⁵⁰

Despite administrative measures that promoted women leaders, the 1977 figures show that the proportion of female members was still low, particularly among those in high-ranking positions. Around 20% of district party secretaries were women, and they only made up 13% of district secretariat members. Around one-quarter of employees of the party apparatuses and one-fifth of teachers in party schools were women. There had, however, been a marked increase in the percentage of women among leaders of the base organizations; from 21% to 33,8% between 1975 and 1977. It seems that the public role of women also increased: in the plenums of the party leadership of the district the proportion of women was 30%, while in the plenums of the district their average was 38%. In the Zeiss factory 26,1% of the party leaders of the factory organization, and 17% of the party secretaries were women.⁷⁵¹

Just as in Hungary, women were mainly active in the youth organization- the FDJ⁷⁵² and the trade union committees, which had less power. In the Zeiss factory, women made up 54% of FDJ members, against a district average of 51%. In the districts' trade union committees the proportion of women varied at between 43% and 55% (among the chairpersons it varied between 27 and 45%). The proportion of women was also high (42%) among the members of the *Konfliktkommission* (even though among the

⁷⁴⁷ Statistik, op. cit.

⁷⁴⁸ A Győr városi VB jelentése az üzemi pártbizottságok alapszervezeteket irányító tevékenységéről.

⁷⁴⁹ The proportion of women among the party members also varied among the individual plants. According to a report of 1977, even though the optical plant had a high proportion of female workforce, only 11,3% of the women were members of the party. Information über die Entwicklung der Mitgliederbewegung, op. cit.

⁷⁵⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/2/17/508, Analyse der gegenwärtigen Ergebnisse bei der Entwicklung und den Einsatz von Genossinnen in Parteifunktionen.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Freie Deutsche Jugend.

chairpersons it was only 22%). The highest proportions of women were found among the committees in charge of the social education of children (71,6%), social insurance (61,9%), social policy (54%) and organized holidays (51,8%).⁷⁵³ This suggests a continued association of women with community work, which at the same time negatively affected their opportunities to get promoted to leading positions. An information report from the Zeiss factory commented in 1973 that even though 905 women finished comprehensive school with a high-school leaving certificate, or obtained a college or university degree, only 15 of them achieved a position commensurate with their education level.⁷⁵⁴ As in 1977 it was stated that the majority of women leaders held low-ranking positions⁷⁵⁵, it seems that gender inequalities continued to structure the political careers of men and women.

Party life

Since none of the minute books of party meetings survived from the period, it is difficult to reconstruct grass-roots party life. Documents from an enquiry conducted in 1969 into party life in the instrument plant suggest that there were similar problems with the regular party meetings to those encountered in Hungary at that time. This holds for the base-cell meetings; according to a report of 1976 the attendance of the meetings of the party leadership of the factory was 84,9%.⁷⁵⁶ An East German report from 1968 lists further deficiencies with ideological training that underlines the similarities with Hungary: “With respect to most of the party commissions, the candidates don’t have to report on

⁷⁵³ Analyse der gegenwärtigen Ergebnisse bei der Entwicklung und den Einsatz von Genossinnen in Parteifunktionen, op. cit.

⁷⁵⁴ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/3/720, Informationsberichte, Carl Zeiss Jena, 10 August 1973.

⁷⁵⁵ Analyse der gegenwärtigen Ergebnisse bei der Entwicklung und den Einsatz von Genossinnen in Parteifunktionen, op. cit.

⁷⁵⁶ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/5/337, Information über einige Probleme der Parteiarbeit, 24 März 1976.

their fulfillment of tasks. In this way the candidate is not trained to actively participate in the execution of the decisions of the party, but he only learns that he does not need to take seriously responsibility and discipline in the party". Furthermore, the report stated that the large factories did not have a concrete picture of the Marxist-Leninist education of candidates, and they enrolled candidates who lacked basic training. In some places managers prevented candidates from attending courses, and they lacked support from the party organizations. According to a report, low attendance of local courses was at a "frightening" level: out of the invited 207 candidates less than half turned up, 92 attended a course in Pößneck (only 20 out of the invited 160 came from Lobeda and 8 out of the invited 40 from the town of Jena).⁷⁵⁷ In 1977, the Zeiss factory reported that 31,2% of the membership visited a party school for more than three months and the proportion was even higher, 43,5% among the *Fachskulkader*, and the college or university graduates.⁷⁵⁸ This, at any rate, shows that ideological training was taken more seriously in Honecker's GDR, than in Kádár's Hungary at the time.

Even though there is little information on the forms and methods of political education in the surviving documents, a 1974 report showed that the distribution of Marxist-Leninist literature was also taken more seriously in the GDR than in Hungary. In the district there were 594 shop-assistants, who dealt with its distribution, and 146 of them (24%) worked in the industrial plants themselves. This did not mean that political literature reached every factory evenly: booksellers could only supply 85 plants, out of a total of 250, with political literature, and the government, as the report critically commented, was reluctant to increase the number of booksellers. Out of the district's 577 municipalities only 50 were served. The base organizations also contracted the shops to facilitate the distribution of political literature. There is no further information about the type of

⁷⁵⁷ Gewinnung von Kandidaten, 12 November 1968, op. cit.

⁷⁵⁸ Information über die Entwicklung der Mitgliederbewegung, 10 Mai 1977, op. cit.

literature that was supported in this way, but there is some evidence that the contracts mainly helped the distribution of propaganda materials⁷⁵⁹ since the report mentioned that in the first half of the year of 1974, 2,165 copies of the publication entitled *Methodik der politischen Bildung* (The methodology of political education) were sold in the factories.⁷⁶⁰

Although the “liberalism” of the Zeiss party organization was criticized by the district leadership, in the light of the albeit fragmentary information about party life, not only was this liberalism very limited as compared to the situation in Hungary, but deviation from the party line was much more strictly punished in the GDR. There were people who objected to the formality of elections by refusing to vote. For this reason, there were campaigns organized before the elections to mobilize people: in 1971, for instance, turnout was 25-30% in the elections, while it increased to 52% in 1974.⁷⁶¹ Criticism of the elections was regarded as “ideological deviation”: in 1977, it was reported that “young comrades” from Zeiss and the town of Gera complained that the candidates on the ballot paper have all been selected before the elections.⁷⁶² The party reports mention another case that shows that criticism in this respect had serious consequences: Comrade F, who was a designer in the research center of VEB Carl Zeiss and a member of the party, was removed from his position as chairperson of the National Front⁷⁶³ in the electoral district of Winzerla because in the working group that prepared the elections he “constantly objected to the resolutions and tasks of the group so that the city councilor of internal affairs, comrade K always had to warn him of the leading role of the party. When the working

⁷⁵⁹ On the basis of party literature that some interview partners gave me as a present, it is, however, unlikely that these publications were widely read in the factories.

⁷⁶⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/3/162, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Ergebnisse bei der Propagierung und den Vertrieb marxistisch-leninistischer Literatur und der Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Literaturvertriebes in Bezirk Gera, 29 August 1974.

⁷⁶¹ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/3/152, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Einschätzung der Ergebnisse der Wahlbewegung, 30 Mai 1974.

⁷⁶² Zur inhaltlichen Fragen der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit die gegenwärtig besonders im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion der Bevölkerung stehen, op. cit.

⁷⁶³ *Nationale Front* was the popular front of the political parties and mass organizations in the GDR. Formally, the GDR was a multi-party system, but in practice the elections and the selection of the candidates were controlled by the SED.

group was informed that the proposals for the electoral committees would be changed, he declared that he would not accept commands and that he would not assist in any show, ‘we want here democratic elections and not a circus’. *When he went as far as to protest against the top candidates who were selected in a public meeting of the nominations committee, he was relieved of his position because he declared that he would not work as a chairperson from 31 March 1979*”⁷⁶⁴. During the interview with comrade F, he gave back his membership card declaring that he would resign his membership. This was not accepted and he was informed that he would be disciplined. Comrade F declared that he “would no longer participate in any discussion and for him the matter is settled”.⁷⁶⁵ The case confirms that the party preferred to exclude those who threatened to resign their membership. It is likewise remarkable that even in this case, when comrade F publicly criticized the candidates of the party, it was emphasized that he was relieved of his post upon his request – not because he would have been – or indeed was - removed anyway. This shows that officials themselves did not want to recognize explicitly the degree to which repression was used to maintain the rule of the party. Comrade F undoubtedly showed considerable courage when he refused to play his part in this “show”; but this ideological climate also explains why there were so few openly discontented grass-roots members in the GDR, compared to Kádár’s Hungary.

Another field where the members of the party in the Zeiss factory were too lenient with the “class enemy” was in work with the *Antragsteller*⁷⁶⁶. In 1984 an enquiry was conducted in the instrument plant (which at the time had 5,000 employees) because 25 of them applied for permission to leave the GDR. The purpose of the enquiry was to supervise targeted political work to convince these people to withdraw their applications to

⁷⁶⁴ Stress is mine.

⁷⁶⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/4/13/85, IKPKK, Informationsberichte, 16 April 1979.

⁷⁶⁶ People who officially asked for a permanent permit to leave the GDR (this involved the loss of the GDR-citizenship).

leave the GDR. The enquiry concluded that political work in this respect was “totally inadequate” and that many employees were reluctant to contradict the *Antragsteller*, because they supported the view that the state should let them leave if they wished. Others even argued that there would be fewer *Antragsteller* if the supply of consumer goods were better. In many places the colleagues refused to enter into political debate with the *Antragsteller*, because they were good workers: “The colleagues direct the discussions to the liberal position that ‘we would not have expected this from this person’ instead of evaluating their actions as a betrayal of our state and siding with the class enemy [...] It is not easy to contradict the *Antragsteller*, because the majority of them do not have a provocative attitude. Among many, there is almost human sympathy for them, because as comrade E said, our people are too liberal in small communities. A section of the comrades believe that the existing problems of the supply of consumer goods hinder our policy”.⁷⁶⁷

There were concrete examples mentioned of how far political work was neglected in this respect: one *Antragsteller*, for instance, argued that even were he to withdraw his application, he would always be discriminated against in the GDR - his colleagues should have explained to him that this was not true - while another *Antragsteller* was asked to undertake extra shifts, even though she wanted to participate in the movement “*Mach mit!*” during that time. Her colleagues failed to argue that she was interested in the social life of the GDR.⁷⁶⁸ An enquiry in the milling shop found that the channels for exchanging information worked unevenly: it took four days for the manager to be told that an employee who was transferred to his plant “because of security reasons”, was actually an *Antragsteller*. When asked, the manager and the party secretary did not know in which

⁷⁶⁷ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-E/2/4/255, Bericht über die Untersuchung der BPKK (Bezirksparteikontrollkommission) und der IKPKK Carl Zeiss Jena in den GO (Grundorganisation) des Betriebes Wissenschaftlichen Gerätebau des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena (G-Betrieb) zur Wirksamkeit der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit bei der Zurückdrängung der rechtswidrigen Anträge auf Übersiedlung in das nichtsozialistische Ausland, 24 April 1984.

⁷⁶⁸ According to the given statistics, 35 Zeiss-employees applied for the permission to leave the GDR in 1980, 31 in 1981, 37 in 1982 and 120 in 1983. In 1980, 63% of the *Antragsteller* were workers. Bericht über die Untersuchung der BPKK, op. cit.

brigade he worked. There was an “offensive” discussion with the party group of the mill shop but the report suggests that the attitude to the *Antragsteller* was rather liberal, because one comrade declared during the interview that there would be less *Antragsteller* if there was a better supply of goods and he himself had to walk his legs off until he could buy the parts for his car.⁷⁶⁹

The political attitudes of many grass-roots members did not differ much from those who were outside the party, and if they had been allowed, they would have criticized economic policy in similar terms to the Hungarian grass-roots membership. Many East German workers who were members of the party also expressed their discontent with the supply of consumer goods and their human sympathy for the stigmatized “class enemy”, if only in a very restrained manner. Conflict between the managers and workers frequently manifested itself as one between the party leaders and the grass-roots members. On the basis of the minute books of the 1969 enquiry in the instrument plant, many grass-roots members thought that workers’ opinions did not matter much in party meetings and that leaders enforced their will anyway. A similar conflict can be documented in the model building workshop in 1971, which was examined by the IKPKK. According to one member of the leadership of the base organization to which the party group of the workshop belonged, the main problem was that there were two camps within the party group: “the two direct production managers have a common opinion and the comrades who work on the machines have a different view. The main reason is that the organizer of the party group and the manager of the workshop is the same person”. According to this information, base-cell meetings were irregular, grass-roots members did not know the topics of discussion beforehand, and nobody did anything on their own initiative. In the meetings the leaders presented the lists of annual premiums and their evaluation of

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, Niederschrift über die Aussprache mit Genossen J, Parteigruppenorganisator in der Fräselei im Beisein des APO-Sekretärs Genossen H am 04.04.1984.

socialist labor competition, which could be discussed, but could not be changed. On the concrete question of whether the tasks given by the party leadership of the base organization represented the party line the speaker – not surprisingly – gave a positive answer, but he added that *“the colleagues and the comrades do not agree with the way as these tasks are communicated and the methods used to implement the party line”*⁷⁷⁰. An interview with a young worker confirmed this view. He commented that even though the workers often contradicted the direct production managers, their opinions did not count. He also had a conflict with one of the direct production managers over a proposal of improvement that he made to the manager of the plant but since his wage depended on the direct production manager, he would be afraid to criticize him in the future.⁷⁷¹

Even these fragmentary sources show that grass-roots party life was often highly formalized, just as in Hungary, and that it is at best doubtful how far the party could train committed Communists, let alone politically educate the masses. Taking into account the frequently voiced criticism that there would be less people who want to leave the GDR if the supply of goods were better, it seems that the propaganda of the party was less effective in the 1980s like in Hungary even if people in the GDR were more careful not to criticize the policy of the party openly. On the basis of the documents it would be difficult to reconstruct the atmosphere of party meetings; it can be assumed, however, that people also formulated criticism at least in the base-cell meetings, but in the light of likely retaliation, it is unlikely that they would have openly discussed their discontent with the socialist state.

⁷⁷⁰ Stress is mine.

⁷⁷¹ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/4/13/83, Untersuchung in der APO/ZGss – Parteigruppe Modelltischlerei, 27 September 1971.

Losing members

There are no overall figures for the Zeiss factory for the numbers excluded from the party, or who were struck off. The discussion, however, of disciplinary procedures suggests that the party sought its loss of the members to a minimum. One exception was conflict over the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, when disciplinary action was taken against 139 members district-wide who opposed the official line; this figure included 32 managers.⁷⁷² The report introduced two cases that show that the party did indeed “fight” for members, where the individuals concerned were good workers, yet, on the other hand, many grassroots-members lacked ideological commitment to the party just like in Hungary. One worker in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena, comrade Z, “despite his 20-year-long membership, does not have close contacts with our party. He wanted to resign his membership because he could not reconcile his religious faith with Marxism. Since he is a very good worker – he is one of the best innovators in his workshop – he was persuaded to withdraw his resignation. Only after he made unclear statements concerning the events in Czechoslovakia was he eventually struck off”. Another case was that of an electrical engineer who claimed that “he was forced to join the party in the army. He has totally fake ideas about the party and he makes ideologically unclear statements, for instance, that ‘our media has not informed people truthfully and therefore he listened to the Western media. Concerning the Czechoslovakian events he therefore did not accept our measures.’”⁷⁷³

1968 was clearly an important year politically for the Zeiss factory party organization compiled a report on the political education of its membership, and the “deviations from the official line” that emerged in relation to events in Czechoslovakia.

⁷⁷² According to the report there were very few comrades among these 139 who had already made critical comments concerning the Hungarian “events” of 1956 and the building of the “anti-fascist wall of defence” of 1961.

⁷⁷³ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/2/4/290, Bezirkspartei kontrollkommission, Einschätzung über die im Bezirk aufgetretene Erscheinungen und Auseinandersetzungen mit Genossen im Zusammenhang mit den Ereignissen in der CSSR, 12 November 1968.

The report did not give statistics, but it introduced individual cases. A foundry worker was expelled from the party because he compared the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia to Hitler's occupation of the country, and he said that the Czechoslovak comrades at the Moscow conference only obeyed commands. The following case sheds some light on the "everyday" methods of repression and the degree of political control over society: it was reported that a 55-year-old woman worker protested against the military support that the socialist countries gave to the Soviet Union in a workers' bus and her comrades that were riding the bus informed her base organization. In another case a brigadier and another comrade visited a Czech family before the intervention, where the husband, who had just been released from prison, told them that "at last we have socialism and real freedom", and therefore they refused to sign a form indicating their agreement with the Soviet Union's "friendly help". These workers were, however, eventually persuaded of their mistake. One candidate-member who worked in the tool factory and was promoted to study engineering had to be, however, expelled because he declared that he would like to keep his personal freedom and he could not subordinate himself to party discipline. This candidate-member had already made critical comments concerning the Exquisit-shops.⁷⁷⁴

The Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia opened conditions in the GDR to criticism, too. According to an analysis of the "hostile manifestations" concerning the Czechoslovak events, people made formal comparisons of prices and wages between East and West Germany; they argued that the East German media was either not objective, or lied utterly; and, from this, they concluded that there was limited freedom of speech and of the press in the GDR, and that those who made "hostile" statements in public or tried to

⁷⁷⁴ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/2/4/297, Einschätzung zur parteierzieherischen Maßnahmen in den Grundorganisationen der IKPO des VEB Carl Zeiss Jena im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung in der CSSR und der sozialistischen Waffenhilfe am 21. 8. 1968. 8. Oktober 1968.

“heckle” the others usually watched or listened to western television or radio.⁷⁷⁵ Attacks on the state order were criminally punishable; but these cases show that even members of the party, who were excluded in 1968, criticized the limited freedom of the press and the lack of democracy within the party.

An analysis of the “hostile manifestations” among district party members between 1973 and 1976 likewise shows that the relationship to West Germany was at the center of political education. One party member was, for instance, excluded because he argued that the “borders are not necessary because there are also Germans living there, they speak the same language and we are the same nation. The wall in Berlin should be removed”. The report regretfully commented that the comrade concerned was a likeable man. Another member was relieved of his post as party secretary, because he was a philatelist and he refused to break his contacts to Western people who had the same hobby.⁷⁷⁶ The report commented that because of this refusal his request to study in the Soviet Union could be reconsidered. A woman worker who was a party member continued a “hostile discussion” in public with a candidate because her husband had been sentenced for *Republikflucht*⁷⁷⁷, and she compared the penal authorities of the GDR to the fascist concentration camps. An old comrade who joined the party in 1930 was excluded because he “praised above all the conditions in West Germany, he defended the social democratic position and he said that he always felt like a ‘little follower’. His organization formerly tolerated these comments because he was an old comrade”.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/2/3/72, Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung, Bericht zum Stand der Durchsetzung und Wirksamkeit der Rechtsprechung im Bezirk auf der Grundlage der neuen Gesetzeswerke zur sozialistischen Strafrecht insbesondere die sich daraus ergebenden politisch-ideologische Probleme, 5 Dezember 1968.

⁷⁷⁶ One interview partner told a similar story; he had the hobby of rearing carrier-pigeons.

⁷⁷⁷ Attempt to leave the GDR illegally.

⁷⁷⁸ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/4/303, Feindliche Handlungen von Mitgliedern und Kandidaten der Partei (1973-1976).

A report from the Zeiss factory likewise shows that the party tolerated much less open criticism in the GDR, than in Hungary. In 1977, six people wanted to resign their membership in the micro plant after only a short period in the party. The investigation revealed that the people concerned spoke out against party policy in party meetings, but the party leadership was too liberal and demanded no explanation. The report also mentioned the case of a skilled worker who commented that “the theory of Marxism-Leninism is good but the practice of the party and the government is not in line with the theory. The high functionaries have been detached from the people and in the GDR there are differences between the classes, look at the Intershop, Exquisit and Delikat shops. People are not correctly informed about the economic situation, and those who tell the truth are silenced. Even Marx and Engels would turn in their graves if they had seen our policy”. The skilled worker made these comments in a party meeting and “some comrades nodded because he referred to existing holes in the supply of goods. He had authority in his party group, because he had been a member of the party since 1945, and he had held leading party functions until 1960”. Despite his merits, the skilled worker was expelled from the party.⁷⁷⁹

Criticism of the party was frequently linked to resignations from the party. One member of the IKPO of the Zeiss factory, who was, allegedly, the first to be “openly opportunist” resigned his membership arguing that the party disappointed the masses. During the interview it turned out that “in his view the party should be separated from the economy and that it should be more open and democratic like the Western parties”. The “opportunist” member was not given the opportunity to resign, but was simply expelled.⁷⁸⁰ In 1980 in the Göschwitz plant, two people submitted resignation letters: a direct production manager declared that he was not happy to represent party policy, and a worker

⁷⁷⁹ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/2/4/242, Bezirksparteikontrollkommission, 4 Januar 1978.

⁷⁸⁰ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-D/4/13/85, IKPKK, Informationsberichte, 8 März 1979.

in the tool factory announced that he was ashamed to be a party member and could not support the party line.⁷⁸¹

This shows that the party took political criticism much more seriously in the GDR than in Hungary, and that criticism of the party among the grass-roots membership was punished more severely. One party member was disciplined because his son was brought to trial because of truculence. This suggests that the organization was also expected to control the lives of the individuals to a higher degree than in Hungary. In court it was revealed that comrade S had allowed his son to watch Western TV programs, and “as father he started to explain this position with the words: ‘Comrade Honecker explained his attitude to watching Western TV in detail at the Ninth Party Congress...’ The public prosecutor interrupted him because he could not let anybody distort the party line in this way. Comrade S and his party group did not recognize that there is no co-existence in the ideological field. Instead of confronting comrade S with his mistake, his party group felt sorry for him because of the troubles that he has with his son and they wanted to see the ‘human’ side of the problem only. This means that in their view, when it comes to a fight against the bourgeois ideology and its manifestations in our country, ‘humanity’ precedes party discipline and the political education of members. The party group took this approach because they didn’t understand the role of criticism and self-criticism in our development, and they lack confidence in our party and state organs. Therefore they refused to take disciplinary action against comrade S. As they did not understand the information that they received and they doubted the facts, they let comrade S influence them negatively against the public prosecutor. The views and attitude of the members of the group display the influence of social democracy [...] We see the main reasons of this liberal attitude of the party group in the following: There was no strong political leadership in the group,

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 19 November 1980.

therefore they could not correctly evaluate the political-ideological conditions. Community life was mixed with companionship, and therefore political education was neglected in the group”. After the discussion with the members of the IKPKK, the party group “recognized” its mistake: the organizer of the group received a reprimand and comrade S a strong reprimand.⁷⁸²

The role of the IKPKK was, however, not only to punish people, but also to demonstrate that members could expect due process from the party. In one case, for instance, the IKPKK conducted an inquiry concerning the case of a trainee who was an FDJ secretary and a candidate-member. After he had problems in his dormitory, he gave notice in the factory and his candidacy was terminated. The inquiry found that the case had the following antecedents: there was a meeting in the dormitory where the FDJ secretary criticized the relationship between the trainees and the teachers, and demanded that trainees should be treated differently. This created a difficult situation for the candidate-member in the dormitory, which finally led him to give notice in his workplace but as the inquiry stated “his exclusion from the party was wrong because only the facts and not the reasons for his behavior were taken into consideration. He tried to solve his problems alone because he lost his trust in the collective”. It was therefore decided that the trainee should be re-admitted as a candidate-member.⁷⁸³ There was also an investigation of the living conditions of trainees, which concluded that many of them, mainly those who came from the northern territories were disappointed, because they thought that the factory consciously deceived the trainees with their advertisements: “Many trainees see that young skilled workers who lived in dormitories come to the AWU where the discipline is too strict; for example, a colleague who lives in the AWU cannot have his own radio, neither

⁷⁸² ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/4/13/83, Bericht der IKPKK, 1 Oktober 1973.

⁷⁸³ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/4/13/80, Bericht der IKPKK, 19 September 1969.

can he hang a picture on the wall of his room⁷⁸⁴, that is to say that young people feel like they are in prison and they want to have their own home, or at least a small room that they can call their own. Therefore we should examine whether the regulations in the AWU are right in the long run, and perhaps it would be better to build more apartments”.⁷⁸⁵ It seems that the case of the FDJ secretary shed light on more general problems concerning the training and future perspectives of young skilled workers.⁷⁸⁶

The IKPKK could mitigate punishment but on the other hand, it also reveals that offences against party discipline could very easily end the political careers of party members. In 1978 a political “case” was created after a satirical carnival newspaper was published by a department of the research center that received the title of the “collective of socialist work”. The publication included “provocative” articles like one bearing the title “Conversation in the pub”, which “highly distorts the work of the academic-technical personnel of the VEB Carl Zeiss Jena and practically describes them as idlers” while from the Zeiss-Alphabet one could learn that “B = brothel, the last institution that Zeiss still misses; C = chattering, the main content of the meetings of the leadership; S = stupidity, the precondition of employment in our enterprise; S as *Scheinwerfer*⁷⁸⁷ = too thin for reading, too thick for toilet-paper”. The leader of the research center immediately recommended that the main editor of the publication, comrade J, who was a physicist, should be expelled from the party and dismissed from his job. The IKPKK chairperson, however, took the side of the physicist: he “got off” with a strong reprimand and was

⁷⁸⁴ See the complaints of young skilled workers concerning this type of accommodation in *From hostels to flats*.

⁷⁸⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-B/4/13/80, Bericht der IKPKK, Argumente der Lehrlinge im Bereich des FB, 25 Januar 1970.

⁷⁸⁶ It seems that impertinence was also frequently counted among the “hostile” manifestations because one teacher spoke of the “negative political attitude” of a trainee who was rebuked for the bad quality of his work to which he replied “now what are the other 20-30% of the employees doing here?” ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. IV-C/2/1/5, Protokoll der Sitzung der Bezirksleitung der SED Gera, 4 Januar 1972.

⁷⁸⁷ The title of the newspaper of the factory.

transferred to model building where “he should prove himself worthy of the confidence of the party because he violated political watchfulness at a time when the class enemy increased its activity in the field of ideology”. The report stressed that it was the IKPKK chairperson who intervened on behalf of the physicist and apart from him two colleagues who were graduates, one of them was a group leader, were also transferred because of their involvement in the case of the carnival publication.⁷⁸⁸ This gives one example of how the system created “enemies” and it also reveals why it would have been naive to expect that discontent at the grass-roots was expressed in public forums.

The end of silence

The rigid ideological discipline of the party was maintained until the very end. Thus, in sharp contrast to the Hungarian case where it was possible to trace the mounting discontent of the population in the information reports, in the GDR the party succeeded in suppressing criticism with repression. This, however, also meant that the party itself had no adequate information on the political mood of the grass-roots membership.⁷⁸⁹ Even party reports from 1989 are silent on the evident discontent of the population – in the beginning of 1989 the factory party organization proved its political watchfulness by informing the responsible comrades that on the day of Soviet cinema five films were presented that, according to the audience, did not depict the Soviet Union in a positive light; “on the contrary, it seems that the state has violated the law and anti-Semitism and alcoholism have become predominant in society. Therefore we ask the responsible comrades not to present films like these in the future.”⁷⁹⁰ Political vigilance worked efficiently until the last

⁷⁸⁸ IKPKK Informationsberichte, 17.2.1978, op. cit.

⁷⁸⁹ I base this statement on the party reports of the factory and the district, I have not studied Stasi files.

⁷⁹⁰ UACZ, VA Nr. 4447, Information über die Bearbeitung der Eingabe der Gewerkschaftsgruppe „Dr. Richard Sorge“ aus dem Betrieb Entwicklung wissenschaftlich-technischer Ausrüstungen, 5.1.1989.

months of the regime: in October 1989 the chief manager of Zeiss reported of a handwritten leaflet to Minister Meier that was found in the staircase of one of the plants: “The day before yesterday Poland, today Czechoslovakia, tomorrow Hungary? How far does the opportunism of East German citizens extend?”⁷⁹¹ The brigade named after Salvador Allende held out - at least according to the testimony of the diary of the brigade: “In spite of the “mass flight” experienced in the last days and the massive increase in the number of those who want to leave the GDR, we cannot let our country be defamed. We are whole-heartedly determined to protest against such attempts. Everybody needs to recognize that without the GDR there would have been no peace and peaceful co-existence of nations in Europe for 45 years. We, the citizens of the GDR can only be proud of it”.⁷⁹²

Some signs of crisis could, however, be detected in the information reports in summer 1989. In July, “events such as the elections in Poland and Hungary and the strikes and violent conflicts in the Soviet Union are evaluated as the weakening of the socialist system”. Further, many party groups represented the opinion that the results of the GDR were too optimistically evaluated by the leadership, and the daily selection of the shops contradicted this evaluation. The report added – for the first time - that party members wanted to resign.⁷⁹³ According to an autumn report, 20 members of the IKPO of Zeiss resigned their membership in September, and 18 in October. A further 321 people announced their intention to leave the party in November. These figures are still very low compared to the Hungarian “mass flight” from the party but, they did indicate a weakening of the regime. The October report also admitted that “there are often not enough arguments to satisfy the employees or to show them the right solutions to the problems that they describe, so for instance, the increases in prices (technical articles), long waiting times for

⁷⁹¹ UACZ, VA Nr. 4722, Fallmeldung, 4.10.1989.

⁷⁹² UACZ, GB Nr. 1209, Brigadebuch, op. cit. 7 Oktober, 40. Jahrestag der Gründung unserer DDR.

⁷⁹³ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. A 9938/2, Informationsberichte, Carl Zeiss Jena, 26 Juli 1989.

repairs and services, missing spare-parts for cars, long waiting times in health care”.⁷⁹⁴ A report of 23 October 1989 informed of a “public letter” that hung on the notice-board of various departments in the Zeiss factory that attacked the leading role of the SED, called for the dissolution of party cells in the factory, and the separation of the party from the economy. It also demanded “bourgeois democracy, a socialist market economy, free elections, and the right to strike and to demonstrate”. According to the report, the factory party leadership immediately took the initiative to “clarify the letter in discussions with the involved collectives”.⁷⁹⁵ It seemed that such an approach survived until the last days of the regime.

The “transition” was so quick that few months later an official letter informed employees that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of the feared chief manager, who was charged with fraud. According to the letter the whereabouts of the manager were unknown; he allegedly escaped to Munich.⁷⁹⁶ It is worth recalling his last speech in front of the district party leadership on 2 November 1989: “As I see it in Jena, finally a “hard core” was left from the 15,000 demonstrators, who were drunk and shouted slogans like “every Communist pig to the wall!” and the usual insults concerning our state, and security organs and many other things, after which I cannot believe that they would demonstrate for this country, for socialism and for the republic. And personally, I would like to add that we should try to win over the positive forces who, as comrade Krenz said, accept the constitution of the GDR, socialist state power and who are ready to make socialism better. But we cannot allow irresponsible elements to question everything that has happened here, that we have done for this country in the past forty years, without any consequences.”⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁴ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. A 9635, Informationsberichte, 19 Oktober 1989.

⁷⁹⁵ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. A 9807, Informationsberichte, 23 Oktober 1989.

⁷⁹⁶ UACZ, VA Nr. 4743, 13.2.1990.

⁷⁹⁷ ThStA, Rudolstadt, Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Gera. Nr. A 9981, Sitzung der Bezirksleitung Gera von 02.11.1989.

The speech of the chief manager well illustrated the lack of any dialogue between the workers and the party. Even though the party did indeed attempt to provide material and social security for the workers, not only were they effectively excluded from control over the means of production, but they could not even express their opinions of party policy towards the working class. While Hungarian sources rendered visible the mounting social and political discontent among the population in the 1980s, silence in the GDR was essentially broken by the mass flight of the population that revealed a regime that was not popular even among those in whose name it exercised power. It remains a question of how far the East German economic reform – had it continued - could have triggered a process of liberalization but it is certain that under Honecker this process was effectively blocked. The result of the long process of the workers' alienation from the system was that in 1989 the regime could no longer address the working class because the workers themselves did not accept the party as a conversation partner.

Conclusion

Although the political climate in the two countries differed substantially – and so did the trajectories of their economic reforms - as the detailed analysis of the two case studies shows, there may well have been more similarities between the two regimes than has been previously assumed.⁷⁹⁸ This can explain similar patterns in the relationship between the regime and the working class; most notably, the absence of working-class protests under late socialism on the one hand, and the lack of independent working-class action in 1989-1990 on the other.

On the basis of the two case studies, there were many similarities in the party's policy towards the working class in the two countries. The standard-of-living policy in Hungary can be easily matched with the “unity of the economic and social policy” in the GDR, which, promoted increases in consumption in order to appease workers. Workers' wages were increased in both countries, and in the GDR, following Ulbricht's fall, the production of consumer goods rose, so that people could spend their money on commodities. In the last years of the NES people had money but there were not enough goods in the shops, which triggered mounting social discontent. This new, consumption-oriented policy was reflected in the ideology of the party where the “working class” became an increasingly abstract category even for the party, and emphasis was put on the general increase of social welfare instead. Both countries' leaderships argued that they would “catch up” with the consumption levels of the Western capitalist countries. This was the “core” of the party's policy towards the working class in both countries, while the party

⁷⁹⁸ Interestingly, the individual case studies in both countries usually stress the *specificity* of the two regimes; in case of the Kádár regime emphasis is placed on market socialism and the expanding private sector, while in case of the GDR the point of reference is primarily West Germany. (See the listed bibliography in *The crisis of the welfare dictatorships*).

was consequently opposed to making political concessions to the working class. Although they supported progressive social initiatives – such as community-building in the workplace (see, e.g. the socialist brigade movement, social work or the common celebration of state holidays, common festivals – mainly in the GDR) and the support for working-class education – the parties attempted to compensate workers for the lack of control over the means of production and thereby conserve existing power relations, rather than to create greater factory democracy. This is evident from the life-history interviews with workers in both countries, and in the Hungarian case, it is possible to document a clear conflict between the brigadiers and the management, when brigades attempted to intervene in production decisions.⁷⁹⁹

The orientation towards consumerism led to a decrease in the social importance of the working class in both countries. Even the scattered criticism in the GDR addressed the appearance of new inequalities, and the three “classes” that were mentioned: those who had relatives in West Germany; those who had special connections in the GDR; and, “normal” workers - suggest that in the ideologically more dogmatic GDR, too, money became more important.⁸⁰⁰ The critical comments of party members likewise show that there existed a marked social gap between the party leadership and the grass-roots membership – or at least this was how ordinary party members perceived this relationship. Since many leading officials remained nominally members of the working class, this, too, contributed to the loss of meaning of working-class identity; it occurred to such an extent that even party members asked whether it could be determined with certainty who belonged to the working class.⁸⁰¹ In Hungary, the reform period was characterized by a wave of complaint that new, wealthy strata had emerged, whose members lived much

⁷⁹⁹ See the Hungarian chapter on socialist brigades.

⁸⁰⁰ See the chapter entitled *New inequalities?*.

⁸⁰¹ Zur inhaltlichen Fragen der politisch-ideologischen Arbeit die gegenwärtig besonders im Mittelpunkt der Diskussion der Bevölkerung stehen, op. cit.

better than the workers. In the 1980s many Hungarian grass-roots members believed that the government was attempting to solve the economic problems of the country by making the working class in state industry pay the price for recovery. This inevitably downgraded the status of being working class in their eyes. References to the working class became rarer in party documents; and even in the more dogmatic GDR the working class was increasingly used as an abstract category that served only to legitimize the rule of the party. While the provision of consumer goods ranked high on the agenda of meetings of the party leadership, the party increasingly lost interest in the working class as an existing social group.

Consumption-oriented politics were successful in the sense that they prevented the formation of an independent working-class movement against the regime. The signs of the crisis of the “welfare dictatorship” were, however, visible in Hungary from the late 1970s when the economic situation of the country no longer allowed the standard-of-living policy to continue. In its response to the growing economic difficulties, the government implemented further pro-market reforms thus offering a secondary source of income to the population, including the working class, in the expanding private sector. This was an opportunity for people to maintain – or increase – their standard of living with extra work, which reinforced the individualization of society and people’s withdrawal from the socialist collectives.⁸⁰² As the cited party reports show, even officials understood that young people had less time for political involvement because they had to establish their own household. In the GDR foreign loans enabled Honecker to continue his welfare policy – at least the population felt the economic troubles later than the Hungarian people did – but the practice of watching West German television programs (*Westfernsehen*) rendered visible the gap between Eastern and Western standards of living that was increasing, rather

⁸⁰² For a similar argument see Erzsébet Szalai, op. cit., 2004; Mark Pittaway, op. cit., 2005.

than falling. While in the 1970s people were happy to acquire a flat on newly built housing estates, in the 1980s there was much less hope that the state would “catch-up” with Western levels of consumption, and the capitalist products that could be bought for Western currency, or in special shops likewise reinforced perceptions of the economic superiority of capitalism. In this sense, the failure of Honecker’s welfare policy became visible prior to the political collapse of his regime: young people in the 1980s did not see the kind of future in the system, that their parents’ generation had.⁸⁰³

The development of the relationship between the party and the workers also displays certain similar patterns. The reform era in both cases marked an important phase in the history of this relationship. In the Hungarian case – apart from addressing the problem of increasing materialism and individualism in society – there were also attempts among workers to criticize enterprise democracy and existing management practices. In the GDR, workers mainly complained of the contradictions of the NES, but there were also signs of a more far-reaching criticism of the system. In both cases, the party showed a marked interest in working-class opinions and it even demonstrated a willingness to consider their demands. Judged by the high number of comments, at that time at least part of the working class held the party to be a workers’ party, and they believed that it would be able to renew its social settlement with the people.

The dialogue between the party and the working class ended, however, in failure in both countries. Both regimes thought that the satisfaction of consumers’ demands would render it unnecessary to renegotiate the terms of its tacit agreement with the workers. The re-hardening of the political line in the 1970s effectively blocked the channels of communication between the party and the working class. Real workers practically disappeared from the party documents in the GDR, while in Hungary in the 1980s, when

⁸⁰³ Information from the interviews. Annette Schüler found a similar difference between the attitudes of older and younger generations of female textile workers. See *id.*, ‘Mächtige Mütter und unwillige Töchter’, in: Peter Hübner-Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1999, 709-740.

the political climate became more liberal, the working class was taken even less seriously as a social category. Fearing to upset consolidated, socialist society in the GDR and, interested in pro-market rather than leftist alternatives in Hungary, ruling parties showed little interest in re-starting social dialogue; and as the events of 1989 showed, neither did the workers believe that the party could have carried through reform. Since discussion of socialist alternatives was suppressed in both countries, and socialism was identified with the regimes that they did not feel to be theirs, there was no reason for independent working-class action. The workerist ideology of the party effectively lost credit in the eyes of the people whom it sought to win over⁸⁰⁴: as one interview partner stated, it was only after they had lived in capitalist society that they learnt to believe the party's criticism.

Even though the Hungarian market reform started in 1968, its impact on social and political life – as compared to the GDR where such reforms were not carried out, on the contrary, Honecker nationalized existing private companies in the 1970s – became clear in the 1980s, thus rendering differences between the two countries more visible. The most substantial change undoubtedly lay in the political climate: while in Hungary gradual liberalization took place even within the party, in the GDR, party members risked being expelled from the party for criticizing its policies.

Market socialism in Hungary had yet another social consequence that was not seen in the GDR; with the increasing individualization of society people's interest in community life declined. Even though the disintegration of socialist collectives in the workplace, and the neighborhood was mentioned with regret in both my East German and Hungarian interviews, the decline of community life in the new society was emphasized more in the East German interviews. East German workers also demonstrated more solidarity after the change of regime than did the Hungarians; in Jena mass demonstrations were organized to

⁸⁰⁴ On the basis of his fieldwork experience in Hungary Burawoy already showed that the workers were very much conscious of the contradiction between the gradually capitalizing country and the official socialist ideology of the party. ('Painting socialism', op. cit., 1992, 111-142).

prevent massive lay-offs⁸⁰⁵, while there were no actions of similar scale in the city of Győr.⁸⁰⁶ This difference could have been explained through the more comprehensive community life of the GDR.⁸⁰⁷

The difference between the political climates of the two countries was reflected also in workers' memories of the two regimes. Although it cannot be said that the socialist system left only negative memories behind in East Germany – in fact, most of the interview partners said that the school system, health care system and child care institutions were better, and the state gave more support to the working mothers than after 1989 – no-one wanted to return to Honecker's GDR. Most of the interview partners said that they were happy that the *Wende* had come. Many people did, however, also express a disappointment with the new, capitalist regime: it was the members of the younger age-groups in particular (people between forty and fifty) who argued that they went to the street for a different society in 1989. They believed that in the united Germany there would be more social justice, and ordinary people would have more say in the issues that affected their country. The new political system received a rather negative evaluation: most workers thought that there was only formal democracy in Germany, and that politics was decided by economics. Interview partners typically argued that the politicians who sat in parliament had lost touch with the reality of ordinary peoples' lives, a comment on planned reforms that cut welfare benefits. Although they held Honecker's GDR to be a dictatorship, all of them including those who said that they were opponents of the socialist system, objected to the equation of the GDR with the Nazi regime.

⁸⁰⁵ Information from interviews with workers and trade unionists ; *IG-Metall, Geschäftsbericht 1993 bis 1995* (Jena, 1995).

⁸⁰⁶ Information from the interview with the chairperson of the trade union.

⁸⁰⁷ In his comparative study of the workers of Lodz and Wroclaw in the 1940s, Padraick Kenney explained postwar strikes in Lodz through the tradition of workers' solidarity while he argued that the absence of strikes in Wroclaw, where Polish workers were newcomers, can be related to the lack of this tradition (Padraick Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists 1945-1950*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Although both the Kádár and Honecker regimes sought to de-politicize labor demands, it can be argued that in Hungary the privatization of the working class was more successful (see the argument in: Mark Pittaway, op. cit., 2005.)

Even if we take into account that workers' experiences of post-socialist transformation was different in the two countries, the Kádár regime received a more ambiguous evaluation in the Hungarian interviews, than the Honecker regime did in the GDR context. While people argued that there were many positive features of the socialist system (full employment, and social security), it was typically skilled urban workers who argued that material security did not compensate them for limited political freedom. Many of my interview partners who lived in the villages, however, reported a marked decline of their standard of living, and they claimed that they would have preferred to live in Kádár's Hungary. There were more female interview partners than men who would have liked to have the previous regime back. Regardless of how the socialist system was seen, the change of regime was felt to be a period in which society was cheated. It was commonly believed that privatization benefited the old elite and that ordinary people received nothing of "peoples' property". Many workers argued that foreign companies only bought local firms to close them and eliminate business rivals, and they were only interested in acquiring the Hungarian markets. They would blame the old elite for selling off national property. Although a majority of my interview partners considered the collapse of the Kádár regime to be inevitable, they thought that political power was appropriated by a narrow group of people who could capitalize on their connections. The change of regime is thus related with exclusion and dispossession. Interestingly, these negative experiences did not challenge capitalism as such: most of my interview partners argued that something went wrong with the implementation of capitalism in Hungary and they typically expected the state to intervene and protect them from the harmful effects of globalization.

Even though the party's policy towards the working class failed in both countries – and essentially did so before the political collapse of the regimes – in retrospect, the policy of the late Kádár regime can be regarded as more successful. In the light of the life-history

interviews the massive ideological repression of the Honecker era essentially proved counter-productive, because not even those who identified themselves as socialists (or even Communists) wanted his regime back, and neither did those who - after years of unemployment - could have counted themselves among the losers of the change of regime.⁸⁰⁸ The limited contacts between East Germans and Hungarians also suggest that it is not true that material security offered sufficient compensation for a lack of political freedom: even though East German workers enjoyed a higher standard of living than the Hungarians, the evaluation of the Kádár regime shows an ambiguous picture not only in Hungary, but the East German interview partners who had visited socialist Hungary also remembered it as a “Western” country – which, on the basis of the relative economic achievement of the GDR can only be explained through the experience of a greater freedom.

While both the reformist and collectivist model of the welfare dictatorships failed, they had a different impact on the workers’ relations to the party state and also the formation of the memories of the socialist system. In Hungary the government’s reforms to improve the economic performance of the country that could have enabled the party to continue the standard-of-living policy initiated gradual marketization: people therefore suffered less from the shortages of everyday consumer goods than the collectivist model proved incapable of eliminating. The expanding private sector – and stagnating real incomes in the state sector -, however, increased social inequalities between those involved in private business and those who were not.⁸⁰⁹ Since the working class was employed in the state sector, its members depended on luck, initiative and connections, to benefit from the expansion of the private economy. As early as 1968, when the first reforms of the

⁸⁰⁸ The most “extreme” story in this respect is that of a worker who was homeless at the time of the interviewing, and had been imprisoned in the 1980s for political reasons in the GDR. Even though he said that he would not fight against for such a system, not even his experience of the new society could embellish the memory of the Honecker-regime.

⁸⁰⁹ See: Iván Szelényi, *op. cit.*, 1990.

Hungarian economy were implemented, it became clear that workers would perceive themselves as losers from the process of reform.⁸¹⁰ Workers' criticism was therefore increasingly targeted at widening inequalities that contradicted the ideology of the regime. The difference between ideology and experience therefore increasingly undermined the credibility of the workerist, emancipatory ideology of the party.⁸¹¹ Parallel to this, in the 1980s a marked decline of the prestige of party membership could be observed: it was telling that working-class quotas remained unfulfilled in large-scale industry in the early 1980s and young people increasingly distanced themselves from party organizations.⁸¹² The collapse of party membership in Hungary preceded the political collapse of the Kádár regime.⁸¹³ Thus, in the reformist model relative political liberalization and the slow transformation of society rendered the signs of the social decline of the regime visible earlier.

When reform was halted in the GDR, a similar difference between official ideology and everyday experience opened up, albeit for different reasons, and in a different way. Even though the collectivist model of the welfare dictatorships that Honecker implemented did not encourage widening inequalities, cadres were still considered to be a privileged caste, who sought to transfer their privileges to their children.⁸¹⁴ In addition, the collectivist model could not do much to eliminate the shortage of consumer goods and discontent grew at relative material deprivation, given that the point of comparison for most East German workers was always wealthy West Germany. The standard of living on the other side of the inner German was clear from West German media, while the East German media regularly

⁸¹⁰ See the chapter on *Reform and Materialism*.

⁸¹¹ See: Michael Burawoy-János Lukács, 'Painting socialism', op. cit., 1992, 111-142; Eszter Bartha, 'The disloyal "ruling class": The conflict between ideology and experience in Hungary', in: Peter Hübner-Christoph Kleßmann-Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), op. cit., 2005, 141-162.

⁸¹² See: *Quotas*.

⁸¹³ See: *Losing members*.

⁸¹⁴ See, for instance Heike Solga's study of social mobility in the GDR (Heike Solga, *Auf dem Weg in eine klassenlose Gesellschaft? Klassenlagen und Mobilität zwischen Generationen in der DDR*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).

discussed unemployment rates in West Germany.⁸¹⁵ Since the government could not prevent the spread of the propaganda of the “class enemy” (*Westfernsehen*), and the rivalry between the socialist and capitalist systems was much stronger in divided Germany, than in Hungary, the Honecker regime resorted to much more systematic repression than was presented under Kádár.⁸¹⁶ Ideological discipline prevented the grass-roots membership from voicing their dissatisfaction, in contrast to Hungary, where party reports informed their leaders of mounting social discontent, in the GDR any political criticism – let alone the criticism of the party – could lead to exclusion from the party and the end of a professional career.⁸¹⁷ Thanks to the repressive political climate, the regime could sustain the illusion that it enjoyed the support of the people until the mass flight of the population from the country revealed the internal weakness of the regime.

By undertaking a comparative study of the relationship between workers and the party-state under Honecker and Kádár, this dissertation offers a historical explanation of why the workers did not defend the workers’ state in countries where there had been no open working-class protest against the ruling regimes since the 1960s. Taking this argument a step further, it argues that the history of the workers can offer a new perspective on the turning point of 1989 by focusing on what made the socialist regimes weak internally, rather than concentrating on opposition activists, or political elites. While the party in both countries consequently refused to seek a political compromise with the working class, both types of welfare dictatorships – the reformist and collectivist – offered

⁸¹⁵ See in more detail in *New inequalities?*

⁸¹⁶ The dissertation only marginally dealt with the methods of repression; it should be noted, however, that the alternative subcultures of working-class youth who were not willing to accept the officially propagated socialist lifestyle and value were also ruthlessly persecuted. On the dissident culture in Jena see the documents of the archive named after Matthias Domaschk, a young worker who belonged to an alternative community and committed suicide upon his arrest in detention. (For an overview of the documents see: Katharina Lenski-Uwe Kulisch, *Thüringer Archiv für Zeitgeschichte 'Matthias Domaschk': Übersicht zu den erschlossenen Sammlungen & Dokumenten* (Jena, 2001). Members of the Jeaner Friedengemeinschaft – a dissident group in Jena - were forced to leave the GDR. (Thüringer Archiv für Zeitgeschichte 'Matthias Domaschk', Jena F6 Friedengemeinschaft).

⁸¹⁷ See, for instance, the reprisal that followed the case of the carnival newspaper described in *Losing members*.

economic concessions in exchange for political passivity. Since the continuation of the standard-of-living policy increasingly collided with economic performance in both countries, the party's refusal to renegotiate the terms of agreement with the working class left the regime much weaker socially, than both its leaders and western advocates of post-totalitarian theories of the Communist state assumed. Despite relative political liberalization under Kádár in Hungary, limited political freedom was markedly criticized in my interviews with skilled urban workers - the very core of the working class that the regime believed was central to its support. This experience contributed to illusion of generalized welfare and the high consumption levels that capitalism could generate for them. Despite the more painful experience of transformation in Hungary, idealized views of capitalism persist, leading to a desire for national capitalism as opposed to the bleak realities of globalization on the Eastern periphery of the European Union. In East Germany, the anti-capitalist ideology of the party that was rather ineffective under the Honecker regime seemed to have a greater appeal after the regime's collapse: my interview partners mostly blamed the regular functioning of the capitalist system for what they saw as negative social phenomena such as growing inequalities, egoism and social insecurity. It seems that it is not only the memory of the collectivist and reformist models of the welfare dictatorships that differ but they also had a different impact on the development of workers' political attitudes after 1989.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1. Wage increase of industrial workers in the county in 1973 (Ft)

	1972	1973	increasing	%
Heavy industry	2.256	2.510	254	11.25
Light industry	1.880	2.075	195	10.37
Food industry	1.994	2.236	242	12.17
Other industry	-	-		
Average	2.069	2.299	230	11.11

Source: GYML, X. 415/128/1, A bérfeljesztés és a különböző bérezési formák bevezetésének hatása a dolgozók helyzetére és a munkaerőmozgásra (a KB november 14-15.-i határozata alapján).

Table 2. Wages of industrial workers in the county (Ft)

	1968	1970	1972	1973
Heavy industry	1.880	2.059	2.256	2.510
Light industry	1.568	1.735	1.880	2.075
Food industry	1.637	1.786	1.994	2.236
Other industry	-	-	-	-
Average	1.711	1.894	2.069	2.299

Source: GYML, X. 415/134/2, Jelentés Győr-Sopron megye munkássága helyzetéről a KB 1974. márciusi állásfoglalása alapján, 3. melléklet, Munkások havi átlagkeresete.

Table 3. Education of workers according to their ages in MVG in 1977 (%)

Age Education	Under- 20	20- 30	30- 50	Above 50	Total
University or College	-	6.6	3.4	2.7	3.9
High School	18.5	27.7	17.1	14	20
Primary School	75	60.4	46.3	27.5	51.4
Unfinished Primary School	6.5	5.3	33.2	55.8	24.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: GYML, X. 415/195/3, Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyárban, MVG összes dolgozójának iskolai végzettség szerinti megoszlása korcsoportonként.

Table 4. Education and qualification of blue-collar workers according to their age and gender in MVG in 1977 (person)

Education	Age	Skilled		Semi-skilled		Unskilled		Total	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
College	Under 30	15	-	-	-	-	-	15	-
	Above 30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
High School	Under 30	754	56	78	102	5	1	837	159
	Above 30	444	22	57	25	6	2	509	49
Primary School	Under 30	2633	96	824	479	166	150	3623	725
	Above 30	2539	88	946	778	99	201	3584	1067
Unfinished Primary School	Under 30	13	2	147	29	116	55	276	86
	Above 30	1158	55	1353	619	335	435	2846	1109

Source: GYML, X. 415/195/3, Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyárban, Fizikai dolgozók iskolai végzettsége.

Table 5. Development of the education of the workforce of Rába MVG (%)

	1975	1979
University or College	3.4	6.1
High School	18	23.6
Primary School	54.6	52
Unfinished Primary School	24	18.3

GYML, X. 415/200/3, A közművelődés helyzete. Az MVG végrehajtó bizottságának jelentése az 1975-ös pártértekezlet után, 12, 1979. december 11.

Table 6. Main features of the libraries of MVG

	Trade union library	Technical library
Members No.	6.537	2.675
Brigade members No.	3.209	889
Visitors No.	52.323	12.676
Borrowed copies	160.690	29.487
Library stock	66.000	47.395

Source: GYML, X. 415/195/3, Jelentés a munkásművelődés tapasztalatairól, helyzetéről és szerepéről, fejlesztésének feladatairól a Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyárban, MVG könyvtárainak főbb jellemzői.

Table 7. Managerial wages in selected workshops of MVG (Ft) in 1979

Factory	Workers (No)	Direct production managers (No)	Factory managers (No)	Direct production managers/workers	Wage of foremen	Wage of managers
Foundry	1214	52	10	23	5.418	6.270
Auto	409	11	4	33	5.000	6.220
Gear	993	29	7	34	5.317	6.571
Forge-shop	473	20	5	24	5.215	6.220
Iron structure	578	20	5	29	5.305	6.340
Wagon	644	26	4	25	5.160	6.275
Motor	1191	31	8	38	5.230	6.300
Vehicle	227	5	3	45	5.900	5.900

Source: GYML, X. 415/200/3, A közvetlen termelésirányítók helyzete, politikai-szakmai felkészültségük értékelése - - az emberi kapcsolatokra gyakorolt hatásuk.

Table 8. Development of the education and qualification of female employees in the Zeiss factory (in number and %)

	1976		1980	
	Number	%	Number	%
University, college	639	3,5	949	5,2
Fachshulkader	1096	6	1478	8,1
Direct production managers	110	0,6	164	0,9
Skilled workers (1+2 years)	12137	66,5	12514	68,6
Without qualification	4270	23,4	3138	17,2
Total	18251	100	18243	100

Source: UACZ, WB Nr. 487, Abrechnung der Frauenarbeit 1980 nach Schwerpunkten, Qualifikationsstruktur.

Table 9. Differential between men and women workers in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in 1978 (monthly average wages)

	Wage-group 4	Wage-group 5	Wage-group 6	Wage-group 7	Wage-group 8	Wage-group 9	Wage-group 10	Wage-group 11	Wage-group 12	Wage-group 13
Average wage of female employees (M/month)	457	507	570	630	669	764	878	1050	1289	1595
Average wage of male employees (M/month)	455	554	576	675	724	836	960	1163	1378	1707
Difference in M/month	2	47	6	45	55	72	82	113	89	112

Source: UACZ, VA Nr. 03740, Analyse zur Entlohnung und Eingruppierung werktätiger Frauen im Vergleich zu werktätiger Männern, 12. Oktober 1978.

Table 10. The distribution of men and women workers among the various wage-groups in VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in 1978

	Wage-grp 3	Wage-grp 4	Wage-grp 5	Wage-grp 6	Wage-grp 7	Wage-grp 8
Number of female employees in the wage-group	99	2062	4571	1375	289	46
% of female employees within the wage-group	79,8	73,4	59,7	26,5	8,2	2,2
Number of male employees in the wage-group	25	747	3082	3803	3232	1334
% of male employees within the wage-group	20,2	26,4	40,3	73,4	91,8	96,7

Source: UACZ, VA Nr. 03740, Analyse zur Entlohnung und Eingruppierung werktätiger Frauen im Vergleich zu werktätiger Männern, 12. Oktober 1978.

List of abbreviations

APO	(Abteilungsparteiorganisation): departmental party organization
AWU	(Arbeiterwohnunterkunft): workers' hostel
BPKK	(Bezirksparteikontrollkommission): district control committee of the party
FDJ	(Freie Deutsche Jugend): Free German Youth, the youth organization of the East German Communist party
GO	(Grundorganisation): base organization
IKL	(Industriekreisleitung): leadership of the party organization of the factory
IKPKK	(Industriekreis-Parteikontrollkommission): control committee of the party organization of the factory
IKPO	(Industriekreisparteiorganisation): the party organization of the factory
KISZ	(Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség): League of Communist Youth, the youth organization of the Hungarian Communist party
MMG	(Mosonmagyaróvári Mezőgazdasági Gépgyár): Mosonmagyaróvár Tractor Factory
MVG	(Magyar Vagon-és Gépgyár): Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory
MSZMP	(Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt): Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
NES:	New Economic System
SED	(Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands): Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SZMT	(Szakszervezetek Megyei Tanácsa): County Council of the Trade Unions
VB	(végrehajtó bizottság): executive committee
VEB	(volkseigener Betrieb): state-owned enterprise.
VGMK	(<i>vállalati gazdasági munkaközösség</i>): economic productive communities of the enterprise

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